



AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF ECUADORIAN TELEVISION FICTION A Comparative Study Using the Obitel Methodology

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a comparative intersectional analysis of two Ecuadorian telenovelas premiered in 2024 by leading national television networks: Los García (Ecuavisa) and Los de al lado (TC Televisión). The qualitative analysis of eight episodes, four from each production, is conducted using the methodology proposed by the Ibero American Observatory of Fiction Television (OBITEL), which examines casting strategies, character development, and the intersectional positioning of characters. The findings reveal an ethnic centralism, with mestizo characters predominantly occupying leading roles, alongside the limited visibility of Indigenous and Afro descendant characters. Furthermore, Ecuadorian television fiction continues to rely on conventional forms of representation, restricting the incorporation of intersectional perspectives that could strengthen narrative complexity and more accurately reflect the country's social diversity.

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1. Introduction

Intersectionality refers to the confluence of two or more social factors that shape an individual and interact in multiple ways, generating diverse situations with either positive or negative effects. The factors commonly associated with intersectionality include gender identity, ethnicity, race, and geographical location (Ríos Bellagamba, 2022).

By engaging with this concept and applying it to the analysis of telenovelas and television fiction broadcast on screen, intersectionality enables a more nuanced understanding of how characters' identities, physical attributes, cognitive traits, and language practices shape social perceptions, either by reinforcing forms of identity with particular significance within a given territory or, conversely, by reproducing negative social stigmas.

Audiovisual media, including series, telenovelas, and films, play a fundamental role in the representation of intersectional identities. Such representations contribute to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of phenomena such as oppression and identity (Laugier, 2021; Martínez-Pleguezuelos, 2020; Martínez Pleguezuelos and González Iglesias, 2019). In this regard, the intersectional approach adopted in this study makes it possible to scrutinise the intersections of race, gender, class, and other identity markers as reflected in the characters. As Martínez-Pleguezuelos y González-Iglesias (2019, p. 175) argue, the representation of these elements constitutes a "faithful reflection on the television screen of the plural, heteroglossic, hybrid, multicultural and multilingual reality that is so common today in the societies in which we live".

In this context, the audience plays a fundamental role, as its perceptions and attitudes influence the representation of intersectional identities. The configuration of audience criteria shapes the processes through which popular, cultural, educational, and fictional narratives are constructed.

Intersectionality in television programmes contributes to the inclusion of more nuanced representations of characters' multifaceted identities, thereby reducing stereotypes and limitations while fostering greater equality and social understanding. For Christian (2019), the value of intersectionality "lies not simply in the brand image of corporate channels or in providing them with new narratives, but also in the critique and reinvention of industry practices to make room for communities historically excluded from the system". (p.4).

In this sense, television, as a mass medium, is not limited to providing entertainment through programming that responds to institutional objectives and to the needs, preferences, and tastes of audiences within an established logic of continuity. Rather, it also contributes to "the formation of viewers as individuals, whilst reflecting the cultures and societies in which audiences are embedded" (Mata-Nuñez, 2024, p. 294). Television both shapes and is shaped by the collective imagination, operating within a market increasingly fragmented by platforms that are gaining ground across specific segments. This transformation is reflected in shifting patterns of media consumption, with forecasts indicating a decline in time spent engaging with traditional television content. According to a report by Parrot Analytics, viewing has shifted from 2 hours 55 minutes on linear television to 3 hours 11 minutes on digital platforms.

Against this backdrop, and within the context in which television operates, this study aims to present an intersectional analysis of Ecuadorian television fiction, adopting the methodology developed by the Ibero American Observatory of Television Fiction (OBITEL) and applied to the Ibero American context, as outlined in the *OBITEL Yearbook (2025)*. From the perspective of the audiovisual industry, situating the study within an intersectional framework entails examining how adapted or original local narratives brought to the screen contribute to the formation of more inclusive societies and to the dismantling of social stigmas that continue to shape cultural and identity formation.

1.1. Cultural Identity and Television Fiction

The characteristics that define television fiction include its social nature, as well as attributes of continuity and recognisability that develop throughout a narrative (Table 1). From a structural perspective, these attributes distinguish it from other types of programming within a schedule,

particularly in the context of generalist television, which employs a range of genres strategically organised to attract audiences and ensure the medium’s profitability. For Vilches (2007), television fiction “goes beyond the simple recognition of the genre and, in terms of its defining attributes, effectively transcends borders, languages, and cultures to become true aesthetic sustenance” (p. 13).

Table 1. Attributes of television fiction

Reality	Stories, however fictional they may be, always have a foundation, a consistency in something, which allows viewers to identify culturally with a socio-cultural reality.
Someone	All stories stem from archetypes, and characters can merge into a single figure. The protagonist is defined by the antagonist, who holds the upper hand because their action has already begun.
Unity	Fictional stories can span hundreds of episodes and stretch over several seasons. The repetition and redundancy found in the telenovela are not merely functional, but belong to a framework that reveals the work’s historical and cultural origins.
Good	Stories are always based on the struggle between good and evil. This tension between two ethical and psychological forces within humanity is what drives popular fiction.
Truth	It is not only lies that serve the plot as a narrative counterpoint to the conflict of interests and emotions in the story. The very structure of the plot revolves around the plausibility of the stories.
Beauty	The beauty of the images, the bodies and the scenes are essential elements in engaging the audience.

Source: Adapted from Vilches, 2007.

Television, within the study of cultural identity, holds significant potential to influence both large and small societies. From this perspective, and situated within a local context, it contributes to the construction of cultural identity through four fundamental dimensions: proximity, identity, cultural appropriation, and the generation of original content.

A further dimension fostered by television is the sense of connection derived from proximity to a society’s ideological frameworks. In this regard, television mediates social processes by narrating events through images that represent what occurs within a given territory, whether social, cultural, historical, or contemporary. In doing so, it facilitates processes of identification and recognition, strengthens credibility, and enhances the value attributed to the information broadcast. At the same time, emerging aesthetics function as an experimental space for the development of new talent, fostering confidence and enabling innovation in the creation of audiovisual narratives with distinct aesthetic styles. These practices are grounded in a plurality of sensibilities and identities shaped by local and regional contexts (Ordóñez et al., 2021).

In particular, television fiction contributes to cultural identity in multiple ways, functioning as a structure through which diverse national identities are sustained and articulated, and becoming a key frame of reference for contemporary society. Through narrative discourses, it shapes and influences audience perception (Saavedra Llamas et al., 2025). As a transmitter of ideas, principles, and values, it contributes to the reconfiguration of the collective imagination.

Within the narrative domain, telenovelas and television fiction reveal the realities of a given territory within an expanding audiovisual industry, bringing into focus social issues as well as the dynamics of both the past and present. These narratives currently hold particular prominence and relevance because:

It is now, particularly since the advent of SVOD platforms, that television fiction has begun to prevail in the preferences of viewers, reshaping a media landscape that, until recent decades, relied more heavily on film production. Television fiction [...] constitute the content that defines programming strategies, persuades users to subscribe, and shapes television viewing patterns. (Saavedra Llamas et al., 2025, p. 18)

The expansion of platforms operated by international providers such as Netflix, HBO Max, and Prime Video is contributing to the consolidation of a television system that supports both the recovery and the growth of the audiovisual sector. Likewise, “the major platforms were followed by national operators, content repositories, and thematic pay television channels, which gradually established a network of content production and distribution” (Chicharro-Merayo y Gil-Gascón, 2024, p. 739). For example, in Ecuador, TC Play operates under this model, offering domestically produced television fiction and telenovelas. Meanwhile, the fiction production model developed by Ecuastudios has enabled several of its productions to be distributed on international platforms such as Prime Video.

1.2. The Ecuadorian Telenovela

Over the last seven years, Ecuador has experienced gradual growth in telenovela production. From 2018 onwards, this genre took a new direction with the success of the telenovela *Sharon la Hechicera*, whose narrative became emblematic in the representation of women, bringing renewed attention to the issue of femicide, a crime that was criminalised under Ecuador’s Comprehensive Criminal Code in 2017. Furthermore, among the productions exported and featured on international platforms is the telenovela *Los García*, an Ecuavisa production premiered in 2024 as part of a broader strategy to prioritise Spanish language content.

As noted by Alvarado (2025), “we believe it is time to invest in Spanish language content, which has established itself as one of the fastest growing languages in the world, surpassed only by Korean”. In this regard, *Los García*, adapted and developed by Ecuastudios and produced by Ecuavisa, exemplifies how well constructed narratives can resonate across different generations, generating impact both on screen and across social media platforms.

2. Methodology

The aim of the study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the telenovelas *Los García* and *Los de al lado*, based on the methodology proposed by the Ibero American Observatory of Television Fiction for the analysis of race and intersectionality in television representations in Ibero America. This methodology is structured around four levels of inquiry: casting strategies; character development strategies; intersectionality and positioning; and narrative strategies, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Methodological strategy for television fiction.

Levels of analysis	Sub-levels of analysis
1. Casting strategies:	1.1. Casting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Main characters (couple) ○ Main characters (around 6 to 8) ○ Secondary characters ○ Tertiary characters
	1.2 Casting composition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Which racial groups are represented and in what order of preference? ● Which racial groups are absent, and what might be the reason for, or the implications of, that absence?
2. Character development strategies	2.1 Character development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identify which characters are simple, one-dimensional (stereotypes) b. Identify which characters are “sign” characters (situational) c. Identify characters with supporting roles

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">d. Identify characters who are stereotypes (who generalise an entire racial/ethnic group, for example) <p>2.2. Character development strategy in relation to the construction of “archetypes”, “types” and “stereotypes”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. To which racial-ethnic groups or social minorities do characters developed as archetypes predominantly belong?b. To which racial-ethnic/social minority groups do the characters belong who are denied the development of their subjectivity within the narrative?c. To which racial-ethnic/minority group do characters presented as stereotypes belong?
3. Intersectionality and positioning	<p>3.1 Intersections of race/ethnicity, social class, gender, sexual orientation, age, religious denomination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Social class of the characters: archetypes, types, stereotypes (protagonists, non-protagonists)b. Gender of the characters: archetypes, types, stereotypes (protagonists, non-protagonists)c. Sexual orientation: archetypes, types, stereotypes (protagonists, non-protagonists)d. Others: age, religious denomination, migrants, people with disabilities
4. Narrative strategies	<p>4.1 Types of narratives: themes, conflicts and circumstances that fuel fictional narratives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Which social groups are associated with behaviours considered positive and aspirational, such as rationality, development, persistence, discipline, compassion, solidarity, support, courage, lawfulness, and success?b. Which social groups are linked to behaviours associated with “deficient citizenship” or considered a “social problem”, such as poverty, illiteracy, irresponsibility, irrationality, unregulated emotionality, servitude, cowardice, failure, violence, illegality, corruption, and criminality?c. Which social groups are linked to the specific presentation of historical facts and/or social events that have occurred and which acquire a kind of documentary status? <p>4.2. General trends</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Is there a particular narrative or theme that is most frequently used when depicting a specific racial-ethnic group or social minority?b. Is there any type of situation or setting within the narrative where a particular racial group is consistently made visible, and in what form? (Elite locations: mansions, hotels, restaurants, executive offices, gyms, amusement parks. Marginalised spaces: prisons, suburbs and forgotten towns, criminal hideouts, the jungle and drug trafficking or guerrilla groups, etc.)

Source: OBITEL, 2025.

The study sample comprises the telenovelas *Los García*, produced by Ecuavisa, and *Los de al lado*, produced by TC Televisión, both premiered in 2024 on national television channels with the highest viewing figures for both general programming and the selected telenovelas, according to data provided by Kantar Ibope Ecuador (2024) (Table 3). The episodes selected from both telenovelas are episodes 2, 4, 6, and 8 (Table 4), in order to complement the analysis presented in the extended version published in the *OBITEL Yearbook* (2025), which examines episodes 1, 3, 5, and 7. The observation period corresponds to the first quarter of 2025.

Table 3. Ratings and share by broadcaster

Channels	Rating	Share%
<i>Ecuavisa</i>	48.025	16.6
<i>TCTV</i>	47,288	16.34
<i>Teleamazonas</i>	14,256	4.93
<i>RTS</i>	26,274	9.08
<i>Telecentro</i>	0.399	0.14
<i>Oromar TV</i>	14.907	5.15
<i>Ecuador TV</i>	0.508	0.18

Source: Kantar Ibope. Rating-Share Ecuador -2024

Table 4. Study sample

Episode	Premiere date	Link
<i>Los García</i>		
Episode 2: Season 1 Ecuavisa	9 Oct 2024	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNLVZYnzoCk&t=43s
Episode 4: Season 1 Ecuavisa	15 Oct 2024	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=klzB-UQ9Tdw&t=31s
Episode 6: Season 1 Ecuavisa	16 Oct 2024	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvudzHbvcDE&t=46s
Episode 8: Season 1 Ecuavisa	18 Oct 2024	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABCj1k9IqbA&t=37s
<i>Los de al lado</i>		
Episode 2: Season 1 Tc Televisión	18 Oct 2024	https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x97m152
Episode 4: Season 1 Tc Television	21 Oct 2024	https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x97stvc
Episode 6: Season 1 Tc Television	24 Oct 2024	https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x97z2ko
Episode 8: Season 1 Tc Television	29 Oct 2024	https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x989c8o

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

3. Results

The analysis of episodes 2, 4, 6, and 8 of the telenovelas *Los García* and *Los de al lado*, both broadcast in 2024, seeks, through various levels and sublevels of inquiry, to examine the different identities of the characters through defining elements such as race and ethnicity, social class, gender, sexual orientation, and age, among others. It also aims to identify who is represented on screen, the types of situations these characters encounter, and to observe the intersectional dynamics that shape and contribute to the construction of Ecuadorian cultural identity. These elements form part of the broader purpose of this study, which focuses on analysing race and intersectionality in television representations in Ecuador through four macro levels of inquiry: casting strategies; character development strategies; intersectionality and positioning; and narrative strategies.

This analytical framework begins with reference data drawn from the telenovelas. *Los García* is an Ecuadorian production that premiered on Ecuavisa in 2024. As noted by Primicias (2024),

“the series is an adapted version of *Los Roldan*, an Argentine production created by Marcelo Tinelli in 2004, which has been reproduced in localised versions in countries such as Mexico and Colombia”. *Los de al lado* follows a similar adaptation model to the Argentine telenovela *El otro lado del paraíso*. Details regarding production, direction, and cast are provided in the technical information (Table 5).

Table 5. Credits

Los García	Los de al lado
Production: José Romero	Production: Tc Televisión
Director: Juan Salazar	Director: Cristian Rodríguez
Screenplay: Adaptation of the Argentine story <i>Los Roldan</i>	Screenplay: Fabrizio Aveiga and El CHURO Creative Productions
A hard-working family of humble means	Cast: Darío Chávez, Jessica Mera de Chávez, Luis Antonio Rivadeneira, Lourdes Miele Rivadeneira
Cast: Diego Spotorno, Cecilia Cascante, María Karla Gómez, Frank Bonilla, Frances Swett, Marina Salvarezza, Nicolas Maiques, Augusto Enríquez, Fernando Villao, Jaime Tamariz, Emma Guerrero, Gigi Miele, Daniela Sánchez, Mauro Falcón, Luciana Guschmer, Anahí Festerling, Viviana Salame, Henry España, Fabián Tapia, Diego Chiang, Cynthia Sánchez, Raquel Villamar.	Broadcast date: 16 October 2024. Season 1 (120 episodes).
Release date: 8 October 2024 Season 1 (140 episodes).	

Source: OBITEL credits (2025).

3.1. Casting Strategies

In the selection of talent, the two telenovelas *Los García* and *Los de al lado* prioritise the casting of Ecuadorian actors and actresses in leading roles (Table 5). In general terms, the protagonists are performers with mestizo features. Across leading, supporting, and minor roles, there is a notable underrepresentation of ethnic minorities, particularly individuals of African descent and Indigenous populations.

It is important to highlight the casting of the trans actress Anahí Festerling in the role of Bianca García as part of the main cast of *Los García*. Her role as the protagonist’s sister represents a significant step within Ecuadorian television fiction, challenging conventional patterns of exclusion and marginalisation. Her presence operates both as a strategy of media visibility and as a form of representation of gender identity. In line with this strategy, new figures from the digital sphere have also been incorporated, including Mauro Flacon (@Kachafa), Gigi Miele, and Luciana Guschmer, whose presence contributes to attracting younger audiences. Through this combination, Ecuavisa seeks both to legitimise these emerging figures within traditional television and to engage established audiences through their digital communities.

In the case of the telenovela *Los de al lado*, the character Bartola appears only sporadically and with limited prominence. She is depicted as an Afro Ecuadorian character in a secondary role as a domestic worker, reinforcing class-based stereotypes and social hierarchies that limit the representation of complexity and diversity.

In this context, within the cast of *Los de al lado*, the rival neighbouring families, the Valerías and the Martins, are portrayed by actors of mixed-race appearance, with no openly Afro Ecuadorian or Indigenous characters among the principal cast. The distinction between these families is defined less by race than by social class and regional origin. The Rivadeneiras embody a wealthy, urban, upper-class family, whereas the Chávezes (episode 1) represent newcomers from a working-class background. The wife, La Pochis, is from Manabí, a detail that underscores her coastal identity. There is no indication of Indigenous characters, and the only possible Afro descendant presence, as noted previously, is Bartola, the domestic worker. Her characterisation

as a gossipy and extroverted figure from the neighbourhood aligns with a recurrent pattern in regional television, in which members of racialised groups are positioned in subservient or folklorised roles.

According to the methodology proposed by OBITEL (2025), when Indigenous or Afro descendant populations are incorporated into television fiction, they tend to appear as background or tertiary characters whose narratives remain underdeveloped, often occupying subordinate positions, particularly as service providers or domestic workers, such as maids, drivers, or gardeners. Bartola fulfils precisely this tertiary function, serving both as a domestic worker and as a source of comic relief, thereby reinforcing this broader tendency. By contrast, the protagonists belong to the dominant social group, namely urbanised mestizo populations, reflecting postcolonial logics of television representation characterised by the disproportionate visibility of white and mestizo characters in central roles, even within an ethnically diverse national context.

A comparable pattern can be observed in *Los García*. The narrative centres on the García family, of modest origins, whose patriarch, José Pepe Pancho García, portrayed by Diego Spotorno, is a mestizo man who unexpectedly rises to a position of corporate power. The central characters, including Pepe and his family, as well as the affluent antagonist family, the Rossis, do not include Indigenous or Afro descendant individuals. The Rossis, identified through Italian surnames such as Vito and Cuty Rossi, evoke a “whitened” elite associated with European descent. The narrative does include an actor of Asian descent, Diego Chiang, in the role of Fernando Amador, representing a relatively uncommon instance of Asian Ecuadorian visibility. However, this remains a secondary character, positioned as a close friend to Pepe Pancho, with limited prominence in the early episodes. Similarly, one of the co protagonists, Carolina Parker, whose surname suggests a foreign, Anglo-Saxon background, plays the role of Pepe Pancho’s advisor, introducing a form of national diversity within the narrative, albeit still situated within a similar racial framework, as she is portrayed as a fair skinned Latina.

Overall, the absence of Indigenous or Afro descendant characters in leading roles is particularly evident, perpetuating a broader dynamic of invisibility. Ecuadorian television fiction, as with Latin American television more broadly, reflects a historical deficit in the inclusion of Indigenous populations. This is manifested in the ethnic homogeneity of predominantly mestizo casts, in which both protagonists and antagonists are largely light skinned mestizos, while racialised groups remain marginal or absent from central narrative spaces. This pattern is further confirmed by the distribution of character participation according to narrative hierarchy, as observed in the analysed episodes.

Table 6. Characters by narrative hierarchy

Classification	<i>Los García</i> (eps. 2, 4, 6, 8)	<i>Los de al lado</i> (eps. 2, 4, 6, 8)
Main characters	Pepe Pacho García; Adelita Vera	Darío Chávez; Jessica Mera/La Pochis
Main characters	María García Vera	Luis Antonio “Toñeco” Rivadeneira
	Toño García Vera	Lourdes Mieles “Luli”
	Mónik García Vera	Juan Toaza “Juanetito”
	Bianca García Borbor	Dayita
	Vito Rossi	Darío’s family/La Pochis (children)
	Cuty de Rossi	Luli / Toñeco as an aspirational counterpoint / conflict
	Enzo Rossi	
	Doña Isabel Luque	
	Liliana Manrique	
	César Manrique	
	Kevin Andrade (María’s boyfriend)	Neighbours (neighbourhood friends)

Secondary characters	Sofía Andrade (Kevin’s sister / María’s friend)	Bartola - Domestic staff
	Rogelio (Pepe Pancho’s friend)	Supporting characters in Toñeco / Darío’s business
	Lucho Goya (another friend)	Secondary characters who provide comic relief and gossip (Bartola, neighbours)
	Friends of the Rossis, low-paid employees, some recurring guests	
	Dulce Gorgor (the Rossis’ domestic worker)	
Tertiary characters	Unnamed extras: customers, passers-by	Neighbours who appear, but without frequent lines
	Non-main neighbours, occasional employees	Extras at social gatherings
	Local officials who appear	Shop staff, estate management staff, etc.
	Waiters, nurses, etc.	

Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

In summary, intersectional analysis involves not only assessing the relative prominence of the characters and identities incorporated into the narrative, but also examining how the differences inscribed within these identities do not operate in isolation, but rather intersect with structures of economic and social power. It further highlights that television fiction, particularly the telenovela, has historically functioned both as a mirror and as an agent in the construction of identity and the social imagination in Ecuador.

3.2. Character Development Strategies

Analysing how characters are constructed in each series allows for an assessment of the extent to which they engage with subjectivity or remain limited to broad stereotypical outlines. Accordingly, this analysis proposes a distinction between complex characters, understood here as characters or archetypes, linear characters, functional figures, and stereotypes that reduce a character to the representation of an entire social group. When these criteria are applied to the episodes examined, clear differences emerge in the degree of narrative development afforded to particular characters, which also correlate with their social position.

Los de al lado: as a sitcom, it presents relatively schematic characters designed to generate humour through contrast. The protagonists embody recognisable social archetypes, namely the newly wealthy yet vulgar neighbour in contrast to the affluent and conceited counterpart. Moreover, the subjectivity of the main, secondary, and tertiary characters is rarely developed beyond the class or regional stereotypes they represent. These figures tend to function as one-dimensional types, defined by a single dominant trait, rather than as evolving three dimensional characters. For instance, Luli is consistently portrayed as superficial and class conscious, a trait that defines her in a fixed manner, while Pochis is characterised as the hard-working mother who takes pride in her humble origins.

This form of comic linearity aligns with the expectations of the genre, yet it limits the possibility of more complex character development. Secondary characters, in turn, fulfil clearly defined functional roles. Bartola, the gossipy domestic worker, operates largely as a stock character, serving to generate narrative complications and act as a conduit for gossip within the housing estate, while her own motivations and background remain underdeveloped. Similarly, Juanetito, the retired caretaker, provides comic relief and participates in a secondary romantic subplot with Dayita, yet remains a static figure anchored in the role of an old-fashioned ladies’ man. Both characters may also be understood as stereotypes. Bartola, in particular, reproduces the familiar figure of the extroverted and intrusive domestic worker, a recurring trope in regional television that contributes to the stigmatisation of female domestic labour. This aligns with understandings

of stereotype formation that emerge not only from aesthetic choices but also from broader logics of cultural legitimisation (Laugier, 2021).

In contrast, the protagonists, all of whom are of mixed race and belong to middle- and upper-class backgrounds, dominate the narrative. Although they remain largely archetypal, they exert greater influence over the development of the plot. For example, the wives shape neighbourhood conflicts, while the husbands undergo comic learning processes, which affords them a slightly greater degree of development than tertiary characters. Nevertheless, even these figures retain consistent traits throughout the episodes analysed, suggesting that the series relies more heavily on comic stereotyping than on sustained character development.

Los García: as a dramedy, adapted from *Los Roldán*, *Los García* offers a comparatively more nuanced portrayal of its principal characters. In the initial episodes, the protagonist, Pepe Pancho García, is presented in multiple roles: as a widowed and caring father, a man of modest working-class origins, and, unexpectedly, as an improvised corporate executive. These shifting positions reveal a degree of internal complexity. His decisions and conflicts, particularly the tension between his background and his new role as company president, are explored with a certain depth within the light hearted tone of the telenovela.

Alongside him, characters such as his sister-in-law Adelita and the consultant Carolina Parker also exhibit greater nuance. Adelita combines the archetype of the self-sacrificing maternal figure with the tension of a concealed emotional attachment to Pepe, thereby suggesting a more developed interiority. Carolina, for her part, initially positioned as an outsider within the household, gradually reveals both professional and emotional motivations, including a possible romantic interest in Pepe, which distances her from the stereotype of the detached career woman and introduces additional dimensions to her character.

In other words, several of the central characters evolve, or at least reveal different facets of themselves as the narrative progresses, thereby avoiding complete one dimensionality. However, this level of development is not extended to all members of the cast. The principal antagonists, the Rossi family, are constructed in comparatively flatter terms. Vito Rossi and his wife, Cuty, embody the archetype of the arrogant and status conscious elite, functioning as caricatured antagonists whose attitudes towards the García family remain largely predictable. Their son, Enzo, represents the figure of the entitled and privileged young man.

These antagonistic characters function less as complex individuals than as social stereotypes, representing a superficial white elite and serving as both a comic and moral counterpoint to the popular protagonists. Similarly, other supporting characters are confined to conventional roles. The matriarch, Isabel Luque, owner of the company, is portrayed as the benevolent figure typical of the telenovela, functioning almost as a fairy godmother. Although her decision to step down is central to the narrative, she disappears early on without significant character development. Pepe's adolescent children, Toño, Mónica, and María, are depicted through relatively simple conflicts characteristic of their age, such as education, relationships, and rebellion, without substantial depth. Likewise, figures such as his friend Rogelio or his employee Lorenzo contribute to the progression of the plot but lack independent narrative arcs, functioning instead as utilitarian characters.

It is important to emphasise a recurring pattern. The characters afforded greater complexity and screen time are Pepe Pancho and his immediate circle, who belong to the same dominant racial and cultural group, namely mestizo populations. By contrast, characters who might introduce alternative perspectives on identity are not developed beyond marginal or anecdotal roles. This is evident in the absence of characters of African descent and in the limited development of the Asian character Fernando. Such patterns raise critical questions regarding representation: which social groups are permitted to function as complex archetypes, and which are denied the development of their subjectivity? In *Los García*, the answer appears unequivocal. The mestizo male protagonist undergoes sustained character development, whereas characters who diverge from the dominant norm, whether in terms of class, ethnicity, or social role, remain confined to fixed types and stereotypes.

3.3. Intersectionality and Character Positioning: Race, Class, Gender, and Narrative Power

Intersectionality is situated within the analysis of race, class, gender, and narrative power. In television fiction, this approach enables an examination of which combinations of attributes are embodied by characters occupying positions of authority or, conversely, those placed in subordinate roles within the narrative world. Following the intersectional framework proposed by Carrera (2021), this study analyses how *Los de al lado* and *Los García* construct their fictional social hierarchies through the intersection of race and ethnicity, social class, gender, and other identity markers.

This distribution reflects what Ríos Bellagamba (2022) identifies as structural intersectional discrimination, understood as the simultaneous operation of multiple axes, such as race, class, and gender, which condition the access of particular groups to spaces of symbolic representation.

3.3.1. Distribution of power by class and race

In both series, upper social classes are predominantly represented by light skinned mestizo characters, whereas those from lower social strata or occupying service roles are portrayed as mestizo individuals with darker complexions. This fictional stratification reflects the hierarchical structures of postcolonial Ecuadorian society, in which the elite is commonly associated with whiteness and European descent, while subaltern positions are linked to working class mestizo or cholo populations.

For example, in *Los García*, the pinnacle of economic power is initially embodied by Doña Isabel Luque, a white elite figure, and subsequently by Pepe Pancho, who, despite his mestizo background and origins in a working-class neighbourhood, attains a position of leadership within the narrative. However, his rise is framed as an exceptional and almost fairy tale like trajectory, implicitly reinforcing the notion that such positions are not ordinarily accessible to individuals from similar backgrounds. Surrounding Pepe, other characters occupying executive or affluent roles, including the Rossi family and Carolina Parker in her role as senior advisor, share a lighter skinned phenotype and possess high levels of cultural capital, expressed through education and refined social practices, in contrast to ordinary employees.

In *Los de al lado*, the affluent neighbour Luli Rivadeneira and her husband Toñeco, a sales manager, represent the local apex of status within the housing estate. They are portrayed as mestizo figures associated with modernity and civility. By contrast, the Chávez family, positioned within the lower middle class, despite residing in the same residential space, retain linguistic and cultural markers associated with a working-class background. Their Montuvio and Manabí origins further position them as culturally subordinate to the Rivadeneiras. Notably, the only characters depicted performing service labour on screen, Bartola in domestic work and Juanetito as caretaker of the estate, also occupy the lowest social stratum.

3.3.2. Gender and power roles

A crucial intersectional dimension concerns the ways in which gender intersects with race and class within these narratives. It is important to note that, despite the prominence of several female characters, formal power within the diegesis remains predominantly concentrated in male figures. In *Los García*, the highest position, that of chairman of the corporation, is assumed by Pepe, thereby displacing Doña Isabel, whose authority had previously derived from family inheritance. Although Isabel initially embodies economic power, representing a relatively uncommon portrayal of a female business leader, her early departure and the subsequent transfer of authority to Pepe ultimately reinforce a traditional patriarchal order, whereby control of the corporation is restored to a male figure. Within this framework, female characters tend to exercise influence through informal or affective roles.

In *Los de al lado*, gender dynamics appear somewhat more complex. Luli and Pochis, as wives, function as key agents in the generation and resolution of conflict between families, demonstrating narrative agency and strong characterisation. However, this agency is primarily

exercised within the domestic and community sphere, rather than within autonomous professional trajectories. Both characters remain situated within a traditionally feminised domain, albeit with a degree of voice and presence. Male characters, such as Toñeco and Darío, compete for recognition through displays of successful masculinity, often expressed through material achievement or sporting prowess, thereby reinforcing conventional gender norms.

Other intersections, including sexual orientation, age, and disability, also warrant consideration. Both *Los de al lado* and *Los García* operate within a predominantly heteronormative framework in their opening episodes. No openly LGBTQ+ characters are identified, nor are there narrative developments that challenge dominant sexual norms. In terms of age and generational representation, both series privilege young and middle-aged adults. Older characters, such as Juanetito and Doña Isabel, are present but occupy roles in which power is either temporary or secondary. By contrast, younger characters, including the children and adolescents in *Los García* and those associated with Pochis and Darío in *Los de al lado*, are afforded limited agency, functioning primarily to complete the family structure or to support minor narrative strands, without participating in significant decision-making processes. Disability is not addressed among the principal characters, all of whom are represented as physically able bodied, thereby excluding an important dimension of social diversity.

The intersection of regionality also merits attention. *Los de al lado* foregrounds the contrast between urban coastal and provincial coastal contexts, particularly Guayaquil and Manabí, as a form of cultural differentiation. Pochis, as a woman originating from a smaller locality in Manabí, is subject to microaggressions grounded in class and regional prejudice, particularly in her interactions with Luli, who positions her as socially inferior. This dynamic illustrates the intersection of race and class with regional hierarchies, reflecting a phenomenon characteristic of the Ecuadorian context, in which internal geography becomes a marker of otherness. By contrast, *Los García*, set entirely in Guayaquil, juxtaposes the marginalised southern zones of the city with its more affluent northern sectors, a spatial distinction that symbolically encodes class and racial hierarchies within a predominantly coastal mestizo framework. In both cases, geographical positioning serves to reinforce social stratification, as characters' backgrounds, whether rooted in working class neighbourhoods or gated communities, shape their access to power and representation within the narrative).

3.4. Narrative Strategies

3.4.1. Social groups linked to behaviours considered positive or aspirational

One of the fundamental pillars of positive representation in *Los de al lado* lies in the role of women as agents of transformation and empowerment within both the domestic and community spheres. Characters such as Dayita, Pochis, and Luli, despite being portrayed through humour and elements of caricature, embody a narrative that presents them as persistent, disciplined, and creative, particularly in relation to forms of small-scale entrepreneurship. In this sense, the series emphasises economic independence in contexts marked by the precarious employment conditions of their husbands or partners. Children, such as Vicky and her brother, are similarly depicted through attributes of innocence and creativity, offering an idealised representation of youth that contrasts with the frustrations experienced by adults. Their interactions with pets, as well as their participation in activities such as collecting clothes for the "Fundación Muchachitos Descalzos", articulate a discourse centred on compassion, solidarity, and empathy.

In *Los García*, characters associated with positive or aspirational behaviour are more closely linked to the business sphere and to processes of upward social mobility. Figures such as Carolina Parker and Doña Isabel exemplify attributes of rationality, success, and discipline. Carolina, through her professionalism and composure, embodies the figure of the successful woman within the corporate environment, while Isabel, as an authoritative figure, symbolises power and legality within the same sphere.

The García family, more broadly, embodies a form of "popular resilience" that the narrative reframes as a central virtue. Although initially presented as a family transitioning from a working-class neighbourhood to an elite residential setting, its members sustain values such as solidarity,

collective effort, humour in the face of adversity, and loyalty to cultural roots, expressed through cuisine, idiomatic language, and everyday practices. Pepe García, in particular, represents a working-class iteration of the “self-made man”. Although his social ascent is contingent upon chance and mediated by the intervention of a powerful figure, Doña Isabel, he is nonetheless constructed as a character possessing leadership capacity, emotional integrity, and a form of strategic naivety that reinforces his symbolic legitimacy.

The findings indicate that virtue is associated less with individual achievement than with the capacity to sustain ethical relationships, to care, to persevere, and to act consistently in contexts of conflict. In this regard, the narrative displaces the meritocratic ideal, presenting social advancement not as the direct outcome of individual merit, but as the product of circumstance, contingency, or external intervention. Aspirational qualities are thus framed not in terms of cumulative success, but through relational capacity and everyday ethical practice. At the same time, there is a shift in the distribution of narrative centrality, whereby women, children, and other non-normative figures emerge as key agents, rather than adult male characters traditionally associated with institutional power.

3.4.2. Social groups associated with behaviours of “deficient citizenship” or “social problems”

The humorous strategy of the narrative intensifies the portrayal of men, particularly those from lower middle-class backgrounds, as figures associated with deficient citizenship. Darío, Juanetito, and Toñico in *Los de al lado* frequently embody the figure of the incapable, immature, dependent, or emotionally unstable man. Across multiple episodes, they are depicted as ineffective in domestic tasks, inept in resolving conflicts, impulsive or indolent, and lacking in foresight and commitment to family responsibilities.

In *Los García*, the Rossi family and the corporate environment surrounding them, despite occupying upper middle class or elite positions, are frequently associated with behaviours that are negatively evaluated from a popular ethical perspective, including envy, hypocrisy, selfishness, emotional repression, class-based racism, and the instrumentalisation of interpersonal relationships.

The irony of this narrative strategy lies in the displacement of traditional associations between social class and moral attributes. Groups typically linked to order, rationality, and success are here repositioned within a register of affective instability and ethical ambiguity. In this way, the narrative subverts the conventional association between marginality and criminality or irrationality. Instead, some of the most destabilising behaviours, including culturally coded racism, covert classism, and hostility towards the newly wealthy, are attributed to those who ostensibly embody institutional authority and rational order.

A key finding, therefore, is that deficient citizenship is not exclusively linked to material deprivation, but operates across social strata through practices such as violence, corruption, contempt for others, and the instrumentalisation of relationships. However, the narrative treatment of these behaviours differs according to class position. When working class characters engage in such practices, they are more likely to undergo processes of correction or redemption, whereas elite characters tend to be portrayed as more resistant to transformation. In both cases, behaviours associated with deficient citizenship are presented as performative rather than essential. That is, they emerge as the product of specific contexts, tensions, or processes of learning, rather than as fixed attributes of particular social groups. This framing enables the telenovelas to articulate a form of social critique that is both dynamic and less overtly moralising.

3.4.3. Social groups linked to the presentation of historical facts and/or past social events

Although *Los de al lado* is not a historical narrative, it contains elements that allow certain scenes to be interpreted as a satirical documentation of contemporary social practices and events. A clear example is provided by the depiction of the closure of the *Tierra Cítrica* enterprise due to unsanitary conditions, accompanied by televisual style coverage denouncing the lack of hygiene.

In this instance, the aesthetic and narrative conventions of consumer or public health inspection programmes are emulated, transforming a fictional episode into an allegory of broader processes, including informality, the precarious nature of domestic and commercial labour, and forms of symbolic state regulation.

Similarly, the Muchachitos Descalzos Foundation, which appears across several episodes as a recipient of donations and a symbol of social charity, functions as a referential point for structural realities, including childhood vulnerability, social inequality, and the need for civic and community intervention.

The narrative of *Los García* subtly incorporates references to wider social dynamics, particularly internal migration, social mobility, and the precarious nature of employment relations. The García family's arrival at the mansion, mediated through an ambiguous arrangement with Doña Isabel, reflects a form of conditional social mobility, contingent upon the interests of more powerful actors. This narrative device evokes a structural condition in which working class populations gain access to material benefits only within a symbolic economy shaped by emotional labour and personal loyalty.

Symbolic representations of the transition from a neighbourhood based social structure to a gated community are also evident, which may be interpreted as an allusion to the urban and social transformations of contemporary Ecuador, including class displacement, gentrification, and tensions between working class populations and elite groups. Within this transition, a form of segregation emerges that is not solely spatial, but also cultural and affective.

In this regard, the findings underscore the ways in which representations of historical and social processes are constructed through everyday scenes that allude to structural issues such as financial violence, social exclusion, and gentrification. Popular narrative thus functions as a living archive of social dynamics, dramatising their effects on individual lives through representations of informal labour, the popular appropriation of rights-based discourse, and enforced adaptations to external class norms. Precarious forms of entrepreneurship, the feminisation of emancipatory discourse, and modes of aesthetic surveillance within business environments are not presented as exceptional phenomena, but as constitutive elements of the everyday social landscape.

3.5. General Trends

3.5.1. Is there a particular type of narrative or theme that is most commonly used when depicting a specific racial-ethnic group or social minority?

The representation of racialised groups in *Los de al lado* is limited, fragmentary, and largely symbolic, consisting of isolated and parodic references, such as Juanetito's exclamation, "For Karanki and Atahualpa!". These instances constitute stereotypical or folklorised forms of ethnic evocation that fulfil an ornamental function, without engaging with cultural or political complexity.

The most visible social minority is that of domestic workers, particularly the character of Bartola. Her portrayal embodies not only class marginalisation, but also the intersection of gender, race, and servitude. Although she is at times treated with a degree of affection and even deference, the narrative constructed around her is grounded in notions of sacrifice, self-denial, and domesticity as a naturalised destiny. Her role as disciplinarian, carer, and silent worker situates her within an archetype of the subaltern class that rarely attains full narrative agency.

In *Los García*, the racial or ethnic dimension is not explicitly articulated through the categories used by the narrative to construct its characters. However, a symbolic framework is discernible, through which certain cultural and physical attributes are associated with working class characters, suggesting a form of racialised representation that remains implicit rather than overtly declared.

The García family is constructed as a cultural "other" within the white, restrained, and elitist environment of the housing estate. Their modes of speech, characterised by idiomatic expressions, coastal sayings, diminutives, and linguistic play, together with their expressive forms of dress and embodied sociability, distinguish them sharply from the estate's original residents. These residents represent an upper middle class white or mestizo ideal associated with order,

aesthetic restraint, emotional control, and regulated consumption. This opposition is not articulated in explicitly biological or phenotypic terms, but rather through a process of cultural coding that performs a similar function of symbolic exclusion.

3.5.2. Is there any type of situation or setting within the narrative where a particular racial group is consistently made visible, and in what way?

The telenovela *Los de al lado* unfolds almost exclusively within domestic spaces, including kitchens, courtyards, dining rooms, and family living areas, as well as, occasionally, neighbourhood streets. Within these contexts, the subjects represented, primarily extended families, mothers, fathers, children, and even pets, inhabit a saturated spatial environment in which the intimate and the public intersect, and where conflicts are intensified by the physical and symbolic proximity of bodies and needs. Notably, the few spaces that suggest aspirational status, such as the set of the reality programme *Cuarentonas con Talento* or small-scale entrepreneurial ventures in confectionery production, ultimately become sites of frustration, sabotage, or failure. This reinforces the notion that social advancement is constructed as illusory or even absurd within the narrative framework.

In *Los García*, the narrative is structured around the contrast between the neighbourhood as a site of origin and the upmarket housing estate as a space of social mobility. This contrast extends beyond physical geography to include domains such as the workplace, the home, and social gatherings, all of which function as sites of cultural negotiation. The mansion inhabited by the García family symbolises both achievement and constraint. While it signifies material advancement, it simultaneously requires adaptation to a regime of cultural and aesthetic norms that remain external to the family's origins. Within the corporate sphere, Pepe Pancho, a man without prior professional experience, rises to the position of company president, illustrating how forms of ethical and relational leadership are positioned in contrast to the perceived detachment and superficiality of conventional executive models.

Public spaces, such as streets and neighbourhood environments, are represented as sites of authentic community, marked by affective intensity and social creativity, in contrast to the regulated intimacy of the domestic sphere and the performative dynamics of the corporate setting.

4. Conclusions

The study finds that national productions such as *Los García* and *Los de al lado* function as far-reaching cultural vehicles, capable of articulating and, at times, subverting social perceptions of race, class, and other identity markers. Both telenovelas, produced by Ecuavisa and TC Televisión respectively, belong to the genre of family comedy drama, a format that, at first glance, appears light hearted and oriented towards entertainment. However, precisely because of its everyday and humorous nature, this genre constitutes a particularly effective medium for the normalisation and reproduction of hegemonic discourses on social stratification. Conflicts presented through humour or affective narratives in the characters' daily lives subtly reinforce stereotypes, rendering them more acceptable to mass audiences.

The methodology developed by the Ibero American Observatory of Fiction Television enables an intersectional analysis of these telenovelas, revealing disparities in character development that reflect structural bias. Both *Los de al lado* and *Los García* exhibit this tendency, reserving psychological complexity primarily for characters belonging to the hegemonic group, namely urban mestizo subjects, while presenting others, including domestic workers, service staff, or wealthy "foreignized" families, through more rigid or caricatured forms.

Character construction in *Los García* and *Los de al lado* aligns with what Christian (2019) terms "identity branding", understood as a narrative strategy oriented towards audiences seeking both identification with alterity and recognition within normative, heterosexual, middle class frameworks.

Across both telenovelas, lower class characters, including domestic workers, security personnel, and neighbourhood figures, are predominantly represented by racialised mestizo or minority subjects, while roles associated with ownership, management, or wealth are occupied by

mestizo characters with more European phenotypic traits. In *Los García*, this dynamic is particularly evident in the transition of the García family from the southern areas of Guayaquil to an affluent northern enclave, where their neighbours, the Rossi family, are portrayed as a quasi-aristocratic elite of distinct lineage. In this way, class division is reinforced through a corresponding differentiation in racial and cultural capital.

Gender operates as an additional axis that modulates the distribution of power. Mestizo men occupy the most visible positions of authority, including executive roles and familial leadership, while women, including those from upper class white or mestizo backgrounds, tend to exercise influence indirectly or remain confined to the domestic sphere.

Taken together, the telenovelas construct symbolic equivalents of ethnicity and race through language, accent, corporeality, humour, and cultural codes. The most visibly represented symbolic minority corresponds to working class coastal communities, particularly through distinctive linguistic expressions, dietary practices, expressive physicality, and forms of affective social interaction. These markers function as narrative substitutes for ethnic and class difference within the urban setting, establishing cultural distinctions that operate as axes of conflict and symbolic differentiation.

Furthermore, the spatial organisation of the narratives reproduces social hierarchies through implicit codes that regulate symbolic belonging. Elite spaces are constructed as sites of controlled exclusion, where material access does not guarantee cultural integration or social legitimacy. Within these environments, expressive difference is perceived as a disruption to order. By contrast, working class spaces allow for greater continuity between identity, language, and behaviour, functioning as territories in which social practices do not require concealment. The distribution of bodies and their modes of inhabiting these environments reveals how space operates as a filter of citizenship, structuring which ways of life become visible, legitimate, or worthy of recognition.

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