OF RHIZOMES AND RADIO: NETWORKING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY

MEDIA IN OAXACA, MEXICO

by

EMILY N. MYERS

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of International Studies
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

September 2016

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Emily N. Myers

Title: Of Rhizomes and Radio: Networking Indigenous Community Media in Oaxaca, Mexico

This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Department of International Studies by:

Derrick Hindery	Chairperson
Robert Haskett	Member
Stephen Wooten	Member

and

Scott L. Pratt	Dean of the Graduate School

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded September 2016.

THESIS ABSTRACT

Emily N. Myers

Master of Arts

Department of International Studies

September 2016

Title: Of Rhizomes and Radio: Networking Indigenous Community Media in Oaxaca, Mexico

In the face of a shifting political climate in Latin America, movements for indigenous rights and autonomy are leveraging community media in new ways transcending the state-market binary. Through ethnographic research with Zapotec media producers in Oaxaca and the supportive organizations forming points of connection between radios and activists, I argue that the strength of the indigenous community media movement in Oaxaca, and its potential to build a movement to resist destructive state and market forces, is best explained by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of the rhizome, which portrays Oaxacan indigenous media as a map of heterogeneous interconnections defying structural hierarchies and binaries. With this picture of a rhizomatic media movement, I demonstrate how radios have paved the way for innovations, revealing creative ways that indigenous groups are connecting with each other and the outside world, while asserting agency in their interactions with the market and the state.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Emily N. Myers

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon
Montreat College, Montreat, North Carolina

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, International Studies, 2016, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Science, Communications, 2011, Montreat College

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Alternative Media
Indigenous Social Movements
Community Development
Nongovernmental Organizations
Latin America

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellow, University of Oregon Sept. 2015 – June 2016
    Spain & Portugal Programs Advisor

Graduate Teaching Fellow, University of Oregon Sept. 2014 – June 2015
    Academic Advisor, Department of International Studies

Graduate Teaching Fellow, University of Oregon Sept. 2013 – June 2014
    Teacher's Assistant, Department of International Studies

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, Office of International Affairs, 2015 – present

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, Department of International Studies, 2013 – 2015

Thurber Graduate Award, Department of International Studies, 2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to all the people I had the privilege to accompany in their work during my research. To the networks of indigenous communicators working tirelessly to rescue their identities from homogenizing forces, in the face of multiple oppressions boldly repeating the message: *aqui estamos.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Indigenous people don't want to take power... they aren't trying to take the place of the state. All they want is their land and autonomy. To not be commodified or forced into a relationship of dependency... The only way communities can transcend capitalism from below is through a wide network of local, community projects and media. When communities are connected, they are stronger and can create new spaces of resistance" (Gustavo Castro Soto, 2015 Interview).

In June 2015 I sat in a café across from Gustavo Castro, a lifelong environmental and human rights activist and supporter of indigenous community media movements in the southern states of Chiapas and Oaxaca. Between sips of steaming coffee, he spoke about connections between environmental struggles in indigenous communities and the creation of media networks to report injustices. "Community radios[1]," he said earnestly, "are often the only media sources reporting on what these corporations are actually doing. The state and corporate media, their silence says it all."

One afternoon in early March of this year, I caught my breath when I heard a news headline on Democracy Now. Gustavo was with Honduran indigenous environmental activist Berta Cáceres in her home in La Esperanza when gunmen broke into the house and murdered Berta right before his eyes, shooting him twice and illegally imprisoning him as a 'material witness.' Evidence would later reveal that the murder had been paid for by the Agua Zarca dam company—a corporation which Berta and her group had led a multi-year struggle against—with the blessing of the Honduran government.

---

[1] Throughout this thesis I use the word 'radio' according to the Spanish translation, meaning radio station rather than a physical electronic listening device.

One might hope this to be an exceptional story of injustice, an isolated incident, but the truth is that this atrocity is part of a sweeping pattern of repression and violence by governments and corporations against indigenous groups labeled 'barriers to development' for getting in the way of their profit-making schemes. In the face of these realities, as Gustavo articulated, community media and radio in particular is so much more than a mere medium for communication—it is often a matter of life and death. Indigenous groups around the world have a unique and complex relationship with government and corporate interests; they are original people in a colonized world who are fighting for their right to exist in ways that often conflict with the machine of global capitalism.

But the everyday genocide is more than the killing of indigenous bodies; it extends to the death of their rights, traditions, languages, knowledge, their social organization, and especially their spiritual and physical connection to the land. This pattern has continued throughout history since colonization, but in a rapidly globalizing context, indigenous groups must carve out their own spaces to preserve their identities. The community media movement is a particularly fertile and powerful space where a new generation of indigenous communicators is contending with globalization and new technology in ways that reinforce, rather than destroy, their conceptions of who they are and where they come from. Liberating technology from state and corporate control, indigenous towns in Oaxaca are forming networks of resistance to overcome isolation and open up spaces where many voices can coexist, where communication can overcome

divisions and decolonize minds— what I identify as a rhizomatic media movement—a decentralized, nonhierarchical, ever-growing web of connectivity.[2]

Contested Terms: Globalization, Neoliberalism, and Development

"Don't use that word." I stopped dead in the middle of one of my interview questions, hoping she didn't mean the word 'indigenous,' or this research was going to be vastly more complicated than I had initially thought. Thankful that this was one of my first interviews, I waited for her to explain. It was not indigenous, but the word 'development,' which I kept using to describe the work indigenous radios were doing in communities. I was attempting to talk about community development, or alternative development, but hadn't done a good job of specifying that intention. It was immensely useful, however, to learn early on in the research of the contention surrounding the term development, and the importance of a clear distinction between grassroots and top-down development discourse. Loreto Bravo, Chilean feminist radio producer and founder of Palabra Radio, explained that using the word development is particularly politically charged in the Mexican and Latin American historical contexts, and in Oaxaca in particular, harkening to paternalistic and top-down state development projects where elite classes make decisions 'for the good of indigenous people' without their consent.

In fact, there are three very broad and oft contested concepts related to my research that must be unpacked: globalization, neoliberalism, and development. McMichael's (2008) work is useful to illuminate my approach to these concepts, as he

---

[2] I discuss a comprehensive definition of rhizomes and their relationship to the community media movement in Oaxaca in the section 'Rhizomes and Community Media' in Chapter III.

presents globalization, neoliberalism, and development as political projects rather than inevitable phenomena, and recognizes that these are not necessarily the best paths for all national states and peoples. More specifically, globalization, neoliberalism, and development are part of an intentional political project by Western powers to increase their global sphere of control and domination. While a full review of all of the waves of thought within these terms is beyond the scope of this study, it is useful to clarify what I mean by these terms, and how specifically I use them in this thesis.

Neoliberalism, Globalization, and Alter-Globalization Movements

Globalization, very broadly, describes global flows of capital, goods, services, information, and technology resulting in increasing interconnectedness and interdependence of peoples and countries, encompassing two main elements: the opening of borders to increase flows of goods and services, and changes in institutional and policy regimes internationally and nationally to facilitate or promote such flows (WHO, 2016). Economic globalization generally refers to neoliberal economic reform, which in the Latin American context anthropologist Charles Hale (2005) traces back to September 11, 1973, the date democratically elected Chilean president Salvador Allende was overthrown and Augusto Pinochet, with US support and under military rule, instituted aggressive *laissez faire* policies, including mass privatization, fiscal austerity, deregulation, removal of barriers to free trade, and cuts in government spending, administered through structural adjustment policies (SAPs).

Hale (2005) also discusses neoliberalism as a full-fledged political project which, although on the surface proposed market-oriented reforms to correct flaws in the former

4

import substitution industrialization[3] model of development to allow wealth to 'trickle down' to the poor and disenfranchised, a plethora of literature, particularly from the Global South, has deemed the neoliberal project an utter failure, and Latin America a poignant example. After 50 years of neoliberalism, over 220 million Latin Americans (upwards of 44 percent) live in poverty, inequality and uneven wealth distribution has deepened significantly, and trade liberalization has caused deep stagnation of the rural sector, resulting in loss of jobs and rising migration (UNAM, 2012: 46). As it relates to my research, indigenous groups comprise a majority of those living in the countryside, employed in agriculture, forestry, and livestock, and thus it is their livelihoods that are most violently shaken by neoliberal globalization and its ills (Stavenhagen, 2015).

Thus neoliberal globalization, or the homogenizing forces of globalization, are referenced in this project as forces which, rather than inevitable historical processes, were intentional political projects of the West in collusion with the Mexican government and elite classes, who implemented projects to further marginalize indigenous populations by first attempting to assimilate them into the nation state, and by second forcing upon them modernistic development initiatives, both of which carry the underlying purpose of sterilizing indigenous rights and autonomy (Hale, 2005). My literature review further discusses how neoliberalism has stripped political rights away from cultural rights for indigenous groups in Mexico, and why this too represents an intentional project of control and forced integration.

---

[3] Economic policy that advocates replacing foreign imports with domestic production. For more see Cardero & Galindo (2005).

My interview *faux pas* revealed the power of words and language, and the need to develop a clear articulation of what I mean by alternative development and alter-globalization movements, or alternative globalizations. Gustavo Esteva's (1998) study of what he terms grassroots postmodernism or post-development is a useful touchstone for the concepts of alternative development, modernity, and globalization referenced in this project. Esteva, along with scholars like Madhu Suri Prakash (1998), and Vandana Shiva (1989), theorizes post-development as social movements that, seeking liberation from the destructive global project of neoliberal globalization, transcend the premises and promises of modernity by re-inventing and creating anew intellectual and institutional frameworks. I would add to this definition the advent of technological advances challenging the nature and foundation of modern power structures (Esteva,1998). Thus when I discuss indigenous people 'interacting with globalization, the market, or the state' it is within this tradition of creative resistance and disruptive reinvention in order to challenge dominant systems and assert alternative ways of developing and existing.

Statement of the Problem and Significance of Study

Much of the research on indigenous media in Mexico has concentrated on two major events which inspired an explosion of community[4] media initiatives: the 1994 Zapatista uprising in Chiapas and its global implications, and to a lesser[5] extent the 2006

---

[4] Community media meaning media owned and operated completely autonomously by indigenous communities, free of government and corporate control.
[5] Lesser known and studied, but certainly not lesser in historical importance.

teachers' strike led by the APPO[6] in Oaxaca. Furthermore, the vast majority of that research focused solely on radio, giving little attention to indigenous use of new technology, media, other telecommunications, or social networks, mainly due to the assumption that the digital divide and lack of connectivity in rural places eclipses the potentials of Internet-based networks. While the reality of global technological, wealth, and resource inequality remains relevant to any and all research on indigenous media, I found in my visits to even the remotest indigenous *pueblos*[7] that crowded Internet cafes, as well as the use of Internet streaming technology by radio stations, were present and growing. Moreover, in Oaxaca and increasingly elsewhere in Mexico, community radio technology, along with open source software[8] is being leveraged in a revolutionary project to create an indigenous community-managed cell network.

Literature on indigenous people and globalization is rife with discussions of cultural imperialism theory, focusing predominantly on the uniformly homogenizing effects of globalization and its destruction of traditional cultures and ways of existing. Through the words and experiences of indigenous media makers, I hope to build upon a growing body of research that moves the focus of cultural imperialism to agency at the margins, and the rich spaces of resistance to homogenizing effects, as well as creativity in

---

[6] The *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca,* translated Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca.

[7] I use the term *pueblos* to refer to multiple usages understood in Mexico, including towns, communities, and peoples.

[8] Software that anyone can study, change, and/or distribute. A more in-depth definition is discussed in Chapter V on Rhizomatic Indigenous Media.

forging alternative modernities and alter-globalizations, finding ways to decolonize technology and use it in ways that align with values, traditions, and culture.

The problem with too great an emphasis on globalization as the great destroyer of culture and difference is not that it isn't true or useful, but rather that it must also give voice to the many stories of agency and empowerment, to reaffirm that indigenous groups and others on the margins of society are not passive victims of globalization, but active resisters and empowered critical thinkers finding ways to build alternatives for themselves.

In this project I first conduct research that is not focused on any specific historical indigenous uprising, but rather to show the continuing struggles that don't fade away after the news coverage of events has long ceased. Second, I enrich the body of research on community media, through an ethnographic exploration of how indigenous groups and media activists are using old and new media together to create a vibrant and dynamic network of alternative media—locally, nationally, and transnationally—which, rather than taking traditional forms of organization, can be better understood through the lens of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of the rhizome, a theory which maps social movements as root systems, growing horizontally and defying linear structures.[9] Finally, I demonstrate how community media is not separate from, but a living breathing extension of indigenous struggles, and represents their agency to choose which aspects of globalization they want to participate in, which they do not, and which they can combine with their own values and knowledge to create something new on their own terms.

---

[9] I give a more in-depth discussion of the theory of rhizomes in the section 'Rhizomes and Community Media' in Chapter III.

Thesis Scope and Organization

For this project, I focus on the community media movement in one state of Mexico that has been a historical site of indigenous resistance—Oaxaca. I spent several days with six separate (but connected, as I explore) community radio stations, scattered throughout the Oaxacan Sierra Madre mountain range. All of the radios in my sample were in Zapotec communities, but I visited radios in different regions in order to get a more holistic picture of the interregional networks that exist, but as there between 70 and 100 indigenous community radio stations in Oaxaca alone, my research can only capture a piece of the larger reality of community media in Oaxaca. However, I argue that my research sample indicates a larger rhizomatic network of community media across the state and country. Furthermore, I sought out *pueblos* using radio as a tool for political consciousness and identity formation, thus I encountered, but did not include in my research, a number of indigenous community radios that focus more on entertainment rather than critical news dialogue or programs related to cultural survival, countering oppressions, forming identity, and so on.

This project draws upon discussions of media policy in Mexico to contextualize the space that community radio and alternative media as a whole fills in society, but it is beyond the scope of this project to make specific policy recommendations, or to speak to trends of community media policy in Latin America more broadly.

In the methods section I first introduce Oaxaca and provide some background on its history, particularly for its indigenous populations, before moving into a discussion of the methods used to gather and analyze research for the project, and some statistical data

from my research sample. Then, Chapter III, Literature Review and Theoretical Framework, delves into literature on globalization, community media in Latin America and Mexico more specifically, and a discussion of rhizomes as a theory of social movements, and how they can be used to better understand the community media movement in Oaxaca and its future possibilities.

Chapter IV focuses on media policy in Mexico, and is an important piece to contextualize how community media interacts with commercial and state media, and the role it currently plays in Mexican society. Chapter V, Rhizomatic Indigenous Media in Oaxaca, comprises the meat of my ethnographic research. I draw deeply from testimony and participant observation to weave together four stories of indigenous media: as part of a growing international movement to decolonize technology, as a space for women to empower one another to articulate their own feminism, as inspiration for the formation of young indigenous communicators, and finally as a site of resistance against transnational extractive industry. Lastly, my conclusion offers recommendations for future research, and ties together the final implications of this project for the future.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Introduction: Methods

I was drawn to ethnography as a research method for several reasons. Firstly, it felt well-suited to my personal desire to get to know the people involved with making radio, whether in indigenous communities or working for supporting organizations and collectives in the city, and to participate in the movement in any way I could. Ethnography has a rich history of activist and participatory research, as I will discuss further, and to truly understand the indigenous community media movement in a more nuanced and engaged way, I preferred to get involved with it as deeply as possible given my time and financial limitations. Secondly, due to my opinions about the assumed objectivity of quantitative research styles, I'm drawn to ethnography's embrace of subjectivity and particularly reflexivity within research, namely, the admission that we should engage with our own inevitable subjectivity as researchers, and how our presence, behavior, appearance, as well as contextual factors might change how an interviewee responds to questions. Most importantly however is reflexivity's ability to make us more aware of our privilege, specifically the power dynamics inherent when privileged University students from the US conduct research with indigenous and other marginalized groups, whose experiences and knowledge systems have been shaped in very different ways from our own, defying many of our ethnocentric assumptions.

Reflexivity compels us to ask ourselves the hard questions: How does the legacy of colonialism, of white people arriving in indigenous communities, taking what they

wanted, and leaving, illuminate my role as an 'activist researcher'? How can I confront

my own internalized and socially constructed prejudices? How do I build the trust

relationships necessary to ensure that I am not just an academic extension of that colonial

relationship? The tradition of ethnography helped me grapple with these questions, learn

from a rich history of those working to decolonize research methodologies, and keep the

history of 'researcher-as-neocolonial-agent' central in my consciousness and practices.

<u>Participatory Ethnography and Activist Research</u>

> "There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the 'practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (Freire, 1970, p. 42).

This project draws from a rich history of community-based, participatory research

and ethnography, which emerged as part of the popular education movement in Latin

America, most notably influenced by liberation theology, and the groundbreaking

theories of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and his (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Drawing both from Marxism and liberation theologians, Freire drew the distinction

between the oppressors and the oppressed in an unjust society. Education, in his

assessment, should be a process through which the oppressed first regain their sense of

humanity, and second are enabled to be agents in their own liberation: "The oppressed

must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption" (Freire, 1970, p. 54).

While Freire's Marxist roots are oft acknowledged, his connection with the ideas

of liberation theology are frequently overlooked. While many academics, particularly

Marxists, are wary of religion's role in the colonial project, as well as its reputation as a

12

hindrance to, rather than vehicle for, critical thought, liberation theology represents a radically different conception of traditional Catholic and Christian teachings. What began as a movement in the Catholic Church in Latin America during the 1950s and 1960s, liberation theology called upon Christians from all social classes to apply the vision of the gospels to end oppressive class structures. As a movement it reclaimed Christian doctrine for the poor, and read the Bible through the eyes of the oppressed (Smith, 1999).

In Mexico and throughout Latin America, the radical priests of liberation theology were the strongest proponents of building indigenous education that was simultaneously new and modern (as opposed to traditional), in line with their value systems, and anti-colonial. Modern day movements for indigenous autonomy can often be traced back to liberation theology, which taught that building the kingdom of God on Earth meant doing the work to overturn unjust social structures (Stenberg, 2006). In the words of Bishop Oscar Romero: "We know that every effort to improve society, above all when society is so full of injustice and sin, is an effort that God blesses; that God wants; that God demands of us."

Community-based participatory research, or CBPR, particularly in Latin America, draws deeply from these traditions and the vision to break research and education away from neocolonial and oppressive structures of dominance and disempowerment. In CBPR, the community participates fully in all aspects of research, including determining research questions and shaping the project itself. It emphasizes collaboration, and equitable partnerships between community and researcher, sharing power, resources, credit, results, and any knowledge produced from the project (Leeuw, 2012). Colombian

sociologist and one of the founders of CBPR Orlando Fals Borda, in a (1995) address to

the Southern Sociological Society, articulated four guidelines for decolonizing research:

- Do not monopolize your knowledge nor impose arrogantly your techniques but respect and combine your skills with the knowledge of the researched or grassroots communities, taking them as full partners and co-researchers. That is, fill in the distance between subject and object;
- Do not trust elitist versions of history and science which respond to dominant interests, but be receptive to counter-narratives and try to recapture them;
- Do not depend solely on your culture to interpret facts, but recover local values, traits, beliefs, and arts for action by and with the research organizations; and
- Do not impose your own ponderous scientific style for communicating results, but diffuse and share what you have learned together with the people, in a manner that is wholly understandable and even literary and pleasant, for science should not be necessarily a mystery nor a monopoly of experts and intellectuals.

Notable in these guidelines is the rejection of the positivist paradigm, which

asserts that there is one objective truth, and has led to belittling or dismissal of alternative

forms of knowledge, and native forms in particular. CBPR is interchangeable with

activist research, and sees researchers and academics as having a responsibility to further

social justice in the world through their work and relationships with communities.

Activist researchers across disciplines have used CBPR in creative ways to break away

from the oppressor-oppressed relationship that Paulo Freire identified in his work, and

the movement has also galvanized increased collaboration between researchers from the

Global South and Global North. Acknowledging our own privilege means recognizing

our role as oppressors and finding ways to rethink not only our ways of life but also our

ways of relating to and interacting with more marginalized groups. Only then can we

break what Freire termed the 'culture of silence,' which describes the "negative, silenced, and suppressed self-image instilled into the oppressed" (1970, p. 11).

Before conducting my research, I took two graduate seminars on Ethnographic Methods with the anthropology department, taught by strong women who embodied inspiring examples of participatory ethnographic research—Lamia Karim, Lynn Stephen, and Sandra Morgan. In the courses we discussed how ethnography relates with activist and also feminist research (Naples, 2003), as it reveals the power of testimony, storytelling, as a form of empowerment, and also a means of broadening the meaning of truth to include alternative and contested views on history and events. Objective scientific research, where the researcher adopts the observer/scholar role, fails to account for the power-laden relationship and ethical responsibility of the very act of witnessing (Fernandes, 2003). Ethnography, in contrast, uses a researcher-as-witness model, both accepting these realities while seeking to work them into the research product. Additionally, under the guidance of Lynn Stephen, I conducted a mini-research project on PCUN's[10] community radio station, Radio Movimiento, which involved in-depth interviews with the radio team, participant observation, and collection of life histories.

In Mexico, every day is dangerous for those who choose to work for media democracy and indigenous rights, and so a large part of the research process was building a level of trust and relationship with the broader community of indigenous media advocates and activists. My first research trip in the summer of 2014 was for the purpose

---

[10] *Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste*, a thriving farmworkers' union located in Woodburn, Oregon.

of establishing those relationships, and letting local media activists and people from

communities shape my research questions. I cannot even begin to express my gratitude to

those 'connectors,' to borrow Malcolm Gladwell's (2000) term, who not only helped

guide my research, but also reached out to their connections to vouch for me and to make

this entire project a reality. My research sites themselves represent the networked nature

of indigenous community media in Oaxaca and throughout Mexico—a complex and

closely connected web of people and organizations that share a passion and commitment

to alternative media and technology. Conducting this research was a learning process,

confronting the tensions of my own privilege and place as an academic, activist, and an

ally. After exploring several research methods, I chose to take a participatory

ethnographic approach to this project.

Borrowing from cultural anthropology[11], I conducted this research using the

ethnographic tradition[12], based on a desire to allow structural realities to arise from the

stories of individuals as they seek to create their own media and serve the needs of their

communities. Cultural anthropologists have been using ethnography since the 19th

century, particularly to study what they called 'pre-modern' or 'primitive' societies that

today we classify as indigenous, native, or original people groups. These classic accounts,

such as Clifford Geertz's (1973) work, have been important in shaping how we

---

[11] Although scholars across disciplines use ethnographic research—Sociology, History
Communications, and Business, to name a few.

[12] Ethnographic research refers to a set of research procedures generally involving
intensive qualitative study of small groups through in-depth interviews and participant
observation (Ellen, 1984).

understand other cultures, but have also been pivotal in shaping anthropological theories explaining the phenomenon of culture.

As a unique segment of society particularly vulnerable due to the legacy of colonialism, neocolonialism, and harmful neoliberal policies, the study of indigenous peoples requires a unique form of research capable of capturing cultural nuances, including traditions, customs, worldviews, and forms of knowledge that are outside of the mainstream. Although I recognize the strengths and necessity of other forms of research, I found ethnography's technique of data gathering to be the best equipped to approach research of indigenous radio, and particularly to map the networks of relationships—what I describe as the rhizomatic quality of the community media movement. This thesis is a subjective truth; it seeks to tell the truth of a particular group of people who are using the tool of media to construct their identities in the face of globalization, neoliberalism, and the very human struggle to preserve the old while embracing aspects of the new. Finally, I admire the ethnographer's ability not only to convey a deep slice of a particular culture and to research it in a detailed and thorough manner, but also the way ethnography highlights and harnesses the power of telling stories.

<u>Research Sample</u>

Over the course of two summer trips totaling roughly fourteen weeks, I spent 2-4 days each with six different community radio stations throughout the Sierra Madre mountains surrounding Oaxaca city—Radio Totopo in Juchitán de Zaragoza (Istmo de Tehuantepec region), Radio Padiushy in Capulalpam de Méndez (Ixtlán district, Sierra Juárez), Radio Xeglo in Guelatao de Juárez (Ixtlán district in the foothills of Sierra

Juárez), Nuestra Palabra Radio in Tálea de Castro (Villa Alta in center Sierra Norte), Radio Bue Xhidza in Santa María Yaviche (Tanetze de Zaragoza, 'El Rincon' of the Sierra Juarez), and Movimiento Radio in San José del Progreso (Ocotlán district of the Central Valley Region). I also conducted interviews and participant observation with a number of grassroots organizations providing support to indigenous radios from Oaxaca City—Rhizomática, a group helping communities build their own cell network, Palabra Radio, focused on amplifying the voices of indigenous women and providing content to more than 20 community radios, and Radio Tlayuda, operating out of Gustavo Esteva's Universidad de la Tierra, which also partners with several indigenous radio stations across the Sierra to share programs, information, and stream content online. I additionally attended a conference in central Mexico after my 2014 research, where I met with a group of activists including Gustavo Esteva and Gustavo Castro.

In July 2015, I spent a weekend with kids from Radio Tsae Xigiae and several neighboring radio stations in Teotitlán del Valle, where Mari Cruz Juarez Cabrera, founder of the Radio en Bola project, was teaching indigenous youth how to create radio content. I received support and guidance from Dr. Juan Mario Perez Martinez, director of UNAM's Multicultural Center and a scholar of indigenous community media in Mexico and around the world. Juan Mario helped connect me with indigenous media scholars and activists, and introduced me to Janis Caol, an indigenous woman whose Ph.D. thesis focused on pedagogy and indigenous community media in Chiapas. Juan Mario also connected me with Eugenio Bermejillo and his team of young indigenous communicators at Boca de Polen, a media collective in Chiapas, as well as Tonatiuh Díaz González and

Juan José García of Ojo de Agua Comunicación in Oaxaca City. I also connected with

Jan and Diane Rus in San Cristobal, who helped steer me toward looking at Internet

cafes, increasing connectivity, and the new pathways indigenous groups are forging to

create alternative modernities.[13]

The concept of the rhizome as a theoretical framework emerged from interviews

with Peter Bloom and his group Rhizomática, who have worked with 19 community

radios in Oaxaca to build community owned and operated cellular networks in indigenous

communities, with the purpose of decommodifying telecommunications and technologies

and creating solutions in line with alternative values and needs. Peter Bloom's partner,

Loreto Bravo, who co-founded Palabra Radio, also introduced me to the open source

software movement within indigenous community radios, with a similar impetus—to

build networks of communications and communicators operating outside of the binaries

of market and state, forging horizontal, interconnected webs of communications which

allow indigenous groups to make connections with modernity on their own terms.

I conducted research over the course of two summer trips, each for seven weeks,

totaling in fourteen weeks of fieldwork. The first research trip was more focused on

building trust relationships with media activists supporting radios, letting interviews

shape my research direction, and gaining permission to visit communities through those

connectors. The majority of interviews with radio stations were conducted during the

summer 2015 research trip. I used a combination of the following data-gathering

methods:

---

[13] By modernity I refer to the social relations associated with the rise of global capitalism, a market society, and the post-industrial era (Giddens, 1998).

- Focus group discussions (three – 10 people)
- One-on-one interviews
- Collection of life stories
- Participant observation
- Mapping social and professional networks

I spent 3-5 days at each radio station, participating in radio meetings and events and sometimes guesting on radio shows, along with holding a combination of one-on-one and focus group interviews with indigenous communicators. I formed questions to understand the history and context of each radio station, its affiliations (if any), and relationship with the community, surrounding communities, and regional community radio networks. I used ethnographic research methods of testimony and participant observation to provide detailed, in-depth pictures of how the stations fit into community life and collective identity formation. Clifford Geertz's (1973) concept of thick description will be useful as I attempt to find webs of meaning or cultural constructions within the everyday—finding broad social and political meanings within storytelling.

<u>Key Questions and Arguments</u>

In my interviews with indigenous communicators at radio stations in *pueblos*, I focused questions around the following themes:

1. Background of the radio station: why and when it was formed, who is involved, what is their relationship with the community, what are generational relationships like within the radio, and how it has evolved.
2. Significance of media and radio: what programs they air and why, the main message(s) they hope to get across, greatest opportunities and challenges, how has new technology changed the way they make radio, how radio has changed them and the community.
3. Participation with a broader network: connection with other communities and organizations, sharing of information and resources, participation with community cell networks, experience with open source software, and use of Internet for streaming or networking with other media makers.

I also interviewed several organizations and community radios based in Oaxaca City providing support and services for indigenous community radios, and for those interviews I focused questions around the following themes:

1. Organization's connection with radios: formed for what purpose, description of the work you do with communities, what the mission of your group is and why you are passionate about indigenous community media.
2. Observations and experiences: what common themes have you encountered in your work, what are aspects which connect disparate radios, how is the media movement becoming more connected, what are the strengths and challenges, how does radio form identity, what are new developments on the horizon.
3. Perceptions of government and transnational corporations; how do the radios interact with state and market, what are the legal and policy challenges, how do the government and corporations view indigenous media, and what is the connection between radios and divided communities.

The interviews and focus groups were semi-formal[14] and used open-ended questions and discussion prompts. I conducted a total of 24 interviews with these six radio stations (17 of these were one-on-one, and seven were in small groups of between three and 10 people) as well as participant observation at each site, a total of 10 one-on-one interviews with media activists and supportive organizations, and three one-on-one interviews with radio stations in the city, along with participant observation of one radio committee meeting at Universidad de la Tierra.

Data Analysis

For this project I compiled field notes, particularly during participant observation, and took photographs, short videos, and audio recordings. I also collected notes and transcribed interviews, as well as any publication material that was relevant from radios

---

[14] Also called semi-structured interviews.

or community media organizations—mainly brochures, website or blog information, or important documents. I translated interviews myself, with editing help from several native Spanish-speaking colleagues. After the translation was complete, I analyzed the research materials and coded them according to the themes that emerged. I then dug into the theoretical framework that I thought would best contextualize and illuminate said themes, and re-mined the data to weave theory and data together coherently.

General Characteristics of the Interview Sample

At the radio stations (including the station I visited to observe a training camp for indigenous youth), 63 percent of those I interviewed were women, and 37 percent were men. Also four out of the six radios had women in top leadership positions (station managers, for example) although most radios had a non-hierarchical management structure. Of that same sample, 70 percent were 30 years old or younger, and 30 percent were over 30. Forty percent of that 70 percent were 18 years old or younger. My interviews at the Radio en Bola workshop for indigenous youth skewed the sample slightly, but every radio I visited had a minimum of two to three youth involved in production or technical work. Religiously the majority of those I interview in the *pueblos* identified as Catholic, with a smaller percentage identifying as Evangelical or other, corresponding to the broader religious makeup of Oaxaca, which is approximately 85 percent Catholic (INEGI, 2010). Of those I interviewed working with media collectives or organizations in the city, the divide was relatively even between men and women, with slightly more women participants, the largest age group was between 20 and 45 years,

and roughly half identified as indigenous or grew up in communities. Several names have been changed at the request of participants.

In three of the six communities, Zapotec is still widely spoken, and in three is only spoken by the elderly and/or some adults. Interestingly but perhaps not surprisingly, as I will discuss further in Chapter V, the three communities where original language use is fading are also the towns with transnational mining activity. Five out of the six radios broadcast programs in Zapotec weekly, four out of six have some Internet connection, and although the wattage of radios was between 15 and 20 (roughly 5-10 miles of coverage) all of the radios use Internet streaming to increase their impact and listenership. Five out of six stations are also present on social media, two have community cell networks and one is making plans for construction, and four are using exclusively open source software to run their stations.

Research Setting

MAP OF RESEARCH SITES

A. THE MIXTECA
B. NORTHERN OAXACA (SIERRA NORTE)
C. VALLEY OF OAXACA ★ OAXACA CITY
D. PACIFIC & SOUTHERN SIERRA MADRE
E. THE ISTHMUS

① TALEA CASTRO (VILLA ALTA)
② GUELATAO (IXTLÁN)
③ JUCHITÁN (ISTMO DE TEHUANTEPEC)
④ CAPULALPAM (IXTLÁN)
⑤ SANTA MARIA YAVICHE (SIERRA JUAREZ)
⑥ SAN JOSE DEL PROGRESO (TUXTEPEC)
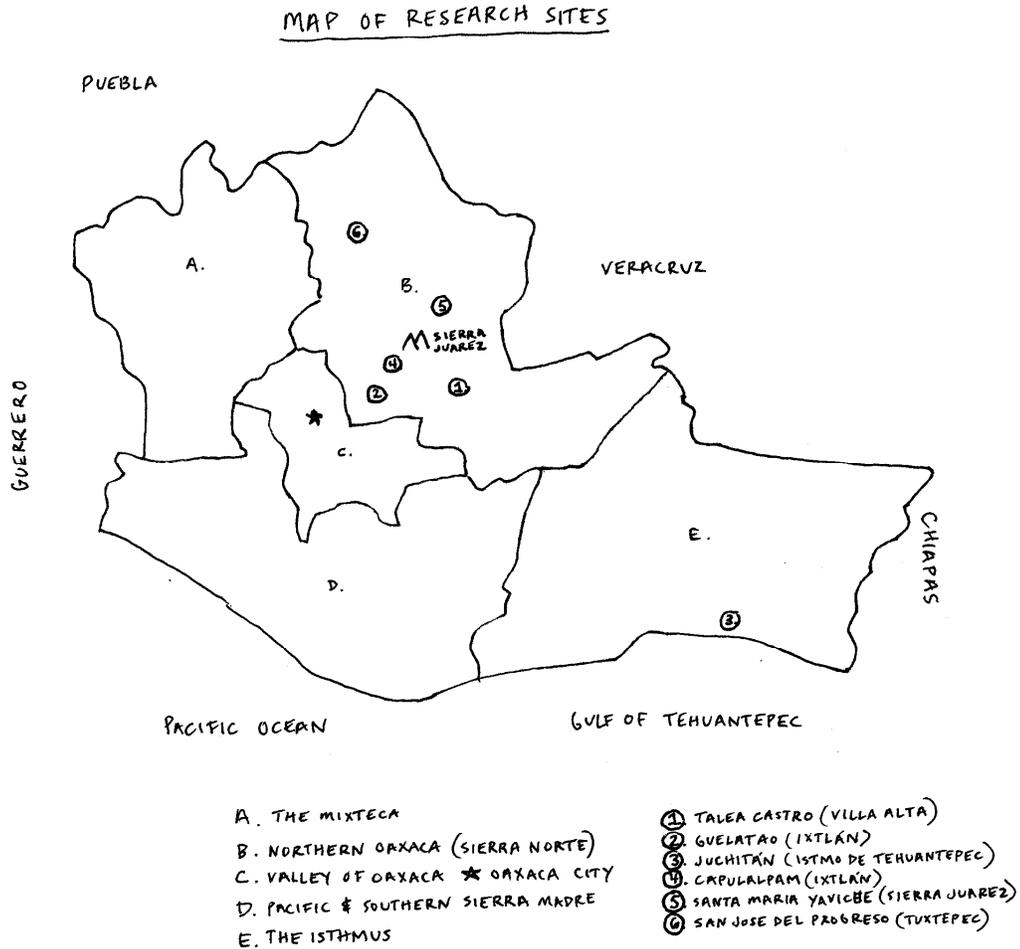
At the convergence of the powerful Eastern and Southern Sierra Madre mountain ranges, Oaxaca is a rugged and mountainous state with a large central valley situated in the southwestern part of Mexico, bordered by Guerrero to the west and Chiapas to the east. The name Oaxaca was derived from the Nahuatl word, Huayacac, roughly translated The Place of the Seed (Gay, 1982). The fifth largest state in Mexico, Oaxaca is unique in its extreme geographic fragmentation and rugged topography, which has played a key

24

role in its stunning cultural diversity. Divided into 570 *municipios*, 418 of these are governed by the indigenous system of *usos y costumbres*.[15] According to CDI[16] (2012), Oaxaca has the greatest percentage of indigenous people, at 48 percent, after Yucatan, and contains more speakers of indigenous languages than any other Mexican state. The vast mountains allow individual towns and cultural groups to live in relative isolation from each other for long periods of time, thus Oaxaca's sixteen ethnolinguistic groups have maintained their original languages, customs, and traditions intact well into the colonial era, and until the present day to a certain extent (Frizzi, 2000).

Oaxaca is doubtless the most ethnically complex of Mexico's thirty-two states, and although the Zapotec and Mixtec are the two largest indigenous groups, they make up only a small part of the tapestry of ethnic diversity in the state. Even today, it is conservatively estimated that at least one-third of the population of Oaxaca speaks an indigenous language (Frizzi, 2000). Yet historian Maria de Los Angeles Romero Frizzi (2000) has clarified that many of these sixteen broader language families "encompass a variety of regional languages, making for a more diverse picture than the number sixteen would suggest" (p. 34). Even between the Zapotec peoples of the Ismus in my research sample, and those of the 'Rincon' of the Sierra Norte, there was a surprising amount of language variation. A visit to the capitol's *Jardín Etnobotánica* reveals the relationship

---

[15] Translated customs and traditions, this local self-governance is technically legally recognized by the government, but is far from respected or protected, as will be discussed further in Chapter III.

[16] The National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples, based in Mexico City.

between Oaxaca's diversity of culture and biodiversity, particularly its prolific natural

resources.

Indigenous groups of Oaxaca. From centrobinacional.org.

Oaxaca's social conditions stand in glaring contrast to its stunning wealth in

resources. According to government statistics, 77 percent of Oaxacans live in poverty. Of

the 100 poorest municipalities in the country, 44 are located in Oaxaca. Almost 40

percent of Oaxacans cannot read and write, 58 percent of young people suffer from

malnutrition, and 79 percent of Oaxacans live with inadequate shelter and services

(INEGI, 2010). Carlos Beas Torres has called this set of social conditions "the painful

legacy of more than 500 years of colonial injustice and despotism of the PRI[17] (Beas

Torres, 2007). This perfect storm of dire social conditions and a wealth of resources has

---

[17] The *Partido Revolucionario Institucional,* translated Institutional Revolutionary Party.
More on their repressive reign in the section entitled 'The Mexican Context' in Chapter
III.

made the region a target of transnational capitalist plunder both historically and in recent years, particularly as a site for extractive mineral exploration.

Internationally, Oaxaca is best known as the site of the 2006 teachers' union uprising against a corrupt PRI governor, Ulises Ruiz, who took office after a fraudulent 2004 election. Over 70,000 members of the teachers' union went on strike, blocking off main streets, to which the governor responded with violent repression of the protestors, including the use of tear gas bombs (Esteva, 2007). This episode unified many Oaxacans with their own reasons to oppose Ulises' rule, and the teachers' union took the opportunity to unify these social forces into the Popular Assembly of the Pueblos of Oaxaca (APPO), subordinating the leadership of the union to this popular assembly. This complex and heterogeneous body was made up of hundreds of social and grassroots organizations, and was the birthplace of a diverse array of indigenous-run community media, in response to the government's use of state and corporate media to try and diffuse the movement (Stephen, 2011). Several thousand women from APPO occupied the state radio and television studios, using them to organize the movement, and opening them up as spaces for the public to express their thoughts and opinions 24 hours a day (Esteva, 2007).

The APPO's movement continues to this day, and during my time in Oaxaca city in the summer of 2015, the dazzling spectacle of Guelaguetza, Oaxaca's state-sponsored festival to celebrate the diversity of indigenous cultures, was juxtaposed by hundreds of indigenous teacher-protestors sleeping in the Zócalo for weeks on end, their rows of shabby tents obstructing tables full of cultural trinkets to attract the tourists who come

27

from all over the world for the festivities. This uncomfortable paradox year after year highlights the irony in the state project of controlling indigenous identities versus realities of indigenous resistance to these efforts. In the words of Janis, 25, who works with Palabra Radio and focused her thesis on community radio and pedagogy: "The state wants indigenous people as pretty tourist attractions, nothing more... they can come out and smile and do cultural dances once a year, but otherwise they should be silent" (2014 Interview)

The community media movement was born out of the unity of the APPO against the repressive politics of the PRI and its fraudulent governor, and represents a strengthening of participatory democratic movements, particularly in the most ethnically diverse regions of Mexico. Simultaneously it represents the tense relationship between political parties, and the PRI in particular, and Oaxaca's many indigenous groups, who demonstrated that unified they have the power to disrupt political systems and oust a corrupt politician. As Esteva (2007) asserts, the government is afraid of their collective power, and must deploy strategies to control and fragment them.

More recently, Ayotzinapa, the disappearance and murder of forty-three student teachers from Oaxaca's neighboring state of Guerrerro, once again drew public attention to the growing tensions between a corrupt state, and social movements—often led by indigenous groups living in extreme poverty—who are not only demanding transparency and honesty from the state, but also "more civil involvement in the workings of government through the use of popular initiatives, referendums, plebiscites, the right to recall elected leaders, participative budgeting, and other such tools" (Esteva, 2007, p.

133). Four out of five *municipios* in Oaxaca have their own autonomous forms of government, and although Oaxaca's state law has legally recognized their right to autonomous governance since 1995, that doesn't stop them from exerting pressure, discrimination, and harassment upon communities that are legally autonomous.

Conclusion

The shelter of the mountains along with Oaxaca's fertile history of resilience and resistance have kept its stunning ethnolinguistic diversity alive, but not immune to the threat of the homogenizing forces of globalization and the economic influence of neoliberal policies and the US. Globally, indigenous populations are generally minority groups, but in Oaxaca—demonstrated by the strength of the APPO movement—with one-third of the population speaking an indigenous language, movements led by and for indigenous groups, particularly when networked with local, regional, and transnational support systems, are able to create their own spaces for dialogue, to articulate identity and form deeper political consciousness, and build alternative ways to interact with the state and market. Through ethnographic research methods, I bear witness to this process within the indigenous community media movement in Oaxaca, and combine the richness of interviews and observations of a movement with theoretical framework, to illuminate the broader implications of this movement, and how it can inform future research of indigenous media.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

> *After over five hours of dusty bumping and winding through treacherous
> mountain roads in the back of a rusty old pickup truck, my research
> assistant (and also younger brother) and I have finally arrived, dusty and
> triumphant, in Talea de Castro, a town and municipality nestled in the
> powerful Sierra Norte mountains of Oaxaca, Mexico. We get the sense
> that we have emerged in a world far removed from the hustle and bustle of
> the capitol city, its pace and rhythm of life sheltered not just by its remote
> location, but also by the strength of the people who have lived here for
> generations.*

> *Yet along with the sense of traditions long preserved in this lush mountain
> village, the first thing we see as we walk the main street are two Internet
> cafes, not two blocks from each other, teeming with people of all ages,
> faces lit up by screens, reflecting the fleeting promises of technology, of
> connections to far away worlds at their fingertips. My brother is pulling
> my arm and gesturing excitedly at our little Telmex cell phone, which,
> instead of the usual Telcel network symbol reminding us that we are
> paying telecom billionaire Carlos Slim for its patchy services, the screen
> instead reads in Spanish "Welcome to Talea Cellular Network. To
> register, go to the radio with this message." So all the hype is true, and we
> have at last arrived in the little David of a town that stood up to the
> Goliath of Mexico's mammoth telecom monopolies. Aware of hundreds of
> eyes on us, these strange and disheveled travelers that have stumbled into
> their remote town, we start walking towards the radio tower in the
> distance.*

I open with this excerpt from my research journal because it reflects the complex

third space that indigenous groups occupy in relation to 'the modern world,' aka the fast-

paced, hyper connected market world that neoliberal globalization has wrought. One of

the strengths of ethnography is its ability to convey those multilayered relationships

without reducing their complexity. Outside of Western ethnocentric assumptions that

everyone wants to be incorporated into the neoliberal capitalist model, but also defying

accounts that still portray indigenous groups as victims of a uniformly homogenizing system, the space they must occupy is contested. To understand indigenous media's significance in Oaxaca, it is useful to contextualize it within overarching discussions of globalization and the rise of the neoliberal capitalist model. I then connect these broader discussions with the contemporary reality of community media in Latin America, and in Mexico specifically. Lastly, I introduce Deleuze and Guattari's concept of rhizomes and how this framework can be used to describe the unique strength of the community media movement in Oaxaca and its nuanced relationship of resistance to the state and market.

The Contemporary Context of Community Media

Recently, demands to democratize the media have been at the forefront of national debates across Latin America, with the end goal to inspire pragmatic policies limiting media monopolies and opening up the media sector to more diverse voices. Left of center and populist governments, particularly in South America, have been forging very different relationships with media, and community media in particular. Interviews with media activists in Oaxaca revealed not only knowledge of these shifts, but also ongoing exchanges and collaborations through conferences and social media with countries that have made huge strides in incorporating community media into society, Bolivia and Argentina in particular. In Mexico, however, where the conservative PRI party retains power and corruption continues to be a pervasive issue, the media remains consolidated in the hands of a few powerful players, inaccessible and exclusive of entire sectors of the population.

31

The growth of academic interest in non-mainstream, alternative and citizen media in Latin America runs parallel to the rising importance of the non-profit media sector, concerns about the results of consumption-driven media (i.e. the spike in entertainment programming and lack of politics, issues, and information), and also the rise of new media technologies, bolstered by the continued importance of older technologies like radio and video. Particularly in areas where the digital divide has limited access to newer media technologies, community radio (a technology particularly embedded in Latin American history and society), continues to be the most important and accessible of these older technologies (Hintz, 2011).

The Zapatistas—whose movement I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter—provide a strong example of the ways in which the new technologies and interconnectedness brought about by globalization processes have also opened spaces for activist networks to connect and to expand transnational media movements, resulting in a stronger and more complex cellular arrangement and greater potential to influence politics. The fact that the Zapatistas were able to draw upon these networks to gain international recognition and support essentially forced the Mexican government to meet with them and hear their demands. Although the struggle continues to get the Mexican government to respect their treaty, the fact that the government signed the agreement and now monitors Zapatista villages constantly with military and police presence represents a recognition of the power of transnational networks to influence and, at times, even circumvent state power (Knudson, 1998).

Yet domestic laws also affect community media greatly. AMARC (The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters) states that the lack of legislation recognizing community media is the principle barrier to the positive and democratizing impacts that grassroots media could have in the region (2015 Interview). Although the political climate in Mexico remains hostile to the opening of community media policy windows, we can see examples across the region of state power being influenced by networks of collaborative horizontal arrangements (like the Oaxacan case mapped in this project) one of which is civil society and the proliferation of social movements (Hintz, 2011). The complexity of this changing relationship between states, business, civil society, and international actors will highlight the nature of policymaking as one of political negotiation. Yet indigenous voices remain notably absent and excluded from political negotiation, which is made all the clearer in Mexico's 2014 Telecommunications Law, discussed in Chapter III.

Community media's importance has been recognized by international platforms throughout history, notably by NWICO / The MacBride Commission in the 1970s, which specifically addressed media representation in the developing world, and recognized the critical role of community media for autonomous development and democracy (Calabrese, 2003). The Inter American Commission on Human Rights has recommended for decades that nations reserve a portion of their media for community ventures, yet these recommendations were overshadowed by the adoption of neoliberal policies, which in turn forced countries into patterns of massive media privatization, consolidation, monopolies, and domination by market interests. The social purpose of the media took a

backseat to its moneymaking potentials, and its social role and potential gave way to more and more entertainment. Luis Rey from Radio Xeglo in Guelatao, sees this focus on entertainment as an intentional move:

> "*The commercial radios, all they do is entertain the people. And then, that's all people want, to be entertained. They don't want to hear about what's really going on... they'd rather be happy, and laugh, and allow themselves to be distracted. They say 'Luis, your radio, it is so depressing! You only talk about bad things!' It's hard, because we want to raise consciousness. We want to wake people up. No one else is being critical like that*" (2015 Interview).

For radio, this meant that frequencies were auctioned off to the highest bidder[18], and community ventures were pushed into legal limbo by strict and impossible regulations, bans on advertising, control of political content, etc. For this reason community radios in Mexico largely exist without licenses, which in turn limits their impact and national recognition.

Yet I argue that these diverse and marginalized voices, despite the oppressive forces of the state and negative impacts of neoliberal globalization, continue to speak out and produce their own media, reflexively dealing with the cards that a global market and repressive governments have dealt--taking what seems useful and discarding, or resisting, what is deemed harmful (Ulin, 2004). The agency that is expressed and adopted at the local level indicates the existence of parallel modernities[19] (Escobar, 2004), and the ways in which Western cultural hegemony produces diverse reactions across nations and

---

[18] More on this process in the section entitled 'Privatized Air and Radio Spectrum as Social Good' in Chapter IV.

[19] Referring to the coexistence in space and time of myriad economic, religious, and cultural flows that are often subsumed within the term 'modernity.'

cultures. This relates to Appadurai's (1991) concept of alternative modernities, which he linked to increased deterritorialisation[20] and movement of people, capital, and social movements across cultural and national boundaries. Within these concepts lies the continued importance of indigenous histories which have unfolded, albeit only semi-autonomously, as a challenge to the notion that 'being modern' is a given. Rather, modernity must be understood as a contested space, constantly pushed back upon by human agency and the existence and persistence of other narratives of modernity and progress.

<u>The Mexican Context</u>

"Poor Mexico, so far from God, so close to the United States."

Although there is actually little evidence that former Mexican dictator Porfirio Diaz actually said this now-infamous quote, it concisely captures the struggle of a nation in the Global South in such close geographical proximity to the rich, powerful, and influential United States. Mexico is a nation intricately connected with the United States, for better or for worse, economically, politically, and culturally, particularly since the Mexican government's open-armed embrace of neoliberal globalization and market reforms.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Latin America as a whole embraced neoliberal policies more radically than perhaps any other region in the world, and is thus the best site to observe its successes and, as even its initial proponents have conceded, its many failures. In Escobar's (2010) definition, "...neoliberalism entailed a series of structural

---

[20] The severance of social, political, or cultural practices from their native places and populations (Appadurai, 1991).

35

reforms intended to reduce the role of the state in the economy, assign a larger role to markets, and create macro-economic stability" (Escobar, p. 421). Its successes seemed to come at a high cost, including growing unemployment and an unwieldy informal market, the erosion of the link between international trade and domestic production, structural unevenness, ecological damage, increased poverty and inequality, and mass displacement and migration (Escobar, 2010).

The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) held a political monopoly in Mexico for decades, upheld by coercion, repression, and violence. Thus, from the 1940s through the 1980s, "clientelism, corporatism, and a state-centered ideology of social justice had attached most Mexican social, economic, and political organizations to the government or its party" (Relly, 2014, p. 4). The media followed suit, serving solely as the voice of the PRI agenda which controlled it through subsidies—despite the 1917 Constitution's[21] guarantee of freedom of the press and expression—wherein oppositional or critical voices were strongly repressed.

In 1996, after divides over political and economic reforms had fractured the PRI party, in a landmark victory the oppositional National Action Party (PAN) candidate Vicente Fox Quesada won the election. During his administration the roll of the press transformed, becoming more civic than authoritarian, and Hughes documented the emergence of seven "first wave" civic newspapers, which emerged in northern Mexico (Hughes, 2006). Yet despite these advances the democratic influence of the Mexican

---

[21] Despite progressive rights laid out in Mexico's 1917 post-revolutionary Constitution, there exist little to no supporting conditions for these liberties (Relly, 2014).

media has never been without opposition and oppression, both from organized crime and corrupt government officials (Relly, 2014).

Now, with the 2012 election of Enrique Peña Nieto, the PRI is once again in power in Mexico, and their legacy of corruption and repression continues. The country remains once of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists (Human Rights Watch, 2013) largely due to repercussions of the US-backed Drug War (Carlsen, 2008) and a weak institutional environment to protect journalists from violence (Waisbord, 2002) or, in Mexico's case, to support watchdog or civic news media in a fragile democracy. In Robert Dahl's (1982) minimal conditions for democracy, one of the more widely accepted is a citizen's right to freely express themselves and their right to seek and obtain information. Yet, in Mexico, the PRI's ties to drug cartels date back to the end of World War II, and citizens still equate the PRI party with its violent and repressive history, for good reason.

After President Felipe Calderon declared the War on Drugs in Mexico, there have been more than 60,000 deaths linked to drug-related violence, organized crime, and government corruption in the country (Human Rights Watch, 2013), and this high risk of institutionalized violence continues to undermine Mexico's already fragile democratic system (Relly, 2014). Thus, in the face of a repressive and corrupt government and a decided lack of freedom of the press, community media—particularly for indigenous groups—becomes not just a space to express identity and protect culture, but also an important political tool to give voice to injustices and build critical consciousness.

Radio in Mexico

Joy Elizabeth Hayes (2000) has traced the birth of radio in Mexico, stating that beginning in the 1920s Mexico became a 'radio nation.' Hayes documents how radio became a central tool in building the modern Mexican nation-state, with the aim of integrating the political, cultural, and economic realities of a largely illiterate population. Other scholars of Mexican history (Hale, 2005; Postero & Zamosc, 2006) have discussed the 'myth of mestizaje,' i.e. an imagined *mestizo*[22] Mexico embedded within this attempt to unify the nation. Indigenous peoples were constructed as idealized caricatures of Mexico's past, while their present realities of extreme poverty, marginalization, and neglect by the government were effectively erased from the project of national integration and development.

According to the work of anthropologist Charles Hale (2005), as Latin America entered into the neoliberal era in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the discourse of *mestizaje* nationalism was replaced with Constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples as culturally distinctive yet equal members of the nation state, with a very limited conception of rights which Hale terms neoliberal multiculturalism. The potential menace of neoliberal multiculturalism for the indigenous peoples of North and Central America lies in the fact that it placed the power to define indigenous identities and rights in the hands of the state, rather than those of indigenous peoples themselves.

By affording indigenous peoples 'cultural rights,' which in Oaxaca translated to the government technically recognizing their right to govern themselves according to

---

[22] A person of mixed ancestries, incorporating both indigenous and European elements.

usos y costumbres, neoliberal multiculturalism notably denies the political and social rights necessary to demand that the government stop its discrimination, harassment, control, and criminalization of community media. This brings us to the critical role of indigenous media to movements for indigeneity[23] in Chiapas and Oaxaca in particular. In resistance to neoliberalism, an assertion of their rights, and an effort to take back control of their own identities, perceptions, and images in the international sphere, indigenous groups in Oaxaca and throughout Mexico use media to represent themselves to their own communities, their nation, and to the rest of the world.

NAFTA, the EZLN, and the APPO

Latin America has always had an exceptionally vibrant and active civil society, and thus have been the site of a rich and influential history of social movements. In the 1990s, Mexico was swept up in a wave of new social movements erupting across Latin America, largely in reaction to the rapid intensification of neoliberal policies in the region. On January 1 of 1994, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), a predominantly Mayan indigenous movement based in Chiapas, the southernmost state of Mexico, declared war on the Mexican government in an armed uprising which took over six towns in Chiapas. News of the uprising reverberated across international media, as journalists analyzed the underlying impetus of the Zapatista revolution--the Mexican government's failure to recognize indigenous peoples, their rights, and their cultures.

It was no coincidence that the EZLN chose January 1, 1994, the same date that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect, a critical piece of

---

[23] What it means to be indigenous, carrying the political significance of establishing a distinct indigenous polity, political entity, nation, or sovereignty.

the neoliberal agenda for Latin America. The Zapatistas argued that agriculture formed the basis of indigenous livelihoods in Mexico, and the effects of NAFTA would effectively undermine small farmers and disproportionately harm indigenous peoples as the most poor and marginalized groups in Mexico. According to CONEVAL (2010), Mexico has the widest income gap between indigenous and nonindigenous populations, with a staggering 75.7 percent of the indigenous population living in poverty, compared with 36.3 percent of the nonindigenous.

This pattern of poverty is part of the structural subordination of indigenous peoples at the hands of decades of neoliberal policies and the legacy of NAFTA in particular, which has been a violent restructuring of the agricultural and rural sector, the sharp decline of subsidies for small farmers, and policies of unprotected employment (Ortiz & Pombo, n.d.). Under NAFTA indigenous people shouldered the most adverse effects, including destruction and appropriation of natural resources on their lands, privatization of forests, mineral deposits, and aquifers, among other things, and displacement due to depletion of natural resources, the decline of agriculture, and changing expectations of youth (Castillo, 2012).

A wealth of research has confirmed that for indigenous people, NAFTA, as the Zapatistas articulated, was "a death sentence." Refusing to be silent while their livelihoods were destroyed, the EZLN represented the refusal of indigenous groups to be silent witnesses of their own erasure. While the Zapatista rebellion was armed with actual weaponry, many scholars have argued that the media was equally, if not more significant to the impact and legitimacy of their struggle. In fact, in the days following the uprising,

supporters of the Zapatistas took to the Internet to broadcast their cause to the world. Led by a charismatic mestizo leader, *Subcomandante* Marcos, the Zapatistas would launch an unprecedented strategic use of the media to build a wide network of support for their struggle. It was not their guns, but rather the force of their domestic and international support, which ultimately pressured the Mexican government to meet them at the negotiating table.

The APPO and Oaxaca's Awakening

Although Chiapas and the Zapatistas have received more attention in the international media, the state of Oaxaca is home to the majority of Mexico's indigenous groups, and has been an equally significant site of resistance. Firstly, out of Oaxaca's majority indigenous population came a proposal to legally recognize *usos y constumbres*[24] as a form of governance. In 1997 Oaxaca's Congress approved a law affording indigenous communities the right to name their municipal authorities without intervention of political parties in accordance with local traditions. Despite the government's failure to honor the spirit of this legislative plan, Oaxaca's example has been extremely instrumental in fueling the national autonomy movement, although the government has not implemented any similar proposals at the national level (Mendoza, 2008).

Oaxaca is fertile ground for indigenous organization, as it has historically remained one of the poorest states in Mexico, with some estimating that 73 percent of its

---

[24] Oaxacan communal autonomy rests on collective institutions such a *tequio* (communal responsibility systems and work obligations), methods of selecting local authorities, and preservation of language and ritual.

people live in poverty. With an indigenous population of almost 40 percent, they are among the state's poorest inhabitants (CONEVAL, 2010). As part of the mestizo state project to assimilate Mexico's primarily indigenous peasant population, education reform became a primary battleground, as the Ministry of Education was used by the PRI as a well-oiled vote delivery machine (Stephen, 2007). Indigenous teachers in Oaxaca, 60 percent of whom are women, have a long tradition of combining their role as educators with activism, and along with Chiapas have one of the strongest teachers' unions in the country—Local 22 Oaxaca, which was key in forcing the Ministry of Education to expand bilingual education in Mexico.

In 2006, as scholar Lynn Stephen has documented in her book *We Are The Face of Oaxaca* (2013), the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO), formed out of a coalition of teacher's unions and civil society groups, disrupted the functions of Oaxaca's government for six months, developing a participatory and inclusive alternative vision for the state. Disparate social movements in Oaxaca coalesced to form APPO when faced with the offenses of corrupt and fraudulently elected PRI governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, who responded to teachers' strikes by ordering police to open fire on non-violent protestors. Central to the 2006 uprising was media, and particularly radio, as an epicenter of organizing across social movements, sharing political messages, and giving testimony to injustices. Elena, 43, from San Jose del Progreso's Radio Movimiento, echoed many interviewees citing the significance the APPO movement for community media in the region:

"This radio started in 2006, as so many did. The APPO, the movement, it brought together so many people, and showed them the power of using media... the power of communication and information. People went back to their communities and started radio stations... they had been woken up" (2015 Interview).

With indigenous women at the forefront, the APPO took over government-controlled media centers, including multiple radio stations, and put them at the heart of ongoing mobilizations, actions, deliberations, and debates, starting an unstoppable process of change in the nature of public culture and politics in Oaxaca (Stephen, 2007). Following the media takeover, APPO women opened the airwaves to voices normally excluded from government propaganda, creating space for the underrepresented to voice their opinions and experiences, shaping the dialogue about the ongoing conflict. I will discuss more about the significance of the movement for women in Chapter V, but the radios became an integral part of alternative cultural production, affecting indigenous people all over Mexico, by changing popular and elites conceptions about who indigenous people are and what they want.

It's important to recognize that the Zapatista and APPO uprisings are not exceptional, but rather situated within a global shift in the past few decades, in which indigenous peoples have begun to take command of the mass media technologies of the dominant society and transformed them in order to meet their own cultural and political needs (Wilson & Stewart, 2008). This project will document how that process is continuing to occupy the space opened up by these movements, despite a hostile state and a highly commercialized mass media. In a unique network of growth with no real center, indigenous movements and identities, articulated through their own media, can be best

understood through the lens of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatari's concept of the rhizome.

Rhizomes and Community Media

When I set out to research indigenous community radios in Oaxaca, the most surprising aspect was finding the active construction of what I would describe as a sophisticated, non-hierarchical network, which expanded beyond just radio into a network of community cell coverage and open-source software. Falling into a common trap, I had assumed that communities would simply not have the resources to build these complex and innovative networks. Yet through strategic relationships with grassroots NGOs and activist groups, the communities in my sample were anything but isolated. Peter Bloom, founder of one of these NGO connectors called Rhizomática, introduced me to an illuminating way to understand the community media movement in Oaxaca, the group's namesake, the rhizome:

> *"I was familiar with rhizomes, as they are often adopted by tech activists and those working to build decentralized networks, like Anonymous for example... but when I did more research on the concept and its history, I realized how perfectly it described what we are trying to build and how it fits into society... what we are doing is unique and different, and the rhizome is a perfect descriptor"* (Peter Bloom, 2014 Interview).

The concept of rhizomes, coined by French politico-philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), can illuminate not only what spread the message of these iconic struggles, but also future possibilities for those groups engaged in alter-globalization and social justice struggles across the globe. Botanically, rhizome means mass of roots and is an

44

underground root mass, such as you see with grass and bamboo, sending out both shoots and roots from its nodes.

The sociopolitical concept, as articulated by Deleuze and Guattari, also presents an illuminating metaphor which, along with theories of alternative media, provides a useful framework for understanding social movements from the margins, and particularly indigenous media movements. To describe the concept of the rhizome, I will quote its four principles from *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987)[25], describing how each relates to the study of community media networks.

"1 and 2. Principles of connection and heterogeneity: any point of a rhizome can be connected to any other, and must be." Rhizomatic networks are dynamic, open, decentralized, horizontal, and diverse. They branch to all sides unpredictably, and connection can be made from any part of the network. In Chapter V, I map out the rhizomatic network of radios and connecting organizations in my sample, to reveal the complex and multiple connections that lend the movement unique strength and resiliency.

"3. Principle of multiplicity: only when the multiple is effectively treated as a substantive, 'multiplicity' that it ceases to have any relation to the One." The most important aspect of rhizomes is that they have multiple entryways, meaning there is no definitive entry or starting point leading to 'the truth.' As Sermijn et al. (2008) describe, "*The* truth or *the* reality does not exist within rhizomatic thinking. There are always many possible truths and reality that can all be viewed as social constructs" (p. 637, original

---

[25] Although the book itself is written as a model of rhizomatic thinking, so while fascinating, it's a difficult narrative to follow, revealing the linear structure of how Western cultures are taught to read and understand stories.

emphasis). In this way, rhizomatic thinking rejects sameness and embraces heterogeneity. In Chapter V I explore indigenous knowledge and value systems, and their recognition of pluralism, or multiple, complementary, and at times contradictory truths, and posit that for this reason rhizomatic theory is the best suited to describe indigenous social movements.

"4. Principle of asignifying rupture: a rhizome may be broken, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines." Because rhizomatic movements are decentralized, meaning rather than one center of power, they have multiple, equal centers, they cannot be easily destroyed or dismantled like centralized structures. As this principle states, if a rhizome is broken or ruptured, it will merely grow further from the place it broke, or from another node.

"5 and 6. Principle of cartography and decalcomania: a rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model; it is a "map and not a tracing" (p. 251). Finally, Deleuze and Guattari describe rhizomes as maps, because they are open, receptive to constant change and evolution, and have multiple entryways, all of which are good or of equal importance.
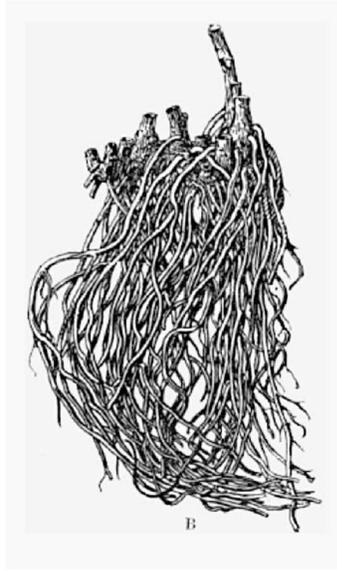
A rhizome.

Made up of "dimensions, or rather directions in motion," rhizomes have no true essence; rather, they change as the relations that comprise them change.

> "As a model for culture, the rhizome resists the organizational structure of the root-tree system which charts causality along chronological lines and looks for the original source of 'things' and looks towards the pinnacle or conclusion of those 'things.' A rhizome, on the other hand, is characterized by ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21).

The rhizome represents an alternative conception of knowledge, which does not organize the world hierarchically in the traditional form, typically limited to vertical and horizontal connections, dualist categories, and binary choices. Rather, the rhizomatic view regards human history and culture as a map or web of attractions and influences with no specific origin or center, for a rhizome "has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing… Barbara Fornssler et al. (2014) has explored the

rhizome as a better model for indigenous and community-based forms of knowledge and research as contrasted with Western research practices that they describe as "linear, objective, and outcome-oriented" (p. 179). Rhizomes instead make space for many stories, or truths, to exist side by side, resisting the idea of "the so-called objective all-seeing eye" (Sermijn et al., 2008).

Western forms of knowledge as well as the organization of nation-states, in Deleuze and Guattari's assessment, are organized like a tree rather than a rhizome. It is hierarchical, linear, centralized, and tends towards binary thinking. The tree[26] imposes the verb 'to be,' but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and…and…and… This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb 'to be'" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 24). The rhizome's movement resists chronology and traditional organization, favoring instead a nomadic pattern of grown and propagation. The nomad, as described by the authors, is a way of being in the middle or between points, characterized by movement and change, and unfettered by systems of organization.

In contrast to the rhizome, Western research has been dominated by paradigms of positivism, and now post-positivism[27] continuing to assume that knowledge production and exchange must be linear, objective, and outcome-oriented, as described earlier (Fornssler et al., 2014). Critiques against these paradigms have been leveled by poststructuralist, postmodernist, feminist, and indigenous researchers in particular.

---

[26] The tree, or arbolic model, represents the linear, hierarchical, territorialized organizational structures associated with the nation-state, and also with Enlightenment-style thought.
[27] Positivism teaches that there is only one objective truth, while post-positivism says the same, but adds that due to the limits of human knowledge, interpretations differ.

Indigenous knowledge defies positivism's assumptions with relational, holistic approaches, accommodating multiple perspectives and circular processes (Kovach, 2009).

In the rhizomatic model, "culture spreads like the surface of a body of water… The surface can be interrupted and moved, but these disturbances leave no trace, as the water is charged with pressure and potential to always seek its equilibrium, and thereby establish smooth space" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21). The authors thus leverage 'rhizomes' and 'rhizomatic' to describe research and theories that allow for multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in how we represent and interpret data, but I also see in the rhizome an illuminating concept to help us better understand movements and networks of indigenous community owned media as a rhizomatic social movement from below, defying linear and predictable patterns.

Indigenous media does not operate completely outside of the market or state, meaning it is not merely counterhegemonic, but engaging in nontraditional ways (often as a means of survival) with the market and state—better described as transhegemonic. In this way networks of community media in Oaxaca are destabilizing[28] the more rigid traditional structures of public and private media spheres. Moreover, indigenous media movements are indivisible from their spiritualities and cosmovisions, as well as the importance of oral history and storytelling, which relays values, beliefs, ways of seeing the world, history, and memory (Berry et al., 2014), and interconnectedness captured well by the rhizomatic model.

---

[28] Deleuze and Guattari described this destabilizing process as deterritorialization.
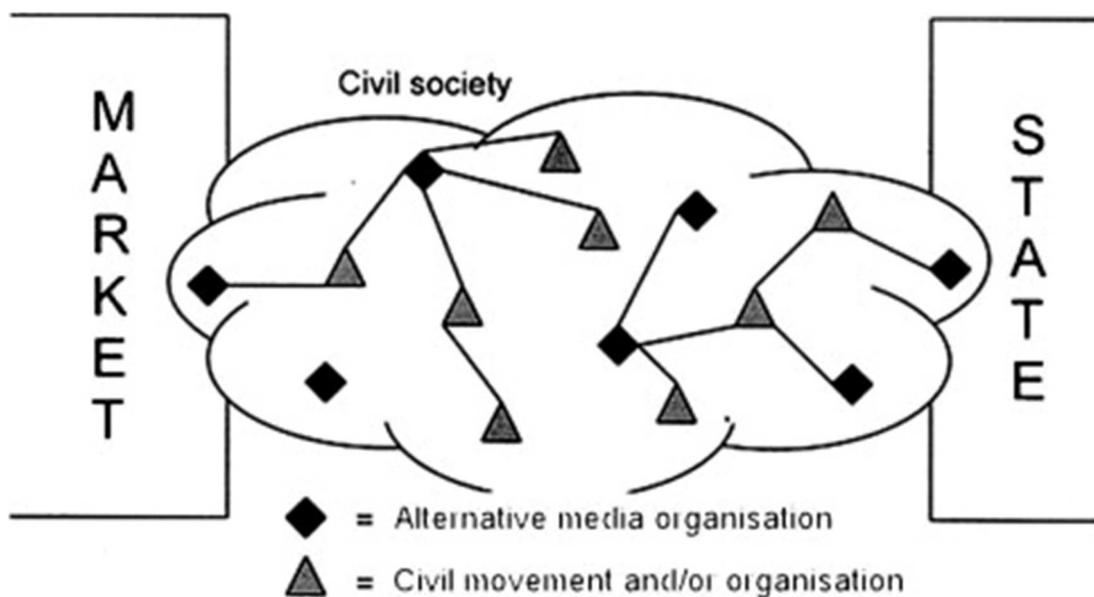
Civil society and alternative media as rhizome. (Carpentier et al., 2003, p. 62).

The above illustration maps a rhizomatic network of alternative media, portraying the third space between market and state which community media occupies. Rhizomatic networks are embedded in a fluid civil society, with an oppositional relationship towards state and market. "They are places and spaces where people from different types of organizations, social movements, and struggles can meet and collaborate" (Carpentier et al., 2003, p. 5). However, the network also acts as a sort of bridge or crossroad between civil society and state and market, creating strategic linkages without the movement losing its identity or become incorporated or assimilated. It is through these linkages that rhizomes 'deterritorialize' the sector, "destabilizing the rigidity and certainties of public and market media organizations" (Carpentier et al., 2003, p. 5).

Thus, through the rhizome we can look at social movements and politics from below by focusing on the informal, indirect, unanticipated, and unpredictable aspects, rather than the traditional dominant Western knowledge systems, which tend to place all

50

the focus on questions of resources or successes and failures. Using the above structure, in Chapter V I map out the rhizomatic network of community radio stations and cell networks in my research sample, as well as the civil society organizations and NGOs that support them, and the third space they occupy between state and market. I use rhizomes to describe the organizational and informational networks making up the indigenous media movement in Oaxaca, including a community-based cellular mesh network, the proliferation of open source software, and how both of these are connected with networks of indigenous owned and operated community radios.

Rhizomes and Alternative Media

Traditionally we have understood media that exists outside of the mainstream spaces of state and market as "alternative media" although, as Downing (2000, p. ix) has pointed out, "everything, at some point, is alternative to something else," thus many scholars of alternative media choose to focus more specifically on radical alternative media. But even within that narrower focus, there is a stunning amount of diversity, or, as Downing puts it, "a colossal variety of formats" (2000, p. ix), which is reflected in the many ways of describing alternative media—popular, free, communitarian, native, citizens', civil society, communal, indigenous, or participatory, to name a few I encountered in the literature. My argument for a rhizomatic approach to community radio stems from the desire to create more space for diversity and freedom from binaries. Rodriguez (2001) discusses how the category of alternative media can lead to binary entrapment:

"...because 'alternative media' rests on the assumption that these media are alternative to something, this definition will easily entrap us in binary thinking: mainstream media and their alternative, that is, alternative media. Also, the label 'alternative media' predetermines the type of oppositional thinking that limits the potential of these media to their ability to resist the alienating power of mainstream media" (p. 20).

Included in the diversity of alternative media are the grey areas where there is overlap with the state and/or the market, for example using commercial tactics to collect funding, or a government grant, should not necessarily exclude media from being alternative. Thus the way we conceptualize and discuss alternative media must carve out space for its fluidity, but also the principal purpose for its alternativity, namely, the participation of societal groups and communities commonly excluded from media discourse, providing "air space to local cultural manifestations, to ethnic minority groups, to the hot political issues in the neighborhood or locality" (Jankowski & Prehn, 2002, p. 3).

Alternative media is also well known as the voice of social movements and sub/counter-cultures, with a heavy emphasis on self-representation, often resulting in more diverse content. Focusing on local events and concerns remains an important theme in alternative media production, as it connects to participatory practices integral to the creation of community media, resulting in more horizontal organizational structures, and media that is by the community, for the community.[29]

The rhizome offers a fresh and interesting way of framing my research on indigenous community radios and globalization in the digital age, because it creates

---

[29] Bearing in mind that 'community' is not exclusively a geographical definition, as communities can cross localities (Lewis, 1993, p. 13).

precisely the space needed for diversity, fluidity, overlap, and grey areas where the alternative media approach falls short. I do not however replace the alternative media approach with rhizomatic media, but rather seek to use the two together, or use rhizomes to complicate the alternative media approach, to better understand the nuanced role of indigenous community radio and alternative media seeking to challenge hegemonic structures and mechanisms of control in Mexico.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Deleuze and Guattari themselves were heavily involved in the French alternative (free) radio movement, viewing it as an opportunity to live out their *utopie deleuzoguattarienne* (Carpentier et al., 2003). Unlike many other French scholars, Deleuze and Guattari do not demonize new technologies as being necessarily dehumanizing, but rather seem keenly interested in 'becomings' between humans and machines and computer-assisted subjectivities (Poster & Savat, 2009). While technology can be considered a new mechanism of control and form of reinforcing Western hierarchies in today's capitalist societies, this research reveals how indigenous groups are reclaiming technology through open-source software, and using it as a tool to resist these external systems of control.

While a tree (representing hierarchical thought) always grows into the same form, rhizomes are constantly changing, thriving on alliances and heterogeneous connections, with no clear center and no enclosing borders. As Santana & Carpentier (2003) describe, the rhizome is "part of a *chaosmosis,* a chaotic osmosis of varied and variable connections rather than an ordered cosmos (p. 33, original emphasis). It can produce flourishing or runaway conditions, but it defies the fixed and static in a constant state of

motion, constantly seeking new connections that lead to becomings. The indigenous media movement in Oaxaca very much mimics this organized disorder and constant state of growth; even if one connection dies, it does not stop the growth, due to the decentralized nature of the network body.

Conclusion

The main purpose of my research is to show how indigenous-run community radio stations are not an isolated activity locked in localism, but rather living, breathing rhizomatic networks wherein people who have been marginalized and oppressed by dominant society have found creative and disruptive ways to assert their agency and their right to connect. Community media has become not just a means of protecting their culture and knowledge from being commodified by the market or tokenized by the state, but also a tool to assert their right to interact with both market and state on their own terms. The rhizomatic approach comes into play to open up new ways to theorize how the local and global touch and strengthen each other within community media (Carpentier, 2003).

Rhizomes also represent the intersections where people from different types of social movements across borders meet and collaborate. Before the digital age, social justice movements were more isolated and focused solely on their own agendas. Today, there is much greater focus within both activism and academia on an intersectional approach to social justice movements, recognizing the numerous connections between movements for women, people of color, indigenous people, immigrants, students, the environment, and so on. Both the Zapatista and APPO movements happened in the midst

of the social justice rhizome, where people fighting various forms of oppression around the world connected with these localized struggles, particularly through new media networks, enabling disparate movements to connect, communicate, and strengthen one other. Throughout this project I explore the rhizomatic nature of the community media movement in Oaxaca as a whole, drawing parallels between rhizomes and indigenous knowledge systems, the community cell movement, and open-source software.

CHAPTER IV

INDIGENOUS RADIO AND MEDIA POLICY IN MEXICO

Introduction

> *"At this moment, while they have everyone nice and distracted with the World Cup, the Mexican government is silently working to pass this new Ley de Telecomunicacciones, which will permit massive media consolidation--even more than already exists in Mexico... Here we have a media monopoly. Carlos Slim is a beast-- he owns it all. But the new movement of indigenous communicators, they are saying that they too need a space for their radio stations. This new law will once again offer them nothing. Even worse, it will be destructive for community media movements. That is why they are making their own networks of communicators. One community in Oaxaca has even built their own cell phone network. What if they could start their own Internet? That's why the state has to control them, to stamp out these citizen movements and protect big capital. This new law is just another extension of that relationship."*

In a 2014 interview, Juan Mario Perez Martinez, project coordinator for the Autonomous University of Mexico's *Proyecto Universitario Multicultural* (PUMC) spoke with fervor about the proposed Telecommunications Law during our interview in his office in early July 2014. My brother and I arrived in Mexico City in July of 2014 to the nation's paradoxical political reality on full display as state policies collided with civilian, and notably indigenous, resistance. In San Cristobal communities protested the government's strategic division of communities through illegal logging; in stark contrast to flowery Guelaguetza celebrations, Oaxaca city center swelled with little tents as members of the teachers' union set up camp to protest recent federal education reforms. In the capitol people campaigned against the privatization--or rather selling off to foreign oil companies--of Pemex, Mexico's nationalized oil giant, as well as against the new

Federal Telecommunications and Broadcasting Law, which would come into effect in August 2014.

This chapter focuses on the importance of policy and political context for community media, beginning with the implications of the 2014 Telecommunications Law, which was not only the subject of a flood of protests during my 2014 research trip, but also emerged as a key theme in interviews, as an example of the Mexican government's refusal to provide comprehensive regulations for community media, and effort to consolidate state power within mainstream media, curtail civil liberties, and criminalize community media further. Next, a discussion of how Ayotzinapa has illuminated that the PRI is continuing its 70-year legacy of repression and corruption, the significance of NAFTA and the US drug war, and the historic and current relationship of community media to the state and market in Mexico.

Implications of the 2014 *Ley de Telecomunicación*

While the country was happily distracted watching Mexico play in the World Cup, on July 14, 2014, President Enrique Pena Nieto signed an antitrust telecommunications reform package that, on the surface, was intended to break up media monopolies, and "bring community and indigenous radio stations out of the shadows, giving them legal recognition under Mexican law" (VICE, 2014). Yet the throngs of community media activists flooding the streets in protest of this new legislation seem to disagree with the president's assessment. Janis Caol spoke about the new law in late July 2014:

"Everyone knows that this is the same shit politicians and the PRI here in Mexico have always pulled... disguised as something to break up monopolies, and to help community radio, when actually it will criminalize those same radios, and it gives the government huge powers...surveillance of communications, censorship, the ability to shut down the Internet."

The February 2014 issue of TIME magazine featured current President Enrique Peña Nieto poised heroically with the caption "Saving Mexico--How Enrique Peña Nieto's sweeping reforms have changed the narrative in his narco-stained nation." The public response was well documented on social media platforms, as outraged Mexicans altered the image and message to make it more accurate: "Slaying Mexico... Selling Mexico...Saving Mexico with Trashy *Telenovelas*." In a less facetious tone, one woman tweeted "...it's the Mexican people who are trying to make Mexico a better place, not Enrique Peña Nieto." The TIME cover mimicked the dominant mass media narrative that the President and his administration are fearlessly tackling Mexico's deep-rooted issues to the applause of a grateful public, while recent events have shed light on a much less rosy reality.

Enrique Peña Nieto has said that the new law will break up powerful and oft criticized television and telephone monopolies in Mexico. Television in Mexico is controlled by Televisa and TV Azteca, who together dominate 94 percent of commercial TV frequencies and nearly all of the market. Radio is similarly concentrated, with 80 percent of commercial stations in the hands of just 13 groups (Americas Quarterly, 2015). For perspective, here is a table of the top eight media owners in the world from 2014:

Owner or Asset Manager	Value of Media Holdings ($ billions)
Government of China	317.2
Government of Japan	67.2
State Street (US)	64.8
Vanguard (US)	63.8
Fidelity (US)	46.5
Capital Group (US)	35.2
Government of Germany	29.9
Carlos Slim	29.2

The top media owners globally, data from (Noam, 2014).

Notice that all of these are entire governments or large hedge funds except Carlos Slim, who is the single largest individual owner of media. As this chart would suggest, mobile access in Mexico is dominated by Slim and his company America Móvil, which owns Telmex and Telcel, and Emilio Azcarraga Jean, owner of Televisa. Mexico's cell service is infamous for high rates and spotty service, and it's no surprise, as competition is extremely limited to non-existent. So why would people be worried about a law designed to curtail these powerful corporate interests? The main issue is the power the law affords to the Interior Ministry.

The new law will reassert the state, as an accomplice to domestic and multinational capital, as the ultimate regulator of telecommunications. The law also grants the state the power to retain civilian data and access it without judicial authorization and shut down telecommunication services for the prevention of crime.

Peña Nieto's presidency marks the return of the PRI, the longest ruling political party in the world, which had an effective monopoly on political power from 1929 until the late 1980s (Hallin, 2000). Ironically, it was the PRI that initially allowed for the creation of these media monopolies in the 1990s in return for political support, and they thrived in this symbiotic relationship with mass media throughout the twentieth century (Hallin, 2000). Thus from the beginning the PRI hegemony smacked of internal cultural imperialism, as the media were fully integrated into the structure of power. Now, with this new law granting the government unprecedented powers over media, many anticipate a climate of fear, self-censorship, and abuse of power.

Proponents of the law believe that "it reinforces the government's role in making sure smaller voices are not drowned out by power, money or bias" (Americas Quarterly, 2015), yet those representing community and minority media as well as those privy to the PRI agenda would beg to differ. According to liberal media theory, the development of media markets is conducive to democracy because it limits dependence on the state and political parties and allows it to play an independent role as government 'watchdog' and as a forum for debate (Dissanayeke, 2006). However, the Mexican case reveals how media monopolies, far from creating any real diversity, have not only cut off the most marginalized sectors from any real participation in the media, but have made it increasingly difficult and dangerous to create media for themselves.

The new Telecom law represents an extension of the legacy of state control and sterilization of indigenous movements and autonomy in Mexico. There is neither mention of nor provision for any comprehensive regulatory framework for community media in

the new Telecom law. Rather, as my interviews and several international news outlets

reported, the reform actually criminalizes indigenous and community radio stations

operating without government permissions.

Ayotzinapa and a Criminal State

> *"Ayotzinapa was so important... to wake the people up, especially the
> students, and remind them that we live in a criminal state"*
> (Luiz Rey, Radio Xeglo, 2015 Interview).

In September of 2014, 43 male student teachers of The Rural Teachers' College

of Ayotzinapa were abducted in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico. Official reports stated that the

students were intercepted by police on their way to a protest and a confrontation ensued,

wherein once the students were in custody, they were handed over to local *Guerreros*

Unidos (United Warriors) drug cartel and presumably killed. The subsequent discovery of

mass graves (literally revealing the skeletons in the nation's closet), suspicion of

government corruption, and general distrust of the PRI government swept the nation and

manifested in mass protests, forcing the resignation of Guerrero's mayor. These students

were indigenous and from an impoverished community, further elucidating the chasm

between freedoms granted in the Mexican Constitution and the violent reality that still

exists daily for indigenous communities in Mexico.

The belief that the PRI government is corrupt and working with drug cartels is

very much connected to US involvement and policies. While Ayotzinapa has catalyzed a

national soul search regarding deeply rooted practices of impunity, corruption,

militarization, and human rights violations, it's also important to put these things in the

context of NAFTA and the US sponsored drug war in Mexico. Because while it's easy

for international media to put all the blame on the Mexican government, global power relations also reveal the US's complicity in these crimes against the Mexican people.

NAFTA and Militarized Mexico

When NAFTA came into effect on January 1, 1994, current president Carlos Salinas de Gortari declared it Mexico's 'entry into the First World.' The free trade agreement locked in the fundamentals of neoliberalism: an export-oriented economy, open market, privileges for multinational corporations, the withdrawal of the state from social programs for development, international labor competition and the commoditization of natural resources (Carlsen, 2008). This agreement, much like the new Telecommunications Law, was hammered out behind closed doors, only to be imposed on a purposefully uninformed society. Social benefits from a paternalistic state began to diminish with the growing dominance of the international market.

This model exerted political pressure for Mexico in the international arena to toe a US line. Nationally, the agreement "constituted a great threat to traditional concepts of national sovereignty and reweaved an already frayed social fabric" (Carlsen, 2008). It created a sort of 'sink-or-swim' situation where the few that refused to or could not swim, or even enter the water, were forced to the margins of political and economic life.

NAFTA is directly connected to the militarization of Mexico, because, due to continued resistance and social movements like the Zapatista uprising, promoters saw the need to protect the agreement from future attacks via the creation, post 9/11, of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP), which essentially armored NAFTA and reflected priorities of the Bush counter-terrorism agenda. Under SPP

Mexico has been pressured to militarize its southern border and repress Central and South American who enter Mexico, presumably in transit to the US (Carlsen, 2008). Then, Plan Mexico in 2008-09 allocated $1.4 billion to Mexican military, police, and judicial systems for training and equipment.

The great irony of the drug war is the US's long history of complete failure to fight its own drug war, namely, the fact that it continues to be the largest market for illegal drugs in the world, a demand which supports Mexico's ever-growing drug cartels. The US includes nothing in its drug war policies to "prevent illegal drug use, increase rehabilitation of addicts, stop the flow of contraband arms to Mexico, or prosecute money laundering" (Carlsen, 2008) within its own borders.

The expansion of NAFTA into the security realm, first via the SPP and then Plan Mexico, indicates that the Mexican government continues to choose a path of authoritarianism and rule by force over an making any attempt to strengthening and diversify the nation's democratic institutions, such as the media. Yet the state continues to communicate its intentions to democratize institutions, notably with its new Telecommunications and Broadcasting Law, which, as the response illustrates, seems to reflect more of a state power grab than a project to limit the power of media monopolies.

If one thing is clear, particularly in light of the mass protests sweeping Mexico over government corruption, the PRI's newfound commitment to democracy in the media seems a lofty goal. Behind a thin veneer of progress and modernization discourse and propaganda about President Enrique Pena Nieto's grand plans to save Mexico from itself,

there is an enraged civil society that is tired of living with corrupt politicians that seem to care more about private capital than their own citizens.

Ayotzinapa inspired voices that had been silenced for too long to finally say, *"Basta*—Enough is enough!" demanding justice, transparency, and accountability for these atrocities. I argue that this awakening of a strong social movement in Mexico, this tragic event which has united and mobilized a diverse nation, is just what Mexico's civil society needs to demand a media law which will actually support the establishment of democracy and speak to the actual needs and rights of the entire populace.

Adelante: Community Media and Policy Changes

> *"The decayed adobe walls in the Mexican countryside display, with amazing regularity, advertisements for Pepsi-Cola. From Quetzacoatl to Pepsicoatl: on the mythic time of the indigenous is superimposed the calendar of Western time, time of progress, lineal time"* (Fuentes, 1971).

Reflecting on Mexico's many-layered cultural terrain, novelist Carlos Fuentes prophetically spoke about the cultural transformations his country would undergo, particularly as neoliberalism accentuated the role of the mass media in defining Mexico's national culture. In the 1990s the PRI party solidified the dominance of the media conglomerate Televisa, by removing regulations and barriers to mass consolidatation in return for political loyalty. Moreover, the foundations of the Mexican media structure were financially backed by US companies such as RCA, Westinghouse, and General Electric. Televisa's influence was upheld by taking "advantage of the Mexican government's massive debts to foreign banks and the recent adoption of neoliberal reforms to increase its commercial interests, solidify its links with transnational corporations, and reinforce its political clout" (Murphy, 1995).

After the massive earthquake in Mexico City in 1985 spurred unprecedented

mobilization of civil society, along with Zapatista and APPO uprisings in 1994 and 2006

respectively, the rise of independent media began to fill in the gaps left by media

monopolies. Activist groups advocating for media democracy were united in their

opposition to the 2016 telecom law, stating that not only were civil society groups

completely left out of the policy-making process, but they felt the new law would open

up the media to more big business and allow the government to control and regulate

media voices like never before. Moreover, protestors decried the fact that the legislation

creates no space for community media whatsoever, which they considered essential to

any project to truly democratize the media.

For the community media sector, both the nation-building and neoliberal periods

of state and market dominance presented substantial challenges. State control left little

space for citizen media models, while the latter has largely neglected non-commercial

and citizen-based media models in its pursuit of profit, business initiatives, and the

private sector. Although movements like the MacBride Report have recognized "the role

of local, alternative, participatory, and decentralized media" (Carlsson, 2003), it didn't

result in any meaningful policies for decades to come, as community media concerns

were crushed by authoritarian governments and business agendas.

Community radio is particularly important in the Latin American context, as it is

immensely imbedded in society and thus remains extremely popular. It is often

represented as "the only media outlet offering local news, programs on local issues, and

programs in local languages" (Hintz, 2011). It is a low cost and low resource technology,

thus transcending the digital divide, yet it has been widely excluded from access to frequency licenses due to discriminatory legislation and regulation (Rodriguez, 2001). Additionally, restrictive laws regarding range and funding have been criticized as abuses of state power to silence diverse voices (Couldry & Curran, 2003). The massive concentration of media across Latin America has further exacerbated this injustice.

Recent political changes have begun to weaken the ties between governments and the mass media, along with a wave of social movements and protests against the dominant social, political, and economic order which has strengthened civil-society groups and social movements, the Zapatista and APPO uprisings, as well as indigenous uprisings following in Ecuador, Bolivia, Guatemala, and Brazil, as well as the economic crash in Argentina in 2001 which less to massive mobilization (Hintz, 2011).

Across the political landscape doors have been opening to include non-state actors in policy shaping, wherein policy is influenced by a multiplicity of actors as a process of political negotiation with increasing importance placed on the interactions between those involved as well as the conditions and environments of interaction (Hintz, 2011). Thus the success or failure of policies not only depends upon the actors involved but on the climate in which they are operating, i.e. favorable or unfavorable institutional settings, policy windows, and policy monopolies which can be broken during shifts in the balance of power.

In order for media to truly be democratized, spaces for community media must be created, as this sector is essential to human development at the community and national level. The role of state power is controversial in some of these cases, but a common

theme is the civil-society mobilizations which have played critical roles in making these policy changes, transforming their agendas into policy through movement-government connections, which demonstrate the fact that community media is a dynamic social phenomenon. It is not frozen in time, but rather subject to constantly shifting historical and political realities, a globalizing world, and shifting relationships between actors (Rodriguez, 2001).

Thus far the relationship of the state towards community media, and indigenous media in particular in Mexico has been disregard at best, and more commonly criminalization and attacks on community radios in particular for their role in speaking out against corruption and injustices, as well as their historical connection to radical organizing against the PRI. However, as I explore in Chapter V, my research reveals a strong and connected community media movement, which holds the potential to create a solid platform from which indigenous groups and community media activists can demand policy changes and recognition of community media and their right to communicate.

The State, the Market, and Indigenous Radio

Until the 20th Century there was virtually no acknowledgement of what we now refer to as "ethnic minorities" due to policies of assimilation and nation building. Mexico was no exception, and its indigenous population of over 12 million speaking over 65 original languages, the largest in Latin America, was 'assimilated' into the state concept of development, the homogeneous *mestizo* nation, and its hegemonic ideas of a uniform language and culture.

Indigenous media also began as part of top-down state development projects, when the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI, Spanish initials) funded more than 20 "indigenous, community" radio stations. Many of these government-sponsored indigenous radios still operate throughout Oaxaca. However, while these stations broadcast in original languages, their primary function was and is to inform indigenous communities of the government's development agenda, and often are not even managed or run by indigenous people themselves, fueling claims of racism and outside influence, resulting in widespread skepticism towards CDI stations (Cusi Wortham, 2013).

Magdalena Luna and her husband Jaime, two of the original founders of Radio Xeglo in the Zapotec community of San Pablo Guelatao, commented in an interview on the relationship between state-controlled indigenous radio and what they consider true community radio in Oaxaca. In 2006 there was a veritable eruption of alternative, critical, community media as the APPO movement brought indigenous groups together, empowered women to step into leadership roles, and set an example of indigenous power and autonomy by taking over government-controlled radio and television stations to work for the movement. But true to form, after 2007 the government responded with a massive reactionary wave of government-controlled stations, along with criminalization and repression of many community radios speaking out against state activities.

> *"Many radio stations call themselves 'community radio' but then you have to ask, are they really part of the community? Who owns them? What interests are they serving? This relates to the importance of women in community radio as well... the men... often become entangled in politics and political parties"* (Magdalena, 2015 Interview).

"Indigenous" media as synonymous with the voice of the government's development agenda continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s, when Mexico was entering a new era of official pluralism, wherein Mexico signed the International Labor Organization's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (ILO Convention No. 169) before any other Latin American country. Yet, true to its contradictory tendencies, the government simultaneously dismantled the *ejido* system of land reform, essentially pulling the rug out from under peasant and indigenous populations by selling their land— their livelihood—to private business.

After NAFTA, as the Zapatista movement pushed indigenous issues into the international limelight, the Mexican government quietly cut funding for indigenous media programs, brought in non-indigenous people to take over government funded 'indigenous' radio stations, and tightened regulations immensely for government-licensed stations. "The reality is that station directors obey CDI guidelines… so these stations aren't really community stations," said Eugene Bermejillo, the director of Boca de Polen media network-building organization based in San Cristobal, Chiapas, in a 2014 interview.

Essentially the state wanted to keep indigenous communities from discussing anything political or potentially subversive on the stations, so they tightened control and could remove stations from the air at any time (Cusi Wortham, 2013). For indigenous media makers this was a crucial shift, because it contributed to the growing networks of grassroots community radio stations on which my research focuses, many of which are

not legally recognized or licensed due to severe and unreasonable government regulations.

Out of 70-100 community radios in Oaxaca alone, only four have government permissions. "Those radios with permissions, they have to be very careful what they say. They can't say anything against the state, or anything against corporations supported by the state. Their hands are tied" (Loreto Bravo, 2014 Interview). In my research sample, none of the six radios I visited had government permissions; none of them could adhere to the rules and regulations required for the permit; none of them wanted the burden of being legally recognized by the state, in terms of the censorship that would be imposed, and the mandate that they must exclusively sell advertising to the government (Erick Huerta, 2015 Interview). AMARC[30] Mexico reports that in all of Mexico, only 19 community radios have permissions, and at least 10 more are in the process of requesting permits, but have reported waits up to three years just for the paperwork (Aleida Calleja 2014 Interview). Socrates Bacces, a Zapotec radio producer from Radio Padiushy in Capulalpam, spoke about the constant danger facing radios, and why they would want official recognition:

> *"The one reason radios want government recognition is for safety and security... at any moment, the Minister of Communications could show up, with armed police. So many radios have been raided... people arrested, hurt, killed. Every time we hear of this happening... and it's not usually reported by the mainstream media, it's the alternative media, or word of mouth... we feel, maybe we are next... There are those who have refused despite the danger. One community radio in Guerrerro was attacked by the government and police, but the people defended the radio together,*

---

[30] Asociación Mundial de Radios Comunitarias México; the Worldwide Association of Community Radios.

and they left. Afterwards, they offered the radio a permit, but they refused.
They didn't want to be censored."

<u>Indigenous Autonomy and Self-Determination</u>

Autonomy or self-determination is understood as respect for internal practices and decision making of indigenous *pueblos,* and also their right to participate in the various economic, cultural, political, and legal decision-making processes of the state. The Zapatista rebellion provided an important political opening to negotiate indigenous autonomy at the national level, through the San Andrés Accords. However, lesser known regional and local movements for indigenous autonomy are deeply rooted in Mexico's history, including the 1974 First Indigenous Congress in San Cristobal de las Casas, including "1230 delegates... 587 Tzeltales, 330 Tzotsiles, 152 Tojolabales, and 151 Choles representing 327 communities" (Gaspar, 1999) as one example of myriad indigenous gatherings held across Mexico in the 1970s and 1980s. One of the pillars of autonomy for indigenous peoples in Mexico is moving away from the state's historic focus on indigenism, which has assimilation as its goal.

The strategic recognition of cultural rights, as Hale (2005) has documented, is a continuation (albeit under a different guise) of the indigenist project, where the state, by 'culturally recognizing' indigenous groups, the government "shapes, delimits, and *produces* cultural difference rather than suppressing it" (p. 13, original emphasis), retaining the power of identity construction while denying indigenous groups social or political rights, in order to keep them out of the way of the neoliberal project. This pushes images of colorful and joyous Guelaguetza celebrations into an uglier and perhaps truer

71

light, particularly juxtaposed with rows and rows of protestors' tents, finding ways to assert their rights in a state that does everything it can to deny them.

Although the Mexican government signed the San Andrés Accords[31] and legally recognized the right to indigenous self-governance in Oaxaca, these seemingly progressive measures are little more than a hollow façade. In reality, the situation for indigenous groups in Mexico has remained dire, as post 1994 and again post 2006 the Mexican government has increased police and military presence in both Chiapas and Oaxaca, rendering indigenous-run media as increasingly important to make Mexico's indigenous struggles visible and to take back control over their identity and culture. While the Mexican government has made next to no effort to implement the accords on indigenous rights, what it has done is embark on a sustained campaign to cripple the legislative process for implementing the San Andrés accords it signed in 1996, while launching a brutal and highly obvious battle on self-declared autonomous governments existing in opposition to the local PRI governments.

Technology has traditionally been used as a vehicle to introduce market logic in the Global South. In Chapter V, I explore further the relationship of the telecommunications industry with indigenous communities in Oaxaca, but the technological divide is perpetuated through lack of profit incentive for businesses to provide service to rural areas, and most telecommunications regulations forbid provision of strictly rural service, meaning micro-telecommunications start-ups have no chance

---

[31] The San Andrés Accords were based on five principles: respect for diversity, conservation of natural resources, greater participation of indigenous peoples in government decisions, right to control their own development plans, and the right to autonomy and self-governance.

whatsoever. Furthermore, the media oligopoly in Mexico has proven incapable and unwilling to do anything about this disparity of connection, and although indigenous towns want to be connected, the media monopolies business models often run counter to their values, wants, and needs.

Privatized Air & Radio Spectrum as a Social Good

This discussion draws from a 2014 interview with Peter Bloom of Rhizomática and participant observation of organized resistance to transnational wind companies in Juchitán, Oaxaca.

Radio spectrum refers to the socially constructed concept that, through technology, we can harness electromagnetic waves to transmit information over distances. The amount of watts a radio station has indicates how far of a distance it can transmit to. Beyond its social construction, radio spectrum is also a socially produced good, although it's been largely turned into an economic good in order to regulate and commercialize it. Yet its true value and contribution to society comes from its social use. Companies pay billions of dollars for radio spectrum for one simple reason: they know that they can build infrastructure on this spectrum to enable the communications of millions of users, whom they can charge for doing so.

Only two percent of radio spectrum in Mexico can be used without a license. The only reason the price of spectrum is so high is due to artificially manufactured scarcity, created by inefficient regulation, which limits one user to each frequency (Acosta et al., 2013). In a real sense spectrum is not a scarce but rather unlimited resource that, with better technology and regulation, is more than enough to serve everyone.

In the proper sense, spectrum cannot be owned, it can only be used. So why assign property rights to it? The answer is because the state wants to continue to charge rent for its use. Mexico, for example, claims that the radio spectrum, as part of the airspace of the nation, technically belongs to the government (similar to the claim that anything under the soil, namely minerals to be extracted and sold, are the government's to sell off). In the capitalist model, the government sells spectrum to the highest bidder, who, having paid such a high price, have the greatest self-interest to make sure users can access it via services they charge for (Acosta et al., 2013). But the digital divide persists, and although there has been a boom in cell phone and Internet coverage for example, there remain billions of people not covered by these commercial services.

The driving point to take away is that radio spectrum is a socially useful good, and it should be regulated so as to provide the most social usefulness to the most people, not in a way to generate the highest price tag. In the words of Peter Bloom:

"...we should attempt to have spectrum considered as a human right... an economic and social right...the right to freedom of expression and the right to information are codified as human rights at pretty much every level" (2015 Interview).

This concept of private air, or privatized natural resources in general, is an affront on the Zapotec identity in particular. During a 2015 protest against transnational wind companies in Juchitán, Oaxaca, a woman stood before the crowd, speaking about what air represents in their cosmovision:

"For us, air not only represents life, but it also carries the ones we love who have died, whose spirits have become air and returned to the people… they want to change the wind's path…of the spirits of our loved ones."

Their community radio station, Radio Totopo, was born out of a basic necessity to resist

the state's Plan Puebla Panama, which mandated that a massive transnational wind farm

be built between those locations, and the little village of Juchitán became the target site

for this initiative. As part of the broader neoliberal project, the state has opened Mexico

to transnational energy and mining companies, who have entered indigenous territories

throughout the country without so much as asking the residents. "It's an element of the

land, of mother earth, critical for our survival. We started to fight for the air because it's

unthinkable they would try to privatize it for profit" (Susen, 19, Radio Totopo, 2015

Interview).

According to community members, the government plans to put into place 60

hydroelectric dams and 40 mining projects in Oaxaca. They took the name Totopo, which

is a traditionally Zapotec (and specific to the Ismus of Tehuantepec) way to prepare and

eat maize, or native corn, because it represents cultural diversity and unity among

indigenous groups. "Scientists, anthropologists, businesses people, they have tried to

attack the radios, saying our argument to defend the air is not scientific... there is no way

to prove there are spirits in the air... but this is part of our cosmovision and our traditions.

We don't need scientific proof" (Raymundo, 22, Radio Totopo, 2015 Interview).

Conclusion

Indigenous groups operate within a tense and multifaceted relationship with both

the state and the market, and the Oaxacan context provides one such example. Neither

public nor commercial media is meeting the needs of indigenous populations, thus they

must create their own media networks, along with civil society groups and NGOs who act

as intermediaries, to bridge the gaps left by state and market. Indigenous radios have an uphill battle, as they must struggle against competition from market forces, as well as symbolic and actual annihilation and state control. Innovation by using radio technologies to create community-managed cell networks, as well as the groundwork for community Internet connection, comprises a rhizomatic movement to creatively resist the tightly controlled realm of the state, and the hyper-materialistic realities of the market. In the face of substantial barriers, these rhizomatic-alternative radio stations continue to remind us that the third way, between market and state, can prove fertile ground for innovative strategies to not only survive the odds, but to thrive.

CHAPTER V

RHIZOMATIC INDIGENOUS MEDIA IN OAXACA

Introduction

> **"***Isolation and self-blame is a strategy to demobilize movements, tangled
> up in this very individualistic way of thinking about issues, which we learn
> from the richer, more powerful countries. We need to recognize how we've
> been trained to see things in binaries...to compartmentalize the world.
> Only when we become aware of this, and learn to see past it, will we see
> the connections that exists everywhere. When we convert our own
> emotions into a dialogue, we overcome what divides us."*
> (Roberta, Radio Tlayuda, 2014 Radio Meeting)

In their monthly radio meeting, the Radio Tlayuda team, made up of indigenous

and non-indigenous allies, sat around a round table in the sunny conference room of

Universidad de la Tierra. Students come from all around the world to study at Unitierra,

and in the midst of a conversation about radio and activism, a few students from the US

began talking about how changing the system is all about changing individual choices,

recognizing our own culpability in perpetuating global inequalities. Roberta, a 24-year-

old Zapotec woman who has worked with the radio for several years, responded carefully

to their comments.

She explained that while recognizing the value of changing individual choices and

minds, we must be sure we don't get stuck there. Radio is an ideal tool to convert our

individual emotions into a dialogue with one another. In that space, we can begin to

recognize how words can limit us, but also liberate us, when we think beyond binaries

and individualism and instead open up our understanding of the world. In that space we

can find simple solutions to problems in our communities. She also spoke of the inherent

privilege in individualistic activism. *"For indigenous people in Oaxaca and in Mexico*

and around the world, organizing and connecting with one another is not a choice. It's a survival strategy*"* (Roberta, 2014). I was moved by this poignant reminder of the ways that dominant culture and Western influences permeate our approaches to activism, seeking to isolate us within binary thinking and individualistic self-blame. Moreover, in order to protect and assert their identities, autonomy, and rights, indigenous groups in Oaxaca must organize, must forge connections across communities and differences, because they recognize that true power is found in unity. The historic examples of the APPO and the Zapatistas reveal the face that unity means power, means they can march to the government offices and demand justice, they can oust the corrupt PRI governor, and they can build a media movement that the state and corporations cannot ignore.

Each radio in my research sample was a unique extension of the community itself—whether it was formed to help unify people and get them to listen to one another after a bitter, polarizing conflict, part of a resistance movement again the arrival of extractive industry against the community's will, or a space for intergenerational exchange to keep threatened customs and traditions alive—each radio carries a unique purpose, but if there's one thing that indigenous groups in Oaxaca understand well it's the strength of forging connections, of seeing the points of convergence between movements. This chapter is a collection of rhizomatic themes connecting radios, which, more than organizations, are better theorized as a living, breathing organisms, a kind of body without organs, deeply connected with communities, but also part of a dynamic and growing network.

Thus, in this chapter I draw deeply from ethnographic interviews, observations, and details to discuss several themes connecting the radios together—the proliferation of community cellular networks very much connected to community radios, the central role of women leading the radio movements, training the next generation of young indigenous communicators, and the relationship between radios and struggles to protect land from extractive industries of oil, gas, and gold and silver mining in particular. These discussions will reveal that rather than isolated themes, these aspects flow together and interconnect in myriad interesting and symbiotic relationships. Like the rhizome, the community media movement is composed of many autonomous, yet intricately connected pieces. My conclusion ties these aspects together by mapping out, visually and theoretically, the rhizomatic network of community radio in Oaxaca.

RHIZOMATIC MAP OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY MEDIA
OAXACA, MEXICO

STATE

MARKET

NUESTRA PALABRA

RADIO TLAYUDA

BOCA DE POLEN

RADIO XEGLO

BUE XHIDZA

OJO DE AGUA

PALABRA RADIO

GNU EterTICs

RADIO PADIUSHY

MOVIMIENTO RADIO

RADIO TOTOPO

RADIO EN BOLA

RHIZOMÁTICA

"1 AND 2: PRINCIPLES OF CONNECTION & HETEROGENEITY:
ANY POINT OF A RHIZOME CAN BE CONNECTED TO ANY OTER,
AND MUST BE...

...4: PRINCIPLE OF ASIGNIFYING RUPTURE: A RHIZOME MAY BE
BROKEN, BUT IT WILL START UP AGAIN ON ONE OF ITS OLD LINES,
OR NEW LINES."

— A THOUSAND PLATEAUS

KEY

△ SUPPORTING ORG

○ RADIO

- - - - - SHARE PROGRAMS
——— SUPPORT FINANCIALLY
· · · · · · OTHER SUPPORT
(TECHNICAL, TRAINING, ETC.)

Rhizomatic Diagram of Indigenous Media in Oaxaca.

Rhizomática: Decolonizing Technology

> *In Mexico we have this saying: 'don't ask to be breastfed!' Well, now we
> have the satisfaction of no longer having to ask these companies, 'Please,
> come and install a service for which we're going to pay you.'"*
> (Keyla, 2014 Interview).

Around the world, large mobile operators refuse to provide service to remote

areas, arguing that it wouldn't be profitable. This argument extends to many 'modern'

institutions people in the industrialized world consider essential—banks and financial

services, restaurant and shopping chains, transportation providers, etc. One of the

communities I spent time with was nestled so deeply in the Sierra Norte mountain range

that buses only arrived there several times per week, either early in the morning or very late at night, and locals never knew when or if the bus would arrive.

A staggering 50,000 communities in Mexico remain without access to reliable cellular service (UNAM, 2015). Indigenous communities, which tend to be in rural or isolated areas, are disproportionately cut off from institutions and businesses dismissing them as unprofitable and essentially not worth the effort. Talea de Castro, an indigenous town and municipality in the Southwestern Sierra Norte mountain range, asked the big cell phone monopolies of Mexico, namely billionaire Carlos Slim's telecom giant America Movil, to build a cell tower. Their response to these communities: We will come provide service when you build us a better road; it's not worth it to send an engineer into the remote mountains of Oaxaca to provide service to less than 10,000 customers.

Keyla, a founding member and the current manager of Talea's community radio station Nuestra Palabra Radio, which now also operates the community cell network, commented on the demands of the phone companies in an interview during my time in the town:

"They were asking things of us that are virtually impossible in a small community like this… a new road, electricity lines… costs there's no way we could support, and they knew that."

The exasperation Keyla expressed as she said these words no doubt reflected that of the entire community, particularly in light of the fact that after Rhizomática helped Talea build their community cell network, guess who showed up? The same commercial companies that had dismissed them as unprofitable and not worth the extra effort, either

saw that adequate demand existed based on the community network's popularity and success, or they feared the implications—that other communities would also build their own networks and take away potential business. The question is, is this a bad thing?

Many economists would consider this an undeniably positive example of development—the community cell network paved the way for commercial companies to provide service to remote indigenous towns like Talea. Indigenous communities in the Sierra have been practically begging to be connected to cell phone access for over a decade, yet the big telecom companies in Mexico ignored them until Rhizomática's team paved another path—an alternative to commercial companies—to connect Talea, along with other largely indigenous towns in the region.

With ideas derived from Austrian-born economist Joseph Schumpeter's "The Theory of Economic Development"(1934), many modern theorists believe that the most interesting question in economics is why economic balance is constantly disrupted by new technologies, firms, and trade patterns, in what Schumpeter termed the 'creative destruction' fueled by entrepreneurs and innovation. David Roodman, expounding on Schumpeter's views, explained that entrepreneurs did not have to be individuals, rather, "…organizations too were entrepreneurial if they developed and spread "new combinations of the means of production" (Roodman, 2011).

Rhizomatic theory describes this creative disruption as 'deterritorialization,' the destabilization of the rigidity and certainties of public and market media organizations" (Carpentier et al., 2003, p. 5), and no doubt it was a recognition of the disruptive power of this community cell network that companies like Movistar and Telcel were rushing to

set up shop in tiny, geographically isolated indigenous communities. This is what Peter Blood described as community media's ability to "build linkages in pre-existing gaps, to facilitate conversations with the state and market in a way that doesn't damage or destroy indigenous livelihoods" (2015 Interview), whereby a rhizomatic network can be embedded within a fluid civil society, while making strategic linkages to demand better policy.

But there was also something overtly political about the presence of both Talea GSM (their community cell network) and the Movistar option. Out of the six community members I briefly interviewed, five of them had purchased Movistar plans rather than Talea GSM, even though the community network is literally a fraction of the cost (about one-third, to be exact). There must be something more appealing about Movistar – perhaps better service, or international fees? Not so, according to the community radio group operating Talea's cell network. Calls to the US are also considerably cheaper with the community network, and the service was of equal if not better quality.

Yet since Rhizomática began their work building community cell networks across the Sierra, Movistar/Telefónica suddenly developed what they termed their 'rural franchising scheme,' which, Peter Bloom explained in our interview, seemed to consist of following Rhizomática around and attempting to install wherever they had already built networks. Bloom expounded on why this represents 'business as usual' for these telecom companies:

"We've determined that the Movistar franchisee is partnering with a local politician in some sort of shady business venture… the politician puts up a little bit of money and convinces villages to put up around $40,000 USD, which is split between the franchisee, the politician, and perhaps the local authorities. They convince the village to spend this huge amount of money by essentially defaming us and our model, even though it is much, much cheaper than the Movistar option."

Then Peter Bloom arrived on the scene, the American co-founder of Rhizomática, a Oaxaca-cased telecom NGO with a groundbreaking idea to give poorly connected rural communities like Talea total control over their own decentralized, open-source, community built and managed cell networks. What's more, these community networks charge just *a fraction* of the infamously high fees of Mexico's large mobile providers, where calls and texts within the town are free, and calls to other parts of Mexico and the world are very cheap, particularly calls to family and friends living and working in the US.

As of June, Rhizomática has set up 19 community cell networks around Oaxaca, and over 30 more in Veracruz, Puebla, Guerrero, and Tlaxcala, particularly in rural indigenous communities in the Sierra Juarez, Mixe, and parts of the Mixteca regions outside of Oaxaca city. Of the six radios I researched, two have community cellular networks established, and a third is in the building process, thanks to Rhizomática. As one of Mexico's least connected states (proportional to having the most indigenous groups of any Mexican state), Oaxaca was the perfect pilot for this innovative work.

In a short interview, I asked Peter Bloom about the possibilities these community managed cell networks hold for future connectivity:

"Yes, this absolutely opens the door for more low-cost tech solutions to help people be more connected to each other and the outside world. For example, we are experimenting with an API which allows us to build applications for the network, in particular something that would allow us to send mass messages to the entire network, much like we get from commercial providers about promotions, etc., but instead these messages would inform the town about events, potential danger or inclement weather, news, or whatever important information they should be aware of. We also have a technology called Web RTC would permit people with internet connection to voice call, video chat, and share files without needing internal or external plugins, which would be an exciting development in communication."

This vision of a cellular mesh network fits perfectly into the theory of the rhizome, hence the group's name. Sakolsky (1998) describes the cellular mesh network as the most rhizomatic technology of all, with independent nodes (cell towers) set up with the same software in their network routers, with every router connected to every other router, forming "a multidimensional web with no one central point to disable it" (p. 2), meaning, for example, that it would be exceedingly difficult for the government to shut down such a network. Thus in partnership with communities, Rhizomática is building a rhizomatic network that is local, horizontal, self-healing, non-hierarchical, and scalable.

I heard about Talea's success in 2014, after returning from my first trip to Mexico, and felt the powerful possibilities in what this little town had accomplished. I researched Rhizomática, and was amazed that this tiny team of people, with relatively few resources, had essentially stepped in and done what the government and corporations have failed to do for indigenous populations in Mexico. I believe telecommunications and the ability to connect are a human right, and Rhizomática's visionary team shares that conviction. Their mission sums it up: Rhizomática seeks "to increase access to mobile

communications to the over 2 billion people without affordable coverage and the 700 million with none at all."

The group's broader vision is to form a state-wide community telecommunications network encompassing all member communities with GSM networks, to give indigenous groups a platform to organize around "regulatory issues, resource and profit-sharing, economies of scale for interconnection with existing telecommunications infrastructure (telephone and Internet), and technical capacity building and maintenance" (Rhizomática). True to their namesake, organizations like Rhizomática are helping communities form networks so that they can interact with state regulation by asserting their human right to communication, and political right to have a voice in policies that affect them.

The Mexican government has a national connectivity program called e-Mexico, which aims to overcome the digital divide by provide computers and Internet access as well as cellular service throughout the country. In a 2015 interview with Ciaby, a 30-year-old technician with Rhizomática, I wondered how the Mexican government responded to the group's successful work, as it garnered considerable attention in national and international media:

> *"The government was actually very interested in their work, as they are doing the government's job to meet the UN Development goal to bring connectivity and infrastructure to rural impoverished locations... they gave us a very small grant to get started, but have not provided any additional funding."*

Two of the radio stations in this project already have community-managed cell networks, Nuestra Palabra Radio in Talea de Castro and Radio Bue Xhidza in Santa

Maria Yaviche, and one is in the process of building a cell network. For reference, Santa

Maria Yaviche was formerly three hours away from any reliable cell phone service, and

with very patchy satellite Internet that according to interviewees, crashes almost every

other day. Like Talea, commercial companies refused to provide them service due to their

small population (about 700 people total) and their remoteness from the city. Oswaldo,

39, founder of Radio Bue Xhidza, provided some background on how their network,

Yaviche GSM, functions:

> "*People pay 30 pesos per month for our network. All local calls are free,
> and international calls are about ¼ peso per minute. Of that 30, 10 goes
> to the Rhizomática technicians, 20 goes to maintenance for the cell tower
> and the radio. It's a self sustaining system, and no one is profiting.*"

Calls within the community are completely free, and also all calls to *pueblos*

within the 'network of networks' are free. To put this in perspective, the plan costs about

$1.80 per month, and international calls cost about $.60 for every ten minutes. It's almost

too much of an understatement to say this is vastly cheaper than any commercial cell

company in the country, and its users say the coverage is significantly better than Telcel,

which is infamous for its expensive, less than impressive service. However, it took people

a while to understand that the network was completely community owned and operated.

"They thought we were Telcel! [laughing] it took people a while to trust us, even in this

small place... through the radio we were able to educated people and tell them that the

cell network is completely autonomous" (Oswaldo, 2015 Interview).

Of course, even with this process of educating locals about the community-

managed cell phone plan, in both Talea and Yaviche, only several months after the radio

and Rhizomática set up the network, Telcel or Movistar showed up, and built the tower

87

they formerly refused to provide. Peter Bloom and several other interviewees also accused the commercial providers of spreading misinformation about the community network, like telling people it didn't work well, or that it would surely crash at any moment, etc.—blatantly false statements. In Yaviche, most people reportedly use the community network rather than Telcel, but in Talea, the community is more divided by this misinformation. This highlights the importance of software that is not associated with divisive commercial interests, in order to build networks of autonomous technology.

The Importance of Free & Open Source Software

Completely autonomous community cell networks and radio stations would not be possible without free and open source software. Peter Bloom put it this way:

"For something to be completely autonomous and in line with indigenous value systems, it needs to be built with platforms that are not controlled by corporations, rather, open-source software gives these communities tools that are not only free of cost, but allow them to learn how it works, how to fix it themselves, and add new features useful for their needs."

EterTICs GNU is a platform for free and open-source software built specifically for community radios. This software allows radios to set up Internet streaming (radio.flujo is a popular open-source platform that many radios in Oaxaca use), audio editing, and automation. Open-source programs OpenBTS, OpenBSC, and Asterisk made it possible for Rhizomática, together with indigenous radio makers, to provide carrier-grade cellular service at a community level very cheaply and with relatively simple technology. Bolivia passed a 2013 law that all community radios switch to open-source software, and hosted the first International Conference on Open-Source Software for Community Radios in 2015. In summer 2016, that same conference will be held in

Mexico City, and Oaxacan radios will highlight their efforts to transition to using only open-source software, and train others.

INTERNET

RADIO   CELL NETWORK

COMMUNITY MEDIA
PYRAMID OF CONNECTIVITY
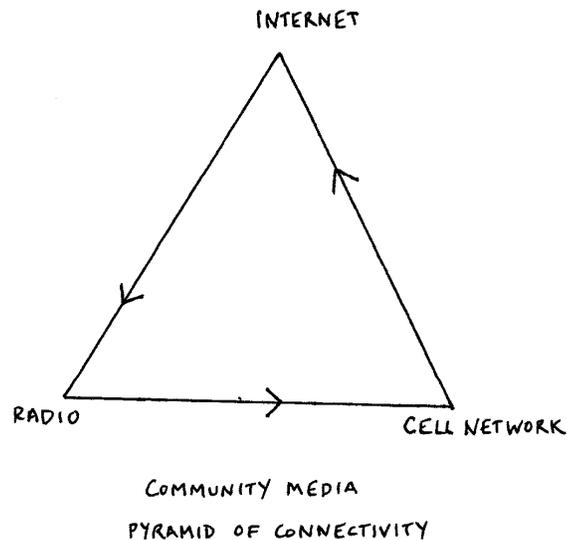
> *"We realized that the same or very similar equipment we were using for radio could be used to build our own community-owned cell tower. Now we are looking at whether the same equipment and technical training could help us make a community Internet connection. It's the same as cell service... the connection we do have is terrible... it doesn't work many hours of the day... through open source software we can accomplish connection that is completely of the community. It is owned by us and no one else... Rhizomática and other organizations find us donations we need, and help us learn how to manage it ourselves. I remember when I fixed the [radio] tower for the first time! It's something that is ours, that we feel very proud of, and gives us something to show the government and corporations who refused us these services"* (Keyla, Radio Movimiento, 2015 Interview).

Joaquin, a 14-year-old boy from Radio Bue Xhidza in Santa Maria Yaviche, taught himself how to use open source software on his aunt's computer when he was just 10 years old. Now, he teaches summer workshops for women and other youth to learn how to use computers and open-source tools. The connections between radio, open-source

software, and radical pedagogy are very strong in Oaxaca. The use of open-source tools, and teaching others to use them, is a particularly poignant example of what Paulo Freire described as " the greatest humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves" (p. 16). Open-source represents not just another example of a rhizomatic network, but also a tool for the creation of knowledge and agency for indigenous people to shape their own reality and facilitate their own liberation from oppressive structure. "Any situation in which some men prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence;... to alienate humans from their own decision making is to change them into objects" (Freire, 1970, p. 27). In Joaquin's words:

> "*In our lives, we have very few choices. Ninety-five percent of men here work in the campo.[32] Those are the only jobs... that's why people leave, to find work other places... the radio, and technology, we try to use them to show people there are alternatives... you don't have to just be slaves to the system"* (2015 Interview).

Free software describes computer software that is free to use, share, and modify. In more technical terms, it means that anyone can access the source code of the software to understand how it works, fix anything that might be broken, and add new features to tailor that particular software to your specific needs. The main difference between open source and traditional proprietary software lies in user and property rights, which are closely linked to capitalistic ideas of private property and ownership. Open source, however, better reflects indigenous values with its flexibility and philosophy of working together cooperatively to build high quality programs. It carries the promise that the user won't be beholden to the

---

[32] In the fields or countryside. In Santa Maria Yaviche, most of the population is engaged in cultivation of maize, beans, and coffee.

whims of companies that own the software, can use it however they want, whenever they want, and ask anyone for support if it isn't working. "If you are using radio to take back the airwaves from corporate control, why not use tools that are free from corporate control along the way?" (Prometheus Radio)

Moreover, open source software is also rhizomatic, and rhizomes provide a perfect lens through which to understand what Ozel (n.d.) has terms our new networked century. Rhizomes have been used prolifically to describe non-authoritarian, diverse, autonomous but connected relationships. The Internet itself has often been described as a giant rhizome (Sakolsky, 1998). Open source software in particular mimics the intricately connected, decentralized structure of the rhizome, as a "space composed of flows that transcend boundaries and forge new connections between places and events with no central facility that organizes the communication" (Ozel, n.d.).

The connections between users in open source software mimics the loose connections between rhizomatic nodes, where each point is self-sufficient yet never isolated, cooperating but never controlled, and able to form complex non-hierarchical networks. For this reason open-source networks are the perfect choice for community radios and cell networks in Oaxaca, with the same unique strength and resiliency, fluidity, and ability to be autonomous while still being very much connected.

Clearly community radio has carved out spaces where indigenous villages, who have not only been ignored or swept aside by state and commercial

development projects, but have effectively been historically taught to feel ashamed of their cultures and knowledge systems, can come together in a process of empowerment, which has resulted in the innovations to construct technologies and networks that reflect principles of autonomy, self-determination, and identity formation outside of state and market control. In my research, two groups in particular emerged as critically important to these processes: youth and women.

Palabra Radio: Women on the Airwaves

> *"The time has come for Oaxacan women to reunite, because it's only with the strength we have together that we can protect ourselves with the ferocity that we imagine and desire: and with the help of radio, put an end to the violence that begets more violence within communities and families, a violence that is carried out indiscriminately against women and children. Our dream is to build with firmness, conviction and with the help of radio, a lasting culture of peace"* (Mayte Ibarguengoitia Gonzalez, Pensamientos y Sentimientos, Palabra Radio).

When I walk into Palabra Radio's office space on a Monday morning, the women are hard at work planning a Cyberfeminist Technology Fair in the city, using technology to raise awareness of violence against women. Palabra Radio is comprised of a small team of inspiring women who have committed their time to accompanying indigenous media makers and build up women's leadership, providing support, training, and workshops to radios. There is a pristine little studio adjacent to the office, where the women of Palabra, along with female guests from various *pueblos*, produce radio show to highlight women's voices, experiences, and issues, to counter the male-dominated space of hegemonic media, where women are objectified and their work made invisible.

92

One theme resounds strongly throughout my interviews—the promotion of women's active participation, decision-making, and leadership. When I analyzed my interview data with radio stations, women comprised roughly 60 percent of those interviewed, and also about 60 percent of those closely involved with the radios. This is in massive contrast to commercial media, which according to Byerly & Ross (2006), employs only a tiny portion of women in senior positions. Moreover, in the traditional, patriarchal, and post-colonial structures of Latin America[33], women's participation and leadership has been, and continues to be, very limited. Throughout Mexico's history women have been constricted to the private realm--the home--and idealized as mothers, caregivers and sexual objects, while their central role in public spaces as political actors, activists and leaders has been intentionally obscured by paternalistic structures. Gender roles were upheld first by the colonial Catholic Church and then again by the post-revolutionary hegemonic discourse of secular nationalism.

Zapotec Women & Feminism from Below

When I visited Juchitán de Zarazoga, the first thing I noticed was the women. I forgot all principles of social etiquette, staring at them, transfixed not just by their colorful clothing and gleaming gold and nickel flecked teeth as they laughed, but how with every move they seemed to defy every gender stereotype of the submissive, meek woman. They are larger than life, assertive, cracking dirty jokes, embodying a type of self-confidence that I frankly envy.

---

[33] Not to fall into the Western feminist trap of portraying Mexican women as passive victims of patriarchy, but recognizing that the organization and leadership of women from the Global South as our greatest hope in the struggle for feminist liberation.

Watching them work, their strong, nimble hands pounding tortillas into submission, I think about the resiliency of a culture that the Aztec empire, Spanish colonialism, and now the neoliberal project, have all failed to stamp out. Juchitán in particular has been referred to as 'the last matriarchy' in news articles (LA Times, 1995), although Juchitecas were allegedly angry about the article, and considered it inaccurate. Nonetheless, I can't help but feel that this culture celebrates the strength of women in a way I have seldom, if ever, encountered. Lynn Stephen (1991) describes Zapotec feminism this way, "...complementarity shaped Mixtec and Zapotec gender roles...as opposed to domination" (p.11), and many scholars have detailed the equal, complementary roles held traditionally by men and women in indigenous cultures, while the hierarchical two-gender system that plagues us today was instituted by Spanish colonizers.

Complementarity is an integral part of the pluralism inherent in indigenous knowledge systems in the Oaxacan Sierra. In this system, multiple ways of being and knowing are different, yet of equal value and validity. Sometimes they complement one another, and sometimes they even contradict, but the existence of multiple truths, or realities, is something that has been much more accepted in indigenous cultures, while Western knowledge systems have insisted that their must be one objective truth which renders all others invalid (Sermijn et al., 2008). This relates to rhizomes and their principle of multiplicity, which state that one truth or one reality does not exist, but "there are always many possible truths or realities that can all be viewed as social constructs"

94

(Sermign et al., 2008, p. 637), and also connects to my research with radio stations,

particularly in programs led by women.

One word kept coming up in interviews, and disproportionately in my interviews

with indigenous women: dialogue. The need for productive dialogue, a meeting of many

voices and perspectives, was hailed as one of the most important purposes of community

radios. "It's not about making everyone agree with you. Learning together is about

making spaces for the many voices that make up our communities" (Mari Elena, Palabra

Radio, 2015 Interview). To be unified for them was not to be the same, or to reach

consensus about complex issues. Rather, unity lies in open dialogue, bringing together

complementary and at times contradictory views, and creating a fertile space for multiple

truths to exist side by side.

Radio Totopo, the *pueblo's* community radio, is no exception to this legacy of

strong women. The five-person radio team includes three women, who shared their own

ideas about feminism and women's voices on the radio:

> "*Traditionally as women, we have been and continue to be excluded from spaces of influence... political, social... so we find our own ways to be political. Our lives are political... and the radio is a space that links us together. Here at the radio, we are leaders, and we speak about issues affecting women. That is a powerful thing, to have a voice on the radio. It helps us have a voice in other places... but it is a struggle. Parents don't want their daughters to be involved with the radio... sometimes we are ostracized because we are the ones who speak out... that's why we need to link with each other, as much as possible.*" (Berta, 2015 Interview).

Palabra Radio is an organization that creates space for women from 30

community radios in Oaxaca to come together, creating content on women's rights,

contraception and women's health, etc., or participated in Palabra's educational

workshops and seminars. While mainstream media is dominated by male voices, studies

have shown that there are a disproportionate number of women with functions in

community radio (Mitchell, 1998), making it a unique sphere where women can gain

confidence, skills, and training. My sample of radio stations corroborated this statistic –

all the radios but one had more women involved than men, and often in leadership roles.

Feminist media academics have emphasized the importance of alternative media spaces

for women. Often when I first arrived in a community, I would be taken to talk to a man

first, but soon found out about all the women involved, and made the effort to interview

them in particular and ask about how making radio has affected their lives.

> *"My experience as a woman in the field of technology and*
> *telecommunications has been very challenging; in a world designed by*
> *men, where they are the keepers of knowledge, the ones who understand*
> *how networks, spectrum, and dials work, I have had to stand firmly and*
> *make my voice heart to make myself visible. To be taken into*
> *consideration by men, one must be self-assured and confident. Despite*
> *that, by creating telecommunications one develops critical thinking,*
> *creativity, and personal development"*
> (Keyla, Talea de Castro, 2014 Interview).

Talea was the one exception to the pattern I described above. I was taken

to meet Keyla, Talea's station manager, who was treated with great respect by all

the men working with her. She also spoke about women in radio opting to not

just be mothers, wives, housewives, teachers, and students, but to take a step

further to share their ideas, voices, and creativity. As Margaret Gallagher (1979)

articulated, "the media are potentially powerful agents of socialization and social

change-presenting models, conferring status, suggesting appropriate behaviors,

encouraging stereotypes" (p.3). Keyla in particular talked about the radio as

something that had given her status in the community, particularly among the

men. Breaking with patriarchal norms, however, sometimes makes these women

targets for exercising their right to communicate. For instance, in 2008 two Triqui

community radio hosts and activists from San Juan Copola, Oaxaca, Felicitas

Martinez Sanchez and Teresa Bautista Merino, were murdered.[34]

Women explained that along with the threat of violence and even murder,

there are also those in the villages that disapprove of women who participate with

the radio, and will socially shame or ostracize them. Yet, despite all these barriers,

the women are there, in every community radio, demonstrating not only their

strength and resiliency, but also how important the radio is for them, to voice their

experiences and stand against the patriarchal status quo. When I asked what gave

women the courage to get involved in the first place, many mentioned the

significance of 2006 in providing a powerful example of the importance of

women in media.

The 2006 APPO uprising had many effects, but two in particular are

relevant to my research: the wellspring of community media movements,

followed by a reactionary new offensive against community media, and radio

stations in particular, and the mobilization of indigenous women. Women have

always been the backbone of education, thus the teachers' union and the APPO in

Oaxaca became spaces where women, contrary to traditional values, stepped into

---

[34] The women were killed after returning from publicizing their radio station, *La Voz que Rompe el Silencio*, which broadcasted political content in their original Triqui language and Spanish.

the public arena of political participation, taking visible and numerous positions of leadership, and breaking out of societal ideas of 'masculine' and 'feminine' tasks. The cover of Stephen's (2013) *We are the Face of Oaxaca* is a crowd of marching protestors, but notably, most of those faces are women. This was reflected in media coverage of the protests, as well as the iconic takeover of government-controlled radio and television—women were leading the march. Their story of social rebellion and breaking out of gendered expectations continues today, and radio continues to afford them a space to talk to one another and strengthen their collective voice.

> *"...radio is for me a space for collective orientation that allows me to strengthen ideas about the process I find myself in now. As women, we swim against the current; workplace harassment, authoritarianism, lack of project perspective on the part of our immediate supervisors... making this struggle very difficult. But I don't feel alone. I don't get discouraged... I know that by accompanying one another we will open a range of possibilities that will undoubtedly move us toward appreciating, loving, and respecting one another"* (Dalia, Radio Padiushy, 2015 Interview).

During the first women's radio coverage of Guelaguetza organized by Palabra Radio in 2012, many women working in radio met each other for the first time, and shared their common experiences of the challenges of being women in radio, as well as the benefits. Recognizing the strength of a broader network of women, they joined together to form the Oaxacan Women's Radio Platform, to have a monthly space for these women from all over Oaxaca to come together and draw strength from their experiences. "Those of us with our voice and actions want to be allies and accomplices for other women... creating spaces where we

can work together for something that we believe in and feel is just, where there

are many alliances, empathy and where we can stop feeling alone. Where we can

keep growing professionally and as human beings and build a world in which

many worlds fit" (Mari Cruz , 2014 Interview).

Similarly to the involvement of women, I was also impressed by the

number of youth and young people (under 25) involved with the radios, often in

leadership positions, creating content, training others on open source software,

and articulating very clear and inspiring sentiments of what the radio meant to

them, and how it is an integral part of their community and worldview.

Radio en Bola: The Next Generation

Arriving in Teoltitlán del Valle and introducing myself to a group of 24 kids

between the ages of 12 and 17, I was transported back to my brief stint as a substitute

teacher for middle school-aged kids, staring into a crowd of young faces, shy and a little

bit awkward (them and me both), caught in that phase between childhood and adulthood

where so much formation happens. But of course these kids have a unique set of

experiences that my substitute teacher summer job in New Hampshire could never

prepare me for, living in a world between traditional cultures and modernity, a world full

of media sending them a whirlwind of conflicting messages, trying to define who they

are. There are kids from the Mixteca, the Sierra Norte, and the Zonas Centrales, and I

know that at least two of the kids in attendance speak original languages. I also know

some of them have traveled over seven hours to get here. Between the barely-passable

road and the vastness of Oaxaca's mountains, traveling between communities, and even to and from the city, always ends up being a many-hour ordeal.

Mari Cruz Cabrera, a 27-year-old ball of energy who has been working with radio stations since she was 16, kicks off the weekend-long workshop. "Ok, forget about all the technical stuff for a minute, and tell me this: why do you want to make radio? What do you want to make?" Complete silence falls, as they look at each other uncertainly, the veil of shyness still not quite broken. Then slowly, they start popcorn responding. "To give people important information! To learn how to speak well to a lot of people. To play with my voice!" For the next two days the kids would learn all aspects of making radio, but before even getting into the technical stuff, they spent a long time on what Mari Cruz and her team at Radio en Bola, a project of Ideas Comunitarias, consider much more important. In Mari Cruz 's words,

> *"We need more spaces where young people from different communities*
> *come together to figure out the why—there's no one definition of*
> *community radio, there's just this need to articulate ourselves and our*
> *own unique way of 'developing.' That's why we need a community radio*
> *model that is dynamic, that is adaptable to each community's needs and*
> *purposes"* (2015 Interview)

In interviews, the kids echoed these sentiments, and considering their median age was 16 years old, exhibited staggering maturity in how they discussed what the radio meant to them, their relationships, and their ability to celebrate, articulate and live out their identities as the next generation of Zapotec communicators, and leaders in their communities. By the end of the weekend, the shyness of the first day was nothing but a foggy memory. It was moving to watch how these discussions around radio and identity, and the pragmatic act of learning

how to make programs had brought out such exuberant confidence in the group. Later, I met with Erick Huerta, 34, who works with Mari Cruz to design the curriculum for Radio en Bola workshops, and he helped me understand how the approach to learning is tightly interwoven with indigenous and Zapotec knowledge, specifically, the milpa.

<u>The Milpa and Indigenous Cosmovisions</u>

In the workshops, the process of making a radio was compared to the milpa[35], which is a native crop-growing system used throughout Mesoamerica, and especially in the Yucatan peninsula. Growing corn involves an entire ecosystem, and every milpa is different, representing different ways of knowing and existing. It is a living practice of pedagogy, and, to borrow from Mari Cruz 's earlier quote, a world in which many worlds fit. I was familiar with the milpa only from its appearance in Oaxaca's incredible culture of indigenous and activist art, so it made sense to find out that the milpa represents the intimate connection with the Earth that is so essential to Meso-American cosmovisions.

"*Human beings are a part of, and deeply connected to, the natural world and the entire cosmos, rather than this idea of superiority and domination. Thus agricultural 'work' is a process of learning and obeying principles of the natural world, through the design and ritualized cultivation of milpa with optimum use of land and local resources, adaption to local conditions – starting with original systems of knowledge and technology – social organization of work, and the prefernces and values of the particular group*" (Erick Huerta, 2014 Interview).

Growing food, then, is not about improving nature, but rather about getting closer to the processes of nature, to learn from it. The word itself is derived from Nahuatl phrase mil-pa, which translates into 'to the maize field,' denoting action and intention. Journalist

Peter Canby, in his (2010) article 'Retreat to Subsistence,' discussed how many

indigenous languages are verb-centric (rather than noun-centric typical to English and

Spanish) and 'to the field' carries intention not just to grow a crop, but to tend to and

nurture the entire cosmovision of a community—the soil, local plants and animals, and

people, as the milpa represents a miniature version of the entire cosmos. It is first rooted

in ideas of self-sufficiency and autonomy in relationship with the Earth and the

community. Numerous forces have threatened to destroy the milpa—the Spanish colonial

empire, the Church, the state after Independence, and now by transnational corporations

like Monsanto, Dupont, and Sygenta. It has survived only because it is so central to all

aspects of indigenous cultural life:

> "...the persistence of these technologies is related to a body of knowledge
> that represents the accumulated, systematized experience of centuries.
> This knowledge and experience are consistent with particular ways of
> understanding the natural world, and with profoundly rooted systems of
> values...social organization, and ways of organizing daily life"
> (Bonfil Batalla & Dennis, 1996, p. 13).

Thus community media is deeply interlinked with this concept of the milpa, food

sovereignty and self-sustainability of communities as traditional ways of living are

threatened by the volatility of the global market. Re-learning and taking back the milpa is

an empowering process of educating each other about autonomy, and practices of cultural

and technical self-sufficiency. This is what Radio en Bola seeks to cultivate, by focusing

on young indigenous communicators.

 I spoke to Nancy, a 14-year-old girl from San Jose del Progreso who attended the

Radio en Bola workshop, after the day's events were over. "I was surprised when she

asked why we wanted a radio. It was good to talk with other kids about the values we have, and how they can relate to what we do with the radios."

Radio en Bola just started in November of 2014, as a project to help young people get involved in creating media themselves. Mari Cruz explained that youth's voices are often lost in the community, excluded from the decision making process, because adults are the figureheads and make all the decisions, which can leave these young people feeling disempowered. Radio en Bola also has workshops specifically geared towards intergenerational exchange, where elders can talk to young people about their culture, language, and traditions, and the young people teach them how to use technology, particularly open source software.

"It's good to ask, how can we use tools built by corporations, when they don't share our values? When their values destroy ours? It's good that we are questioning this here, and then we can learn about alternative options." Dulce, a 17-year-old from Galala, reflected after the workshop on the conversation they had around technology and values. Again, the theme of empowerment through alternative choices stood out in young peoples' reflections. Amartya Sen wrote about a definition of development which rests upon how free a person is to control the choices that affect their life: "Development consists of the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency. The removal of substantial unfreedoms, it is argued here, is constitutive of development" (1999, p. 11).

I would add that freedom of choice goes beyond capitalism's conception of freedom as primarily the freedom to consume, particularly in the case of this upcoming

generation of indigenous media makers, where on the contrary true freedom comes from their ability to make the choice to opt out of mindless consumerism, and instead to create an alternative space where technology does not have to conflict with their values and culture. The open source movement discussed early is a poignant example of technological self-sufficiency in action. Loreto Bravo has been active in the open source movement for radios in Chile, the US, and now in Oaxaca. "It's part of a larger technological decolonization movement... in Bolivia, Evo passed a law that all community radios switch to using open source software within seven years."

Eliminating dependency on corporate controlled technology is synonymous with eliminating dependency on Western technology, as the vast majority of software, like Microsoft, comes from the US and Silicon Valley. What does come from Mexico is part of the massive media monopolies that control the country's telecommunication sector, and beyond that there are shockingly few alternatives. March 1, 2015 was the first International Conference for Community Radios and Open Source Software in Cochabamba, Bolivia. "This year we will hold that conference here in Oaxaca. There's a lot of work to do before then... We are still in the beginning stages of the transition here, but it's growing slowly... we are showing that there are other options that don't further dependency relationships" (Loreto Bravo). Radios in Oaxaca are using open source software to edit audio, to automate programming, and to stream programs on the Internet.

"A few years ago, being on the Internet was a dream, and now it's become absolutely essential, because it allows us to expand our reach and transcend the limits imposed by our broadcasting power," Jaime Luna, the founder of Radio Xeglo, said in a

2015 interview. This radio-Internet hybrid, combining new and old media, is helping community radios in Oaxaca connect with each other and stay informed, and also to expand their reach further than they ever imagined – even to the US.

Gumucio Dagron (2006) has rightly warned of the 'electronic apartheid' instituted by the Internet as a technology that purports to cover the whole world yet is also subject to hegemonic and Western-dominated forces, which exclude huge sectors of the population. Indeed, an awareness of the Internet's lack of neutrality and early tendency to amplify inequalities is imperative to any study of indigenous groups using the Internet, in my research emphasize that the future of the Internet as a tool for democratic social change greatly depends on the dominant social and economic models. Acevedo's (2008) statement is critical: " Do public libraries contribute to increase the inequality between the more favored literate and illiterate people? Would it be a reason to prevent its construction or close them until the universal literacy will be accomplished?" (p. 231)

Many, including acclaimed ingenious media scholar Faye Ginsberg (2005) have rightly critiqued the perception that the entire world has entered the digital age equally and the Internet will soon revolutionize the way we see democracy and transcend the role of the nation-state, traditional forms of organization, etc., citing this vision as completely unrealistic and based on Western-centric delusions that are out of touch with the majority of the world, which still lacks access to basic needs such as food, water, electricity. I agree with Ginsburg, namely that trying to impose these technologies upon the most impoverished and marginalized corners of the world before addressing other more basic needs is completely inappropriate and shortsighted.

Yet it's equally shortsighted to assume that indigenous communities, in their impoverished situations, are not also sites of creative resistance. It comes back to the victim versus agent dilemma, and my research contributes to a body of work detailing how, despite resource inequality and lack of access, movements at the margins are drawing upon networks of support to build technology that works for them, to reinforce their values, needs, and ways of association. It's not easy, and there are still many barriers to be overcome, but this research demonstrates that you don't have to have access to excessive money and resources to be an innovator.

To close out this chapter, I discuss a final theme that resounded throughout the research: radios as spaces to resist the abuses of transnational corporations, abuses that not only divide communities, but are supported and protected by the state, military, and police. Where there is no mainstream media coverage to document these abuses, many community radios were formed out of the immediate need to testify within and outside of the community, and spread the message—we are here, and we cannot accept these injustices. Thus radio became a tool for collective consciousness and organizing against these companies continuing a long history of colonial pillaging.

Indigenous Radio and Extractive Industry

San Jose del Progreso mural protesting Canadian Fortuna's silver mine (2015).

This mural right at the entrance of San Jose del Progreso reads, 'Yes to life, no to the mine.' Of my sample, three villages had transnational mining activity on their ancestral land. These were the same three villages that reported that Zapotec was only spoken by elderly, and perhaps some adults, but its use was fading. Could this be a mere coincidence? My research, and that of many others, indicates that it is definitively not. Although indigenous groups comprise only five percent of the world's population, they have traditional claims to 20 percent of the Earth's surface area and resources (Gedicks, 2015). As globalization and rapidly expanding economies have accelerated worldwide demand for minerals and metals, mining companies are scrambling for new supply

sources, taking an unprecedented multinational nature. According to Al Gedicks (2015), 60 percent of the world's exploration and mining companies are Canadian, including the one that set up shop in a small village called San Jose del Progreso, Oaxaca.

Since Vancouver-based silver and gold mining company Fortuna set up shop in San Jose in 2005, violent attacks have left four local residents dead and many others wounded. Moviemiento Radio was formed soon after the mine arrived, without their permission, in response to the injustice. This was the biggest radio team I encountered, with a whopping 27 people involved, many of whom were women and children. We sat in a big circle sipping orange soda, as they took turns recounting stories of the conflict around the mine's arrival.

> *"Twenty-three people were thrown in jail. We protested, and the police came not to help us, but to protect the mine... there was horrible harassment of women and children, and people in general... and then the worst happened. Paulina [gestures to an elderly woman in the circle] her son Bernardo disagreed with the mine... he starting receiving death threats... then he was shot when driving home from the Oaxaca airport"* (Rodolfo, 2015 Interview).

Paulina looks at the ground, wearing a pained expression, as Rodolfo recounts the story. Far from being an isolated event, this same pattern has played out across Latin America, where areas traditionally belonging to indigenous groups are targeted by corporations for their rich resources, most often without the permission of the indigenous groups living there. The latest wave in this saga is extractive industries—metals, minerals, and aggregates including gold and silver mining and oil and gas extraction.

Mining is the single most destructive assault on the environment, moving significantly more earth and producing more toxic waste than any other industry

(Bebbington, 2012). This, combined with the fact that the size and scale of modern

mining operations is unprecedented, has led to a pattern across Mexico and countries

throughout Latin America of these huge companies arriving without warning on

indigenous lands, and beginning extraction with the state's blessing. Governments,

however, can do little to deny companies access, thanks to provisions of free trade

agreements like NAFTA, which allow companies to sue governments by invoking

foreign investor rights (Gedicks, 2015). It is estimated that in the next 20 years, about

half of all mineral resources targeted by mining multinational will be from indigenous

territories (Bebbington, 2012).

The arrival of mines has revealed serious and deep differences regarding whether

this type of industrial development is a driver for community benefit, or a threat to

traditional culture and sustainable livelihoods. As the temptation of personal gain eclipses

authentic community priorities, democratic processes are the first victims. "The worst

thing was how it divided the community..." said Beatriz, a 35-year-old woman and one of

the original founders of the radio. "...other communities where the mines have come, they

haven't changed for the better at all... they were left without clean water and in worse

poverty than they were in before." Indeed, precedent would indicate that mining brings

profits to the corporation, to the state (through high taxes), and little lasting benefit to the

communities themselves, other than damage to their environment, their social relations,

and their health.

Right after the mine came in 2005, San Jose got a lot of support as it coincided

with the formation of the APPO movement in 2006, and the environmental and human

rights group Coalition of United Peoples of the Ocotlán Valley (CPUVO using the Spanish acronym) coalesced to fight against Fortuna's extreme rates of extraction, which poses an extreme threat to the region's scarce water supplies. Then in January 2012, the residents of San Jose gathered to protest the construction of a pipeline many feared was intended to divert municipal water to the Cuscatlán mine. This was the conflict in which police fired shots into the crowd, killing Paulina's husband. While Fortuna denies its use of the town's water supply, many remain skeptical.

"We have to be very careful about how we talk about the mine. Our main goal was and still is justice around the mining, but too much violence has occurred. We have children here, working in the radio... we have to be very cautious." This was Eduardo, a 56-year-old who has been involved with the radio since its founding. Some of the kids, he says, don't know the history of the mine, so we have to teach them about it. This dual message emerged of caution, and obvious fear built out of the awareness that the government would protect the mine over their lives, seeing them as a 'menace to development,' and also the responsibility to raise consciousness in the community, and motivate a new generation to be aware of the past and what is still going on in the present.

The section on the milpa and indigenous cosmovision briefly discussed one of defining characteristics of indigenous groups: their specific attachment to the land and territory, and their traditional modes of production, such as the milpa, which are integral parts of their collective identities. Thus as these transnational companies extend their reach to 'remote' corners of the globe, they are "disrupting and sometimes destroying the

communal and subsistence cultures of both indigenous and non-indigenous communities in a process or capital accumulation and dispossession" (Gedicks, 2015). This not only relates to the loss of original languages, but also to the fact that companies' presence divides communities, further threatening their livelihood and weakening their social fabric.

Another principal concern of Movimiento Radio was to mend a community deeply divided by the mine. "We want to create a space for dialogue, where people can call in any time and share their thoughts and opinions... yes, we get menaces calling in who just want to attack us... but it's worth it to open up that space" (Beatriz, 2015 Interview). The radio airs a wide array of programs, particularly geared towards women and teaching Zapotec to younger generations, as the language was already diminishing in use before the mine arrived, and now is only spoken by less than one percent of the town. Nancy, 17, elaborated on what the community radio means to San Jose, and the benefits of building a network:

> *"We share programs with other radios, and communicate with them over walkie talkie to share news, local events, things going on with the mine... we even got to meet a team from Ecuador doing community radio. This radio is a part of us, and we are building this network of radio producers... we are stronger as part of this network."*

As globalization has brought about a dangerous boom in extractive industry, alter-globalizations have risen up to counter these destructive forces, and the ability to communicate is an essential component to strengthen this resistance, as well as outside activists groups like Amazon Watch and Global Mining Campaign. San Jose's radio ensures that the mine's activities and abuses will not go undocumented or unnoticed. As

111

one US mining consultant conceded, "the increase in communications capability means that the essential isolation of resource colonies is largely a thing of the past" (Gedicks, 2015).

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Connected, Yet Autonomous

I conducted many interviews for this project, all of which inspired me as an

activist and ally, but none more so than Valdu's story. I had arrived in Santa Maria

Yaviche, the most remote community I visited in terms of road access (only one bus goes

between Yaviche and the city per week). It was the sort of pitch-blackness that you forget

exists, in this place so sheltered from any city light pollution, as my bus had arrived four

hours later than expected. I asked where the radio was, and started a steep climb towards

the little wooden building, beckoning like a lighthouse in the darkness. Valdu and his

wife invited me to get some sleep in their little adobe house across from the radio, but we

ended up talking late into the night over Oaxacan hot chocolate and fresh tortillas. Valdu

spoke slowly and softly, so as not to wake his sleeping daughter in the adjacent room, and

told me about the radio through his life story:

> *" I went away to University in the city, on a scholarship. I wanted to be a*
> *teacher. Plus I knew with a degree I could move to the city, or somewhere*
> *else, and get a good job. But I got there and I looked, spoke, dressed*
> *differently... I encountered terrible discrimination there. I felt ashamed of*
> *where I came from, of my culture, of being an 'ignorant peasant.' So I*
> *started dressing like a vaquero[36] and partying and drinking all the time,*
> *just whatever I needed to do to be accepted. I never spoke one word of*
> *Zapotec during those years. One night I got sick from drinking too much...*
> *I vomited blood...it was that night, looking at myself in the mirror, I knew I*
> *had lost myself. The next week a visiting lecturer at the Uni, a missionary*

---

[36] Cowboy; cattle-driver.

of liberation theology,[37] who asked me 'Why are you dressing like that?' I went to his courses, and through his teaching I met Christ, God, Ghandi, MLK, Marcos and the Zapatistas, Che Guevara... and through this process I returned to myself. It was a huge weight lifted off me... to speak Zapotec again. I started an organization for indigenous students at the Uni, and we founded the first Zaptec radio program, to speak and share our identity... to demand respect... and to teach each other to celebrate where we come from. To no longer be ashamed. From there I knew what my role would be—to go back to my community and build a radio, to teach others to feel proud of who they are as indigenous, the Xhidza[38] people."

Valdu returned to Yaviche to be a different kind of teacher. The radio, for him, represents a model of alternative living, a refuge from the seduction of consumerism, materialism, and obsession with money, modeled by influences of globalization and mass media. Moreover, he discusses his own experience with what Paulo Freire (1970) termed the 'culture of silence,' whereby the most marginalized have been bombarded with the message that their cultures and identities are inferior and backwards, instilling a negative, silenced, and suppressed self-image. This culture of silence is particularly imposed by the dominant education system. For Valdu, this manifested in feeling that he had to hide his identity, and abandon his original language, clothing, etc. He describes a moment of conscientization, "developing consciousness, but consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform reality" (Taylor, 1993).

---

[37] Born in the Latin American context, liberation theology is an interpretation of Christianity from the experiences of the poor; reading Scripture and Christian doctrine through the eyes of the poor.

[38] Zapotec word for air used by communities in the Rincón section of the Sierra Norte mountains.

Radio, he said, is also a tool for raising consciousness, holding the power to rescue a culture that has been silenced and portrayed as backwards, alien to development, and shameful. It is an integral part of the struggle for autonomy in all aspects of life, living outside of dominant systems, a space to dialogue with each other and build a rhizomatic movement, which grows like the Zapatista *caracol*[39]. It is a tool to preserve language as a conduit of culture, and to create education within the community's own diverse lived experiences. Through radio they can become agents in their own liberation, for solutions must come from within indigenous communities, not from without. Like the milpa, radio is a space for learning together, collaborating, and accompanying one another on a process of consciousness and identity building, which is deeply rooted in nourishing and sustaining the community by making the most of local resources, knowledge, and technologies.

But while Valdu acknowledged the difficulties of existing in that third space, between state and market, he emphasized the importance of making connections with other communities and with the outside world. *"Radio... is a tool to stay connected. Autonomous does not mean isolated... it means the opposite. Autonomy is not possible in isolation from one another."* While indigenous community media maintains a complex relationship with the state and market, it is part of a growing movement to take the tools of globalization— media, telecommunications, and digital technology—and make it work for

---

[39] Structural model of the Zapatistas' council of good government.

115

themselves on their own terms. The rhizomatic network of community media uncovered in this project represents the agency, creativity, and innovation of those who have been portrayed as passive victims of globalization, too isolated and too resource poor to be innovators. These six radios, Movimiento Radio, Radio Xeglo, Radio Bue Xhidza, Nuestra Palabra Radio, Radio Padiushy, and Radio Totopo, are not just symbols but living breathing examples of the unique strength and possibility of rhizomatic connections. Through supportive organizations like Rhizomática and Palabra Radio, indigenous villages are building a platform to mobilize around policy and regulation, multinational corporations, and their rights.

The Zapatista uprising and the APPO movement were Rhizomatically organized movements, decentralized, interconnected, and extremely difficult to stamp out. The media movement in Oaxaca is following similar patterns, and with events like Ayotzinapa and the 2014 Telecommunications Law shining a light on the PRI's corrupt core, may be fertile ground to strengthen indigenous leverage with the state and commercial interests, to assert their rights and presence with a unified and amplified voice.

Despite challenges and the destructive forces wrought by the legacy of colonialism, decades of NAFTA, and the continuing menace of neoliberal globalization, the community media movement in Oaxaca, demonstrated through the stories of six small *pueblos,* is a dazzling example of the strength, resiliency, and creativity with which indigenous groups are resisting, and decolonizing tools

116

like technology to align with their values, knowledge, and way of life. For women the radio is a space to speak boldly, and confront the patriarchal status quo. For youth, it lets them build confidence, and to parse out their identity and connect with tradition amidst changing expectations and technological advances. Through language and communication, they heal together, grow together, resist together, repeating the message: We were here, we are here, we will always be here.

"When you're trying to build alternatives, a radio is so much more than just a means of communication. It's a way of life." Like Valdu, indigenous groups in Oaxaca are using radio to reconstruct their identities, outside of and autonomous from those they are ascribed by government projects, commercial interests, Western portrayals, or colonial empires. Radio is more than just words and dialogue, it is a space to change consciousness, and build a model of alternative living. Valdu put down his hot chocolate, looked around at his beautiful adobe house he had built with his own hands, and said softly yet confidently, "La radio no es solo decir, sino hacer."

Areas for Further Research

As with any project, immersing myself in this topic also revealed other areas related to indigenous community media that are ripe for research. I will discuss one in particular that kept showing up in my research—community radio's relationship with increasing migration from indigenous Oaxacan communities to the US, and the creation of cross-border political participation through radio.

Oaxacalifornia: Out Migration and Community Radio

> "*Women are the ones who speak about migration. They are occupying*
> *these radios, because in many communities the men have migrated. For*
> *women the radio is a refuge, as well as a space for alternative learning*"
> (Janis, 2014 Interview).

Janis talked about different layers of women's centrality in community

radio—the men get embroiled in politics and leave these community spaces,

women's connection to alternative education, but the theme of migration came up

at almost every radio station, and women were always the ones discussing it. In an

interview with Eugenio Bermejillo, founder of Boca de Polen, an indigenous

media collective in Chiapas, he discussed the potentials of radio as a bridge

between the community and those who have migrated to find work.

> "*In the communities there is a huge demand for a way to*
> *communicate with those who have migrated, especially to the US.*
> *People still depend upon word of mouth to find out if their family is*
> *safe... in some situations people will actually call in to the*
> *community radio station, to tell their family they have arrived*
> *safely in the US*" (Eugenio, 2014 Interview).

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into more depth about the

phenomenon of migration, scholars tracing migratory flows have identified huge spikes

in numbers of indigenous people (particularly Mixtec communities) from Oaxaca

migrating to northern Mexico and the US, particularly California, in search of jobs.

Economic restructuring of the country with free trade agreements like NAFTA along with

cost cutting in social welfare has had the most intense effect on rural *campesinos* in

Mexico, such as Mixtecos and Zaptecos of Oaxaca, Totonacas of Veracruz, Nahuas of

Guerrero and Purepechas in Michoacas, to join migratory flows to the US. A 1991 census

of the California Institute for Rural Studies found indigenous Mixtec migrants from

Oaxaca accounted for five-to-seven percent of the state's agricultural farmworkers

(Rivera-Salgado, 1999).

As indigenous ethnic identity has been strengthened thanks to global waves of

indigenous resistance movements, indigenous migrants have responded to discriminatory

and exploitative conditions in the US in a highly creative way, building cross-border

political organizations to make collective action possible. Media and radio in particular is

a central part of this process. My research reveals how the advent of Internet streaming

has opened up new possibilities for transnational connections via community radio, and

the creation of a transnational social and cultural web facilitated through radio, both to

share culture and information, and also to engender useful flows of remittances from the

US back to migrants' communities.

While I wasn't able to focus on these transnational networks of political

participation through radio, it is clearly fertile ground for future research about the

community radio movement, and how it connects indigenous movements within Mexico

with immigration issues within the US. In my ethnographic methods course, I had the

opportunity to research Woodburn-based farmworkers' union PCUN[40] and many of my

interviews also revealed that those involved in the union also staying informed of issues

in their communities of origin, all of which were in rural Mexico, through Internet

streaming of community radio stations. They expressed how incredible it would be if

community radios on both sides of the border were more connected, and I agree, and

---

[40] *Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste*; United Farmworkers of the Northwest.

119

think this would be a fantastic area for future research on community radio in the US and

Mexico.

REFERENCES CITED

Acevedo, M. (2008). Los desafios para la integración de las TIC en una cooperación en red. Encuentro Internacional sobre TICS para el Desarollo. Gijon, FIDMA.

Acosta, B., Carreón, V., Elbittar, A., & Rivera, H. (2013). Auction of radio spectrum and its effect on social welfare in Mexico. *Trimestre Económico, 80*(3), 687-718.

Al Jazeera Staff. *Dozens of students missing in Mexico after police fire on protest.* Al Jazeera America. October 1, 2014. Retrieved from http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/10/1/guerrero-mexico-students.html

Americas Quarterly. *Media 1.5.* Winter 2012. Retrieved from http://www.americasquarterly.org/Waisbord

Appadurai, A. (1991). *Modernity at Large Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Public Worlds). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Arenal, E. (2007). Women in the Oaxaca Teachers' Strike and Citizens' Uprising. *Feminist Studies*, 33(1), 107-117.

BBC News. (2013). *The Mexican Village That Got Itself Talking.* Retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-24450542

Beas Torres, C. (2007). *La Batalla por Oaxaca*. Mexico: Ediciones Yope Power.

Bebbington, A. (2012). *Social Conflict, Economic Development and the Extractive Industry Evidence from South America.* (Routledge ISS studies in rural livelihoods). Hoboken: Taylor & Francis.

Berry, K., Fornssler, B., McKenzie, H., Dell, C., Laliberte, L., & Hopkins, C. (n.d.). "I Got to Know Them in a New Way". *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies,14*(2), 179-193.

Bonfil Batalla, G., & Dennis, P. (1996). *México profundo : Reclaiming a civilization* (1st ed., Translations from Latin America series). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Brecher, J., & Costello, T. (1994). Global village or global pillage: Economic reconstruction from the bottom up. Boston, MA: South End Press.

Byerly, C., Ross, K., & Wiley InterScience. (2006). *Women and media : A critical introduction.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.

Calabrese, A. (2003). *Contesting Media Power.* Oxford, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC.

Canby, P. (2010). *Retreat to Subsistence.* The Nation. Retrieved from https://www.thenation.com/article/retreat-subsistence/

Carlsen, L. (2008). Armoring NAFTA: The Battleground for Mexico's Future. *NACLA Report on the Americas 41.5* (Sept.-Oct. 2008) Retrieved from http://nacla.org/node/4958.

Carlsson, U. (2003). The Rise and Fall of NWICO - And Then? *Nordicom Review.* Vol. 24, No. 2. 31-68.

Carpentier, N, Lie, R., & Servaes, E. (2003). Community Media as Rhizome: Expanding the Research Agenda. *Journal of Alternative and Community Media, 19*(3), 287-294.

Castells-Talens, A., Rodríguez, J., & Concha, M. (2009). Radio, Control, and Indigenous Peoples: The Failure of State-Invented Citizens' Media in Mexico. *Development in Practice, 19*(4/5), 525-537.

Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Castillo, G. (2012). Migración étnica y cambio social entre los Odham del noroeste de Sonora. *Andamios* 9: 375–409.

Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas. *Basic Information Sheets Indigenous, 2012 Population*. (2013, July 13). Retrieved from http://www.gob.mx/cdi#documentos

CONEVAL. *Poverty 2010.* (2010). Retrieved from http://www.coneval.org.mx/Medicion/Paginas/Medici%C3%B3n/Pobreza-2010-en.aspx

Couldry, N., & Curran, J. (2003). *Contesting media power : Alternative media in a networked world* (Critical media studies). Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.

Cuevas Valenzuela, H. (2006). Laclau, E. 2005. La Razón Populista. Revista De Ciencia Política (Santiago), (1).

Dahl, R. (1982). *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* London; New York: Continuum.

Diasio, F. (2010). AMARC and more than 25 years of community media activism. *Telematics and Informatics, 27*(2), 193-195.

Dissanayake, W. (2006) Globalization and the Experience of Culture: The Resilience of Nationhood. *Globalization, Cultural Identities, and Media Representations.*

Downing, J. (2011). *Encyclopedia of Social Movement Media*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications.

Escobar, A. (2004). *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Escobar, A. (2010) Latin America at a crossroads: alternative modernizations, post liberalism, or post-development? *Cultural Studies,* 24(1): 1–65.

Esteva, G., & Prakash, M. (1998).*Grassroots post-modernism : Remaking the soil of cultures.* London ; New York : New York: Zed Books ; Distributed in the USA exclusively by St. Martin's Press.

Esteva, G., Breña, M., Rus, J., & Lerager, J. (2007). The Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca: A Chronicle of Radical Democracy. *Latin American Perspectives, 34*(1), 129-144.

Fals-Borda, O. (1995). Research for Social Justice. *Southern Sociological Society Meeting*.

Fernandes, L. (2003). *Transforming feminist practice : Non-violence, social justice, and the possibilities of a spiritualized feminism* (1st ed.). San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Education.

Frizzi, M., (2000). "The Indigenous Population of Oaxaca From the Sixteenth Century to the Present," in Richard E.W. Adams and Murdo J. MacLeod (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas,* Volume II, Mesoamerica, Part 2. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Fuentes, C. (1971). *Tiempo mexicano* (Primera edición. ed., Cuadernos de Joaquín Mortiz ; 11-12). México: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz.

Gallagher, M. (1979). Women and the Mass Media: Industrialization and Development. *Educational Broadcasting International, 12*(4), 148-52.

Gaspar, R. (1999). Binational Organizations of Mexican Migrants in the United States. *Social Justice.* 26, no. 3: 27-38.

Gay, J. (1990). *Historia de Oaxaca* (3a ed., "Sepan cuantos-- " ; núm. 373). México: Editorial Porrúa.

Gedicks, A. (2015). Transnational Mining Corporations, the Environment, and Indigenous Communities. *The Brown Journal of World Affairs, 22*(1), 129-152.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures : Selected essays*. New York: Basic Books.

Giddens, A. (1998). *Conversations with Anthony Giddens: Making Sense of Modernity*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

Ginsberg, F. (1993). Mediating culture: Indigenous media, ethnographic film and the production of identity. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ginsberg, F. (2005). Rethinking the digital age. In *Global indigenous media: Cultures, practices, and politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Gladwell, M. (2000). *The tipping point: How little things can make a big difference* (1st ed.). Boston: Little, Brown.

Gold, T., & Renique, G. (2008). A Rainbow in the Midst of a Hurricane: Alternative Media and the Popular Struggle in Oaxaca, Mexico. The Radical Teacher, (81), 8-13.

Gumucio-Dagron (2001). *Haciendo olas. Estudio de comunicación participativa para el cambio social.* Nueva York: The Rockefeller Foundation.

Gumucio-Dagron (2006). Television comunitaria: ni pulpo, ni pulpito, Palpito. *Infoamerica.* Retrieved from http://www.infoamerica.org/articulos/textospropios/gumucio3b.htm

Hale, C. (2005). Neoliberal Multiculturalism. *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 28(1), 10-19.

Hallin, D. (2000). Media, Political Power, and Democratization in Mexico. In J. Curran (Ed.), *De-Westernizing Media Studies*. London; New York: Routledge.

Hayes, J. E (2000). *Radio Nation: Communication, Popular Culture, and Nationalism in Mexico, 1920-1950.* Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press.

Hintz, A. (2011). "From Media Niche to Policy Spotlight: Mapping Community-Media Policy Change in Latin America." *Canadian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 36 No. 1, 147-159.

Hughes, S. (2006). *Newsrooms in Conflict: Journalism and the Democratization of Mexico*. Mexico: Pitt Latin American Series.

Human Rights Watch. 2013. *World Report 2013: Mexico*. New York: Human Rights Watch.

INEGI. *Censo de Poblacion y Vivienda 2010: Oaxaca.* Retrieved from
    http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/contenidos/proyectos/ccpv/cpv2010/

Jankowski, N., & Prehn, Ole. (2002). *Community media in the information age : Perspectives
    and prospects* (Hampton Press communication series. Mass communications and
    journalism). Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press.

Juris, J. (2005). The New Digital Media and Activist Networking within Anti-Corporate
    Globalization Movements. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social
    Science, 597*, 189-208.

Khasnabish, A. (2008). *Zapatismo Beyond Borders*. University of Toronto Press.

Knudson, J. W. (1998). Rebellion in Chiapas: Insurrection by Internet and public relations.
    Media, Culture & Society. 20.

Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations and contexts*.
    Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

LA Times. *The Women Who Run Juchitan.* (1995, March 31). Retrieved from
    http://articles.latimes.com/1995-03-31/news/mn-49349_1_economic-life/2

Leeuw, S., Cameron, E., & Greenwood, M. (2012). Participatory and community‐based
    research, Indigenous geographies, and the spaces of friendship: A critical
    engagement. *Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe Canadien, 56*(2), 180-194.

Lewis, P. (1993) 'Alternative media in a contemporary social and theoretical context', In P.
    Lewis(ed.) Alternative media: linking global and local. Paris: UNESCO, pp. 15-25.

Madrazo, Alejandro. "Telecommunications: Mexico's New Reform" Energy in the Americas.
    Summer 2013. Americas Quarterly. Retrieved from
    http://www.americasquarterly.org/content/telecommunications-mexicos-new-reform

Malinowsky, B. (1922). *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

McMichael, P. (2008). *Development and social change : A global perspective* (4th ed.,
    Sociology for a new century). Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press.

Mendoza, R. (2008). Dealing with Diversity in the Construction of Indigenous Autonomy in the
    Sierra Norte of Oaxaca. *Bulletin of Latin American Research, 27*(3), 351-367.

Mitchell, C. (1998). Women's (Community) Radio as a Feminist Public Sphere. *Javnost - The Public, 5*(2), 73-85.

Murphy, P. (1995). Television and Cultural Politics in Mexico. *Howard Journal of Communications.* Vol. 6, No. 4, (1995). 250-261.

Naples, N. (2003). *Feminism and method: Ethnography, discourse analysis, and activist research*. New York: Routledge.

Noam, E. (2014). Mexico's Media Concentration and Ownership in Global Comparison. Columbia University Business School.

Ortiz, L., & Pombo, D. (n.d.). Indigenous Migration in Mexico and Central America. *Latin American Perspectives, 41*(3), 5-25.

Ozel, Bulent. (n.d.). An Hypergraph Based Approach for Unlocking Power Relations in Rhizomatic Open Source Software Communities. Retrieved from http://pascal.case.unibz.it/handle/2038/626

Pieterse, J. (1994) Globalization as hybridization. *Journal of International Sociology* 9(2): 161–184.

Poster, M., & Savat, David. (2009). *Deleuze and new technology* (Deleuze connections). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Postero, N., & Zamosc, L. (2006). The Struggle for Indigenous Rights in Latin America. *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 11(1), 208-210.

Prometheus Radio. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.prometheusradio.org/

Relly, J. (n.d.). Silencing Mexico. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, (1), 108-131.

R H I Z O M A T I C A. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://rhizomatica.org/

Rivera-Salgado, G. (1999). Mixtec Activism in Oaxacalifornia: Transborder Grassroots Political Strategies. *American Behavioral Scientist, 42*(9), 1439-1458.

Rodriguez, C. (2001). *Fissures in the Mediascape: An International Study of Citizens' Media.* New Jersey: Hampton Press.

Roodman, D. (2012). *Due diligence : An impertinent inquiry into microfinance*. Washington, D.C.: Center For Global Development.

126

Rus, J. (2003). *Mayan Lives, Mayan Utopias: The Indigenous Peoples of Chiapas and the Zapatista Rebellion.* Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.

Sakolsky, R., (1998). Introduction: rhizomatic radio and the great stampede. In: Sakolsky, R., Dunifer, S. (Eds.), Seizing the Airwaves: A Free Radio Handbook. AK Press, Oakland, CA, pp. 7-13.

Santana, & Carpentier. (2003). Mapping the rhizome. Organizational and informational networks of two Brussels alternative radio stations. *Telematics and Informatics, 27*(2), 162-176.

Schumpeter, J. (1936). *The theory of economic development : An inquiry into profits, capital, credit, interest, and the business cycle* (Harvard economic studies ; v. 46). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom* (1st ed.). New York: Knopf.

Sermijn, J., Devlieger, P., & Loots, G. (2008). The Narrative Construction of the Self: Selfhood as a Rhizomatic Story. *Qualitative Inquiry*, (14)4:632–650.

Singh, P. (2005). Indigenous Rights and the Quest for Participatory Democracy in Latin America. *International Studies,* (1), 61-76.

Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. London: Zed Books.

Stenberg, S. (2006). Liberation Theology and Liberatory Pedagogies: Renewing the Dialogue. *College English, 68*(3), 271-290. doi:1. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/25472152 doi:1

Stephen, L. (1991). *Zapotec Women* (1st ed., Texas Press sourcebooks in anthropology; no. 16). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Stephen, L. (2007). 'We are brown, we are short, we are fat ... we are the face of Oaxaca': Women leaders in the Oaxaca rebellion. *Socialism and Democracy, 21*(2), 97-112.

Stephen, L. (2011). Testimony and Human Rights Violations in Oaxaca. *Latin American Perspectives*, 38(6), 52-68.

Stephen, L. (2013). *We Are the Face of Oaxaca: Testimony and Social Movements*. Durham: Duke UP.

Stavenhagen, R. (2015). Ruta Mixteca: Indigenous rights and Mexico's plunge into globalization. *Latin American Perspectives, 42*(4), 92-102.

Ulin, R. (2004). Globalization and Alternative Localities. *Anthropologica*, Vol. 46 (2), pp. 153-164.

UNAM. *Economic and Social Policy in Mexico: Disparities and Consequences.* (2015, April 9). Retrieved from http://www.probdes.iiec.unam.mx/en/revistas/v46n182/body/v46n182a2_1.php

Vice News. (2014) Why Activists Don't Trust Mexico's New Antitrust Telecom Laws. Retrieved from https://news.vice.com/article/why-activists-dont-trust-mexicos-new-antitrust-telecom-laws>.

Verea, M. (2014). Immigration Trends After 20 Years of NAFTA. *Norteamérica*, *9*(2), 109-143. Retrieved from https://lbj.utexas.edu/sites/default/files/file/PANEL1_Verea.pdf

Waisbord, S. (2010). The pragmatic politics of media reform: Media movements and coalition-building in Latin America. *Global Media and Communication,* (2), 133-153.

Wilson, P., & Stewart, M. (2008). *Global indigenous media : Cultures, poetics, and politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.

World Health Organization. (n.d.). Globalization. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/social_determinants/themes/globalization/en/

Wortham, E.. (2013) *Indigenous Media in Mexico: Culture, Community, and the State.* Durham: Duke UP. Print.