

MEDIA IN TWENTIETH- AND TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY LATIN AMERICA

J. Justin Castro
Arkansas State University

Media, Sound, and Culture in Latin America and the Caribbean. Edited by Alejandra Bronfman and Andrew Grant Wood. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012. Pp. xvi + 169. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 9780822961871.

“Muy buenas noches”: Mexico, Television, and the Cold War. By Celeste González de Bustamante. Foreword by Richard Cole. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013. Pp. xxxvi + 275. \$40.00 paper. ISBN: 9780803240100.

Broadcasting the Civil War in El Salvador: A Memoir of Guerrilla Radio. By Carlos Henríquez Consalvi (“Santiago”). Translated by Charles Leo Nagle V with A. L. (Bill) Prince. Introduction by Erik Ching. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010. Pp. xlvi + 229. \$55.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780292722859.

Culture of Class: Radio and Cinema in the Making of a Divided Argentina, 1920–1946. By Matthew B. Karush. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012. Pp. xi + 275. \$23.95 paper. ISBN: 9780822352648.

Citizens’ Media against Armed Conflict: Disrupting Violence in Colombia. By Clemencia Rodríguez. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. Pp. 328. \$25.00 paper. ISBN: 978081666584.

As reflected in the newly established Mass Media and Popular Culture Section within the Latin American Studies Association and a plethora of new publications, scholarship on Latin American media has expanded significantly in recent years.¹ These studies are particularly germane in a world increasingly hyperconnected by communications technologies and social media. This review considers five books that focus predominately on electronic mass media and cover a wide range of topics, regions, and times, exemplifying the diversity of current research. *Media, Sound, and Culture in Latin America and the Caribbean*, edited by Alejandra Bronfman and Andrew Grant Wood, is a collection of essays that looks not only at media but at sound itself. *Culture of Class* by Matthew B. Karush discusses Argentine radio and cinema in the years preceding the presidency of Juan Perón. *Broadcasting the Civil War in El Salvador* is the memoir of revolutionary radioman

1. Examples include Viviane Mahieux, *Urban Chroniclers in Modern Latin America: The Shared Intimacy of Everyday Life* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012); Erica Cusi Wortham, *Indigenous Media in Mexico: Culture, Community, and the State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); and Bruce Girard and Fernando Perini, eds., *Enabling Openness: The Future of the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Ottawa: IDCRC/CRDI, 2013).

Carlos Henríquez Consalve, aka "Santiago." *Citizens' Media against Armed Conflict*, by Clemencia Rodríguez, examines "citizens'" radio in twenty-first-century Colombia, and in *Muy buenas noches*, Celeste González de Bustamante explores the first twenty years of Mexican television.

Media, Sound, and Culture in Latin America and the Caribbean contains much of the breadth of current research in one slim edited volume. This excellent multidisciplinary collection of essays explores electronic mass media but also hearing "as a critical sense in which to decipher issues of social and cultural change" (xi, emphasis in the original). The authors correctly point out that scholars, and people generally, have long privileged sight over other senses, and their book begins to offset that bias by emphasizing things heard. Bronfman and Wood separate the book into three parts: "Embodied Sounds and the Sounds of Memory," "The Media of Politics," and "The Sonics of Public Spaces," a loose compartmentalization that brings a measure of coherence to the wide array of contributions. Although the articles vary significantly, together they successfully make the book's argument that "soundscapes, music, noise, and silence reveal to us something about prevailing worldviews, technologies, epistemologies, and aspiration past and present" (x). The most original bestowal of the volume is its inclusion of little-explored topics on the impact of sound outside of common media. Nevertheless, for those interested in more traditional studies of media in politics and culture, the volume does not disappoint. Essays by Gisela Cramer, Alejandra Bronfman, and Alejandro L. Madrid are well argued and cover international politics, rebellion and control, media spectacle, and democracy across Latin America.

One of the strengths of the volume is that it uses sonic themes and sources to inform other prominent topics in Latin American studies. Christine Ehrick's "Radio Transvestism and the Gendered Soundscape in Buenos Aires, 1930s–1940s" examines radio broadcasting's role in the creation of gender identity, arguing that "radio vocalizations represent a projection and performance of the body in an exclusively sonic way, which in turn highlights the fact that the voice is critical in coding the body along presumed racial, class, and gendered lines" (xi–xii). Ehrick contributes a refreshing change of pace to Argentine radio studies, providing a well-argued and entertaining essay on gender, a topic too often ignored.

Media, Sound, and Culture in Latin America and the Caribbean also benefits our understanding of memory and public spheres. In his article on Carnival in the Bolivian city of Oruro, Gonzalo Araoz contends that music and rhythm are crucial concepts for explaining memory and "the complex phenomenon of temporal perception" (xv). Andrew Grant Wood's "Such a Noise! Fireworks and the Soundscapes of Two Veracruz Festivals" returns to the festival of Carnival, but in the Mexican port city of Veracruz. He also looks at the celebration of Candelaria in Tlacotalpan, Veracruz, which honors the Virgin of Candelaria using pyrotechnics "to mark festival time, chase off evil spirits, and celebrate local power" (117). Araoz and Wood bring sound to the forefront of public displays and the creation of community, challenging scholars to incorporate senses other than sight.

One thing that this anthology, and media and sound studies more broadly, could do with less of is what Ehrick rightly recognizes as its "palette" over-

crowded with jargon (21). She states this apologetically while rehashing audio-visual scholar Michel Chion's term "acousmatic." There is something terribly ironic about academics writing about communication in a way unapproachable to most people. A problem more specific to the volume is the incorrect use of "sound" and especially "sonic technologies" in place of more specific terminology. For example, in Bronfman's otherwise admirable essay "Weapons of the Geek: Romantic Narratives, Sonic Technologies, and Tinkerers in 1930s Santiago, Cuba," she argues that "sonic technologies" had become essential to government leaders and insurrectionists. Surely she is talking about telegraphs, telephones, and radios, not, say, drums and horns, which are also sonic technologies. In this instance, using umbrella terms clouds more than it clarifies.

Despite a few problems with incoherence and jargon, this volume is otherwise a model for interdisciplinary scholarship. It includes historians, an anthropologist, media scholars, and specialists in literature. Its willingness to put sound at the forefront of research is refreshing and provides a trailblazing approach to Latin American media studies.

Adding to a burgeoning scholarship on media, technology, and popular culture in twentieth-century Argentina, Matthew Karush's *Culture of Class* is one of the more impressive publications treating radio and cinema in Latin America.² Karush argues that cinematic and radio productions of the 1920s and 1930s reinforced class-based polarization, which Juan Perón capitalized on while creating a massive populist movement. This finding runs contrary to studies of the more nationally unifying media productions in the United States, a contrast that Karush readily exploits. His cultural approach is an innovative way of looking at the rise of Peronism, a subject traditionally dominated by economic and political analyses. The author convincingly shows that "populism in Argentina was not merely a byproduct of industrialization or a reflection of labor politics; it was also the outcome of a particular pattern of mass cultural production" (179). Karush's work is theoretically sophisticated while maintaining a high level of readability.

The argument that twentieth-century populism is directly related to culture and the rise of new mass media is not completely novel. In discussions of Mexican president Plutarco Elías Calles, Jürgen Buchenau defines populism as "a discourse that appeals to 'the people' and 'the nation' by mass media."³ One of the most widely read English-language anthologies on Latin American populism, Michael L. Conniff's *Populism in Latin America*, discusses the appropriation of

2. Other noteworthy works on Argentine media include Robert Howard Claxton, *From Parsifal to Perón: Early Radio in Argentina, 1920–1944* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007); Beatriz Sarlo, *The Technical Imagination: Argentine Culture's Modern Dreams*, trans. by Xavier Callahan (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008); and James Cane, *The Fourth Enemy: Journalism and Power in the Making of Peronist Argentina, 1930–1955* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012).

3. Jürgen Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles and the Mexican Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007), xxi–xxvii; Jürgen Buchenau, "Plutarco Elías Calles and Revolutionary-Era Populism in Mexico," in *Populism in Twentieth Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría*, edited by Amelia M. Kiddle and María L. O. Muñoz, with a foreword by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), 38–57.

popular culture by populist leaders and the importance of new means of transportation and communication (street cars, buses, radio, television) in that process.⁴ Eduardo Elena, who similarly writes about Peronist Argentina and shares many of Karush's arguments, discusses the connection between the rise of Peronism and the mass media marketplace.⁵

Thus the link between advancements in electronic media and populism has been well established, but Karush does more than argue that radio and cinema were components of Perón's propaganda machine: he clearly demonstrates that they were crucial to the cultural environment of the preceding decades that allowed Peronism to exist in the first place. Using films, including *Los tres berretines* (1933), *La rubia del camino* (1938), and *Chingolo* (1940), Karush shows that "authentic" stylings that praised the working class and condemned greed among the wealthy remained popular in Argentina, even while American films attempted to blur class divisions. This derision of callous elites had deep-reaching roots in Argentina. Stories with similar plots are commonplace in late-nineteenth century Argentine literature. Perón, Karush argues, capitalized on these societal divisions, incorporating them into his own rhetoric and into state broadcasting operations of the 1940s. Originally, radio and cinema programs were the product not of an authoritarian, top-down project "but of the messy functioning of a capitalist marketplace" (10). This finding mirrors a similar conclusion in Bryan McCann's work on popular music, radio, and politics in Brazil.⁶ It runs somewhat contrary to my own findings on radio development in Mexico, where state oversight and direct participation in broadcasting were prevalent at an earlier date.⁷

More specifically about radio, *Broadcasting the Civil War in El Salvador* is unusual in that it is a memoir. It was originally published in Spanish in 1992 as *La terquedad de izote: La historia de Radio Venceremos*. Written by Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, also known by his wartime moniker "Santiago," the book covers his experiences as an announcer for the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional's (FMLN) Radio Venceremos from his arrival from Nicaragua to El Salvador (Santiago is Venezuelan) in December 1980 until late 1984, when a major invasion of rebel territory marked a turning point in the war. Despite its obvious bias, the memoir has a refreshingly simple narrative; it is clearly written and superbly translated. It not only provides a firsthand account of one of the more important revolutionary radio campaigns in twentieth-century Latin America, it is a window into the revolution itself, telling the story of the "nationwide rebellion and its international context" and the "very personal" memories of Santiago himself (xviii).

Calling the work a memoir is somewhat of a misnomer; it is more a work of col-

4. Michael L. Conniff, ed., *Populism in Latin America*, 2nd ed. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012), 7–10.

5. Eduardo Elena, *Dignifying Argentina: Peronism, Citizenship, and Mass Consumption* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).

6. Brian McCann, *Hello, Hello Brazil: Popular Music in the Making of Modern Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

7. J. Justin Castro, "Wireless: Radio, Revolution, and the Mexican State, 1897–1938," PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, 2013.

laborative memory and journalism. Members of the infamous Atlacatl Battalion burned the original manuscript, which Henríquez Consalvi had to leave buried in a shallow hole during a hasty retreat in October 1984. The surviving members of the radio team helped him rebuild his journals. They also used accounts of people who had appeared in the original manuscript. This raises the inevitable problem of constructing an accurate portrayal from refashioned memories. Nonetheless, the resulting product is still one of the better firsthand accounts of the civil war and the role of radio in revolution.

According to the narrative, Henríquez Consalvi overheard members of the Salvadoran army discussing the destruction of his manuscript during one of the more fantastic events related in the memoir. When army forces carried out an operation in Morazán, the district that Radio Venceremos most frequently operated from, the radio team set a trap for one of their archenemies, Colonel Durango (Carlos) Monterrosa, by letting government forces capture a radio the rebels had rigged with explosives. They remotely detonated the device while Monterrosa sat in a helicopter, killing him and his entourage. This story suggests how important the radio operation was and that the Salvadoran army made shutting it down a top priority.

Early in the book, Henríquez Consalvi discusses the successes of the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) and other FLMN forces while stressing the difficulty of constructing the radio station. He states that 1981 “was predominately the foundational and informative phase of the radio” (171), but this also proved an important period for the radio’s operation because it was at times the only voice that condemned massacres (including the El Mozote massacre), bringing those atrocities to the world’s attention. In 1982 and 1983 Radio Venceremos became more of a mouthpiece for FMLN propaganda, highlighting rebel military and political advancements while criticizing the government and Salvadoran military. The mobile station also “emphasized the need for greater literacy and education, which elevated the combatants’ political awareness.” By 1984 the station’s goal was to be an “organizing force, a rallying point for the people in any way possible, be it through syndicates and unions or farming cooperatives.” The announcers also hoped to counter US intervention and aspired to make the radio into an over-the-air school (171–172).

Broadcasting the Civil War in El Salvador is an excellent resource for understanding rebel communications during the civil war that dominated El Salvador throughout the 1980s. It is also a noteworthy source for understanding daily life in war, US intervention in Central America, the formation of the Atlacatl Battalion, the role of the Catholic Church, revolutionary education campaigns, and the personal loves and jealousies of revolutionaries in war. The three brief epilogues from 1992, 2003, and 2009 provide further context and perspective.

Clemencia Rodríguez’s *Citizens’ Media against Armed Conflict* similarly focuses on media in an area torn by violence, in this case Colombia. Her book is also a work of activism, “shamelessly celebratory of the fact that in the midst of situations in which armed groups impose silence, terrorize civilians, and make communities feel helpless, a handful of exceptional Colombian men and women figured out how to use radio, television, video, and photography to overcome the

impact of war on their communities" (31). Unlike Henríquez Consalvi, Rodríguez condemns all groups participating in mass violence: the Colombian army, paramilitary groups, drug cartels, and rebel organizations. Instead, she celebrates nonaligned "citizens'" media, which goes beyond journalistic coverage and focuses "on the communication needs and daily realities of the people in their communities" (233). She is a passionate proponent of citizens' media as a counter to the negative consequences of extreme, long-term violence on communities, a subject she has been researching for nearly thirty years. *Citizens' Media against Armed Conflict* is the product of fieldwork carried out from 2004 to 2006.

Throughout the book, Rodríguez focuses on two questions: "How do communities react when harassed by armed groups?" and "Do media play a role when communities try to galvanize a response?" (1). Building on extensive fieldwork in three regions—Montes de María, Magdalena Medio, and Caquetá—she argues that communities in these areas react to armed groups by establishing media programs that help build and reassert community identity, temporarily relieve fear, and re-create trust in public spheres and democratic processes. In consistently making her argument, Rodríguez does a thorough job of using prominent secondary sources from a number of disciplines to discuss the historical and intertwined problems of violence, land tenure, economic instability, and inequality in Colombia. Although a communications scholar, she places much of this research within a framework based around anthropological theories of violence.

Rodríguez focuses most of her attention on Radio Andaquí and the Escuela Audiovisual Infantil de Belén de los Andaquíes in the Caquetá region, the Communications Collective of Montes de María, and the Asociación Red de Emisoras Comunitarias del Magdalena Medio. She shows that these operations rarely directly interact with armed groups or denounce human rights violations, in fear of retaliation. Instead, they undermine violence by more subtle means: displaying disruption in daily life without pointing fingers, and "performing" a culture of peace within the public sphere. Here she stands squarely on James C. Scott's theories of the "weapons of the weak" and "hidden transcripts," discourses that unite people while avoiding retaliation by those with the power to terrorize. In the last chapters of the book, Rodríguez provides general views about community media held by those that influenced the movement before adding her own theoretical conclusions about how citizens' media are best carried out. In the end, she argues that "citizens' media that regard communication as performance, rather than as information dissemination or persuasion, are better positioned to disrupt violence in contexts where unarmed civilians are cornered by war" (35).

There are parts of her work that could be hashed out in more detail. For example, she insinuates that community radio is a crucial part of rebuilding a healthy Colombian nation, even titling her second chapter "Nation Building, One Voice at a Time," but the connection between community radio and nation building is not thoroughly developed. She articulates well that these operations help build trust in reopening public spheres and democratic processes, but these seem more influential in regional culture and politics than in creating a sense of shared nationhood. She briefly discusses the important role played by officials from the

national Ministry of Communications and Ministry of Culture in training the pioneers of citizens' radio, an intriguing facet that warrants further explanation, since the officials appear crucial to the formation of these community networks and their ties to the nation-state. Rodríguez also paints citizens' media in Colombia as exceptional, but in this she may underestimate the number of similar projects in other parts of Latin America.

Rodríguez's work also begs more questions about the extent to which these cultural productions can, in and of themselves, stem violence. She paints armed groups as outside of Colombia's rural communities despite their long and intertwined history. Surely these towns have produced their share of guerillas, paramilitary fighters, and regular soldiers. These militants are responsible for violence, but are they also not necessary for peace? Building peace and less fearful communities is a complex undertaking in which citizens' radio can play an important role, but underlying problems that help generate violence still need to be addressed.

The exquisite fieldwork and powerful arguments of *Citizens' Media against Armed Conflict* provide strengths that outweigh the shortcomings and inherent biases of the book. Rodríguez shows without a doubt the power and good that citizens' media have brought to communities, rebuilding spirit in regions long plagued and stigmatized by violence. Her unabashed praise of the leaders who maintain these endeavors is justified by their bravery and results. The book is essential reading for people interested in the role of media in countering violence and in twenty-first-century Latin American society more generally.

Celeste González de Bustamante's "*Muy buenas noches*" is the only work in this review that focuses solely on television, examining the first twenty years of the medium in Mexico (1950–1970). She articulates the central theme of the book as "the limits of cultural hegemony at the height of the PRI [Partido Revolucionario Institucional] and the Cold War" (xxv, 207). The author examines the influence of US culture and media and the relationship between leading Mexican producers—especially the Azcárraga family—and the state. A central goal here is to "describe and explain the role that television executives, producers, and reporters played" in efforts to win "the hearts and minds of citizens" in Mexico (xxiv). She argues that news coverage overwhelmingly favored the PRI and US economic interests, though tensions arose when the desires of media owners did not align with those of state and US business leaders. In other words, media producers usually played along but were "not simple mouthpieces." Both media executives and state officials "promoted modernity and consumer values broadcast from above" (xxvi–xxvii). González de Bustamante's argument that early television was largely a top-down affair provides an interesting contrast to Karush's findings on Argentina and research by Brian McCann on Brazil (noted earlier).

The book is the compilation of five separate case studies: "(1) Mexican [railroad activists] and Cuban revolutionaries during 1959, (2) presidential and heads of state visits at home and abroad, (3) the space race and the country's participation in this Cold War technopolitical competition, (4) the 1968 movement and the Olympics, and (5) the 1970 presidential election and the World Cup" (xxiv–xxv).

The case studies are diverse and only loosely connected, but they allow González de Bustamante to “explore the limits of an authoritarian government and the role of non-super powers during the Cold War” (xxviii).

The long-standing relationship between the Azcárraga family—especially Emilio Azcárraga and Emilio Azcárraga Jr.—and top PRI officials is well known, but details of how this relationship formed and its implications are still being explored by Mexican and US scholars.⁸ Predominately relying on television scripts, González de Bustamante provides insights into this relationship, further confirming what others have long insinuated: “Government and media executives worked together to convince national and international audiences that Mexico was indeed a modern country” in order to benefit the PRI politically and the Azcárragas, among other media executives, economically (175). A stable and modern-appearing Mexico was good for government and good for business. Media monopolies and the single-party state worked together for mutually reinforcing goals. Ultimately, however, González de Bustamante argues that the placement and number of reports suggest that under most circumstances monetary more than political interests guided decision making by news executives and, as a result, most producers and reporters. The author backs up her claims with convincing research that adds depth and weight to her argument, however unsurprising that conclusion may be.

González de Bustamante proves her point about economic influences on decision making better than her stated theme about the limits of imposed “cultural” hegemony, which she never clearly articulates. She does discuss how student protesters in the late 1960s used alternative media to express their views: street theater, art, and demonstrations. But she never demonstrates what the limits of this business-state-imposed hegemony are. González de Bustamante is more successful in showing that “the mexicanidad that this book seeks to explain was forged from above by [economically motivated] media producers influenced by high-ranking government officials” despite also being shaped by “a negotiation between elite producers and popular viewers” (xxviii).

A large part of this elite-produced *mexicanidad* is “tele-traditions,” including televised Independence Day celebrations, political speeches, and sporting events, all portrayed as safe and commonly held traditions. She briefly notes in the book’s introduction that the image of Mexico transmitted over television has its roots in radio broadcasting, but this understates the precedent; in fact, everything she categorizes as a “tele-tradition” was previously a radio tradition. The longevity of the collaboration between state elites and media elites—who were sometimes the same people—is one of the most important facets of power in modern Mexico. Comprehending how these relationships transcend specific mediums, governments, and generations is crucial to obtaining a big-picture understanding of media-state relations in Mexico. González de Bustamante has made a noteworthy

8. See, for example, Claudia Fernández and Andrew Paxman, *El Tigre: Emiliano Azcárraga y su imperio Televisa* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 2013); Pável Granados, *XEW: 70 años en el aire* (Mexico City: Editorial Clio, 2000); and Chappell H. Lawson, *Building the Fourth Estate: Democratization and the Rise of the Free Press in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

contribution to this process by providing new information and analysis on the early television era.

Her work, in comparison with the others in this review, shows some of the commonalities and differences being uncovered about the development and use of media in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Latin America. In the modern world, media have become crucial components of identity and power. Media have been recognized by government officials, business leaders, and by insurrectionists as essential to political and military control. In some places, media were mostly the product of the marketplace, as in the United States and pre-Perón Argentina. In Mexico, top-down forces appear to have been stronger, a result of revolution-era leaders needing to control the chaos unleashed by the Mexican Revolution (1910–1940), which occurred simultaneously with the development of mass electronic media. But despite authoritarian tendencies among some business and government leaders, a number of communities have managed to use media in novel and locally important ways. This appears to have been more common in countries with weaker national states, though it exists in most, if not all, nations. Another wave of relatively democratic approaches to media has also become more prominent with newer modes of mass media, including social-media Internet sites, which have increased interactive forms of communication despite being funneled through a limited number of social-media providers.

Will the evolution of these new electronic media change cultures and governance in Mexico and other Latin American countries along patterns similar to those that occurred with radio, cinema, and television? To explore this important question we need to better understand how past and present media have been used: personally, regionally, nationally, and transnationally. The works reviewed above help pave the way toward a better understanding of the role of media in an increasingly interconnected Latin America.