

# Distances and affinities between doramas and local fictions according to Chilean: melodrama in Switched

*Distancias y afinidades entre doramas y ficciones locales según guionistas chilenos: el melodrama en Switched*

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## Abstract

Increasingly, the screens of Latin America, in both broadcast and pay TV or streaming, have expanded their offer of Asian fictions with high melodramatic content. In them, it is possible to find elements that approach it and others that distance it from the Latin-American television genre par excellence: telenovelas. This work seeks to understand the reasons behind the success of *doramas* in Latin America from an interpretive-professional perspective based on semi-structured interviews with Chilean scriptwriters of telenovelas, who discussed the series *Switched* as a case study. The results suggest that, among the characteristics that potentially link its success in Latin America are, on the one hand, the rescue of elements of classic melodrama —archetypes, a strong love story, universal conflicts— and, on the other, a restructuring of the genre linked to the Asian cultural idiosyncrasy and the use of narrative and audiovisual elements attractive to the youth-adolescent public.

**Keywords:** melodrama, telenovela, dorama, scriptwriters, TV, teenagers

## Resumen

Crecientemente las pantallas de Latinoamérica, tanto en TV abierta como de pago o *streaming*, han ido aumentando su oferta de ficciones asiáticas de alto contenido melodramático. En ellas es posible encontrar elementos que la acercan y otras que la distancian del género latinoamericano por excelencia: las telenovelas. Este trabajo busca comprender las razones detrás del éxito de los *doramas* en Latinoamérica desde una perspectiva interpretativa-profesional a partir de entrevistas semiestructuradas a guionistas de telenovelas chilenos, quienes discutieron como caso de análisis la serie *Switched*. Los resultados sugieren que dentro de las características potencialmente vinculadas a su éxito en Latinoamérica se cuentan, por un lado, el rescate de elementos del melodrama clásico —arquetipos, historia de amor fuerte, conflictos universales—, y por otro, una reestructuración del género vinculada a la idiosincrasia cultural asiática y al uso de elementos narrativos y audiovisuales atractivos para el público juvenil-adolescente.

**Palabras clave:** melodrama, telenovela, dorama, guionistas, TV, adolescentes.

## 1. Introduction

Melodramas are front and center stage of Latin American communication studies, present in the collective imaginary of its literature, music and in the most important television genre produced in this region: telenovelas (Martín Barbero, 1987; Cabrujas, 2002). A powerful love story with evil villains and heroines in distress are some of the elements of these productions (Escudero, 1997) that have extended their influence to cultural production in faraway countries like Turkey (Vasallo de Lopes & Orozco, 2017), Japan and Korea (Dettleff, 2018).

Such occurs with *doramas* (Clements & Tamamuro, 2003), Asian fictions of heavy melodramatic content that appear with relative frequency on Latin American screens and that increasingly receive high audience ratings, especially among adolescents (Dettleff, 2018). This article seeks to contribute to understanding the success of these productions in Latin America from an interpretative-professional perspective, based on semi-structured interviews of seven Chilean telenovelas screenwriters that reviewed the same TV production –*Switched*– to discuss points of comparison and contrast between doramas and Latin American fictions. The objective was to explore the main elements of the melodrama found in *doramas*, both narratively-speaking, as well as in terms of audiovisual construction and recognizable characters in the Latin American context, and those that could explain their success and acceptance by the audience in the region.

The main results show that Chilean screenwriters consider *doramas* a return to the classic melodramatic genre, particularly for its use of archetypes and traditional love story, despite there being a restructuring of the genre linked to Asian cultural idiosyncrasy. On the other hand, the success of these productions is linked to the identification of its target audience (in the case of *Switched*, adolescent viewers), the protagonists, presence of universal conflicts and recognition of traditional melodramatic matrices.

## 2. State of the art

### 2.1 Import of a domestic product: telenovela, melodrama and Latin American identity

The idea of the telenovela produced in Latin America is intrinsically related to the concept of melodrama (Martín-Barbero, 1987; Monsiváis, 2006; Mujica & Bachmann, 2015; Rincón, 2017). From its primary orality, the melodrama

[does] not only constitute a media concept, but rather a social concept that has allowed for the construction of a narrative matrix of what is Latin American, transforming into a place of cultural encounter and recognition (...). The melodramatic narrative, solidified in different genres and formats (...) is turned into the reflection of an era and an awareness (Reguillo, 2000, pp. 20).

In the classic melodrama, in terms of plot structure, two ideologies or models of social regulation drive the story: “One of them is identified as right, fair, and good, while the other is wrong, unfair, bad. (...) This conflict structured into four traditional matrices: desire/impediment; unawareness/awareness; interclasses and civilization/barbarity” (Fuenzalida, Corro & Mujica, 2009, p. 23). According to Martín Barbero (1987) these matrices emphasize the imbalances in a, in many ways still, premodern Latin America (oral and visual, with tremendous economic and social inequalities, patriarchal, emotional, servile) and a modern development model (meritocratic, bourgeois, literate). The melodrama, manifest in the telenovela and also in the *bolero*, popular religion and film, forms an interstitial space in which the audience, from the two opposing worlds mentioned earlier, can mediate (Herlinghaus, 2002). Melodrama is a mediator and still present in the new forms of cultural and audiovisual consumptions promoted by multiple screens and *streaming* services, forming a relationship between what is global and what is domestic (Benamou, 2010; Orozco & Miller, 2017; Dorcé, 2020)

These conflicts serve as indispensable guidelines for screenwriters when writing these stories (Bruna, 2018). Class differences, the search for identity, the clash between the country and the city or between cultures act as catalysts or obstacles

in the narrative, and are embodied in archetypes such as the romantic couple leading the action – the struggle for love between a damsel in distress and a hero and an antagonistic force (Brooks, 1995; Acosta-Alzuru, 2017). The melodramatic TV format varies from country to country, but the epitome is the classic telenovela that has a defined plot structure and a certain number of episodes (Mazziotti, 2006). To the previous, one can also add the modern and post-modern telenovela described by Adrianzén (2001) and that expand on the range of themes, the structure, and rhythm of the traditional plot.

Latin America is a permanent “laboratory of identities” in which individually and collectively the possibilities of “being recognized, considered and having a voice in the decisions that affect us, depend on the expressivity and effectiveness of how we relate our stories” (Martín-Barbero, 2003, p. 22). Essentially, the telenovela tunes into the Latin American search for identity (Martín-Barbero, 1987); it is the only authentically regional audiovisual genre (Fuenzalida et al., 2009) and our screens show and we consume both local and the wider Latin American telenovelas more than any other fictional product (Straubhaar, 1991; Vasallo de Lopes & Orozco, 2017).

Given their central importance in almost all Latin America, telenovelas have been considered drivers defining local identity and elements of cultural cohesion and integration, to the extent that they allow us to speak of a pan-Latino context (Erlyck, 2018). Nevertheless, the production of the telenovela has gone global since the decade of the '90s. Telenovelas from different countries have had success in Eastern Europe, Asia and the Middle East. *Los Ricos También Lloran* began the decade of globalization (Helguera, 2008); *Marimar* was a success in the Philippines and had two remakes (Ford, 2017); Slovakia adapted the Argentine *Señoras Papis with Oteckovia* (Bruna, 2018); the Colombian series *Yo soy Betty, la Fea* was seen in the United States as *Ugly Betty* and in China as *Ugly Wudi*, and *La Reina del Sur* had its North American version called *Queen of the South* (Segura, 2018). The export of the Latin American telenovela was described in the '90s and 2000s as an example of asymmetric interdependence, although still less significant in regards to U.S. cultural production (Straubhaar, 1991; Piñón & Rojas, 2011).

Given the strength of local production, the arrival of fictions from other continents to Latin America was, until 2015, scarce and somewhat random. As shown in OBITEL yearbooks, it was not until the arrival of the Turkish telenovelas that the tendency to import versions of this same genre created in other cultures began to take hold in the region (Dettleff, Cassano & Vásquez, 2017).

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## 2.2 The *dorama* in Latin America

Except for the Japanese manga, that from the '80s to the 2000s represented a large part of children's TV programming (Fajnzylber, 2002), Dramatic fictional television from East Asia has had a disparate presence on open TV in Latin America (Dettleff, 2018). The most studied cultural phenomenon in this sense has been the so-called “Korean wave” or “hallyu” (Dettleff, 2018; Carballo, 2018), despite it covering much more than Korea, and has had varying degrees of success depending on the country (De Castilho, 2015). One of the main cases of success of Asian pop culture in the region are so-called *doramas*, “a combination of telenovelas, miniseries and TV series [...] [with] a narrative structure similar to Latin American telenovelas, featuring considerable doses of melodrama” (Urbano & Araujo, 2018, p. 523). According to Carvallo,

They are called *doramas* for the similar pronunciation of the word “drama” (English), this term was coined to refer to Japanese “telenovelas” (*deurama*) and later it was used for Korean “telenovelas”; it was about differentiating the two as J-Dramas and K-Dramas, similar to the denomination of their music, however, this use did not take hold (2018, p.198).

In Peru, these products have been systematically programmed on smaller networks with fewer, yet loyal, viewers (Dettleff, 2018). In Argentina they are shown mostly on cable. In Chile, their presen-

ce has been scarce: in 2006, TVN programmed the Korean series *Escalera al Cielo* and in 2012, Mega aired Korean productions like *Boys over Flowers*, *The Secret Garden* and *Manny*. Although none of these were among the highest that year, they received good audience ratings for their time slot.

Despite the variations between countries, these formats have been widely watched by young audiences on the internet (Han, 2019). Their success has been mainly linked to young Japanese (*J-pop*) and Korean (*K-pop*) pop stars, a music genre that has a large following in the region (Meza & Park, 2015; Copa & Poma, 2017) and to the fact that they share symbolic codes with Latin American telenovelas (Quintero, 2016). In accordance with that proposed by La Pastina and Straubhaar (2005) for the consumption of Mexican telenovelas in Brazil, Hartzell (2019) suggests that the main reason for consumption and enjoyment of *doramas* in Latin America is how viewers identify characteristics of melodrama. Carballo (2018) states that the telenovela and *dorama* are comparable given that both “move in the same symbolic field” (p. 218).

Although there are studies that explore the success of these productions in Latin America from an audience perspective (Intriago & Alexandra, 2017; Zarco & Chica, 2017) or from an educational perspective (Álvarez, 2011), articles that analyze how the creators of local fictions —telenovela scriptwriters— interpret this phenomenon are practically non-existent. Studies on scriptwriters have focused on their characteristics (Virino & Pérez, 2016), on the characteristics of their trade (Dittus, 2017) and on the object of their profession (Proaño, 2016; Gutiérrez, 2018; Rodríguez, 2018); very few use them directly as subjects of study (Ortega & do Carmo Fonseca, 2016). However, in a context of falling audience ratings (Vasallo de Lopes & Orozco, 2017) and in which pressure to import and emulate foreign products mounts, it is important to study the perceptions of these products in those who will write future Latin American telenovelas.

### 3. Methodology

Our research is exploratory and qualitative and its main objective is to critically reflect, from a professional perspective, on the main classic elements of the melodrama present in *doramas*, their narrative elements and those of audiovisual construction recognizable in the Latin American context, and those that could explain their success and acceptance by the audience in the region. Between January and May 2019, researchers performed seven in-person interviews of Chilean telenovela scriptwriters. They opted for a semi-structured interview —of 45 minutes on average— thanks to its flexibility and that it offers the possibility to clarify terms, identify ambiguities and reduce formalities (Díaz-Bravo *et al.*, 2013; Taylor & Bogdan, 2008).

The list of interviewees was deliberately made using the following criteria: must have telenovela scriptwriting experience, belong to different TV networks and have participated in high-rating TV productions. In addition, interviewees were chosen from the pool of scriptwriters associated to at least one of the important national organizations (Chileguionistas or “Chilescriptwriters” and the Association of Directors & Scriptwriters) that were actively working on projects<sup>1</sup> and/or had collaborated on recent productions.

With two scriptwriters from each network (Televisión Nacional de Chile, Canal 13 and MEGA), plus an industrial icon, and after observing data saturation in the responses, the sample was deemed sufficient to portray the different perspectives of Chilean scriptwriters (See Table 1)<sup>2</sup>.

Table 1. List of Interviewees

Scriptwriter/ Interview date	Gender	Scriptwriter since	Experience with <i>doramas</i>
Subject 1 (30/04/2019)	Female	2007	Little, has watched it only for work-related purposes. Doesn't particularly like them, finds the composition, themes, plots and conflicts to be very juvenile. Finds quality level of production to be impressive.
Subject 2 (25/03/2019)	Male	1983	Avid watcher: starting with <i>Escalera al cielo</i> (TVN, 2006) began to learn more about <i>doramas</i> . Has mainly seen Japanese and Korean (historical, with mythological background, melodramatic and hospital dramas).
Subject 3 (27/03/2019)	Male	2004	Likes them, feels that they capture the essence of telenovelas using typical elements (secrets, impossible love stories).
Subject 4 (29/01/2019)	Male	2004	Very little experience with them.
Subject 5 (02/02/2019)	Male	2004	First viewed <i>El príncipe de la azotea</i> , a favorite for the more crude mix of drama and comedy. The beginnings of <i>She was pretty</i> and <i>Switched</i> were fascinating.
Subject 6 (17/03/2019)	Female	2012	First time seeing one.
Subject 7 (25/03/2019)	Female	2009	Knew they existed but had not seen one, finds rhythm of Asiatic narration hard to get used to, it seems slower

Source: Authors own elaboration

All the interviewees were asked to watch at least the first episode of *Switched* (in Latin America, *El patito feo que surcó los cielos*) – a six-episode Japanese *dorama*, produced and released in August 2018 as a Netflix Original aimed at international audiences– available in Chile only on said streaming service. This *dorama* was used as study case for its recentness, for being one of the new programs available in the second semester 2018 on Netflix, for being a *torendi-dorama* (drama “trendy” or “modern”) (Twu, M. A., 2004) and because, having only six episodes, the unit of analysis (pilot) was enough to portray the potentially relatable elements of melodramas, without being “tanpatsu” or “nijikam” –*doramas* with only one episode or duration of two hours (Tanaka, 2010). Police, detecti-

ve, and time period *doramas* were not used for lack of accessibility to all the interviewees.

*Switched* begins with Umine, an obese girl who is the subject of bullying at school and abuse by her mother, changing bodies with Ayumi, the popular girl in her class, and girlfriend of the cutest boy. After they change bodies, Umine realizes that, despite being *beautiful* now, she is insecure and distanced from her friends which makes her meaner. Ayumi, on the other hand, despite being *ugly*, builds a relationship of trust with her peers and makes her best guy friend fall for her.

The list of questions used for the interview included some in regards to perceptions on the similarities

and difference between the *dorama* and the Latin American melodrama, specifically on the dramatic and audiovisual structure as well as character development. Finally, they were asked to suggest hypotheses regarding the interpretation that regional audiences would make of this type of fiction.

The interviews were transcribed in their entirety and analyzed using an axial coding matrix that, upon combining inductive and deductive thinking (Campo & Labarca, 2009), allowed us to start with a primary classification based on the list of interview questions, in order to later create new categories and subcategories, as well as links between them. The main components of the matrix were the classic aspects of melodrama identified in the *dorama*, and, the differentiating components. The intermediary categories, coded the following: archetypes, history, format, narrative structure, audiovisual resources, characters, audience references, etc. and at the same time new subcategories emerged during the analysis.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Melodrama Japanese-style

The interviews gave us insight as to what Chilean scriptwriters understand by the concept of melodrama and confirm that they interpret this element based on theory, defining it as “a narration that exacerbates the emotional aspects of the plot” (Subject 1), sustained by a love story, often considered impossible. One of the interviewees emphasized that the melodrama is formulated by “the ideas of the romantic hero and the heroin, the villains that embody malevolent values, without nuances, that are on the evil side and that inhabit it quite consistently until the end (...) and the presence of characters that we know as archetypes: the fairy godmother (...), the suffering victims, the evil villain. (...) always love and the desire to satisfy this love as a fundamental premise” (Subject 7).

Based on this conception, most interviewees consider that *Switched* portrays classic melodrama characteristics, especially the use of archetypes and the classic love story: “It begins like a love story, which is the genesis of the genre, and with archety-

pe characters, which is a main characteristic of the melodrama” (Subject 3); “I see the romance as the basis, the prince and princess archetypes, (...) and the changing of roles that the melodrama also uses often” (Subject 7).

Despite having some elements of the genre, there are codes that differentiate *Switched* from the classic melodrama, mainly for its target audience and for having a structure closer to that of an American series than a telenovela: “I don’t feel that it features any characteristic of the classic melodrama because it follows its same rules, mainly targeting children and adolescents with a moralizing purpose: good triumphs over evil, true love is incorruptible” (Subject 2); “It seemed more organic to me, more similar to a traditional American series structure, more dramatic than melodrama” (Subject 4).

Interviewees coincide in that the narrative structure shares components with the Latin American telenovela, especially love as the driving force and main argument of the story (the villain steals the body of the heroin in order to be with the boy she loves), the presence of a suffering protagonist and the use of a plot twist at the end of each episode:

The classic telenovelas that made the genre popular worldwide, (...) with an almost impossible love story, with, in the majority of the cases, a protagonist that suffers from the beginning to the end of the story. *Switched* seems to fit in that style by unabashedly depicting the protagonist’s suffering (Subject 2).

However, they recognize that the treatment of the romantic relationship breaks from the classic Latin American codes:

Culturally there is a something much more camouflaged (...), relationships are much more idyllic, they almost never overlap. (...), there is a difference in how they are handled, in how physical and transparent we Latin Americans are (Subject 7)..

One of the differences that is most obvious in regards to the narration has to do with its pace and the structure of the group of protagonists: “It has an emotional tempo that I’m not sure will work in a Latin American production but nevertheless seems interesting to explore. (...) There is an emphasis on feelings, on feelings more than action” (Subject 7);

“One thing in the structure of romantic *doramas* is that they use the love quadrangle, while in Latin America there is a love triangle. Asians are more traditional in this sense” (Subject 2).

In terms of audiovisual characteristics, it seems that *doramas* are actually further away than closer to Latin American telenovelas. The main components they share are the depiction of characters as a resource to clearly show the role they represent within the fiction and the use of audiovisual resources that exacerbate emotion:

The portraying of emotion based on closer camera shots to understand what is happening to the character feeling the emotion; the use of loud music as a resource that greatly emphasizes the emotion that we want the audience to feel, and also, character creation by use of archetypes, the very pretty character, the very ugly character (...) no one could mistake which character plays which role (Subject 7).

The interviewees recognize differences in the level of production and photography and filming techniques that make for a particular visual aesthetic that references the manga aesthetic, with playing with camera angles and shots, emphasizing symbols that you do not normally see in the Latin American telenovela: “The narration of *Switched* is totally Eastern-style, with manga influences and not necessarily because they are related, but rather because it is a trademarked style, patented by them” (Subject 2). In regards to the audiovisual language of the series, another interviewee explains

(...) There is an effort to use a more cinematographic language, with a camera that is less of a narrator and more in the moment, that is what seems to be the difference on screen. A different camera filming style, different timing, moments of silence, the montage and musical score (Subject 3).

## 4.2 Character development

According to the interviewees, *Switched* is developed based on a code recognizable to Latin Americans, the teen telenovela that “shows a reduced world view (...) in which we can play with different roles” (Subject 7), recognizable when “comparing

them and relating them more to *high school fictions*” (Subject 1). In addition, the characters have classic aspects, recognizable in the West, like the fable of the *Ugly Duckling*:

One can roll back to the great narrative tropes, especially fairytales and Latin American TV series share those narrative spaces and structures. I see the arch (...) of the story of the ‘Ugly Duckling’, a little of this ‘beautiful being hidden in a defective body’ (Subject 1).

Latin American telenovelas and *doramas* work based on prototypical characters. However, the scriptwriters agree that in *Switched*, character portrayal, especially of the villains, is different, becoming the characters’ most distinguishing features, “nuanced”, “dynamic”, “that navigate a scale of grays”, “with surprise twists”, going from evil to sudden, unexpected kindness. This is evident in the character of Koshiro (Shiru), that at the beginning appears as a false villain, but in the end is revealed to be a hero.

For the hero to appear no earlier than in Episode 4, and that the villain is not really a villain, but instead was always part of a plan made to help the heroine ... if we were to put that in a TV series here, the real hero appearing in the latter half of the episodes, it wouldn’t be accepted (Subject 5).

Something similar happens with the antagonist, Umine, the most complex character, who drives the story and represents physical characteristics that in Latin America would be used to generate likeability and not to shape the antagonist.

I can identify a good variation: the villain is a girl who is overweight, which would traditionally make her the victim, and in this case, she becomes the catalyst at the center of the plot. A formidable villain, unscrupulous and selfish, she is only worried about herself and what she wants. Dangerous, like good villains have to be (Subject 3).

Producers always aim for [a character like Umine] to not be evil. (...) We cannot laugh [at her], we have to teach a lesson (...) I can’t remember an evil overweight female character (in Latin America) (Subject 5).

However, scriptwriters agree that she is considered a villain only because she exercises her villainy constantly justified by her own suffering:

She will have her great motivation, which was the bullying she suffered and that she was not happy, but she commits an act of great evil, which is to steal the life of another person, (...) We can justify it, but it is still evil (Subject 5).

On the other side of the story, there is the heroine: “the sum of all virtues” (Subject 1), “perfect in every way” (Subject 1), and “regardless of the body in which she was in, she has inner beauty” (Subject 2). The interviewees agree in that one would expect her to be, given her physical attributes and following classic North American narratives, a villain: a pretty girl who is cruel. But this is not the case, and she not only accepts her fate and the injustice, but she can even come to understand Umine. However, despite her virtues, being the classic heroine, selfless, she appears a little old-fashioned for current fictions, in which there are abundant strong female characters (Cassano, 2017; Mazziotti, 2017):

The heroin has a few indications she suffered a little, (but) she is a girl without problems: has a wonderful life, with parents who love her, a happy life, friends at school, a best guy friend who loves her because she was a good person, a *mino*<sup>3</sup> that was good-looking and also loved her, had good grades. (Subject 5).

She is a classic heroine, the victim in the situation, who we want to hug and console. (...) Represents a baseline protagonist, but that, these days, I feel is a bit obsolete. (...) In an era in which the feminist movement has had a great impact and today's heroines are empowered and formidable women (Subject 3).

Finally, masculine figures occupy a secondary role in the plot and represent two combined archetypes. Rather than a single hero, there's two: Kaga – the clown, representing the unconditional love that seems to be the true protagonist of the love story – and Koshiro (Shiru), the villain/hero, “handsome, popular, athletic” (Subject 5).

What is important is the story of the girls (...) the men serve to drive the girls' storylines (Subject 3).

The masculine image goes from less to more. (...) There is a sort of prince and a clown, and it seems that the clown is more willing to see things differently. (Subject 7).

Out of the two, the one who stands out the most is Kaga, a “character built to solidify the general structure” (Subject 2). However, contrary to what one would expect in Latin America, his importance in the story is not rewarded, because the protagonist ends up dating Koshiro (Shiru).

(Kaga) is the real masculine protagonist, because it is he who actively helps the supposed heroine, for that reason, in the end, viewers want to see him together with Ayumi (Subject 6).

### 4.3 Interpretation based on a Latin American audience

There was little consensus in the answers to the question, how do you think the Latin American audience reads/interprets this type of fiction? Each scriptwriter emphasized more complementary aspects. The main aspect they agreed on in regards to decoding is the coincidence between the characters' ages and those of viewers, targeting a school-age audience and representing that same reality.

I tend to think that it is not a primetime show, but rather a niche market and directed at a specific audience (...) between the ages of 13-18. (...) (that) in today's globalized world reads/interprets this type of series just as they would in its country of origin (Subject 1).

I don't think Latin American adolescents see this type of story differently, because there is also an element of 'fantasy' that is fully incorporated into the young adolescent world (videogames, books, comics, series, etc.) (Subject 6).

For others, the key to interpretation lies in the recognition and empathy for current issues like bullying:

(*Switched*) in essence shows how it feels when a person is rejected or has low self-esteem, reaching a point in which a victim becomes the perpetrator (...). This occurs in Latin American culture and it's called bullying (...) how a person who feels like that



can resort to an extreme solution is not only part of Eastern culture (Subject 5).

We see the identity crisis, relationship crisis, existential dilemmas (...). In the end the conflicts are much less exacerbated, but they exist. There are the classmates that discriminate against the overweight girl, that treat her badly, that bully her... All these topics are contained in our idiosyncrasy (Subject 4).

On the other hand, others believe it is the presence of universal conflicts, like the love story, physical appearance or the choice between good and evil, that make it a recognizable story for any context:

[It's] a point in common with the Latin American telenovela (...). Love stories have always existed, and always will. (...) Therefore, I feel that the scope of this series goes beyond borders, triggers emotion and identification despite cultural differences in audiences on this side of the world (Subject 3).

They envisage the purest romantic feelings, those which we perhaps do not have such a direct relationship with in our own fictions, possibly pure love without so much contact, like a more sacred connection (Subject 7).

Finally, cultural distance appears to bring young people closer to a point of interest, or to stories that, told in Latin America, would be implausible. The success of these stories shows that there is a space for an ingenuity that is only believable in a context completely different to that of Latin America which "making the fiction more permissible to inhabiting spaces that, if it were now and today, would not work out" (Subject 7).

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

According to the literature, the melodrama's influence on different fiction genres is based on a structural foundation that appeals to emotion (Martín-Barbero, 1987, 2003). The TV melodrama allows for audiences to identify with stories and feel recognized in terms of their pain, sadness and experiences (Rincón, 2007). This need appeals to

audiences from various countries and is present in fiction products from many different places: the telenovela, *doramas* and Turkish series.

In a context of increasingly international audiovisual consumerism – a phenomenon that has intensified with mass access to streaming platforms with audiovisual production from countries once considered distant – makes it important to deal with these points of interaction and distance. These changes have diversified the origin of fiction that we consume, relativizing the power of markets like that of North America and promoting the study of similarities and differences with products like the *dorama*.

The point of view of the interviewed scriptwriters helps us to appreciate the components of the narrative and audiovisual matrix of these products. Studying the perception of these professionals is a contribution to the state of the art, given they are key players in the process of incorporation and interpretation of narrative codes. Their reflections allow us to dive into how the melodrama found in Asian fictions builds not just characters but also the main premise of products like *Switched*.

Scriptwriters perceive the main mechanism of Latin American audience identification with *doramas* stems from the recognition of the traditional melodramatic matrices, especially the configuration of archetype characters, the universal nature of forbidden love and other omnipresent conflicts –indifference, poor self-image and the never-ending battle between good and evil—. In addition, one must consider that this fiction is mainly consumed and interpreted by a younger audience, with today's relevant issues like bullying.

Understanding the scope of *doramas* proves interesting upon seeing how they differ from the classic melodrama. According to the interviewees, a big difference is that there is no love triangle between the contentious couple and a third person who obstructs the relationship (Acosta-Alzuru, 2017), but rather a love quadrangle with two feminine archetypes that struggle for love and two masculine figures that respond to two male roles in society; in the case of *Switched*, a hero that at the beginning seems like a villain and a *clown* that transforms into a second hero. This is the most substantial

change, given the archetypes transform into more complex, profound and nuanced characters, and a dramatic arc that surprises viewers.

The scriptwriters insist that these distances strengthen audience acceptance making the depicted situations and ways of interacting plausible, the very same that in a local production would ordinarily be far-fetched. The recognition of characteristic features of the Latin American melodrama, added to these differences, give us understanding as to the relationship local audiences have with foreign products as the result of a productive conflict between cultural similarities and differences.

Finally, the results suggest future lines of research for the study of Asian fiction consumption in the region, exploring if this conflict is effective and, if it is,

how audiences experience it. In addition, the elements of narrative and audiovisual structure recognized by the interviewees could lead to new studies that focus on analysis from the product itself.

## Notes

1. At this time only three networks produce their own telenovelas and each one premiered an average of two per year.
2. Although interviewees authorized the use of their names, they were not released in order to emphasize general tendencies instead of personal perceptions.
3. In this context "a boyfriend".

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