

# Dependency and development: the importance of TV news in the history of Mexican television<sup>1</sup>

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**Resumo:** Atualmente, o México produz conteúdos televisivos para uma indústria global multi-bilionária. Em uma escala internacional a maior rede comercial do país, o Grupo Televisa, vende programação para mais de cem países, inclusive nações da América Latina. Apenas a rival brasileira Rede Globo confronta a Televisa em termos de lucro e produção na região. Pesquisas sobre a história da televisão mexicana tendem a investigar a programação de entretenimento, mas os telejornais representam outro gênero importante e a análise dos noticiários pode aprofundar a compreensão do papel da televisão na formação das atitudes dos cidadãos. Este artigo apresenta um estudo da primeira fase dos programas jornalísticos na televisão mexicana (1950-1970) como forma de discutir temas ligados ao desenvolvimento e à dependência na América Latina – uma manifestação da desigualdade econômica global.

**Palavras-chave:** televisão, notícias em televisão, México, América Latina, história, mídia, desenvolvimento.

**Abstract:** *Dependence and development: the importance of TV newscasting in the history of Mexican television.* Mexico today produces television content for a global multibillion dollar industry. On an international scale, the country's largest commercial network, Grupo Televisa, sells programming to more than 100 countries, including Latin America countries. Only Brazil's Rede Globo rivals Televisa in terms of revenue and production in the region. Research about the history of Mexican television tends to focus on entertainment programming, but news programming represents another important genre and an analysis of TV newscasts can deepen our understanding of the role of television in shaping people's attitudes. This article presents a study of the first phase of television newscasting (1950-1970) in Mexico and discusses issues related to development and dependence in Latin America – a manifestation of global economic inequality.

**Keywords:** television, TV newscasting, Mexico, Latin America, history, media, development.

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## Introduction

Throughout the 1950s, Jacobo Zabludovsky, the man who would become Mexico's best known news anchor, hosted *Noticiero General Motors*. The newscast sponsored by General Motors Corporation would become the country's first news program of record. *Noticiero General Motors* aired from 1950 to 1962 on Mexico City's XHTV, Channel 4 (REBOLEDO, 1998, p. 104). In 1952 on TV Tupi in Rio de Janeiro and in 1953 on TV Tupi in São Paulo, *O Reporter Esso*, a newscast sponsored by Standard Oil was broadcast into a growing number of middle-class homes (REZENDE, 2006, p. 106). That foreign companies such as General Motors and Standard Oil sponsored and advertised on Latin American news programs was no accident. The practice emerged from a new economic development model that privileged multinational corporations over a previous model that emphasized state control over industry (CARDOSO, 1973, p. 149; CARDOSO and FALETTO, 1971). Through this new model, the television industry and as a result television news operations became part-and-parcel of what Cardoso called "associated-dependent development" (SANCHEZ RUIZ, 1988). Employing some of the ideas fomented by Cardoso, communications scholars began to draw attention to an imbalance of global information flows and some attempted to create a new world information and communications order that would reduce "cultural imperialism" (BURTON and FRANCO, 1978; DORFMAN and MATTELART, 1975; PASQUALI, 1982; SAID, 1993; SCHILLER, 1978; SILVA, 1971). The menace of cultural globalization loomed large as Herbert I. Schiller warned that:

cultural homogenization that has been underway for years in the United States now threatens to overtake the globe...Everywhere local culture is facing submission from the mass-produced outpourings of commercial broadcasting (1967).

For some scholars the debate over dependency and development might seem tired and all too familiar, yet it is exactly at this particular juncture in the new world communications (dis)order<sup>3</sup>, that a reflection on how and what locally produced messages were being broadcast at the height of the dependency debate can be useful because looking back provides better understanding of and a point of departure for twenty-first century discussions on the topic (STRAUBHAAR, 2007, p. 60). In short, the debate is still relevant, especially given that in 2005 the United States and Israel were the only two countries to vote against the UNESCO convention that seeks to balance the flow of information across the globe (RIDING, 2005, p. E3; Gentili, 2002).

If the television industry and therefore, the television news business in Mexico is an example of associated-dependent development, then this article seeks to explain how

<sup>3</sup> By (dis)order, I mean that the internet and other new technologies have created a more complex media landscape than in the 1970s, and as a result, the media landscape is unpredictable in terms of the types of content as well as organizations that emerge from the changing panorama.

this relationship expressed itself on the shop floor of newsrooms, and eventually wound up into the homes of viewers. In other words, I aim to illustrate how television news reports manifested the associated-dependent phenomenon on a daily basis. By putting news reports of the 1950s and 1960s in their proper historical context and analyzing them through the lens of dependent development in Latin America, I seek to contribute to the discussion about the significance of a more equitable system of global information flows. At its very core then, this article asks, What can Mexican television news tell us about dependency and development, and more specifically about associated-dependent development, from 1950-1970, which marked the first twenty years of the television industry as well as the height of economic growth, often referred to as the “economic miracle.”

As a secondary line of inquiry, I am interested in exploring the question of associated-dependent development in domestic news programs beyond the Mexican case. For example, how did the phenomenon of associated-dependent development appear – if at all – on the airwaves in Brazil, the country in which the region’s other media giant, Rede Globo, emerged? What happened in Chile? – a country whose leaders embarked on an alternative path (at least during its initial phase of development) than the more common commercial television model.

From 1950 to 1970 television news reports frequently offered examples of both Mexico’s dependent position to the United States as well as the country’s continued development. The news reports, which aired on Telesistema Mexicano, the precursor to media conglomerate Televisa, demonstrated the country’s complex position in the world economy – that on the one hand illuminated, the country’s dependent position, and on the other, offered evidence of a nation increasing its level of development and modernity. Television and new communications technology both symbolized as well as served as the medium to inform citizens of those realities.

Beyond that, the daily news in many ways reflected the associated-dependent relations and economic interests of its owners. In his study of Televisa during the 1980s, González Molina developed a similar argument (1990). Much attention has been paid to the influence of foreign programming on Latin American culture and *telenovelas*, but what about domestically produced programs such as news broadcasts? News programs included reports that simultaneously promoted economic interests and modernity. As this article reveals, media executives often found themselves as subjects of news reports.

After I explore the explanatory pay-off of this sort of exercise, I will look more closely at the case of Mexico to answer the question at hand. Then, I open up the question for the rest of Latin America, paying specific attention to Brazil and Chile. First though, it is helpful to discuss more in detail, what can be achieved by looking at television news as an example of associated-dependent development.

## Why look at television news through the lens of associated-dependent development?

The literature on the television industry is vast, yet almost fifty years after the official inauguration of the electronic medium, Sánchez de Armas remarked at how few books exist on the history of television programming in Mexico when he stated:

¿No es terrible que casi 50 años después no haya disponibles libros que nos permitan consultar la programación de la televisión mexicana, o que no sean más de cinco los textos de obligada referencia sobre la historia de este medio en México? Son un par de los muchos ejemplos que podría ofrecer al respecto (1998, p. 13)?

The corpus of work in English on the subject from a historical perspective is more paltry, although a few important works have emerged recently (HUGHES, 2006; LAWSON, 2002; HUGHES and LAWSON, 2004).

Anyone who has attempted to conduct research in the area of media history knows that numerous factors make this type of research especially challenging. First, the historical documents that would be of most interest to scholars— in this case, scripts, film, videotape— may not have been archived or even exist decades after being aired. The earliest newscasts were not recorded. This only became common practice after the advent of videotape in the 1970s. Therefore, newscasts scripts are the most important remaining documents of early television news. Frequently, news professionals are most concerned with the daily production of news and often do not consider a priority the storage and maintenance of previously aired content. Second, because news scripts, film and tape are undervalued, they are often lost through neglect or through natural disasters. What is left of Televisa's news archive has survived earthquakes and floods, and exposure to the elements. Rede Globo's news archive has undergone several floods, so that many key images and scripts have perished. Third, for financial and political reasons, privately-owned corporations are not in the business of catering to academics. Only recently has Rede Globo established Globo Universidade, a program that, according to its website has "*o objetivo de incentivar o intercâmbio de conhecimento entre a TV Globo e as universidades do Brasil e do exterior*" (<http://globouniversidade.globo.com>).

Analysis of early Mexican news programs provides new scholarship that could be useful in at least two ways. First, it presents concrete empirical data missing from much of the existing scholarship on the history of television that is anecdotal, theoretical or abstract (OROZCO, 2002, pp. 214-215; SANCHEZ de ARMAS, pp. 10-11). As Waisbord states, "the lack of attention to specific situations has often resulted in incomplete and skewed portrayals" (1998, p. 254). Second, this article has chosen television journalism as its focus, an area that has been largely neglected in the scholarship to date, which has treated either print media or entertainment programming, especially *telenovelas*.

Beyond putting the abstract into concrete terms, historically based scholarship can put the events into a wider context of the political economy of the 1950s through the 1970s, serving to distinguish the processes of the mid-twentieth century with those of twenty-first century. Through historicizing the news industry of the 1950s, we can see the relationship between the economy, politics, and media that globalization had already begun to occur, yet globalization in 1959 was much different than that of 2009. This is particularly relevant with respect to the Cold War, as Straubhaar argues,

Both the United States and the USSR actively pursued alliances with elites in developing countries as part of the Cold War, so political and military concerns often overlapped or even opposed economic interests of the elites in both industrialized and developing countries (2007, p. 57).

Cold War politics, as they related to what ended up on the air, should not be understated. For example, the Cuban Revolution of 1959 drastically changed U.S.-Mexico-Cuba-Soviet Union relations, and those changes were represented on the small screen.

By putting the debate regarding dependency and international communications in its proper historical perspective, and by analyzing news scripts as historical documents, I aim to advance the work of Sinclair and others who have examined this issue at a macro level (1990, 1986). This endeavor should lead to a deeper understanding about the age of rapid industrialization in Latin America and the relationship between international and domestic economies, politics, media, and the public (as citizens and as consumers).

## Mexico as a case study

In 1949, Mexican entrepreneur and close friend of President Miguel Alemán Valdez, Rómulo O'Farrill Sr., who also owned the daily newspaper *Novedades*, received the country's first television concession. After several days of testing, on September 1, 1950, O'Farrill's television station XHTV, Canal 4 officially beamed Latin America into the television age, with the broadcast of Aleman's fourth informe (address to the nation)<sup>4</sup>.

A businessman originally from the state of Puebla, O'Farrill had two key connections with U.S. media interests. First, he worked with Meade Brunet, Vice-President of RCA, who attended Mexico's inaugural television ceremony (CASTELLOT, 1993, p. 20). O'Farrill purchased \$2.2 million dollars worth of television equipment from RCA necessary for the initial broadcasts (CASTELLOT, 1993, p. 20). Second, O'Farrill had received financial backing from U.S. citizen and movie theater king, William Jenkins (CASTELLOT, 1993, p. 20).

Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta was the next major commercial television player to enter the picture when his station, XEW-TV (with the same call letters as his radio station)

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<sup>4</sup> On September 18, 1950, Brazil officially beamed South America into the television age.

officially began to broadcast in 1952. Guillermo González Camarena's XHGC, Canal 5 also began transmitting in 1950. Azcárraga Vidaurreta purchased technical equipment from General Electric and Dumont for the first transmissions (MEJIA BARQUERA, 1998, p. 28). His ties to U.S. commercial broadcasting stemmed from his initial days in radio and affiliations with NBC and CBS (OLMOS, 1998, p. 280).

Beyond technical expertise and financial backing from abroad, one decision early on, would have far reaching implications that would influence the content of entertainment as well as news programming well into the twenty-first century. President Alemán's decision to apply the U.S. commercial model in 1949 paved the way for not only foreign advertisers to push consumer goods, but would create a tension between providing accurate information and generating profits that continues today.

Before turning to the actual content of news on television between 1950 and 1970, one other factor must be considered with respect to the relationship between domestic media entrepreneurs and foreign interests and influence. Foreign news agencies encompassed a large percentage of news related content that appeared on television throughout Latin America (BOYD-BARRETT, 1980). The most powerful news agencies and those from which Telesistema Mexicano often obtained information included the AP, UPI and UPITN (UPI's television news service), Visnews (Reuters' television news service), *Agence France Presse*, and at times, TASS (Soviet Union News Service) (GONZALEZ de BUSTAMANTE, 2006, p. 188).

A reliance on information from foreign news agencies does not necessarily translate to an automatic reproduction of the images and information obtained from an external source. Editorial directors of news programs had the final word, along with state sponsored censors, when it came to exactly how a story would be framed. Moreover, although the AP and UPI had set up Latin American bureaus, the majority of the news staff included locally hired staff (BOYD-BARRETT, 1980, pp. 91-92).

## Primacy of international news

Now let's turn to how the relationship of associated-dependent development rendered itself on television news programs. The findings presented here are based on content analyses of news scripts and rundowns from two news programs, *Noticiero General Motors* and *Noticiero PEMEX SOL Novedades*, which aired between 1950 and 1970 on Telesistema Mexicano (González de Bustamante, 2006).

The following represents a "typical" news rundown for *Noticiero General Motors* during the 1950s<sup>5</sup>. A rundown or *orden* provided a list of reports and items such as commercials and the order in which they would air. The *órdenes* also included the length of the

<sup>5</sup> All of the primary documents discussed in this article, unless otherwise noted, are housed in Grupo Televisa's Filмотeca de Noticieros (Newscast Archive) in Mexico City, Mexico.

each item in the newscast. Often newscasts were divided into two sections, international and national news items. The first news bulletins took up about 15 minutes of airtime.

April 13, 1954

### **Noticiero General Motors**

1. Eisenhower-Oppenheimer investigation (I)
2. Charles De Gaulle-returns to power (I)
3. Eisenhower-throws out the first pitch of the big league baseball season (I)
4. Ex-pres Truman attacks Joseph McCarty (sic) (I)
5. U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles arrives in France (I)
6. U.S. and Great Britain regarding "agresiones rojas" (I)
7. Journalists and photographers tour a new railway station in Mexico State (D)
8. Death of Luis Cabrera, ex-minister of hacienda for Carranza (G)
9. Harry Reid, head of the North American Commercial Mission meets with CEIMSA (Mexican Exporting and Importing Company) leader to offer products (I,D)
10. Madero street closed for construction (D)
11. Chief of Police looking for Faces brothers (C)
12. Asociación Mexicana de Caminos and director of "punto cuarto" to establish school for mechanics and machine operators (D)
13. Federal police detains "tres asesinos" (C)
14. General Francisco Múgica buried (G)
15. Raul Haya de la Torre press conference at the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (G)
16. Judicial police investigate case of lost 40,000 pesos (C)
17. NY Yankees win (I)
18. 16 people die in plane crash in Chile (I)

The rundown above, like many others during this time period, included an abundance of reports regarding international affairs. Nine out of 18 stories or 50% of the items emphasized international news.

The second most common story category in the rundown included those items that featured national development related projects. Four out of 18 or 22% of the total items dealt with development issues.

Three out of the 18 or 16% of the reports focused on governmental affairs, such as the burial of General Francisco Múgica. The same number and percentage of reports featured prominent crime stories. One report, the meeting between leaders of CEIMSA (Mexican Exporting and Importing Company) and the North American Commercial Mission, fell both into the international as well as development categories.

When President Dwight D. Eisenhower visited the former colonial city and now resort town of Acapulco in February of 1959, the amount of international news was even greater.

February 18, 1959

### **Noticiero General Motors**

1. Eisenhower press conference (I, G)<sup>6</sup>
2. Acapulcans prepare for presidents (I, G)
3. Duchess of Kent (I)
4. Transformation Industry (D)
5. Issac Stern in Houston, Texas (I)
6. 20-30 Club Luncheon (D)
7. Journalists head for Acapulco (I, G)
8. Bull fights (S)
9. News Wrap
  - a. Archbishop Makarios vs. Greek government (I)
  - b. Eisenhower on Berlin (I)
10. Commercial-Super-Motors, S.A.
11. Eisenhower on Guatemala vs. Mexico dispute (I, G)
12. John Foster Dulles hospitalized (I)
13. Archbishop of New York, Francis Spellman in Central America (I)
14. Summary of other presidential visits to Mexico (I, G)
15. News Wrap
  - a. Suspension of livestock trade between Mexico and the United States (I, G)
  - b. Execution of Cuban War criminal by firing squad (I)

In the rundown above, eleven out of 15 or 73% of the news items focused on international issues. With the U.S. president visiting, it seems natural that there would be an abundance of foreign news, but three out of four stories is quite remarkable, even taking into consideration Eisenhower's presence.

## **Promotion of television, business and national (development) interests**

From the 1950s to 1970s, television news became a prime mechanism to foment the interests of businessmen and national development efforts. Moreover, from the ear-

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<sup>6</sup> I=International, G=Government, D=Development, C=Crime, S=Sports

liest stages of television news programming, producers used news as an avenue to attract viewers and promote the interests of television owners and sponsors.

Often Romúlo O'Farrill, Sr. and Emilio Azcarrága Vidaurreta, the owners of Telesistema Mexicano, appeared as subjects of news reports as they met for *comidas* and *cocteles* with leaders of various governmental officials and multinational corporations.

On February 21, 1955, Rómulo O'Farrill Sr. and Rómulo O'Farrill Jr. served as the focus of a report on *Noticiero PEMEX SOL Novedades* that provided details about a meal they hosted for Mr. Vernon Moore and Mr. J.J. McIntire of General Motors as the two O'Farrill's demonstrated "*su simpatía y comprensión*," for the work of the GM executives before they headed for other positions.<sup>7</sup>

Rómulo O'Farrill Sr., who also functioned as the president of the Comité Directivo de los congresos panamericanos de carreteras (Pan American Highway congress) appeared in the lead report in the same newscast on February 21. The report highlighted O'Farrill's leadership in assisting with the construction of "*[una] medida económica y social, como es la de fomentar la articulación del sistema vial panamericano, estructura en la que se apoyan los transportes terrestres y por ende, las economías nacionales y el intercambio en el hemisferio.*"<sup>8</sup>

A week later O'Farrill topped the news again, as *Noticiero PEMEX Sol Novedades* reported that he hosted a dinner at his house for delegates of the Pan American Highway congress.<sup>9</sup>

These types of reports served to improve the social standing of media entrepreneurs among the public, domestic and international businessmen, and politicians who may have been watching the programs. In addition, the stories reflected the associated and dependent relationship that media moguls such as O'Farrill and Azcárraga maintained with foreign interests.

The relationships had been established and cultivated long before the advent of television. O'Farrill, an automobile dealer, for example had worked with William Jenkins in Puebla and Azcárraga had ties with foreign banking interests through his marriage to Laura Milmo, the daughter of British citizen Patricio V. Milmo, and granddaughter of James F. Milmo, major stakeholder in National Bank of Laredo (FERNANDEZ, 1983, p. 163). O'Farrill owned the Mexico City daily *Novedades* which often contributed news content to television from the 1950s to late 1960s.

In addition to promoting the image of media executives, news producers established credibility and promoted a station's efforts during news programs. When Jacobo Zabludovsky landed in Havana to meet Fidel Castro in January of 1959, *Noticiero General Motors* was there, "conscious of its responsibility to serve all of the Republic of Mexico,

<sup>7</sup> *Noticiero PEMEX SOL Novedades*, 21 February 1955.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Noticiero PEMEX Sol Novedades*, 28 February 1955.

contracted the best services in order to give truthful and up-to-date information about the situation in the Republic of Cuba."<sup>10</sup>

Coverage of sports as news became one of the frequent ways in which media could promote its own interests, as well as those of multinational corporations which paid for television commercials. In 1955, the Pan American Games, held in Mexico City, provided Telesistema Mexicano one of the first opportunities to combine international interest in sport and profit.<sup>11</sup>

Eleven years later, on May 29, 1966, Emilio Azcárraga Milmo along with the President of the Republic, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz inaugurated Estadio Azteca, the soccer stadium where the team America would play. Azcárraga had bank rolled the stadium and had acquired the home team America in 1959. The stadium would be used for national as well as international games such as the Olympics that Mexico would host in 1968. Today, the stadium also is used to house part of the company's film and video archive.

Jacobo Zabludovksy and Pedro Ferriz delivered the details about the inaugural ceremonies on Telesistema Mexicano. Ferriz commented:

We, as Mexicans also feel proud to have a stadium of this magnitude in every aspect, as the best out of any place in the world in my judgment. I have been to the stadiums Maracanã in Brazil and Wembley in England, The National in Santiago and the one in Tokyo, and ours is more functional in every way.<sup>12</sup>

In the fall of 1968, sports as well as social unrest competed for time on television news. Media executives and political leaders understood the important role that television played in creating a favorable image. That understanding influenced how both social unrest as well as sport would be covered and used to foment development efforts (González de Bustamante, 2010).

By 1968 television had become one of the nation's most important forms mass media. Between 1950 and 1970 the number of television sets throughout the country skyrocketed from a mere 100 receivers to 4.5 million (Mexico, 1961; Mexico, 1970). By the end of the 1960s, television stations had been established in 29 out of the country's 31 states. In the late 1960s, news encompassed a large portion of television programming, and by the end of the decade, annual news programming throughout the country produced by commercial and government owned stations totaled approximately 2,847 hours (Noriega and Leach, 1979, p. 58). In 1968, national and international advertising agencies directed 40 percent of their publicity to television advertising, totaling more than 973 million pesos (SANCHEZ, 1988).

An examination of coverage of the student massacre of 1968 and the Olympics that began 10 days after the *matanza* revealed that news executives put their goals of creating

<sup>10</sup> *Noticiero General Motors*, 7 January 1959

<sup>11</sup> *Noticiero PEMEX Sol Novedades*, 11 March 1955.

<sup>12</sup> Telesistema Mexicano. 29 May 1966.

a positive image of the nation before an international audience ahead of their interests in informing the public (GONZALEZ de BUSTAMANTE, 2010). The size of the viewing public (audience) had grown tremendously in the first twenty years of television. The estimated viewership for the '68 Olympics reportedly totaled 900 million (SANCHEZ de ARMAS, 1998, p. 535).

Two years later, as Mexico City hosted the World Cup and a presidential campaign ensued, news executives put their financial interests ahead of their political interests. For an entire week, coverage of the World Cup eclipsed reports about the upcoming elections (GONZALEZ de BUSTAMANTE, 2006, p. 279). On June 17, less than two weeks before the election, the World Cup semi-finals led the newscast on *Su Diario Nescafé*, as anchor Zabludovsky announced, "Today the semi-finalists in the ninth World Cup play. At Estadio Azteca, Germany and Italy will face off, while at Jalisco Stadium, Brazil and Uruguay will go head to head."<sup>13</sup>

Between June 17 and 23, *Su Diario Nescafé* aired 38 reports on the World Cup and 16 stories on the presidential elections (GONZALEZ de BUSTAMANTE, 2006, p. 279). The placement of the World Cup stories and elections stories also bears mentioning. Not once did election stories top the newscast during that week, while reports on the World Cup led the newscast four out of six days. The influence of the ruling party, PRI over news coverage, could be noted as well, as only three of the 16 stories on the elections focused on PAN opposition candidate, Efraín González Morfín.

By June 21 the presidential campaign drew to a close, along with the World Cup.

Brazil and Italy faced off in the final game of the four week event. Zabludovsky let morning viewers know of the game's outcome as he led *Su Diario Nescafé*,

Brazil beat Italy, by a score of 4-to-1. The same score as the game between Italy and Mexico. The points made by the Brazilians gave the Italians a lesson on how to use the ball and how to score a goal.<sup>14</sup>

As reports like these demonstrate, throughout the first twenty years of television, Telesistema Mexicano news executives frequently placed their financial interests ahead of their political interests. They're motive – to garner more viewers, advertisers, and therefore, increase profits.

By the 1970s, political leaders throughout the region began to latch onto the concept of creating a new world information and communication and order. Through UNESCO *fora*, governments established *políticas nacionales de comunicación* (national communications policies), in an effort to reduce the influence of foreign programming. A reform environment swept the hemisphere (WAISBORD, 1998, p. 256). It was in this wave of

<sup>13</sup> *Su Diario Nescafé* was the precursor to 24 horas, which began to air in September 1970 and would become the country's longest running newscast to date.

<sup>14</sup> *Su Diario Nescafé*, 21 June 1970.

anti-imperialism that Mexico created its first national news agency, pumped money into a national television network, and made an attempt –though probably never realistic – to nationalize television. It was a sign that nation-states such as Mexico viewed the imbalance of information flows as a threat to national sovereignty. Indeed, it became “painfully obvious that the ability to identify and to present the national version of events is one of the basic criteria of national sovereignty” (SCHILLER, 1978).

It was during this time that the interests of the country’s political and business leaders diverged. Large media owners such as Azcárraga Milmo lobbied against Echeverría’s efforts to exert state control over television. The conflict surfaced in October, 1974 when Televisa hosted the First World Encounter of Communications in Acapulco. Miguel Alemán Velasco, the first director of Telesistema Mexicano’s corporate news division, recalled that at a luncheon President Echeverría pointed out the many failures of private television and threatened to nationalize the networks.<sup>15</sup> While the interests of the nation’s leaders and business entrepreneurs often worked to each others mutual benefit, this was one instance and time in which they clearly did not.

## A call for comparative study

From radio to film to television, the United States and other foreign companies invested heavily in cultural industries throughout the region, but did associated-dependent relationships unfold in the same way? How did the early newscasts in other parts of the region reflect associated-dependent relationships in Brazil and Chile, if they did at all? And, why examine Brazil and Chile in comparison to Mexico? It is to those questions that this article now turns. While it is beyond the scope of this article to answer the first two of the questions posed, I can justify comparative studies of Mexico, Brazil, and Chile.

The benefits of comparative study can be substantial, but the research plan must be systematic and there must be a rationale for comparison (KOCKA, 2003). By comparison, I mean that the units of analysis would include the media systems in various nations as well as go beyond national boundaries. With respect to television industries in Latin America, comparative study is a logical method to examine media in the region because even before in inception of television in the 1950s, the forces that shaped the development of media systems throughout the region were both internal as well as external. For historians, a comparative approach allows the researcher to move beyond the “nationalist or civilizational straightjackets that have bedeviled so much history writing in the past” (EATON, 1997). Certainly, media moguls were not constricted by national boundaries, so why should the researcher? Further, the problem of associated-dependent development is a global problem, and one that should be studied from a global perspective. In expanding

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<sup>15</sup> Alemán interview with author, 14 March 2006.

the scope to various regions, the focus is not on the nation or place, but on the problem itself (EATON, 1997). Answers to these questions, contribute to not only the history of Latin America, but world history.

Why Brazil? Television officially began in 1950 in both Mexico and Brazil, at a time when the leaders of both countries pursued development strategies through rapid industrialization. Industrialization and unprecedented growth led to an increase in the middle-class, and consequently a growing number of citizens who could purchase television sets as well as those products advertised on television. Rapid growth along with the government's generally *laissez faire* policies with respect to the economic side of the television industry allowed both Grupo Televisa and Rede Globo to emerge as the two largest commercial networks in the region.

One important aspect of these two networks rise to power that warrants further study is internal competition. In the case of Televisa, by 1955 three commercial stations existed in Mexico City, but because of the relatively small size of the market, the enterprise had become a losing venture. To make it profitable, the three stations merged to create Telesistema Mexicano, which became Televisa in 1973. The history of Televisa has been marked by consolidation and centralization (SANCHEZ RUIZ, 1988).

In contrast, Francisco de Assis Chateaubriand's Diários Associados established Brazil's first station TV Tupi in São Paulo, with equipment and assistance from General Electric. A year later he inaugurated TV Tupi in Rio de Janeiro, with assistance from RCA Victor. Rede Globo did not emerge until 1965, with financial and technical assistance from Time-Life. In 1980, TV Tupi folded under government pressure, and the network was sold off as two networks, Sistema Brasileira de Televisão (SBT) and Rede Manchete (PATERNOSTRO, 2006, p. 34). In addition, Brazil's television industry developed in two competing economic centers, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. A systematic look at how local media entrepreneurs dealt with internal competition could shed additional light on the evolution of the industry.

The growth in the domestic market, through ties with foreign companies and advertisers, and a rise in the middle-class in the region's two largest countries, enabled Televisa and Globo to expand beyond national boundaries. Televisa exports entertainment and informational programming to more than 100 countries, while Globo exports to more than 120 nations (WAISBORD, 1998, p. 260).

Both Televisa and Globo have been controlled by media families, the Azcarrága and Marinho families respectively, with strong ties to networks within and outside of the region. An examination of how these patriarchs consulted with the heads of other networks would offer valuable details about how the associated-dependent development relationship evolved.

If the Brazilian case offers an example of a similar media system compared to Mexico to emerge in the region, what country would constitute a contrast? Certainly, not all countries followed a commercial network model. Chile represents the largest country in Latin America to pursue a non-commercial television system (FUENZALIDA, 2002).

The first broadcasts did not occur until 1958, making it a rather later comer to the television scene. The latent arrival in Chile had its advantages. Those who decided the path the television would take had time to see the failures of commercial television and opted to have it controlled by the state and universities. Beyond examining the debate over setting up a non-commercial model in Chile, analysis of early television news programs (if the archives exist) would shed light on how dependency and development may have been expressed differently under a distinct television system.

On February 12, 1955, *Noticiero PEMEX Novedades* led its newscast with a report on U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon's visit to Mexico. In the report, Nixon stated that Mexico was "un gigante que despierta."<sup>16</sup> The report went on to state that during his stay, Nixon met with numerous business leaders including Rómulo O'Farrill Sr., president and director of Novedades, "el mejor Diario de México," and Rómulo O'Farrill Jr., Vice President and General Manager of Channel 4.<sup>17</sup> The report concluded with a statement by Nixon who claimed that "private initiative is the nerve center of progress in the great economic field in Mexico," and that the activities of the country's businessmen served a "patriotic end."<sup>18</sup>

As this report and others throughout the first twenty years of television demonstrated, television news programs revealed the country's dependent as well as developing status in a world system. Those who controlled the airwaves controlled news content, and in so doing they often sought to promote their own economic interests. Their decisions reinforced foreign interests, but as Cardoso and Faletto would say, this did not happen because they were foreign, "but because they may coincide with values and interests that these groups pretend are their own" (1971, p. xvi).

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<sup>16</sup> *Noticiero PEMEX Sol Novedades*, 12 February 1955.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

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