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Rogers, Jennifer B.

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# Radio and Collective Identity in the 2006 Oaxacan Uprising

JENNIFER B. ROGERS  
Long Island University, CW Post

## ABSTRACT

*This article examines the role of radio in advancing activist and democratic participation in countries disadvantaged in the digital divide, with a focus on a Mexican social movement, the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO). Within their community of radio listeners, APPO radio stations encouraged the sharing of emotions, events, and experiences between movement activists and potential allies. For APPO, radio served as the backbone for the construction and negotiation of a collective identity. Using the 2006 Oaxacan uprising as a case study, the author analyzes the importance of radio in generating the tools necessary for mobilization, collective identity, and democratic participation.*

Successful social movement actions, especially those that require quick mobilization, depend on the ability of social movement leaders to quickly communicate the details of the event and reasons for the mobilization. If a movement or social movement organization (SMO) is unable to communicate effectively to its members and the broader public, it weakens a critical resource—its membership. This may result in the inability to mobilize, recruit, and counter messages spread by the media, government, and opponents. Within economically less-privileged nations, access to alternative media sources, such as radio, is an important tool for mobilization. However, little attention is paid to the role of radio in social movements despite the importance of radio in areas that are disadvantaged in the digital divide.

Social movements rely on the media for three things: “mobilization, validation, and scope enlargement” (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993, 116). Those who control the media, in other words, the power elite, ultimately choose what is reported and how it is framed. Countering the power elite with grassroots alternative media like radio, grants movement actors means to encourage mobilization, validation, and scope enlargement, as well as democratic participation and collective identity (Windrich 2000 and Brinson 2006). In

particular, Brinson's study of the free radio movement examines the importance of alternative media to the success of social movements in communicating their message and actions. However, neglecting the role alternative media plays in circumventing dominant media and in transforming media, "may lead us to underestimate the power and resources available to social movements to generate favorable media coverage" (Brinson 2006, 544). Additional focus is needed, therefore, on the role of alternative media, especially radio, in movements within poorer nations. As Buckley (2000) argues, radio is unique in that it is ubiquitous throughout the richest and poorest nations, as well as in urban centers and remote rural communities.

The Oaxacan uprising offers us an opportunity to examine the vital role of radio within a social movement, especially in a less developed country. Networks of communication and radio worked together to provide an accessible forum for debate, thus stimulating a collective identity and movement mobilization. Studies of contemporary U.S. social movements are increasingly less interested in the role of radio because of the dramatic increase of Internet users. Many movements of today are mobilized through email and texting and funded through Internet sites. In stark contrast are some social movements throughout the global world that rely on other mediums, such as radio. The digital divide between nations, rich and poor, and rural and urban communities reinforces the importance of accessible, inexpensive forms of communication. In rural communities, an increasing number of people have telephones and television, while computers and Internet access is primarily used by the middle and upper classes, the youth, and urban city dwellers. About 79% of Mexican Internet users are between the ages of 12 to 34 years (55 percent are between 12 to 24 years). The global information age has brought with it a digital divide, separating the information haves from the have-nots. For example, in 2007 approximately 21.3 percent of Mexicans utilized the Internet (Mexican Internet Association 2007) as opposed to 70.2 percent of the U.S. Population (Internet World Stats 2007). This statistic shows a relatively low penetration of Internet use in Mexico, but this number has dramatically increased in just a few years; compared to 14.3 percent in 2004 (Mexican Internet Association 2004). There are 8.7 million Mexican computers connected to the Internet and 63.2 million cell phones operating in Mexico out of a national population of 108.7 million (Mexico Internet Association 2007; CIA World Factbook 2007). Within Mexico, Internet users are concentrated in urban areas and the capital city, accounting for 92.4 percent of all users. Over 40 percent of Internet users are in the state of Mexico and *less than 1 percent* of users are in the state of Oaxaca (Mexico Internet Association 2007). Radio and telephone are more important than new media tools such as Twitter and Facebook for disseminating movement ideas and recruiting new members in areas where free and inexpensive means of communication are prioritized, such as it is in Oaxaca. However, as the use of smart phones rise, hand-held accessible websites like Twitter and Facebook, may eventually change the face of emerging movements in rural Mexico.

Until Internet-ready cell phones become commonly used, radio remains a thriving and key tool for activists in economically and technically less-privileged nations. In Oaxaca, the second poorest state of Mexico, the ability to mobilize a community and a network of communities relies heavily on accessible, inexpensive media tools, such as radio, telephone, and word-of-mouth. For example, radio listeners informed their community when armed caravans drove through their city streets during the 2006 Oaxacan uprising by calling into Radio Universidad (Esteva 2006). Later in this article, I discuss this key event and the role of the radio in mobilizing the Oaxacan community against state repression. This article contributes to the broader discussion of the role of alternative media in social movements, by focusing on the neglected role of radio within one particular case, the Oaxacan uprising of 2006.

During the uprising, Oaxacan activists used radio to counter the government's negative and oppositional messages and to orchestrate the take-over of government-controlled media outlets. The use of radio also resulted in the ability to develop an outlet for spreading the movement's message and actions, while also offering an avenue to quickly mobilize supporters during an action. Finally, radio fostered the movement's ability to enlarge a base of supporters, helped form a collective identity, and provided a forum for debate. I argue that especially within the context of a rural or poorer nation, radio is essential in generating the tools necessary for mobilization, collective identity, and democratic participation; however, movements who rely on radio must also deal with limitations imposed by state repression, such as government pressure to control the airways through regulation and/or physical violence.

In the following section, I offer a brief description of the Oaxacan uprising and community radio. I then outline the literature on the role of radio in building democratic participation and collective identity. Third, I present my methods used and move on to my case study of an umbrella activist movement/organization in Oaxaca, and the role of radio in fostering mobilization, collective identity, communication, and democratic participation. Finally, I offer some questions about the future of radio within social movement research with particular regard to the importance of recognizing the impacts of the digital divide in our assumptions about different forms of alternative media.

### **Brief History of APPO<sup>1</sup>**

The Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO) was officially formed on June 17, 2006 in response to government repression of the teacher's union in Oaxaca, Mexico. Although the organization and movement goals of APPO

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<sup>1</sup> In this section, I draw on the 2007 report by the Latin American Studies Association, Gustavo Estava (2006), Victor Raúl Martínez Vásquez (2007), my ethnographic data collection and formal and informal interviews.

centered on gaining support for the teachers and the ousting of Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, it was an umbrella movement for farmers' rights, land rights, and indigenous rights in general. The APPO story begins with the teacher's union and a routine yearly strike. In an effort to demand better wages and resources for their schools, on May 22, 2006, teachers initiated a statewide strike and one-month encampment in the capital city, Oaxaca. For their encampment, the teachers seized the *zócalo*, Oaxaca's historic town center that is surrounded by the old government palace, hotels, stores, and restaurants. The teachers of Oaxaca have a tradition of striking for better wages and are often rewarded for their efforts with a small increase in salary and sometimes money for their classrooms. On June 14, 2006, however, the striking teachers and their children were awakened at 4:30am by the sound of helicopters dropping tear gas on the *zócalo*, some of which also landed on private homes and businesses. This decision by the Governor to end the teachers' strike with tear gas and violence was the catalyst that sparked the formation of the APPO movement/organization.

The teachers' strike transpired during the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) governorship of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, who was elected in 2004 despite a hail of accusations regarding corruption and a fraudulent election. Unfortunately for Ortiz, his violent response to the teachers' strike united the teachers with his political opposition. Recognizing potential allies, the teachers called on other Oaxacans to help with their struggle. Organizations from all over Oaxaca, representing pueblos (small communities), indigenous groups, women's groups, and unions, among others, joined together with the teacher's union instigating a broader movement under an APPO umbrella. In his book about APPO, Oaxacan Sociologist Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez states, "The APPO can say that it is a movement of movements" (2007, 71 my translation). Vásquez opines that APPO is "something more than a front for organizations, it is an anti-authoritarian popular movement that expresses a social necessity of inclusion, participation and justice" (2007, 72 my translation). APPO self-labels as a popular movement and Vásquez asserts that APPO is a movement, but it also operates as an organization. It has large constituency meetings that utilize consensus decision-making and it has a central advising council.

Lynn Stephen (2010) discusses the government response to the uprising: "When the federal government did not respond, state officials relied on paramilitary groups to try to re-establish order through repression. On a nightly basis, beginning August 2006, caravans of paramilitaries patrolled the city picking up people they targeted as APPO sympathizers" (74). Neighborhoods throughout the capital city protected themselves from state repression, government convoys, and routine criminal activity with barricades, constructed with cars, burnt vehicles and buses, trash, tires, and wire. At the end of October, barricades were common at nearly every intersection throughout the center of town, effectively stopping business as usual.

The APPO movement received little international attention until the murder of New York Indymedia reporter Bradley Roland Will on October 27, 2006. With a push from the U.S. after Will's murder and a change in Mexican national leadership from President Fox to President Calderon, Governor Ulisis Ruiz Ortiz finally received federal support on October 28th in the form of 4,500 Federal Preventive Police (PFP), water tanks, and helicopters. By late November, the PFP had dismantled barricades and took control of Radio Universidad, the primary tool utilized by APPO for information dissemination. On November 20 and 25, thousands of APPO supporters marched in "megamarches" that concluded near the zócalo and ended in hours of battle between activists and the PFP. On those days and in the subsequent weeks, hundreds of Oaxacans were arrested under accusations of arson and vandalism. APPO continues to organize today, but it has taken on new challenges and it is not as large of an organization or movement as it was in 2006.

### *Community Radio and State Repression*

In Latin America, radio is commonly utilized by indigenous populations and broadcast in local indigenous languages. These local, non-government and often low-wattage stations qualify as "community radio" because such stations "provide service to civil society—a service that attempts to influence public opinion, create consensus, strengthen democracy and above all create a community—hence the name community radio" (José Ignacio López Vigil, AMARC Regional Coordinator for Latin America, quoted and translated by Mtimde et al. 1998, 22). As community radio stations, Radio Universidad, Radio Planton, Radio Calenda, and Radio Nandia strengthened a social movement community and their local communities, while also supporting direct opposition to the state.

Radio Universidad and Radio Planton were the two main radio stations that were instrumental in disseminating movement information to Oaxacans. Prior to the strike and the formation of APPO, Radio Planton and Radio Universidad had diverse programming, including news, various types of music, and special topics (for example: activism, animal rights, indigenous issues, women's rights, and sexuality). Subsequent to the strike and development of APPO, both stations broadcasted news of the movement 24 hours a day. Located in a studio in the teachers' union office building (Section 22), Radio Planton was a resource and outlet for teachers and community members to develop their own public programming. Though located in the union building, only 20% of the programmers were teachers and the rest were community members (interview with Hector<sup>2</sup>, a programmer and leader of Radio Planton, 11/27/06). Radio Planton started on May 23 in 2005 and had been on air for just over a year when the PFP seized the zócalo and forcibly took them off the air in June 2006.

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<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms are used for all names.

Radio Universidad operates on the campus of the Benito Juárez Autonomous University in Oaxaca (UABJO). A majority of the programmers are students, but other Radio Universidad participants are from the surrounding community, Oaxaca City (interview with a Radio Universidad programmer, 11/15/06). Radio Universidad broadcasted APPO-supported news from the beginning of the movement through most of November 2006 and was the central source for APPO communication, community discourse, and updates on PFP whereabouts within the capital city.

Approximately 130 radio stations in Mexico operate as community stations, but only 12 have a license to operate (Cevallos 2007). Community radio stations, whether operating legally or illegally came under fire by the government in an effort to suppress their right to freedom of expression. Besides Radio Universidad and Radio Planton, which operated in the capital city of Oaxaca, two other Oaxacan community radio stations were forced off the air during the uprising, Radio Calenda and Radio Nandia, which are both low-wattage stations that serve their local, small communities. As low-wattage stations, their signal does not usually go beyond their small communities. Additionally, these stations rely on a smaller staff and/or volunteer base. Despite their government-granted licenses, both of these stations suffered repression because of their support of APPO.

One of Radio Calenda's (serving San Antonino Castillo de Velasco) volunteer radio reporters, Darío Campos, stated that the overthrown PRI mayor of her town (same political party as Governor Ulises), "opened fire on one of my colleagues, although he missed; another almost lost an eye when stones were thrown at him; and I was arrested and received death threats, and was later forced to sign a document in which I promised not to support subversive activities" (Cevallos 2007). Radio Nandia, an indigenous Mazateca community radio station also suffered reprisals from PRI party supporters. Alleged government officials shut down the station at gunpoint during the 2006 APPO uprising (Cevallos 2007). Unlicensed radio stations face a constant threat of being closed down. On the other hand, the state maintains power over permitted stations that must operate under a vague legal framework. The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) advocates for licensed community radio stations in Mexico, as well as globally, and continues to push for the granting of more licenses. Nandia and Calenda filed complaints through AMARC, which in turn publicized their illegal and violent closure.

Community radio stations have difficulty obtaining legal status because of the burdensome fees and regulations. At the 2007 Oaxacan Media Conference, programmers spoke of these difficulties, but stressed the importance of community radio to their listeners. These stations provide a variety of services such as, agriculture, health, obituary, weather, and news, which are often broadcast in indigenous languages. Communities rely heavily on these local stations, thus they have potential to sway public opinion. The government is perhaps threatened by this power and the potential of radio to mobilize citizens against the power elite.

## **Methodology**

From October 2006 through April 2007, I conducted participant, ethnographic observation and interviews with activists, community members, and radio deejays in Oaxaca, Mexico. My analysis relies on three data sources:

1. Interviews with approximately 20 APPO activists, key leadership in Radio Planton, female leaders of the Coordinadora de Mujeres Oaxaquesas Primero de Agosto (COMO), and programmers at Radio Universidad and Radio Planton;
2. Ethnographic observations of marches and rallies; and
3. Ethnographic observations at the State Forum of the Indigenous Pueblos of Oaxaca, the Constituent Congress of APPO, the State Assembly meeting of COMO, and the 2007 Oaxacan Media Conference.

### *Interviews*

This article is part of a larger project on land rights and genetically modified corn (see Rogers 2008). Therefore, the interviewees used in this project on radio and the Oaxacan uprising are part of a subset of the 50 interviews completed for the larger dissertation project. I utilized a snowball method to connect with most of my informants, especially those in the APPO movement. A few interviews were obtained through circumstance; I met them at an event or protest. Each interviewee participated in a semi-structured interview in Spanish.

The interviewees utilized for this project and referenced in this article were selected based on their involvement in APPO, community radio, as well as the movement in general. Most of them also were involved in radio and television broadcasts in support of the Oaxacan popular movement. In effect, my interviewees are part of a convenience sample, but they are representatives from diverse segments of APPO radio and the movement in general. Key players of the APPO movement/organization who were interviewed for this project included Alfonso, a media spokesperson for APPO, Hector, a programmer and leader of Radio Planton, Melissa, of COMO, and two programmers each at Radio Planton and Radio Universidad. Additionally, I toured Radio Universidad, a key APPO radio station, in October 2006 while it operated under protection of supporters and barricades.

### *Ethnographic observations of marches and rallies*

My analysis is also informed by my own personal experiences living in Oaxaca during and after the APPO struggle. I witnessed the conflicts in the street, most notably the conflicts in October and November 2006, listened to reports on the radio, collected newspaper articles, and documented over thirty informal



conversations with APPO supporters. My analysis is enhanced by my critical observations as an ethnographer in the field.

### *Ethnographic observations of formal meetings*

I attended the Constituent Congress of APPO and the State Forum of the Indigenous Pueblos of Oaxaca. Over one thousand APPO representatives attended the Constituent Congress on November 10-12, 2006 to develop an APPO constitution. The State Forum took place on November 29, 2006 with an attendance of approximately 300 APPO representatives from Oaxacan indigenous communities.

In addition, I attended several small COMO forums that highlighted their successful take-over of a local television station, Channel Nine. COMO invited me to attend a weeklong series of events in celebration of International Women's Day during the first week of March 2007. As part of International Women's Day, COMO held a march, rally, and a large state assembly meeting hosting approximately 500 indigenous women on March 8, 2007. At these events I documented stories told by indigenous women about their struggles as mothers, wives, indigenous women, and activists.

### **A Look at Radio and its Role in Social Movements**

Radio provides an alternative means for citizens to engage in civil society by promoting democratic participation through the public forum of radio airwaves. Hartley (2000) coined the term, "radiocracy"—government by radio, to encapsulate the possibilities of radio in the promotion of civil society, democracy, and communication. Hartley (2000, 155) states:

As early as 1927, radio was envisaged as a means for community-building, collective communication and dramatic imagination. Brecht [1979/80] saw radio as a perfect opportunity for building a public sphere and for promoting the development of civil society. Radio allowed direct contact with the population at large, bypassing the existing 'ideological apparatuses' of the state.

Thus, within the formation of a social movement, radio is a medium for communication with the public and serves as the foundation for building community with those dealing with similar struggles and issues. A "radiocracy" is possible when radio is available as a popular alternative to dominant media outlets and results in a public forum run by the movement for the movement. As in the case of the U.S. textile worker's movement from the late 1920's through the mid-1930's (Roseigno and Danaher 2004), grassroots radio can function as an easy and inexpensive forum for communication and the construction of a social movement

culture. Brinson (2006) argues that alternative media can combat the “fundamental asymmetry” in media-movement relations, while also forming the foundation for a strong communication network and outlet for movement ideas and activities (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993). The asymmetry in media-movement relations puts grassroots movements at a disadvantage because the power elite generally controls the dominant media outlets.

When people share the common experience of listening to the same radio station, and therefore the same music and programming, they are part of an “imagined community” (Hartley 2000). During a social movement, this “imagined community” that is fostered by radio, is brought to life through solid networks and relationships that exist in the streets, at barricades, and in APPO protest rallies, as will be discussed in the following section. For APPO, and for much of community radio, the listener community is more tangible than imagined because the programming is not just for the community, but produced by the community as well.

The “imagined community” united by APPO radio aided in the cultivation of the movement’s collective identity. Polletta and Jasper (2001) define collective identity as: “An individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connections with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities, although it may form part of a personal identity” (284). APPO radio stations elicited shared emotional connections and experiences for movement activists and potential allies within the so-called “imagined community,” which served as a backbone for the construction and negotiation of a collective identity.

The importance of collective identity is clear in social movements and in times of war, and the media has an integral role in framing issues and building support. Each side broadcasts their struggle, from their point of view, countering news from other media to gain support for their side. Within emerging economies, the digital divide necessitates the importance of inexpensive and accessible media tools, such as radio, for indigenous and grassroots movements. Windrich (2000) uses the case of the 30-year Angolan war between Jonas Savimbi’s National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and the governing Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) to discuss the role of the clandestine radio station, Voice of the Resistance of the Black Cockerel (VORGAN). VORGAN’s role was vital to the movement because it served to communicate their ideas in a predominantly rural and illiterate population. VORGAN was a powerful recruiting tool and it fostered a collective identity around a common struggle and enemy: “Fighters could be recruited with appeals to their ethnic or racial solidarity, troops could be instructed and inspired for battle, and the rewards of wealth and power could be dangled before the would-be victors” (Windrich 2000, 215-6). Controlling media, therefore, is a powerful movement tactic.

The take-over of government controlled TV and radio stations was an attempt by APPO to control media in Oaxaca and spread alternative information that favored the APPO movement, criticized the governor and his policies, and supported indigenous land rights. The APPO effectively shut down the state and city government within Oaxaca City and governed themselves through the development of a new state constitution and a “radiocracy” that was built on the take-over of a TV and radio station by a group of women activists.

### **The Case of APPO: Mobilization, Collective Identity, and Democratic Participation**

For a mass mobilization of the people, social movement scholars generally agree that a means of communication must be accessible to a network of activists (for a classic example, see Freeman 1983). In this section, I discuss how the APPO movement was able to communicate its ideas and develop a culture of debate, foster collective identity, and provide a key tool for mobilization, through tactics of taking over mainstream media and using independent radio. In a new social movement organization, such as APPO, the threat of state repression requires movement actors to take precautions for preserving their identity and the safety of their constituents. APPO’s use of radio helped facilitate mobilization against state repression, while also offering a forum for public debate and democratic participation.

At the basis of building public participation is the need to foster feelings of agency, the right to speak, and the opportunity to be heard. Lynn Stephen found, in her study of APPO and Oaxaca, that:

the first rights that people seek within a complex set of human, indigenous and women’s rights discourses are ‘the right to speak’ and ‘the right to be heard’ (see Poole, 2007)...In my research in Oaxaca, the spaces of the occupied radio stations, marches, rallies, neighborhood meetings, and hanging out at the barricades, provided contexts for many people to begin exercising these fundamental rights to speak and be heard for the first time. (2010, 81-82)

Through the takeover of television and radio stations, APPO activists provided a necessary venue for emerging activists to listen and be heard as they decided their own position regarding the uprising.

On August 1, “several thousand women from APPO peacefully occupied the studios of the state radio and television network. Through its outlets in Oaxaca, the network had continually been used by Governor Ruiz for propaganda against the movement” (Esteva 2006). After an APPO march, a group of women decided to confront the television station and request on-air time to offer an alternative to the state news. When the station refused, the women peacefully took over

the station and ran it with their own programming for 20 days. Some members of the studio's staff helped the APPO women broadcast information and ideas about the APPO movement. The women who occupied Channel Nine formed their own organization, COMO, which is part of APPO, but is also dedicated to addressing the needs of indigenous women. They worked to inform APPO of the needs and demands of women and effectively gave voice to indigenous women within the movement. The women of COMO speak proudly of their three month possession of the state's Channel Nine television and radio stations and successful 20-day broadcast of APPO news (interviews with COMO activists, 3/8/07). I was informed by Melissa, a COMO activist that, "it is the job of women to put themselves forward as central actors" (interview, 3/3/07). She stated that it is women's role to educate children and teach a new generation to fight for their rights as women and indigenous people. Fidelia Vasquez, a 55-year old member of COMO stated in *Anthropology News*:

I am a woman born in Oaxaca of Zapotec and Mixtec blood. Our mission as women is to create, educate, communicate and participate. That is why we are here occupying the state radio and TV station....We went out into the streets on the first of August to tell Ulises Ruiz that he had to leave Oaxaca. We are women who don't usually have a voice because we are brown, we are short, we are fat and they think that we don't represent the people, but we do. WE are the face of Oaxaca. (Stephen 2007, 13)

After 20 days of broadcasting from the Channel Nine studios, the police destroyed the broadcast signal. Despite the lack of a signal to broadcast their message, the women remained at Channel Nine for three months to prevent the station from broadcasting a pro-government message. The occupation ended when a group of undercover police entered the facilities, destroyed some of the equipment, and injured some of the activists. Within a few hours of losing the signal for Channel Nine, APPO supporters took control of every TV and radio outlet in the city. They returned control of the stations to their owners a few days later, but kept control of Radio Universidad, until it was jammed at the end of October 2006.

In August 2006, APPO supporters staged 24-hour sit-ins at public government buildings. The governor and his officials were forced to meet in private homes and hotels (Esteva 2006, see also Stephen 2010). On August 22, a convoy of 35 SUVs and government vehicles (with official insignia) drove past the sit-ins and shot guns into the air, above the heads of the protesters. The witnesses called into the various radio stations and reported on the event and the location of the convoy as it roamed through the city. The convoy may have intended to primarily intimidate the protesters, but one of the shots killed a young man at a sit-in. The community quickly organized barricades to stop the convoy. At one point, part of the convoy was impeded and the men in one SUV abandoned

their vehicle to escape (Esteva 2006). This type of quick mobilization would not have been possible without the help of Radio Universidad.

Radio Universidad is a building in the back of the Benito Juarez Autonomous University in Oaxaca (UABJO). Although it is still on the campus grounds, a fence separates it from the rest of the campus and a second fence separates it from a side street that opens up into a residential community. Because UABJO is an autonomous university, the government police are unable to legally enter the premises without the permission of the director of the university. As the PFP entered the capital city on October 28 and attempted to attack the radio station, radio programmers called for neighbors to protect the station. Helicopters hovered over Radio Universidad, dropping tear gas canisters, while the programmers emphatically requested non-violent assistance. Thousands, including women and children, surrounded the paramilitary and the PFP, blocking their exits. The PFP negotiated with the civilians for a safe and nonviolent exit, in exchange for stopping the attack on the radio station. This incident is another extreme, yet clear example of the power of the radio in actions requiring quick mobilization.

For over three months, APPO supporters had access to numerous radio stations (Radio Universidad, Planton, and Channel Nine), but eventually Radio Universidad was the only one remaining on the air, until it too, was stopped in November 2006. When no radio stations were on the air, the PFP visibly occupied the city and questions arose about the future of APPO. Many people expressed concern to me about the movement because they could not easily get access to community news. In an interview with Sara of Radio Universidad, I was told that the station primarily serves to inform the public about the “truth” because mainstream news sources are biased. As a public forum, Radio Universidad was a clearinghouse for debate and information about events, deaths, and disappearances. Taxi drivers, workers, activists, and even non-supporters all relied on Radio Universidad to communicate community information that affected their daily lives, such as road closures, protests, and actions by the PFP and the APPO.

During the APPO movement, radio became more than a community forum or “imagined community;” it was an essential component that bound together all Oaxacans as they struggled to find out what was happening to their community on a minute-by-minute basis. For all their listeners, APPO-controlled radio stations offered an easily accessible format for obtaining practical information (road closures, safety issues, debate) and even entertainment. Marches, barricades, and the events of June 14 provided inspiration for music promoting the Oaxacan popular movement. Musicians sang on the radio and at protests about APPO’s history and demands. The following song by Uriel Montiel, “Oaxaca por la Libertad,” (Oaxaca for Freedom) sings of the suffering of Oaxacan people and calls on them to fight back.

*Estoy harto de ver/ Como abusan de mí/ Que maltratan mi pueblo y  
lo hacen sufrir/ Estoy harto de ver/ Como pueden matar/ A los niños, maestros*

*en esta ciudad/ Estoy harto (estamos hartos)/ Y lo vamos a gritar/El pueblo unido vamos a luchar/ Oaxaca debes de levantarte/Oaxaca vamos a luchar/ Por los niños, la paz, por la humanidad, por tu libertad.*

I am fed up with what I see/ How they abuse me/ That they mistreat my town and they cause suffering/ I am fed up with what I see/ How they are able to kill/ Children, teachers in this city/ I am fed up (we are fed up)/ And I am going to scream/ The people united we are going to fight/ Oaxaca you must rise up/ Oaxaca we are going to fight/ For the children, for peace, for humanity, for your freedom. (my translation)

The APPO radio stations disseminated songs of protest and messages of hope that reinforced a social movement culture (Taylor and Whittier 1995; Gamson 1995; and Snow 2001). Music enhances the culture of a social movement by reinforcing a collective identity, framing the cause of discontent, and providing a sense of political efficacy (Rosigno and Danaher 2004, xxii). In the lyrics above, the singer switches between we and I as he enumerates grievances, anger, and solutions that center around fighting as a unified movement. Using the plural we, the songs enhance a sense of community and collective identity by “delineating identity and insider/outsider status” (2004, 131).

From June to November 2006, Radio Universidad operated primarily to offer information and entertainment related to APPO and the teachers’ movement. In an interview with Alfonso, a media representative for APPO, he stated that radio stations are an essential and necessary tool for communication between Oaxacan citizens. Whether a person supported APPO or not, they often listened to the station to remain informed about road blockades, protests, and safety issues. According to Alfonso, APPO used the radio as a free forum of debate; people could call the station and be granted access to discuss their views on the air. Most importantly, Radio Universidad gave the means for free and quick communication to a large number of people. Alfonso criticized mainstream media for broadcasting biased and anti-APPO messages. By focusing on instances of violence, Alfonso claimed that the media painted a distorted image of the movement. Only by controlling media could APPO disseminate a broader image of their message, goals, and strategies.

APPO claims that “*el carácter político de nuestra lucha popular es masiva, pacífica, y justa* (the political character of our popular movement is massive, peaceful, and just)” (APPO 2006, 1 my translation). A strategy of non-violence is difficult for people to believe when the mainstream media focuses on violence at barricades, molotov bottles, and youth painting graffiti. My interview with Alfonso occurred in March 2007, four months after the forced closure of Radio Universidad. He spoke about the chaos and confusion brought by the loss of their only means of broad, free media. Without the radio, they were forced to rely on word-of-mouth, phones, and the Internet for communication.

For APPO, radio was a powerful movement tool for mobilization,

communication, collective identity, and democratic participation. This form of alternative media contributed to the democratic, consensus oriented ideals of the movement. Atton (2002, 80) outlines the importance of alternative media to social movements because of their role in facilitating democratic participation and “the production of knowledge within new social movements.” Radio Universidad did just that. Through broadcast interviews, callers, and stories from the street, the station played a key role in knowledge production, despite the validity of the knowledge. In many ways, this was community-produced news. Stories were verified or denied by subsequent callers, thus producing debate and deliberation over the airwaves. The use of radio by APPO falls within the definition of radical alternative media, as described by Downing (2001) -- the station was operated by those in the subaltern (primarily activist youth) in opposition to those in power (specifically, the governor), and although APPO was not successful in their fight to change the power structure, they used alternative media to “build support, solidarity, and networking laterally against policies or even against the very survival of the power structure” (2001, xi).

For six months, APPO occupied the *zócalo* and information was easily gathered through informal discussions as people primarily remained and slept in the historic center. After the PFP arrived, the APPO moved a few blocks away to the plaza in front of the Santa Domingo church. In these locations, it was common to see vendors selling jewelry and newspapers, but most interesting were the DVD documentaries on sale and displayed on televisions throughout the plazas. Amateur APPO filmmakers quickly compiled DVDs with footage of recent events. Often, in front of each television, ten to thirty people would be watching the films. Each DVD was sold for approximately three US dollars. These public viewings served to remind everyone of the actions of the movement and emotionally draw in those who were not part of particular events. The APPO occupation in the *zócalo* and their use of radio fostered more than an “imagined community,” (Hartley 2000) together they developed a true possibility for debate and collective identity.

### **Conclusion**

Radio offers an inexpensive mechanism to promote democracy; community members can participate in public discourse outside the voting booth or city hall. Hartley’s (2000) conference address about “radiocracy” outlines the use of radio as a democratic medium, but the term “radiocracy” could also reflect the importance of radio’s role in forming a collective identity in social movements. I would like to see Hartley’s term, “radiocracy” used to revisit how we understand the role of radio in social movements. In what ways does radio help democratize a social movement? Are certain voices privileged on the air? Who chooses not to participate or is unable to participate in the “radiocracy” and “imagined community”? In

Oaxaca, the community supported by Radio Universidad went beyond imaginary or virtual, it was a physical experience lived everyday in meetings, marches, and actions in the street. When the movement was physically located in the zócalo, community members interacted on a daily basis. When the activists were forcibly removed from the zócalo, the radio helped sustain a collective identity through a form of “radiocracy”—offering debate, communication, and information to movement actors and non-supporting community members.

Further research should examine the specific differences between radio in Mexico and the United States, with an eye to how the digital divide impacts information distribution and collective identity with contemporary social movements. Most importantly, as researchers, we must recognize that these differences exist and examine forms of communication as they are utilized in a movement. The APPO movement is a complicated situation and its history, tactics, and failures are a necessary part of any social movement analysis. Radio basically provided a forum—a forum for debate, the spreading of ideas and news, and a location to build an “imagined community” as it enhanced a real, physical community and its collective identity.

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