

# Evangelical indigenous radio stations in Colombia: Between the promotion of social change and religious indoctrination

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## Abstract

This article refutes dominant views that define evangelical indigenous media as intrinsic tools for religious indoctrination. The case of the Colombian Misak community shows that evangelical radio stations can contribute to community building. However, the degree of the positive or negative contribution of evangelical media depends on the dominance of evangelical presence at indigenous localities. The rapid expansion of indigenized evangelical groups via the provision of social services has radicalized Evangelicals against views different from their own. As a result, these evangelical media are progressively leaving their role as promoters of positive social change to become tools for religious indoctrination.

## Keywords

Evangelicalism, evangelical indigenous radio stations, Misak community, Latin America, religious indoctrination, social change

## Introduction

Community and alternative media scholars from Latin America have traditionally disregarded evangelical media as tools for religious indoctrination incapable of promoting positive ‘social change’ (Andrade, 2010; Assmann, 1987; Gumucio Dagron, 2007). Based on two years (2013–2015) of ethnographic fieldwork in the Colombian indigenous Misak (Guambiano) community, this article problematizes this simplistic view on evangelical media. I show how, like secular community media, evangelical radio stations

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have also contributed to strengthening communal life in indigenous societies. However, their positive impact depends on the degree of competition for political power that exists between Evangelicals, Catholics and non-religious factions within indigenous communities. This article builds on the argument of Trejo (2009), who takes a market-oriented approach to analyse the varying degrees of cultural tolerance and support of ethnic mobilization by Catholic and evangelical organizations in indigenous communities in Mexico, suggesting that it depends on the degree of competition between them. High competition fosters tolerance as religious practitioners are pressed to respond to the needs of the indigenous poor, while lower competition promotes religious radicalism and allows those needs to be ignored. However, his analysis fails to consider the role of sectors within indigenous communities that do not identify with either of these religious tendencies or individual responses as people navigate between the potential benefits and limits of interventions made by more extreme religious sects in their communities.

The Misak is one of the most politically militant and more active media developers among the Colombian indigenous people. In the 1970s, they became one of the pioneer Latin American indigenous groups in taking up identity as a tool for political action in the Department of Cauca, an area highly affected by the armed conflict between the state, Leftist guerrillas and right-wing paramilitary organizations (Findji, 1992; Muelas Hurtado and Urdaneta Franco, 2005; Van Cott, 2001). Along with the Nasa community, they founded the first regional and national indigenous organizations in Colombia, the Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC) and the Organización Indígena de Colombia (ONIC) (Peñaranda, 2012). Through the representation of its community member Lorenzo Muelas, the Misak participated in the drafting of the 1991 multicultural Colombian Constitution, which guarantees indigenous people the right of community land tenure through the *resguardo*, a territorial structure that dates back to Spanish rule and that is administered by the annually elected council called *cabildo* (Gow, 1997; Santamaria Chavarro, 2013). The Misak territorial autonomy over Guambia (the Misak's main *resguardo*) and other territories has allowed them to launch various programmes, including community radio, with the aim of (re)constructing their social, cultural and economic traditions (Tumiñá Ussa, 2017). Both the once-dominant Catholic church and the growing evangelical groups have intervened, at times collaborating with (and at others disrupting) this Misak decolonial trajectory.

Historically, the intervention of US evangelical missionaries in Latin America, particularly in indigenous communities, has been polemic due to the promotion of individual empowerment, ideological affinity with the status quo, and disregard for community action (Andrade, 2010; Demera Vargas, 2007; Garrard, 2010; Gros, 1999; O'Neill, 2010; Orta, 2004; Stoll, 1982). In recent years, scholars have started providing more nuanced discussions of the social role of traditional and non-traditional evangelicalism, such as Pentecostalism (Burdick, 2005; González and González, 2008; Gumucio, 2002). This approach inspired this analysis on the Misak's unlicensed evangelical radio stations *Srio Wam* (Good News in the Misak language, Nam Trick) and *Pentecostal Estereo*. Along with the *cabildo*'s radio station, Namuy Wam (Our Language), these indigenous radio stations broadcast news, music and, in the case of the evangelical stations, preachers' sermons to more than 20,000 Misak (Romero, 2005) settled in different territories via airwaves and the internet.

In the beginning, evangelical radio stations prioritized community service over religious indoctrination. They became part of a series of evangelical institutions that offered essential services that the state had historically neglected and that local indigenous authorities had limited or no resources to provide. These services range from venues for social connections outside of the Misak community to emotional support for alcohol addiction and domestic violence. To carry out this social function, these evangelical radio stations developed similar practices to those praised in functional community media projects, including open doors for community participation (Rodríguez, 2001), ‘translocal’ autonomy (Hayes, 2018) and self-sustainability (Cerbino and Belotti, 2018). Due to the progressive growth of evangelicalism after the 1991 constitutional recognition of the right to freedom of worship, a new generation of more radical Evangelicals started taking control of the evangelical radio stations, promoting less tolerant positions, even against the Misak political and cultural agenda initiated in the 1970s. These political shifts show that evangelical radio stations at indigenous settings are not intrinsically negative, as many academics argue. Rather, evangelical radio stations respond to power relations that involve Evangelicals and other social actors – Catholic organizations, non-religious indigenous sectors and the state – within indigenous communities.

### **The ‘Catholic bias’ in evangelical media research**

Like other areas of Latin American religious studies (de la Torre and Martín, 2016), a ‘Catholic bias’ has influenced the small body of scholarship available on Latin American evangelical media. Pioneer researchers denounced Latin American evangelical radio stations and televangelists as US-based conservative and for-profit religious indoctrinators who pushed popular sectors away from collective forms of mobilization promoted by the progressive sectors of the Catholic church, toward actions that pursue individualistic and material empowerment (Assmann, 1987; Silleta, 1988). According to the Bolivian media theorist, Alfonso Gumucio Dagron, this ‘new bad’ evangelical media promotes ‘content having little to do with democracy, support of local culture, or struggle for human rights’ (2007: 205). He contrasts evangelical media with the ‘old good’ Catholic media initiatives, which alternative and community media scholars praise for transforming dominated communities into active actors of their own destiny (O’Connor, 2004; Rodríguez, 2003; Sánchez, 1989). Despite Gumucio Dagron’s strong assertions, he recognizes an absence of empirical evidence on these new ‘bad’ evangelical media.

In the case of evangelical media in indigenous communities, Andrade (2010) illustrates how evangelical radio stations promote individualistic American social values among the Ecuadorian Quichuas. This indoctrination, she adds, has transformed deeply indigenous people’s morality and perceptions of life, bringing about some positive lifestyle changes, such as the introduction of the culture of saving money and fostering awareness about alcoholism, but also negative consequences, including the promotion of migration to cities and the erosion of collective forms of social participation. In opposition to this model, Catholic radio stations are noted for endorsing ‘traditional’ local indigenous practices (Andrade, 2010).

The ‘Catholic bias’ in evangelical media studies stems from a tendency to contrast the progressiveness of some branches of the Catholic church with the well-documented

conservative actions of evangelical groups. Evangelical polemical actions include the involvement of US evangelical missionaries in counter-insurgency efforts during the Cold War (Stoll, 1982), the support of US televangelists to the Guatemalan military dictator Efraín Ríos Montt, infamous for the assassination and displacement of hundreds of thousands of Maya (Garrard, 2010), and the opposition to legal rights for LGBT populations (Encarnación, 2011), to mention just a few examples. Based on the evangelical political record, media scholars have largely dismissed, albeit a priori, any possibilities for linking evangelical media with positive social change.

A few scholars have problematized the normative idea of evangelicalism as an intrinsically reactionary force. D'Epinay and Willems pioneered this approach, showing how the evangelical emphasis on individual self-improvement, obedience and strict moral principles helped disenfranchised peasants to endure the effects of the chaotic introduction of modernity in rural areas, such as the social repercussions of the mechanization of agricultural industry and migration to urban areas (in Vásquez, 2008: 162). According to Trejo (2009), the evangelical involvement in empowering disenfranchised sectors motivated progressive sectors, such as liberation theologians, within the traditionally conservative Catholic church to also respond to local groups' needs. Despite the competition between these two forms of institutional religious advocacy for the poor, Evangelicals attracted more followers than liberation theologians because the former provided tangible solutions for people's daily problems, while the latter focused their struggle towards structural economic and social changes that required longer and uncertain political processes (Bergunder, 2009).

The negative view on evangelism began to change with the growth of Latin American Pentecostalism,<sup>1</sup> which facilitated the appropriation and indigenization of Protestantism especially but not exclusively by popular masses (González and González, 2008). More recently, various researchers have launched a new generation of scholarship on 'positive Evangelicalism' (Burdick, 2005; Gill, 2008; Gumucio, 2002; Smilde, 2004; Steigenga and Smilde, 2004). Without denying its conservative moral stance and recognizing its cultural and organizational diversity, this scholarship shows how Pentecostalism has helped lower classes to navigate the uncertainties and instability created by neo-liberal policies (Martin, 1998), facilitated grass-roots political mobilization (Smilde, 2004), forged new generations of indigenous leaders (Gumucio, 2002), and improved women's participation in the public and private spheres (Steigenga and Smilde, 2004).

Following these new visions on the social role of Latin American evangelicalism, Medrado (2013) nurtures the discussion on evangelical media by problematizing the theoretical differentiation between the 'good community media' and the 'bad community (evangelical) media'. Based on the media landscape in a favela in Salvador, Brazil, she argues that evangelical radio stations, despite their indoctrinating spirit, can effectively foster popular participation like secular community radio stations. Her contribution falls short, however, in that it idealizes secular 'community media', takes an uncritical approach to 'social change' (Dutta, 2015), and lacks a contextualization of local evangelicalism, implying wrongly a conservative uniformity in evangelical ideologies, practices and actions (de Almeida, 2017).

As I show in the next section, the case of the Misak community demonstrates that evangelical radio stations, not only replicate practices traditionally praised as

‘progressive’ by alternative/community media scholars, such as grass-roots control and participation (Rodríguez, 2001) and autonomous financial sustainability (Cerbino and Belotti, 2018; Hayes, 2018), but they can also be agents for ‘social change’. The Misak evangelical radio stations, for example, have a history of promoting active community participation in administration and media production, although this role is decreasing due to the radicalization of evangelical organizations within this indigenous community.

## Evangelicalism in Guambia

Through the 1887 Concordat, the state granted to the Catholic church the mission of ‘incorporating’ indigenous populations into processes of modernization via Catholic education (Restrepo, 2006). Under this mission, Catholic organizations such as the Congregación de las Misioneras de la María Inmaculada y Santa Catalina de Siena (also known as Hermanas Lauras) created schools, bringing formal education for the first time to the Misak. These religious congregations, however, also imposed various authoritarian restrictions against the community’s cultural practices, such as forbidding the use of the Misak language, controlling labour and production, promoting the acquisition of debts to participate in mandatory Catholic festivities, and excluding the Misak women from the few opportunities available for empowerment, among other abuses.

When the first US evangelical missionary organization, the Christian Missionary Alliance (CMA), arrived in the 1930s in Guambia, they became the ‘progressive alternative’ to the abuses of the Catholic church. Evangelicals denounced Catholic restrictive practices and campaigned against participation in Catholic festivities and alcohol consumption (Gros, 1999; Troyan, 2010; Uribe Vasco et al., 1993). In 1955, the CMA founded the first non-Catholic, bilingual educational institution in Guambia directed by a Misak woman. CMA also opened the Biblical Institute of Ambachico, where Misaks and members of other indigenous communities received training in linguistics and evangelization (Cely Beltrán, 2011; Searing and Osuna, 1999; Troyan, 2010). Another US evangelical organization, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), arrived during the 1960s, contributing to the production of more than 27 publications that invigorated different aspects of Misak culture through the use of different disciplinary lenses, including phonology, linguistics, literature, discourse analysis, community development theory, and anthropology (Sánchez and Branks, 1978).

Despite the opposition of the Church and the Catholic-controlled *cabildo* to the Evangelical presence, transnational evangelical missionary institutions such as CMA and SIL were able to expose the Misak to new empowering experiences during the 1960s and 1970s. They promoted trips outside of the community, offered educational opportunities in Nam Trick, provided access to modern agricultural technologies, and established the first community radio stations, which lasted a short time due to high costs of radio production at those years (Demera Vargas, 2007).

The individualistic vision of progress, inclusion and development of these evangelical missionaries initially clashed with the indigenous collective struggle for territorial recovery in the first years of the 1970s (Demera Vargas, 2009; Rappaport, 1984). Yet, by the end of the 1970s, evangelical Misaks started to become more involved in community

political actions. The Misak Evangelicals' political change resulted from multiple factors, including the progressive disentanglement of the Misak leadership from the power of the Church, the departure of external conservative evangelical missionaries who disagreed with radical actions towards territorial recovery such as the seizing of land controlled by mestizo landowners, the arrival of external supporters (university professors, students and members of Leftist organizations) with experience in grass-roots mobilization, and the possibility of accessing land and other resources through community organizing (Caviedes, 2002; Gros, 1999; Schwarz, 2018; Troyan, 2010). As result, during the 1980s, the integration of evangelism into Misak political life fostered a generation of local non-evangelical and evangelical leaders, such as Lorenzo Muelas and Henry Eduardo Tunubala, who promoted ecumenical activities and established local versions of external evangelical churches, such as the Alianza Cristiana Misionera Guambiana de Colombia (Demera Vargas, 2006).

After the 1991 constitutional recognition of the right to freedom of worship and the repeal of the 1887 Concordat, a great variety of local evangelical and Pentecostal organizations mushroomed in Guambia. Meanwhile, Catholic organizations, such as the Hermanas Lauras, started to pull out from Misak territories. The constitutional recognition of indigenous territorial autonomy and the neoliberal decentralization and privatization of essential social services also created a paradoxical situation in which indigenous communities became legally able to manage their territories, but without sufficient economic and technical resources to efficiently provide educational and health services. As result, the Evangelicals became the providers of those essential services, especially those related to psychological support, that the Catholics previously offered, the state denied, and the indigenous authorities could not deliver. This strategy has been very effective for evangelical religious recruitment considering that the Misak authorities calculate that more than half of the community currently self-identified as 'Evangelicals', displacing Catholicism as the principal religious affiliation among the Misak.

### *The role of evangelical radio*

Twenty years after their first failed attempt to develop an evangelical radio station, Henry Eduardo Tunubala and other leaders from the Church Alianza Misionera Cristiana Guambiana established the radio station, Srío Wam, in 1995. According to one of its founders, Jeremías Tunubalá, even though the Canadian evangelical missionary organization, Galcom International, funded the project, the primary goal of this radio station was not religious proselytism. They intended to create a participatory space where the community could talk about problems in its own language.<sup>2</sup> Due to its autonomous management and vocation for community service, this forerunner radio station became a sort of 'communication school' for various Misak, such as Jeremías Tunubalá, José Antonio Trochez and Eduardo Almendra. At the end of the 1990s, they became vital in the creation, administration and implementation of media production at the *cabildo*'s community radio station, Guambia Estereo (now Namuy Wam).

Pentecostal Estereo is the second oldest and largest evangelical radio station in Guambia. Eduardo Calambas, one of its volunteer members, explained that the religious organization, the Pentecostal Unida Internacional, established this radio station in 2001

to ‘transform lives’ by attracting, working with and helping the youth, through the teaching of the Bible to overcome problems that they commonly endure, such as alcoholism, drug addiction, single motherhood and domestic violence.<sup>3</sup>

With a small amount of money raised among its members, Pentecostal Unida Internacional rented a microphone, acquired a radio antenna and purchased a low-power transmitter that only provided a 100-m signal. Later, they launched various fundraising events, or *siembras*, in which Pentecostals, non-Pentecostals, Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals contributed for the expansion of their radio station. They also collected some funding at the regional congress of the radical pro-Israel conservative evangelical Confederación Iberoamericana de Comunicadores y Medios Masivos Cristianos (COICOM), based in the nearby city of Cali. As a result, Pentecostal Estereo could acquire a transmitter capable of covering a significant area beyond the Misak territory, new computers and microphones, and specialized equipment that enabled remote broadcasting – equipment that not even the *cabildo*’s community radio station enjoy.

Given the pride with which the members of the Pentecostal Unida Internacional talk about their communication project, the expansion of the radio station has not been motivated by just the desire for a more powerful medium to broadcast biblical preaching and music. Pentecostal Estereo also became a manifestation of the growth and empowerment promoted by this religious organization.

This radio station success has contributed to the reputation of the indigenized evangelical organizations among the Misak. On one occasion, a non-evangelical Misak I interviewed – who preferred to remain anonymous – shared the rumour that some evangelical organizations were collecting money to launch a broad array of services, ranging from a television channel to health-care facilities. This person, as well as many others I informally asked about these projects, assured me that ‘if the Evangelicals want to accomplish something, they can do it. These people are very organized and have connections with wealthy organizations.’ Due to their good collective reputation, evangelical leaders and radio practitioners are often elected by Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals to serve in the Misak *cabildo*’s Justice Program, an autonomous institution created to exercise the right of self-administration of justice. There, they must investigate and punish all crimes that happen within the territory, and deal with the community’s social concerns, such as infidelity, domestic abuse, drug addiction and alcoholism.

Despite ideological rivalries, various non-evangelical Misaks have supported economically and politically the expansion of evangelical radio stations. For instance, non-evangelical leaders have mediated between the evangelical radio stations and state’s media authorities, such as the state’s Ministry of Information Technology and Communications, to prevent confiscation of equipment due to lack of broadcasting licences. According to Misak authorities and evangelical radio practitioners, the indigenous people’s territorial autonomy proclaimed by the 1991 Colombian Constitution provides them the autonomic right to radio broadcasting. The state disputes this argument by stating that the electromagnetic spectrum is a regulated national public asset and its control for broadcasting goes beyond the right of indigenous people’s self-governance within their territories.

Ironically, despite their lack of broadcasting licence, the state has supported some of these radio projects. For instance, in 2014, the Colombian military forces provided economic and technical aid to settlers of the Misak *resguardo* at the municipality of Morales, Cauca, for an unlicensed evangelical radio station, Impacto Estéreo. This support was part of a state campaign to ease tense relations with, and gain support from, populations settled in areas affected by armed conflict. As part of the agreement, the radio station staff appeared in a four-minute video campaign in which they expressed their gratitude to the military forces (Fuerzas Militares de Colombia, 2014). This intervention created tensions within the Misak community. On the one hand, some people rejected the military's support, considering it a dangerous involvement in the armed conflict. On the other hand, some other Misaks found the participation of the military in this type of campaign positive, inspiring them to seek economic support from the Ministry of Defense for other development projects.

### **The new dominance of evangelicalism in indigenous communities**

Even though evangelical radio stations can promote social change, the degree of progressiveness or conservatism of evangelical or any other religious media project depends upon the intensity in the competition for power among different socio/religious groups. As Trejo (2009) illustrates, when there is high competition between Catholics and Evangelicals in Latin American indigenous communities, religious organizations tend to be more tolerant, especially with what they consider to be 'traditional' indigenous practices. But when one of these religious groups becomes dominant, its level of tolerance decreases.

As Heuser (2015) explains, evangelicalism attracts Latin American impoverished communities, not for their religious appeal, but for their provision of services. In the Misak case, various testimonies corroborate this theory. Liliana Tamayo, a former Catholic and now evangelical community member, for instance, explained to me that many women have turned to evangelical radio stations and other organizations, seeking relief from mental health issues related to physical and emotional abuse. Even though the participation of Misak women in politics and education has improved since the 1980s, they continue to endure high levels of domestic and sexual violence. Due to limited funding, scarcity of resources and heavy workload of cases in the *cabildo*'s Justice Program, many of the perpetrators of crimes against women never face any punishment for their actions. As Barbara Muelas, a former vice-governor of the *cabildo* explained to me in an interview in 2015, 'when a victim denounces a crime the authorities organized a hearing with the accused and the accuser. Authorities archive the case if they cannot resolve it immediately. These cases are almost never resolved'.<sup>4</sup> This lack of justice is aggravated by a lack of resources to help the victims. The community's health programme does not offer psychological support, and the state programmes are too few and too hard to access. Thus, evangelical churches and their radio stations became the only available source of help for victims of gender-based violence.

Like the case of the Catholic development programme, ACPO Radio Sutatenza (Cortés, 2019), these evangelical media initiatives brought positive as well as negative consequences. During the 2000s, a new generation of more radical evangelicals assumed the direction of Srro Wam. Unlike in the 1980s, the new evangelical leaders such as Srro Wam's director, the pastor Álvaro Dagua, openly manifested their scepticism about Misak's cultural ideas, including their myth of origin, by contrasting them with evangelicalism. This new Srro Wam's administration also selected collaborators exclusively from those Misak who had been baptized as Evangelicals, preferably married and belonged to the Alianza Misionera Cristiana Guambana.

Like other younger evangelical pastors, Dagua performed his indigenous identity in very particular ways. In addition to his opposition to some cultural Misak traditions, he uses western clothes instead of the typical poncho-and-blue-skirt Misak costume. At evangelical events outside of the Misak territory, however, he presents himself as a member of the Misak community, dressing in traditional Misak clothes. The same can be said about Jhan Carlos Chirimuscay Yalanda, recognized as the first Misak child preacher, who dresses in suits and ties in his presentations in Guambia, but who uses the Misak dress when he attended events outside of the community.

This identity performance reflects two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, these preachers seek to access economic opportunities and connections outside of Guambia by satisfying the desire of external donors for successful cases of indigenous conversion to evangelicalism. On the other hand, inside the Misak territory, preachers benefit from the promotion of individual empowerment and material success wearing 'modern' suits and ties, increasing their popularity among the Misaks who want this type of personal success for themselves. In short, these Misak pastors do not have any problem in profiting from assuming or rejecting their indigenous identity in different contexts.

The rising of this new generation of evangelical leaders with less tolerant views about other cultural and religious practices has increased conflicts with non-evangelical sectors within the Misak community. For instance, in 2013, a group of Misak evangelicals, supported by the evangelical dominated *cabildo* elected for that year, founded a school to provide education to the children of evangelical families, which not only promoted evangelical values but also restricted the teaching of Misak cultural practices. The evangelical rejection of Misak culture is based on various claims that unveil a strong sense of self-shame among the most radical Misak evangelical leaders towards their indigenous identity. These evangelical leaders, for instance, criticize the 'lack of coherent reasoning' from those who practise spiritual traditions, the 'backwardness' of traditional dressing, and the 'uselessness' of speaking Nam Trick.

In 2014, the newly elected non-evangelical *cabildo* clashed with evangelical Misak leaders over their school's educational orientation. As a political strategy for fragmenting the indigenous movement and reducing its contesting power, the Colombian government has invigorated the conflict between the Evangelicals and the non-Evangelicals by legitimating the creation of the first national evangelical indigenous organization, the Organización Pluricultural de los Pueblos Indígenas del Cauca (OPIC) (Ramírez, 2015). Despite this interreligious conflict, evangelicals and non-evangelicals can maintain unity through the practice of collective representation in the *cabildo*. Because of conviction, necessity or convenience, the majority of the religious and non-religious Misak who live

in their territory still participate in this exercise of self-governance. Indeed, as I highlight in the next section, evangelical radio programmes are still serving a variety of social functions beyond religious proselytism.

## Evangelical radio programming

The programming of these radio stations relies heavily on music, preaching and some broadcasting of local news and local religious events. They also support the production of popular music – salsa, vallenato, cumbia and carranga – with lyrics promoting committed spiritual life, family values, chastity and abstinence. For instance, Pentecostal Estereo has an archive of more than 500 songs in Nam Trick. Jorge Eduardo Sanchez, a Misak musician and music producer, has produced more than 300 songs in his small production company called GEDAR Production, which has received support from various international missionary groups in Canada and the USA.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to evangelical music, these radio stations broadcast pre-recordings and call-ins through which broadcasters engage in discussing solutions for all sorts of problems within the Misak community, such as health issues, infidelity, lack of money, and interfamilial violence. Their audiences include Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals who find these messages hopeful, especially in moments of crisis. This was the case with Rosa Maria Montano, who has suffered from *osteogenesis imperfecta*, an illness that affects the growth and strength of her bones since an early age. Due to her parents' lack of knowledge, she endured a tough childhood and adolescence, full of loneliness, enclosure and abuse. She explained that evangelical radio broadcasting became one of her few sources of hope and companionship during those difficult years: 'It was like someone giving me advice. When I had troubles, these messages were as if someone was talking to me directly. When I felt terrible, it was like a hope to alleviate suffering'.<sup>6</sup> Years later, motivated by her mother, who became an Evangelical by seeking help to endure her difficult relationship with Rosa Maria's father, Rosa Maria became an active member of two evangelical religious organizations. There, she learned to play the piano, drums and guitar and received classes on public speaking and singing. Although she left evangelicism because it was opposed to the traditional spiritual practices she embraces, Rosa Maria continued listening to the evangelical radio stations in moments of despair.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to inspirational music and messages, the shows of these radio stations includes several hours of international shows produced by national and international preachers influenced by the controversial Theology of Prosperity, a Neo-Pentecostal (NP) doctrine that has gained popularity since 1980 through Latin America. Much criticized by the Catholics as well as evangelical traditionalists, this doctrine seeks to attract followers from poor areas by promising an improvement in their material conditions through entrepreneurship and free-market practices (Piedra, 2007). For example, on 18 April 2015, Srío Wam broadcast a preacher who, in a sermon full of analogies between fruitful spiritual life and entrepreneurship, explained the set of attitudes that true Christians would need to succeed. She began with 'The Parable of the Bag of Gold' (Matthew 25: 14–30), a biblical passage that talks about how a wealthy man, who was setting out on a long journey, entrusts his wealth to three of his servants: five bags of gold to the first, two to the second, and one to the third. The first one put this money to work

and gained another five bags. The second man did the same, obtaining other two. Meanwhile, the third dug a hole and buried his master's gold. On his return, the master euphorically congratulated the first two productive men, while he blamed the laziness and evil of the third, dispossessing him from the gold, and giving it to the first one. In short, the sermon portrayed material success as a simple consequence of personal effort, disregarding any structural social and economic constraints that transcended the individual's power.

As Lopez Urbina (2008) explains, Neo-Pentecostalism produces dramatic theatrical shows that involve acting, preaching and music. Since television and radio fulfil a key role in its diffusion, Piedra (2007) considers Neo-Pentecostalism to be a mass media phenomenon. These mass media spectacles attempt to sell more than just the idea of the relationship between money and salvation. They also portray members of these evangelical congregations as freedom warriors persecuted by the tyranny of the evil Catholic church. As compensation for this cruel persecution and suffering, truly committed Christians gain the capacity of healing and being healed (Lopez Urbina, 2008).

The relationship between evangelical preaching – live or via radio – and healing is deeply ingrained within the Latin American evangelical movement, especially among the Pentecostals (Espinosa, 1999; Rodríguez-Galán and Falcón, 2018). In the Misak case, evangelical radio stations have become instruments for evangelical healing. For instance, Javier Morales, a member of the Iglesia Pentecostal Unida Internacional and a former media practitioner at Pentecostal Estereo, told me about how, in 2013, he and his family moved to Bogotá to seek new job opportunities. After a few days working for a food production company, a box hit his right leg, causing a painless small cut. Over days, he began to develop swelling and pain, which reached the point that he could no longer walk. He sought medical assistance, but found that his leg was severely damaged from an infection. After two surgeries and several months of convalescing, Javier and his family returned to Guambia. Javier's recovery was not easy, but after 3 months of helplessness and very dissatisfying medical reports, he was finally able to walk again. The encouragement to stand up and move came from the prayers of members of his church at his house and his constant listening to Pentecostal Estereo. Now, he believes that he owes his health to God's miracle. This is not the only miracle to which Morales gives testimony. He also explained the case of an evangelical radio broadcaster who developed seven sicknesses, including blindness and heart and lung problems, from being exposed to poisoned soil. Javier stated that after many sessions of praying and fasting, this person was able to leave the hospital, recover and become an active member of his religious community.

As shown, evangelical radio station programming fulfils various important cultural and social missions for the Misak society. In relation to cultural ones, they became accessible venues for Misak musicians to defuse their prolific music production, invigorating the community's cultural life. Also, as the case of Rosa Maria Montano shows, these radio station programmes provide Misak women some venues for relief in moments of anguish. Finally, Javier Morales' case unveils that this programming provides the Misak wide access to healing and other syncretic religious practices. These contributions, however, cannot obscure the problematic Neo-Pentecostal ideology promoted by a newer generation of more radical evangelical leaders. These radio programmes endorse values

that contradict solidarity relationships that are fundamental for the type of community life envisioned by advocates of the Misak decolonial agenda, placing value on the accumulation of money and work ethics based, not in communitarian solidarity, but individual economic rewards.

## **Conclusion**

The case of the Misak evangelical radio stations problematizes the dichotomy of ‘good Catholic-versus-bad evangelical’ that is dominant in the analysis of evangelical radio stations in Latin America. The cases of Srío Wam and Pentecostal Estereo demonstrate that evangelical radio stations can fulfil similar functions as those recognized and valued by secular and Catholic-influenced community media projects. For instance, Misak evangelical radio stations have facilitated participative venues, not only for media production, but also for community leadership, recording music and organizing fundraising events. Also, they have been able to establish a ‘translocal’ (Hayes, 2018) autonomy, meaning that they maintain control over the local programming even though they receive funding from external sources. These evangelical radio stations also become one of the few instruments accessible to Misak women to cope with health and social problems. And, finally, the Misak evangelical radio stations demonstrate the capacity of marginalized sectors of society to self-sustain their media initiatives. For these reasons, the Misak evangelical radio stations can be as communitarian, empowering and social service oriented as many secular indigenous community radio projects that, despite being controlled by local indigenous authorities, rely on the support of international aid agencies and the state.

Even though there are positive contributions to the development of evangelical radio stations within the Misak territory, this situation has increasingly changed due to the transformations in the community’s religious market. Due to the declining presence of the Catholic church and the extraordinary expansion of evangelism since the 1990s, there is a new generation of more radical evangelical leaders who started to compete for power against non-religious indigenous leaders. The radicalization of evangelism in Guambia is evident in the conspicuous promotion of Neo-Pentecostalism by evangelical radio stations, which encourages individual economic empowerment over collective forms of work and social mobilization.

Radical evangelical ideologies such as Neo-Pentecostalism come alongside the provision of fundamental services by evangelical groups, such as counselling and healing, to attract those in need who do not have access to any other public or private social service provider. As a result, evangelism continues to grow and become more radical against other social and cultural ideologies. The challenge for indigenous authorities, local indigenous institutions, and regional and national indigenous organizations, therefore, is to contest the power of the Evangelicals, and any other religious group, by effectively promoting social services and solidifying their position on ‘territorial autonomy’ and other critical political topics for indigenous decolonial agendas.

Overall, it is not possible to generalize that evangelism, especially evangelical radio stations, have played a regressive or progressive role within the Misak

community. During my fieldwork, I met all sorts of people involved in evangelicalism – as current, former and seasonal affiliates – some of whom embraced with pride the Misak's dress and language, and participated in local collective dynamics of production and governance. But I also encountered evangelicals who, for instance, disowned traditional Misak medicine and deemed Misak symbology as satanic. The internal tensions between those pro-indigeneity and those who support evangelical values represent a clear danger for indigenous people's political and cultural project, one that has fought for territorial autonomy to assure the (re)construction of their autochthonous modes of thinking and living.

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### Notes

1. The Latin American Pentecostal movement encompasses a diversity of Christian inspired groups characterized by the practice of participatory worship services in which people experience miracles, or 'gifts' of the Holy Spirit (Heaton Anderson, 2013).
2. Personal communication with Jeremías Tunubalá, Guambia, June 2015.
3. Eduardo Calambas, personal communication, Guambia, June 2015.
4. Barbara Muelas, personal communication, Guambia, April 2015.
5. Jorge Eduardo Sanchez, personal communication, Guambia, May 2015.
6. Rosa Maria Montano, personal communication, Guambia, July 2015.
7. Ibid.

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Diego Mauricio Cortés’ work explores different aspects related to the involvement of indigenous people in Latin America with community-oriented media, specifically evangelical radio stations, the Catholic multimedia project, ACPO-Radio Sutatenza, and state-supported indigenous media. His research includes work on indigenous identity formation, indigenous universities, popular research methods, self-governance and autonomy, religious indoctrination, social movement formation, and neo-liberal governance. In addition to his research on media and indigenous people, he also researches and teaches courses that relate to drug trafficking, popular culture, ‘Whiteness’ and US society.