



Transnational Frequencies: Commercial Radio along the Mexico-U.S. Border, 1930-1946¹

Between 1930 and 1946, radio transformed northern Mexico. In those years, 53%, or 155 out of 292 stations established in Mexico were located along Mexico's northern borderlands.² These stations mapped a new geography along the U.S-Mexico border, unifying disparate areas of Mexico. Northern Mexico has distinct characteristics, making it difficult to regard it as one contiguous region. It is a diverse place, politically and ecologically. The landscape features deserts, mountains, and, most prominently, the Rio Grande and its surrounding valley. Northern Mexico is also home to towns dating back to the nineteenth century as well as military outposts that became tourist destinations in the twentieth, such as Tijuana. Moreover, these stations offered programming that was national and transnational, or cross-border. From Tijuana to Matamoros, radio stations broadcast to local audiences *and* to listeners across the U.S. Southwest.

By the end of the Second World War, when Mexican national networks engulfed local radio stations and Mexican immigrants in the United States began to

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² Data collected from Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas (Hereafter AGN, SCOP) expedientes 22/131.6-(721.1)/1 to 22/131.6-(722)/21 (116 total)

establish their own Spanish-language radio stations, these stations began to disappear. However, during the time they were in operation, they played an integral role in assimilating Mexican immigrants to U.S. consumer society through Spanish and English-language commercials, offering artists and singers places to perform new music, and conveying the voice of the government through speeches, bulletins, and weekly programs. This essay uses U.S. government records, station quarterly reports, personal documents of Mexican radio personalities, Mexican Foreign Relations data, Spanish-language newspapers from the U.S. Southwest, and government records from Mexico's Ministry of Communication and Public Works, *Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas*, or SCOP, to explore how this process came about.

First, it situates cross-border radio stations within the current literature on broadcast media, the borderlands, Mexico, and Chicana/Chicano studies, and the study of Mexican immigrants in the United States. Second, the paper provides context on the political, cultural, and technological factors allowing broadcast media to flourish and become a powerful mass media tool in Mexico during the first half of the twentieth century. Third, it explains the intentions of the radio station owners, Mexican entrepreneurs who saw the border not as the periphery of their nation, or the boundary between Mexico and the U.S., but as the center of their operations. A summary of the steps needed to obtain a radio concession is offered, as well as examples of strategies used by stations to lure audiences in the United States. Next, the essay explores censorship by answering the following question: how much control did the Mexican government, via SCOP, have over radio operations? The conclusion briefly explains the circumstances that led to the decline in local radio stations along Mexico's northern border and addresses the relevance of this topic given current global issues.

Literature Review

To date, the study of radio in northern Mexico is eclipsed by "border radio"-high-powered stations located on the Mexican side of the border that were owned by a handful of Americans evading the U.S. government, the American Medical Association

and the Federal Communications Commission.³ Gene Fowler and Bill Crawford analyze these rogue operations in their book, *Border Radio: Quacks, Yodelers, Pitchmen, Psychics, and Other Amazing Broadcasters of the American Airwaves*, which provides a detailed look at the broadcasting activities of American entrepreneurs, but overlooks the work of their Mexican counterparts. Furthermore, it offers a limited view of the Mexican government's involvement in this transnational broadcasting endeavor and disregards the Spanish-speaking audience also listening to these stations from the United States.

In the last four decades, historians and mass media specialists have authored important works on the history of radio broadcasting in Mexico.⁴ Joy Elizabeth Hayes' seminal book, *Radio Nation*, explains how the Mexican government's nationalistic project after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) coincided with the arrival of commercial radio broadcasting in the early 1930s.⁵ Most recently, J. Justin Castro's, *Radio in Revolution: Wireless Technology and State Power in Mexico, 1897-1938* illustrates the development and role of two technological advancements to Mexico: the telegraph and the radio.⁶ This essay acknowledges that the Mexican government attempted to control commercial radio as it centralized power in Mexico City during the twentieth century, but in contrast to the previous literature, it addresses challenges to this control by other regions.

³ For more on the topic of "Border Radio" see, Gene Fowler and Bill Crawford, *Border Radio: Quacks, yodelers, pitchmen, psychics, and other amazing broadcasters of the American airwaves* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1987); José Luis Ortiz Garza, *Una radio entre dos reinos: la increíble historia de la radiodifusora mexicana más potente del mundo de los años 30* (Mexico: DF: Javier Vergara, 1997); Roberto Avant-Mier, "Heard it on the X: border radio as public discourse and the Latino legacy in popular music" in Michael C. Keith, ed., *Radio Cultures: the Sound Medium in American Life* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 47-64.

⁴ Jorge Mejía Prieto, *Historia de la radio y la televisión en México* (Mexico City: Colección México vivo, O. Colmenares, 1972); Fernando Mejía Barquera, *La industria de la radio y la televisión y la política del estado mexicano* (Mexico City: Fundación Manuel Buendía, 1989); Gabriel Sosa Plata, *Las mil y una radios: una historia, un análisis actual de la radiodifusión Mexicana* (Mexico City: McGraw-Hill, 1997); Ángel Miquel, *Disolvencias: literatura, cine y radio en México (1900-1950)* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005); Fátima Fernández Christlieb, *La radio mexicana: centro y regiones* (Mexico City: J. Pablos Editor, 1991); Juan Leyva, *Política educativa y comunicación social: la radio en México, 1940-1946* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1992); Pavel Granados, *XEW: 70 Anos en el aire* (Mexico City: Editorial Clío, 2000).

⁵ Elizabeth Joy Hayes, *Radio Nation: Communication, Popular Culture, and Nationalism in Mexico, 1920-1950* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000).

⁶ J. Justin Castro, *Radio in Revolution: Wireless Technology and State Power in Mexico, 1897-1938* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016).

Over the years, borderlands historians have offered important contributions to the understanding of this disparate place.⁷ Most notably, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border* by Rachel St. John explains how nineteenth and twentieth century events in California and the Baja California peninsula shaped public understanding of the border today.⁸ Another notable book explaining the borderlands rich and complex transnational history is Geraldo L. Cadava's *Standing on Common Ground: The Making of a Sunbelt Borderland*, which carefully explains the creation of cross-border business ties between communities in Arizona and Sonora, Mexico in the twentieth century.⁹ And finally, a number of mass media specialists and Chicana/o scholars have explored how Mexican immigrants in the U.S. use and mobilize through media. *Sounds of Belonging: U.S. Spanish Language Radio and Public Advocacy* by Dolores Inés Casillas focuses on Spanish-language radio use in recent decades.¹⁰ What is missing from this rich literature is a transnational view of the entire U.S.-Mexico border region that considers Mexico's active role shaping the borderlands between 1930 and 1946. Moreover, unlike the pre-existing scholarship, the essay explains how broadcasting led to a layered transformation of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Background

A number of social, political, and technological factors contributed to the arrival of more than one hundred radio stations in northern Mexico during the 1930s and 1940s. The first was directly tied to the Mexican Revolution, the first social revolution of the twentieth century, which began in 1909 with the overthrow of Porfirio

⁷ Andrew Grant Wood, ed. *On the Border: Society and Culture Between the United States and Mexico* (Landham: Roman and Littlefield, 2003); Oscar J. Martínez, *Troublesome Border* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998); Juan Mora-Torres, *The Making of the Mexican Border* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2001); David E. Lorey, *The U.S.-Mexican Border in the Twentieth Century: A History of Economic and Social Transformation* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1999); Omar S. Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope: Forging Identity and Nation in the Rio Grande Borderlands* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

⁸ Rachel St. John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁹ Geraldo L. Cadava's *Standing on Common Ground: The Making of a Sunbelt Borderland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁰ Dolores Inés Casillas, *Sounds of Belonging: U.S. Spanish Language Radio and Public Advocacy* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

Díaz, a dictator who ruled Mexico for more than thirty years. In the subsequent decade, civil war, unrest, bloodshed, and chaos plagued the nation.

When the violent phase of the Revolution ended in the late 1910s, the government pushed for a reconstruction agenda that collided with the unprecedented interest of the public for wireless broadcasting. This “radio fever” began in the early 1920s, when trends and technological innovations from Europe and the United States arrived in Mexico. In urban centers throughout the nation, as one Mexican historian noted, “people were interested in the scientific advancements of the day and in having fun, they wanted to forget about the armed conflict.”¹¹ Wireless broadcasting, as radio was called at the time, was a technological triumph, embraced because it was relatively inexpensive, popular, and it simplified pre-existing forms of communication like the telegraph.

The Mexican government turned to radio hoping that it could be used to reach prisoners, for rural education, to broadcast weather reports to rural farmers, and for other social welfare purposes. As scholars have pointed out, the Mexican government was fortunate that radio broadcasting was part of a new mass communications technology that flourished at the exact moment that the state and commercial interests were looking for an economical means of reaching the population.¹²

As Mexico embarked on a new era where existing technology was making communication between people easier and more accessible, SCOP created a series of laws to regulate the industry. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, public access to the spectrum had been restricted, available only to organizations with political ties, government departments, or the military.¹³ But in the 1920s political leaders decided that in Mexico there would be government ownership, or “nationalization” of the spectrum. Individuals and corporations were allowed to apply for a radio concession

¹¹ Jorge Mejía Prieto, *Historia de la radio y la televisión en México* (México, DF: Colección México Vivo, 1972), 24.

¹² Elizabeth Joy Hayes, *Radio Nation: Communication, Popular Culture, and Nationalism in Mexico, 1920-1950*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000), xiii.

¹³ Friedrich Katz, *La guerra secreta en México* (México, DF: Ediciones Era, 1981); Roberto Ornelas Herrera, “Radio y Cotidianidad en México (1900-1930)” in Aurelio de los Reyes, ed., *Historia de la vida cotidiana en México*. Tomo V. Volumen 1. Siglo XX. Campo y Ciudad. (México, DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005).

when SCOP passed regulatory measures in 1931.¹⁴ That year, Mexico's first mass media legislation allowed small business owners, investors, and entrepreneurs across the country the opportunity to purchase concessions for commercial, amateur, and experimental broadcasting stations for the first time.¹⁵ Within two years, Mexico was home to 50 commercial radio stations, 52 amateur/ experimental stations, and five cultural and "official" -or government-owned- broadcasting stations.¹⁶ Some of these radio stations appeared along Mexico's northern border with the United States.

Mexican Radio Entrepreneurs and Their Cross-Border Strategies

The dozens of men and a handful of women who started radio stations in Mexico's northern border during the 1930s and 1940s pioneered ideas that were transnational, exhibited a unique perspective on the border, and targeted specific listeners in the United States.

From the outset, their goal was to use their transmitters to send signals across the border into the United States and the greater border region. In annual reports collected by SCOP, stations along Mexico's northern border listed the furthest location where their transmissions could be heard. On all occasions, this was not a city to the south, in central Mexico, but towards the north, in the United States.¹⁷ When she was filling out paperwork for her radio concession, for example, a woman by the name of Rosa Carranza de Múzquiz envisioned building a "regional station that covers the Rio Grande."¹⁸ Múzquiz's cross-border vision seeped into station slogans, logos, and mottos across Mexico's northern borderlands. Found on the edges of stationary paper, they reaffirm the perspective some station owners had and prove that their quest to cross

¹⁴ *Diario Oficial*, 31 de agosto de 1931, "Ley sobre Vías Generales de Comunicación y Medios de Transporte."

¹⁵ Fernando Curiel, *La telaraña magnética y otros estudios radiofónicos* (México, DF: Ediciones Coyoacán S.A. de C.V., 1996), 297. *Diario Oficial*, 31 de agosto de 1931, "Ley sobre Vías Generales de Comunicación y Medios de Transporte," and *Diario Oficial*, 8 de Julio 1933, "Ley de Impuestos a las estaciones radiodifusoras."

¹⁶ Archivo General de la Nación, Ramo Presidentes, Fondo Abelardo L. Rodríguez (Hereafter AGN, ALR) 100572/Caja 002 (expediente 06/56)

¹⁷ Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes, Acervo, Informe Anual de la XEAW 1934.

¹⁸ AGN, SCOP, 22/131.6-(721.1)/12

borders with radio airwaves was possible. “The Voice of the Californias,” and “The Voice of the Pacific,” for instance, were the mottos of Tijuana’s XEAE and Ensenada’s XEG.¹⁹ In the state of Chihuahua, Ciudad Juárez’s XEWC claimed to be the “International Announcer,” while Reynosa station XED boasted that it was the “Voice of the Two Republics.”²⁰ The letterhead of another Reynosa station, XEAW, featured a map where lightning bolts shaped like radio signals leave the city and intermittently cover the continental United States.²¹ Indicating the geographic span of where XEAW’s programming could be heard, as the map did, was a sure way to let listeners or advertising clients know the power of the station.

A particular view of the border guided the actions of radio station owners. From Tijuana to Matamoros, entrepreneurs opened stations where they were at the center, not the periphery, of the space between Mexico and the United States. In their view, new stations were not simply on the edge of northern Mexico, or “just across the border” as the American border blasters promoted their businesses. At heart, radio station owners saw the border not as the periphery of their nation, or the boundary between Mexico and the U.S., but as the center of their operations.

Lastly, Mexican radio entrepreneurs had the Mexican population in the United States in mind decades before U.S. advertising agencies realized the value of the Spanish-language market. Small businessmen like Fernando Parra Briseño, for example, desired for his Tijuana station “to be heard among the population in Southern California, where millions of Mexicans exist.”²² Making contact with Mexican immigrants was the motivation one solicitor had behind securing a transmitting license across the border from Brownsville, Texas. This particular owner hoped his station would be “heard primarily *allende el Bravo* [on the other side of the Rio Grande], as there is a great number of Mexicans who are anxious to hear the voice of their *Patria* [Fatherland], but because of the distance and interference from the American stations, cannot find it.”²³

¹⁹ AGN, SCOP, SCOP 22/131.6(722)/16 and AGN, SCOP 22/131.6-(722)/17

²⁰ AGN, SCOP, 22/131.6-(721.4)/11

²¹ AGN, ALR, expediente 150304

²² AGN, SCOP, 22/131.6 (722)/23.2.

²³ AGN, SCOP, 22/131.6 (721.1)/14

Patriotism aside, Mexican immigrants living in the United States were, in fact, in a disadvantageous position regarding Spanish-language radio. To a Mexican immigrant family in the U.S. Southwest during the 1930s and 1940s, a radio receiver at home offered only sporadic Spanish-language music, speeches, or entertainment. Local English-language commercial stations provided the Mexican immigrant population Spanish-language programming, but it was limited. Mexican-led radio programs were broadcast over U.S. stations only at dawn or in the evenings and weekends until the mid-1940s.

In order to obtain a concession from SCOP, a series of steps had to be followed. First, would-be concession holders needed to make a refundable deposit of \$100 pesos at the *Banco de México*. This amount increased between 1931 and the mid-1940s, but it ensured that the paperwork would be processed. Second, an original copy of the owner's birth certificate, indicating that he or she had been born in Mexico, had to be mailed to SCOP. This was vital, as the Ministry sometimes rejected applications of naturalized Mexican citizens, or if the petitioner was unable to produce the original document. Diagrams of the equipment (transmitters, tubes, antennas, towers, etc.) had to be included in the application, approved and drafted by an engineer. Moreover, owners needed to produce a receipt verifying that the equipment belonged to them and corresponded with the sketches for the station.

To obtain a radio concession, SCOP also required a price list indicating how much each station would charge advertisers for commercials. A potential commercial radio station owner also had to submit a sketch of the city in his/her application, clearly indicating where the equipment would be placed and how far away this was from the center square. Even though the law did not set strict restrictions on the exact location of new stations, according to SCOP guidelines they had to be located outside of the city limits for aesthetic and urban development reasons. The large structures housing the antennas were eyesores, which could interfere with amateur stations, and were inconvenient for the growth of a small urban environment along the border. As towns

and cities grew during the 1930s and early 1940s, this became increasingly problematic.²⁴

Would-be-radio station owners had 90 days to collect the necessary materials and send them to SCOP offices in Mexico City. On average, it took several months, and sometimes over a year, from the time a solicitor submitted their paperwork until the station received its concession. The owner of station XEDJ, in Magdalena, Sonora, for example, waited ten months to hear back from SCOP about building “*El Portavoz de Sonora*,” a station he intended to open an hour’s drive from the U.S.-Mexico border.²⁵ And many, like the owner of XEFQ, began broadcasting before they received proper authorization from Mexico City.²⁶ Distance from the capital, the headquarters of SCOP, a slow and sometimes unreliable postal system, incomplete applications, disputes over assigned frequencies, failed inspections, and even global conflicts like the Second World War contributed to the wait time. For instance, when she was planning to open her station in Matamoros, Rosa Carranza de Múzquiz set out to buy a transmitter from the United States. As she was seeking to do so in 1941, she alleged that radio distribution warehouses had not been able to fill her request “because of the war.”²⁷ That same year, a radio technician in Coahuila responded to the scarcity of radio equipment in the United States by constructing the parts he needed himself.²⁸

Other bureaucratic hurdles, such as the overabundance of departments and offices within SCOP, also postponed concession approval time. SCOP relied on the Telegraph Department, a branch of the Ministry, to handle the technical side of new and existing stations. They assigned frequencies, determined the exact wavelength a station could operate on, and were responsible for the paperwork, laws, and permits needed to build new stations.²⁹ Often, communication between the Telegraph Department and

²⁴ AGN, SCOP, 22/131.6-(721.1)/12

²⁵ AGN, SCOP, 22/131.6-(721.5)/4

²⁶ AGN, SCOP, 22/131.6-(721.5)/7

²⁷ AGN, SCOP 22/131.6-(721.1)/12

²⁸ AGN, SCOP, 22/131.6-(721.3)/12

²⁹ Archivo General de la Nación, Ramo Presidentes, Fondo Obregón-Calles, Acuerdo Presidencial: Código Telegráfico y Telégrafos Nacionales Reglamento General. Capítulo II. Artículo 26.

other departments took several weeks, even though they were located in the same building.

Nonetheless, extending the right of access to the airwaves for individuals and establishing a path for them to follow provided a new opportunity many were eager to take, as there was much to gain from this venture. Yet the success of entrepreneurs did not rest solely on the Mexican government and SCOP. Radio stations were businesses, and their future depended on patrons - in this case, radio listeners - to survive. To ensure they had a steady and reliable audience, entrepreneurs positioned themselves at the crossroads between the two nations.

In order to reach these potential listeners, they focused on the content of their radio station programming. For example, in 1933, when the local economy in his hometown of Tijuana was suffering, a SCOP employee by the name of Isidro Salcido wrote to Mexican President Abelardo L. Rodríguez, claiming that broadcasting the riches of the Peninsula over the airwaves would help spur the city's suffering economy. His plan was to organize a "tourism hour" over local station XEAA that included government propaganda and tourist friendly commercials. The basis for Salcido's plea was summarized in the question, "What better avenue than radio to promote Baja California's beauty?"³⁰

Persuading visitors from the United States to travel to Mexico through the use of commercial programming was, in fact, a strategy used by radio entrepreneurs to increase listenership. And as the number of U.S. visitors to Mexico increased during the 1930s, tourist spots highlighting the beauty, cultural richness, and relative ease of traveling to Mexico were added to the daily programming of stations along the northern border.³¹ Radio station entrepreneurs knew that broadcast media easily carried messages across small or large distances, depending on the power of the transmitter. And as the interwar years wore on, they came to realize that tourism programming was

³⁰ AGN, ALR 573/21 caja 215

³¹ For more on U.S. tourism to Mexico see Dina Berger, *The Development of Mexico's Tourism Industry: Pyramids by Day, Martinis by Night*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), Dina Berger and Andrew Grant Wood, eds., *Holiday in Mexico: Critical Reflections on Tourism and Tourist Encounters* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), Nicholas Dagen Bloom, ed., *Adventures into Mexico: American Tourism beyond the Border* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006).

a viable way to attract listeners in the U.S. Southwest. Radiomen's efforts complemented the work of the tourist industry across Mexico. These programs, in a way, were aural companions to the era's travel agency brochures or landscape sketches exalting Mexico's beauty.

Tourism programming by commercial stations along Mexico's northern border was often supported, and sometimes directly funded, by nongovernmental organizations whose interests mirrored the patriotic campaigns of the government. In the late 1930s, for example, the *Asociación Mexicana de Estaciones Radiodifusoras Comerciales*, the Mexican Association of Commercial Radio Stations, or AMERC, insisted that all commercial radio stations in Mexico use the airwaves for the betterment of Mexican society. AMERC believed that stations along Mexico's northern border, in particular, had a duty to transmit patriotic and tourist-oriented programming to the United States because of their location, at the crossroads of the two nations.³²

There were other ways that Mexican commercial radio stations kept audiences in the United States tuned into their programming. Often, these strategies came about when the government wanted to regulate the radio industry. In 1936, SCOP mandated that all commercial radio stations employ only Mexican citizens.³³ For stations along the border this was more of a challenge than those in central Mexico or the Yucatán Peninsula, since U.S. born artists and operators frequently crossed the border into Mexico and performed or worked at Mexican stations. To resolve this issue, station owners sought Mexican-born broadcasters who had lived in the United States. The hope on behalf of owners and managers was that during their stay in the U.S., they had acquired the correct pronunciation of English-language words. For instance, a person who could relay the following message, from station XEAF, without hesitation, was sought after: "Visit the Romantic Twin Cities of Nogales, Where Mexican Hospitality Meets American Enterprise," and then in Spanish, "*Donde la Confianza, Cordialidad y Respeto Mutuo de Ambos Nogales Brinda Facilidades y Atractivos Ejemplares en la Frontera.*"³⁴

³² AGN, SCOP, 22/131.6-(721.3)/35-4

³³ AGN, ALR, 573.7/9 caja 218

³⁴ Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes, Acervo, Informe Anual de la XEAF, 1934.

A broadcaster who could speak both languages flawlessly was useful and also an action not reprimanded by SCOP. Article 72 of the 1936 law stated that if a Mexican-born broadcaster had the ability to speak in English and be understood by native English speakers, he or she had the right to do so.³⁵ This provision prompted many to seek jobs in local radio stations as broadcasters. José María Sanata Peña, who had worked in the Tijuana telegraph office for twenty years, for instance, asked for a broadcaster post in the city because he knew “enough English.” Sanata Peña, who moved to Tijuana in the mid-1920s, adapted to his surroundings, learned English, and thus considered himself a viable candidate for the job.³⁶

Mexican states bordering the U.S., such as Sonora, specialized in grooming Mexican-born bilingual broadcasters. Between the late 1930s and the early 1980s, Cananea station XEFQ offered amateur broadcasters the opportunity to join their “Broadcasting School.” Station owner Pedro L. Díaz believed that commercial radio outside of Mexico City was different, and thus it was important to train broadcasters in the local lexicon.³⁷ Díaz’s theory falls in line with Mexican historian Fátima Fernández Christlieb’s claim that, since the 1920s, the radio industry counted on other regional nuclei outside of Mexico City, and that, depending on their location, radio businessmen and broadcasters used strategic language in their programming.³⁸

Notable bilingual broadcasters also emerged in the state of Chihuahua. Jesus Soltero Lozoya learned to speak English in the early 1920s when he moved to Los Angeles with his family to work in the fields. In 1927, when the Lozoyas returned to Mexico, Jesus took his fascination with U.S. sports back to his home state. After his dream of becoming a professional baseball player in the U.S. was shattered by an injury, Lozoya approached the owner of XELO in the early 1930s and asked for a job as a sports broadcaster. The owner willingly accepted the proposition, and the career of *El*

³⁵ AGN, SCOP, 22/131.6-(721.3)/35-4

³⁶ AGN, SCOP, 22/131.6 (722)/13 f

³⁷ Julio Sosa Ballesteros, *XEFQ “La Voz de la Ciudad del Cobre” Radio 980 62 Aniversario Edición Especial* (Editorial El Autentico, México, 1999), 12.

³⁸ Fátima Fernández Christlieb, *La Radio Mexicana: Centro Y Regiones* (México, DF: J. Pablos Editor, 1991), 13, 19.

Gallito Madrugador (The Early Morning Rooster), one of Chihuahua's legendary sports announcers, began in the border town of Ciudad Juárez.³⁹

Broadcasters who moved back and forth between Spanish and English with ease, like the *Gallito Madrugador*, contributed to the success of border stations because they had an easier time pronouncing names, reading commercials, or, in his case, calling plays of a sport that was inherently American but widely popular in cities and towns across northern Mexico. This feature - the bilingual broadcaster - gave commercial radio along the border a distinct identity and set it apart from the rest of Mexico. Moreover, bilingual broadcasters furthered the vision and goal of radio station owners by establishing a relationship with Mexicans living in the U.S. Southwest. Lozoya, for example, was proud that XELO was "the teacher of the air for thousands of compatriots living in the United States."⁴⁰ Luis Castro López, who was a broadcaster in Mexicali, also noted that the station he worked for served a social function in farm worker communities in California's Imperial Valley. On occasion, the support of Mexican immigrants kept his station on the air. Castro López recalled that, "Farmers...would come and bring me money...so that I could pay the electricity bill, the rent and buy records."⁴¹ Cross-border collaborations such as these placed radio stations at the locus of transnational communities and cross-border cultural ties, and, along with strategic programming, became a winning solution for commercial stations along Mexico's northern border.

Government Control of Commercial Radio

Mexican political leaders who ascended to power in the 1920s commanded the nation's governing bodies to lend a hand in nation-wide reconstruction campaigns. For their part, SCOP helped take the revolutionary message from the capital city, the center of political power, to areas beyond central Mexico by creating laws requiring

³⁹ Marcos Aldana Aguirre, *El gallito madrugador: la vida de Jesús Soltero Lozoya* (México: Ciudad Juárez, 2001), 95.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Manuel Ortiz Marín and Miguel Antonio Meza Estrada, *Testimonios de la radio en Mexicali* (Mexicali, BC: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 1994), 8,11.

commercial stations to broadcast government speeches, bulletins, and important messages on a daily basis. But to monitor day to day operations, SCOP also created a system with built-in supervisors, men known as *interventores*. An appointed government overseer, the *interventor* was a type of broker who intervened on behalf of SCOP at each station, listening to daily programming and enforcing the law through reports and fines, as needed. The actions of *interventores* across Mexico's borderlands demonstrate the challenges and complexities of reigning in and standardizing commercial radio stations far away from the capital city. Some were obedient civil servants, others clashed repeatedly with station owners, and a number of them took the law into the own hands.

The "eyes and ears" of SCOP, *interventores* were key figures in commercial radio operations in Mexico alongside concession owners, operators, singers, and managers. And in a similar vein, they are difficult to judge as a unit. Some, like Anacleto Díaz, an *interventor* in Nogales, Sonora, made their own rules and perpetuated the region's uneven growth and it's lack of cohesion through extortion. Other *interventores* positioned radio station owners against the government, while some worked diligently and followed the law as closely as possible, sometimes putting their career on the line in the process. Tension, compromise, and struggles between *interventores*, SCOP, and the federal government lie at the heart of transnational radio's history along the border during the twentieth century.

Paid by radio station owners but appointed by SCOP, *interventores* were assigned important duties and navigated a peculiar world in between SCOP and station owners. They were different than SCOP inspectors, who interacted with *interventores* but were stationed in Mexico City and traveled on assignment to the provinces. Inspectors had a similar set of responsibilities, but more power. To an entrepreneur opening a new station, they were indispensable. A favorable inspector's report, for instance, was necessary before a new station went on the air.⁴² But for the most part, their presence across Mexico's northern border was sporadic and scheduled, only

⁴² AGN, SCOP, 22/131.6-(721.5)/5

visiting cities to conduct annual technical reviews and audits, or when a station was blatantly violating the law and needed to be closed down.⁴³

SCOP commanded *interventores* to oversee stations and draft reports when they observed violations of the law. These affidavits/official statements, or *actas*, were sent to Mexico City and could potentially shut stations down, or at least impose heavy fines. SCOP also required that *interventores* submit copies of station programming to SCOP's offices in Mexico City, which had to be done by listening intently to daily broadcasts, and writing down what was transmitted each hour. The task of listening to radio programming, especially recorded information when that became more common in the 1940s, was essential; SCOP believed that to truly control the content of transmissions, "reviewing the synopsis of a drama or a script was insufficient."⁴⁴ Hence, it was crucial that they live in the same town or city where the station was headquartered, or at least in a nearby location where the transmissions could be picked up with ease.

Interventores were assigned broad complex tasks and expected to exhibit a wide range of knowledge, including technical, business, organizational skills, and a full understanding of broadcast media legislation. For example, they needed bookkeeping skills because they collected statistics, data, and were responsible for creating an archive with the bulletins, announcements, and incoming official correspondence of their assigned station. However, they also needed to be authoritative and stern in enforcing the law when and if they listened to a violation, since SCOP gave them freedom to enforce penalties.⁴⁵ Sometimes, SCOP even authorized them to decide upon punishments when a station broke the law. After an *interventor* reported that Tijuana station XEAF broke the law by airing commercials for alcoholic beverages, which was strictly prohibited, for example, SCOP officials in Mexico City told him to carefully observe further programming and either file an official report, or ask the station to cancel those advertisements.⁴⁶

⁴³ AGN, SCOP, 722/20

⁴⁴ AGN, SCOP, 22/131.6-(721.2)/4

⁴⁵ Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes, Acervo, Acervo, 590/876

⁴⁶ AGN, SCOP, 22/131.6 (721.5)/5

Interventores resemble other actors in the history of the U.S.-Mexico border in that they crafted their own identity in the midst of circumstances inside and outside of their control. In the nineteenth century, for instance, a U.S. customs guard by the name of Emilio Kosterlitzky, who was a legendary figure known for helping border elites fight bandits, reconfigured the border on his “own terms” when the Mexican Revolution changed the landscape of northern Mexico. He was accepted as a “border citizen” as historian Samuel Truett describes, in part for “his ability to navigate informal networks of custom and kinship.”⁴⁷ In the same way that Kosterlitzky used the boundaries between the United States and Mexico to his own advantage and depended on local power players to carry out his work, so, too, *interventores* were forced to be familiar with the local culture and often took advantage of the international border for personal reasons. Rooted in the local culture, the presence of the *interventores*, perhaps more than their effective surveillance of radio stations, led to the formation of a region with growing ties to the United States.

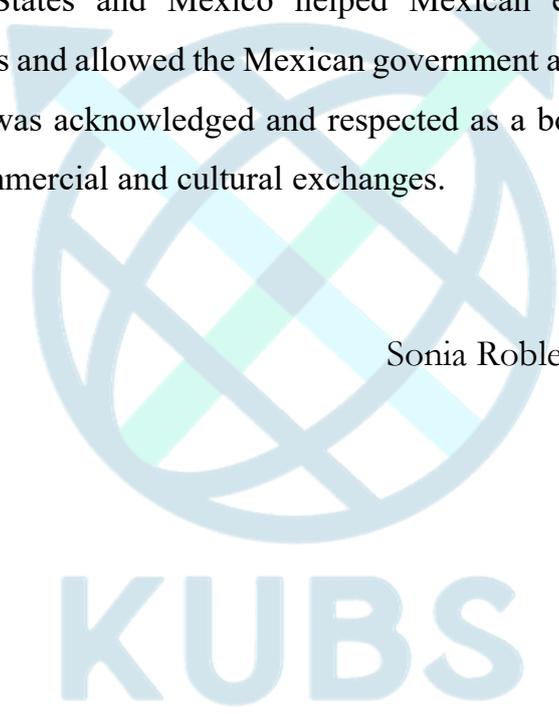
Conclusion

Two factors led to a decline in cross-border programming by Mexican radio stations in the late 1940s. The first was the creation of *Radio Programas de México* (Mexican Radio Programs) or RPM, Mexico’s first national network based in Mexico City. RPM consolidated the artistic, commercial and cultural broadcasting activities in the country. In turn, the influence of border stations slowly began to change, as, in order to broadcast, they had to connect with Mexico City, either by telephone during a live broadcast, or through a recorded program that arrived via mail. Moreover, the national networks led to a decline in trans-border broadcasting because their stronger signals allowed them to reach audiences in the United States directly. The second factor was the emergence of 24-hour Spanish-language stations in the U.S. Southwest. Owned and operated by first and second generation Mexican immigrants, these appeared in the

⁴⁷ Samuel Truett, “Transnational Warrior: Emilio Kosterlitzky and the Transformation of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, 1873-1928,” in *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 243.

years following the Second World War in greater numbers. The culmination of these events did not bring an end to transnational cultural and music exchanges, of course, but did contribute to a decline in Mexican local radio stations along the northern border.

Given current debates on the use of technology and mass media to interfere in the outcome of presidential elections, question the integrity of leaders, define local and national identities, ignite social movements, and monitor human behavior, it is important to note that historically, media such as radio has not considered political borders. On the contrary, during the 1930s and early 1940s, the international boundary between the United States and Mexico helped Mexican entrepreneurs establish transnational businesses and allowed the Mexican government and SCOP to assert their authority. The border was acknowledged and respected as a boundary, but it was not seen as a barrier to commercial and cultural exchanges.



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