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Review / Reseña

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

Alejandra Bronfman's *Isles of Noise: Sonic Media in the Caribbean.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016.

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J. Justin Castro's *Radio in Revolution: Wireless Technology and State Power in Mexico, 1897-1938* and Alejandra Bronfman's *Isles of Noise: Sonic Media in the Caribbean* represent two of the newest additions to an important and growing body of scholarship on radio history. Until recently attention to radio has been dwarfed by the scholarly consideration given to print, photography, film, television, and music. Kate Lacey, in a recent overview of the radio studies field, speculated radio's lack of "visual imagery in an age of spectacle" might help explain why radio was long overlooked as a worthy focal point of analyses compared to so many other communications media counterparts.[1] Castro's close focus on Mexico and Bronfman's broader trans-Caribbean perspective offer the latest correctives to this increasingly diminished imbalance and do so through a welcome focus on developments in Latin America in a field heavy on Euro-American emphases. Both books illuminate radio's centrality to an array of domestic and international battles for political, economic, social, and cultural control that surrounded the technology from its initial emergence as form of wireless telegraphy through its transformation into a broadcasting medium. In so doing, both Castro and Bronfman's volumes capture what *Technology & Culture*, the flagship journal for historians of technology, referred to as the "tangle of competitions" that has suffused the scholarship on not just radio, but all electronic media commanding so much recent scholarly attention.[2]

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[1] Kate Lacey, "Up in the Air? The Matter of Radio Studies," *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast and Audio Media*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2018): 119.

J. Justin Castro's *Radio in Revolution: Wireless Technology and State Power in Mexico, 1897-1938* explores radio's development in Mexico against the backdrop of the Mexican revolutionary state's rise and consolidation of power. Radio proved critical to the Revolution's successful effort to topple Porfirio Díaz's long-ruling dictatorship in 1911 and establish a new revolutionary state. It remained a vital and effective tool to consolidate the revolutionary state's power and counter subsequent rebellions through the end of the 1930s. The first portion of book places particular emphases on wireless telegraphy, military communications, intelligence gathering, and the extension of state authority over more distant territories through official communications and surveillance. Castro paints a compelling picture of how the anti-Porfirian revolutionaries and a succession of ruling revolutionary political parties deployed radio more effectively than any rivals, rebels, or dissident factions. When broadcasting emerged in the 1920s, the government adapted its determination to deploy radio technology to maximize authority and control. It established a framework for broadcasting that enabled the state to promote government propaganda and build support for its policies. As had been the case with wireless telegraphy, dissenters and opponents hoped to deploy broadcasting to challenge the government and its authority. However, by the end of the 1930s the Mexican government had outmaneuvered and outflanked such challengers to silence their voices over Mexico's burgeoning broadcasting market. "Radio and the revolutionary state," Castro writes, "matured together" (139).

The Revolution, in Castro's telling, is at the center of forces that shaped Mexican radio. The regime tailored its radio policies toward surmounting the challenges of building a new nation-state, which included ever-present concerns about protracted insurrection and an enduring desire to bring the volatile forces of the Mexican Revolution under the authority of the state. These policies effectively secured strong central control over radio. The consequent close cooperation between the government and commercial radio interests further benefited state authority and limited opportunities for oppositional forces to articulate their dissent via radio. At the same time, pro-Revolutionary populist politics found a platform in broadcasting unique to Mexico. The system that emerged was not just distinct from the commercial broadcasting system that developed in the United States, but also distinguished Mexico from its other regional neighbors. "The Revolution," Castro writes, "is the reason populist politics emerged over the airwaves in Mexico earlier than other Latin American nations" (7).

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[2] "In this Issue," *Technology & Culture*, vol. 51, no. 4 (October 2010): i.

This six-chapter account proceeds chronologically through this terrain. It begins with late nineteenth century efforts of Porfirio Díaz's administration (1876-1911) to acquire radio technology to strengthen the state and its military against growing challenges to its rule. These efforts fell short and the regime's revolutionary opponents seized the communications advantage from Díaz, which contributed to his downfall. While the larger story of Díaz's modernization efforts and his ultimate demise has been extensively told, Castro's focus on radio's significance to Díaz's modernization initiatives is a welcome and long-overdue addition to that historiography. In the process, Castro challenges a familiar picture of Díaz as a leader all-too-willing to grant concessions to foreign nations based on the ultimately mistaken belief these foreign ties could prolong his rule. As Castro illustrates, Díaz's radio policies, like his successors, sought to minimize foreign influence over radio's development and ensure that control of this important new medium remained firmly in the government's hands. Díaz's instincts about the importance of keeping radio under government control proved correct, albeit via an outcome he had hoped to avoid. Among the many reason's the Porfiriato collapsed at the hands of the Revolution in 1911 was the opposition effectively adopted and deployed radio against Díaz and muted his administration's communications advantages.

This determination to deploy radio for the purposes of exerting power and control is a theme that runs throughout the book. When the brief post-Porfiriato revolutionary presidency of Francisco Madero (1911-13) was supplanted by the military dictatorship of Victoriano de la Huerta, Huerta's efforts to "militarize" radio for the purpose of defeating his opponents fell short against the more adept use of communications by his revolutionary opposition. These efforts, a focus of chapter 2, succeeded in ousting Huerta by 1915. Within the factionalized revolutionary forces, it was Venustiano Carranza's "Constitutionalists" that, with the help of radio, outmaneuvered rival Villista, Zapatista, and Felicista factions to secure control. Between 1915 and 1920, the ground covered by the third chapter, the Constitutionalists deployed radio as a tool to facilitate governance across the vast expanse of Mexican territory. Carranza's efforts to keep radio firmly under the authority of the state and limit foreign involvement illustrated his commitment to defending Mexican sovereignty. The regime also deployed radio to collect intelligence on domestic opposition. Radio's corollary use as a tool to conduct foreign policy also helped the administration acquire weapons and munitions to bolster its position against domestic rivals. In short, the Carranza presidency established the framework that cemented radio's enduring centrality as a tool of domestic control and foreign policy in revolutionary Mexico. That infrastructure outlived his presidency and Carranza himself, who ultimately fell victim to dissident forces in 1920.

Broadcasting, a central focus of the remaining three chapters, posed new challenges for the succession of post-Carranza administrations. The overall policies and initiatives pursued from 1920-1938 continued to prioritize point-to-point radio communications as a means of enhancing domestic control and conducting foreign relations, but also show the civilian and military leadership grappling with the increasingly diverse uses of radio beyond wireless telegraphy. With broadcasting, the revolutionary state turned its attention to harnessing entertainment and educational programming to bolster its power. The difference with broadcasting compared to other uses of radio was the greater willingness of the regime to allow a select number of large Mexican corporations to dominate the country's emergent broadcasting industry. These corporations and the families that owned them (especially the prominent and wealthy Azcárraga family) enjoyed close ties to the government; they typically supported the official goal of deploying commercial broadcasting as a means of cultivating support for the revolutionary state through carefully chosen educational and cultural programming. Broadcasting thereby emerges as central component to the revolutionary government's corporatist structure that continued to take shape across a succession of presidential administrations from Alvaro Obregón (1920-24) to Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40).

By placing radio at the center of his exploration of the Mexican Revolution through 1938, Castro does more than add a new technological perspective to otherwise well-trodden historical territory. Castro's radio-centered telling of the Mexican Revolution illuminates the larger verity that, in any setting, key actors make choices that shape the trajectories of technological development and determine how a technology will be deployed, develop, and subsequently affect the people and societies that engage it; such choices have been first and foremost shaped by a vast array of factors and calculations embedded in the surrounding historical context. Castro's analysis in this regard is informed by scholarship many historians of technology and communications will find familiar, including seminal works by Michael Adas, Hugh Aitken, Susan Douglas, Daniel Headrick, and James Schwoch. Mexico, the study ultimately illustrates, is typical to the extent that the trajectory of radio development reflected calculations and choices rooted in and motivated by context-specific forces, especially Mexican politics, economics, culture, and geography. Ultimately, the uniquely Mexican attributes of such forces shaped radio in that country into a distinctly Mexican medium.

Radio in Revolution rests on a strong base of archival research. Castro mined an array of national and regional archives across Mexico, making sure to dive into various government records, including the holdings of communications, defense, and education bureaucracies. His research also included an exploration of the radio-related archival holdings of several private and university libraries. Castro complemented this research with explorations into US-based holdings, including those at US National Archives and the NBC records housed at the Wisconsin State Historical Society. Those American sources help give depth to the portions of the study that explore the intersection between radio and Mexico's foreign relations.

With such sources allowing Castro to underscore the centrality of the state in building and controlling Mexico's radio communications infrastructure and operations, the book positions itself as a prequel of sorts to Celeste Gonzáles de Bustamente's *Muy Bueno Noches: Mexico, Television, and the Cold War* (2013).[3] Gonzáles explored how between 1950 and 1970 the single-party state ensured Mexican television news programming echoed government priorities and concerns, just as radio broadcasting had done a generation earlier. It was an outcome reflective of the government's close relationship with and favorable concessions granted to prominent media moguls, including—once more—the Azcárraga family, which is a testament to the enduring significance of the corporatist relationships forged via radio during the revolutionary era. Since Castro placed his focus on the radio-based policies and initiatives that ultimately contributed to the building of the revolutionary state, his study does not aim to explore audience engagement with mass media to the extent that Gonzáles did.

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[3] Celeste Gonzáles de Bustamente's *Muy Bueno Noches: Mexico, Television, and the Cold War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013).

However, Castro's account of communications policies from the revolutionary period illuminates the extent to which Mexican Cold War era media policies and practices rested on a foundation radio built.

Readers who are interested in exploring audience engagement with radio during roughly the same time-period will be drawn to Alejandra Bronfman's *Isles of Noise: Sonic Media in the Caribbean*. Through the comparative exploration of radio and other "sonic" technologies in Cuba, Haiti, and Jamaica, Bronfman argues "wireless and broadcasting helped generate the idea that the Caribbean and the wider world ought to be imagined as *distinct* and *distant* even if increasingly connected" (6). To make this case, Bronfman explores the dynamics of technological development, programing, and control in each location. All three countries shared a common Caribbean denominator in their respective efforts to delineate and distinguish their respective broadcasting systems and practices from the world outside the Caribbean. At the same time, Bronfman effectively underscores how the surrounding contexts particular to each location shaped radio in ways that were unique to that setting, even though many of the larger processes and patterns that informed radio's transformation into a broadcasting medium after 1920 were evidenced throughout the region and across the globe. In Haiti and Cuba, for example, the often-imposing shadow of American occupation and influence affected the choices surrounding radio's development, while in Jamaica it was the British colonial presence that loomed large. The result is an account that is both transnational in its perspective and locally rooted in its analysis. Determined to "remain cognizant of national boundaries while drawing attention to other aspects that do not necessarily depend on them," Bronfman's study ultimately illustrates that the "imperial, translocal, and national coexist and in many ways constitute one another" (152).

Bronfman builds this account on an impressive range of interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological foundations that include theories of race, gender, and imperialism, while also deploying insights from such fields as anthropology, communications, and cultural studies, to name just a few. Her insights from technology studies and sound studies are of particular relevance to the themes explored in this review. From the former, Bronfman emphasizes throughout her book that technologies are shaped by the particularities of the surrounding context, underscoring the significance of a variety of relevant political, cultural, diplomatic, military, economic, environmental, and geographic factors. As broadcasting took root, listener preferences and choices were among the most significant influences shaping radio in each locale. Here, Bronfman builds her analysis on the insights from sound studies, most notably

Kate Lacey and her formulation of the "audience as listening public" in which listening is an active and engaged participatory act. Informed by additional insights from media scholars Michael Warner and Brian Larkin, Bronfman paints a picture of active listeners in their respective Caribbean locations engaged with and making demands of radio and radio stations. With programming preferences shaped by deeply rooted cultural and political desires, radio in the Caribbean became, in Larkin's words, "sites for political contest" (9).

Following an introductory chapter that lays out those methodological and theoretical foundations, five subsequent chapters that are both thematic in focus and chronological in coverage explore radio's development in each locale. The first remains closely focused on Haiti in the context of the American occupation that spanned 1915 through 1934, casting radio as a tool deployed to exert power and control in a manner that echoes Castro's emphases. The next two chapters widen the lens to consider the power dynamics of radio in the Caribbean more expansively against the backdrop of broadcasting's transnational rise. The remaining two content chapters place the focus more squarely on broadcasting from the 1940s into the 1950s; one considers how creole voices infused Haitian and Jamaican radio, while the other notes the uneven development of broadcasting across the Caribbean and attempts to make sense of the contrast between "dense media contexts" and those that "remained electronically silent" (10). A brief concluding chapter considers the contemporary relevance of radio's development and identity in the Caribbean, including parallels to the more recent development of the internet (like radio before it, a technology that is even now unevenly available throughout the Caribbean).

Historians of technology will appreciate Bronfman's perspectives technological development, particularly in the early stages of wireless development at a time when the technology was especially flexible and malleable, before its popular uses became fixed in ways users now take for granted. Her exploration of the intersection between radio and the American occupation of Haiti is particularly compelling in this regard. The US occupation period of 1915-1934, in fact, paralleled broadcasting's emergence as the most popular and widely known use of the medium from its initial origins as an alternative to wired telegraphy. Comparable to the jockeying for position and advantage that Castro explored in the context of the Mexican Revolution, Haitian radio became the focal point of contestations between the American occupiers who wanted to exert control and Haitians who sought to resist. These contestations, however, were not just limited to seeking control over the flow of information that could advantage one side or the other. US occupiers, for example, also harnessed radio's electrical currents to deploy them as tools of torture and intimidation against Haitian resisters. This example of malleability and deviation from intended uses during the early stages of technological development was not unique to Haiti. Historian Ronald Kline identified a comparable, albeit seemingly less sinister, example of technological malleability when noting how in the late 1920s and 1930s rural American farmers not yet connected to the US electrical grid often harnessed their automobile's electrical system to charge the batteries of their coveted radio receivers in broadcasting's early years, which in turn led some rural retailers to sell radios in which the battery was interchangeable with a car battery for easy charging.[4] In Haiti, though, it was the context of an unpopular American occupation shaping the technological choices that illuminates this much darker example of technological malleability.

Bronfman's exploration of the intersection between language, identity, and broadcasting across the Caribbean is also compelling. In both Haiti and Jamaica, for example, enthusiasm for broadcasting in creole languages captured the larger political contestations between the peoples of each territory against American occupiers and British colonial authorities, respectively. In Jamaica, where Britain retained its colonial authority into the 1960s, British efforts to impose a radio system that mirrored Britain's system with BBC and emphasized "proper English" as its central pillar encountered sharp Jamaican resistance. In opposition to the British, the Jamaicans fought to establish broadcasting as a medium that was independent of British influence and identity, especially with regard to the language spoken over the airwaves. "In both Haiti and Jamaica," Bronfman writes, "people navigated between 'white talk' and 'black talk,' and a broad range of voices in between" (116). More generally, radio and broadcasting's deployment as a tool of subversion and resistance to unpopular authorities in Cuba, Jamaica, and Haiti is a theme that runs throughout the book and ties these Caribbean peoples together in a broadly common struggle against outsiders, while the circumstances and contestations specific to each area underscores the contingencies that distinguished broadcasting's use and development within all three areas.

Bronfman's expansive multi-archival research in the context of her skillful application of interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological insights is a defining strength of this book. Her research encompassed archival collections in Cuba, Haiti, and Jamaica, as well as Canada, Great Britain, and the United States. Her vast primary source base includes official documents, corporate and private records, and an array of periodicals and newspapers. The vast research net that Bronfman casts allows the comparative aspects of her analysis to shine by illuminating transnational and trans-Caribbean patterns of radio's development and listening while also never losing sight of how forces and factors distinct to each locale shaped radio within specific contexts.

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[4] Ronald Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 115-16, 125.

Her skillful conveyance of listener perspectives warrants special commendation. The ephemeral nature of radio listening and the consequent relative lack of primary source documentation surrounding it is a challenge that radio historians typically struggle to surmount when considering the audience. The collections of listener letters and program recordings preserved in various archives that Bronfman exhaustively mined and the glimpses that periodicals and newspapers provide of a larger listening public are compelling. However, such a source base still leaves the radio historian grappling with the fact that most listeners never documented or preserved any aspect of their engagement with radio. Bronfman acknowledges the limitations of "teasing listener practices out of historical documents," and in the context of discussing Jamaica, concedes that she is engaged in a "speculative, if intriguing, exercise" (103). However, it is that acknowledgment of source limitations before proceeding with carefully drawn conclusions based on the available documentation, a firm grasp of the context surrounding listener choices, and the skillful application of relevant theoretical insights that works so well. The result is, despite the inherent source limitations, convincing insights into acts of listening, as well as compelling critiques of political authorities' exaggerated notions of their presumed abilities to influence engaged radio listeners.

In placing a focus on radio in their respective explorations of Mexico and the Caribbean in the first part of the twentieth century, Castro and Bronfman make important contributions well beyond adding two more volumes to the burgeoning body of radio studies literature. To date, that scholarship has been dominated by explorations focusing on what Kate Lacey, in her assessment of the field, referred to as the Anglophonic frame of the Global North. Through their respective considerations of Mexico and the Caribbean, Castro and Bronfman are instead adding to a small but important and growing body of scholarship that puts the Global South at the forefront. Such studies are, of course, essential to ensure that the countries of what had once been referred to as the "developing world" are considered in their own right and on their own terms. For the field of radio studies, these accounts also encourage the exploration of transnational processes of radio development and exchanges that both distinguishes South from North, as well as intertwines them.[5] To the extent that Latin America is at this point the best represented in radio studies exploring the Global South, Castro's close focus on the dynamics of radio and power within the Mexican Revolution and Bronfman's more broadly cast comparative consideration of the Caribbean offer models for how one might apply such analyses to other understudied areas of the world.

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[5] Lacey, "Up in the Air," 112-114