

When Latin American Melodrama Meets Nordic Noir: How SVOD Reshapes Chilean TV Fiction

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Abstract

This article aims to understand the impact of subscription video-on-demand commissions on locally produced content in Latin America's smaller markets. It focuses on the case of *42 Days of Darkness* (2022), the first Netflix Original in Chile produced without the participation of local broadcast channels nor with contributions from state funds. Through a contextualized textual analysis of the series, focusing on Netflix's strategic approach to national/global production, a shift has been identified in both the look and practice of national TV series programming with this new stakeholder. Although the local industry has already ventured into the detective genre based on local crimes, Netflix's first production in Chile adopted narratives and visual motifs congruent with melancholic elements of Nordic noir. We conclude that one of Netflix's main strategies in this project was to embrace the global popularity of the Scandinavian genre's aesthetics while maintaining elements of Latin American melodrama, a predominant genre in the region, in order to appeal to local audiences, creating content with a negotiated, "glocal" appeal. The participation of subscription video-on-demand giants in small industries such as Chile could help to create captivating TV series and energize the local audiovisual production industry. However, it might lead to the homogenization of content and the erasure of cultural specificity.

Keywords

Chile; Latin American melodrama; melodrama; Netflix; Nordic noir; SVOD; SVOD originals

1. Introduction

Until the 2000s, serialized TV fiction production in Chile was not of particular interest to local television channels (Parodi & Quiroz, 2021). Since it was not considered profitable, fictional TV series were almost exclusively made via funding from the National Television Council (Consejo Nacional de Televisión [CNTV]),

which became their production engine (Sanhueza, 2018). This content stood out for its success in reflecting the realities and features of Chilean social idiosyncrasy (Mateos-Pérez & Ochoa, 2019, p. 13). The origin of their financing shaped what Chilean TV series would become.

The eruption of international streaming platforms changed how we conceive of television (Lotz et al., 2018) and subverted production logic in several parts of the world (Scarlata et al., 2021), with Netflix as the main “dominant challenger to linear television, viewing practices, and nationalized media systems” (Jenner, 2018, p. 3). As in the rest of Latin America, Netflix started streaming in Chile in September of 2011, three years before the service was available in countries like Austria, Belgium, France, or Germany. Since then, it has become the most successful streaming platform in the country. According to the national TV survey, in terms of streaming services subscriptions, Netflix leads with 93%, Disney+ (including Star+) holds 44%, and Prime Video has 41% (CNTV, 2024, p. 15). Even though subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) platforms do not inform how many subscribers they have, the large increase in data consumption versus the decrease in paid TV in Chile suggests that SVODs have become important content suppliers in the country (Observatorio Iberoamericano de la Ficción Televisiva [OBITEL], 2024, p. 110). Although Chile is not one of the main Latin American markets, the rise of SVOD consumption habits might have encouraged companies like Netflix to commission original content there. The arrival of a new stakeholder might introduce changes in the thematic offer and visual motifs that emerge in locally produced fictional series, but to what extent?

This article focuses on the case of the first Netflix original produced in Chile, commissioned by local production company Fábula, but without the participation of any local broadcast channels or contributions from state funds (Antezana Barrios, 2024). The series *42 Days of Darkness* (2022) is a crime thriller based on a true case: the disappearance of Viviana Haeger on June 29, 2010, in Puerto Varas, southern Chile. Haeger was a married mother with two daughters who disappeared from her house one morning after her husband went to work. The press widely covered the case, and huge resources were implemented to find the missing woman. Oddly enough, Haeger’s body was found in an attic, in her own house, 42 days later. Her husband was charged with the murder, along with an accomplice, but was ultimately acquitted due to a lack of evidence. The series is partially based on the book *Usted Sabe Quién: Notas Sobre el Homicidio de Viviana Haeger*, a journalistic investigation by Rodrigo Fluxá.

Combining close textual analysis of the six episodes of the series with a contextualized analysis of Netflix’s strategic approach to national/global production in Latin America, we identified a shift in how original content is being produced in Chile. Melancholic elements (Waade, 2017), such as emotionally complex characters, landscapes, lighting, and music associated with the Scandinavian genre were recognized. Although the local audiovisual industry had already ventured into the detective genre based on local crimes, this production has a different televisuality (the look and the practice of TV programming), which embraces the global popularity that Nordic noir has achieved (Stougaard-Nielsen, 2016). We argue that while one of Netflix’s main strategies in this project was to draw on Nordic noir aesthetics, they also sought to include some elements from Latin American melodrama. This traditional genre has predominated audiovisual content (Martín-Barbero, 1995) in the region. The strategy was successful in this case, as it ranked seventh among the most successful non-English series during its first week on the platform, accumulating 9.9 million hours watched since its premiere (Equipo de Culto, 2022).

The participation of SVODs in local audiovisual ecosystems can create compelling and recognizable TV series aimed at audiences used to “glocal” streaming narratives and energize the local audiovisual production industry.

But it might also lead to the homogenization of content and the erasure of “its sociocultural context in the process” (Petruska & Woods, 2019, p. 72) which could disengage local audiences. We conclude that to avoid this phenomenon, Netflix has evolved its approach to commissioning original content.

2. Netflix and the “Localization” of Transnational Content in Latin America

The main strategy that SVODs implement to consolidate themselves in international media markets has been to promote the creation of “original” content. This title is a broad and non-transparent category that describes multiple forms of production and degrees of involvement of streaming companies (Pedro, 2022). Afilipoaie et al. (2021) identified four different investment patterns in Netflix Originals: licensed original, continuation deals, co-producing/co-financing, and full originals. This last category corresponds to those series or films commissioned by SVOD companies from local production companies to create exclusive and original content. Once production is completed, the platform retains distribution rights around the world. This strategy was used by Netflix in Chile for its first commissioned fictional TV series.

SVOD platforms have made an important impact on the way production cultures work (Idiz, 2024), taking the transnationalization of content to its highest point (Lobato, 2019; Lotz & Lobato, 2023). Transnationalization “proposes a negotiation of cross-border dynamics, including policy, audience reception, creative culture, the patterns and the diversity of players involved in production and fragmentation of markets” (Iordache et al., 2022, p. 237). This transnational content has been around for quite a long time, thanks to cross-border channels and the impact of cable television (Chalaby, 2005). However, international co-productions suitable for different national audiences traveled mainly in a one-way direction, particularly from English-speaking countries to the rest of the world. For instance, HBO Latin America produced transnational content in Chile (co-produced with Fábula) for the first time in 2010 (Antezana Barrios, 2024). *Prófugos* (2011–2013) was produced in Spanish with a local cast and distributed to a Latin American audience. Another example is *Sitiados* (2015–2019), which was made in Chile by Fox International, this time with actors from different Latin American countries who spoke with a neutral accent. Both series engaged with audiences within their cultural proximity zone (Straubhaar, 1991) but never got to “travel” West.

In contrast, commissioned content created by SVOD platforms is conceived from their origin under a logic of “glocalization” (Robertson, 1995), which sets universal stories that appeal to a global world in local contexts that wink at belonging to a national audience. Furthermore, it allows global audiences to watch content that otherwise would not have been available in their regions. Therefore, the concept of transnationality within SVOD platforms implies a spatial and cultural shift in how audiences are conceived. As argued by Sundet (2016) “audience making” in the age of media convergence demands a different approach to fulfill the expectations of both national and international audiences. For Latin American audiences who have considered television as its main source of entertainment and information, the televisual world “is expanding...as audiences experience different screens and audiovisual possibilities” (Orozco & Miller, 2016, p. 3). Despite limitations of access or an evident “appeal among the upper middle class and elite, who have the cultural capital to enjoy and appreciate it” (Straubhaar et al., 2019, p. 233), the interest of SVOD companies to expand production efforts in the continent is evident. This aligns with the engagement of Latin American audiences with one of their favorite content formats, TV fiction (OBITEL, 2024), specifically *telenovelas* (Parrot Analytics, 2018).

Although the Latin American audiovisual industry is quite heterogeneous, with giants like Mexico or Brazil and smaller industries like Chile, Peru, or Uruguay, SVOD platforms have been interested in the region since their beginning. Netflix began its expansion outside the United States first to Canada in 2010, and just one year later to Latin America. According to Albornoz and Krakowiak (2023) this strategy was based on two main factors: large audiences were accustomed to consuming American content; and “the penetration of pay-tv in some Latin American countries, especially among the middle and upper social classes, provided fertile ground for the streamer to market its product” (p. 129). Netflix’s localization strategy (Lobato, 2019) followed a similar regional pattern, with different emphases according to market size. Mexico, “the biggest and most influential Spanish-speaking country” (Orozco & Miller, 2016, p. 3) and the biggest media market in Latin America, was where localization strategies were tested. Following Cornelio-Marí (2020), this was done first by “creating a specific version of the site for the market, dubbing and subtitling...[and] next, licensing local content and lastly, going into original production” (p. 7). Accordingly, it was the first SVOD to venture into creating original content on the continent in 2015, with the series *Club de Cuervo* produced in Spanish by a Mexican production company (García Leiva et al., 2021). The bet was successful and spurred the expansion of local commissioned production to other large regional markets.

Brazil is the second-largest market in the company’s regional expansion. According to Rocha and Arantes (2023), it meets all the conditions to become a successful business plan. It has a large population (speaking the same language, Portuguese), a growing middle class, and adequate infrastructure. Netflix started commissioning original content in 2016, with the post-apocalyptic thriller *3%* (2016–2020), choosing a genre made to succeed. But they have also embraced local genres like *telenovelas* in *Girls From Ipanema* (2019), “negotiating and reconfiguring the traditional features of the Latin American Melodrama to serve its own transnational business model” (p. 127). Another important country in the region is Argentina. Serpe (2023) describes it as the third biggest media market in Latin America, which has enthusiastically embraced SVODs. Consequently, streaming services have acquired and commissioned Argentinian fictional content, drawing on a well-experienced local industry. He argues that Argentine SVOD content “builds on the tropes and talent that emerged from New Argentine Cinema, a movement characterized by its low-budget social dramas and incisive representation of the impact of neoliberal policies in the country” (Serpe, 2023, p. 109). The content produced since the first Argentinian original *Edha* (2018), has evolved from thrillers associated with complex TV (Mittell, 2015) to biographical and other fact-based dramas providing “both domestic and international spectators with a repository of national popular culture” (Serpe, 2023, p. 118).

Comparatively, Colombia is a smaller market but has an important tradition in content production for the region, especially exporting *telenovelas*. Unlike other markets, Netflix’s commissioning strategy has benefited from the support of public policies that favor audiovisual industry development in the country. In 2012, Law 1556 (known as Location Colombia) was enacted, propelling “Colombian audiovisual panorama to its definitive turn towards SVOD series, and one of its first beneficiaries was Netflix with the series *Narcos* (Padilha, 2015–2017)” (Uribe-Jongbloed et al., 2021, p. 75). This law provides reimbursements for the production costs of foreign companies that develop their films in Colombian territory, which has recently supported the production of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (2024). Following Heredia Ruiz (2022), Netflix Originals strategy can be outlined in a commitment to content localization through alliances with locally recognized production companies and diverse stories that can travel globally with a catalog. However, she argues these “original” stories might be “chosen based on the cultural stereotype of Latin America, associated with soap operas, drug trafficking, crimes, soccer, corruption, etc.” (Heredia Ruiz, 2022, p. 26).

2.1. TV Fiction Within the Chilean Audiovisual Ecosystem

Recently, smaller markets like Chile have become interesting for streaming companies like Netflix and others, mainly because of their high internet penetration rates—97% (Newman et al., 2024)—and “increase in the volume of downstream data, presumably driven by streaming on demand” (OBITEL, 2024, p. 117). They follow a similar strategy to develop original, exclusive, and global productions throughout the region (Heredia-Ruiz et al., 2021). The first link between local audiovisual ecosystems and SVOD is through distribution. Thus, some successful Chilean broadcast TV series were acquired for streaming distribution. In 2017, Netflix purchased two seasons of *El Reemplazante* (2012–2014) and the series *Juana Brava* (2015) for its catalog (Nuñez, 2017), both produced by local production companies with the aid of public funds. At the same time, Amazon Prime Video acquired for its catalog the series *Los 80* (2008–2014), a popular show for local audiences. Two years later, they ventured to increase their participation in local production with *El Presidente* (2019), a collaboration between international production companies and a local one, Fábula. This business partnership continued with the two seasons of *La Jauría* (2020–2022), which was inspired by the Spanish *La Manada* rape case and the #MeToo movement. Hence, when Netflix decided to commission its first original series in Chile, they chose Fábula, the most important local production company. Not only did they have experience producing an international TV series, but they were also known throughout the continent for their successful film productions, including Chile’s first Oscar for best foreign language film, *A Fantastic Woman* (2017).

Until the late 90s, the Chilean audiovisual ecosystem focused on a particular kind of TV fictional content. Local broadcast channels relied on *telenovelas* whose length better justified production expenses and ensured higher audience levels. Furthermore, TV series were seen as “an audiovisual product of lower rank” (Parodi & Quiroz, 2021, p. 28), as they were closer to low-budget sitcoms. To improve the quality and diversity of TV content, CNTV launched competitive funds (Fondo-CNTV) for independent production companies and broadcast channels to finance part of their projects. As Chile does not have a public media system and what is considered the public broadcast channel must finance itself through advertisement (Godoy, 2000), this public policy allowed the production of high-quality content for open broadcast television (Sanhueza, 2018) and promoted TV fictional series as a valued audiovisual product within local audiences.

In addition, by the first decade of the 21st century, Chile celebrated two commemorative dates that favored the development of fictional productions. In 2010, the country celebrated the bicentennial anniversary of its independence. Hence, a strong corpus of TV series depicting historical events like the independence process (Mateos-Pérez & Ochoa, 2019) or the Pacific War (Antezana & Santa Cruz, 2023) was made. For instance, *Héroes* (2007–2008) portrayed the lives of the main independence leaders who freed Chile from Spanish rule, and *Adiós al Séptimo de Línea* (2010) told the story of a Chilean spy during the war with Bolivia and Peru. Another important milestone was commemorating the 30th anniversary of the *coup d’état* in 2013, which led to the production of a TV series that, for the first time, depicted on television the traumatic events around Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship. Within this context, we find series like *Los Archivos del Cardenal* (2011–2014), which showcased the work of human rights lawyers dealing with forced disappearance cases, and *Ecos del Desierto* (2013), which was based on the real-life of Carmen Hertz, a human rights lawyer whose husband was kidnapped and killed by what is known as the Caravan of Death. These fictional representations produced an important debate about the importance of mediatic memory and how different generations react to the representation of traumatic events (Antezana Barrios & Cabalin, 2018). A good example of this

period's TV series is *Los 80* (2008–2014), which works as a historical and a mediatic memory for younger audiences. It follows the everyday life of the Herrera family, a middle-class couple with two teenage children and a younger son, from 1982 until the end of the dictatorship in 1989. The show ran for seven seasons and had a huge audience success during its first four seasons, as it portrayed daily life during that decade without delving into political issues. However, as the episodes progressively included human rights violation topics, such as the eldest daughter falling in love with a member of the Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez, a guerilla organization against Pinochet, and the inclusion of torture scenes in what was considered a family show, some local audiences lost interest in the series (Antezana Barrios & Sepúlveda, 2022).

Another trope that emerged within the last decade was a sort of disenchantment with what was expected from democratic governments, namely improvements within the pension, education, and health systems. This was explored in some realistic portraits of Chile's neoliberal crisis with a social and political narrative referring to the post-dictatorship period of transition to democracy (Hardy, 2020; Martin-Cabrera, 2023). As Chilean society had been experiencing profound transformations, including a crisis of institutional trust and an increase in the perception of social injustice (Frei, 2024), some of these productions could be seen as a premonitory vision tracing the social unrest that had been accumulating for years during the democratization process and that erupted in a serious social outbreak on October 18th, 2019 (Cabello, 2021). For instance, series like *El Reemplazante* (2012–2014) showed Chile's precarious public school system, or *Bala Loca* (2016) which explored imaginaries about journalism and the media in a post-dictatorial and neoliberal society (Faure et al., 2024) based on real corruption issues. Equally important was the production of crime dramas based on true local cases, for example, *La Cacería* (2018), based on the life of a well-known serial killer or *Zamudio, Perdidos en la Noche* (2015), which was inspired by a high-profile hate crime against a member of the LGBTQ+ community. These stories had high levels of audience and an impact on the public sphere, mainly because they depicted local identity, cultural processes, and open debates around issues that were important in Chilean society (Cabalin & Antezana, 2020).

As shown above, Chilean TV fictional series were conceived as a mirror of local social issues and real-life events. They also helped the country to develop a small but specialized audiovisual industry, which drew attention from SVOD platforms. During the last few years, local productions have acquired some elements from the quality/complex TV shows developed abroad. Accordingly, TV series have fewer episodes, prioritize natural light and real settings, and have a more natural acting style, etc. Nonetheless, we still find a lot of indoor scenes, artificial lighting, emotional performances shot in a very close frame, melodramatic music, etc. All these elements have some degree of aesthetic connection with *telenovelas*, which in Chile are still widely consumed (CNTV, 2023) and are well-regarded even by younger audiences (Antezana et al., 2022).

2.2. Latin American Melodrama Meets Nordic Noir

Melodrama can be traced back to French theater and can be characterized by heightened emotions told through narrative and aesthetic resources. According to Brooks (1976), "the connotation of the word includes indulgence of strong emotionalism, moral polarization schematization; extreme states of being situations; overt villainy, persecution of the good; clarification of the cosmic moral sense of everyday gestures" (p. 10). We can find melodramatic cues in any cultural production, although audiovisual language has optimal elements to depict them through its *mis-en-scène*. For example, as melodrama "relies on archetypal roles (e.g., the damsel in distress, the lover, the villain, the hero) to address moral polarization"

(Mujica & Bachmann, 2016, p. 336), close-up shots help to portray characters' struggle with good and evil, intensifying gestural exaggeration. Other resources, such as background music, slow-motion movements, and acting techniques akin to the theatre can also help melodrama representation.

In contrast, Mittell (2015) defines melodrama as “more of a mode than a genre, an approach to emotion, storytelling, and morality that cuts across numerous genres and media forms” (p. 233). Following Linda Williams's proposition to redefine melodrama away from certain excessive genres like soap operas, he presents melodrama as a mode that “unites various forms of serial television via a shared commitment to linking morality, emotional response, and narrative drive” (Mittell, 2015, p. 245). Building on that argument, Dorcé (2020) states that melodrama “would be the symbolic entity that makes it possible and enhances the audiences' affective involvement with characters and dramatic situations through a...scheme that is not necessarily reductionist, Manichean or excessive” (p. 11) and has become a dominant mode in global contemporary transmedia content.

Even though a melodramatic mode can be identified in structuring discourses in different formats (Dorcé, 2020), Latin American melodrama has some characteristics of its own, still leaning on some excessive traits and emotionally engaging with its audience. It was born within cinema but has found its fulfillment in *telenovelas*. This fictional TV genre originated in the Cuban radio drama and expanded throughout Latin America during the 60s, when broadcast television stretched across the continent. While some formal characteristics of this genre are close to English-speaking soap operas, featuring multi-casting love stories in many episodes, *telenovelas* have a whole different social impact on Latin American audiences, which appropriate this cultural product as it interacts with their own lives (Orozco, 2014). As in the rest of Latin America, this genre followed certain formal characteristics such as a high number of episodes, generally broadcasted daily, with a main love story and a happy ending. This Latin American version of a soap opera was “a cultural catalyst in which all types of desires and emotions effervescently converge, at the same time as an element of cohesion of that Latinity” (Orozco, 2002, p. 16). Thus, the success of this type of TV fiction allowed the development of a prolific industry, which generated enormous profits (Rincón, 2019; Santa Cruz Achurra, 2003). The stories depicted become part of everyday life, and audiences relate to the main characters through “catharsis, as per crying along with the heroine of a telenovela without feeling silly or guilty” (Orozco & Miller, 2016, p. 5). According to Martín-Barbero and Muñoz (1992), this connection between fictional content and audiences expands further on conversations within the community and has a cohesive effect, mainly by using melodramatic elements. These productions have successfully circulated internationally (Mazziotti, 1996; Piñon et al., 2020) and are well received by audiences in their adaptation to the new logic of streaming as super series, which “not only emulate their traditional telenovela narratives but also rework the genre” (Piñon, 2019, p. 204).

As genres evolve, they take elements from other storytelling traditions and aesthetic cues to work as transnational content. In today's audiovisual context, “new transnational production culture appears to be affecting the production, distribution, and reception of series, and crime drama seems to be a powerful, cross-cultural phenomenon with the noteworthy possibility of traveling internationally” (Hansen et al., 2018, p. 3), while remaining important for its local audiences. Within this genre, the emergence of the Scandinavian brand of Nordic noir has had an influence which “has turned into a transnational cultural form” (García-Mainar, 2020, p. 158). While Nordic noir can be identified with a broad number of cultural products, including literature and films, television production has expanded its popularity through iconic TV series like

Forbrydelsen (The Killing; DRI, 2007–2012) and *Bron-Broen* (The Bridge; SVT1, DR1, 2011–2015), which have been widely translated, subtitled, and adapted into foreign languages and markets (Stougaard-Nielsen, 2016). It is understood as a “broad umbrella term that describes a particular type of Scandinavian crime fiction, typified by its heady mixture of bleak naturalism, disconsolate locations, and morose detectives” (Creeber, 2015, p. 21). Nonetheless, McCulloch and Proctor (2023) theorize “Nordic Noir as a cultural category rather than a set of stylistic or formal characteristics” (p. 5), which is “built out of a familial matrix of intertextual ancestors and antecedents” (p. 9). In other words, it is a genre that can trace its origins to police procedural novels or French film noir and, as a cultural phenomenon, it is in constant evolution.

On the other hand, a combination of style, settings, and references to social concerns are perceived as attributes of this genre by the audiences and the industry. Waade (2017) identifies Nordic noir on screen “with a certain melancholy displayed in the plot, the imaginary and the characters” (p. 380) inherited from Scandinavian crime literature. These melancholic elements, she argues, have a strong connection “with a particular landscape and climate aesthetic that expressed romantic ideals” (Waade, 2017, p. 381) and can be characterized by:

- a) Complex characters and gender issues such as powerful women, feminized male antiheroes, and in some cases socially and emotionally dysfunctional main characters as well; b) A particular use of Nordic settings, including landscape, lighting, climate, design, and architecture; c) Societal criticism such as the Nordic welfare system. (Waade, 2017, p. 384)

Another important element in her characterization of melancholy is a particular kind of music expressing a certain gloomy mood in these crime stories: “The sound of Nordic Noir is often muted, at a slow pace, with single voices or no lyrics at all, sometimes involving significant dissonance and a mixture of instruments from folk music and more contemporary rock ballads” (Waade, 2017, p. 389).

The combination of narrative and aesthetic elements associated with Nordic noir, produced in one specific region of the world, has traveled extremely well (Badley et al., 2020). While it is not new that Nordic noir has influenced TV fictional crime dramas in many different places, even in sunnier areas such as Italy (Toft Hansen & Re, 2021) or Spain (Cascajosa Virino, 2018), we can wonder what happens with content in specific national contexts that are both small and peripheral. “The glocal nature of Netflix Originals...markedly local (in terms of such elements as the origin of the production, actors, locations, subject matter and language) and then globalized thanks to techniques and practices designed to reach audiences in other countries” (Neira et al., 2023, p. 3) impact national audiovisual production cultures and the way TV series look. This was theorized by Caldwell (1995) as televisuality, which designates a system of commercial conditions, styles, ideologies, cultural values, modes of production, programming, and audience practices that configure television as a medium. As SVOD companies are expanding norms of television production changing the way stories are told and how they look on screen in different parts of the world, we propose the following research questions:

RQ1: What narrative and aesthetic elements can be identified in *42 Days of Darkness* as belonging to the Nordic noir genre?

RQ2: In what way has Latin American melodrama become present in the series’ televisual elements?

RQ3: To what extent has SVOD production changed the Chilean fictional series’ televisuality?

To answer these RQs, we propose a textual analysis of the six episodes of *42 Days of Darkness* (2022), focused on narrative and visual analysis (Casetti & Di Chio, 1999) of each episode. From a narrative point of view, we emphasized the description of plots, arguments, characters, and genre. The visual analysis focused on *mise-en-scène*, frames, visual elements, lighting, and sound motifs. For context, we include press interviews from Netflix regional executives, producers, and directors.

3. Latin American Melodrama Mode On

Although the series directors Claudia Huaiquimilla and Gaspar Antillo were keen on assuring they worked “on a story that is not based on, but is inspired by; therefore, it does not attempt to document an absolute truth” (Valdivia, 2022, para. 4), for those who followed the case through the press, the similarities with reality were evident. The main character, Verónica Montes (Aline Küppenheim), Viviana Haeger’s alter ego who suffers the same fate, disappears from an exclusive gated community in a small city, leaving her documents, valuable objects, money, etc., behind. The rest of the cast is also made up of recognizable characteristics from police chronicles: Mario Medina (Daniel Alcaíno), the husband who will mobilize suspicion throughout the story; and the daughters, Karen (Julia Lübbert) and Emilia (Montserrat Lira), who grew up between the constant tension of the trial and the suspicions towards their father that never fully dissolved.

The narrative also includes some characters based on real people whose traits were enhanced by fiction to boost the melodramatic mode. For instance, one of the main characters is based on the victim’s sister, Cecilia Montes (Claudia Di Girolamo), who embodies the tension between good and bad as she insists on finding out what happened to her sister and starts to point out her brother-in-law as a suspect, even though it might break the family. Her stubbornness to question the police work guides the storyline through the crucial stages of suffering and acting upon something that feels unjust. At the same time, Di Girolamo’s worried face, in a close-up frame, is something the Chilean audience knows well, as the actress is one of the most recognizable stars from daytime *telenovelas* from the past decades.

Another fictional character that reaffirms the melodramatic mode of the script is the lawyer Víctor Pizarro (Pablo Macaya). Pizarro is a petty, decadent lawyer frequently suspended from court cases because he doesn’t play by the rules. He becomes so obsessed with the case that he assembles a team of former investigative police officers who work as private investigators to solve the case: Nora Figueroa (Amparo Noguera) and Braulio Sánchez (Néstor Cantillana). This trio of misfits will discover inconsistencies in the husband’s alibi and convince the victim’s siblings to hire Pizarro as their lawyer. The figure of the lawyer in this series is the equivalent of the police/investigator, an emotionally complex character as seen in Nordic noir TV production, a melancholic observer with a particular sensitivity that captures loss and the unknown (Hansen & Waade, 2017). His traits can be identified as an anti-hero, an ambiguously moral protagonist (Eden et al., 2017) that reminds us of “the possibility of redemptive change and transcendence” (Fitch, 2005, p. 8). Like detectives Kurt Wallander and Sarah Lund, Víctor Pizarro is socially dysfunctional. He can barely work with the team of investigators he is supposed to trust; he has a problematic family life, as he is divorced and an unreliable father; he is awkward and does not care about his appearance. But most importantly, he is obsessed with his work and finding the true killer, whether to find justice for the victim or to satisfy his ego. In an interview with a local newspaper, Sergio Coronado, the real lawyer, said, “despite the great differences, there is something completely true: the passion with which he intervened in the case” (Mejías, 2022, para. 1). Pizarro’s obsessive behavior shows up in a scene where he is supposed to go on a

fishing trip with his son. He suddenly realizes something doesn't add up in Medina's alibi and ditches his son in the middle of the road.

3.1. Contextualized Social Criticism: Chile's Social Inequalities and Gender Gaps

The context is quite important to develop the narrative of this series because the crime that inspired this fictional text is not just any murder case; in this sense, it brings to light some important issues in Latin American societies—gender violence against women and class differences when facing justice. Even though gender violence is a global problem and has become a key factor in transnational dramas, violence against women is a relatively common trope within Latin America's cultural production, and Chile is no exception. According to the annual report on femicide by the Chilean Ministry of Women and Gender Equality (Subsecretaría de Prevención del Delito et al., 2022), in 2020, there were 43 femicides and 180 attempted femicides. The largest number of completed femicides occurred in the Metropolitan Region (where the capital city is located), and “the regions with the most attempted femicides were the Metropolitan and La Araucanía regions (where the series was shot)” (Subsecretaría de Prevención del Delito et al., 2022, p. 17).

The concept of femicide, which means the killing of a woman or girl by a man on account of her gender, has given accountability to what a few years ago was just labeled as murder. The fact that the series was based on a criminal event of this nature pushed the production team to include a woman co-director in order to incorporate a gender perspective, which gave some specificity to the series. In a few interviews with the press, Claudia Huaiquimilla accentuates the intention of having this perspective: “The great challenge for me, who has written stories with male and adolescent protagonists, was to build a story where there are female protagonists of all ages, from all social classes...without being spectacular or falling into stereotypes” (Ramírez, 2022, para. 3). She reveals she read a lot of domestic violence and femicide cases to define the main traits of the female characters, showing special care for the way they would depict violence against women in this production. Indeed, we see a different approach to what national audiences were used to watching in other national TV series, where women are shown yelling or crying as they represent the victim's role. In *42 Days of Darkness*, there are no images of the crime or even flashbacks of violent episodes between Verónica and her husband. Images of the body or the crime scene are absent from the screenplay. In contrast, the victim appears in home-movie-style flashbacks, which portray her as a loving woman with her daughters and her sister, hugging and giggling by the lake in one of the few sunny scenes we see. Despite a certain gloominess in her eyes, the *pathos* of these scenes is more subtle than the content generally produced for local audiences.

Gender issues were not the only societal critique that became a fundamental stance for the directors. In addition, the script highlights the fact that the police searched for the body of a missing woman for days with no results, even though it was inside the house the whole time. Not only did they waste precious time in a murder investigation with their lack of thoroughness and diligence, but they didn't follow all the leads because of the class status of the victim's husband. The screenplay emphasizes the difference in treatment that both the police and the justice system give to individuals of different social backgrounds. While Nordic noir focuses its social criticism on the welfare system or other societal behaviors like a certain lack of social cohesion, in *42 Days of Darkness*, the theme of class appears throughout the storytelling. Class differences represented in this series are common to local audiences, as different social backgrounds and classism is an important trope in Latin American melodrama. Correspondingly, Chilean TV series have shown this topic less subtly, showing how different life can be in a dusty shanty town or an upper high-class quarter. In this

Netflix original, we don't see extreme poverty or evident power abuse from the upper class. Still, we see how detectives and judges treat Medina as he tries to influence the course of the investigation. For instance, there is a scene where police officers bring a dog specialized in locating corpses, and as the dog starts barking at the house, the victim's husband decides they should go to the woods instead. Police officers do not even question him when he points out where to search. According to Huaiquimilla, "This story acknowledges the existence of two Chiles...we come from two different backgrounds and this co-direction experience was a complementary dialogue that helped us a lot when it came to telling stories from different perspectives" (De la Maza, 2022).

3.2. Nordic Aesthetic With Local Markers

The true crime that inspired this series happened in Chile's Lake District during the southern hemisphere's winter. Hence, most of the news coverage from the case showed the rainy, cold, and humid weather of that part of the country during the harshest winter months. The landscape is full of lakes and forests that might resemble the Scandinavian scenery, which producers highlighted as an attractive element for international audiences. Therefore, the landscape is an important part of the storytelling, reflected in wide cinematic shots of the Llanquihue Lake and its leafy green surroundings. According to one of the series directors, the idea was "that the weather enhanced the feelings of the characters, the emotions...so the viewer would be able to see in the series that everything was bathed in the landscapes of the south" (Torres, 2022, para. 5). Consequently, it was purposely filmed during the winter to keep the atmosphere gloomy and foggy, enhancing the cool-toned lighting and a predominant blue filter that evokes the melancholic atmosphere associated with Nordic noir's contemplative cinematic landscape.

Lukinbeal (2005) poses the idea that cinematic landscapes "extend far behind the silver screen to intersect how we narrate our identities in our landscapes, and we define the extent of ourselves within a global cinematic community" (p. 18). He identifies landscapes as different concepts: in the first place, landscape is space "that is closely identified to the term placeless and generic representations of place" (p. 5), this space provides an area where the narrative can evolve, but it is reduced by close-up shots, which prioritize social space and dialogue. A second meaning of landscape on screen is as a spectacle, encoding "power relations within the gaze...what constitutes beauty, who is gazing and what we are gazing upon" (Lukinbeal, 2005, p. 11) We argue that the cinematic landscape serves in this series as an aestheticized spectacle of what has traditionally been just rural, harsh, and sometimes impoverished settings in Chilean audiovisual productions.

The district where the series was shot (the cities of Pucón, Villarica, and Puerto Montt) have beautiful touristy areas but are also situated in one of the poorest regions in the country, in constant tension for the right to ancestral land between the Mapuche people (Chile's Native people) and local farmers. Although the scenery might resemble the Scandinavian countryside, the material conditions are very different. This is what Lotz and Potter (2022) raise as the problem with streaming productions when the "need to attract and serve audiences across nations...actively discourages cultural specificity" (p. 688). According to the categories these authors established when describing how to locate a story in an audiovisual text, *42 Days of Darkness* would be a "placed" series. This means the series is geographically located in the narrative, and "background imagery of landmarks and well-known symbols locate the story so there can be no doubt as to where the action is taking place" (Lotz & Potter, 2022, p. 689). Yet, these signifiers provide minimal details to situate the story within its cultural context.

However, we still find some local markers included for local audiences to identify the story as Chilean. Images of recognizable national newspapers and TV channels are common as the crime had important press coverage. Another important local marker is the restaurant the lawyer and his two private investigators visit regularly. It is a typical *fuenta de soda*, a diner where you can have a local hot dog with tea or a beer. The scenes in this place remind local audiences where these events are taking place. Furthermore, the sound works as a local marker, creating a distance with Nordic noir. While the main theme is a gloomy ballad with lyrics, called *Que Entre el Frio* (let in the cold) by the Chilean performer Niña Tormenta, the rest of the soundtrack mixes different musical genres, from Bolero to local pop music. The *mise-en-scène* is designed around dialogues between the characters and the music playing in car scenes, restaurants, shops, etc.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This article proposes to identify to what extent SVOD production can change Chilean fictional TV series televisuality. The case study analyzed here is Netflix's first original production in Chile, a small player compared with other Latin American countries like Mexico or Brazil.

Although some common elements of Nordic noir are recognizable at first glance, we can still find Latin American melodrama in *42 Days of Darkness*. Accordingly, the narrative of this series unfolds around three main ideas that are also present in this genre, including Chilean TV series produced without streamers: class differences, mistrust in governmental institutions, and oppressed but reliable female characters. Women are not always heard in an extremely patriarchal society like Chile, but local fictional content has a long tradition of portraying feminine characters as strong, determined, and guiding the actions in the story. In this case, the victim's oldest daughter, who is divided between believing her father's version or believing he is the murderer, embodies the emotional ambiguity of the case; the victim's sister is the one who pushes and hires a lawyer who is willing to go against all odds to find the killer; and finally, the policewoman who finds the body where everyone has looked before without seeing anything, are good examples.

Another point where the classic structure of Latin American melodrama is noticeable is the strong social structures that frame the characters' behaviors. There is certainly a melancholic trait in every single one of them, but they are not lonesome. The series preserves the classic representation of the importance of family ties, the same link that appears to be fundamental in *telenovelas* and other fictional Latin American TV series. Families constitute the foundational stone where every character can find support no matter what. The victim can rely on her siblings and mother to fight for the truth, and even the primal suspect can find unconditional support in family bonds.

At the same time, on an aesthetic level, Nordic noir was certainly an inspiration for how *42 Days of Darkness* would look, enhancing some elements that can be linked with the cinematic landscape of the Scandinavian region. Large frames of lakes and forests immerse us in the rainy atmosphere of southern Chile in winter. The cooled-toned lighting in the images might confuse a distracted audience, but the story is not set in Europe, but in South America. On a narrative level, the series also takes some topics we see in Nordic noir (and other complex TV series). The lead character depicts the figure of an anti-hero, this time not a detective but a lawyer obsessed with the case. He has all the classic features of an emotionally complex character: problematic relationships with his work, colleagues, and family; he is ambiguously moral and doesn't care what people think of him. The narrative also includes social criticism in Nordic noir, although this time centered around a critical point towards some institutions like the police or the justice system.

Despite the elements that might make us think that *42 Days of Darkness* is just another placeless crime series without any cultural context, some elements emerge and give a glimpse of a certain belonging within the Chilean TV fiction tradition. The way characters relate to each other, how they are framed, the problems they must deal with, and the sounds around them point to the cultural cues of local Latin American melodrama. This negotiated “glocal” content is another example of the emergence of novel subformats that combine local content “with the cinematic aesthetic motifs of the American and English multigenic series of Quality television” (Dorcé, 2020, p. 10). This change is now expanding to the smallest industries in the region.

The limitations of this work are mainly related to a certain opacity in the local industry, which makes it difficult to access real creative negotiations that happen when producing this kind of content. Although there has been some successful research where scholars have had access to production processes and even writing rooms (Redvall, 2013), the Chilean context is different. There is an official “total creative freedom” discourse that circulates in the press that might not be that accurate, and it is difficult to have a sincere response from local producers as they see the collaboration with SVOD as an opportunity to develop future projects. Another limitation of this analysis is that it is based on just one case. By now, Netflix and other SVOD companies have produced other series exploring different topics and are expanding to films and documentaries. This opens the possibility for new research on the next steps of streaming production in a small market like Chile and what challenges it will bring to Chile’s audiovisual ecosystem.

Finally, local producers are delighted with the entrance of a new player in the industry, even if some creative concessions must be made to reach wider audiences as “the value Netflix claims to derive from culturally specific yet multi-nationally legible stories” (Wayne, 2023, p. 55) is high. Producer Ángela Poblete summarized the experience this way: “It is nice and satisfying to see our series travel, reach more people and break down myths, thus opening up spaces and paths for the consolidation of our industry” (CinemaChile, 2022, para 3).

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Conflict of Interests

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