

## EMPODERAMIENTO CAMUFLADO: NARRATIVAS “FRUSTRATIVAS/GRATIFICANTES” DE MUJERES POPULARES EN EL ESPACIO RADIAL DE PEDRO LEMEBEL

### Resumen

Durante los últimos años, la popularidad del escritor chileno Pedro Lemebel ha aumentado, con la aparición de un vasto número de documentales, películas, artefactos de arte callejero y canciones, que dan cuenta del incuestionable compromiso social del autor con los sectores marginales de Chile. La crítica académica correspondiente también se ha revitalizado, con varios artículos y libros que indagan en torno al aporte literario y cultural del escritor. Sin embargo, un aspecto no lo suficientemente explorado en estos estudios es la participación de Lemebel en el programa radial “Cancionero” de la emisora Radio Tierra, donde compartiría sus crónicas musicales con un público conformado principalmente por dueñas de casa. En un contexto donde la agenda radial estaba saturada de programas de entretenimiento, el rol contracultural de Lemebel marcó una diferencia. Este artículo analizará seis crónicas radiales biográficas sobre seis mujeres populares latinoamericanas. En ellas se evidencia el compromiso del autor por estimular reflexiones sobre una feminidad popular, construida en base a las acciones de estas mujeres.

### Palabras claves

Lemebel, Radio, Feminismo, Biografías, Cultura Popular, Crónica.

### Abstract

Chilean writer Pedro Lemebel's popularity has increased in the last years. Several documentaries, movies, plays, street art works and songs have paid tribute to this writer's unquestionable commitment to Chilean marginal groups. Lately, literary criticism on Lemebel's work has also been revitalised, with numerous journal articles and a few manuscripts engaging with this author's contribution to Chilean popular culture and literature. However, an aspect that still needs further revision is his participation in radio. Between 1994 and 2002, Lemebel conducted the program “Cancionero” on Chilean feminist Radio Tierra station. This midday space was mainly focused on an audience of stay-at-home mothers with whom the writer shared literature, strategically accompanied by ad-hoc music. Because most female-oriented radio programs at the time were focused on entertainment, Lemebel's action was indeed countercultural. This article is engaged with the content of such literary/audio material. It analyses six audio samples from this radio show, where biographies of famous Latin American women are depicted. It demonstrates the writer's commitment with reflecting upon an idealised image of popular femininity, by showcasing actions of right and wrongdoing, performed by these women.

### Key words

Lemebel, Radio, Feminism, Biographies, Popular Culture, Crónica.

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# CAMOUFLAGED EMPOWERMENT: “FRUSTRATING/GRATIFYING” NARRATIVES OF POPULAR WOMEN IN PEDRO LEMEBEL’S RADIO SPACE

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Between 1994 and 2002, Chilean *cronista* Pedro Lemebel (1952-2015) conducted a radio space entitled “Cancionero” on Chilean Radio Tierra station. By this time, he had already published three of his most successful *crónica* books: *La esquina es mi corazón* (1995), *Loco afán, crónicas de sidario* (1996), and *De perlas y cicatrices* (1998). In this radio show, the writer used to read some of these *crónicas* live on air, accompanied by ad-hoc music. As he stated in his 1999 interview with Roberto Bolaño, this oral segment was particularly addressed to an audience of stay-at-home mothers, expected to be cooking lunch or doing the domestic chores (“Entrevista a Roberto Bolaño parte II”, 1999). In times where women’s autonomy was still a controversial topic in Chilean patriarchal society (Richard, 2001), Lemebel’s oral project became a countercultural action. He shared contents with this public – unusual in those years’ media –, such as politics, sexuality, and culture, aiming to contribute to their becoming knowledgeable and critical of Chile’s contingency.

This article argues that Lemebel’s radio participation unveils a camouflaged strategy of female empowerment. This engagement might be inspired by his closest female circle and evidenced by his commitment, solidarity, affect and complicity with women (Luongo, 2020). We propose that this strategy is mostly attempted by exposing biographical *crónicas* that depict female actions of right or wrongdo-



ing, what we call – in an analogy with the act of breastfeeding (Klein, 1996) – “frustrating” or “gratifying” narratives. “Frustrating” stories would portray biographies about women with questionable roles in society (passive, frivolous, chauvinist), yet who were influential because of having a space on Chilean television. On the other hand, “gratifying” stories would portray biographies about exemplary women (opinionated, brave, socially/politically committed), yet who did not have the same media coverage.

To spell out this argument, this article is divided into four sections. The first one contextualises the influence of radio in Chile. It addresses the development of this platform from the mid-twentieth century onwards, highlighting its political impact during the dictatorship period as well as the democratic era (Lasagni, Edwards, and Bonnefoy, 1985; Sunkel and Geoffroy, 2001).

The second section introduces the countercultural impact of feminist Radio Tierra station during the first years of the democratic transition (Poblete, 2006). By offering an inclusive space to citizens – essentially women – to voice their demands without censorship, this segment explains how Radio Tierra contributed to opening dialogues about Chile’s contingency.

The third part focuses on Lemebel’s radio space. It explains the use of “contrapunto” (Mateo del Pino, 2004) as an essential component of his oral project, characterised by melodies contributing to either complementing the narration, or creating new interpretations. This section closes by providing relevant theoretical views on the meaningful role of radio sounds to generate emotions in domestic environments (Tacchi, 2009).

Finally, part four analyses six *crónicas radiales* that Lemebel once read on this station. Some of these samples are available on the Internet, while others belong to a private collection accessed by the author in Santiago de Chile, November 2019.<sup>1</sup> Three of these recordings constitute “frustrating” biographies about Chilean television women Raquel Argandoña, María Luisa Cordero and Gloria Benavides. These oral narratives are contrasted by other three “gratifying” texts dedicated to popular women Cecilia Pantoja, Mercedes Sosa, and Carmen Gloria Quintana, serving as examples of bravery, thoughtfulness, humbleness, and social commitment.

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1. Audio samples of Lemebel’s *crónicas* are scarce. Some of them are available on YouTube on the channels “Radio Tierra” and “Virgo,” respectively. In total, an average of seventeen samples are easily accessible, out of which six are dedicated to women. In this article, we analyse two of these and include four more that belong to the forecited private collection.



## The influence of radio in Chile

Radio has historically been an influential means of communication for Latin American audiences. It has given low-income segments a voice in times of political revolt, while it has also contributed to constructing a more realistic image of urban life (Giglia & Winocur, 1996). Besides, it has had a relevant social role in politics since the early 1970s, being used by governments with often-questionable purposes. Hence, Rosalía Winocur states that radio can either open or close the actual perspectives of urban life. On one hand, it opens them when a plethora of experiences and realities are captured. On the other hand, it closes them when ideologies distort the interpretation of such experiences and realities (Winocur, 2013).

In Chile, radio was an influential means of communication by the mid-twentieth century. This was possible because this medium could create a close connection with popular audiences given that it reached the peripheral areas that newspapers could not. This also ensured that uneducated people – unable to read – could also have access to information (Lasagni, Edwards, and Bonnefoy, 1985). This point is indeed relevant because radio – unlike newspapers – did not require people “to be literate to absorb oral history” (McHugh, 2012, p. 187). Also, given that “listening can be a secondary rather than a dedicated activity” (McHugh, p. 187), it gave people time and space to do other activities in unison.

After the 1973 military coup, both public and private stations became fully controlled by the military forces (Lasagni, Edwards, and Bonnefoy, 1985). Ever since, radios – same as television – served to dictator Augusto Pinochet’s propaganda campaign, which sought to discredit the Socialist rule of Salvador Allende and consequently, project the military government as the only viable option to progress. Also, to reach a wider range of citizens, Pinochet’s administration ordered the creation of new radios in remote areas, where privately owned stations could not afford to be installed (Lasagni, Edwards, and Bonnefoy). Thus, radio became a highly influential platform because it contributed to reinforcing political ideologies.

A very clear example of dictatorship control was present in Radio Portales. Although this station held programs that were engaged with giving voice to low- and middle-income groups, they used this space for advertising purposes. For example, in the show *Un alto en el camino*, the radio presenter visited the suburbs of Santiago aiming to collect experiences from people in hardship. For their participation,



they received – as gifts – the same products that sponsored the show (Lasagni, Edwards, and Bonnefoy, 1984). The program was not committed to covering people's needs, but to use their voices as an engaging technique, appealing to the audience's compassion. This ensured a higher rating and consequently, more possible consumers.

Although all radios were submitted to political control during this period, there were some differences between AM and FM stations. AM stations were focused on news and entertainment programs, where music worked as an add-on. FM stations, on the other hand, were mostly commercial. They were open to broader audiences and their programs aimed to entertain and advertise products. The type of music they played helped to identify the public they sought to reach (Lasagni, Edwards, and Bonnefoy, 1984). Given that they were more profitable, FM radios exponentially increased in numbers by the 1980s. They also offered a better sound quality, which impacted people's preferences when comparing AM to FM frequencies (Sunkel and Geoffroy, 2001).

Once democracy returned in 1990, FM radios became more influential than AM stations. In a less restrictive and more open context, several international holdings established in Chile and created new FM radios that mostly offered entertainment programs that “imposed a model of broadcasting as an entertainment industry” (Poblete, 2006, p. 319). In this scenario, social or political topics were almost absent. This was aligned with the first democratic government's agenda, which sought to maintain the same status quo inherited from the dictatorship. This occurred mainly because of two reasons. Firstly, the same politicians that had worked with the military government (the right-wing) became the new government's opposition. They were still highly influential in political decisions. Secondly, the new government faced the current political scenario aiming to reconstruct Chile based on the same economic principles established by the dictatorship. Thus, with a still predominant authoritarian influence, Chile visualised the future leaving the past behind and establishing renovated political alliances that overlooked this country's recent political history (Moulian, 2002).

Chile's new democratic society faced an expansion, yet not a real transformation. The concepts “exploitation”, “alienation” and “domination” were eliminated from the official discourse, and so were the ways to discuss about politics (Moulian, 2002). Besides radio, this strategy was also supported by the two most influential means of communication: television and press, which continued the process of



cultural intervention that the dictatorship had enacted years before. On one hand, the main public television channels maintained the same grid, broadcasting programs that prioritised entertainment over culture and education. On the other hand, the printed press was controlled by a private duopoly (El Mercurio and Copesa) that continued to circulate with a predominance of 98% in the market, and spreading news that were aligned with the governments’ agenda (“En Chile la concentración de medios...”, 2016).

As we can see, – in this era – means of communication still responded to a strategy of official regulation. They were either controlled by the state or by private owners. In the private sector, some platforms continued to expand the political ideology inherited from the dictatorship. Pinochet’s government had economically privileged them, so they remained loyal to his administration. On the other hand, there were other platforms uninterested in both political and social matters, mainly because engaging with controversial topics was unprofitable.

Some of these radios recuperated the connection with citizens by opening microphones yet discussing private topics rather than public ones. Commercially, this was a successful strategy. For example, in the show *El Chacotero Sentimental* broadcast by FM Rock & Pop radio since 1996, the presenter used to hold conversations with people who narrated personal stories, usually overloaded with sexual details. They used nicknames to cover their real identities. In their article on this program’s social phenomenon, Yáñez-Urbina, Calquín, and Guerra-Arrau (2017) argue that this strategy allowed people to expose their intimacy, while they could also hide their identities. This could possibly be interpreted as a resemblance of Chilean society’s restraint. That is, although people might have indeed desired to express themselves freely, doing it by revealing their names would have made them feel uncomfortable, a trauma probably inherited from the dictatorship’s invasive surveillance.

While FM stations gained more territory in the media, AM stations began to lose it. Some of them moved to the FM frequency. The ones that remained AM represented less than 22% of the whole radio coverage by 1996 (Poblete, 2006). This prompted their independence and made them focus on local communities instead. They were locally sponsored as well. Programs were based on local news and entertainment spaces, with music intended to accompany women while doing the house chores. Hence, the songs normally had lively rhythms, such as *cumbia*, *salsa*, or *bolero*. The idea was to make radio a loyal and pleasant accompaniment to their daily routines.



In this context, discussions about the contingency were hardly present in radio's agendas. Therefore, opening spaces to dialogue with the population about their opinions on socio-political matters became necessary in order to interfere with the passivity imposed. A relevant contribution was made with the creation of Radio Tierra, an autonomous station specifically focused on offering low- and middle-income people – especially women – a space to voice their opinions and demands. The following segment explains the impact of this radio station in Chile.

## **Radio Tierra: An autonomous feminist voice**

Inaugurated in 1991, Radio Tierra emerged as an autonomous station in the AM frequency, aiming to create a countercultural radio space to dialogue with women about Chile's contingency. It “was established at the beginning of the 1990s by the Corporación Feminista La Morada in Santiago with funding from the Dutch agency KULU” (Poblete, 2006, p. 322). La Morada was an open house located in Santiago and established in the 1980s, aiming to provide women with a free gathering space to organise themselves and articulate their needs and demands (Ríos et al., 2003).

Radio Tierra “strove to produce ‘communicability’ and ‘ciudadanización’ (the process of expanding and activating citizenships), that is to say, civil/citizen communication and citizenship in/through communications” (Radio Tierra, 2002, as cited in Poblete 2006, p. 327). It enacted a type of public journalism intended to make audiences visible, by constructing a collective agenda capable of competing with the official program of both politics and authorised media. Juan Poblete states that public journalism,

privileges topics, not authorized sources: the acknowledgment, for a plurality of discourses, of different ways of knowing and forms of expression, of the right to deliberate. [It] does not merely highlight isolated and shocking news stories but follows them up and adds depth to its coverage. In this way, public journalism seeks to escape from the confines of the classic scheme where information is the main indicator of the quality of public opinion, in order for news to grow organically from the processes of participation (2006, p. 322).

By the time it was inaugurated, Radio Tierra absorbed the momentum of Chilean feminism from the last years of the dictatorship era.



During the military period, feminism was not only highly active but also unified. This was mainly possible because the military regime represented patriarchy, identified as women’s common enemy. By then, gender binary roles were clearly defined and officially delineated by the 1981 constitution which contained “una prohibición explícita de sustentar ideologías que [atentaran] contra la familia patriarcal, tradicional, con normas establecidas por el sistema educativo y afianzadas por los medios de comunicación masivos” (Kirkwood, 1986, p. 46). In view of this, several feminist independent groups both political and popular emerged. Some of the political ones were *Mujeres por la Vida*, aimed to denounce the lack of a female voice in political spaces (Baldez, 2003), or *El Movimiento Feminista*, which intended to congregate women to participate together in public rallies to publicly show female union (Ríos, Godoy, and Guerrero 2003). Two of the popular groups were *Las Domitilas* or *El Colectivo de Mujeres “Lo Hermita”* mainly composed by low-income women, aimed to reflect, debate, and foster consciousness about male oppression (Ríos, Godoy, and Guerrero).<sup>2</sup> In those years, *La Morada* conducted several female workshops that were highly relevant to open spaces for these debates to take place (Ríos, Godoy, and Guerrero 2003).

Once democracy returned, Chilean feminism waned because of the inexistence of both a common enemy and a mutual agenda.<sup>3</sup> Political feminist groups opted for finding in the government an ally to their demands, especially because a national women’s service was created (SERNAM). On the other hand, the popular feminist wing decided to remain dissident in order to maintain an autonomous voice. Thus, Chilean feminism was divided between women who were in favour of an institutional coalition and those who wanted to remain independent (Feliú, 2009).

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2. Drawing on Engels (1884), Sandra Lozano (2012) states that gender inequality originates in the private household. Men have historically worked in order to keep and perpetuate their inheritance. Women, on the other hand, have stayed at home to do the domestic work and to take care of children, thus prolonging men’s dominance. Whereas capitalist governments utilised this structure for production purposes, Marxist ones were unable to abolish it during their apogee. Orthodox Marxism denied women’s necessity to become independent, arguing that such a debate might deviate the movement’s main social objective.

3. In other countries of the Southern cone this situation also occurred yet with some nuances. In Argentina, for example, a more unified vision of feminism evolved, although controversial topics such as abortion or contraception still divided women. In fact, although the dictatorship had ended by the early 1980s, a debate on abortion began only after the 1990s (Tarducci, 2018). Meanwhile, in Uruguay, feminist groups were mainly divided about the past, with some women supporting the amnesty for military abuses and others claiming for justice. Once this point was cleared, feminism started to concentrate on themes related to gender equality (Schwarz, 2018).



Because the institutional group represented the political spectrum and had more visibility, they became a hegemonic type of feminism. As such, they were aligned with the government's agenda. Under the surveillance of both the Catholic Church and the traditional opinion of the right-wing, institutional feminists proposed a less confrontational debate, focused on the role of women in family structures, rather than their right to decide on controversial topics such as divorce or abortion (Richard, 2001).

Raquel Olea agrees with this as she states that the Catholic Church was highly influential in the development of a motherly role of femininity, placing women at the head of the family structure:

Las demandas feministas por derechos a la educación, a la participación en los espacios de poder; las aspiraciones a una convivencia democrática, en lo público y privado, retroceden ante la presencia poderosa del símbolo femenino resacralizado en la identidad materna, ahora por efectos del mercado. La figura de la madre se ofrece entonces para ser administrada desde las políticas del Estado como desde las negociaciones del mercado; sea para hacerla persistir en el imaginario con el signo tradicional de la virgen-madre, para vigilar el despliegue de una feminidad otra, o para controlar resignificaciones emergentes que ponen en crisis los discursos oficiales de familia y amplían lo femenino a una heterogeneidad aún sin cauce en los imaginarios dominantes (Olea, 1998, p. 7).

In this scenario, the concept "gender" was condemned and seen as an antagonist of moral and social conventions. "Natural" female features (emotionality, delicacy, intuition, practicality, etc.) were highlighted and connected to fields where women could develop themselves skilfully, such as health, education, or the household. This contributed to reinforcing the difference between both genders and thus, elicited the notion that femininity was inferior to masculinity (Richard, 2001).

Meanwhile, women who identified with autonomous feminism continued to work independently, organising public events and participating in non-political regional feminist meetings.<sup>4</sup> They became a counterhegemonic movement that sought to represent those women

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4. One of these was the Latin American feminist encounter in Cartagena, Chile in 1996. While the autonomous feminist group (*Autónomas*) oversaw the organisation, the institutional one (*Institucionalizadas*) participated in the talks. This meeting unveiled the irreconcilable differences between both groups. Cartagena was a tense moment showing that Chilean feminism was in crisis. It was also a missed opportunity to discuss the future of Chilean women and to come to a consensus between both ideological wings (Álvarez et al., 2003).



unidentified with the official articulation of feminism. La Morada remained one of those autonomous organisations and they used their Radio Tierra as a platform to voice women’s demands, giving them access to cultural and political dialogues, mostly unavailable on other media.<sup>5</sup>

As a platform linked to autonomous feminism, Radio Tierra aired programs that sought to give citizens’ associations, collectives, and social organisations a place to freely share their thoughts and needs. One of these was a program called Voces de la Ciudadanía. Several national organisations participated in this space, mainly representing women linked to the detained-disappeared or sexual minority groups.<sup>6</sup> The same radio workers provided training to these people so that they were able to conduct their programs autonomously (Richard, 2001).<sup>7</sup>

Another relevant space on the radio was a program conducted by Lemebel. It was entitled “Cancionero”<sup>8</sup> and was based on reading his *crónicas* interlaced by ad-hoc music. This show was broadcast at noon. Lemebel’s program aimed to reach – among others – a specific audience of stay-at-home mothers, expected to be cooking lunch at that time. The program was relevant in that it shared cultural and political debates with underprivileged female audiences. This represented Radio Tierra’s spirit to create dialogues with women about Chile’s contingency, in times where they were mostly assumed to have a passive position in society, being relegated to their family roles within the household.

5. Together with Raquel Olea and Vicky Quevedo, one of the founders of the Radio Tierra project was Margarita Pisano, also a founder of the Chilean *Feministas Autónomas* movement (Gaviola & Lidid, n.d., pa).

6. It is also important to mention the relevance of the program *Triángulo Abierto*, the first homosexual radio space in Chile, aired on Radio Tierra in 1993. Hosted by gay activist Víctor Hugo Robles, this program was created “cuando se le propuso al Movimiento de Integración y Liberación Homosexual (MOVILH) que realizara una serie de ocho transmisiones radiofónicas, que saldrían al aire los martes por la noche. Sin embargo, debido a su gran impacto las ediciones se extendieron en el tiempo. Lemebel participó en este espacio, en una entrevista en la que, según cuenta Robles (54) ‘habló del mariconeo nacional’ e ‘inauguró en *Triángulo Abierto* sus aplaudidas crónicas radiales colizas” (Mateo del Pino, 2020, p. 270).

7. Juan Poblete states that more than reaching wide audiences, Radio Tierra’s main role was to give people spaces to speak up their voices. In this regard, the radio had a “‘glocal’ function, i.e. it articulate[d] local logics, which [were] themselves already the result of the changes globalization ha[d] brought to national life, to global logics and discourses such as feminism, multiculturalism, identity politics, ecological movements international NGOs, etc.” (Poblete, 2006, p. 326).

8. Ángeles Mateo del Pino declares that the title of the program was not random, “pues dicha denominación remite a una colección o repertorio de canciones y estilos diversos, tal es lo que hace Pedro Lemebel, al ir desplegando a través de las ondas pinceladas musicales –folclore, neofolclore, nueva canción chilena, nueva ola, bolero, tango, vals, balada, mambo, pop, rock...–, a la par que ‘airea’ sus propias crónicas literarias, logrando con ello una complicidad basada en letras, sonidos e imaginarios” (as cited in Mateo del Pino, 2020, p. 271).



## “Cancionero:” Lemebel’s radio space

“Cancionero” was broadcast between 1994 and 2002. An initial proposal of the show was based on the author reading his *crónicas* accompanied by ad-hoc music. A second phase included interviews with well-known people mainly from the cultural or political field. Lemebel used to state that books – unlike radios – were an “exotic” find in peripheral areas (as cited in García-Corales, 2005). Hence, having access to this space was highly significant because it allowed him to share his literature with low-income audiences, especially women. This point is highly relevant to understand the democratic aim of Lemebel’s oral project, as it also proves the efficacy of radio to reach broader audiences both effectively and affectively. In this regard, Siobhan A. McHugh states that the act of radio listening

creates a pact of intimacy between speaker and listener and an accompanying sense of “liveliness” not found in print. Oral history that reveals a narrator’s strong feelings and emotions will engender strong affective resonances in listeners and thus be retained. If well crafted as storytelling through sound, using sound’s own affective power, oral history on radio can be elevated to an art form that can move, inform, and delight its audience (2012, p. 206).

Lemebel’s commitment to women can be evidenced in his 1999 interview with Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño. By that time, both writers already knew each other well.<sup>9</sup> In the program, they hold a conversation about several topics, such as radio and television, although they mainly concentrate on their memories.<sup>10</sup> Bolaño sounds very comfortable, responding to Lemebel’s unpretentious questions, possibly a strategy to bring the international writer closer to the radio audience. Listening to Bolaño speaking about quotidian occurrences is certainly unique. This was achievable by the atmosphere that

9. Roberto Bolaño was crucial for the internationalisation of Lemebel’s literary career. Bolaño introduced Lemebel to Jorge Herralde, the director of the editorial Anagrama, which published Lemebel’s *Loco afán: crónicas de sidario* and later, his only novel *Tengo miedo torero* (Hola, 2015).

10. Ignacio Echevarría recalls the moment in which both writers met for the first time in 1998, after they were introduced by Malala Ansietta (the representative of editorial Planeta Santiago). “Malala habla de un mutuo ‘enamoramiento’ y del comienzo de una ‘hermosa amistad’. Pero importa precisar que para entonces Bolaño sabía quién era Lemebel, de cuyas acciones como miembro integrante de las Yégua del Apocalipsis tenía noticia, y de algunas de cuyas crónicas había leído ya desde España. Conocerlo personalmente supuso para Roberto confirmar la intuición de que se trataba de ‘uno de los mejores escritores de Chile y el mejor poeta de mi generación, aunque no escriba poesía’” (Echevarría, 2020, p. 30).



Lemebel created in this radio space. Arguably, this acted as a strategy to pave the road for more intricate topics, such as politics or literature. This can be demonstrated in his question to Bolaño, when he asked him to describe his literature in simple terms so that the audience of Radio Tierra would easily understand him:

Pensando en ese público un poco ausente de estas fanfarrias culturales, pensando en el público de Radio Tierra, en la señora que en este momento nos está escuchando y está revolviendo la olla al o mejor, si ya es hora como de almuerzo, porque en este país se almuerza un poco tarde, y a esta hora es muy escuchada Radio Tierra, entonces, a ese público que está un poco alejado de estos contenidos, ¿Cómo le definirías tú, tu quehacer escritural para explicárselo?<sup>11</sup>

At the beginning of the interview Bolaño defines his literature as "difícil." However, after Lemebel's question, he rewords his statement and declares that maybe, the *señoras* listening to the program might want to first approach his texts by reading his short stories or novelas, which are written in a less intricate form. Thus, Bolaño opens an extraordinary invitation to these ladies to read his literature. As above stated, this was only possible by the facilitation of the familiar atmosphere that Lemebel created in his radio program.

We have previously mentioned that Lemebel's *crónicas radiales* were usually accompanied by music. It would be logical to assume that stories were connected to both lyrics and melodies. However, this was not always evident. Oftentimes, songs inspired an opposite feeling, creating an awkward connection between the literary and the musical experience. For example, if the narration spoke about a dark character, music might probably be soft rather than tense. This particular phenomenon has been defined as "contrapunto" (Mateo del Pino, 2004, para. 5); that is, melodies that may activate thoughts or memories and thus set specific atmospheres. Arguably, this connection was possible because the "expressiveness of the spoken word may also elicit an emotional response distinct from the meaning of the words themselves" (McHugh, 2012, p. 192), but also because of the familiarity that popular music creates, especially considering that "we tend to feel more strongly about music that we already have some connection to, and familiar music may also accompany personal memories" (Bicknell, 2009, p. 65).

11. See min. 8:07: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ha5jbU2ojBU> (Viewed 29 June 2021).



For Judith Sierra-Rivera, the musical repertoire that accompanied the narration in Lemebel's radio space was purposefully selected, thus ensuring to elicit a response from the audience. She argues that Lemebel appealed to nostalgia by using melodies from yesteryear that were somehow connected to his audience's past. Then, he recuperated the "pain and worries experienced by those – generally from the working class and the dispossessed – who have always enjoyed songs that are despised by most of the middle class and the privileged" (Sierra-Rivera, 2018, p. 108). Ultimately, the goal was to "interpellate the residents of the poor neighbourhoods of Santiago by telling stories pertinent to their daily lives and memories" (Sierra-Rivera, p. 104). As such, "Cancionero" served as a medium that made a political gesture evident, becoming a "space of dissidence" to respond to the "neoliberal consensus" imposed by the tepid governments of the democratic period (Sierra-Rivera, 2018).

For Héctor Domínguez, Lemebel's program was particularly relevant in that it defied patriarchal domination by using a space mostly governed by women and addressed to women. "Lemebel conforma una perspectiva política que pone en la posición enunciativa a lo femenino. Podría hablarse aquí de una agencia feminista y entonces un travestimiento discursivo [...] Esto quiere decir que la normatividad de la orientación sexual se reorienta hacia un juego de suplantaciones, un deslizamiento de una superficie a otra" (Domínguez, 2004, p. 136). As such, "Cancionero" embraced a political action by giving minority groups both a voice and space, thus contributing to propagating narratives that patriarchal power sought to control.

"Cancionero" allowed Lemebel to enter the intimate space where women – listening to the show – would be either cooking or doing the domestic chores. In this regard, it is relevant to notice that there is a meaningful connection between radio sounds and domestic life. In her article "Radio and affective rhythm in the everyday" (2009), Jo Tacchi sustains that radio sounds "hold the capacity to generate emotion, but not in isolation. Radio is a medium entering the home from the outside, and it helps to create domestic environments in which domestic relationships take place" (p. 177). That is, although affective responses are individual and cannot be predetermined, the space in which they are evoked may have an impact on someone's mood. In this respect, listening to these stories in the intimate home space would create an atmosphere ideal to absorb the radio sounds. "Radio sound has a role (for some an important role) in this enterprise, in providing rhythm for the everyday. Radio sound is used to change or



maintain mood, and through this mood generation, to create affective rhythms for everyday domestic living” (p. 181).

From Tacchi’s perspective, we could infer that Lemebel’s radio program might have provided listeners with “the affective rhythm” to start or to continue to do the domestic chores yet accompanied by provocative information. The program might have created a routine, becoming a musical company and setting a specific mood to carry out the home tasks. In this intimate environment, the oral messages of the *crónicas* – complemented with ad-hoc music – might have reverberated in the audience more significantly, especially considering the content’s familiarity. Although Lemebel used to read *crónicas* with varied topics in his show, one aspect that requires attention is the interpretation of biographical *crónicas* about Latin American popular women. How would have female listeners identified with them? What is the message behind those biographies and what would have the author pursued with this task? We will aim to answer these questions in the following sections.

### **Lemebel’s commitment/solidarity with women**

Stating that Lemebel might have had an influential role in promoting ideal roles of femininity in his radio program may be strongly questionable from a radical feminist perspective, which disregards the impact of a male, yet queer voice sharing a female autonomous discourse. Therefore, we will start this section by justifying this position with some theoretical views on feminism, from a male/queer angle.

Tom Digby – the editor of the book *Men doing Feminism* (1998) – considers himself a feminist man. He is aware that this position is provocative. He is likely to be asked, “What do you mean?” and is often treated “as traitor by many men, and with suspicion by some women” (1998, p. 3). Yet, he justifies his view by stating that any vigorous opposition between gender roles is inherited from patriarchy: “men and feminism is rooted in the gender binary that is a typical of patriarchal cultures, according which every (or almost every) human being is rigorously confined within one of two mutually exclusive categories, man or woman” (p. 2).

While radical feminism makes binary distinctions, Sandra Harding purports that a liberal type of feminism does “not question the desirability or inevitability of gender categories” (1998, p. 181). She adds that “categories themselves serve primarily male supremacist interests. That is, it has been primarily in men’s interests to



distinguish their gender from femininity in order to link manliness to the distinctively human and ideals of nationalism, race, ‘the worker,’ reason, militarism, the heroic, the ethical, etc.” (p. 181). Consequently, the preoccupation with making such distinctions “obscures aspects of ourselves and our surroundings that do not easily fit into such categories no matter how they are evaluated” (p. 181).

From a queer feminist perspective, Mimi Marinucci coins the word “solidarity” to express the position from which queer theory embraces feminism. “[T]his solidarity seems born of a deep understanding that the oppression of women and the suppression of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender existence are deeply intertwined. Feminist identity, like LGBT identity, stretches the boundaries of established categories of gender, sex, and sexuality” (2010, p. 106). Marinucci also agrees with the impact of binary oppositions as above described and recognises that a major problem with this is that divisions tend to grant “priority to the privileged side of the relevant binary” (p. 109). In this sense, “the concept of feminism is itself queer” (p. 109).

Particularly, the concept of “solidarity” used by Marinucci is highly relevant to understand the position from which Lemebel might have absorbed a female voice. There is an unquestionable commitment with femininity in the writer’s project, certainly inspired by those women who were part of his artistic/ideological formation. Gilda Luongo – a literary critic and close friend of the author – refers to this point in her article “¿La ciudad de las mujeres? Una ética-política en tus crónicas, Pedro Lemebel,” where she states,

En la cercanía, supe de tus afectos y complicidades con mujeres de carne y hueso, cuerpos femeninos de diverso tono, estilo. El amor amoroso. Te nutrías de ellas, sobre todo de aquellas que para ti cultivaban una vertiente estético-política en su estar vivas en la lengua filosa. Tú decías que no tenías amigas sino amores. Nunca habría estado cerca de algunas bellas e intensas si no hubiese sido por tu tendencia a juntar sujetos tan distintos [...] Entonces, ahora te digo bajito, miraré contigo, cronista irreverente/insurgente, con ojo agudo, aquellos escritos que pongan de relieve, en espacios urbanos, las figuras femeninas que aparecen en lo público, por ende, ocupan un lugar en lo político -desde este feminismo- y me dejaré sorprender frente al armado, al tinglado, a la tarima, al trazo al que echas mano para dibujarlas en tus crónicas, el modo en que las situas, las palabras con que las llamas, maneras y formas en que las perfilas, zonas de lo ético-estético-político; sus devenires alegres, tristes o tenebrosos en contextos, siempre en contextos ciudadanos seleccionados e imaginados por ti (2020, pp. 157–158).



Sandra Bartky states that there are men who integrate “feminist values and a profound commitment to the feminist movement into their lives” (1998, p. xii) because of their personal relationships with their direct environment, such as the strong influence of women in their family circles. These men, she argues, “deserve a place at our table: they have listened and learned from us; there is much that we can learn from them” (p. xii). This idea aligns with Luongo’s opinion about Lemebel, as it expresses the origin of his political ethics with women. Luongo talks about the feminist influence of women *de carne y hueso*, whose tone and style were diverse. We interpret this as her recognition of the varied female inputs in Lemebel’s life, from his feminist and academic friends,<sup>12</sup> to the most intimate and personal inspiration of the women of his family.

One of the characteristics of Lemebel’s literature is its engagement with popular culture narratives, such as biographies or experiences of people who are part of the Latin American collective imaginary. In the case of popular/famous women’s stories, it is possible to see that the author would have absorbed them in the same way he absorbed the feminist influence from his inner circle. In his radio show, he exposed these narratives and added music to them, thus bringing them back to where they originally belonged: *el mundo popular*. It is relevant to mention that these biographies not always aimed to eulogise the role of women. In fact, he portrays them as realistic as possible, with pros and cons, with actions of right and wrongdoing, as if expecting listeners to draw their own conclusions, yet guided by his words, his voice, and the stimulating background sounds.

Because the author was fed by women’s stories, we like to think of this artistic practice as an analogy to the act of breastfeeding.<sup>13</sup> Melanie Klein (1996) asserts that when a child sucks milk from his/her mother’s breast he/she absorbs a good (gratifying) and a bad (frustrating) breast. In this procedure, the child divides the breast into

12. Chilean poet Carmen Berenguer – also a close friend of Lemebel’s – mentions that some of these influences are Nelly Richard, Diamela Eltit, Raquel Olea, Olga Grau and Soledad Bianchi. These women, Berenguer argues, anticipated today’s feminist, political and cultural world. See min 26:10: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_VUuwn-GFqc&t=1604s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_VUuwn-GFqc&t=1604s) (Viewed 30 June 2021).

13. Bernice Hausman states that breastfeeding is feminist and political. She argues that “breastfeeding is an important, and crucial component of women’s political rights [because] breastfeeding is not just about understanding breastfeeding itself as a political practice of maternity; it is also, and more importantly, about promoting motherhood as a political project for women.” “Promoting motherhood as a political project is about not allowing it to be relegated to a ‘private’ world of intimacy and natural relationships. It is about creating a feminist politics of motherhood” (Hausman, 2004, p. 275).



a process she calls “splitting.” On one hand, “[t]he good aspects of the breast are exaggerated as a safeguard against the fear of the persecuting breast”; on the other hand, “[t]he frustrating object is kept widely apart from the idealized object” (p. 168). Borrowing Klein’s concepts, Lemebel absorbs “gratifying” and “frustrating” narratives. In a “splitting” process, he exaggerates the good aspects of “gratifying” stories in order to make them look and sound as exemplary. On the other hand, he also highlights the negative aspects of “frustrating” biographies, ensuring they are kept apart from the ideal ones. In both cases, women’s actions speak for themselves, placing the author’s role as a facilitator of a discourse that is essentially female. He uses his voice, talent, and wit, as well as his radio space, in order to amplify reflections about what he considers (because other women taught him) should be the right position of women in society: opinionated, brave, empowered and committed with social/political causes, rather than passive, frivolous, chauvinist or devoted to her family obligations. As we will see in the next section, this strategy would unveil a camouflaged action of female empowerment.

### **“Frustrating and gratifying” *crónicas* about popular women**

In this section we will analyse six biographical *crónicas* about women in the Latin American spectrum that were broadcast in Lemebel’s radio program. This analysis will be based on the writer’s oral narration as interlaced with the sounds that accompany the text. First, we will review three “frustrating” *crónicas* about three women who were influential in Chile’s media during the 1990s: Raquel Argandoña, María Luisa Cordero and Gloria Benavides. These stories depict features that highlight negative aspects of their personalities, such as frivolity, selfishness, or lack of social commitment. Then, we will include another three “gratifying” *crónicas* of different women who received less media coverage, yet whose biographies are relevant because of portraying an empowered, brave, opinionated, and thoughtful role in their respective times: Cecilia Pantoja, Mercedes Sosa, and Carmen Gloria Quintana. This section demonstrates that Lemebel’s participation in radio pursued a countercultural strategy, as it showcased roles of womanhood different to the traditional and submissive ones that were portrayed on mainstream media.



In the *crónica* “La Quintrala de Cumpeo (o Raquel, La soberbia hecha mujer),”<sup>14</sup> the writer introduces a thorough biography of Raquel Argandoña (1957- ). Argandoña is a famous television woman in Chile, popular for her pride and frankness. In her youth she was a model, participating in television shows and beauty contests. She was also a news presenter and host of several national festivals. Argandoña gained more recognition after she participated as an actress in the television series *La Quintrala* (1987).<sup>15</sup> In her study on “Las Quintralas audiovisuales,” Claudia Bossay summarises Argandoña’s biography as follows:

Para 1987, año de estreno, [Argandoña] era uno de los rostros fuerza de las pantallas de TVN, tras haber sido Miss Chile en 1975, representado al país en un certamen internacional de belleza y haber leído por varios años las noticias en 60 minutos (1975-1988, TVN) el noticiero central del canal oficialista de la dictadura. Entra a trabajar en la televisión a sus 14 años (1971), a través de una breve colaboración en el programa de baile Tip-Top, del cual se va tan solo unas semanas más tarde, para comenzar a trabajar en Sábado gigante (1962-2015, Canal 13, Univisión), el famoso programa ómnibus de Canal 13, del cual se retiró tras un conflicto con su animador Don Francisco (Mario Kreutzberger). La modelo, animadora, conductora y actualmente panelista de matinales y programas de farándula chilena, suma más de treinta años en la pantalla y un sinnúmero de rivalidades con personajes públicos. El papel de la Quintrala fue el más importante como actriz -también trabajó brevemente para Televisa en México-. La fuerza del personaje la ayudó a inmortalizarse en la televisión. Argandoña es parte de la historia de la televisión de Chile, por haber interpretado a la Quintrala, pero también por ser parte de la oficialidad visual de la dictadura (2021, p. 28).

Most of these events are mentioned in Lemebel’s *crónica*, yet the writer mainly emphasises Argandoña’s personality. He describes her as a woman who learnt to be proud and blunt during her childhood.

14. An adapted version of this *crónica* was published in Lemebel’s book *De perlas y cicatrices* (1998) under the same title. The radio recording belongs to a private collection accessed in Santiago de Chile, November 2019.

15. Catalina de los Ríos y Lisperguer – also known as *La Quintrala* – was a Chilean landholder who lived in the seventeenth century. She was popular for her beauty, as well as for her cruelty with her servants. She is a mythical character in Chilean history, representing ambition and evilness. One of her most iconic fictional representations is present in Magdalena Petit’s homonymous novel (1932). The television series *La Quintrala* (1987) – starring Raquel Argandoña – is also an emblematic adaptation.



Sarcastically, he states that she assumed herself special because she was beautiful and sophisticated, in a country where people normally are ugly and rude: “había nacido para princesa, condesa o duquesa, en un país donde la gente es fea y ordinaria” (“La Quintrala de Cumpeo [o Raquel, La soberbia hecha mujer],” n.d.).

Also, the writer states that such differences probably created a barrier between Argandoña and the populace. He mentions that despite her fame, she was never really loved and admired. Although she sought to be esteemed – mostly because of her political interests – people realised her dishonesty: “Raquel, tan preocupada del jet set, nunca supo ganarse el afecto popular que no la pasa, que no la quiere, que le devuelve su arribismo derechista al verla ya ajada por su inútil maña de realeza” (“La Quintrala de Cumpeo [o Raquel, La soberbia hecha mujer],” n.d.).

For Lemebel, Argandoña’s interests were stronger than her social convictions. Hence, he introduces her as a woman with political aspirations, yet without a genuine social commitment.<sup>16</sup> This was particularly evident during the dictatorship times. In those years, the model became highly popular, especially around high-class circles that were linked to the government. Lemebel states that Argandoña represented the image of an “ideal” Chilean woman for them: chic and beautiful, certainly different from what women in low- and middle-income sectors look like. He also mentions that she took advantage of her contacts in order to secure her fame. This is something the author condemns; that is, using her privilege for personal, rather than a collective/social benefit, especially during Chile’s darkest years, when people lacked a voice that represented them:

Aún así rodaban los ochenta, en el Chile aporreado de los milicos, cuando la burguesía chilena quería tapar lo que ocurría con galas almidonadas y pompones nazis. Cuando la propaganda de la dictadura encontraba eco en esas revistas “para gente como uno,” [emphasis added] ahí estaba la Raquelita sumando su pretensión a ese entablado aristócrata amigote del fascismo. Allí era la diosa de hielo para los yuppies atontados por su altanera elegancia. Era la más regia, la más top, la más chic de las mujeres chilenas que miraba sobre el hombro al país, apoyada solamente en su frágil hermosura y en su gordo peluquero, que le llevaba la cola. Entonces todos

16. In 1996, Argandoña began a career as a politician, being elected as a councillor for Pelarco, a small town in Chile’s VII region. In 2000, Argandoña became the town’s mayor. In both elections, the right-wing party Renovación Nacional supported her.



los cuicos murmuraban: es ella, Raquel, lo más distinguido que ha dado este país de rotos. Es ella, Raquel, la soberbia hecha mujer (“La Quintrala de Cumpeo [o Raquel, La soberbia hecha mujer],” n.d.).

The use of *contrapunto* in this *crónica* mirrors the writer’s ironic strategy. The narration is introduced and accompanied by the song “Ella es” (1998) by Argentine *cumbia* band Adrián y Los Dados Negros, whose lyrics highlight a woman’s uniqueness:

Bella como flor, de campos ajenos,  
Dulce como miel, miel de amor del bueno,  
Bello es su mirar, suave en sus caricias,  
La rosa al andar, y gracia en su risa.<sup>17</sup>

Albeit romantic and perhaps poetic, these lyrics are smeared by the tropical rhythm of the song, accompanied by the distinctive keyboards, drums, and electric guitars of Argentine *cumbia*. Lemebel uses that melody – indeed familiar in Chilean marginal areas – as an introduction to the narration, creating an awkward connection between Argandoña’s “sleek” image and the song, elsewhere identified as vulgar or tasteless. It is relevant to mention that Adrián, the band singer, is also popularly known for his ugliness. In fact, the singer graciously refers to this physical feature in his autobiographical song “Por qué me siguen las mujeres” (1997), where he states that – despite being ugly from head to toe – he is successful with women.<sup>18</sup> Thus, by conjuring all these elements, Lemebel presents a smudged image of Argandoña, with elements that characterise poverty. Ultimately, this *crónica* provides an alternative biographical image of the model, which somehow intercepts her public influence on Chilean women from low- and middle-income sectors.

A similar phenomenon occurs with the *crónica* that Lemebel wrote about famous Chilean psychiatrist María Luisa Cordero (1943-), entitled “La Doctora Cordero.”<sup>19</sup> Besides being a psychiatrist, this woman has participated in several Chilean television shows since the 1980s, gaining fame for her frankness and outspokenness. She has been a panellist in conversation programs, as well as in entertainment and morning talk shows, where she usually makes blatant

17. Listen on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3sOfPOACVA> (Viewed 1 June 2021).

18. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqsPykwSNzY> (Viewed 25 August 2020).

19. This *crónica* was not published by Lemebel. The radio recording belongs to a private collection accessed in Santiago de Chile, November 2019.



statements about topics often connected to the position of women in society, such as “Yo soy contraria al aborto” (*Dra. Cordero En MV* 2018), “Ella (a famous model) era una pésima dueña de casa” (*La Dra. Cordero trapeó con Laura Prieto* 2017), or “Ella (a woman victim of male violence) se calienta cuando le pegan” (‘Dra. Cordero por comentario sobre violencia de género’, 2021). Cordero’s chauvinist comments – made visible on television – have had repercussions and received criticism by her colleagues, however this has not interfered with her continuous participation on the small screen. In fact, by January 2021, she still had a permanent weekly space on a popular Chilean late-night show.

While giving space to chauvinism in the current era may result incomprehensible, this phenomenon is not at all rare on Chilean television, a network broadly influenced by patriarchy. In fact, a study conducted in 2007 by Lorena Antezana – about the presence of female roles on Chilean programs (show business, series, soap operas, news, morning talk and reality shows) – demonstrated that while men are usually depicted with features that highlight their power, women are represented with antagonistic roles that mostly emphasise their male dependency. By making a distinction between fictional (géneros de acción) and non-fictional shows (programas de realidad), Antezana purports that,

[e]stas representaciones son antagónicas, pues mientras que en los programas de realidad la mujer es presentada como objeto decorativo y secundario (roles menos destacados y con menor presencia en pantalla), en los géneros de acción es caracterizada como independiente y decidida (en roles de ‘profesional’ y ‘señorita liberal’). De esta manera, en los programas de realidad tiende a dominar el arquetipo femenino dócil y maleable, mientras que los estereotipos urbanos son los que predominan, de manera caricaturesca, en la acción y los programas finta. Si a esto le sumamos que el tiempo que se le otorga en la parrilla programática a los programas de realidad es mayor que el destinado a la acción, el modelo de mujer que predomina es el dependiente (2011, p. 113).

Lemebel’s *crónica* about Cordero demonstrates his understanding about this problem, visualising this character as part of it, given her sexist opinions and influence on television. His text aspires to contribute to neutralising her popularity by showing aspects of her personality that would prove her lack of ethics in expressing such vehement points of view.



Hence, Lemebel introduces Cordero as a person who should not be trusted. He proves this point by referring to her political position about Chilean recent history. Although he does recognise her condemning of injustices in both periods dictatorship and democracy, he criticises her inconsistency in doing this, with irony and sarcasm, rather than respect and sincerity. Lemebel argues that her frankness was overestimated because it became innocuous and meaningless. Not having an identifiable aim and without committing to a political side, her words transformed into an elaborate discourse that criticised politics with more grandiloquence than content:

ella, la simpática doctora Cordero, la show woman de la talla picante, invitada pegote del espectáculo televisero, el show donde ella tira caca con ventilador para cualquier lado, tanto al vegete Pinocho como a la izquierda de la Gladys, de la misma forma, como si los lugares fueran iguales. Mire usted, señora cordero ¿No le parece que alguien le revolvió mal el naípe? (‘La Doctora Cordero’, n.d.).

Therefore, the *contrapunto* of this *crónica* is created with a song that speaks about rubbish. To present this, Lemebel uses the cha-cha-cha song “La basura” interpreted by Orquesta América (2001). Thus, the popular verse of the song: “a esconderse que viene la basura” – articulated with random lamb bleats – introduces the context of the text, associating Cordero’s arguments with rubbish.

Yet, apparently, the author’s utmost intention with this text is to highlight Cordero’s lack of professionalism and medical ethics.<sup>20</sup> Lemebel suggests that she was more interested in popularity than in her patients. The artist boldly criticises one of her statements in which she denied the integration of psychiatric patients to society, assuming that all of them were poor and thus, a social burden. Considering himself proudly poor, this is something he does not tolerate. Lemebel argues that Cordero’s opinion not only did demonstrate that she spoke from a position of superiority, but also that her words were offensive and classist:

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20. In 2003, a Chilean News Report program recorded Doctor Cordero issuing fraudulent medical prescriptions to two of her patients. Consequently, she was expelled from the national Colegio Médico one year after. See <http://www.bibliotecanacionaldigital.gob.cl/colecciones/BND/00/RC/RC0120444.pdf> (Viewed 8 June 2021).



Por ahí leí que usted no estaba de acuerdo en abrir los manicomios doctora. De integrar a sus reclusos a la vida civil, como se ha hecho en Italia y otros países. Usted decía que los locos en Chile eran gente pobre y si no estaban enjaulados, ¿quién los iba a cuidar y mantener? A mí me parece que usted es clasista en sus apreciaciones, al tildarnos a los pobres de locos, drogadictos y delincuentes, como lo hacen los sociólogos burgueses ('La Doctora Cordero', n.d.).

Another *crónica* with similar characteristics is one dedicated to popular Chilean singer and comedian Gloria Benavides (1948- ), entitled "Las caricaturas me hacen llorar."<sup>21</sup> Benavides is a famous artist who began her musical career in the 1970s, singing mellow teenage love songs. By the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s, she participated as an actress in the successful comedy show *Jappening con Já*. Yet, she is mostly recognised for her comic character "La Cuatro Dientes," which she performed in the popular Chilean television show *Sábado Gigante*. This character impersonates a poor Chilean woman who lacks some teeth, speaks incorrectly, and wears rags. It became famous internationally when the American channel Univisión acquired the national show in 1986.

In the *crónica*, Lemebel introduces Benavides as a woman of humble origins, who worked hard in order to become famous. He emphasises that she was born in San Miguel, a revolutionary middle-class suburb in Santiago, before she reached popular success. Possibly, the author uses this information to elicit the audience's empathy, reinforce their attention, and lead them to connect with the singer's biography.

Along the narration, the author recalls the days when Benavides started to perform in the media as a singer, like in the popular *Revista Ritmo*, very famous among Chilean yesteryear's teenagers. He recalls that one of her most famous songs was called "Muchacho malo mi mal amor," which speaks about a woman's ill-tempered boyfriend. This is something that Lemebel cannot bear. He disapproves of this singer's tepid lyrics, incapable of compromising with a social message, immensely needed in the hostility of the dictatorship years. Lemebel tacitly juxtaposes her role with the many singers who participated in Chile's political *Nueva Canción* movement, like Violeta Parra and Víctor Jara. He declares that singing about "boyfriends" was negligent,

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21. An adapted version of this *crónica* was published in Lemebel's book *De perlas y cicatrices* (1998) under the title "Gloria Benavides (o 'era una gotita en la C.N.I.')." The radio recording is available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-MmSeDGqGs> (Viewed 5 July 2020).



and probably as serious as remaining silent when people claimed for a voice that spoke for the oppressed. He makes this judgment evident as he states:

[L]a balada pop de la gotita nunca fue estridencia, su cancioncita repetía el idilio quinceañero del “muchacho malo mi mal amor” [emphasis added], y nunca se contagió con ninguna letra irreverente. Así, su blanda dulzura conquistó a todos los papis de aquella época, que soñaban que sus niñas fueran así, igual de amorosas, rosadamente tiernas, diferentes a esas cabras locas que se arrancaban el pelo gritando por Elvis o los Beatles (“Las caricaturas me hacen llorar,” n.d.).

As per her comedy role as “La Cuatro Dientes,” Lemebel disapproves of her making fun of poor women. He argues that this character did not represent them. Coming from a marginal background, the artist states that humble Chilean women do not speak like that, nor do they wear such old-fashioned rags. They are in fact wiser. For Lemebel, “La Cuatro Dientes” only exists in Benavides’ imagination and her success was the result of the cultural transformation of a domesticated country that learnt to normalise clueless humour.

The *contrapunto* of this *crónica* is particularly meaningful. The writer uses songs from Benavides’ repertoire to contrast the narration, such as “Las películas tristes me hacen llorar,” “La gotita,” and “Muchacho malo mi mal amor.” These songs were highly popular during the 1970s and 1980s; therefore, they are assumed to be part of the expected audience’s collective imaginary. The narration is juxtaposed with the singer’s lyrics. For example, when a bombshell about Benavides is dropped, Lemebel increases the background volume, thus highlighting the song’s message. The listener is prompted to listen and pay attention to both the story and the song, being thus exposed to notice the contradiction between the singer’s discourse and her actual biography.

Towards the end of the *crónica*, the song “Las películas tristes me hacen llorar” is played. It accompanies the climax of the story, where Lemebel reveals that Benavides was married to an agent of the Central Nacional de Informaciones, the dictatorship’s intelligence service. This man was involved in a confusing incident with the son of the agency’s top authority: Manuel Contreras. In that event, Contreras’ son murdered Benavides’ husband. Lemebel states that this episode revealed Benavides’ most intimate secret, as it also unveiled her actual political views. He indicates that this event demonstrated that Benavides was



indeed a supporter of the military regime, despite her “innocent” gaze in the newspaper covers: “dramáticamente cómica, insoportablemente frágil, dudosamente engañada” (“Las caricaturas me hacen llorar,” n.d.). As the melody fades in, the author concludes that Benavides’ entire life could be summarised in the lyrics of her song about animated movies, suggesting that her inoffensive personality was a farce. Finally, he closes the *crónica* repeating the last verse of Benavides’ song... “las caricaturas [siempre] me hacen llorar”, while the singer’s voice sounds in the background echoing the same words in unison.

Unlike the forecited *crónicas* about Argandoña, Cordero or Benavides, which highlight “frustrating” experiences, there are other works about popular Latin American women that serve the purpose of portraying examples of bravery, thoughtfulness, humbleness, and social/political commitment. This is the case of the *crónicas* written about Cecilia Pantoja, Mercedes Sosa, and Carmen Gloria Quintana. As aforementioned, recuperating their stories and making them visible on radio was a countercultural strategy by Lemebel to speak about topics that were overlooked or ignored during the 1990s, such as homosexuality, culture and the crimes of the dictatorship. Yet, most importantly, he achieved the exposure of such topics to women from low- and middle-income sectors, thus contributing to creating spaces of reflection about Chile’s contingency, thus undertaking a camouflaged exercise of female empowerment.

An example of this is visualised in the *crónica* about Chilean singer Cecilia Pantoja (1943- ): “Cecilia: El platino trizado de una voz,”<sup>22</sup> which introduces biographical aspects of this artist that are considered open secrets in Chile, such as her supposed homosexuality, not publicly admitted by the singer.

Cecilia became famous in the 1960s as part of *La Nueva Ola* movement, formed by national singers who sang in English, played foreign rhythms like Rock and Roll, and adopted artistic names in English as well, thus demonstrating their profound admiration for foreign cultures, especially the American. Cecilia was different. Instead, she sang in Spanish and Italian and preferred Latin American rhythms, such as *bolero*, tango, and mambo. She was highly popular among young audiences, and she also gained international recognition during that time.<sup>23</sup>

22. An adapted version of this *crónica* was published in Lemebel’s book *Loco afán, crónicas de sidario* (1996) under the title “Cecilia (El platino trizado de la voz).” The radio recording is available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqQYwUjgU5g> (Viewed 5 July 2020).

23. About this point, Juan Pablo González states the following: “La magnitud y organización del fan club de Cecilia, por ejemplo, pudo apreciarse con su llegada triunfal al aeropuerto de Santiago en octubre de 1965, luego de actuar en el Festival de Benidorm. El recibimiento, ampliamente cu-



In the *crónica*, Lemebel introduces Cecilia as a unique voice, a promising “star” for the Chilean popular music of the 1960s. Her image was also unique because she did not represent female stereotypes. On the contrary, she had a masculine aesthetics, wearing pants and short hair. For the writer, Cecilia’s aesthetic change was political as it unveiled her way to represent lesbianism and thus show hints of her homosexuality in years when opening about this topic would have been strongly criticised by society.<sup>24</sup>

When the 1970s came, *La Nueva Ola* movement lost vigour with the potent emergence of the *Nueva Canción* movement. Some singers abandoned their careers, began new projects, or updated their looks to remain active. Cecilia did the latter, although unsuccessfully. She chose to intensify her masculinity by wearing suits that made her look like a female version of Elvis Presley. Because of this makeover, the traditional national media strongly criticised her. This affected her career and forced her to change festivals and television shows for bars and nightclubs:

Después llegaron los 70 y la estridencia roquera desgarró la balada pop de los ya no tan jóvenes coléricos. Muchos se fueron para la casa y otros se quedaron animando programas del recuerdo, con el zapateo *yeah yeah* [emphasis added] de la placa de dientes. Pero Cecilia aprovechó este cambio y tiró lejos los taco altos [sic] y los vestidos de seda, y de la noche a la mañana apareció travestida de Elvis Presley. Con buzo plateado y botas tejanas enfrentó la nueva década, con su pinta chula. Pero este país, hediondo de moral y tradición, no aceptó la estética chicana que evaporó el tul femenino de la estrella. Por eso, la lengua amarilla de la prensa la fue desprestigiando, hasta ahogar su trino en el vaso de alcohol que tomaba y seguía tomando, esperando inútil que el teléfono callado sonara por algún contrato (“Cecilia: El platino trizado de una voz,” n.d.).

The writer mentions that during these hard times, Cecilia’s lesbian fans remained loyal to her. They continued to be present night after night singing her songs in the nightclubs. They even risked their safe-

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bierto por la prensa escrita y radial, ponía de manifiesto el fenómeno del ‘cecilismo’ en Chile, pues ninguna artista mujer había despertado ese nivel de admiración y fanatismo entre sus seguidoras” (González, 2013, p. 140).

24. “Las violencias que atravesaron la política latinoamericana con una creciente tendencia entre 1969 a 1989, convergieron con las restricciones a homosexuales de larga data en el continente [...] En Chile, la preocupación por el crecimiento urbano promulgó, inspirados por saberes médicos, a prácticas coactivas que colocaron la sexualidad como un asunto público y fueron utilizadas para cercenar prácticas sexuales entre varones y mujeres del mismo sexo” (Caro and Simonetto, 2019, p. 69).



ty, dodging the curfews imposed by the military regime. According to the writer, they were grateful to Cecilia because she had represented them while in years when homosexuality was brutally condemned.<sup>25</sup> This was particularly noticeable during the authoritarian rule because of the heteronormative military influence. Therefore, for Lemebel, beyond her unquestionable artistic talent, Cecilia's most relevant contribution was her "silent" representation of homosexual minorities.

The *contrapunto* in this *crónica* is articulated with the most popular songs of Cecilia's repertoire. The narration opens with the song "Como una ola," speaking about a woman's feeling of loneliness. Then, the melodies of "Amor, Mon Amour, My Love" and "Se ha puesto el sol" play in the background. Finally, the reading closes with the song "Es la nostalgia," which speaks about the ineffable power of nostalgia. Perhaps, the writer chose to include this song at the end, appealing to the audience's melancholy, being aware that Cecilia is certainly part of their musical memories. Arguably, these verses would act as an invitation for them to remember their youth and thus reflect upon their own experiences during Chile's darkest years, prompted by Cecilia's voice singing: "Es la nostalgia que se apodera de mí, es tu recuerdo que no ha querido partir" (Pantoja, 1965).

Another *crónica* that also concentrates on a singer's biography is "Dos encuentros con 'La Negra' Mercedes Sosa,"<sup>26</sup> dedicated to Argentine singer Mercedes Sosa (1950-2009). Sosa was a folk music *cantora*<sup>27</sup> who became popular throughout Latin America during the 1970s, as part of the *Nueva Canción* movement. Most of her songs speak about justice and equality for proletarian groups, inciting

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25. As an example of brutality in the dictatorship, Víctor Hugo Robles cites a testimony by Tomás Rivera González – a transvestite known as "La Doctora" – in his book *Bandera Hueca. Historia del movimiento homosexual en Chile* (2008): "El golpe fue terrible para los homosexuales, particularmente para los más pobres, entre ellos los que trabajábamos en San Camilo. Si te terciabas en un operativo y los milicos se daban cuenta de que eras maricón, cagabas. Era una inseguridad espantosa ser maricón en ese momento y en esas condiciones de toque de queda [...] Esto ocurrió en el barrio de San Gregorio, donde vivían mis amigas. En un habitual operativo militar y al percatarse los milicos que mis amigas eran maricas, las sacaron a unas canchas abandonadas, les ordenaron correr en la oscuridad y les echaron los perros a puros mordiscones y a La Chela la remataron con una bala en la cabeza" (as cited in Robles, 2008, pp. 17–18).

26. An adapted version of this *crónica* was published in Lemebel's book *Háblame de amores* (2012) under the title "Toda la piel de América en mi piel." The radio recording is not publicly available. It belongs to a private collection accessed in Santiago de Chile, November 2019.

27. "Cuando le llamaban cantante, Mercedes Sosa pasaba el trabajo de aclarar que su quehacer musical se ajustaba mejor a la categoría de cantora. Para muchos artistas de la nueva música latinoamericana la diferencia era importante: los cantantes cantan porque pueden, en tanto que los cantores lo hacen porque deben. Esta diferenciación entre habilidad y deber realza, con meridiana claridad, la posición ética que Mercedes Sosa escogió para hacer su vida: la decisión de seleccionar una trinchera moral de activismo sociopolítico comprometido con la suerte de los pueblos oprimidos del mundo" (Vásquez, 2009, p. 1).



their unity to fight political oppression. In her article on Mercedes' artistic commitment, Angie Vázquez describes that her songs used to expose

las crudas realidades de la vida en su forma más sencilla. Su letra iba dirigida, con extraordinaria belleza y ritmo, a la razón humana. La multidimensionalidad de sus mensajes, en letra de su autoría y en canciones de otros grandes cantautores, jamás perdió la palabra clara como medio efectivo. Su canto era poesía social en función a la denuncia de las injusticias que, también, sirvió como crónica del rescate a las cosas simples y hermosas en la resistencia de la vida cotidiana de tantos latinoamericanos [...] El lenguaje de la resistencia social, totalmente presente en las canciones de Mercedes Sosa, expresaba consignas de ruptura con el orden político establecido y denunciaba el fracaso del sistema en ofrecer una sociedad de equidad y justicia social particularmente a los más vulnerables. Consigna, en su caso, significó tanto la meta estratégica política como el enunciado que recogía la necesidad de libertad en el latinoamericano (2009, pp. 2–3).

In his *crónica*, Lemebel begins stating that he is an admirer of Mercedes. He highlights her contribution to Latin American folk music during the emergence of Socialist projects in the continent, comparing her with Silvio Rodríguez, Atahualpa Yupanqui, Violeta Parra and Víctor Jara.

His text is narrated as a personal memoir. He remembers when he travelled to Argentina – already a democracy – to see Mercedes in concert. Although he struggled to get there, he was finally able to arrive at the stadium on time. Because he was carrying a heavy backpack, the safeguards did not allow him in, until the singer's guitarist interceded and offered to look after his baggage. Finally, he was able to see the show. When the concert ended, he went to the dressing rooms aiming to collect his backpack and to also meet Mercedes in person. He recalls that she welcomed him as if he were an old friend:

Al terminar el espectacular recital de Mercedes, que apretó el corazón de todos los asistentes recién liberados del peso dictatorial, me dirigí a los camarines a recoger mi mochila y allí me recibió ella en persona, con una ternura tan grande, como el compromiso acústico de su voz. “¿Eres chileno?”- me preguntó con los ojos empañados. “Y no te canté la canción de Víctor”- murmuró abrazándome, mientras sus gruesos lagrimones mojaban mi cara. “¿Y ahora dónde vas?”- me preguntó tremendamente maternal. Por acá cerca, le murmuré con timidez. “Nosotros te llevamos”.



Y me encaramé en el auto de Mercedes, ante la mirada picota de los guardias, que debieron cargar mi mochila hasta el coche, a pedido de esta gran estrella (“Dos encuentros con ‘La Negra’ Mercedes Sosa,” n.d.).

This fragment is introduced and accompanied by Mercedes’ song “Hermano dame tu mano,” a song that speaks about the brotherhood of citizens of different nations who unite to fight for Latin America’s peace and freedom under military rules. The *contrapunto* in this case is present between the lyrics of the song and the writer’s narrated story. He also includes other popular songs by Sosa with themes that depict Latin American inequality, such as “El Cosechero,” “Canción para Carito,” and “Canción y Huayno.”

Although the text emphasizes Mercedes’ simplicity, humbleness, and motherhood, Lemebel contrasts those characteristics with her social commitment, as a singer who was an emblem of the 1970s protest song. Thus, the author transforms the singer’s biography into an example of solidarity and social commitment, both aligned and connected. Arguably, he uses Mercedes’ image to reach out to those mothers behind the radio speakers, who were probably as maternal and caring, yet who did not have the space to express their political voices when Chile was governed by terror. As stated by Tacchi (2009), these actions are possible by the affective implications that radio sounds hold, impacting people’s mood, and becoming specifically meaningful when evoked in the intimate home space.

While these *crónicas* indirectly address political topics, one that offers a straighter and historical approach is “Carmen Gloria Quintana, la página quemada de la historia.”<sup>28</sup> This oral text speaks about this woman’s appalling story during the military regime. Carmen Gloria Quintana (1968- ) was a university student in 1986. In July that year, she attended one of the several rallies in Santiago against Pinochet’s dictatorship. This demonstration was brutally repressed by military force. Most protesters managed to escape; yet, Carmen Gloria, and photographer Rodrigo Rojas (1967-1986) were caught. The officers threw gas onto their bodies and then, they lit them on fire. They were severely burnt. Although Government officials affirmed “that Rojas and Quintana had set themselves afire with inflammable liquids they were carrying in order to take part in illegal

28. An adapted version of this *crónica* was published in Lemebel’s book *De perlas y cicatrices* (1998) under the title “Carmen Gloria Quintana (o ‘una página quemada en la feria del libro’).” The radio recording is not publicly available. It belongs to a private collection accessed in Santiago de Chile, November 2019.



protests," following news reports revealed an intentional military action (Brooks, 1990, para. 6). That day, the military men who were responsible for this crime assumed that Carmen and Rodrigo were on the verge of dying, so they took them and dropped them in an abandoned area in Santiago's outskirts. Later, police found them and sent them to the hospital in an ambulance. Carmen survived and went through a long recovery period. Rodrigo, on the other hand, died in the hospital a few days later.

Lemebel's *crónica* narrates this terrible story in detail. Yet, he pays special attention to what occurred with Carmen after the incident. For example, he recalls the episode when she met Pope John Paul II during his visit to Chile in 1987. He mentions that Carmen looked at him, showing the burn scars on her face as if telling him that her body was the testimony of Chile's pain. Yet, the Pope continued his pilgrimage, pretending that he had not seen anything special: "[E]l papa se hizo el gringo y pasó de largo frente al sudario chileno, tirando un puñado de bendiciones a diestra y siniestra" ("Carmen Gloria Quintana: La página quemada de la historia," n.d.).

Then, Lemebel focuses on Carmen's present. He tells the audience that she graduated as a psychologist and became a mother. He emphasises that, despite the adversities, she managed to carry on, like the thousands of citizens who suffered the consequences of tyranny, either being tortured or losing a relative. "El cronista sabe que [Carmen] es un eco multiplicado, sabe de tantas otras, que pudieron, con su brío vital, retomar el rumbo en sus vidas heridas" (Luongo, 2020, p. 166). Hence, he concentrates on Carmen's current life as if aiming to create a closer connection with the audience, by placing her as an equal. He is aware that the national media has constructed a mythical and confusing story about this tragedy. Therefore, by focusing on Carmen's present, the writer demystifies her and introduces her as a "real" person who cohabits the listeners' same territory. He brings her closer to them, creating the idea that what happened to Carmen could have happened to anyone:

Ahora Carmen Gloria estudia psicología, tiene un hijo, y al parecer su vida siguió un destino parecido al de muchas jóvenes de ese tiempo, a no ser por su eterno maquillaje, que lo lleva con cierto orgullo, como quien luce en el rostro una factura del costo democrático. Y esa página de la historia no tiene precio para el mercado librero, que vende un rostro de loza, sin pasado, para el consumo neoliberal. Así, mucho después que Carmen Gloria ha sido tragada por la multitud, sigo viendo su cara como



quien ve una estrella que se ha extinguido y solo el recuerdo la enciende en mi corazón homosexual, que se me escapa del pecho, y lo dejo ir, como una luciérnaga enamorada tras el brillo de sus pasos (“Carmen Gloria Quintana: La página quemada de la historia,” n.d.).

The *contrapunto* in this *crónica* is certainly different compared to the previous ones. Instead of choosing a song, Lemebel begins the narration with the background sound of burning fire. This creates an intriguing atmosphere, while it also anticipates the importance of fire as a key element of the story. Then, during the reading, this sound fades out and no background music is used. Apparently, the writer uses silence as a sign of respect, demonstrating that no music can symbolically interpret Carmen’s overwhelming story. Towards the end, a piano melody by Keith Jarrett fades in and accompanies the text’s last lines, creating a melancholic atmosphere and eliciting a reflective moment, “a pact of intimacy between speaker and listener” (McHugh, 2012, p. 206), activated by the unique experience of radio listening.

In conclusion, we have proposed in this article that Lemebel’s radio program unveils a camouflaged strategy of female empowerment. In years that were adverse to women because of a feminist division, a cultural crisis and a dominant patriarchal discourse, Lemebel’s show became relevant as it offered women a space to reflect upon Chile’s contingency, thus attempting to boost their autonomous thinking. As part of this repertoire, it is possible to find women’s biographies that are both non-exemplary and exemplary, what we have previously called “frustrating” and “gratifying” narratives. “Frustrating” stories highlight models of passive, frivolous or chauvinist womanhood, while “gratifying” ones showcase an opinionated, brave, and socially/politically committed type of femininity. It is relevant to mention that in this task Lemebel became a mediator/facilitator of a discourse that was essentially female, originated by women and addressed to women. He used his talent and wit in order to articulate such narratives in an elaborate format – adding voice and ad-hoc melodies – making them attainable for an ideal/affective interpretation from the domestic space.



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