

Television, Democracy, and the Mediatization of Chilean Politics

Simón Salazar, Harry L. (2018) *Television, Democracy, and the Mediatization of Chilean Politics*. Lanham (Maryland): Lexington Books. 190 pgs. ISBN: 978-1-4985-5954-6

"15 minutes in 15 years is not much time", is what Patricio Bañados said at the beginning of the campaign advertising slot before the plebiscite of 1988. As mentioned by the book Harry L. Simón Salazar, each side, for "Sí" and for "No", had 15 minutes, daily, for 27 days, starting at 10:45 p.m. The daily average of viewers was 4.5 million and became the most watched TV program, even more than *Sábados Gigantes* (p. 27). On the day of the plebiscite, 93 percent of Chileans had watched the slot at least one day.

The work proposes a theoretical focus to describe the process and sociocultural shift that took place at a time post-dictatorship in which mass media played a key role, in particular the campaign advertising slot that, according to the author, started the mediatization of politics in Chile. The slot, states Simón Salazar, "provides empirical evidence on how a nation learns to ac-

cept the idea that politics in a modern democracy vary according to media content to be consumed and [...] replaces the traditional forms of political compromise" (p. x).

The book is divided into four sections: The historical context of the No campaign; the theoretical focus on mediatization; the empirical analysis of the campaign advertising slot previous to the 1988 plebiscite, and closes by offering some conclusions and projections for the mediatization field of study. The slot is analyzed entirely including production, postproduction, and contents.

In the first section, the author introduces four different periods in the history of Chilean TV: its beginnings as a university project (1958-1964); the political polarization of different media (1964-1973); the period during Pinochet's dictatorship, the development and consolidation of the natio-

nal TV system, the plebiscite and the broadcasting during Aylwin's administration (1973-1990), and the age of privatization and concentration of television and mediatization of politics under La Concertación (1990-2013, p.35). However, this categorizing of periods omits subtleties that other works offer to better understand such history (Fuenzalida, 1983; Hurtado, 1989; Lira, 1987; Munizaga, 1981).

The theoretical focus is that of mediatization in terms of the process in which the media serve as intermediaries, redefining the political, social and cultural realms. This focus highlights that the practices and languages adopted by the political or social spheres are altered and take on the very dynamics of the media. The author recognizes that focuses coined in the context of industrialized countries are inadequate or inappropriate to apply in authoritarian contexts or with those with diverse political cultures. Therefore, he proposes theoretically widening the focus. The author says that "mediatized politics continues to be conceptually relevant in the case of Chile, although with certain exceptions [...] Politics can be described as mediati-

zed when mass media are the main channel via which political information is transmitted, and the mediatized politics refers to a context in which the media have become the most important vehicle for political self-representation, on one hand, and the representation of the institutions involved in governance, electoral processes, and opinion forming, on a broader scope" (p.65).

Nevertheless, the author does not make an issue of this focus on the mediatization in light of the proposals of Latin American authors on media, mediations, and mediatizations. This is particularly surprising especially when stating that "that which is perceived as a mediatic/commercial dynamic in the case of the slots is better understood as a "popular aesthetic" (p. 105), ignoring the theoretical work on popular aesthetics in communication that various authors from the Latin American school of communication have developed, such as Jesús Martín Barbero.

When the author says, the slot was a television

catharsis (p. 73), revealing the unique and exceptional character of said cultural production and its consequent consumption and circulation, the author conceptualizes the campaign advertising slots as a cultural artefact, like the idealization of

a peaceful transition to a procedural democracy (p. 77). The paradox of Chilean democracy is that the plebiscite was won by democratic means, says the author, but establishes the framework built during the dictatorship and that it is this act that causes the later coming about of the mediatization of Chilean politics. However, the transition is decided on years

Constitution 189 (Otano, 1995, see especially the first chapter of "Tupahue: Transición, hora cero"). Therefore, even when it is convenient, provocative and productive to define the slot as a cultural artefact, the author attributes centrality to an event that was, rather, a sign and the result of a larger process, which is the strategic decision of the then opposition of

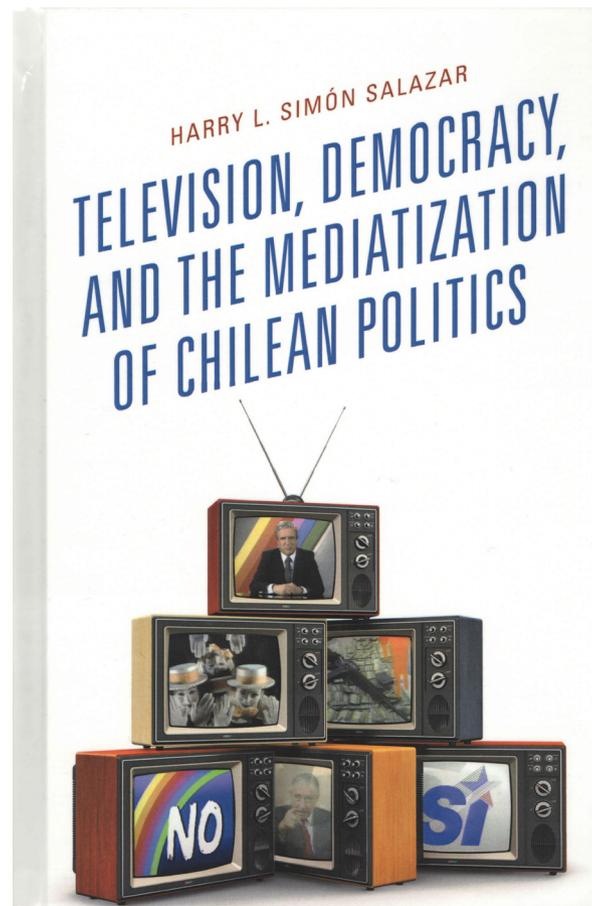
disputing the power within the illegitimate framework of the dictatorship, thus legitimizing it.

media research, but also for the contemporary Chilean cultural memory.

Material is grouped and analyzed in 3 large categories: re-occurring segments, series, and unique segments. The work describes in detail

Nevertheless, the work is noteworthy in terms of its access to archive material and which should be mandatory reference material in the future. In fact, the details the au-

thor offers on the difficulties to access and rebuild the audiovisual material of the slot shows the problems of accessing and the very existence of audiovisual archives in Chile, having repercussions not only for



before the plebiscite and this is, rather, an act, that is most obvious on the surface of a process that dates back to at least 1984, when what would later be La Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia accepts the timeline of Pinochet's

the total time slot, the number of segments of each slot, by day; the most reoccurring type of material and also provides specifics on both the time slot of Sí as well as that of No. Plus, it specifies the character of the content (positive, neutral or negative). Among the interesting results and that question common sense in terms of this material is the notable thematic similarity between both slots, little mention of human rights in the No time slot, the fact that only a third of the content of the Sí time slot directly attacked the No, and a campaign of No full of messages of "happiness" and "hope", where politics is absent.

The book's conclusion is a brief summary of Chile's political history since 1990, but separate from the study itself, which is one of the text's weaknesses. In fact, the text contains some errors or simplifications that future editions should correct. For example, it states that Evelyn Matthei is an attorney, when in reality she has a degree in Economics. The book says Salvador Allende was murdered during the raiding of La Moneda Palace and that his death was declared a suicide by the overthrowing military regime (p. 5), but later says that Allende's death has been debated for decades and "recent investigations confirm that he did in fact commit suicide" (p. 21) (see Montes, 2014).

When addressing political conflicts inside public televi-

sion during the Unidad Popular, the author states that TVN was more aligned with the Demócratas Cristianos (p. 40). However, according to various statements, DC members were the minority on the board of directors of TVN during the UP (Lira, 1987).

The author also indicates the rock band Los Prisioneros appeared for the first time on Chilean television during the political advertising campaign slot (p. 27). However, the band had already appeared on TV during the 1985 Teletón, on Canal 13's show Más Música and on the children's program, Patio Plum, on the Canal de la Universidad de Chile in 1986.

The text states that "the slot took the role of a mediator artefact of Chilean political culture, offering a secondary sociocultural means towards an imagined peaceful reconciliation and a civil government for Chile other than what would be, on the contrary, an evitable armed insurrection and civil war" (p. 80 and p. 81). Nevertheless, the author does not provide references that support his statement of a country on the brink of civil war and earlier studies do not support such statement.

The author says the plebiscite occurred in a highly antidemocratic context, but later states that the democratic scenario was limited to the mediated public connection that the

TV time slot provided (p. 76). Although undoubtable the an-

ti-democratic character of the context in which the plebiscite took place, Chilean society had begun to rebuild certain political and social foundations since the early 1980s, such as the student organizations (the FECh), as well as occupy, not without risk, public spaces by way of national days of protest that sought to dispute the public realm in the streets.

All things considered, Simón-Salazar's book is, without a doubt, a contribution to earlier work published on the 1988 campaign advertising time slot (Boas, 2009; Cronovich, 2013; Hirmas, 1993; Piñuel, 1992; Portales & Sunkel, 1989; Quilter, 1989; Tironi, 2013; Valdés, 1988).

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DOI: 10.5354/0719-1529.2018.50432