

Three Peasants Fight for Freedom: Radio and the United States' Cultural Cold War in Latin America

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This article examines the 1961–1962 adaptation of the highly successful 1940s Cuban radio series *Los tres Villalobos* and the sociopolitical and industrial circumstances that shaped this radio product. Produced by the Miami-based company America's Production Inc. for the United States Information Agency and authored by the scriptwriter of the original series, the 1960s version explored the evils of communism and introduced the economic, political, and social benefits of John F. Kennedy's "Alliance for Progress" plan for Latin America. The article argues that through radio programs such as *Los tres Villalobos*, America's Production Inc. and its Cuban media professionals initiated a series of "ventriloquist" acts that voiced the political and socioeconomic objectives of the Kennedy administration and represented some of the political rhetoric emerging from Cuban exile groups in Miami.

Keywords: Cuban exiles, Miami, USIA, propaganda, 1960s, Latin America, radio

What happened with the happiness of the people, the cordiality of men, and the generosity of the farmers? They are gone! They died when communism took over the region! Now, there is only mistrust! The father distrusts the son! Brothers are suspicious of each other. Families are divided. . . . And over the entire region, the phantom of hunger slowly takes over. (Couto, 1961–1962, p. 1)

These words frame the beginning of the second season of the 1961 version of the adventure radio show *Los tres Villalobos*. Written by Armando Couto, the author of the original and highly successful 1940s–1950s Cuban radio series, the new three-part *Los tres Villalobos* entered Cuba and Latin America in the early 1960s via the United States Information Agency's (USIA) Voice of America (VOA) and affiliated commercial radio stations in the region. The new three seasons' version, written between 1961 and 1962, shared the genre, narrative structure, and principal characters of the original radio program that was first produced in Havana during the 1940s and that became a major hit across Latin America in the 1950s. Ideologically, however, the two versions could hardly have been more different.

Following the Western's genre conventions, situated in the same fictional place of Ayatimbo, and featuring the Villalobos brothers—Rodolfo, Miguelón, and Macho—the series' first and second seasons (with

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26 and 130 episodes, respectively, each episode approximately 30 minutes in length) depict a revolution and the formation of a communist state, a thinly veiled reference to the Cuban Revolution. In the third season, across 130 episodes, approximately 30 minutes each, the action moves to a different location and introduces the topics of economic development and modernization. The Villalobos brothers' quest for justice and their desire to help those in need that defined the 1940s–1950s *Los tres Villalobos* remained at the core of the 1960s remake. Yet, in the new version, justice became synonymous with anticommunism and helping those in need meant luring listeners into accepting the benefits of the U.S.-designed path toward modernization. The 1960s *Los tres Villalobos* is a clear example of the media tools used by President John F. Kennedy's administration to communicate his "Alliance for Progress" plan for Latin America.

Aware of the devastating poverty, illiteracy rates, and political instability that characterized many countries in Latin America and sensitive to the possible ideological seduction of communism in the region, President Kennedy foresaw the 1960s as the "decade of development" (Rabe, 1999, p. 9). Economic development, capitalistic democracy, scientific and technical knowledge, social reform, and the dismantling of the *latifundista* (landowner) class were at the center of Kennedy's Alliance for Progress plan for Latin America (Rabe, 1999, pp. 10–11). Whereas Kennedy's preoccupation with Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution were the primary influences over his policy in Latin America, his plan for economic development and democracy was also molded by the modernization theory that had defined U.S. policy and academic circles since the 1950s.

Proponents of the modernization theory believed that "traditional"/developing societies could become modern/democratic and procapitalist nation-states through economic incentives, political and social transformations, the development of infrastructures, and the appropriation of Western/U.S. sociocultural values (Latham, 2000). An important component of this theory was the use of the media to communicate promodernization messages. The work of Daniel Lerner, one of the intellectual forces behind the theory, provided justification for the use of the media. For Lerner, as journalism scholar Hemant Shah (2011) writes, "mass media were assigned the key task of making . . . [the] modernization model attractive and irresistible" (p. 4). Kennedy's Alliance for Progress fomented a variety of socioeconomic programs for Latin America and, by way of USIA, the administration used the media as a propaganda tool to promote the benefits associated with capitalistic democracy and modernization (Cull, 2009; Dizard, 2004; Fein, 2008). It is in this U.S.–Latin American Cold War context that Armando Couto's anticommunist and promodernization remake of *Los tres Villalobos* was born. Nonetheless, Couto's creation is only half of the story.

During the early 1960s, Couto, together with other Cuban media professionals, performers, and scriptwriters, who had relocated to Miami after Fidel Castro came to power, participated in the production of Cold War politically infused entertainment radio shows with titles such as *El futuro empieza hoy* [The Future Begins Today], *Dos extraños* [Two Strangers], and *Mi hermano el indio* [My Brother, the Indian] that, similar to *Los tres Villalobos*, critiqued communism and endorsed the Alliance for Progress plan for Latin America. Working for the Miami-based company America's Production Inc. (API), the recently arrived creators initiated a mediated relationship with the U.S. government. In the case of *Los tres Villalobos*, a three-part series produced during the years of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion and the Cuban missile crisis, Cuban media creators voiced the Alliance for Progress's ideology of anticommunism, development, and

modernization while, concomitantly, injecting some of the Cuban-Miami community's frustrations and impotence with the situation in Cuba.

This article examines the three seasons of *Los tres Villalobos*, the production company behind the series, and the political and sociocultural context that shaped this early 1960s propaganda radio show. The article argues that by way of radio programs such as *Los tres Villalobos*, API and its Cuban media professionals initiated a series of "ventriloquist" acts that enacted the political and socioeconomic objectives of the Kennedy administration and disseminated some of the political rhetoric emerging from Cuban exile groups in Miami. However, although at one level, the ventriloquist acts could be seen as mere transmissions of Cold War-infused political messages, these performances were more unstable. Place (Miami-Cuba-Latin America), the Cuban media's past (1940s–1950s), the media professional exilic present (1960s), and audiences (imagined listeners across Latin America) also played an important role in the ventriloquist acts.

My use of ventriloquism is influenced by David Goldblatt's (2006) and François Cooren's (2016) work. For Goldblatt, ventriloquism is "an act in which *things* talk—in which things are made to talk by one who is present to them. It is a language-game in which talking to oneself and talking through intermediaries has an important place" (p. xi). Performing voices and pretending to listen to another entity are key aspects of the ventriloquial illusion. As part of this illusion, one recognizes a conversation between two entities or a monologue, wherein the ventriloquist is talking to her/himself (Goldblatt, 2006, pp. 38–43). Goldblatt uses ventriloquism to analyze the process of art making and interpretation, but it is also possible to use his analogy to analyze issues of language and power relations. As Cooren and Sandler (2014) write regarding Goldblatt's use of the term, "Ventriloquism . . . problematizes the question as to *who* or even *what* is speaking or more generally, saying or doing something in a given situation" (p. 230). In other words, the ventriloquist and "dummy" act could be influenced by different factors and could represent a variety of positions beyond the communication between two entities.

Extending Goldblatt's theorization of ventriloquism and relying on Bakhtin's concept of polyphony, Cooren (2014, 2016) uses ventriloquism to analyze human interactions and narrations. Interested in how we "invoke, convoke, and evoke, various beings that are made to say things through what we say" (2016, p. 24), Cooren proposes that in any type of interaction, it is possible to identify various real and hypothetical "figures" directly and indirectly participating in a dialogue or influencing what or how we communicate. Figures "can take, among others, the form of *facts* or *situations* . . . of *values* and *principles*" (2014, p. 2). These figures, nonetheless, do not delimit the ventriloquist or dummy roles given that, according to Cooren, there is always an exchange of positionings. As he explains,

Human beings are ventriloquists to the extent that they speak *in the name* of or *for* figures. . . . Conversely . . . human beings can also be considered ventriloquized in that they can be considered themselves animated, moved, motivated or enthused by what they stage in their dialogue. (2014, p. 3)

In using the analogy of ventriloquism then, I am accentuating how geopolitical conflicts, political power, ideological threats, place, exiles' frustration, and radio and movie genres (among other elements) operated as figures in the production of API's propaganda radio programming in general and *Los tres Villalobos* in

particular. Even, as in the case of *Los tres Villalobos*, the Cuban media professionals' ventriloquists' acts foregrounded Kennedy's policies and the USIA's mission under Edward R. Murrow to "persuade" and "disseminate straight unargued information" (Sorensen, 1992, p. 16), these acts, as analyzed in the following pages, were influenced by a variety of forces, and, most likely, conveyed meanings to audiences beyond the politics of the Kennedy administration.

To provide a broader picture of the figures that influenced the artistic creation and production of *Los tres Villalobos*, I draw on sources obtained at four archives. Congressional records and the available USIA and VOA documents at the National Archives II in Maryland provided information about the U.S. propaganda program directed toward Latin America. The papers of former Florida Senator George A. Smathers (1951–1969) at the University of Florida–Gainesville offered important background on President Kennedy's administration's fight against communism across Latin America, as well as the Cuban migration to Miami during the 1960s. The existing company documents from API located at Tulane University's Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, the papers of Cuban scriptwriters Armando Couto and María Julia Casanova housed at the University of Miami's Cuban Heritage Collection, trade magazines, newspaper stories, and personal interviews with family members of Louis J. Boeri, API's founder, shed light on the beginning of API, the recruitment of Cuban media professionals, and the ways in which *Los tres Villalobos* voiced anticommunism and promodernization messages.

Still, despite relying on a broad array of sources to reconstruct part of the U.S.–Latin America and U.S. Spanish-language media's past, it was impossible to fully uncover all of the figures that formed the USIA/API covert media enterprise. Secrecy was a fundamental component of the USIA/API business arrangements, always attempting to mask the U.S. government's influence and political intentions. In the context of Latin America, this masking was relevant because, as I explain below, any association of propaganda programming with the United States would call into question the veracity of the messages being broadcast. The "Reds" (communists) used propaganda; the United States "shared" information; thus, the U.S. government needed intermediaries to transmit what U.S. policy circles deemed was nonpropaganda information.

The United States' Media Battles With the "Reds" and America's Production Inc.

In stepping up propaganda activities in Latin America, communists are now providing *gratis* packaged programs for local longwave stations. Most reportedly are in soap opera format, attractive to Latins, and depicting American style capitalism as taking unfair advantage of the poor, sick and needy. ("Red Soap Operas," 1961, p. 5)

On February 13, 1961, *The Boston Globe* included a brief note announcing that VOA would broadcast the one-hour documentary "The Anatomy of a Broken Promise" across Latin America. According to the note, the documentary was part of "a major USIA effort to intensify worldwide reporting of the Cuban refugee situation, and particularly to get the story into all parts of Latin America" ("U.S. Radio Will Expose," 1961). Two decades after the U.S. government had sponsored news and entertainment radio programming to create political alliances across the region as part of the Good Neighbor Policy, U.S. state officials once again relied on radio to mobilize transnational support against a new menace: communism (Cramer, 2012;

Ehrick, 2019; Heil, 2003; Horten, 2003; Shulman, 1990). However, contrary to the late 1930s when the U.S. government had time to develop a multifront media strategy to counteract Germany and Italy's propaganda, in 1960, the swift ideological transformation of the Cuban Revolution pushed the U.S. government to put something "on the air" without a well-thought-out media plan. As New York Senator Kenneth Keating remarked to Congress in March 1960, "We must take immediate affirmative action to keep open channels of truth" with the Cuban people and Latin Americans (p. 6271). Although VOA began to air a one-hour Spanish-language show throughout the region in March 1960, it was clear to many U.S. officials that an hour was not enough.

By February 1961, when "The Anatomy of a Broken Promise" was scheduled to go on the air, the USIA had increased VOA's production of Spanish-language programs from seven to 14 hours a week. Still, even with this growth, the United States fell short in comparison to the communist opposition. According to a January 9, 1961, *Washington Post* article and a USIA report to Congress, the Soviets transmitted a total of 56 hours weekly and China, being a close second, aired a total of 21 hours in Spanish and 10.5 hours in Portuguese targeting Brazil. Other communist countries broadcast a total of 174 hours to the region (Marton, 1961; "Russians Increase Global Broadcast," 1962). As historian Tobias Rupprecht (2015) documents, while the Soviet Union began a propaganda campaign toward Latin America in 1953, after the death of Stalin, it intensified in 1961. The Soviets produced shows not only in Spanish and Portuguese, but also in the indigenous languages of Quechua, Gurani, and Aymara. One hundred thirty hours of programming were produced by Radio Moscú in Cuba (Rupprecht, 2015, p. 38). USIA, on the other hand, not only produced less programming than the Soviets and the Chinese, but it had also failed to develop any Portuguese-language shows by 1961. Despite the fact that since 1960 some members of Congress and several people affiliated with the Department of State had been vocal about the need for the United States to engage in media communication with the people of Latin America, it was only after the Bay of Pigs debacle in April 1961 that Congress deemed USIA and its Voice of America as valuable assets for U.S. foreign policy (Smathers, 1961). With the 1961 Congressional approval of \$3.25 million for USIA, its director, former journalist Edward R. Murrow, set out to "beef up" USIA's television, radio, and film activities in Latin America ("Compromise Reached," 1961).

Murrow's USIA media strategy had three integrated tactics. The first tactic involved U.S. commercial broadcasters exporting their radio and television programming. In this regard, Murrow urged networks to export dramas, variety shows, and documentaries that had little or no violent content ("Red Threat Lifest Program Theme," 1962; "U.S. Station Programs," 1961; see also Curtin, 1995). Through this tactic, officials intended to improve the U.S.'s image abroad. A second interconnected tactic encouraged U.S. broadcasters to establish business associations and information exchanges with Latin American media owners as a way to help fight communist propaganda. These business arrangements were intended to facilitate selling programming with positive representations of the United States to television stations across the region. Several Latin American broadcasters, who were already in talks with U.S. networks about investment opportunities in their industries, welcomed this arrangement ("Toward Hemispheric Freedom," 1961; "U.S., Latin Radio-TV Urged to Fight Reds," 1962). A third tactic revolved around USIA sponsoring and contracting independent producers to create radio and television shows and documentaries, in addition to commission of scripts ("Commercial Stations Magnify Voice," 1962; "USIA Boasts Strong International Voice," 1961). Whereas Murrow's predecessor had initiated the production of radio shows, the renowned

news anchor expanded media production by including film and television and by increasing radio programming. In terms of radio, VOA and commercial stations in Latin America transmitted the finished programs, and USIA sent the commissioned scripts to affiliate stations throughout the region. These stations then produced the scripts locally. An important component of exporting radio programming and scripts was the absence of any identification as USIA products. As the USIA's acting director (Abbot Washburn) explained to members of Congress, "Both pre-recorded and locally prepared materials are frequently used on the air without attribution to USIA, which removes natural connotation[s] of propaganda [and] thereby enhances their credibility" (Washburn, 1961, p. A 836). It was precisely through these unidentified propaganda entertainment programs (presented as apolitical) that the Miami-relocated Cuban scriptwriters, performers, and media professionals working for API officially entered the world of U.S. policy.

It is worth noting that, in addition to the API talent, many Cuban exiles had been involved with U.S. propaganda operations since the early 1960s. As several scholars have documented, Cuban exile political groups formed in Miami as soon as the exodus began, and many worked closely with the U.S. government (García, 1994; Pedraza, 2007; Torres, 1999). Although there were drastic ideological differences across these groups' political orientations (from far-right militia groups, to politically centrist groups, to groups that embraced the social justice and democratic ideals that originally defined the Cuban Revolution), several leaders of political organizations collaborated with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in undercover operations (such as the Bay of Pigs) as well as in the production of news-oriented propaganda shows for the CIA's Radio Swan (Frederick, 1986; Soley & Nichols, 1987; Soruco, 1996; Walsh, 2011). Furthermore, in Miami, political radio programming opposing Castro's regime was the order of the day. In some cases, the U.S. government funded the production of the anti-Fidel Castro shows. As journalism scholar Gonzalo R. Soruco (1996) writes, "WMIE radio, which later became WQBA, 'La Cubanísima,' was also chosen by the exiles and the U.S. government in the propaganda war against Castro because its signal covers much of western and central Cuba" (p. 38).

The atmosphere across the Miami-Cuban exile community was politicized beginning with the early stages of the post-1959 Cuban migration to the United States, even though it was unlikely that every exile was a member of a political organization. Radio programs, churches, community gatherings, and theater performances all focused on Castro's overthrow and returning to the homeland. This political environment intensified after the aborted Bay of Pigs invasion. The exiles' hopes for a Cuba without Castro did not materialize, leaving many discouraged and blaming the United States for the disastrous outcome. As historian María Cristina García (1996) writes, community members "sent telegraphs to President Kennedy pleading for a U.S. intervention" (p. 32). Although many political groups formed after the Bay of Pigs and while the CIA and Cuban exile militia groups' battles with Castro continued throughout the 1960s, a sense of defeat saturated the Cuban exile community in the United States (Pedraza, 2007, pp. 92-114). In the words of API's scriptwriter and renowned theater figure in Cuba and Miami María Julia Casanova (2000), "All of this [her propaganda radio work for the CIA's Radio Swan] was before the unsuccessful Playa Girón [Bay of Pigs], when the North American government still seemed officially unwavering in supporting Cubans in the armed battle against Castro" (p. 64).

A sense of urgency and impotence permeated the Miamian Cuban exiles during the early 1960s. These feelings and the increasingly tense U.S.-Cuba relations served as the political backdrop for API's

propaganda-oriented entertainment programming in general and the *Los tres Villalobos* 1961–1962 remake in particular. By residing in Miami, API's scriptwriters, talent, and technical staff breathed politics into both public and private spheres. The only API individual somewhat removed from the passionate political atmosphere that characterized Miami during the early 1960s was Louis J. Boeri, founder of the media production company.

Boeri founded API in 1961 to "furnish Spanish programming to the U.S. Information Agency, which hoped to use a Latin American passion for soap operas to U.S. advantage" ("Radio Soap Operas Make Comeback," 1965). By 1963, Boeri had expanded his radio production to include commercial entertainment programming targeting the Latin American and the U.S. Spanish-language markets. API had "more than 50 performers and technicians" on its payroll, all of whom were highly experienced actors, scriptwriters, and technical staff who were involved in radio and television production in Cuba, "the unquestioned leader of Latin television and radio production" during the 1950s (Anderson, 1963; see also Rivero, 2015). With his office and studios on the fifth floor of "The Freedom Tower" in Miami, Boeri formed a radio programming empire, selling 650 programs to the U.S. government, to more than 200 radio stations in Latin America and Spain, and to many U.S. Spanish-language radio stations ("Episodes by Exiles," 1965).

One of the first shows produced by API was *Los tres Villalobos*, a series that since the late 1940s and through numerous media forms—radio, movies, albums, and postcards—was an established part of Latin Americans' cultural imaginary. In the memories of those who had previously consumed the series, *Los tres Villalobos* was a familiar product detached from any Cold War political connotations. Following the same narrative structure and using the actors/voices that had performed the heroic characters in the original series, Couto's creation was a perfect match for USIA's media strategy in Latin America.

Los tres Villalobos: The Original and the Miami Remake

For more than a year now, three fictional freedom fighters have been striking daily blows against communists in Latin America. Their names are Miguelón, Macho, and Rodolfo—the brothers Villalobos. (Meyer, 1962, p. 12)

In the early 1940s, when Couto's original *Los tres Villalobos* first aired on RHC Cadena azul, Cuba had two forms of dramatic radio programming: the romantic series and the adventure series. The first romantic series was broadcast in 1938 with the genre solidified in "La novela del aire" (1941–1958), a program that since its inception included a variety of accumulative romantic radio narratives (González, 2009, p. 7). The birth of the adventure series is associated with the program *Chan Li Po*, authored by the famous Cuban scriptwriter Félix B. Caignet in 1934. A hybrid cultural product, this detective drama combined an indigenized version of Hollywood's Charlie Chan films with a Cuban tale about a highly intelligent, perceptive, and hard-working Cuban Chinese medicine man who migrated to the island during the mid-19th century. Each episode of *Chan Li Po* centered on "a hero and his adventures" in solving a mystery with his sagacity and intuition while also maintaining his humane personality (Cué-Sierra, 2006; González, 2009; see also McEnaney, 2017). Chan Li Po was not a cold and detached detective but, rather, a compassionate man who used his talent to help those in less powerful positions. These characteristics—heroism and compassion—would define the personality of the Villalobos brothers.

Protecting those in need was the Villalobos' life quest, particularly the *campesinos* (farmworkers). The brothers' incentive was a result of their experiences in the fictional valley of Ayatimbo. Originally *campesinos* themselves, they lost their older brother and land (the ranch "Las delicias") to two unscrupulous men. Their inability to obtain justice through traditional channels forced the Villalobos to take matters into their own hands. In *Los tres Villalobos*, the system was generally depicted as corrupt; hence, the brothers routinely fought to protect those oppressed by people with either economic or political power.

The Robin Hood-esque narrative that defined *Los tres Villalobos*, in addition to the brothers' ongoing journeys across the fictional Ayatimbo to protect the powerless, connect the program with the tradition of the Cuban adventure radio series initiated by *Chan Li Po*. Nonetheless, in terms of some of the aural (in radio) and visual cues (in posters advertising the show, postcards, albums, and movie adaptations), the Mexican films of the Golden Age (1936–1959) and the Hollywood Western were highly influential in constituting *Los tres Villalobos'* generic traits. For instance, the theme song of the original *Los tres Villalobos* is a ranchera, a Mexican musical genre popularized across Latin America in some of the films of Mexico's Golden Age of cinema. Whereas the musical theme of *Los tres Villalobos* opens with the voices of the actors playing the Villalobos brothers enacting, as culturally expected, a Cuban accent, the accordion tunes, the singing style, and the musical arrangements connect the series with the tradition of rancheras. On the other hand, the posters, postcards, albums, and movie adaptations reflect the influence of elements of the Hollywood Western in *Los tres Villalobos*. Visually, the Western influence can be seen in the brothers' costumes, the horses used as a mode of transportation, the lasso, and the general ambiance. Aurally, the Western genre elements were emphasized on radio through the sound of galloping horses and the battles with pistols and rifles. Still, although the 1940s–1950s *Los tres Villalobos* engaged in a genre dialogue with the Hollywood Western, the conversation occurred at the iconographic and aural levels. The political underpinnings of the Hollywood genre were absent in the 1940s–1950s *Los tres Villalobos*.

As film scholars have broadly discussed, the Hollywood Western and the frontier that is constitutive of the genre's geographical imaginary are associated with imperialistic expansion, individualism, ethnic conflict, and a clash between savagery and civilization. In the words of Gilberto Pérez (1998), "The Western is a drama of violence" in which the frontier is seen as the "founding myth of the American nation," a place of conflict, yet also a space for reinvention (pp. 232, 244). In this environment, the hero arrives, pistol in hand, to "resolve the conflict between pioneers and savages" (Cawelti, 1999, p. 36). Place, specifically the frontier, plays a pivotal role in the Western, presenting, according to Pérez, a series of dualities: "East and West, past and future, feminine and masculine, European and Indian, order and freedom, garden and wilderness, civilization and savagery, culture and nature" (p. 247). These dualities permeate the characters and their relationships with each other.

The aforementioned sociopolitical and geographic framework of the Western did not make it into Armando Couto's adaptation of the genre in the 1940s even though, like the Hollywood creation, a few of the series' episodes included an evil "Indian" (such as el Indio Taboa who was captured by the Villalobos). By incorporating dangerous "Indians" in the narrative, *Los tres Villalobos* mimicked the duality of civilization and savagery ingrained in the Western in which "Native Americans are usually portrayed as mean-spirited enemies of the moving train of progress" (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 119). Through mimicry, a process by which, as Homi Bhabha (2012) explains, the colonized reproduces the colonial discourse, the Villalobos

became the White Europeans fighting the ethnic others. This representation, however, was disconnected from Cuba's ethnoracial reality. The aboriginals in Cuba were exterminated with the European conquest; hence, the inclusion of Indians in *Los tres Villalobos* created a distance between representation and reality, particularly in terms of ethnicity. Furthermore, the main enemies of the Villalobos brothers were politically and financially powerful White Cubans (e.g., Emilio Capetillo and Judge Alvareda). Thus, although the series' sporadic inclusion of Indians reproduced the Hollywood stereotype, these characters, similar to the costumes, arms, and horses, were used for dramatic purposes. Armando Couto indigenized the Western to provide the ambiance for the creation of adventures.

According to Cuban media critic Mayra Cué-Sierra (2012a), *Los tres Villalobos'* narrative re-created the experiences of the day-to-day life of the Cuban *campesinos* and "the struggles of the common man." For the most part, the unifying force behind the powerless in the series was class. The Villalobos dedicated themselves to protecting poor *campesinos*. This demographic characteristic, the fictionalization of place (the valley of Ayatimbo), and the incorporation of elements associated with the Golden Age of Mexican cinema and the Hollywood Western, made the original *Los tres Villalobos* appealing to people across Latin America. During the 1950s, Armando Couto's radio program was a major hit throughout the region, influencing the production of four movies, two in Mexico (*Los tres Villalobos* and *La venganza de los Villalobos*) and two in Cuba (*El regreso de los Villalobos* and *La justicia de los Villalobos o El valle rojo*; Cué-Sierra, 2012b). Rodolfo, Miguelón, and Macho were well-known figures in Latin America. Hence, using the brothers to "fight Reds," could be understood by radio listeners as another journey in the Villalobos' fight for justice.

As previously mentioned, the 1961–1962 version of *Los tres Villalobos* consisted of three seasons. The first two focused on communism and the third centered on modernization. Whereas, similar to the original series, the location for the first two parts was Ayatimbo and even as the brothers used horses as their mode of transportation, temporally, the remake related more to the present. To be sure, none of the episodes made direct references to time; however, the characters and themes included in the first two parts and the push for modernization that defined the third part circuitously placed the action in the early 1960s. In this regard, the Miami remake of *Los tres Villalobos* engaged in an ideological conversation with the Hollywood Westerns of the 1950s and early 1960s. As film scholar Stanley Corkin (2004) observes, in the Western of the Cold War era, "national interest is defined not simply by the goal of occupying contiguous lands but also by the imperative of reordering them according to a distinctly U.S. vision of civil society" (p. 19). The Miami remake situates the Villalobos' fight for justice in accordance with the Kennedy administration's agenda toward Latin America and, in doing this, the Villalobos brothers became heroic figures fighting the barbaric forces of communism and backward traditions. The savages and major threats in Ayatimbo were not Indians but, instead, were communist leaders, communists in disguise, and people invested in some of the traditions of the past.

In the first part of the series, the Villalobos brothers arrive in Ayatimbo at the request of a good friend, shortly after the triumph of a revolution. As some residents of the valley question the sincerity of the revolutionary leader, the Villalobos realize that the *revolucionario*—Gabriel Rasco (phonetically sounds similar to Castro)—was the craftiest and most evil tyrant they have ever faced. Gabriel, together with his brother Saul (phonetically similar to Raúl) and their diabolic and asthmatic advisor, Fausto Nevara (phonetically similar to Guevara) better known as El Gaucho, had previously fought a battle in the mountains

against the (unnamed) tyrant of the valley. Following their victory, Gabriel presented himself as a hero of *el pueblo*. It was only after Gabriel had expropriated farms and businesses from the people—forcing thousands of *campesinos* into exile—that some citizens of Ayatimbo questioned the Rasco brothers' political intentions. Thus, in the first part of the series, the Villalobos witness the people's support for their charismatic leader, his ambition for power, his evil nature, and the progressive transformation of Ayatimbo into a communist region. The Villalobos try to organize a revolution against the Rasco brothers, but they are unsuccessful. Part 1 ends with Gabriel Rasco's supposed assassination of the Villalobos brothers.

In Part 2, Rodolfo, Miguelón, and Macho, having survived, return to the valley with the primary objective of convincing the *campesinos* that both the Rasco brothers and communism are evil. However, they encounter two main obstacles. First, Macho, the youngest of the three brothers, is persuaded by Gabriel Rasco's political vision and joins the revolution. Second, the farmers, who have always supported the Villalobos, no longer trust them thanks to the Rasco brothers' campaign to destroy the Villalobos' reputation. Thus, Rodolfo and Miguelón are forced to hide in the mountains and look for allies. Over time, the people of Ayatimbo (and Macho) come to terms with the atrocities committed by Gabriel Rasco and begin to understand that communism has destroyed Ayatimbo and the spirit of the people. Many *campesinos* decide to support Rodolfo and Miguelón's fight against the tyrant. The series' second part ends with a triumphant battle, leaving the Rasco brothers and El Gaucho dead (the Villalobos blew up a sewer with the Rasco brothers and El Gaucho in it). Miguelón ponders the future of a democratic Ayatimbo. Although he is concerned about all the work that must be done to rebuild the area, his main worry is the young people who have been indoctrinated with communist propaganda.

Whereas Part 1 presents a fictionalized enactment of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, Part 2 portrays the Cuban exiles' idealized outcome of the Bay of Pigs as a successful military operation. Cuban exiles' frustrations, lack of hope for a democratic government in Cuba, and conflicts between island and exiled Cuban families are indirectly referenced in the series. During both seasons, Armando Couto used *Los tres Villalobos* to channel the sentiments of the Cuban exile community. As sociologist Silvia Pedraza (2007) notes regarding the Bay of Pigs' failure,

As 1961 ended, three years after the initial triumph of the revolution, the opposition it generated had largely been crushed. Like all social conflicts, it was lived in people's daily lives, as Cuban families became divided between those who supported the revolution, becoming integrated to it, and those who rejected it, taking the road to exile. (p. 109)

During the first and second seasons, the feelings of the Cuban national and extended/diasporic family served as figures that shaped Couto's ventriloquism. Couto, nonetheless, needed to balance his act and also channel President Kennedy's policies toward Latin America.

The action of the third season occurs in an unidentified valley near Ayatimbo and the narrative introduces the topics of economic development, the benefits of eliminating the *latifundista* class, and modernization. Still, the specter of Gabriel Rasco and communism are present in the narrative (Rasco appears in the dreams of one of the characters).

When the Villalobos arrive in the valley, a young engineer who works for the government is developing an unspecified plan that will greatly improve the area and the well-being of the *campesinos*. The majority of the landowners have already sold part of their lands, offering them to the *campesinos* for installment payments. The government and banks have helped both the *campesinos* and the landowners with the business transactions that will improve the life of the *campesinos*. These two entities have also established a series of important development plans (also unspecified) for the valley, which have been very successful. Yet, the government and the young engineer are encountering some resistance. One of the landowners refuses to sell his land. He is part of the valley's oligarchy who wants to keep the old socioeconomic system in place. Doing everything possible to see the government's plans fail, the landowner creates alliances with the leader of the farmworkers. This leader, a communist in disguise, is trying to dissuade the *campesinos* from trusting the government and the engineer. The Villalobos then have two main tasks: to investigate and stop the landowner's goal to destroy the government's efforts in the region and to stop the spread of communist ideas by the communist in disguise. As expected, the brothers are able to defeat the landowner and the communist and the valley continues its path toward economic modernization.

Part 3 of *Los tres Villalobos* directly incorporated elements of Kennedy's Alliance for Progress plan for Latin America. As Michael E. Latham (2000) observes, "The ideology of modernization shaped and legitimated an ambitious, highly publicized effort to combine the promotion of Latin American development with the containment of communism" (p. 72). By addressing the government's efforts to improve the valley's infrastructure, by discussing how the landowners sold some of their lands to *campesinos*, and by explaining the ways in which both government and banks assisted the *campesinos* with acquiring land, the last part of *Los tres Villalobos* introduced the U.S.-guided economic development trend that was taking place across Latin America. In addition, the threat of the spread of communism in the region was an ongoing thread in the narrative.

If during the 1940s and 1950s, the Villalobos tirelessly fought against those with economic and political power, in the 1960s version the brothers' fight for justice became a battle against communism and sectors that resisted socioeconomic changes. By transferring communism and modernization to the fictional Ayatimbo, *Los tres Villalobos* attempted to convince audiences across Latin America that the terrifying situation in Cuba could occur anywhere in the region. Improving the life of the poor and advocating for sociopolitical and economic transformations offered the best solutions for combatting communism. This ideological and structural move (anticommunism and modernization) was at the core of the Alliance for Progress, a policy that "was a cultural battleground as well as a strategic and economic one" (Latham, 2000, p. 71).

We do not know, however, whether this program influenced people in Latin America. The available sources for USIA's radio programs' reception in Latin America between 1960 and 1963 are somewhat general, providing information for the hours during which people listened to VOA and the class spectrum of those who listened (USIA, 1963b). The existing memos, telegraphs, and reports do not provide information about specific programs. Furthermore, and as I previously observed, many of the USIA-commissioned radio programs were broadcast via commercial stations throughout Latin America. Thus, in Cuba, USIA radio programs aired over VOA; however, in other countries across the region they could have been broadcast on any number of national/local stations.

Despite the lack of specific program information, we have a few clues as to how some listeners reacted to *Los tres Villalobos*, particularly in Cuba. Based on a USIA July 1963 report, which included interviews with Cuban refugees, when the Cuban government did not jam the signal, VOA was successful on the island, particularly in city areas:

Even though most of the refugees were interviewed within a few days after their arrival in the United States, 60% had heard of the Alliance for Progress and could identify the United States as its sponsor. . . . This suggests that American media, and especially radio, must have a considerable audience in Cuba. (USIA, 1963a, p. 3)

Armando Couto, *Los tres Villalobos*' creator, also believed in the success of VOA in Cuba. Although Couto did not list specific sources, in his notes he indicated that *Los tres Villalobos* was a hit, echoing USIA's limited research on the island. According to the scriptwriter, *Los tres Villalobos* offered catharsis and hope for a democratic future in Cuba. The characters' accusations against communism "represent what the people in Cuba would like to say if criticism would not be forbidden by the government" (Couto, 1961–1962). Based on Couto's words, *Los tres Villalobos* offered a political voice to the silenced Cuban citizens. The Miami exiles' anti-Fidel Castro rhetoric that dominated radio, theatrical, and social events most likely served as figures influencing the views of fellow exile Couto. At the same time, we could say that Couto was ventriloquized, most likely channeling his political views about the situation in Cuba during the early 1960s in his opinion regarding the impact of his show on the island.

The Different Figures That Influenced API's *Los tres Villalobos*

This article analyzes the ways in which a variety of figures influenced API's *Los tres Villalobos*' ventriloquist act. Cold War political forces, President Kennedy's view of Fidel Castro as a threat to Latin America, Louis J. Boeri's vision to establish API with highly experienced Cuban exile media professionals, and the Cuban exile community's frustration with the situation in Cuba operated as figures that directly and indirectly shaped the ventriloquism in *Los tres Villalobos*. API's propaganda shows were part of a broader USIA campaign (which included publications, movies, television shows, and radio programs) designed to fight communism in Latin America and promote economic development and modernization. A 1961 Congressional Report makes clear the belief that the U.S. government would have to win back the Latin American people:

There is no blinking the menace of Castro. His fiery words and his flamboyant personality appeal to the Latin-American temperament. His tirades against the United States inflame the discontented and rebellious. The attempted revolution against him aroused a storm of resentment and bitter criticism of this country. But USIA has sought to show how he betrayed the ideals of his own Revolution, has pointed up the atrocities of his regime and his subservience to the Sino-Soviet bloc. (USIA, 1961, p. 15)

The three parts of *Los tres Villalobos* drew on the threat of communism in Latin America to position it as a danger to the people in the region.

At first glance then, and based on the aforementioned quote, one might think that Cuban scriptwriters such as Couto merely followed the ideological script established by the Kennedy administration and its USIA leadership. However, the ventriloquism was more complex. Couto's view of communism and of his life in Cuba before the revolution most likely influenced his representation of the U.S. Cold War ideology. Although Couto's *Los tres Villalobos'* papers include no indications of possible alliances with Cuban exile groups, the visceral anticommunist and anti-Castro tone in the series echoed these groups' and the Cuban exile community's perspectives. Couto represented the voice of his compatriots in Miami.

The upper and middle-upper class Cubans who settled in Miami during the early 1960s became active participants in the anti-Castro movement and in the reenactment of life in prerevolutionary Cuba. This activism transcended political organizations: Plays, cultural events, comedic acts, organizations, and radio programs (among other things) served as valves to channel cultural pride, political activism, longing, and impotence. Shows with titles such as *Cuba llora, canta, y baila* (Cuba Cries, Sings, and Dances), theater names that reproduced the names of important venues in prerevolutionary Cuba (e.g., Teatro Martí, Las Máscaras, and Teatro Radio Centro), and radio shows that, as literary and media studies scholar Albert Sergio Laguna (2017) writes, "had a political slant regardless of whether the broadcasts were directed towards the island or those living stateside" (p. 60), were part of the day-to-day atmosphere in Miami ("Cuba Lloro, Canta y Baila," 1961; Manzor & Rizk, 2011; Rosell, 1961).

Los tres Villalobos then was not only a show that enacted the anticommunism and anti-Fidel Castro sentiment that defined the Cuban exile community, it was also a cultural artifact that symbolized the Cuba of the past or, more precisely, the Cuba of the exiles' past. The radio show served as a figure of a time when Cubans saw themselves and their media as the most developed in Latin America (Rivero, 2015). The fact that the same actors played *Los tres Villalobos'* principal characters in the original and in the Miami adaptation helped the merging of the media past and present for the people involved in the production and, most likely, for the audiences who listened to the new version.

Following the ventriloquism of *Los tres Villalobos*, API and its Cuban exile media professionals added new ventriloquist acts. In addition to continuing to produce propaganda shows for USIA, API developed the "API Program," which incentivized U.S. companies to sponsor API shows for the Latin American market by creating "a radio broadcasting campaign . . . designed to strengthen the image of private enterprise and the Alliance for Progress" (API Program, n.d., p. 1, emphasis in original). By creating new shows, adapting Cuban radio programs familiar to Latin American listeners (such as the adventure radio series *Tamakun*, also authored by Armando Couto), and broadcasting on commercial stations in Latin America, the "API Program" was designed to convince Latin American citizens to consume particular products and embrace capitalism.

Through their work, Cuban exile scriptwriters, performers, and media professionals added a new layer to the interconnectedness of the region's media. The commercial broadcasting structure instituted across the region beginning in the 1920s and the development of Havana as a center of media production for Latin America during the 1940s–1950s served as a foundation for the production of programming with propagandistic messages in a new geographical place. Miami, a location that until the 1960s was best known as a Southern resort town, became the epicenter of this enterprise. A Miami-based radio production machine

was established in 1961 that, through familiar voices, stories, and sounds, attempted to conceal a U.S.-designed Cold War call to fight anticommunism and embrace capitalism and modernization for a democratic Latin America. For the Cuban exile media professionals, API provided a job and a continuation of the craft they began and excelled in Havana, Cuba.

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