

VENEZUELA: IN SEARCH OF THE LOST MELODRAMA

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Autores:

Zicri Colmenares-Díaz¹ (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1384-737X>)

Luisa Torrealba* (<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7739-0367>)

Morella Alvarado* (<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4124-0575>)

Martin Hahn* (<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7546-1432>)

Introduction

In 2023, the national fiction premiere in Venezuela continues in the search for the lost melodrama. In the midst of a complex political and economic context, HispanoTV invested in the production of *Dramáticas*, a series conceived to be broadcasted simultaneously on free-to-air television and VoD platforms. The purpose is to reach and reconnect with local audiences and with the more than 8 million Venezuelan migrants who have left the country in recent years because of the complex humanitarian crisis. Rebroadcasts and imported fictions from both the Ibero-American region and, Northern Europe and Asia rule the Venezuelan screen.

1. The Venezuelan audiovisual context in 2023

1.1. Free-to-air television in Venezuela

Figure 1. National free-to-air television chains/channels in Venezuela

Private channels (9)	Free-to-air channels (11)
Canal I	123 TV
Globovisión	ANTV - Fundación Audiovisual Nacional de Televisión
La Tele Tuya (TLT)	Ávila TV
Meridiano Televisión	ConCiencia TV
Televen	ShowVen
TV Familia	Colombeia. La televisora educativa de Venezuela
Vale TV	Tele Sur -La Nueva Televisión del Sur C.A.
Venevisión	TVES - Fundación Televisora Venezolana Social
Vepaco TV	TV FANB
	Vive TV - Visión Venezuela
	VTV - Compañía Anónima Venezolana de Televisión
TOTAL CHAINS = 0	
TOTAL CHANNELS = 20	

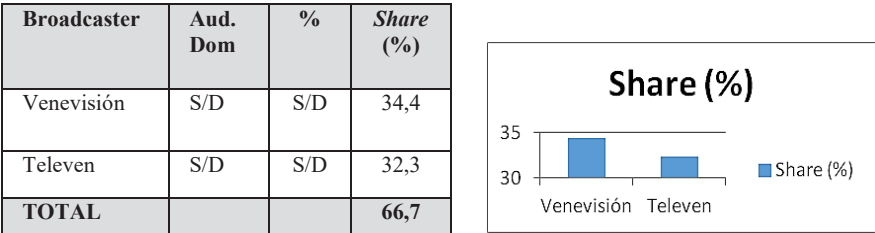
Source: Obitel Venezuela

¹ Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, México.

* Universidad Central de Venezuela.

During 2023, 20 free-to-air channels broadcast nationwide, 11 belong to the public sector and nine to the private sector. There was a slight decrease in free-to-air television. The television station Alba TV, which is financed with public funds and whose objective was to promote the articulation of social movements in Latin America, ceased broadcasting in January 2023. However, there are more public than private channels. In public television stations, propagandistic contents prevailed, while in private channels, informative, fiction and entertainment contents predominated. In news segments, a pattern of self-censorship was noticeable regarding information that could be considered critical of the national government. On the other hand, the state-owned television station Corazón Llanero, whose contents were focused on the promotion of traditional Venezuelan music, was transformed into the channel Show Ven, which is distinguished by having a high definition signal and focusing its contents on the transmission of music videos of various genres, talent contests and retransmission of live recorded concerts.

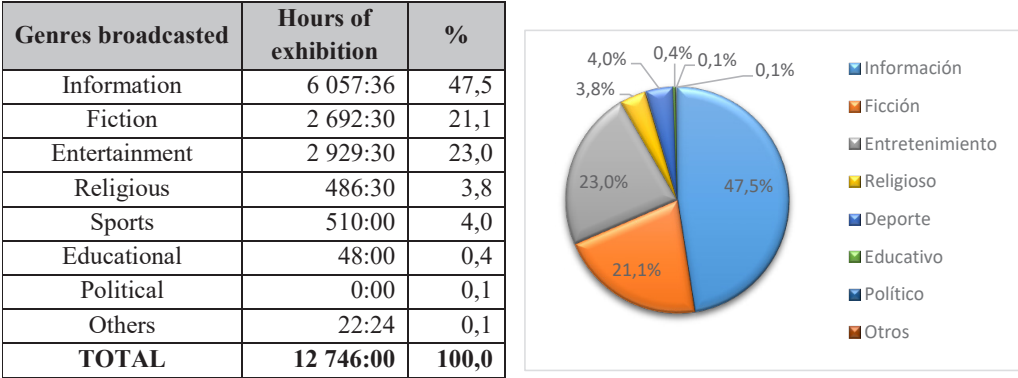
Graph 1. TV rating and share per station (rating per household)



Source: BB Media (10 most watched programs between 29/01 and 04/02 2023).

There is no complete and systematized information because there is no company in the country that keeps an exhaustive record of the rating and share of free-to-air television. The media and advertising agencies usually hire the services of transnational companies that carry out focused measurements, the results of which are confidential. However, partial data was obtained, generated by BB Media and published by the Produ portal, about the 10 most watched programs from January 29 to February 4, 2023. The results in Graph 1 are the result of the average of such data, in order to have a reference on the audience behavior of the two most watched channels: Venevisión and Televen, the two largest private television stations in the country.

Graph 2: Genres and hours broadcast in TV programming



Source: Obitel Venezuela

For Graph 2, a partial sample was taken from the programming of three television channels (Venevisión, Televen and Globovisión) during 24 weeks. The genre that occupied the most space was news. In 2023, several relevant events took place in the process of consensus building for the return of democratic institutions in Venezuela. A negotiation table was established between the government and sectors of the Unitary Democratic Platform, to define agreements that would guarantee that the 2024 presidential elections in Venezuela would be free and competitive. The opposition sectors carried out the primary election to select their candidate for the 2024 presidential election. The process against Venezuela at the International Criminal Court continued, to determine whether to resume the investigation for the alleged commission of crimes against humanity in the country. All these events had an impact on the relevance of news information, occupying the largest number of hours in the programming. Entertainment and fiction content occupied the following positions in relation to the number of hours shown.

1.2. Pay TV and VoD platforms in Venezuela in 2023²

At the beginning of June 2024, the *Comisión Nacional de Telecomunicaciones* (CONATEL) had not published the indicators of the telecommunications sector in the country for the year 2023; this opacity of the sector was compounded by complaints from the main pay TV operators about piracy in the sector. According to Francisco Escutia, CEO of the consulting firm Laapip, In Venezuela, 16% of households engage in traditional piracy and 30% consume illegal pay TV (El Pitazo, 2023).

The main private pay TV companies, SimpleTV, Inter, NetUno and Súper Cable, continued operating. As well as the state-owned service Cantv Televisión Satelital.

²There are no official and updated figures on the pay TV sector in Venezuela, nor on its audience, which prevented the elaboration of Table N° 2, of the most watched pay TV channels in Venezuela during 2023.

The pay TV services of the Venezuelan channels IVC Networks, Venevisión Plus, Sun Channel (tourism), Escuela+ (educational) remained active. Both IVC Networks and Venevisión Plus included the transmission of serialized fiction in their programming.

In addition to the above, there is no public data on the penetration of VoD platforms in the country. Journalistic reports state that Netflix is the platform with the most users. In Venezuela, the premiere of the second season of the fiction series *Pálpito*, by Venezuelan writer Leonardo Padrón, on April 17, 2023, turned out to be an important event. Although this fiction was filmed in Colombia and Turkey, it incorporated Venezuelan actors Mariaca Semprun and Ernesto Calzadilla, thus reinforcing the bond and acceptance by the Venezuelan audience, which had already been achieved with the first season. A week after its premiere, it accumulated more than 52 million hours of playback, making it the most watched series on the platform worldwide. It was the most watched series in 64 countries in its first week, including Venezuela, according to Netflix itself (Gaitán, 2023).

Victor Lara (2023) made an approach to the panorama of VoD platforms in Venezuela, presented through a survey through an online media. As a result, he found that only 20.06% of the 426 readers who participated have a subscription to any streaming platform. Of these, 54.25% indicated that they pay for more than one platform and the most watched were Netflix (85.10%), Disney+ (30.85%), Amazon Prime (29.78%), Star Premium (18.08%), Blim TV and Magis TV (with 17.02%, each) and Pluto TV (14.89%).

The device most used to access the platforms' content was the smartTV. The majority (47.9%) indicated that they obtained the subscription through the purchase from screen vendors and not by being directly subscribed with the platforms. The most consumed contents were series (94.68%), movies (89.36%) and documentaries (52.12%), which reveals that fiction consumption is the one that prevails in streaming services. At the time the survey was published, June 2023, the Venezuelan series *Dramáticas* had not yet been released, so it did not appear in the applications for streaming consumption.

1.3. Sources of funding in the audiovisual sector

In 2023, the government's *Comisión Nacional de Telecomunicaciones* (CONATEL), through its *Fondo de Responsabilidad Social*, which is funded by the telecommunications sector tax contributions made by operators, financed diploma courses in audiovisual production and an initial training program in television and audiovisual creation, to stimulate the development of audiovisual productions in the country. It also kept open throughout the year the reception of projects to finance the execution and commercialization of audiovisual productions by independent producers.

These funds are granted on the basis of the Technical Regulations for the administration, allocation, follow-up and control of the resources of the Fondo de Responsabilidad Social.

Although there was little public information on the productions resulting from the financing with this fund, it was learned that one of the productions was the documentary “Camino a Carabobo, todos por la Patria”, identified by its makers as part of the docufiction genre. Made by Venezuelan filmmaker Rubén Hernández Remón, it narrates the actions undertaken by the Liberator Simón Bolívar, which led him to win the independence battle of Carabobo.

The series *Dramáticas* was the only Venezuelan fiction production that premiered in 2023, under the production of Hispanomedios with an alliance for broadcasting in open signal with Venevisión. It was conceived as a fiction product to be broadcast in parallel in broadcast and streaming, and financed with private resources from Hispanomedios itself and various Venezuelan commercial brands that served as sponsors.

1.4. Communication policies

The television sector in Venezuela operated, throughout 2023, under the precepts of the *ley de Responsabilidad Social en Radio, Televisión y Medios Electrónicos* (Resorte-Me); the *Ley Orgánica de Telecomunicaciones*; and the *Ley Constitucional Contra el Odio, por la Convivencia Pacífica y la Tolerancia*, which have a punitive nature, which promoted self-censorship of content that could be considered critical of governmental management. The national government, through CONATEL, continued with the expansion policy of its *Televisión Satelital Abierta* (FTA) project, with nationwide coverage, which offers access to open signals from 56 television channels and 11 radio stations.

Television stations include in their programming sports, news and entertainment content, both national and international. Although access to content is free of charge, not all citizens have the possibility of enjoying FTA; to access this service it is necessary to purchase a decoder kit, antenna and accessories, valued at 1,587.75 Bolivars (equivalent to US\$44). The minimum wage in Venezuela is 120 Bolivars (US\$3.28), which means that 14 minimum wages would be required to purchase the kit.

1.5. Digital and mobile connectivity infrastructure

At the time of writing this chapter, May 2024, official telecommunications sector statistics published by CONATEL were not yet available, so alternative sources of information were used to provide an approximation of the sector's performance. According to Datareportal's *Digital 2024: Venezuela* report, the number of Internet users in Venezuela reached 17.94 million with a penetration of 61.6%. The number of cell phones with active lines reached 21.37 million, which implies that 73.4% of

the population had access to this service. Although the data in the referred report are from January 2024, they are the closest records to the end of the year 2023.

2. Analysis of the Year: National and Ibero-American Premiere Fiction on Free-to-air TV

In the last six years, free-to-air television and especially those channels that produced fiction (Venevisión and Televen) recorded a drastic drop in the creation of series, telenovelas and miniseries. However, in the year 2023, what some people linked to entertainment called “the return of melodramas to Venezuela” or “the reactivation of productions in Venezuela” took place, due to the premiere of the series “*Dramáticas*”. However, melodrama continues to be lost from Venezuelan screens, a series of only 12 episodes does not mean a return of melodramas, but rather, it is evidence once again that television stations in the country cannot afford national productions.

TABLE 1. Premiere fictions screened in 2023
(national, foreign Obitel and co-productions)

UNRELEASED NATIONAL TITLES– 1	16. <i>Los Ricos También Lloran</i> (telenovela-México)
Venevisión	17. <i>Tu Voz Estéreo</i> (serie-Colombia)
01. <i>Dramáticas</i> (serie)	Venevisión
UNRELEASED FOREIGN TITLES– 26	18. <i>Amo Despertar Contigo</i> (telenovela-México)
La Tele Tuya	19. <i>Go! Vive a tu Manera</i> (serie-Argentina)
02. <i>Isla Paraíso</i> (telenovela-Chile)	20. <i>Imperio</i> (telenovela-Brasil)
03. <i>Juncal</i> (serie-España)	21. <i>La Mexicana y el Güero</i> (telenovela-México)
04. <i>Sabuesos</i> (serie-España)	22. <i>La Rosa de Guadalupe</i> (unitary-México)
05. <i>Vida y Pasión - Paixão</i> (serie-Portugal)	23. <i>Mi Secreto</i> (telenovela-México)
Televen	24. <i>Papá a Toda Madre</i> (telenovela-México)
06. <i>Café con Aroma de Mujer</i> (telenovela-Colombia)	25. <i>Querer sin Límites</i> (telenovela-Brasil)
07. <i>Corona de Lágrimas 2</i> (telenovela-México)	26. <i>SOS me Estoy Enamorando</i> (telenovela-México)
08. <i>El Rey, Vicente Fernández</i> (miniserie-Colombia)	27. <i>Totalmente Diva</i> (telenovela-Brasil)
09. <i>Entre Sombras, Secretos que Marcan el Alma</i> (serie-Colombia)	28. <i>Los Elegidos</i> (serie-EEUU)
10. <i>La Desalmada</i> (telenovela-México)	UNPUBLISHED OBITEL CO-PRODUCTIONS - 2
11. <i>La Herencia. Un Legado de Amor</i> (telenovela-México)	La Tele Tuya
12. <i>La Ley del Corazón 2</i> (telenovela-Colombia)	29. <i>Amores que Engañan</i> (unitary -EEUU, México, Brasil)
13. <i>La Madrastra</i> (serie-México)	30. <i>Historias de Diván</i> (telenovela-Argentina, Uruguay)
14. <i>La Reina del Flow 2</i> (serie-Colombia)	
15. <i>Los Archivos del Cardenal</i> (serie-Chile)	TOTAL UNRELEASED TITLES: 29

Source: OBITEL Venezuela

As shown in Table 1, foreign titles lead the premieres in free-to-air television. Mexican productions continue to be the main alternative for Televen and Venevisión channels. It is worth mentioning the wide offer of serialized fiction productions to which Venezuelan viewers have access. Outside the Obitel scope fifty-eight titles were broadcast from China (11 titles); South Korea (18); Denmark (1); Philippines (2); Russia (4); Turkey (14); Belgium, France, Iceland, Italy and Lebanon (1 title each). The above shows how geopolitical factors have an impact on the exhibition of serialized fiction and have repercussions on a diversity of supply on the screen that is difficult to match in other Ibero-American contexts.

As a result, Venezuelans have the possibility of interacting with content generated more than three decades ago (*Pobre negro*, 1989, RCTV), or with unusual content (Belgian, Danish or Nordic). The information on these fictions is not included in the table because they do not belong to the Obitel scope, but it shows the need to complete the programming as a consequence of a reduced national production. In any case, it is relevant to point out that international productions shown in the country increasingly allow audiences to get to know new scripts and a diversity of cultures, contexts, genres and styles that are not present in Venezuelan television.

Venevisión aired the only previously unreleased national title, *Dramáticas*, which narrates a sequence of events in a television channel on the verge of bankruptcy, where renowned and experienced actors and actresses unite with the objective of rescuing it, which ironically resembles the reality of national production companies. It also broadcasted several non-fiction programs, such as the *Festival de la Orquídea*, a musical event held in the city of Maracaibo, in the state of Zulia, which was broadcast after 11 years of absence on this channel. With the participation of national and international artists, who were awarded for their talent, this program obtained a 71% share (Venevisión, 2023a). In addition, they broadcast several sporting events such as the Professional Baseball League (LVBP), the South American Soccer Confederation Cup (Conmebol), the Major League Baseball (MLB) and the Venezuelan Soccer Federation League (Futve), and the World Baseball Classic, which obtained a 53.8% share between March 8 and 21 (Venevisión, 2023b).

TABLE 1b. Exhibition of rerun titles during 2023
(national, foreign Obitel titles and co-productions)

REPEATED NATIONAL TITLES – 9	REPEATED FOREIGN TITLES - 7
Televen	La Tele Tuya
01. <i>Amor Infiel</i> (telenovela)	10. <i>A Garota da Moto</i> (telenovela-Brasil)
02. <i>Escándalos</i> (unitary)	Televen
03. <i>Mi Prima Ciela</i> (telenovela)	11. <i>El Rey del Ganado</i> (telenovela-Brasil)
04. <i>Nadie me Dirá como Quererte</i> (serie)	12. <i>Lo que Callamos las Mujeres</i> (serie-México)
Venevisión	13. <i>UEPA! Un Escenario para Amar</i> (serie-México)
05. <i>Amantes de Luna Llena</i> (telenovela)	14. <i>Una Familia de Diez</i> (sitcom-México)
06. <i>Arroz con Leche</i> (telenovela)	15. <i>Xica Da Silva</i> (telenovela-Brasil)
07. <i>Ciudad Bendita</i> (telenovela)	16. <i>Los Elegidos</i> (serie-EEUU)
08. <i>Entre tu Amor y mi Amor</i> (telenovela)	
09. <i>Voltea pa' que te Enamores</i> (telenovela)	TOTAL OF REPEATED TITLES: 16

Source: OBITEL Venezuela

For several years, reruns have become an important tool to cover the absence of national productions in television programming. As in the year 2022, the exhibition of reruns (Table 1b) was mostly made up of titles premiered in the 2000s. Two productions from the mid-1990s stand out: the Brazilian telenovela *Xica Da Silva* (1996) and *El Rey del Ganado* (1996).

TABLE 2. National fiction formats for release in 2023
and their evolution in the five-year period

Format	Titles						Hours					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Telenovela	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	300:00	0	0	300:00
Series	2	1	0	1	1	4	35:00	3:00	0	240:00	9:00	287:00
Miniseries	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	3:00	6:00	0	0	9:00
Sitcom	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:00
Unitary	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:00
Docudrama	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:00
Others	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0:55	0	0	0	0:00
Total	2	1	3	1	1	8	35:00	0:55	306:00	240:00	9:00	596:55

Fuente: OBITEL Venezuela

At the beginning of this section it was mentioned that free-to-air television channels (Venevisión and Televen) experienced a significant decrease in fiction production in recent years. Table 2 shows an apparent continuity in the premiered national fiction. However, the reality is that in 2023 only one series produced in the country was premiered, *Dramáticas*, with a duration of 9 hours. In 2022 it was

the miniseries *Carabobo*, *Caminos de Libertad*, entirely financed with public funds, with a duration of 240 hours; and 2021 shows 300 hours corresponding to two tele-novelas premiered and broadcast by RCTV Internacional in 2001 and 2009, which had not been premiered on Televen. Therefore, the scarce 9 hours of production does not represent an increase when compared to the production that took place in the 80’s and 90’s when Venezuela was internationally known for its dramas.

TABLE 3. Premiere fictions released in 2022: Countries of origin

Country	Titles	%	Hours	%
NATIONAL (total)	1	3	9:00	0
OBITEL COUNTRIES (total)	28	97	1873:45	100
Argentina	1	3	10:15	1
Brasil	3	10	444:25	24
Chile	2	7	124:55	7
Colombia	6	21	305:00	16
Ecuador	0	0	0:00	0
España	2	7	155:00	8
EE.UU. Hispanos	0	0	0:00	0
México	11	38	728:15	39
Perú	0	0	0:00	0
Portugal	1	3	91:40	5
Uruguay	0	0	0:00	0
Venezuela	1	3	9:00	0
CO-PRODUCTIONS (totales)	2	7	14:20	1
National Co-productions	0	0	0:00	0
Obitel Countries Co-productions	2	7	14:20	1
TOTAL	29	100	1882:45	100

Source: OBITEL Venezuela

Table 3 shows that 97% of the productions released correspond to international productions. Mexico and Colombia top the list as the countries with the most productions shown on the screens (11 and 6 respectively), while national premieres are in second place with only one production.

TABLE 4. National and Obitel fictional formats shown in 2023

Format	Titles				Hours			
	Nationals	%	Other Obitel	%	Nationals	%	Other Obitel	%
Telenovela	0	0	16	57.1	0	100.0	1395:20	74.1
Series	1	100.0	9	32.1	9:00	0.0	446:40	23.7
Miniseries	0	0.0	1	3.6	0:00	0.0	27:05	1.4
Sitcom	0	0.0	0	0.0	0:00	0.0	0:00	0.0
Unitary	0	0.0	2	7.1	0:00	0.0	13:40	0.7
Docudrama	0	0.0	0	0.0	0:00	0.0	0:00	0.0
Others	0	0.0	0	0.0	0:00	0.0	0:00	0.0
Total	1	100.0	28	100.0	9:00	100.0	1882:45	100.0

Source: OBITEL Venezuela

The telenovela is the leading format in national and Ibero-American fiction, exhibited for several years. Since the 1980s and even before, telenovelas became an essential part of the entertainment of Venezuelan citizens due to their content, quality and stories linked to everyday life. It could be understood that it is part of the culture, therefore, television stations prefer this format over others.

TABLE 5: 5 Most watched titles in 2023³

	Title	Chanel	Producer (country)	Format/Genre	No. of chap/ep in 2022	Time Band	Rating	Share
1	<i>Querer sin límites</i>	Venevisión	TV Globo (BR)	Telenovela	150	Prime time		
2	<i>La rosa de Guadalupe</i>	Venevisión	Televisa Univisión (MX)	Unitary	22	Prime time		
3	<i>Mi Secreto</i>	Venevisión	Televisa (MX)	Telenovela	80	Afternoon		
4	<i>Papá a toda madre</i>	Venevisión	Televisa (MX)	Telenovela/romantic comedy	20	Afternoon		
5	<i>Imperio</i>	Venevisión	Rede Globo (BR)	Telenovela	80	Prime time		
Total of National Productions: 0				Original foreign scripts: 5				
0%				100%				

Source: Data obtained from the publication of information generated by BBmedios- OBITEL Venezuela.

There is a strong inclusion of foreign premieres outside the Ibero-American sphere in all channels, such is the case of Turkish series that dominated the screens, among which the following stand out: *Amor* (A.Ş.K.); *Amor Bajo el Mismo Techo / Amor en la Azotea*; *Amor en Renta* (Kiralık Aşk); *Amor Manchado* (Leke); *Derecho a Vivir*,

³ For editorial reasons, Table 5 only includes 5 titles and not 10. One of the excluded titles corresponds to a Turkish series and the rest were repeats.

(*Hayat Yolunda*) *Así es la Vida*; *Nueva Vida*; *Rosa Salvaje* (Gülizar); *Soñando Contigo* (Meleklerin Aski); *Las Mil y Una Noches*; *Su Nombre es Leyenda* (*La Leyenda, El Sobreviviente*); *Pájaro Soñador*, (*Erkenci Kus*) and of course, *¿Qué Culpa Tiene Fatmagül?* Which ranked first among the most watched titles, but is not registered in Table 5. According to Venevisión's Instagram account, this telenovela had a 61.1% share⁴ (Venevisión, 2023d).

Other titles that topped the most watched titles were the Venezuelan telenovela *Arroz con Leche*; the Mexican series *Una Familia de Diez*, the U.S. series *Los Elegidos* and the Brazilian telenovela *Xica Da Silva*, which first aired on Televen's screens between 1997 and 1998, with ratings successes; this is the third time it has been broadcast on Venezuelan screens (twice on Televen and once on La Tele). The only national production, *Dramáticas*, was not among the most watched.⁵

3. VoD 2023 Monitoring

3.1 VoD platform market in 2023

The beginnings of Internet television in Venezuela and its different models date back to the first decade of the twentieth century. The references, as in other contexts, are associated with the distribution of content hosted on platforms that function as repositories, as in the case of YouTube. Subsequently, it would move towards the model proposed by Bill Gates as "Connected TV" with amplification of its action through the TV stations' own sites, mobile applications and social networks.

It is the Covid 19 pandemic, in 2020, which gives a boost to VoD in Venezuela. The leading role is played by Netflix, but there are several VoD options available, including Amazon Prime, Disney+, Disney+, Paramount+, Apple TV+, Google TV, Paramount+, Star+, HBO Max, Movistar+ Lite, Prime Video, Filmin and SKY. Although there are official limitations on the use of foreign currency in the country, at present, the economy is dollarized and most transactions are made in that currency. Thus, from some banking institutions and applications, payments are made for the contracting of VoD services, although, as mentioned above, some households consume this service through piracy.

In the case of Netflix, the most popular platform in the country, "the service can be [signed up] from a Venezuelan IP address with any Visa or Mastercard debit or credit card, as well as with Payoneer, Facebank, Wally, Zinli, Bancamiga, and in general any card that admits US dollar charges" (Hernández, 2023). However, the options of

⁴ Venevisión's Instagram account indicates that it was in a sample of 3500 set top boxes, but it does not mention the measurement company.

⁵ Table 6 about the audience profile of the most watched titles: gender, age, socioeconomic level was omitted due to the lack of information available for its presentation.

“renting” and “borrowing” from foreign domiciled accounts are maintained as an economic option that allows expanding the socioeconomic range to sectors C, D and E for access to content.

In addition to the above, Venezuelan companies have increased the range of Internet television services offered by Venezuelan companies over the last two years: the launch of the Venezuelan platform Inter Go, which offers Pay TV channels, on-demand content and 24 exclusive signals. Net Uno Go, Streaming SimplePlus and VepacoNet make up the private offer. The first two are part of well-known subscription television services. While the third one “belongs to Grupo Trust Mediático, [...] a corporation that groups several companies related to advertising (Vepaco), marketing, telecommunications and legal and financial advisory services” (Wiki Vepaco, n.d.), but there is no possibility of obtaining information related to the number of subscribers, as well as figures on the profits obtained in the country, due to the opacity already mentioned at the beginning of the chapter.

3.2. Content offer from local VoD platforms in 2023 (national, regional within the country)

Faced with the private offer of services, Venezuelan television stations opted to offer their programming free of charge. It is especially interesting to highlight those that include national and international serialized fiction. The first service was offered in July 2020 by Radio Caracas Televisión (RCTV):

RCTV created its own application, in order to place all its series and movies and other productions on a completely free and legal platform, in addition to removing all its content on YouTube and redirecting it to the platform (Hollogram Television, 2022).

The application, which had become a luxury option to access the contents of the Venezuelan channel that is banned from broadcasting in Venezuela, switched to a content syndication plan to TV channels and other platforms.

Taking advantage of the agreements with companies such as **Tubi TV** and **Pluto TV**, some telenovelas were delivered to these platforms, but the final blow, and the reason why I write this article, It was when RCTV signed an agreement with what is now TelevisaUnivisión not only to add its content, but to create linear channels with all the novels of this producer (Hollogram Television, 2022).

After this, the main official television channel -with a high propagandistic profile- Venezolana de Televisión, also joined the VoD offer in the country. VTV IP is part of the official free offer, which complements Miraflores TV, active since 2017.

3.3. VoD analysis in 2023: national premiere fiction and co-productions

Table 7 shows the *Dramáticas* series as the only content broadcast through the Hispano TV service. However, it is important to note that there was a wide range of Venezuelan serials on VoD, especially through the platforms Apple TV+, Venevisión Play, Vix, Novelisima and Pluto TV which, although most were released by open signal, even more than 20 years ago, 169 of these titles were first broadcast on these platforms. Even when some titles are repeated, and by excluding repetitions, the offer is reduced to 112 titles, it is a necessary data, because although VoD content is not being created, Venezuelan fiction has a strong presence in the aforementioned platforms and contributes to the country’s audiovisual memory.

TABLE 7: National fiction and co-productions broadcasted in 2023 on VoD

NATIONAL PREMIERE TITLES
HispanoTV – 1
01. <i>Dramáticas</i> (serie)
Total: 1

Source: OBITEL Venezuela

For the preparation of table 7. National fiction and co-productions broadcasted by Tubi TV, Prime Video and Simple TV were not taken into consideration. Nor did the offer of Televen Stream, since it was last included a foreign fiction in the VoD service.

3.4. Narrative characteristics of VoD in 2023

Dramáticas is the one Venezuelan premiere production aired through VoD during the year of 2023. Its premiere on October 16th, was simultaneously broadcasted on free-to-air channels and through the streaming platform HispanoTV. This platform includes a catalog of Venezuelan series and *telenovelas*, historically known, that can be accessed for free and from any part of the world. However, to be able to watch *Dramáticas* from abroad, the cost up until mid 2024, was 4,99 dollars. The series consists of 12 episodes of 44 through 45 minutes in length, excluding the last episode that is 53 minutes long; it foreshadowed a timid reactivation of the national television industry, although after the series there was no continuity on the development of new production. The series unfolds the story of:

Two rookie producers [who] will make a telenovela to bring a channel that has not made a production in years back to the market; so with a low budget, many lies and using this channel’s successful telenovelas as reference, they bring together three great actors and

a leading man in the genre, not aware that the past of these stars is going to make them live an actual melodrama behind the scenes (HispanoTV, 2024).

In this production the relationship between the media ecosystem and the point of view “from the inside” is highlighted as the main storyline, since it revolves around a bankrupt traditional television channel, they build their narrative from there and make their own aesthetical propositions. It includes elements from the digital culture that enrich the language and grammar of television, for example: live broadcasts through a smartphone, selfies, video calls, the usage of social media, etc. In the series, the narrative pays tribute to the television of the past, and resorts to self-referentiality as a narrative resource, which creates an innovative theme.

Although the main storyline revolves around Scarlet Ortiz, Luis Geronimo Abreu, Roxana Diaz and Lupita Ferrer, who are the main characters in the series, the “telenovela” and the behind the scenes of that same telenovela, the rest of the cast contributes in a balanced and accidental manner to the construction of the plot. The lines and appearances do not highlight some performances over others. Each actor and actress contribute their own special touch; sometimes over-acted performances, typically in comedies, that hinders the narrative and try to cause through humor that the audience is disconnected from day to day life problems.

On the series they make use of the camera movement known as handheld or “*cámara en mano*”, it is a style that consists of loose movements and sometimes unsteady ones, that intend to bring a sensation of realism and dynamism but sometimes are distracting. The final episode shows, that thanks to the success reached by the *telenovela* and the investors, the channel recovers from bankruptcy, but the scene is far from the reality of the Venezuelan fiction, because even though *Dramaticas* was considered a return of fiction, the channels do not count with an investment that allows them to keep consistent productions throughout the years yet.

4. Interactivity and audience participation

On April 14th it was announced over social media, through Hispanomedios’ (@hispanomedio) and producer Daniel Ferrer Cubillan’s (@danielferrerc) Instagram, the signing of a contract between Venevision and Hispanomedios for the broadcast of *Dramaticas*. With a total of 7 275 “likes” and 746 comments, the post marked the beginning of a series of posts to promote the before, during and after of the launching of Daniel Alfonso Rojas and Daniel Ferrer’s original series. At first, “it was believed that Venevision would go back to the drama production, but wasn’t this way” (Brizuela, 2023, para. 5), it was only the free-to-air channel, where the 12 episodes were broadcasted. According to an interview to Andres Badra, current vice president and general

manager of Venevision, the TV station does not have the resources to invest in the talent for a project as big as *Dramáticas* “To have a mildly competitive product you need an investment so high in technology and talent, behind and in front the scenes, that today’s Venezuelan market doesn’t have the amount of money to back up a *telenovela*’s production” (Brizuela, 2023, para. 5).

Nevertheless, with the #RegresanLosCulebrones and #hechoenvenezuela, Venevision and Hispanomédios reported the confirmation of each actor and actress that would take part in the series through videos that showed the most important work made by the recognized stars of Venezuelan television, along with an advertisement about their return to the screens. This marketing strategy generated positive opinions about the new production and criticism about the country’s situation. Such is the case of the user @deybyrodriguex who, on May 26th 2023, commented:

So this way the media and the entertainment industries in my country validate @nicolas-maduro’s dictatorial regime, because (sic) if there is money to make soap operas but not for the people’s stomach (sic) then you are sending a message of validation to the world, saying that Venezuela is fixed (sic) when my country’s democracy is still kidnapped

The posts with most interaction were the ones made by Ferrer’s Instagram account, with the confirmation of the actress Rosmeri Marval, who had 70 421 “likes”, and Escarle Ortiz’ with 35 432. On June 7th, the production officially began with the participation of Venezuelan and latin american *telenovelas*’ recognized stars such as: Tania Sarabia, Amanda Gutiérrez, Elba Escobar, Javier Vidal, Mimí Lazo, Lupita Ferrer, Hilda Abrahamz, Dora Mazzone, María Antonieta Duque, Aroldo Betancourt, Víctor Drija, Fernando Villate, Jorge Palacios, Isabella Pérez, Rosmeri Marval, Arán de las Casas, Mariángel Ruiz, Kiara, Jalymar Salomón and Wanda D’ Isidoro.

In other words, the greatest advertising was through the Instagram accounts of @hispanomedio, @danielferrerc and the actors and actresses’. And, even though the producer of the drama posted information about the series from his Facebook user, he did not reach the same number of interactions. The official trailer premiered from the Youtube account of HispanoTV and obtained 372 208 views, 5 thousand “likes” and 619 comments, mostly positives ones and a minority were criticizing the cast, the lines and the acting: “This production is a parade of senior citizen figures that no longer represent this country at all. The past stays in the past and does not come back no matter how much you want it to” (@keniaanasco6802, September 2023), “So over-acted, theyre very old for this clowning. I don’t understand why they brought Mimi Lazo [...] she came to take the position away from other actresses who live inVenezuela, takes away the desire to watch it already [...] (@namr2347, September 2023).

Another advertising strategy that worked out to bring communities of audiences was the participation of the cast in private events at the three most important cities in Venezuela: Caracas, Maracaibo and Valencia, where they shared “their impressions of [the] reactivation of the dramatic production in Venezuela, after seven years” (Venezuela news, 2023, para. 2). The events began in Caracas on October 13th with a press conference to officially introduce the series; the next day was the pre-release at the Baralt Theatre in Maracaibo, with the main characters of the series. On Sunday the 15th, they screened the first episode of the series at the Municipal Theatre of Valencia, and they finished on October 16th with a special edition of the magazine program, *Portada's* in Venevision, where they presented the anteroom and the premiere on a free-to-air- channel.

The premiere happened simultaneously with the launching of the website www.mihispano.tv and the app HispanoTV, so that people could enjoy *Dramaticas* from anywhere in the world. The apps TV Latino and Venevision Play, were also options to watch the series, but the audience expressed through Venevision's Instagram that said apps did not work. After the premiere, strong criticism was generated through social media: “don't worry about watching it, it's very BAD, horrible it seems like they're acting students but the worst ones!!! A very poor way to resume the dramas made in Venezuela, they got a 01 on their report card” (@belkibeatrizsarrin, October 31st 2023), “Dramáticas or geriatrias?” (@gusani50, October 31st 2023), “oh nooooo I won't even watch it, didn't meet my expectations and I was so excited for a Venezuelan drama (heartbroken emoji and sad face) with top-notch actors but there's no chemistry” @thamaraaltuve, October 31st 2023). Despite this, from the casts' Instagram accounts; @hispanomedio; @danielferrerc and to a lesser extent @venevision continued the invitation and promotion of the drama.

5. Highlights Of The Year

In August of the year 2023, the Venezuelan streaming platform Venevisión Play was launched in its test phase, owned by Organizacion Cisneros and operated by Cisneros Media. According to Arepa Tecnologica (2023), during the first month of the trial period, it reached 60 thousand downloads. Venevision Play includes access to Novelisima⁶ -created in 2008, as the evolution of Venevision Continental, which, as its name suggests is a *telenovela*-themed channel that broadcasts on a free-to-air channel in the United States and Puerto Rico. Cisneros Media's Novelisima application has also been available since 2022.

⁶ Available at <https://www.novelisima.com/>

We introduce various options to enjoy the great stories that define the most popular genre of latin television. Everyday we present 6 new episodes on our linear channel. Additionally, you can watch every episode we have broadcasted on Novelisima.com and an additional selection of *telenovelas* exclusively available on VOD, that way you can enjoy all the drama and passion when and wherever you wish (Google Play, 2023a).

The 1.0.6 version was released on February 21, 2023 and it has over 50 thousand downloads. On the other hand we have Televen Stream, introduced in September, 2023 in its version 2.11.263.1053, available on iOS, Apple, Samsung, and Roku. It can be downloaded through Play Store, IStore and through a QR code; it has over 100 thousand downloads and it is produced by Mediablocks LLC.

We offer accessible live Venezuelan Television wherever you are. Live sports and daily updates from different television shows. You will be able to enjoy them from the comfort of your Android devices. Customers will only need to install the app to access hundreds of sports and live TV shows from any place. Customers will be able to choose the live channel and hundreds of hours of programs (Google play, 2023b).

Stands out as a significant element, the fact that the main telenovela production channels in the country, Venevision y RCTV have made their content available for free through different streaming platforms, as well as in their own Youtube channels. Such as the case of the profile Venevision Telenovelas (@VenevisionNovelas), created in 2008, it has 960 186 748 views, has posted 6791 videos and has over 1 million subscribers. Whilst in 2021, all of the content that was uploaded on RCTV's Youtube channel was deleted, even though it had more than 1 million subscribers.

In this scenario, the work developed by the fans stands out, since it contributes to the audiovisual memory of serialized fiction in the country, such as the one by the user @familygomezbermudez, that without being certain whether or not she owns the rights of reproduction of fiction, she has three accounts. The first one, @familygomezbermudez7629, was created on January 15th, 2022, it does not have any recognizable location, to date it has 2363 full-length videos uploaded corresponding to national titles, it has over 17 thousand five hundred subscribers and over 11 million views. The second account from this user is @familygomezbermudez7410, it was created on October 6th, 2012, it has posted 1432 videos corresponding to 16 national titles, it has over 15 thousand subscribers, 10 and a half million views and it is located in the United States. The third and last account is @familygomezbermudez9037, it was created on September 21, 2021, it has posted 229 videos corresponding to 4 national titles, it has over 3 thousand subscribers, a million and a half views and it is located in Puerto Rico. To sum things up, this user has gained in her three accounts over 23 million views over the course of 11 years, without being able to locate further information about the account by using OSINT to research. The

abovementioned shows the impact of the service in democratizing the access and, especially, the implications in terms of monetization.

6. Theme Of The Year

Venezuelan audiovisual dramaturgy is in exile. Those who are still in the country have few offers for creation. Hence, those who graduate in careers related to audiovisual dramaturgy explore job opportunities outside the borders. While video conferencing tools such as Zoom or Google Meet are sufficient for writers to reach any executive's desk, they also need to make face-to-face contact, which could provide additional opportunities. Hence, the country's own proposals have been displaced to an eternal waiting room that, with no intention of establishing responsibilities, accounts for a complex context that expelled Venezuela from the serialized fiction market.

There are no business and governmental agreements that would allow them to move forward even though there are human and technical resources in the country that can carry out proposals that meet market requirements. Venezuela is looking for its seat in the market, but to do so, it is essential to stimulate audiovisual fiction dramaturgy. An example of this "crisis" of audiovisual dramaturgy is evidenced by the fact that, in Venezuela, there is still no record since 2019 of any "complex"⁷, audiovisual product, aimed at the audience of 15 to 25 years old and offered from a team of makers between 20 and 35 years old. There are young voices, but they are not shown in the little production that is generated.

In the alternative circuits of audiovisual production, it is noticeable that young people want to create products, but there is no dialogue that combines experiences, will, talent and financing. All this means that playwriting in Venezuela is aging. Despite this reality, there have been some attempts at independent production, without large budgets or commissions from any platform. The little amount of serialized fiction that has been produced in the last six years has characteristics that show its own ways of constructing stories and that are expressed in themes, styles and characters.

Between 2018 and 2023, the following productions were produced: *Eneamiga* (RCTV Producciones, 2018); *Carolay* (BG Creativos, 2019); *La Dama y El vigilante* (TVes, 2019); *Intrigas tras cámaras* (Quimera visión, 2020) untrained; *Almas en pena* (RCTV, 2020); *Carabobo, Caminos de Libertad* (Villa del Cine, 2021); *Vivir y Convivir en Venezuela* (Imaginantes Producciones, 2021); *Bloque 8* (Lisandro Aguilar, 2021)⁸; *Carabobo, Caminos de Libertad*, 2da temporada (Villa del Cine, 2022), and *Dramáticas* (Hispanomedios y Venevisión, 2023).

⁷ Complex TV is a term proposed by Jason Mittell that arose from the American cinema of the 1970s and gave way to the deconstruction of the linear narrative structure. The complex narrative model is typical of non-linear structures and works as a puzzle that the viewer assembles because he/she has the ability to reconstruct the discourse in front of him/her.

⁸ No localization of content viewing, beyond the posts published in the RRSS.

In them, there is a tendency to show universes linked to the media theme and how television itself narrates itself. *Eneamiga*, *Intrigas tras cámaras* and *Dramáticas* are in this category. In the three productions there is a critical view that, on the one hand, is literate by explaining terminology, processes and even professional jargon, and on the other, reveals some of the business logics and bad practices that have had negative consequences, such as, for example, unrestrained competition and product espionage.

In this section, the analysis focuses on *Eneamiga* (which was broadcast for the first time in 2023, on AppleTV+ and *HispanoTV* platforms) and *Dramáticas* (premiere on open signal and *HispanoTV*). *Eneamiga* puts the emphasis on the communication phenomenon led by Paula Sanchez, a web star through a site and all the elements that in the current context represent digital media. The conception of the main character stands out, which moves away from traditional views: she is a young, successful woman who marks the lives of other women through the generation of content that functions as an aspirational reference. Beyond the obligatory plot lines, among which the stories of impossible love, betrayals and reunion with the past stand out, we see here an interest in presenting female characters that resemble many Venezuelan women: enterprising, supportive, curious, creative, beyond the low-income young woman whose life will change thanks to her encounter with the young protagonist and his fortune.

This brings us face to face with an evolution in gender dynamics that challenges traditional roles and highlights the transformations on which masculinities and femininities are conceived. Thus, there is a break in relation to the one on whom the important decisions of a company fall: a young woman who has had opportunities, Paula. She, who continues her successful career, thanks to the love alliance with a man who represents the ideal young, beautiful, adventurous and with solid economic resources, opts for the love of Diego Hernandez, her friend from adolescence and who barely survived as a technician in a recording studio. Paula is shown as a vulnerable woman who expresses her emotionality, without any concealment, so that the archetype of Athena is blurred, to show a plausible character.

Other characters who are transgressors against the established models for childhood and motherhood are the girl Lisa Castillo Dávila and her mother, Lucía Dávila. The daughter and wife of Guillermo Castillo, make up a disruptive family model, against what tradition shows. Guillermo, the father, is inscribed in the new masculinities by being the one who manages the household, while Lucía is presented as the “provider” woman who shares responsibilities with him. In addition, she is a woman who chose to resume her university studies as a decision of personal satisfaction, which allows her to detach herself from the role of mother and wife, and she expresses this without any kind of remorse.

On the other hand, the character of Lisa, a girl of approximately 12 years old, rarely smiles, perhaps because she is shown as a child under the autistic spectrum and with limited social skills, however, she is the one who permanently presents critical reflections with her environment and makes them without apparent filters. Along with Guillermo, other characters in *Eneamigas* that stand out for the masculinities they represent are Gianluca Brandini, Paula's husband, who is shown as her supportive partner and invites her to reflect on what it means to be a web star. Likewise, Humberto Delgado, who shows his sexual diversity without implying mockery, pigeonholing, stigmatization or simplification of stereotypes for homosexuality. In this regard, it is important to point out that, although in Venezuelan serialized fiction there is an intention to show respectful views on sex diversity, one of the channels that broadcast *Eneamiga* on open signal was forced to censor one of the love scenes between Humberto and Leonardo, due to the limitations imposed by the *Ley de Responsabilidad Social en Radio, Televisión y Medios Electrónicos*.

In the case of *Dramáticas*, the analysis starts with the review of its constructive elements to define its format and expose the dramatic structure of the story, describe the conceptualization, as well as the aesthetic proposal. In *Dramáticas*, unlike *Eneamiga*, the protagonist is not a person, but a group of actresses, who are sought by a team of producers to save a channel in bankruptcy. The promotional offer shows it as *Dramedy*, which is not a genre, but a format and is as imprecise as the composition of the word. This is what the creators and writers called the series as a marketing strategy, although it is advisable to define it as a "comedy series sort of a *telenovela*". One strategy used to give strength to the proposal was to resort to a constellation of Venezuelan actors and actresses who live inside and outside the country. Most of these actors are over 60 years of age and their inclusion could have been used for recognition, experience and to work on values such as dignity, respect, participation and inclusion, but it remained on the surface.

Announcing the return of telenovelas with a product such as *Dramáticas* was part of the sales packaging used. But, there is no reflection on the part of the production company on what it implies to return to telenovela production in Venezuela, in relation to the high cost of talent and technical equipment. It is important to mention the economic aspect, because budgets have an impact on production, on the construction of scripts and, finally, on the results of the final product. This is because telenovelas are an industrial product that is confused with artistic manifestations. The most important platforms have series in their schedules that they call "sort of *telenovela*", which implies a format that writers must respect according to market research and background evaluation. *Dramáticas* is a story told in 12 continuous episodes that halfway meets the format requirements demanded by the platforms.

In the *Dramáticas*, it is observed that the numerous characters are the protagonists of their own subplots and this, at times, slows down the natural development

of the central story. The main story is saturated with funny sketches but the development of the north of the main characters is uneven because the gag predominates. The chronological narration is what shows us that its structure is linear or classic according to Bordwell.⁹

It is interesting to observe how the characters show glimpses of an inner world as they speak longingly of what they did in the past and, in doing so, try to recall the golden age of the Venezuelan *telenovela*. This is why the conjugation of the narrative elements is more similar to a telenovela written in the 90's than to current proposals, even though *Dramáticas* meets the demand sought by some production houses. One of the weaknesses of *Dramáticas* is that it lacks attractive narrative threads for the target that desires "complex" products. The fact of setting the plot in a country that no longer exists gives it a nostalgic touch that could have been attractive for the audience that longs for the production of Venezuelan fiction serials. However, recalling the classics from a superficial point of view resulted in the public expressing "This does not appeal, right?".¹⁰

Each character has an unfinished story that, in order to advance, is intertwined with other characters in another plot, producing the sensation of the advancement of the total story. But, the main characters are flat and are immersed in bizarre situations, betting on the charisma of the actor rather than the character. The narrative and structural proposal is linear or classic, but it is not an aspect that differs from other series of other production companies in broadcast TV or on demand in Latin America. It is important to recognize that this is a proposal that is well constructed visually, especially in its aesthetic proposal, but it lacked the dramatic element that would engage the audience and give it the necessary support.

⁹ David Jay Bordwell is an American researcher who developed a theory on the narrative structures of American cinema. For more information see: <https://davidbordwell.net/>

¹⁰ Statements of Mrs. Eufrosina, 78 years old, inhabitant of the city of Caracas, in personal interview.

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