

# Social merchandising in a Brazilian telenovela: notes on the promotion of environmental sustainability in *Velho Chico*

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## Abstract

*Telenovela* is one of the main audiovisual narratives in Brazilian television. Rede Globo, the major player in the sector, makes use of social themes as one of its main tools to raise awareness and promote this debate among viewers. Starting from this perspective, this article aims to map how these social insertions, called social merchandising, take place. We are also interested in observing more closely the way the plot of *Velho Chico* helps promote the cause of environmental sustainability. Lopes and Orozco Gómez (2009), Trindade (2007), Blessa (2006) and Baccega (2003) are some of the theoretical references that support this study. Selected scenes are analyzed so as to map the designated contents and the characteristics of this type of narrative construction which aims, above all, to foster interaction with the telenovela through the identification of the living moment with the plot of the show.

**Keywords:** Communication. Telenovela. Social merchandising. Environmental sustainability.

## Introduction

The *telenovela* is one of the most popular media genres in Brazil. It is widely viewed as an excellent product by which is possible to promote the discussion about dilemmas and paradoxes present in our society (LOPES; OROZCO GÓMES, 2009). For Baccega (2003, p.8 – Our translation),

Every society, with higher or lower degree of education, men, women, children, youths and adults living in the most different parts of the country discuss the social theme brought about by the telenovela. This has to do with the fact that media in general – newspapers, radio –, also triggered by the telenovela, open space for the theme in question.

Televised audio-visual narratives such as series or *telenovelas*, show great agility in dealing with contents of complex social meaning in order to inform, raise awareness and

to foster the debate on these problem topics among its viewers (BACCEGA, 2003). For Baccega, there is no doubt that the media perform an educational role. This can be seen in the *telenovelas*, which, in their own way, “help build citizenship” (BACCEGA, 2003, p.9).

Considering the potential of sensitization and promotion of the social debate in television fiction, this paper aims to investigate social insertions named social merchandising in the *telenovela* produced by Rede Globo for its prime-time audiences. To ground the study empirically, we focus on the plot of *Velho Chico* (*Old Chico*), aired in 2016. The selection of our empirical *corpus* take into account the leadership of the broadcaster in terms of audience ratings, as well as its strength as a content producer and exporter.

In this article, we set out to conceptually explore the practice of merchandising. Then, we offer a historical perspective on this strategy by pointing its development in national television fiction. Finally, we detail the social merchandising project developed in *Velho Chico* by focusing on the environmental themes present in the plot. We critically analyze selected scenes, by examining the contents covered and the characteristics of this type of narrative construction.

We resort to the studies of Sant’Anna (2002), Zenone & Buairide (2005) and Blessa (2006) as theoretical foundation on the concept of merchandising. For social merchandising, we mainly rely on Lopes & Orozco Gómez (2009) and Trindade (2007). Several other references help to ground our study of *Velho Chico*’s narrative. Among other reasons, this *telenovela* stands out for highlighting the thorny issue of environmental sustainability in contemporary Brazil.

## **A brief conceptual discussion on merchandising**

The strategy of merchandising can be broadly defined as “the aspects of selling the product or service to the consumer provided through normal channels of commerce or through means other than advertising vehicles” (SANT’ANNA, 2002, p.23 – Our translation). Other authors characterize this as a commercial insertion in *telenovelas*, films, live shows and other types of entertainment (ZENONE; BUAIRIDE, 2005). This is also known in different countries as “product placement” or “tie-in”.

In Brazil, Blessa (2006) explains that the term merchandising is more closely associated with the insertion of products and brands in audiovisual content, especially in *telenovelas*. They contributed to the diffusion of the term. Lopes & Orozco Gómez (2009, p.57 – Our translation) describe the actuality of this practice:

Advertisers know that ‘fiction sells’. We could add that they also know that ‘through fiction one can easily sell’. So, they are betting on a great future with it, both by harnessing its programming grids in order to place their commercials as well as (...) above all, by naturalizing advertising in an increasingly incisive way within their own spaces and narratives.

In the way we understand it, there are two types of merchandising: the “traditional” one, linked to actions in stores, and the so-called “editorial merchandising”, that can be defined as a strategy of insertion of brands in contents of entertainment (DROGUETT; POMPEU, 2012). We must also consider “product placement” and “tie-in”. “Product placement” refers to the “tactical placement of products and brands in entertainment content” (BURROWES, 2008). To “tie-in” also refers to the insertion of advertising in programs and other media content not originally about advertising (DE SIMONI, 1997 apud TRINDADE, 2007). These two strategies are not so similar to editorial merchandising, as there is a basic difference in their mode of operation:

Merchandising somehow shares the same mentality of conventional advertising. It operates by interrupting the natural flow in entertainment content. In product placement [and tie-in] the idea is to ensure such a presence occurs in a subtle way so as to generate less friction among the viewers (SANTA HELENA; PINHEIRO, 2012, p.157 – Our translation).

In short, we can define these expressions as follows: promotional actions carried out in shops (traditional merchandising); the abrupt insertion of products and brands into entertainment content in a similar way to that of conventional advertising (editorial or commercial merchandising). Finally, we have the insertion of products and brands into entertainment content in a subtle way, integrated with narrative scripts without interrupting viewers’ enjoyment (product placement or tie-in).

Having this brief terminological overview of the strategy of merchandising and its different applications and interpretations, we can now conceptualize social merchandising. Trindade (2007, p.344) explains that, unlike editorial or commercial merchandising that aim to “advertise or promote a given merchandise, brand or service”, social merchandising aims to propagate “positive values for the collective well-being of society or to provide some public utility service for the community”.

### **Social merchandising in the *telenovela***

In 2009, research carried out by the Ibero-American Observatory of Television Fiction (OBITEL) focused on the growing presence of advertising in fictional television narratives. According to the results of the debate coordinated by Lopes & Orozco Gómez (2009), a rather complex interpretation of social merchandising is offered:

Social merchandising is a type of communication strategy that consists on placing certain socio-educational messages in the plots and scripts of television fiction (and other types of entertainment programs) so as to allow the audience to extract positive teachings and reflections in order to enhance their knowledge,

values, attitudes and practices. What characterizes it is the presence of references of preventive, protective, reparative or punitive measures; warnings for associated causes and consequences, or for inappropriate behavior and habits (LOPES; OROZCO GÓMEZ, 2009, p.153 – Our translation).

Whereas commercial insertions aim to convert into profit the exposure of a given brand or product, social insertions aim to promote food for thought, and eventually to contribute to the transformation of public attitudes regarding the specific topic in question. Social insertions also work to foster interaction with the *telenovela* by means of identification of the living moment with the plot of the show.

Research carried out by OBITEL (LOPES; OROZCO GÓMEZ, 2009) shows that controversial, preventive and educational themes are recurrently present, especially in the productions of Rede Globo<sup>1</sup>. Thus, social merchandising stands out a striking feature of national television fiction (BEZERRA, 2014).

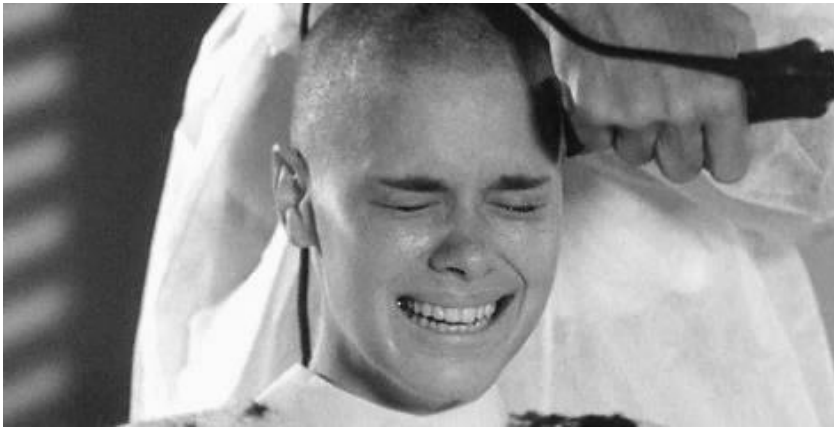
Leading productions from this media group have promoted social causes. *Explode Coração* (*Heart Blast*, Glória Perez, 1995) mobilized the country with the dissemination of images of missing children and families who held on to their hope of finding them one day. In *Laços de Família* (*Family Ties*, Manoel Carlos, 2000), the social motto was the campaign for the donation of bone marrow for treating cancer patients. One of the major characters who had her hair shaved in an intensely emotional scene, contributed greatly to promoting viewers' sensitization on the subject.

**Figure 1** – Isadora Ribeiro and Debora Evelyn in *Explode Coração*



Source: Memória Globo.

<sup>1</sup> Rede Globo uses the term 'merchandising' to refer to the appearance of brands and products in *telenovelas* and other programs. 'Social merchandising' refers to plots anchored in social issues so as to raise awareness and spark up the debate. In this text, we use this same terminology, though we are aware of its imprecision.

**Figure 2** – Carolina Dieckmann in *Laços de Família*

Source: Memória Globo.

During the 11th International Seminar of the Ibero-American Observatory of Television Fiction (OBITEL) at the University of São Paulo in 2016, Beatriz Azeredo, director of social responsibility at Rede Globo, explained that there are two different types of insertions in the strategy of social merchandising. One makes use of “context” scenes and the other one favours “socio-educational” scenes. In “context” scenes, a given theme or topic is discussed within the story. This approach can appear in the lines of a given character or present itself as a subject in the narrative. In “socio-educational” scenes, the theme unfolds along several chapters, occurring a resolution of the conflict situation created to present the theme. “It is common to draw attention at first to the downside [of the theme], as in domestic violence. There are several scenes and the theme trigger an uncomfortable reaction”. As the plot unfolds, there is some type of an outcome that helps mobilize the audience for the cause in question.

Every year, Rede Globo issues its Social Actions Report. This annual overview of the network’s social merchandising strategies documents each social theme, the amount of actions that were undertaken and the programs involved in these efforts, as well as their developments in projects outside the television. Octavio Florisbal, for decades the director general of Brazil’s largest media group, stressed the importance attributed to social actions in the program grid of the network, as follows:

Highlighting the social role of television has always been part of our priorities. This principle is reflected in our administration as well as throughout our grid of programs. It can be seen daily in the *telenovelas*, in the content of the programs, in the coverage of our journalism, and even in the commercial breaks, when we make our video available free of charge so that millions of Brazilians can get to know and mobilize over relevant social themes (REDE GLOBO, 2011, p.3 – Our translation).

We must never underestimate the close association between media and consumption cultures (CASTRO; BACCEGA, 2009). Therefore, it is wise to take a cautious approach to the allusion of the social role of television in the above-mentioned speech. Although one should ponder over the motivations of a commercial company in adopting this type of practice, this social perspective of the broadcaster has already won recognition and awards at national and international levels. We understand corporate social responsibility as a touchstone in brand image management. Corporate reputation and brand image are main assets in the current business market.

The secretary of education of the Brazilian Association of Lesbians, Gays, Transvestites and Transsexuals (ABLGB) praised the production team of Rede Globo for their sensitivity in dealing with homosexuality in the *telenovelas Amor à vida (Love for Life, Walcyr Carrasco, 2014)* and *Liberdade, Liberdade (Freedom, Freedom, Mário Teixeira, 2016)*. The activist emphasized the educational role of the media in spreading “information and knowledge that otherwise would not be available to many people”.

When dealing with topics that some consider as polemical or even taboo, the media, when used in an ethical way, can contribute to elucidate, demystify and promote the understanding of what is “different”. Media can encourage reflection and give subsidies for respect towards what before has been the object of contempt and prejudice (...). Respect is different from accepting. It is also different from tolerating, in the sense of bearing with condescension. It is not necessary to accept that which differs from our personal convictions. But respecting that means recognizing there are differences between people, and not necessarily that some are more valued than others. It means living harmoniously in a society that is undoubtedly plural, diverse and heterogeneous. It means not imposing any given worldview in preference to another, but making way for different worldviews to coexist peacefully (REIS, 2016 – Our translation).

According to Reis (2016), in discussing matters of collective interest, social actions in the broadcasting network contribute to inform and to raise awareness of the population. They also act toward the promotion of “human dignity” regarding respect for diversity and in the promotion of inclusion of social minorities in our society. Having clarified the concepts of merchandising and social merchandising, we are ready for our investigation of the social insertions in the *telenovela Velho Chico* by critically analyzing selected scenes.

### **Social Merchandising in *Velho Chico***

Written by Benedito Ruy Barbosa (his grandson, Bruno Luperi, and daughter, Edmara Barbosa as contributors), artistic direction by Luiz Fernando Carvalho, *Velho Chico* premiered on March 14th, 2016. The drama tells the story of the forbidden love between



Tereza and Santo. Set in the northeastern backlands of the 1960s up to the present, the plot unfolds around a recurring dispute between ambitious Afrânio and a rival family. Known as Colonel Saruê, Afrânio spares no effort to seize more land and to increase his production at any cost, while hoarding enemies and losing the respect of his own family.

A landmark in Brazilian tele dramaturgy (STYCER, 2016) due to its remarkable aesthetic proposal, with long contemplative plans, strong tonalities and theatrical interpretations, *Velho Chico* aimed to contribute to promoting the appreciation of Brazilian culture. Traditional myths and legends from the northeastern backlands and indigenous ancestral tales such as the love story about the origin of the river São Francisco are presented. Handmade paintings and the emblematic song *Tropicália*, by Caetano Veloso, highlight the opening of the *telenovela*.

**Picture 3** – Opening panel in *Velho Chico* expresses ancient legend about the origin of the river São Francisco



Source: Gshow - Globo.com.

The production can be remembered for the drowning of a leading actor in the river São Francisco during filming. It can also be remembered for its political appeal in discussing new family structures, ideological freedom, the valorization of indigenous culture, cooperative economy and environmental sustainability, among other interesting topics. In the cultural pages of the newspaper Zero Hora, an academic researcher praised the thematic scope of the plot.

A prime-time *telenovela* discussing sustainability? Wow. Alternatives in production fit for a given biome? Even journalism has not been dealing with these issues! In another chapter, the protagonists spoke about the importance of the cooperative economy for small producers. A win-win system. Suddenly

I realized I was moved by the language, as well as by the themes that, unfortunately, so often lie outside the national agenda. I am surprised that *Velho Chico* is not afraid to be ideological at a time when this expression has been treated so badly. In several dialogues, one can see this worldview comprises ideas of freedom, of social and political action (KRAEMER, 2016).

The texts of social merchandising are not always incorporated in the script of the *telenovelas* in a natural way. Reception can be disrupted if they are identified as a strange element. Still, *Velho Chico* clearly acknowledged the “environmental discourse” as shown in the social merchandising strategy that characterizes this type of production of Rede Globo. In *Rei do Gado* (*Cattle King*, Benedito Ruy Barbosa, 1996) a score of landless workers promoted the debate on agrarian reform. In *A Favorita* (*The favorite*, João Emanuel Carneiro, 2008), known for the rivalry between the heirs who compete for a pulp and paper mill, Bracelpa (Brazilian Association of Pulp and Paper) figured in educational dialogues about the production process in the sector.

By featuring the São Francisco river as a major character, ideals are openly displayed in the plot, as noted by the journalist quoted above. Amid the quarrels of two enemy families, the transposition of the river São Francisco imposes itself as a watershed. Reviving the controversial irrigation project of the northeastern semi-arid region, the characters’ recurring dialogues ponder whether there would be advantages or negative impacts on the environment. While describing the experience of producing social merchandising actions in *Velho Chico*, one professional praised a newly established form of partnership:

When we received the synopsis of *Velho Chico* last year, the technical team quickly realized the historic opportunity to have a *telenovela* that features the river as a main character. And this is the river São Francisco, with everything it means in discussing our country. We had an unprecedented proposal for the authors and the directors, who immediately agreed on us striking a partnership with Conservation International in order to take advantage of this opportunity. We see this as a great way to update and increase the potential of the themes we deal with in *Velho Chico*. And so, for the first time in the history of Globo *telenovelas*, we have a certified partnership that allows for this ongoing collaboration (AZEREDO, 2016 – Our translation).

This partnership was endorsed by the vice-president of the NGO<sup>2</sup> in Brazil, during an event<sup>3</sup> in Rio de Janeiro: “Using *telenovelas* - such a popular genre - and bring to its content this message of how nature is important for the population is a unique opportunity.

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<sup>2</sup> Conservation International is a North-American non-government organization that acts globally in the protection of biodiversity.

<sup>3</sup> Other Voices of Old Chico, an event from the platform Less is More (Rede Globo), was part of the program of the annual meeting *Viva a Mata* (Hail to the Woods), promoted by the Foundation SOS Mata Atlântica at the Museum of Art in Rio (MAR) in 2016.



It's the best way to incorporate the culture of sustainability into people's lives". To study the insertions of environmental content in the plot of *Velho Chico*, we selected two representative scenes, analysed below.

Before we proceed to the empirical analysis, let us briefly explain the methodological procedures we used. For this selection, we used the keyword "river São Francisco" to search the page Globo Play for scenes that feature the river. Considering the objectives of this study, we then selected the most representative scene from each category of social merchandising ('context' and 'socio-educational' scenes, according to AZEREDO, 2016). In order to undertake the intended critical analysis, we transcribed the dialogues and mapped the themes addressed in each scene while making considerations about their logics of production.

It is important to emphasize that the focus of this study on social merchandising in *Velho Chico* lies in its production. Even though research on reception could undoubtedly complement the understanding of the repercussions of this *telenovela* and its strategies of social merchandising, this type of research goes beyond the scope of our study.

### **Scene 1 - Miguel is appalled by the poor state of the river São Francisco**

Tereza, Colonel Saruê's daughter, fell in love with Santo and got pregnant by him. She married another man at the behest of her family, to cover up the socially unwanted pregnancy. Years later, she meets her son again and finds herself forced to confront her old love.

Miguel is the offspring of the forbidden romance between Tereza and Santo. Miguel did not heed his stepfather's wishes to make a politician out of him, and graduated in Agronomy. In order to work in close contact with the land, he specialized in organic farming. Upon returning from his studies in Europe, he had his ideas and proposals rejected by his grandfather. He proceeds with his project of organic and self-sustaining agriculture in coming across the fruit cooperative led by Santo.

In this scene shown on April 29, 2016, Miguel (Gabriel Leone) and Tereza (Camila Pitanga) talk during the crossing of the river São Francisco.

[images of the river and working fishermen]

[Tereza and Miguel are on a raft]

[soundtrack – *Ciúme (Jealousy)*, by Caetano Veloso]

Tereza [watching the river] "It's really sad to see how shallow Old Chico is now".

[Miguel looks at the river and cries] "It's a tragedy".

[He pauses]

"How can man treat a river like this with so much neglect? You know what hurts me the most? Knowing that we're killing the river to generate energy. Knowing that we are clogging a river in the name of progress. Everything to

accommodate more people under some air conditioning place on the coast, or for the industry to run at full power. What country is this that in order to grow, mom, destroys its greatest riches? What kind of growth is this that does not care for the people? That does not care for nature? That cannot see anything else but the interest of half a dozen privileged people?”

[Tereza speaks, sadly] “Old Chico will not die, son”.

[Miguel looks sad and enraged] “I do not feel sorry for the river, mom. I feel sorry for man. Look at Mariana, mother. The Doce river is dead. One of our rivers. It is dead, mom. Look at the signs, mom. Look, look. It’s all here” [images from the river banks]. “Nature is screaming at man in every way, but it seems that man cannot hear anything but the voice of money. Yet nature is no fool. Nature does not tolerate such abuse. Do not think that it will accept being neglected this way, because it will not. Old Chico may be ill-treated by man today, but nature is not the one who will pay for this. It’s us, mom. All of us”. [images of the river]

[soundtrack - *Saint Francis’ Prayer*, instrumental mode]

Miguel: “The day when Old Chico is gone, mom, he’ll leave only thirst in his place. Thirst and hunger. All that one day was alive will dry up. And there is no money in the world that can make a river reborn”.

[Tereza comforts Miguel] “That day has not yet come, son. Maybe we can redeem ourselves” [images of the river]. “But look! Look. Old Chico has not given up on us yet. He has not given up, son”.

[They hug each other]

With this eloquent mother and son exchange, we can see how the controversy about environmental degradation was incorporated into the script. By pointing out the disadvantages associated with hydroelectric plants, Gabriel Leone’s character complains about the destruction of national waters “in the name of progress” and “for the interest of half a dozen privileged ones”. His outburst reveals his character’s critical stance on the current energy and industrial models, questions what is considered “production at full speed” and criticizes the spoliation of natural resources due to the perceived subservience to the “voice of money”.

Miguel explicitly cites the Doce river, its basin destroyed by an avalanche of mud and industrial waste after a dam burst in Mariana, Minas Gerais, in November, 2015. This is considered our country’s largest environmental disaster. According to a study by SOS Mata Atlântica, recovery actions have focused more on the prevention of new breakdowns than on the reduction of water contamination rates. Report released by the NGO informs that contamination of the waters of the river Doce basin goes on as a result of the “continuous dumping of ore tailings [which] keep rivers dead and unused, posing health hazards to riparian communities, animals and ecosystems” (BRAGON, 2017).

By highlighting the advanced state of degradation of the river, Miguel evaluates that there is no way to compensate for such damage: “there is no money in the world that can make a river reborn”. Motherly and hopeful, Tereza comforts her son with a message in favour of a possible redemption by means of an eventual rapprochement with the forces of nature.

Considering the two types of scenes in which social merchandising actions can be found, this one above can be classified as a “context” scene. Throughout the plot, the theme of environmental degradation resulting from the use of water as a source of electricity and other forms of disrespect to the river are presented as an integral part of the narrative. Along with the rules of this genre, “good” and “bad” characters are classified according to their attitudes regarding the environment.

Let us now focus on a “socio-educational” scene. This type of scene shows that there’s a problem to be faced. This will eventually culminate in a kind of exemplary outcome. Even though it is somewhat long, it is important to notice the didactic tone of this dialogue. It not only scores the melodramatic tone of the plot, but it also presents, though not without some ambiguity, a strong message on ethics and social responsibility in agriculture.

In this scene aired on April 19, 2016, Tereza is angry about pesticides in the crop. According to the rhetoric of the industry that produces them (which the script seems to endorse), these chemical compounds made for killing pests can become a health hazard due to incorrect handling in agriculture.

## Scene 2 - Tereza uncovers the use of pesticides during harvest

Tereza walks by the crops and spots a machine spraying the plantation.

She approaches and sniffs at some fruits, then rages:

“They’re soaking wet! ... My goodness heavens! They’re all covered in pesticide!”

[She yanks a fruit from the tree and walks away. She bumps into employees loading some crates into a pick-up truck.]

“Hernani, man, look at this fruit. It’s drenched in poison... Look, you can smell it from afar!”

Notice the somewhat abrupt semantic shift from “covered by pesticide” to “drenched in poison”. The ambiguity of the discourse makes it unclear if Tereza reproaches the use of chemicals in the crop or if she considers unsafe the way it is being used.

“Yes, Tereza. Sorry ma’am ... There was no lack of warning”.

“You know we cannot pick fruits like that. You do know that?!”

“The order came from the colonel himself. What could we have done?”

“Talked to me. Should have done something, Hernani. This cannot be, man!”

“I tried, Tereza, but the colonel ... well, you know him better than anyone else”.  
“I know him, but I also know the market. My customers will not accept soggy  
fruit like this. Holy Mother of God!”

In this passage, the lines “you know we cannot pick fruits like that” and “my clients are not going to accept soggy fruit” suggest the lady is upset about the ostensive presence of the pesticide in the harvest she is about to sell. One could infer that if they had not been “soaked,” there would be no problem in harvesting and marketing those fruits. In this scene, she is portrayed as a professional who is concerned with the ethics of the business. She also shows cordiality towards the employees. In a perfect television rag style, the cap of an irresponsible agro-producer and tyrant boss fits her father, the villain of this *telenovela*.

Responsibility for the quality of one’s produce, and lack of dignity in labor relations are shown in the final section:

Tereza tries to get a grip on herself.  
“How’s crop control?”  
“This time, there was no way, you see? There’s been a lot of disqualified mangos”.  
“How much?”  
“Not even 20% are grade A”.  
“What? 20%? Are you kidding me?! Did you tell my father that?”  
“Does he listen to anyone?”  
“No, but he’ll have to listen to me. If he wants me to keep me delivering his fruit, he’ll have to listen to me!”  
[Feeling furious, Tereza leaves as she holds one of the fruits in her hand]  
“Just what I needed!”, she snaps.

This part of the scene seems to imply that the market itself discourages poor agribusiness practices. An ill-managed crop will yield fruits graded below the standards. Customers will reject “soggy” fruits as not compatible with recommended norms and procedures. We can interpret as a certain nod to the neoliberal tenet of self-regulation the suggestion that corporate social responsibility can be encouraged while irresponsible practices can be curbed by solely applying business rules.

In the following scene, that end the episode, Tereza confronts her father and shows she is determined not to work for him anymore.

## **Closing remarks**

As Baccega (2003, 2015) teaches, the *telenovela* has gone through different phases, having established itself as an extremely popular mass product. Unlike the all-or-nothing

type of worldview that characterized the productions of the early 1960s, more recent socio-cultural *telenovelas* portray the complexities of today's world. They represent daily life according to the norms of fiction, in sync with what is happening in society.

Due to its protagonism in daily practices with audiences from different segments, the *telenovela* participates in contemporary social pedagogy and plays an important socio-educational role in the circulation of ideas and the promotion of debate on various types of social issues. The actions of social merchandising concretize the mission to merge, to the fictional scripts, specialized knowledge, in such a way that the audience continues immersed in the narrative of the booklet and, nevertheless, is able to apprehend the social messages inserted there.

While it can be said that some of these problems are closer to daily life, others are more complex and require a greater effort so that they can be inserted in the script of the plot without compromising the enjoyment of the work. This is the main challenge with regard to social merchandising. "Becoming multiple, adapting, launching quickly on new forms of expression, entertainment, and sociability is the main cunning of marketing," says Borrowes (2008, p.49). With social merchandising is no different.

With regard to the Brazilian *telenovela*, in assuming its "sociocultural" character, fictional television production emphasizes the importance of these themes for the visibility (and commercial profitability) of the plot, as well as for the exercise of its pedagogical function. Related to the socio-educational action of the product in question, new partnerships and developments are being built, such as the role of NGOs in technical support and also the dissemination of their own campaigns in tune with *telenovelas*. New horizons open up for the third sector and expand, at least in terms of diffusion, the reach of the social projects in question.

Fontenelle (2010, p.215) reminds us that in the mid-1990s "the discourse of responsible consumption (...) began to gain relevance". Reflecting on what she named as the rise of "the fetish of the autonomous self", we come to believe that by making the "right", "ethical" and/or "responsible" choices, the consumer would contribute to redirect certain practices in the marketplace, where producers and traders are usually more concerned with their own immediate profit. Fontenelle (2010) stresses the neoliberal cunning of locating in individual action (and not social inequalities, which are ignored) the possible solution to the dilemmas and contradictions while leaving the market itself untouched.

In the scenes of *Velho Chico*, young Miguel urges us to consider the environmental impacts of the actions of man. Tereza rages over the complex topic of pesticides in agriculture. Even if she did not explicitly condemn their use - as it might be the case with Miguel, an adept of organic agriculture -, nor questioned the laxity of Brazilian legislation as compared to other countries in protecting their citizens from pesticides (LAZERI, 2017), one cannot deny that the plot of *Velho Chico* dealt with raising awareness on environmental

sustainability. As we have shown, “contextual” and “socio-educational” scenes were intentionally designed to foster viewer’s identification with the storyline as well as to encourage the debate on socially responsible and environmentally sustainable practices in agribusiness.

To sum up our discussion we argue that, in its own way, this piece of television fiction written by Benedito Ruy Barbosa sustains and extends the long-established tradition of the Brazilian socio-cultural *telenovelas*.

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