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***LA VOZ DE LOS DE SIN VOZ: INDIGENOUS RADIOS AS TOOLS OF RESISTANCE
AGAINST THE NEOLIBERAL MEXICAN STATE***

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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**PROFESSOR NEIMAN
PROFESSOR PÉREZ DE MENDIOLA**

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Introduction

Mexico has one of the largest indigenous populations in the Americas, with an approximated 78 distinct indigenous peoples. (Global Americans) Despite the fact that about a quarter of Mexico's population identifies as indigenous, the political implication of identifying as an indigenous person still carries a negative connotation. More than that, indigenous peoples find themselves disproportionately affected by poverty with almost 80% living under the poverty line. (Global Americans) While the government's approach to tackling poverty in indigenous communities includes establishing new commissions and institutions for the development of indigenous peoples as well as implementing new policies that ensure their inclusion and recognition within the state, the "implementation gap" is lacking and doesn't manifest itself in any substantive way. Not only have these new institutions and policies not changed the material conditions for indigenous peoples, but they have also failed to address the inherent paternalistic attitudes in their assistance. Perhaps the biggest disservice done in this 'help' is that it doesn't necessarily consider an alternative approach- one that is constructed by indigenous peoples. While not all indigenous struggles are the same, there is a common thread. The "development" of indigenous peoples cannot emerge from the outside as a project spearheaded by the state. Instead, it can be found in the indigenous peoples' demands and rights to territory, autonomy, and self-governance.

For the purpose of this study, I want to expand on what indigenous peoples' right to territory means, so as to not limit it to only signify the visible and physical spaces they occupy, but to also include the airwaves through which powerful messages are carried out for their

revindication of land, community, and respective identities. I specifically want to focus on the study of indigenous radios as ideological tools for both the Mexican government and indigenous communities alike. I seek to explore the spaces of resistance that emerge from these radios as well as their limitations. I will particularly focus on two types of radio models: the state-sponsored 'Indigenous Cultural Broadcasting System' radios and the free 'pirate' radios. My analysis of these radios will focus on the radio stations' structure, their programming and objectives, and their participation with the communities they are broadcasting to. Moreover, I will choose radios from the state of Chiapas, a state with one of the highest radio concentrations and with the most radios without broadcasting concessions in the country. To guide my analysis, I pose the question: What roles do SRCI radios and free radios have in indigenous communities? I hypothesize that although these radios are structured differently and have different objectives, they both play a role in strengthening community cohesion and resistance against neoliberal ideology and politics. These two outcomes are especially relevant in the context of Mexico's push to create a national identity that is compatible with neoliberalism.

Defining a Mexican National Identity to uphold Neoliberalism

The development of a unified national identity where citizens are defined as consumers is a direct result of the embedded neoliberalism within Mexico. This new citizenship that emerged alongside the expansion of neoliberalism "did benefit some Mexicans, notably urban-based upper and middle classes... the majority of the rural poor, and especially the Indigenous peoples, experienced increasing poverty and exclusion." (Preston) This fact is interesting when neoliberalism presents itself as a solution to the problem of poverty, one which is exacerbated in

rural indigenous communities. David Harvey defines neoliberalism as “... in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.” (David Harvey 3)

The emphasis on individualism and the privatization of land as a way to justify and facilitate resource extraction and global trade contradicts much of what various indigenous peoples stand for. This ideology isn't compatible with the demands presented by them. Therefore, the permeation of such an ideology has been opposed by the campesinos and indigenous peoples in Mexico. They have demonstrated a resistance to the development of policies that seek to steal communal land that sustains the livelihood of their communities.

As a result of indigenous mobilization, as seen with the Zapatista Army of National Liberation against neoliberal politics, the integration of indigenous peoples into the wider national Mexican identity- one constructed with neoliberal values- is crucial to the complete neo-liberalization of the state. Indigenous peoples in resistance are perceived as a threat to the neoliberal state because their conception of development and sustainability differs to that of the wider Mexican population. For example, various indigenous groups in Chiapas, some of whom are part of the Zapatista movement, define development in relation to their local communities rather than to a wider global economy. “Ideologically, the Zapatistas advocate for an alternative participatory system of development, which favors grassroots initiatives over top-down directives. The Zapatistas promote development principles that connect the complex socio-historical fabric of Chiapas' indigenous communities with the local economic sphere. Their ideals revolve around the preservation of cultural and linguistic traditions, the sanctity of

land for indigenous people, and the perpetuation of organic and local farming practices within the region.” (Khokhar) Their emphasis on this differentiation, their approaches to the economy, and their self-identifications as indigenous peoples in struggle present a challenge to the neoliberal politics in Mexico. Consequently, the government works actively to combat indigenous resistance on multiple fronts by creating a unified national identity where citizens can be defined by their rights as consumers first and foremost and where racial and ethnic identifiers are blurred.

This certainly wouldn't be the first instance that Mexico has undertaken a project to redefine its citizenship and create a new Mexican identity that is compatible with the politics of the time, particularly where indigenous people are concerned. During the era of 'el porfiriato'¹ “...el indigenismo fue una reacción frente a la posiciones de los intelectuales y políticos hispanoamericanos...que intentaron “modernizar” sus países no sólo imitando las formas culturales europeas, sino que promovieron una sustitución étnica mediante migraciones por un lado y persecución a los indígenas por otro.” (Potes and Paz 36) During this era, indigenism can best be defined by the active persecution of indigenous peoples. Through violent schemes such as forced assimilation and the erasure of indigenous cultures, indigenous peoples were othered and marginalized. Interestingly, this same indigenism “...pretende ser una reivindicación de los indígenas mismos, sojuzgados, explotados, y perseguidos aun en regiones en que eran absoluta mayoría demográfica.” (Potes and Paz 36) This political ideology that defined the relationship between the state and indigenous peoples was essential to maintaining Mexico as a modernized

¹ Refers to the era before the Mexican Revolution in which Mexican president Porfirio Diaz ran the country under dictatorial rule. It is a period marked by “extensive modernization but political liberties were limited and free press was muzzled.” Britannica.

state. However, as a result of the Mexican revolution, a new nationalism emerged and with it, a new citizenship was constructed. This time, the national identity would reject the European and North American models, even those concerned with notions of modernity. In its place, “El nacionalismo mexicano de los años veinte y las décadas sucesivas [buscaría] en su propio suelo el lugar donde pudieran sujetarse las raíces de una cultura nacional y dotar de un rostro a sus gentes...” (Potes and Paz 37) Whereas prior to the revolution indigenous cultures were rejected due to their supposed incompatibility to modernity, now they became essential in the construction of a Mexican identity distanced from its colonial past.

This new period, one which was apparently more accepting of indigeneity, marked the rise of neo-indigenism. Essentially, with the emergence of the neo-indigenist discourse, there was a distancing from the indigenist past which aimed to persecute and erase indigenous peoples but that at the same time claimed to give indigenous peoples the right to revindication. Neo-indigenism signaled an approximation and inclusion of indigenous peoples; however, this inclusion was done under the state’s own terms. This robbed indigenous peoples of the right to auto-determination and self-identification.

At the turn of the century, the Mexican government adopted a different approach to the indigenist one of the 20th century to placate indigenous peoples and allies, disguising its actions as the promotion of multiculturalism, a policy that is supposed to celebrate diverse cultures and identities within the state. However, it has actually become a strategy against indigenous peoples. Similar to the policies implemented by the Mexican government during the 20th century, which claimed to celebrate an indigenous past as a way to resist the national identity that had been informed by European colonization, the policies of multiculturalism are being used to create a

new national identity that integrates the many indigenous peoples that reside within Mexico. The notion of multiculturalism has been transformed to create a sense of unity within the different demographics that make up the country. It gives the impression that everyone can be accounted for as citizens of the state, making it easier to reclassify everyone under a new neoliberal-based identity. It is what Neil Harvey refers to as a “market citizenship.” This type of citizenship isn’t necessarily compatible with a “pluri-ethnic citizenship,” but also doesn’t oppose it. (Neil Harvey) After all, both types of citizenships aim to homogenize at any expense.

Along with the market citizenship, neo-indigenist policies have effectively replicated strategies like those from the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the International Labor Organization, to supposedly “acabar con la desigualdad y la injusticia de los pueblos indígenas, pero estos proyectos, a pesar de su discurso multicultural, prescindan de la autonomía y la autodeterminación indígenas y no han logrado cambios estructurales.” (Nahmad 83) One of Mexico’s most obvious attempts to allegedly end inequality for indigenous peoples is through the various institutions it has assembled over the decades.

A Brief History on the Indigenist Institutions in Mexico

Most recently in 2018, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador replaced the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI) with a new organization: The National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (INPI). He announced in a conference, “Todos los coordinadores que trabajen en estos centros de atención van a ser indígenas... tendrán que ser de la misma cultura donde esté ubicada la región, y vamos a respetar tradiciones, costumbres y organización social. Esto va a ayudar mucho para sacar de la pobreza a

millones de mexicanos." Unlike the previous commission, this new institute would be decentralized from the federal government and would be led by indigenous representatives, all of whom would have to share the same indigenous culture with the region they were to represent. President Lopez Obrador's speech parallels President Vicente Fox's own speech when he introduced the CDI in 2003 to replace the antiquated and assimilationist National Indigenist Institute (INI).² This maneuver to spearhead a new commission would signal the Fox administration's willingness to cooperate with indigenous communities, specifically with the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas being at the forefront of the political agenda. As a result of the demands presented by the indigenous led Zapatista movement³, "control became a state priority over paternalism. Indigenous peoples became a matter of national security." (Castells-Talens et al. 528) This is exemplified in Fox's address regarding indigenous autonomy. He stated that the Mexican government had to, "dejar atrás el paternalismo, dejar atrás el asistencialismo y la manipulación..." (Presidencia de la Republica) His apparent commitment to engaging in dialogue with the Zapatistas to resolve the demands they presented, so long as they were willing to talk combined with the newly established CDI demonstrated a shift in how the new administration would approach the indigenous peoples in Mexico.

By erecting a newly named commission, the Mexican government was completing a double task. Firstly, it was burying the assimilationist policies and castelianization projects that

² The National Indigenist Institute was founded in 1948, with the goal of integrating indigenous peoples into the state of Mexico and its national culture.

³ The Zapatista uprising began in 1994, as a response to protest against Mexico's involvement in the NAFTA agreement. The movement garnered international attention and has developed over the decades into a struggle for indigenous autonomy and self-determination.

the INI had carried out for the supposed development of indigenous peoples but that instead came to the detriment of indigenous peoples and their respective knowledge, cultures, and languages. Secondly, it was effectively shifting into an era of neo-indigenism, which signaled to “a set of policies that suggest that consumption will be one of the solutions to indigenous poverty and cultural marginalization.” (Castells-Talens et al. 528)

In that sense, both Lopez Obrador and Fox centered the economic conditions of indigenous peoples around the country as the main focus for development. In effect, Mexico’s neoliberal policies would accompany the state’s plan to improve the material conditions for indigenous peoples. In theory, once indigenous peoples were economically self-sufficient, discrimination against them would cease. However, contrary to what Fox stated in his address, the CDI’s development programs would continue a trend of paternalism and welfare to ensure that the Mexican government would maintain their dominant position, all while pacifying the indigenous “threat” manifested in their demands for autonomy and self-determination. This ploy for pacification would be best assisted by programs like the System of Indigenous Cultural Radio Broadcasters (SRCI)⁴. This state sponsored radio network was established for the purpose of promoting the revitalization and preservation of indigenous cultures and languages. While the network’s administrative organization would change in structure and name, its goals and approaches would remain relatively the same. Like with the INI, both the CDI and now the INPI promote the idea of a cohesive national identity. It’s certainly hinted at in President Lopez Obrador’s aforementioned announcement, where he uses the term “mexicanos” instead of

⁴ In Spanish, it is denominated ‘Sistema de Radiodifusoras culturales indigenistas. The term indigenista is a legacy of the INI, which is reminiscent of the consolidation of cultures for a cohesive Mexican national identity.

indigenous peoples when he is talking about helping indigenous groups out of poverty. The language used in his discourse demonstrates an attempt to consolidate the national identity through an integration of indigenous peoples. This intentional maneuver epitomizes one of the defining characteristics of the neo-indigenist agenda: the intercultural approach. (Castells-Talens, Ramos Rodríguez, and Chan Concha 528)

The intercultural approach is essential to Mexico's nation building. It assumes that the myriad indigenous identities are compatible or are malleable enough to be compatible with the non-indigenous Spanish speaking identities and structures of power. However, equally notable is that this approach is unbalanced. The burden of adopting an intercultural approach is delegated to indigenous groups, while mestizos and other non-indigenous groups are absolved of the work to inform themselves and learn about indigenous culture and language because they are already a part of the dominant culture within the state. They don't need to advocate for themselves to be recognized the way indigenous peoples do; though indigenous peoples don't need to be recognized by the Mexican state and its citizens to justify their existence and validate their struggle for autonomy.

Under this context, the System of Indigenous Cultural Radio Broadcasters serves as an example in the ways the Mexican government harnesses the promotion of indigenous diversity and culture to further its construction of a unified national identity. It also serves as a tool for indigenous commissions to maintain appearances and regain their primordial role as protectors of indigenous peoples. Their claim had been shaken by autonomist discourse surging from the conflict in Chiapas. (Talens 127) That new institutions have replaced the old ones is

inconsequential; the radio network project to promote indigenous voices through government intervention and support has survived the transitions and new administrations.

SRCI Radio Analysis: La Voz de Los Vientos

One of the two state sponsored radios in Chiapas is La Voz de los Vientos (XECOPA). It was founded in July 1997 in Copainala, Chiapas, Mexico, and has served 39 municipalities with bilingual programming since, including native languages like Zoque and Tsotsil, as well as Spanish. Since its inauguration, its mission has been to consider “la población como el principal protagonista y asume su papel de agente transformador de la sociedad.” (INPI Ecos Indígenas. La Voz de la Diversidad) In that sense, the radio’s objective to be an agent of transformation for society aligns with the community-based radio categorization that the government assigns to it. Unlike other models of radio that are privatized, and for-profit, community-based indigenous radios are under public domain thus qualifying them for a special concession as well as state funding.

However, labels are insignificant when a radio’s structure, broadcasting, and participation within the region contradict the indigenous communities’ own interests and values. There are various angles through which the radio can be analyzed, starting with who holds ownership over it. As a part of the larger SRCI network- its financing and administrative operations are managed by the CDI, an institution that serves the state’s goals in nation building and integrating indigenous peoples. “La capacidad de aprobar acciones o prohibirlas corresponde en última instancia a la CDI. Las radios son, pues, de la CDI: le pertenecen en un sentido material y legal. (Talens 133) Since the radio belongs to the CDI, the indigenous directors, radio hosts, and other

members of the station can only do so much before they encounter any limitations to the content they want to produce, broadcast, and promote through community events. This touches on the idea that although the radio is broadcasted to indigenous communities by indigenous people, it is still owned by a third party- one which may decide to censor or make administrative decisions that may best serve their own interests. It's up for debate whether a radio where indigenous people have no stake in ownership can be considered an indigenous radio at all.

Whether the radio is truly serving the community's best interest is further put into question when the radio's mission is accounted for. XECOPA radio states in their mission that it seeks to "generar contenidos radiofónicos... [para] la percepción positiva de lo indígena en la población mestiza." (INPI Ecos Indígenas. La Voz de la Diversidad) The wording of this mission gives the impression that the radio's programming serves a double task: on the one hand, it attempts to rediscover, strengthen, and preserve indigenous culture. On the other hand, it also states that it aims to create a positive image or representation of indigenous peoples to the larger mestizo population. Centering the mestizo population rather than the indigenous communities is revealing. Who is the radio really meant to serve, and why is it that only the indigenous communities are tasked to create positive representations of themselves for others when the same isn't expected from the dominant groups in Mexico? It's one thing for an indigenous community to have the power to foster their own auto representation under their own terms- especially after facing centuries of violence and erasure- for their own self-identification and community cohesion. It's an entirely different thing to have to mold an identity to appease to the tolerance of the dominant culture/national identity. The fact that one of the radio's missions is to create a

positive representation for the mestizo population assumes that there are aspects of indigeneity that are not palatable or compatible with the wider national identity.

The claim that the promotion of indigenous cultures by an SRCI radio such as XECOPA serves the neo-indigenist agenda of assimilation and integration through the guise of interculturality is furthered when looking at the station's bilingual programming. The station's incorporation of the native languages of the Copainala region into the programming as add-ons suggests that Spanish is assumed to be the standard. One of the reasons for centering Spanish may have to do with the linguistic makeup of the community; however, it also is related to, "La teoría intercultural neoindigenista [que] parece presuponer que si las radios de la CDI transmiten en español, las audiencias mestizas aprenderán a valorar a las culturas indígenas." (Talens 138) Once again, there's an implied attempt to appeal to the mestizo identity. This is not to say that the incorporation of multilingual broadcasting doesn't align with the community's goal to revitalize and visibilize native languages on the air waves. However, it does simultaneously perform an invisible job, which is to once again shift the responsibility on indigenous peoples to bridge indigenous society to non-indigenous mestizo society in Mexico.

At the same time, an analysis on XECOPA's impact on the Copainala communities isn't complete without first considering the possible alternative outcomes of the radio's presence in the region. Recognizing the limitations that the radio works under, and the outcomes that result due to them is only part of the evaluation. Whether it's functions and objectives are more compatible with the state than with the community it serves can be up to debate; nevertheless, understanding that XECOPA radio is a tool that can be transformed and appropriated allows for alternative readings to what indigenous resistance looks like.

XECOPA's objective to serve the communities that they are broadcasting to, can be seen through their commitments toward engaging with the community as well as their scheduled programming. They offer a variety of segments, many of which intersect with the revitalization and strengthening of the native languages of the region, the preservation of traditional music and dances, and the recuperation and promotion of indigenous identity- particularly where the youth is concerned. The station especially concerns itself with creating radio segments that will ensure, "la participación de niños y jóvenes, buscando así la preservación de la identidad." (INPI Ecos Indígenas. La Voz de la Diversidad)

Luis Hernandez Aguilar, a Copainala community member and Zoque musician and dancer, speaks on his experience with the youth, the importance of transmitting and sharing knowledge to keep their respective ingenious identities alive, and how La Voz de los Vientos creates spaces for the community to showcase the work that he and his students are doing. He begins by saying that, "Desde niño, a los 8 años empecé a practicar lo que es el instrumento... Mi papa me enseñó- es la herencia de mi padre que tengo... [Los alumnos] van a aprehender como yo les enseñe...para que ellos vayan aprendiendo y no se pierda la música tradicional..." (Paasch and UNESCO Mexico) The importance of transmitting the knowledge that was passed on to him by his father is integral to the cohesion of the community, particularly in uniting the older generations to the younger ones. He goes on to say that, "...el que le gusta, entonces se incorpora con nosotros y nosotros no estamos para negar, nosotros estamos dispuestos a enseñarles verdad, instruirlos, y por eso se sigue considerando esta costumbre." (Paasch and UNESCO Mexico) For him, it is not a burden to teach the youth what he learned as a boy. To see the musical tradition, he was taught as a boy continue, is to see the continuation of a culture that refuses to conform or

be lost. Moreover, his concerns about the youth in his community speak to the anxieties that are felt by other elders of the community and may be representative of an entire generation of indigenous elders. Mexico's efforts to "modernize" and "develop" the country through neoliberal policies has had a push and pull effect on the youth, resulting in the migration of younger generations to more urbanized areas. Forging strong ties between community members then becomes an act of resistance against the threat of erasure coming from assimilation, integration, and time. This collaborative work is essential to the overall survival of indigenous identity, an identity which is tied to the territories they reside in.

Jose Espinoza Sanchez, director of the XECOPA radio, also touches on the importance of revitalizing indigenous identities and the radio's meditative role in facilitating the community's cohesiveness. He recounts the incredible loss that occurred when the Chichonal volcano erupted and buried an indigenous community of "ancianos, ancianas, musicos, danzantes, y rezadores..." in the Francisco Leon municipality. He adds that each community has their own distinct dance and music, and so when a community disappears there is incredible loss not just because of the people but also the knowledge they carry with them. The traditions in the Francisco Leon community were buried, and now "...muchos niños ahora solo conocen la historia. Si dejamos de transmitir [en la radio] de aquí entre 20 y 30 años vamos a desaparecer como pueblos originarios... [seremos] autodenominados por el otro como hombres de palabra y eso es lo que no queremos principalmente y la emisora pues tiene esa función básicamente." (Paasch and UNESCO Mexico) The indigenous communities in the Copainala region take an active role rather than a passive one in ensuring their cultural practices, languages, cosmovision- all those things that make up their identity- are more than artifacts of the past. The work that they do as a

community paired with the XECOPA station demonstrates the ways in which the radio has been reappropriated to serve the community in the way that best fits their goals. A tool that had been originally established for the purpose of serving the state's nation building, is transformed as a tool for resistance within indigenous communities.

Even if the station is owned by the government- meaning that the state's CDI has administrative power to decide what can be broadcasted, as well as has control over its financial management and other administrative aspects- indigenous peoples still find ways to appropriate it for their own benefit. To negate the possibility of indigenous appropriation of a government radio would be to overlook the myriad ways indigenous peoples have resisted in the past and continue to in the present, even if these resistances are not conventionally political. Certainly, the recuperation of indigenous identity and cultures is resistance in and of itself, especially given the historical context that has made indigenous survival a feat. *La Voz de los Vientos* has been able to help create an alternative space for a diverse set of indigenous peoples to come together and hold dialogues regarding the rights of indigenous peoples. Just last year, in their celebratory event of 'Día de los derechos humanos,' various community leaders came to speak on the commitments indigenous peoples should have to ensure their survival. During this reunion, community members, teachers, and elders were able to come together under the sponsorship of the radio. The compañera Yolanda Castro emphasized the importance of unity between indigenous peoples to politically organize as well as to continue the everyday struggle to maintain indigenous histories, cultures, and traditions alive through practices like weaving textiles to create huipiles and passing on fishing practices between generations. These type of practices not only maintain their cultures alive, but resist against "...las grandes empresas de la

corrupción que han ido mermando la economía de los pueblos en resistencia.” (Radio XECOPA)

She adds that change won't come to indigenous communities if they don't actively seek it.

“Ningún partido político nos va a dar todo. Entiéndanlo. Únanse. La unidad es lo más importante- si no hay unión, no hay esperanza, no hay transformación, no hay cambio. El cambio lo tenemos que hacer a pie hombres y mujeres, ancianas y ancianos, niños y niñas.” (Radio XECOPA) Her statement resonates a truth within the community; they need to unite together to transform the conditions they are under as well as to maintain hope. As shown by one of the fishermen 's responses, the dialogues that emerge out of the events hosted by the radio have helped awaken a political consciousness. He states, “Hoy ya nos estamos dando cuenta... que debemos pelear [por] nuestros derechos. No debemos de quedarnos quietos...” (Radio XECOPA) The struggle for their human rights goes on beyond dialogues and manifests itself in the organizing they do. He adds that, “Ahorita se están logrando muchas cosas. Con decirle que ahí campesinos y pescadores que han estado en la cárcel injustamente...” (Radio XECOPA) He attributes their resistance to the teachings that are exchanged within grassroots organizers and community teachers.

As a result of the participatory nature of these radios, albeit under the limitations that the state can impose at any given time, the state sponsored radios as seen with La Voz de Los Vientos are transformed to be something more than a tool utilized by the state. Both the objectives of Mexico to create a cohesive national identity and the objectives of indigenous communities coexist. Just as the government plays a role in forming narratives and enforcing structures of power through the radios, so do the indigenous peoples of Copainala find their own ways to resist and create their own movements of struggle. The members of indigenous

communities aren't only consumers of the programming that is being transmitted on the airwaves; they are creators and transmitters as well. The programming of a radio like XECOPA would not be possible without the active participation of indigenous peoples. They give life to the radio, through their sharing of knowledge, language, and self-identification. As seen with other studies of state sponsored radios, the mere existence of a radio that promotes the participation of community members as listeners and content creators has led to the visibility and self-recognition that had not previously been there. "La iconografía de las radios... está restableciendo un vínculo entre los mayas del presente y los mayas prehispánicos, otorgándole a dicho pueblos un papel en la historia que el nacionalismo mexicano le había arrebatado." (Castells-Talens 133) By forming connections between the past and present, indigenous communities- in this case the Mayan peoples- have been able to form connections with a past that is not centered in Mexican nationalism. These connections inform their resistance today, and give them a place in history that they hadn't been able to outwardly claim before. Moreover, they define their histories from their own perspectives, knowledge, and understandings of the world. Rather than building their histories from a place of oppression, they build upon a history that is "alejada del nacionalismo oficial que les otorga." (Castells-Talens 133) Mexican history has had a tendency to homogenize and consolidate indigenous cultures and ways of life into a single identity, so distancing away from the nationalist narrative allows for an alternative way of self-identification. This is why it is important for indigenous communities to have the space and the tools to create a differentiated identity. Furthermore, it's worth noting that "...la mayoría de los oyentes desconocen que las radios les pertenecen al gobierno federal..." (Castells-Talens 133) This further demonstrates that although these radios may be owned by the government, they

still offer a space for indigenous resistance. In the face of a state that has not only erased but implemented assimilationist policies towards indigenous groups, the perseverance of indigenous culture and language is a powerful testament of resistance. The Mexican government may be benefiting from these radio stations to push state formation ideology and nationalism by relying on the guise of multiculturalism, but at the same time indigenous communities are also finding ways to benefit their communities and defend their interests.

An Alternative Radio Model: The Zapatista Uprising and the Proliferation of Free Radio as a response to SRCI

Prior to the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, the System of Indigenous Cultural Radio Broadcasters (SRCI) was already well in place. It had been around since 1979, starting with its first transmission in Guerrero, Mexico and eventually expanding to set up other stations around the country. To date, there are 22 stations in total with the mission of establishing, “un medio de comunicación indígena para los indígenas.”(Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas) How that translates into practice however, is that although these radios may be operated by indigenous peoples to deliver programming relevant to the community they are broadcasting to, the radios are still owned by the state. The government supports the financial administration of these radios to ensure that the SRCI radios are not manipulated by local governments, politicians, or special interests’ groups. That’s the goal anyway. However, in the past, “El Estado... ha controlado y censurado las radios indigenistas y las ha intentado usar a su favor.” (Castells-Talens 134) Moreover, as a result of their financial stability being dependent on the government, there’s no “actual transferring [of the] media" into indigenous hands. (Chan Concha) Ownership remains

with the state and creates a conflict against the push for SRCI radios to become “a tool of free development of the indigenous peoples.” (Castells-Talens et al. 530)

The Zapatista National Liberation Army’s demands to transfer the SRCI radios to indigenous peoples in 1994 was met with resistance from the government, and instead redefined “not only the relationship between the state and indigenous peoples, but also the perception that the state had of the stations.” (Castells-Talens et al.) If the INI and the government hadn’t previously considered the possibility that SRCI radios could be used as tools to facilitate political organizing for indigenous autonomy, they certainly were now. “Since their beginning, the stations worked close to the communities, strengthened their culture, and contributed to the subversion of the dominant symbolic order.” (Ramos Rodriguez) The SCRI had been created with the objective to better integrate a diverse set of indigenous communities- each with their own language, culture, and cosmovision- into the wider national identity. It is possible that cultural and language revitalization was as far as they conceived indigenous resistance would go. Since the SCRI radios’ ownership was not transferred on to indigenous peoples- certainly not to the Mayan indigenous communities in the southern state of Chiapas and especially not during the peak of the conflict- an alternative radio model was adopted, one that didn’t rely on the authority of the government’s broadcasting laws. Already, “...uno de los pilares del EZLN fue, desde 1982 [era] su sistema de comunicación interna... a través de ella se conectaron las comunidades y los milicianos.” (Martinez Mendoza et al. 164) The “pirate” radio- that is the radio without concessions or permits granted by the Federal Telecommunications and Broadcasting Law- was essential to the coordination of various indigenous communities within the territory. In fact, the first of these radios that emerged in Chiapas belonged to the EZLN. (Martinez Mendoza et al.

158) It was at this crucial point that free radios began to emerge and propagate around the country, but especially in Chiapas- which holds the highest concentration of pirate radios today. In rural areas, these radios are the only sources of broadcasting. It's also worth mentioning here that for the study of radios without concessions or permits, I will make a distinction between for-profit pirate radios and community-based pirate radios. Indigenous radios fall under the community-based radio category, especially since their broadcasting serves a social function rather than an economic one. "No todas las radiodifusoras que no cuentan con autorización para transmitir, comercializan sus espacios: no les interesa el lucro porque tienen otras prioridades, como conquistar conciencias..." (Martinez Mendoza et al. 155) The distinct objectives of these different radio models warrants a relabeling of the "pirate" indigenous-led community radios. Therefore, instead of calling them pirate radios, I will be referring to them as free radios. This serves the purpose of emphasizing their mission of resistance and ideological foundations in spite of the government's pushback and censoring. Otherwise, simply denominating pirate radios as illegal is simplistic and limits the possible meanings that they can adopt. "Pirate" or free radios are more than vehicles of communication operating under illegality; the assumption that they are, infers that these radio stations are requesting permission from the state to exist. Once again, for the Zapatistas and indigenous communities all throughout the country, permission is not a prerequisite for existence, nor is it a necessary condition for them to demand basic human rights as citizens of the state. By framing radios through their legal status or its lack of it, its ideological foundations that inform the content that they are transmitting is ignored.

Free Radios, Radio Insurgente: La Voz de los de sin Voz, and Koman Iel

Free radios, as mentioned previously, do not operate under the framework of legality. Working outside the system allows indigenous-led community radios to broadcast programming that would typically be censored by the government for its oppositional and revolutionary messages. By operating under an “illegality”, there’s an intentional refusal from the part of indigenous groups to be absorbed into the authority of the state. In their pursuit of “...freedom from the state’s institutions, these groups hope to set their own agenda on education and information.” (Woodman) This is a radical act in itself considering that these types of radios face “La amenaza de poder coercitivo, coactivo, que tiene el estado en las vías de la comunicación...” (Castillo Herrera 83) That communication channels are controlled to the point that the free flow of information is prevented robs indigenous communities of their rights to free speech. This coercive threat presented by the government is best demonstrated in their monitoring of oppositional radios, and in how these radios “... han sido “levantadas" [por] que se oponen totalmente al sistema de gobierno...” (Castillo Herrera 83) That these types of radios are concession less is just an excuse to validate the state’s intervention and censoring.

In contrast to the SRCI radios, ownership of the radio is shared and not centralized. They are constructed from the bottom up and rely on an active participation of the members of the community. These types of radios are mostly funded by community members themselves, meaning that the radio is communally owned rather than by a third party. For example, Radio Insurgente, a clandestine radio that declares itself to be the “voice of the voiceless,” maintains its financial stability through donations. This station is managed by volunteers, and “offers a mix of local news, music, and politics.” (Woodman) At the peak of the Zapatista uprising, Radio Insurgente also served as a tool to coordinate between various indigenous communities.

In any case, that a radio depends on the community it serves rather than the state, allows for community members to have a stake in the station. For the indigenous communities within the autonomous zones of Chiapas, the radio is a tool that keeps the community connected in their day-to-day lives. The radio allows them to communicate across distances, as well as serves as a way to mobilize- whether it be for an immediate call for help or for a long term struggle. The community's commitment and stake in the radio is seen through their protection of it.

In an interview with a broadcaster from San Cristobal, Chiapas (who remains anonymous but goes by the alias of Pakal Culebro), he states that accessing the free radio as an outsider is quite difficult. For one, reaching the remote area in San Cristobal where the radio is located is hard to access due to the geography of the region. Mostly however, it has to do with the fact that community members in the San Cristobal region work together to ensure that those who wish to enter will not negatively impact the radio or reveal too much about its location. This helps keep away authorities that would take the radio station apart if they knew where the station was broadcasting from. He says to the interviewer, “A menos de que la gente sea conocida, les dan paso, sino por ejemplo tú, tuviste que mostrarles quién eras y a qué venías, pero pues ya le habíamos contado a la colonia que vendrías, pero pues igual es bueno verificar siempre.” (Castillo Herrera 90) Through his response, he demonstrates the nature of a close-knit community that is working together to ensure that the radio keeps going live.

Moreover, that the free radios are owned by the communities themselves means that indigenous peoples are able to claim free speech without having to demand it from the state. Pakal Culebro states in an interview that free speech belongs to those who have actively sought it out; it wasn't something that was given or guaranteed. He stated, “Pues para mi desde la ilegalidad, si existe [la] “libertad de expresión...” nadie nos monitorea...pues si es viable la

libertad para nosotros...” (Castillo Herrera 102) His experience as a radio announcer had been one marked by persecution and death threats for denouncing the government. These threats against his person as well as his family informed his understanding of the relationship between the power of radios as vehicles of resistance and the government. For him, a freedom of speech cannot be achieved by abiding by the laws imposed by the government. He adds that sadly, the right to speech and to oppose the government’s actions could “tristemente [existir solamente] desde la clandestinidad de tu radio.” (Castillo Herrera 102) From his experience, having a radio concession or ownership over a radio does not necessarily mean that the government would not intervene in the radio’s broadcasting if their programming opposed the state. In fact, a friend of his had the station he worked at torn apart by officials despite the fact that the station had all the necessary permits and broadcasting concessions. (Castillo Herrera) Under the model of free radios, running as a clandestine broadcaster is a necessity. In a similar manner to how Pakal Culebra co-runs an anonymous radio in the region of San Cristobal, Radio Insurgente also runs under the radar to avoid being shut down. It moves around the region, never sticking to one single place. It is always on the move. (Woodman)

The equipment that these radios count with is oftentimes not strong enough to reach the same bandwidth that radios with permits and concessions do. However, because they are so rooted within the communities they serve, they don’t need to reach long distances so long as they are meeting their communities’ needs and objectives. This however does present a challenge in accessing recordings or transmissions from free radios if you’re not already a part of the community. Thankfully, radios and collectives like Koman Iel have gone online to create an archive of memory. Koman Iel along with organizations like Radio Zapatista have been crucial in raising, “raising awareness of the challenges facing indigenous groups.” (Woodman) More

than that, they also revisit history so as to keep dialogues about resistance and struggle alive. The work that they do is essential to the awakening and continuation of a political consciousness, especially when the Mexican state has “sought to restrict the right to protest.” (Woodman)

In a recording on the anniversary of the Zapatista uprising, Koman Iel hosts a roundtable to discuss the ‘Los Acuerdos de San Andrés.’ They start the programming with a powerful and resonant message. “...somos los herederos de los verdaderos forjadores de nuestra nacionalidad, los desposeídos somos millones y llamamos a todos nuestros hermanos a que se sumen a este llamado como el único camino para no morir de hambre ante la ambición insaciable de una dictadura...” (Koman Iel) This message is a call to mobilize, and to oppose the insatiable appetite of a system that seeks to continuously oppress them all while letting the very people that work the land, starve. This message is characteristic of other recordings that are archived in Koman Iels collective.

Lastly, one notable aspect about free community radios in the Chiapas region is that they also transmit multilingual programming. They broadcast programming in the native languages of the regions they are in, as well as in Spanish. That both SRCI radios and free indigenous radios broadcast in both Spanish and native languages may seem not so dissimilar; both types of radios offer bilingual programming. Yet the key difference lies in their underlying motivation to do so. While for the SRCI radios bilingualism is a requirement, especially to align with the government’s nation building goal of bridging non-indigenous society to indigenous society, it’s not so for indigenous-led free radios. If they offer programming in Spanish in addition to the native languages of the region, it is because they are reflecting their communities’ linguistic makeup. For example, in Zapatista autonomous zones, not everyone identifies as indigenous but their struggle as campesinos align with the indigenous people’s struggle for autonomy and

revindication of land. It is important for both groups to continue their fight against the neoliberal state and so a bilingual broadcasting makes sense.

Conclusions: The Implications of Indigenous Resistance through Radios

While there are many communication channels and sites of knowledge through which indigenous communities can organize around, the radio is unique in the sense that it is, “el único medio en donde no se necesita saber leer ni escribir para entender sus mensajes, porque solamente es necesario poder oír.” (Castillo Herrera 82) The radio allows for a deeper understanding of what it means to be connected to the space one occupies. The indigenous peoples’ claim and right to a territory or land isn’t just about the space they can see or touch. It includes the soundscapes the broadcasting waves exist in. Different indigenous communities around the country fill the invisible spaces we cannot see with knowledge, culture, and resistance.

Although each type of radio model has its own limitations, both are powerful tools that indigenous communities can utilize to create a political conscience that both informs their approach to organizing as well as provides a source of community and hope. The participatory nature of indigenous-led radios creates a space for indigenous community members to come together and collaborate to produce content that will both help the larger community organize for their rights, as well as maintain their cultures, languages, and cosmovisions alive. Through the interviews and short segments provided by the ‘La Voz de Los Vientos’ radio, there is a noticeable emphasis on programming that is more centered on culture and language. While this type of programming is not explicitly denouncing the neoliberal state and its policies, by celebrating and maintaining a different array of identities alive, indigenous peoples are performing radical stands against the state’s objective of creating a unified national identity. “The

neoliberal landscapes will only be a reflection of economic efficiencies reducing differentiation and moving toward homogenization...” (Deaton) When the goal of the state is to homogenize in order for it to construct an identity that is compatible- or malleable- to the push and pulls of neoliberalism, revitalizing native languages and the promotion of indigenous cultures is an incredibly powerful countermove of resistance.

Free radios also perform this type of resistance, but place a heavier emphasis on programming that renews the commitments of their community to be united in a struggle for land, autonomy, and auto-determination. In the case of Il Koman, its broadcasting revisits the historical moments of Zapatista political resistance against the neoliberalization of the state. In this way, we see a more direct denouncement and resistance against the politics of neoliberalism that infringe on the indigenous’ peoples right to live and work with dignity.

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