Middle Atlantic Review of Latin American Studies, 2021
Vol. 5, No. 2, 40-59

Rock and Roll and Telenovelas on Public Television? Cultural Shifts from Luis Echeverría to José López Portillo

Melixa Abad-Izquierdo
Farmingdale State College
izquiem@farmingdale.edu

This article examines an instance of how the relationship between commercial television in Mexico and the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) was recalibrated each time a new president took office. One important example of this calibration occurred in the presidential transition from Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970–1976) to José López Portillo (1976–1982). In 1972, Echeverría Álvarez created state-run Channel 13 that hired the experienced commercial television producer Luis de Llano Palmer, who by 1977 was fired because of his efforts to bring popular culture to public television. The example demonstrates the fractions within the television industry and the power relations between the media and the state. This article examines the power struggle and cultural negotiations that played out between the state and broadcasters during the 1970s and shows how the creation of the Radio, Television and Cinematography (RTC) government agency and Channel 13 was the state's attempt to gain stronger influence in the increasingly powerful commercial television industry.

Keywords: Mexican television, censorship, Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), Luis del Llano Palmer, Luis Echeverría, José López Portillo

Este artículo examina una instancia de cómo la relación entre la televisión comercial en México y el Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) se recalibraba cada vez que un nuevo presidente asumía el cargo. Un ejemplo significante de esta calibración ocurrió en la transición presidencial de Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970–1976) a José López Portillo (1976–1982). En 1972, Echeverría Álvarez creó el canal estatal Canal 13, que contrató al experimentado productor de televisión comercial Luis de Llano Palmer, quien en 1977 fue despedido debido a sus esfuerzos por llevar la cultura popular a la televisión pública. Su ejemplo demuestra las fracciones dentro de la industria de la televisión y las relaciones de poder entre los medios de comunicación y el Estado. Este artículo examina la lucha por el poder y las negociaciones culturales que se llevaron a cabo entre el Estado y las emisoras durante la década de 1970 y muestra cómo la creación de la agencia oficial de Radio, Televisión y Cinematografía (RTC) y del Canal 13 fue un intento del Estado de

DOI: 10.23870/marlas.295

ejercer influencia más fuerte en la cada vez más potente industria de la televisión comercial.

Palabras clave: televisión mexicana, censura, Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), Luis del Llano Palmer, Luis Echeverría, José López Portillo

Introduction

The relationship between television and Mexico's political economy can be traced back to the beginnings of the medium and the ways in which different Mexican administrations impacted media policy (Paxman 2014, 299). President Miguel Alemán's approval of a commercial model for television in 1948 benefited members of the business class such as Rómulo O'Farrill and Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta. Both their families were involved in media: the O'Farrills had personal ties to the Alemán family and owned the newspaper *Novedades*; Azcárraga was the owner of a radio network. However, intellectuals such as Salvador Novo, one of the authors of the report on television ordered by Alemán, did not support commercial television (Novo and González Camarena 1948). The decision to implement commercial television responded to the administration's modernization policies and the development of a consumer culture. Furthermore, business interests benefited from state investment in infrastructure such as roads and telecommunications. It was implicit that commercial television would represent the official ideals of national identity and traditional gendered roles in its programming, but this tacit understanding presented a challenge to the television stations, particularly in the context of the Cold War and national dissent in the 1960s. News coverage of national and international issues was often the source of disagreements between the government and broadcasters. For example, the depictions of the president, the Cuban Revolution of 1959, and the student protests in 1968 that led to the Tlatelolco massacre were salient issues in the tension between the state and broadcasters (González de Bustamante 2012, 167).

Stronger Grip on Television: Authoritarianism, Broadcasting and Culture

The meaning of culture for the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) government is probably best expressed in Article 5 of the Federal Law of Radio and Television (1960), according to which radio and television were to have political and social purposes, helping to strengthen national unity and integration among the various sectors of society. In effect, the endeavor of broadcasting was to "help to raise the cultural level of the people and preserve national characteristics, customs, traditions of the country, its language, and promote the values of Mexican nationality" (Ley

Federal de Radio y Televisión 1960).[1] For the administrations of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964–1970) and his secretary of interior and successor Luis Echeverría (1970–1976), strengthening national integration, and with it the legitimization and power of the PRI in Mexico, were unquestionable goals. For the state, "culture" was little more than a code word for a broader effort to keep the reins of Mexico in the hands of the PRI, while for the business class and intellectuals the meaning and purpose of "culture" was much more fragmented. The business owners in charge of broadcasting wanted contents that made audiences, and thus sponsors, willing to pay for commercial spots. Dramas and telenovelas were to appeal to a broad audience. Intellectuals considered commercial television lowbrow or worse, as a vehicle that was bringing foreign values.

In December 1968, as part of this complicated performance of power and influence, the government passed two aggressive bills that empowered the state in its relationship to the broadcasting industry: Article 9, requiring free airtime for the state, and Article 16, regarding taxation. The purpose of these measures was to assert the state's authority over the television and radio industries. Telesistema, and particularly Emilio Azcárraga Milmo—son of Azcárraga Vidaurreta—had an important role in extraofficial negotiations with the Mexican state after passage of these bills. According to an article in the *New York Times*, Azcárraga Milmo declared that "the law was unacceptable and that negotiations were under way to change it" (qtd. in Giniger 1969, 30). The declaration exemplifies the ways in which broadcasters appeared obedient to the state in public discourse, but in private still had the power to negotiate the conditions of their obedience.

Echeverría was the presidential candidate of the PRI in November 1969. Since the 1940s, the rule had held that the PRI candidate would become the next president. While Díaz Ordaz was a right-leaning moderate, Echeverría's presidency would move toward populism. Most analysts explained this shift as an aftereffect of the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre and, paradoxically, the PRI's own subsequent efforts—particularly those of Echeverría, who was, with Díaz Ordaz, suspected as the intellectual author of the massacre—to improve relations between the state and students, intellectuals, and the urban middle class. As president, Echeverría increased the budget of the national university, redistributed land to peasants, and adopted a friendly position toward leftist governments in Latin America. He went so far as to allow the creation of opposing parties in an effort to demonstrate a façade of democracy (Schmidt 1991). Print media were allowed to discuss and criticize scandals that occurred in public institutions as part of this democratic performance (Freije 2015).

[1] The exact words were paraphrased often in speeches by state officials on the functions of television. My translations throughout, unless otherwise indicated.

Echeverría created the Secretariat of Broadcasting (Secretaría de Radiodifusión), a new governmental office attached to the Secretariat of Communication and Transportation (Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transporte). Many of the responsibilities assigned to the latter secretariat under the 1960 radio and television law were now passed to this office (Fernández Christlieb 2005, 119–120), led by Miguel Álvarez Acosta, a seasoned and adaptable "cultural bureaucrat" (León Palacios 2017). The term "cultural bureaucrat" refers to a career administrator working in culture-related offices: education, arts, broadcasting, etc. These bureaucrats often had responsibilities to work directly with artists and content creators and served as their intermediaries with the government. The term is useful here because it ties the role of the cultural bureaucrat to mediation. Throughout his career Álvarez Acosta was assigned to different positions linked to the cultural policies of the Mexican state, such as the National Institute of Art and the cultural affairs office for the Secretariat of Foreign Relations.

The creation of the new Secretariat of Broadcasting can be considered from two opposing angles: broadcasters would benefit from having a governmental office to deal directly with their needs and concerns; however, the office also permitted closer and more direct attention to the activities of broadcasters regarding programming content and compliance in the execution of duties toward the state, for example, in the dedication of 12.5 percent of airtime free to the state. In 1974, six years after the passage of Articles 9 and 16, the secretary of Communications Álvarez Acosta complained in *Comunicaciones y Transportes*, the official journal of the secretariat, about the difficulties of enforcing such obligations.[2] Noting the complexities of the changing relationship between the government and the broadcasters—especially the ways in which the latter avoided compliance with the law and the presence of a certain amount of complicity from members of the government—Álvarez Acosta wrote: "This [evasion] is usually done amicably, including setting conditions that the state has tolerated to avoid extreme measures. But there has been obstruction, from arrogant to timid or friendly, that prevents compliance with the law" (Álvarez Acosta 1974).

The concessionaires' part of the agreement involved programming improvements, and the state reserved the right to revise the agreement every five years to ensure the stations' compliance. Although the final measure was not as powerful as originally intended, it did imply stronger state intervention. The stations played along, all the while trying to avoid taxation. At the same time, the state waived the threat of

[2] The dynamic described by Álvarez Acosta is an excellent example of the *dictablanda* character of the PRI regime. See Gillingham and Smith, *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938–1968* (2014). This invented word plays on "dictadura," where "-dura" is also a form of the word meaning "hard," and its contrast, "blanda," meaning "soft."

MARLAS 5(2), 2021, DOI: 10.23870/marlas.295

nationalization it had used repeatedly whenever it felt the need to expand its sphere of power. The role of cultural bureaucrats like Álvarez Acosta demonstrates the disagreements between the business class administering commercial television and intellectuals who were part of the PRI state apparatus.

Brewing Tensions

In the 1970s, significant changes occurred in Mexico's media landscape. Television competition ended between Telesistema Mexicano (hereafter Telesistema), which operated Channels 2, 4, and 5, and the independently-owned television stations Channel 8 (Televisión Independiente de México) and Channel 13. The two independent channels had debuted in 1968, sparking a competition that was dubbed "la guerra de canales"—the war between networks—by some journalists (Barbieri 1972, 3). At that time, the competition was stimulating, because Mexican television had been monopolized by Telesistema since 1955. Between 1968 and 1972, Mexican networks produced and imported varied, attractive content. However, by 1972, Grupo Monterrey, the organization behind Channel 8, was open to merging with Telesistema. Both companies claimed that the cost of competition was too high. The merger created Televisa in early 1973, bringing back the O'Farrill and Azcárraga families as the dominant voices in commercial television (Fernández and Paxman 2013; Niblo 1999).

Meanwhile, the independent Channel 13 was expropriated from its owner, Francisco Aguirre, and turned into the nation's second state-run channel. The first such channel was Channel 11, which had been run by the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN) since its beginnings in 1958. The creation of a second state-run channel was an effort to resolve continuous arguments about lack of cultural content in television.

In 1973, the state directly administered Channel 13, and Telesistema had merged with Channel 8, thereby forming Televisa. The tenuous relationship between the Echeverría administration and broadcasters did not improve during this period. Televisa developed a tense relationship with the administration, and the two remained suspicious of each other.[3] That suspicion was intensified by public acts of violence, some politically motivated. Eugenio Garza Sada, the patriarch of Grupo Monterrey, a powerful Monterrey business organization that owned Channel 8, was the victim of a failed kidnapping attempt that ended in murder. Violent kidnappings were not limited to media executives; Fernando Aranguren Castiello, a prominent businessman from Guadalajara, was also kidnapped and eventually murdered.

[3] For reasons that are unclear in the documentation, the director general of national security had a ranch property of the Azcárraga family under surveillance.

MARLAS 5(2), 2021, DOI: 10.23870/marlas.295

Aranguren's kidnapping occurred at the same time as that of Anthony Duncan Williams, the honorary British consul, who survived his captivity (Fritz 2012).

These high-profile incidents, orchestrated by urban guerrilla groups, illustrate the level of violence and instability unleashed by the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre, which touched many aspects of Mexican society and most importantly dealt political and moral blows to the PRI. Activities of rural guerrilla movements peaked at the same time that the PRI was attempting post-Tlatelolco reconciliations with groups such as disgruntled, urban, middle-class youth, sectors of the intellectual community, and the urban middle class in general. The PRI embraced strong repressive measures from torture to disappearances to eliminate rural and urban resistance, but none of them improved the dismal regard for the state. Some in the PRI thought that control of a television station could help the party repair its national image. However, business owners blamed Echeverría for not being able to control the violence, and tensions continued for the rest of his presidency.

Luis de Llano Palmer, Public Television, and Private Inroads

Underlying the merger of Channels 2, 4, and 8 to create Televisa and the conversion of Channel 13 into a state-run outlet was a tacit agreement between the state and Televisa. The state's role in this agreement was to allow Televisa to continue as a private company, so long as it did not challenge the power of the state. The two streams could then coexist: Channel 13 would be a space for intellectuals, providing cultural content programming to appease the sectors of Mexican society that had long complained about the lack of it on commercial television (Novo and González Camarena 1948); and Televisa's role was to continue to appeal to the urban middle class and increasingly to working classes acquiring television sets.

That this agreement was a tacit one did not shield it from conflicting interpretations. In this context emerges a cautionary tale of the dangers of overstepping such an agreement. The subject of the tale is Luis de Llano Palmer (1919–2012) who was hired to work at the new Channel 13 after a long career in commercial radio and television. De Llano Palmer was a Spaniard who arrived in Mexico in 1940, escaping the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), where he fought on the Republican side against the nationalists whose victory allowed the rise of Generalísimo Francisco Franco. His first experience in Mexican media was in radio, at station XEQ owned by Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta, where he wrote scripts for the successful radio show, *El monje loco*. Later in the 1940s, he moved to XEW, the most important radio network in Mexico and perhaps Latin America, also owned by Azcárraga Vidaurreta. Additionally, Palmer had the opportunity to work for the

international division of the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) in New York. By 1952, when television broadcasting began in Mexico, De Llano Palmer was an experienced producer in radio and theater. He participated in television's early development, producing and directing teleteatros and eventually telenovelas for Televisa (Díaz Moreno 2010; Kennedy 1956, 39). To this day, his children and grandchildren are involved in television, theater, and music.

After conflicts at Televisa, de Llano Palmer was hired as a television producer at Channel 13, where he went on to play different roles in production and programming. His experience was an invaluable asset to the new channel, whose employees were mostly young and inexperienced (De la Lama and de la Lama 2001). However, in the fall of 1977 he became the target of accusations that claimed he had undertaken a commercialization of the ostensibly public station. Particularly incendiary was the acceptance of commercial advertising, the inclusion of telenovelas, and the broadcasting of rock music performances in regular prime-time shows (Basurto 1977). His dismissal was made public and the circumstances narrated in detail in the pages of the newspaper *Excélsior* and the weekly magazine *Proceso*.[4] The newspaper went so far as to name Pablo F. Marentes González—at the time the director of Channel 11, the other state-run channel—as party to the campaign against de Llano Palmer.[5] The *Excélsior* article is not signed and depicts the firing as a direct result of machinations by officials at Channel 13 who opposed the inclusion of entertainment such as telenovelas and rock and roll concerts.

According to articles on his dismissal, the work environment at Channel 13 had been hostile toward de Llano Palmer going back to at least July of 1977 (Guzmán 1977). When a letter addressed to Pablo Marentes González from the radio and television workers union (STIRT) accused de Llano of union busting because he allegedly hired from outside the union, de Llano denied the accusation. In early September 1977, a press bulletin by Rafael Enriquez Lizaola, head of the Channel 13 press department, circulated with the title "Scandal at Channel 13." In addition to the accusations already noted, it included a mocking complaint about the hiring of actress Irma Serrano for the main role in the teleteatro *Hoy invita la Güera*, by Federico S. Inclán.[6]

[4] *Proceso* was created by employees who left the newspaper *Excélsior* after a labor dispute.

[5] Pablo F. Marentes González was the son of Tomás Marentes Miranda (1904–1991), a PRI politician and controversial governor of Yucatán (1952–1953) with ties to Miguel Alemán. Marentes González later became the director of Channel 13 and the general director of the Mexican Institute of Television. It is safe to state that he belongs to the PRI and the intelligentsia (Camp 1995, 434). Marentes was a cultural bureaucrat who, like Álvarez Acosta, survived different PRI administrations. More recently Pablo Marantes González was named consul general in Austin, Texas, by the administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (Arvizu and Alcántara 2019).

[6] One of the reviews published at the time of the premiere described it as containing "subtle allusions to current politics, displaced onto another time" ("alusiones finas a la política actual,

MARLAS 5(2), 2021, DOI: 10.23870/marlas.295

A farce originally published in 1953 and staged in 1955, its depiction of Antonio López de Santa Anna, the legendary nineteenth-century general and dictator, as an opportunistic politician was controversial.

Hoy invita la Güera criticizes the Mexican state, but, apparently to avoid censorship, it is set in an earlier era, the period just before the Pastry War (1838–1839).[7] The plot was loosely based on the historical figure María Ignacia Rodríguez de Velasco (1778–1850), an upper-class woman prominent during the War of Independence (1810–1821), who financially supported independence. She allegedly had romances with important figures such as Agustín de Iturbide (1794–1876), general of the royalist forces, later rebel, president, and dictator of Mexico after Independence. Many of the historical details about Rodríguez de Velasco are difficult to confirm (Arrom 2019).

Irma Serrano was an actress and singer, well known in part because of her affair with Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, the married former president (Robledo and Serrano 1978, 138–155). After the end of their affair, Serrano continued her career and gained further notoriety by playing risqué characters in dramas such as *Naná* (1976), originally written by Emile Zola and later adapted for theater, and *Lucrecia de Borgia* presented in 1977 (Rabell 1977). Theater critics considered both plays of poor quality, though they were a financial success, in part, they said, because Serrano appeared naked. Serrano, also an entrepreneur, bought her own theater where she produced plays that were avant-garde and controversial. It could be argued that she was a savvy businesswoman who provided an escape valve to the conservative Catholic society.

The possibility of public television broadcasting a story about a woman who allegedly had affairs with important politicians in the nineteenth century, played by the actual mistress of one of the most controversial presidents in Mexican history, was too much. The reason for his casting of Irma Serrano is unknown, and of the many accusations made against him, it is the only one de Llano Palmer did not deny. Decades later in an interview, Carlos Alazraky, who worked for de Llano Palmer, stated that the main sources of contention were the broadcasting of a Joe Cocker performance and the hiring of Irma Serrano (Monjarás 2017). De Llano was proud to mention the high ratings of his productions, and Alazraky was a publicist who later became the owner of one of the most important public relations firms in the country. Hiring Serrano—clearly a person who did not shy away from scandal—to play the role

refiriéndola a la de otros tiempos"; Solana, 1955). A second reviewer stated: "For some time this excellent piece by Inclán has gone from theater to theater, looking for a brave 'producer' to stage it" ("Hace tiempo que esta excelente pieza teatral de Inclán rueda de teatro en teatro, buscando 'productor' valiente que la montara"; Maria y Campos 1955).

[7] A conflict between France and Mexico. It takes its name from an incident with a French pastry chef whose store was damaged by Mexican soldiers.

MARLAS 5(2), 2021, DOI: 10.23870/marlas.295

of "La Güera" would bring media attention and attract larger audiences. However, the use of such commercial strategies at the state-run channel clearly bothered segments of the cultural bureaucrats aligned with the PRI.

Significantly, the incident involving Channel 13 revolved in part around two women: the historical figure of La Güera Rodríguez (1778–1851), who lived during the transition from colony to republic and whose lifestyle was criticized, mainly because of her alleged affairs, and Irma Serrano, considered a low-class performer who was romantically involved with the president blamed for ordering the Tlatelolco massacre. The television station became a space for intellectuals and individuals opposed to commercial television who considered Serrano a valid target (albeit one that would suffer fewer consequences than would de Llano Palmer), based on the political sins of her former lover. In this sense, the situation recalls the use of women, especially mistresses, as deflectors of criticism directed at male heads of state. Nevertheless, the possibility of current criticism shifted onto a past president was a controversial proposition. After all, Channel 13 was created as an effort by the PRI to coopt segments of the intelligentsia.

These issues were not perceived as merely ideological differences among coworkers. A turn toward violence appeared in a physical altercation between Carlos Alazraky and Rafael Enríquez Lizaola, the Channel 13 press department chief. According to reports in *Excélsior* and *Proceso*, Alazraky, a close collaborator of de Llano Palmer, confronted Enriquez Lizaola, and as the exchange became heated, Alazraky slapped Enriquez Lizaola. It was this altercation that received the attention of the press and publicly revealed the disagreement about the casting of Irma Serrano and the dismissal of de Llano Palmer.

The firing happened in 1977—a transition year in which the new administration of President José Lopéz Portillo (1976–1982) was choosing political appointees for state positions, including the head of Channel 13. The disagreement thus brought uncertainty for all employees in administrative positions, and the conflict that already existed was heightened by concern over possible changes to come. Early in the year, *Proceso* published an op-ed column about cultural institutions in which the author lamented the end of the relationship between the state and the nation's intellectual circles.[8] The column described the presidency of Díaz Ordaz as anti-intellectual and indicated that Echeverría had used intellectuals only to repair the legitimacy of the party after the state repression. The funds allocated for state television were part of the larger foreign policy of *tercermundismo* (Third Worldism) that Echeverría cultivated (Zolov 2020).

[8] Jorge Hernández Campos (1977). The author was a writer and founder of *Proceso* and *Unomásuno*.

The *Proceso* piece also stated that López Portillo was entering the presidency at a time of crisis for cultural institutions and suggested that this crisis was in part due to the economic crisis. The article decried the lack of a common denominator among institutions and segments of the population, citing among them the Museum of Modern Art, Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, the Zona Rosa, and indigenous communities, and paraphrased historian Daniel Cosío Villegas regarding the importance of recognizing common interests and putting national interests before foreign ones. Despite this reference, the *Proceso* author admitted weaknesses in Cosío Villegas's ideas of nationalism: it was created by the elite that emerged from the Revolution—the urban and middle classes—and his ideas of nationalism did not correspond to the realities of Mexico. The article concluded with a call to the government for concrete policies on culture. It also specified the ambitions and hopes of intellectuals and individuals working in cultural institutions for the new president.[9] In the long term, the transition from Echeverría to López Portillo indicated the beginning of neoliberal economic policies. This change meant that to receive help from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Mexico needed to implement austerity measures and move away from the economic populism/nationalism that characterized the early years of the Echeverría administration (Sheppard 2016). By 1976, the price of oil dropped, and amid an economic crisis, months before the end of his presidency, Echeverría implemented austerity measures.

Analyzing the dismissal of de Llano Palmer discloses division among cultural institutions and the Mexican government. The incident brings to light several conflicts within Mexican television during the 1970s. Some officials at the state-run channel were unhappy with de Llano Palmer's intention to bring popular culture to public television.[10] In de Llano Palmer's defense, the telenovelas and musical shows presented on Channel 13 were different from those that appeared on commercial Televisa. Most of the Channel 13 telenovelas were adaptations of literary works, and, for the most part, the actors participating in them were considered dedicated to their work, with careers spanning theater and movies as well as television. Often, these actors came from the experimental theater movement of the 1960s and 1970s (De la Lama and de la Lama 2001).

Nonetheless, de Llano Palmer stood accused. He had cast one of his own daughters in several Channel 13 productions, opening the way to denunciations of nepotism. The inclusion of foreign music shows, some of which included rock and roll

[9] Hernández Campos (1977, 40) wrote that "democratización y difusión de cultura corren pareja" (democratization and cultural promotion go hand in hand).
[10] For more on theoretical discussions of popular culture, see Schelling (2004) and Bueno and Caesar (1998).

MARLAS 5(2), 2021, DOI: 10.23870/marlas.295

performers, could also be traced to a de Llano Palmer family connection: his son, also named Luis, Luis de Llano Macedo, was one of the music producers involved in Mexico's rock scene of the late 1960s. Moreover, he had filmed the notorious Avándaro music festival (September 1971), which was attended by hundreds of thousands of Mexican youths and was perceived as a political challenge to the Echeverría repression. Avándaro was a three-day rock festival where national bands performed. The number of young people attending reminded the government of the 1968 protest.

The aftermath of this festival brought the unofficial banning of rock and roll from Mexican radio, television, and public events (Zolov 1999). Even the presentation of rock shows on state-run television, whether taped in the United States or elsewhere, became risky. In fact, the most controversial performances that included rock music were not primarily festival productions, but taped US variety shows that often included music of other genres as well, such as folk music and pop. These shows were part of the prime-time lineup, and presenting foreign rock performers in this time slot was perceived by the state authorities as a particular challenge to the unofficial ban. The government considered these music programs hostile to the mission of the state channel. However, in an extensive interview, de Llano Palmer had declared: "I don't understand the rhythms. I've never heard Joe Crocker sing, but I have no right to deny his existence" (qtd. in Guzmán 1977).[11] He explained also that as a media person, he understood that to achieve high ratings the channel had to open up to new musical trends and to the idea that rock and roll, pop, and folk were creating new genres.

Several articles indicate that Enríquez Lizaola allied with Marentes González to organize the campaign against de Llano Palmer that ended in his firing. Both were cultural bureaucrats who had been involved in television and other media for many years, but they apparently felt no fellowship with de Llano Palmer, whom they considered to represent commercial interests ("Se abrirá una investigación..." 1977; Basurto 1977). For them, such entertainment was unsophisticated. To complicate the ideological disagreements, there were administrative issues. In part because of financial constraints, the administration of Channel 13 was quite chaotic, resulting in contradictory policies and general instability. From the time the channel was acquired by the state, it had had several directors, not all of whom were knowledgeable in the medium. In his declarations to the newspaper *Excélsior*, de Llano Palmer mentioned this problem (De la Lama and de la Lama 2001). Despite the channel's role at the forefront of public broadcasting, it was accepting more advertising, including ads for alcohol and tobacco. It was unlikely that de Llano Palmer was involved in these

[11] "Yo no entiendo esos ritmos, nunca he oído cantar a Joe Crocker, pero no tengo derecho a negar su existencia".

MARLAS 5(2), 2021, DOI: 10.23870/marlas.295

decisions, especially because he oversaw programming, not sales or budget. We will see in the next section that cultural institutions, including Channel 13, were very low on President López Portillo's priority list.

From Echeverría to López Portillo

The political transition that brought José López Portillo to power was to some extent a continuation of business as usual. The key members of the Echeverría administration were ambitious and had already acquired a certain amount of power and influence, along with the ability to flex their muscles behind the scenes. These candidates did their best to show support for the media and protect it from pressure, making sure that their efforts appeared in the best light in the press. Echeverría himself had used his power to choose his successor as PRI candidate for president. However, his choice of López Portillo, then finance minister, over Mario Moya Palencia, the secretary of the Interior and presumed front-runner ("Mexican Business in Political Move" 1975) caused a stir in the inner circles of the PRI, the Mexican press, and even in the US press.[12] Moya Palencia's official position under Echeverría was the same that Echeverría had held under the Díaz Ordaz presidency. He was also the favorite of business owners, who saw him as a moderate and conservatively aligned politician in contrast to the incumbent president. It was Moya Palencia who served as the intermediary between broadcasters and the president in the creation of Televisa in 1972.[13] Not surprisingly, Moya Palencia had been the television industry's contact person in the Echeverría cabinet, the person who took the hit when relations between broadcasters and the president grew tense.

Several circumstances contributed to Moya Palencia's downfall. The most scandalous was his connection to Alberto Sicilia Falcón, a fixture of Mexican government social circles for many years, who was arrested for drug trafficking in the summer of 1975. During the investigation, several ties between Sicilia Falcón and people close to the presidency were revealed, including the exposure of Moya Palencia and members of the Zuno family related to María Esther Zuno de Echeverría, the president's wife.[14] According to testimonies taken at the time of the investigation, Moya Palencia had enjoyed rides on Sicilia Falcón's private airplane, among other perks. Less of a scandal but still important was Echeverría's suspicion that Moya Palencia and his supporters were undermining his authority by engaging in secret agreements and machinations to secure his candidacy (Schmidt 1991, 98–99). Given these events

[12] Other possible successors to Echeverría were Hugo Cervantes del Río, secretary to the presidency, and labor minister Porfirio Muñoz Ledo.
[13] The editors of *Tele Guía* seemed to be admirers, and Moya Palencia had connections to cinema and print media ("Moya Palencia" 1969).
[14] For more about this incident, see Mills (2015).

MARLAS 5(2), 2021, DOI: 10.23870/marlas.295

and his own perceptions, Echeverría decided to select López Portillo, a childhood friend, who ran for president without opposition (Riding 1976).

While Echeverría had a well-outlined policy toward the media, López Portillo never developed a comprehensive or cohesive media policy. The reasons can be attributed to several differences in administration and political ideologies. Although Echeverría chose López Portillo as his successor, he did not have any control over the political decisions the latter took once in power. It is important too to remember that Echeverría, once out of the presidency, was in a vulnerable position, given his role in the repressive measures taken by Díaz Ordaz and the dirty war he waged against the guerrilla groups that proliferated in the early 1970s. Reports by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) about López Portillo offer great insight into his personality and how he was perceived by the US intelligence community. In early reports, CIA informants assured the US government that the new president had a different administration style than his predecessor and that his policies were friendly to the business community. The findings of the informants must be contextualized in Mexico's complicated role in the Cold War. Echeverría was friendly toward the communist Cuban government and the socialist government in Chile that was overthrown in 1973 with CIA collaboration.

Amid this instability came an administrative reform that transferred Channel 13 and other publicly supported broadcasting outlets from the Secretariat of Communications and Transportation to the Secretaría de Gobernación (analogous to the US Department of the Interior) to a new administrative body, the General Office of Radio, Television and Cinematography (Dirección General de Radio, Television y Cinematografia, RTC). The president's sister, Margarita López Portillo, was appointed head of the RTC, though her only broadcasting experience was writing scripts for television and serving as a censor in the movie section of the Secretariat of Broadcasting (Granados Chapa 2006). Apparently, the reason she was appointed was her family connection to the president.

Nepotism was hardly unusual: Luis Echeverría's brother, Rodolfo Echeverría (generally known by his artistic name Rodolfo Landa), had a significant role in the state-run institutions that promoted, financed, and distributed movies. While the president can be criticized for nepotism, Rodolfo's performance seems to have been competent. However, the tenure of Margarita López Portillo was, and has continued to be, viewed as a disaster. The best remembered event of her leadership—or lack thereof—was the tragic fire that badly damaged the national film archives (Cineteca Nacional) on March 24, 1982. The fire burned for sixteen hours and left several dead and dozens injured. It was estimated that more than ninety percent of the films in the archive were lost.

The López Portillo administration was fiscally conservative. This position allowed for an amicable relation with the IMF, and it was adopting economic measures to reassure both national and international business interests (CIA 1977b). Responding to the urgent need to improve the economic situation of the country, the president embarked on a restructuring of the bureaucracy with the aim of making it more efficient (CIA 1977a). However, the broadcast media and their relationship to the state remained minor among López Portillo's concerns. A review of the annual presidential state-of-the-union addresses shows that Echeverría discussed issues related to communication infrastructure or media every year, while López Portillo mentioned them in only half of his annual addresses. It is likely that PRI leaders with an interest in broadcast media, like Enríquez Lizaola and Marentes González, took advantage of the president's disinterest to get rid of Luis de Llano Palmer. López Portillo's lack of a clear policy in communications was considered a weakness and discussed in print media outlets (Granados Chapa 1986). Under López Portillo, Channel 13 experienced a slow decline due to budget cuts, internal issues, and the incompetent administration of the RTC by the president's sister.

In 1982, when Miguel de la Madrid became president (1982–1988), the channel was once again restructured and then rebranded as Imevisión (Instituto Mexicano de Televisión). Under the de la Madrid administration, Marentes González became the director in 1985 of the state-owned network. Despite his efforts, the network was still showing a serious deficit at the end of de la Madrid's term in 1988. Then, with the austerity measures taken by Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994), Imevisión ceased to exist. The state's television stations were sold to private companies, and once again, after a hiatus that began in 1973, Televisa had a competing commercial network (Toussaint 1993).

Conclusion

Tying a disagreement within public television to wider political changes allows for an analysis of the breaks and continuities between the administrations of Luis Echeverría and his successor, José López Portillo. Those breaks made possible the dismissal of de Llano Palmer. Furthermore, in historical accounts written by collaborators of Channel 13, the contributions of de Llano Palmer were recognized while administrators such as Marentes González and Enríquez Lizaola were barely mentioned (De la Lama and de la Lama 2001). The omission highlights the fragmentations among the intellectual and political circles in charge of the channel. Back in 1973, Echeverría had conceived Channel 13 as a means to co-opt the middle class, and showing rock music programs could advance that goal. With the change of administration and the economic crisis came resistance to this democratizing effort from above and below: opening television entertainment to genres that were perceived as marginal or noncompliant with national goals was now seen as a

challenge to authority (by the PRI) and morality (by the Catholic Church and its conservative supporters).

Despite Echeverría's designation of him as his successor, López Portillo sought to establish distance from the former president and create his own cabinet, loyal to him (Smith 1981). This was the context for the appointment of Margarita López Portillo as director of the RTC, since the new president emphasized loyalty over competence. As RTC head, Margarita López Portillo was far from silent. Perhaps because of her previous experience as censor, she decided to emphasize Catholic family values. Program content during this period was more conventional.

Another difference between these two presidents was their economic policies. The fall in oil prices and the implementation of austerity measures under López Portillo meant the beginning of a change in the economic model in Mexico, and many government services were affected, including Channel 13. The economic problems continued when in 1982, and just a few months before López Portillo left office, an unprecedented peso devaluation hit the Mexican economy (Walker 2013). With this economic downturn, once again, the budgets of many cultural institutions were dramatically cut.

The main challenge with Channel 13 was that it was part of Echeverría's personal political agenda and not part of the PRI's institutional political goals. The trajectory of the channel in the 80s and 90s demonstrates that it was a project in a precarious situation. An attempt to rebrand Channel 13, despite the bleak economic scenario, happened during the presidential term of Miguel de la Madrid. In May 1985, the channel was relaunched as state-run network Imevisión. The chief of the network was none other than Pablo Marentes González who very proudly claimed it as "a new TV network aimed at the working and rural classes, with domestic programming designed to strengthen 'the national identity' " (Van Bennekom 1985). The new network tried to compete with Televisa, then a media behemoth, but old issues such as differences among administrators and money issues did not make this possible. By the time Carlos Salinas de Gortari became president in 1988, neoliberal economic policies were strongly in place, and as part of them Imevisión was sold in 1992. A new commercial network emerged named TV Azteca and owned by Salinas Pliego, a businessman with strong ties to Salinas de Gortari. With the sale of Imevisión the state abandoned public television because the main commercial TV channels Televisa and TV Azteca were firmly in the PRI camp.

Melixa Abad-Izquierdo is an associate professor in the Department of History, Geography and Political Sciences at Farmingdale State College. She has bachelor's degree in Education from University of Puerto Rico-Río Piedras campus and a PhD from Stony Brook University. Her research interests and publications focus on popular culture in Latin America.

References

Álvarez Acosta, Miguel
1974 "La radiodifusión." *Comunicaciones y Transportes* (Nov.–Dec.): 12.

Arrom, Silvia M.
2019 "La Güera Rodríguez: La construcción de una leyenda." *Historia Mexicana* 69 (2): 471.

Arvizu, Juan, and Suzzete Alcántara
2019 "Designa AMLO a Pablo Marentes cónsul en Austin." *El Universal*, March 19.

Barbieri, Jorge Carlos
1972 "¿Qué sucederá cuando las aguas vuelvan a su nivel?" *TV-Farándula,* Jan. 24–30: 3.

Basurto, Luis G.
1977 "Luis de Llano: Vocación indiscutible." *Excélsior*, Sept. 19: 7.

Bueno, Eva P., and Terry Caesar
1998 *Imagination beyond Nation: Latin American Popular Culture*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Camp, Roderic Ai
1995 *Mexican Political Biographies, 1935–1993*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

CIA, Central Intelligence Agency
1977a *International Issues. Regional and Political Analysis.* May 18. https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp79t00912a002300010003-1
1977b *Mexico under Jose Lopez Portillo: Problems and Prospects for US-Mexican Relations*. December. https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000233629.pdf

De la Lama, Marta, and Felipe de la Lama, comps.
2001 *Canal 13, vida, pasión y gloria: apuntes para la historia de la televisión pública mexicana 1972–1992*. Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa.

Díaz Moreno, Eva
2010 "Muere el Productor Luis de Llano Palmer." *Excélsior*, Oct. 23.

Fernández, Claudia, and Andrew Paxman
2013 *El Tigre: Emilio Azcárraga y su imperio Televisa*. 3rd ed. Mexico City: Grijalbo.

Fernández Christlieb, Fátima
2005 *Los medios de difusión masiva en México*. Mexico City: Juan Pablos.

Freije, Vanessa
2015 "Exposing Scandals, Guarding Secrets: Manuel Buendía, Columnismo, and the Unraveling of One-Party Rule in Mexico, 1965–1984." *The Americas* 72 (3): 377–409.

Fritz, Darío
2012 "Los secuestros de Garza Sada, Aranguren y Duncan Williams." In *El libro rojo, continuación III (1959–1979)*, edited by Gerardo Villadelángel Viñas, 305–318. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Gillingham, Paul, and Benjamin T. Smith, eds.
2014 *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938–1968*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Giniger, Henry
1969 "Mexico Assailed on Radio-TV Plan." *New York Times*, Mar. 9: 30.

González de Bustamante, Celeste
2012 *"Muy buenas noches": Mexico, Television and the Cold War.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Granados Chapa, Miguel
1986 "Balance de un sexenio: La comunicación de 1970 a 1976." In *Comunicación y política*, by Granados Chapa, 27–34. Mexico City: Ediciones Océano.
2006 "Plaza pública: Margarita López Portillo." *Reforma*, May 11: 13.

Guzmán, Rodolfo
1977 "Luis de Llano: La comercialización del Canal 13, decisión de Somex." *Proceso*, Sept. 26: 19–21.

Hernández Campos, Jorge
1977 "La cultura: cuestión de sí misma." *Proceso* 39, Aug. 1: 39–40.

Inclán, Federico S.
1997 *Hoy invita la Güera*. 1953. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Kennedy, Paul
1956 "Musical Crisis in Mexico." *New York Times*, Dec. 23: 39.

León Palacios, Paulo C.
2017 "Instantáneas de un burócrata cultural: el oficio de promover el teatro durante 'el milagro mexicano.' " *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 33 (3): 367–393.

Ley Federal de Radio y Televisión
1960 *Diario Oficial,* January 19.

Maria y Campos, Armando de
1955 "Estreno de *Hoy invita la güera*, en el teatro Globo, por Lola Bravo." *Novedades*, April 3. Reseña Histórica del Teatro en México 2.0-2.1 | Sistema de Información de la Crítica Teatral (criticateatral2021.org)

"Mexican Business in Political Move: Joining Presidential Contest, It Calls for Reversal of Echeverria's Policy"
1975 *New York Times* (1923-Current File), May 14: 6.

Mills, James
2015 *The Underground Empire*. New York: Doubleday.

Monjarás, Jorge A.
2017 "El hombre con suerte que se convirtió en publicista de los políticos." *Alto Nivel*, July 26. https://www.altonivel.com.mx/empresas/emprendedor/hombre-suerte-se-convirtio-en-publicista-los-politicos/

"Moya Palencia"
1969 Editorial, *Tele Guía* 883, July 10–16: 3.

Niblo, Stephen R.
1999 *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption*. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources.

Novo, Salvador, and Guillermo González Camarena
1948 *La televisión: Investigación del Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes*. Consulted at the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Fondo Documental Miguel Alemán Valdés (MAV), Vol. 472, Exp. 523/14.

Paxman, Andrew
2014 "Cooling to Cinema and Warming to Television. State Mass Media Policy, 1940–1964." In *Dictablanda. Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico*, *1938–1968*, edited by Paul Gillingham and Benjamin T. Smith, 304–325. Durham: Duke University Press.

Rabell, Malkah
1977 "Se alza el telón. De *Zaratustra* a *Lucrecia Borgia*." *El Día*, Feb. 25: 24.

Riding, Alan
1976 "Mexico Elects a Symbol." *New York Times,* June 13.

Robledo, Elisa, and Irma Serrano
1978 *A calzón amarrado*. Mexico City: Fleischer Editora.

Schelling, Vivian
2004 "Popular Culture in Latin America." In *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Latin American Culture*, edited by John King, 171–201. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

"Se abrirá una investigación. Hizo crisis una campaña contra Luis de Llano y renunció a Canal 13"
1977 *Excelsior*, Sept. 26.

Sheppard, Randal
2016 *A Persistent Revolution: History, Nationalism, and Politics in Mexico Since 1968*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Schmidt, Samuel
1991 *The Deterioration of the Mexican Presidency: The Years of Luis Echeverría*, translated by Dan A. Cothran. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Smith, Peter H.
1981 "Retrospectiva y perspectiva: De Echeverría a López Portillo." In *Los laberintos del poder: El reclutamiento de las élites políticas en México, 1900–1971*, by Smith, 322–362. Mexico City: Colegio de Mexico.

Solana, Rafael
1955 "Teatro. *Hoy invita la Güera* de Federico S. Inclán, dirige Jebert Darién." *Siempre,* April 13. Reseña Histórica del Teatro en México 2.0-2.1| Sistema de Información de la Crítica Teatral (criticateatral2021.org)

Toussaint, Florence
1993 "Políticas financieras de la televisión estatal." In *¿Televisión pública en México?*, edited by Toussaint, 121–138. Mexico City: CONACULTA.

Van Bennekom, Pieter
1985 "Mexican government goes into TV in a big way." *United Press International,* May 14.

Walker, Louise
2013 *Waking from the Dream: Mexico's Middle Classes after 1968*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Zolov, Eric
1999 *Refried Elvis*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
2020 *The Last Good Neighbor: Mexico in the Global Sixties*. Durham: Duke University Press.