THE NEGOTIATION OF INDIGENIST RADIO POLICY IN MEXICO

By

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To Esther and Carlota.
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- Problem
- Innovative Approach

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THE NEGOTIATION OF INDIGENIST RADIO POLICY IN MEXICO

By

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Major Department: Journalism and Communications

In 1979, the Mexican government installed a radio station that broadcast in the indigenous languages of the state of Guerrero. The station was followed by several others. By the mid-1980s, a radio network was operating on a regular basis for indigenous audiences throughout the country. While the stations operated after an increasingly participatory model, their funding and management depended 100% on the decisions of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI), Mexico’s governmental agency for indigenous affairs. The work of the stations remained close to the indigenous audiences, but the financial and institutional dependence on INI limited certain aspects of the stations.

The problems became obvious in 1994, when the guerrillas of the EZLN erupted in several towns of the state of Chiapas. During the uprising, the Zapatista rebels occupied a local INI radio station for a few hours. After 1994, the state’s communication policy became more restrictive. Censorship and self-censorship increased in the stations’
programming. Devices were placed on the transmitters to kill the signal in case of necessity. In some stations, fear became common among staff members. Meanwhile, the Zapatistas demanded the transfer of the stations to the indigenous communities.

The indigenous communication policy turned into an intricate game in which the radio stations had to negotiate their operation on a daily basis with actors involved. In July 2003, the Mexican government dismantled INI. The institute’s functions, including the control of indigenous-language radio stations, were transferred to a new institution, the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI).

Through in-depth interviews, ethnographic observation, document analysis, and semiotic analysis carried out in Mexico City and in one Maya-language station in Yucatan, the following question was raised: How was policy negotiated in Radio XEPET, a government-owned station that broadcasts in Maya?

The actors involved in the negotiation of policy include, with different weight: the radio station, the local indigenist offices, the federal indigenist offices, the state government, the Ministry of Defense, the Interior Ministry, the Ministry of Finance, the local government, the traditional indigenous authorities, and local non-governmental organizations. Not all actors had the same weight in the shaping of the policy. Although the negotiation took many forms, in general, the policy was shaped more by a series of everyday practices than by the official rhetoric of the government.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

During the 21st century, the mass media will play a determining role in the survival or extinction of threatened languages and cultures throughout the globe. Most of the 6,000 languages of the world—including 14 in Mexico—hold few chances of surviving in the immediate future (UNESCO, 2002; Wurm, 2001, 47). The “language wars,” as some have labeled the tension between dominant languages and minority languages, have a death toll of up to 10 languages per year (Bjeljac-Babic, 2000; UNESCO, 2000). To reverse language shift toward the dominant languages, the use of the mass media is crucial (Fishman, 1991, 2001).

Since the existence of languages, thousands of languages have been born and disappeared, often without leaving any records of their existence. The endangerment of the global linguistic diversity, nevertheless, does not correspond to natural changes. In the 19th century, the rise of the nation-state increased linguistic persecution as territorial integrity became associated with cultural homogeneity (Bjeljac-Babic, 2000). Although state nationalism was sometimes successful in eradicating the languages of the colonies, in many cases the conflict that erupted still lasts today.

Throughout the 20th century, states used the media to accomplish cultural homogeneity. As a response to the broad presence of dominant languages in the media, some indigenous populations and ethnic minorities began using the media as means to resist the assimilation. Browne (1996) summarized the history of this effort (which might
have begun as early as the 1920s with Irish-language radio, and was shared by other minorities throughout the world).

Even though the shift toward the dominant languages had reached enormous proportions, preservation of linguistic diversity gradually gained importance in international institutions, with different timelines depending on the area of the world. In Latin America, official recognition of indigenous languages did not arrive until the end of the 20th century.

In 1986, UNESCO (1999) launched a program to promote the culture of peace through the respect of multilingualism, showing that assimilation was losing popularity (at least in theory), and legitimizing the use of the media for linguistic resistance.

Following the international trends for minority cultural and linguistic protection, Mexico—the Latin American country with the highest number of minority language speakers—amended its Constitution in 1992 to recognize the multicultural character of the State. A subsequent amendment in 2001 recognized the right of indigenous peoples to an autonomous organization (Barié, 2003, 384-385). In 2003, the Mexican Congress passed a law to protect the language rights of indigenous peoples. According to Article 6, the State will adopt the necessary means to guarantee that the mass media promote the linguistic and cultural diversity of Mexico. The government will also allocate a percentage of its free broadcasting time\(^1\) to programs in indigenous languages (Congreso de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 2003).

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\(^1\) Article 15 of the 2002 Radio and Television Act allocates 30 daily minutes of free airtime of government-produced programming in Mexican TV and radio stations. The character of the programming varies: “educational, cultural, social, political, sports-related, or other matters of general national or international interest, as provided by the Secretaría de Gobernación [Department of Government]” (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2002).
Throughout Mexico’s history, however, Mexican nationalism has attempted to eliminate the indigenous languages as part of its drive to assimilate native peoples into the dominant society. The Mexican Revolution gave birth to indigenism, one of the key policies and theoretical justifications of state formation. Since its early days, in the 1920s, Mexican indigenism aimed at “Spanishizing” the indigenous populations through several mechanisms, including education and the use of the mass media.

In the 1979, Mexico’s National Indigenist Institute (INI), the branch of the government in charge of indigenous affairs, began using a radio station in the Balsas River basin for development purposes. One of the distinctive characteristics of the station was its use of the indigenous languages in its communications. Within a decade, INI started up other stations throughout Mexico, forming a radio network that broadcast in indigenous languages. In 2003, INI disappeared and most of its functions, including the management of the radio network, were transferred to a new office, the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples. As in many other Latin American countries, radio became the medium that indigenous languages first used to become public again.

Unlike in other countries, however, most indigenous language radio stations that operated in Mexico were set up and are owned by the State. The stations that were to defend indigenous rights and cultures belong to the same state that had historically attempted to eliminate these rights and cultures. This contradiction has yielded to a situation in which the staff is indigenous, but the manager of each station seldom is.

Over time, the radio stations have been the objects of praise, but also of criticism, mainly because of their unique, and often contradictory, characteristics. Because the
State owns them, indigenous activists have accused them of being counterinsurgent tools. At the same time, because the work of the radio stations is closely tied to indigenous communities, the State has not always trusted them. The stations, therefore, operate on a tense tightrope (Castells-Talens, 2000). They have become simultaneously one of the most substantial programs of Mexico’s indigenist policy and one of the most desired objects for indigenous activist groups, including the guerrillas of the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation).

These stations have been defined as being either tools of or obstacles to indigenous social, economic, and cultural development. Rather than attempting to answer whether the stations help or hinder the development of indigenous cultures, it might be helpful to think of these stations as spaces where policy is negotiated.

The everyday operation of the stations is an indication of how what was intended as an indigenist policy becomes a negotiation between several social actors and the station. By analyzing the explicit State policy toward indigenous radio and studying the case of a station (Radio XEPET, “The Voice of the Maya”), one might build an understanding of how this negotiation occurs. Among other factors, this policy analysis must include who the actors are, the discrepancies between the formulation and the implementation of the policy, and the extent of agency of each actor.

This dissertation can help shed some light on the State’s radio policy toward the Maya of Yucatan. It is also a way of analyzing the operation of Radio XEPET, today’s most prominent mass medium in the Maya language. As with the other indigenous languages of Latin America, the full development of the Maya language requires (among other measures) full access to the mass media (Ligorred Perramon, 1997, 16).
Background

An appreciation of the context of the study requires a trip through the culture and history of some of the actors involved. Throughout the 20th century, Mexicanist scholars have debated over what constitutes Mexico’s national culture. Whereas some argued the existence of a dichotomous Mexico (urban vs. rural, modern vs. traditional), other anthropologists and historians contended that the fragmentation of Mexico into many cultures called for the study of each region separately (Rubenstein, 1998, 41). The second group perceived any attempt to find cultural continuity within Mexico as participation in the process of state formation (42).

Rubenstein (1998), however, argued that from a mass media viewpoint, a national culture emanated from post-revolutionary Mexico, a national culture involving two discourses: modernity and tradition. The first one embodied progress, industrialization, and urbanity; the second, conservatism, rural life and Catholicism. Because of their antagonism, the two discourses needed each other and shared many characteristics: both had their roots in the past, they were both new, they both changed with time, and both were used by the government and by the government’s opposition.

Whether a Mexican culture exists or not, Yucatan (the site for much of the research) has a distinct culture and identity. Good Maust (2000) recalls an illustrative personal anecdote about the sense of Yucatec identity:

In 1993 I listened to a midwife in the south of Mérida helping their children with their homework. She was explaining the concept of borders. “There is a border between Yucatán and Mexico,” she explains, “just like the border between Mexico and United States. That is why we are called Yucatecos and not Mexicans.” (Good Maust, 2000, 11)

The background information section introduces Yucatan, the Maya people, the town of Peto—from where XEPET broadcasts—and some of the policies and historical
events. It also outlines some of the communication and pedagogic theories that have shaped indigenist broadcasting.

**Yucatan: State and Peninsula**

Yucatan refers to two different concepts, depending on whether one uses the term to refer to the state or the peninsula. The state of Yucatan is one administrative division of a larger geographical and cultural entity, the Yucatan Peninsula. Both terms are useful in this dissertation.

For cultural purposes, the peninsula of Yucatan is the frame of reference. The indigenous population of the peninsula speaks a common language, “Yucatec Maya.” This language, also called simply “Maya,” has some slight dialectical variations within the region, but the variations do not hinder intelligibility among speakers. For this reason, the Yucatan peninsula has a certain degree of cultural and linguistic homogeneity across a vast territory, a feature that is absent in most indigenous parts of Mexico. Additionally, the Maya language is also spoken in some areas of Belize.

When talking about cultural aspects of radio broadcasting, therefore, the entire peninsula of Yucatan is considered. Radio XEPET, for instance, always emphasizes in its broadcasts that its audience is in the state of Yucatan, but also in the other states of the peninsula: Campeche and Quintana Roo.

For political and institutional reasons, however, the dissertation refers to the state of Yucatan, which is the state from which Radio XEPET broadcasts. The political institutions that intervene in the negotiation of policy at the state level are the institutions of the state of Yucatan, not of Campeche or Quintana Roo. The Instituto Nacional Indigenista, for example, has a delegation in the state of Yucatan (a state with its own governor and institutions).
Maya Peoples

Michael Coe (1999) calls the 7.5 million Maya of the 21st century “survivors.” (230). A strong sense of community, a hold on the land, and a solid belief system have contributed to the viability of Maya cultures despite political and social hostility and historical adversity. The Maya are the largest single group of indigenous people in the Americas north of Peru (11). At the time of Conquest, the Maya extended throughout Mexico (the Yucatan Peninsula and parts of Tabasco and Chiapas), Guatemala, Belize, and western regions in El Salvador and Honduras (11).

The Maya area is generally divided into three parts: Southern (the highlands of Guatemala and Chiapas and the coast of El Salvador); Central (the Guatemalan Petén, Tabasco and the southern part of the Yucatan Peninsula); and Northern (the rest of the Yucatan Peninsula). The Southern area lacks some of the archaeological characteristics of the other two. Additionally, The Maya inhabited parts of the highlands Chiapas only at a relatively late date (31). Because the Central and Northern parts have no natural boundaries, they hold much in common. The northern area, however, is poorer and communities organized around sinkholes (31).

The three Maya areas share the same language family, yet the nearly 30 Maya languages are mutually unintelligible (34, 36). This dissertation deals with the Maya of Mexico, and more specifically with those who live in the Northern Area. If the Maya usually call their language by the specific name (e.g., Tzeltal, Tzotzil, or Mam), the Yucatec Maya speakers call their language (known as “Yucatec Maya” in scientific terms) simply “Maya.” Through this work, therefore, the term “Maya language” will refer to the language of the Maya of the Yucatan.
According to the official census, self-reported Maya speakers in the states of Campeche, Quintana Roo, and Yucatan totaled 817,000 in 2000. From 1990 to 2000, the percentage of the population that speaks Maya decreased by almost 10% (Güemez Pineda, 2003). Although the language is far from extinction, its social situation seems to worsen. Maya monolingualism is decreasing, but Spanish monolingualism is increasing, especially among the youths (Güemez Pineda, 2003).

**Maya Language and Discrimination**

Maya culture is, still today, the object of discrimination. Commercial broadcast media in Yucatan systematically ignore the language and project a stereotyped image of the Maya as ignorant and reticent to progress (Güemez Pineda, 2003). The education system also neglects the Maya language, except for some programs in primary school (Güemez Pineda, 2003).

Linguistic discrimination has been interpreted as the “cement of structural” violence against the Maya (Leirana Alcocer, 2001, 199). Besides the historical marginalization of indigenous languages in the Mexican education system (Vaughan, 1997), discrimination has often been less visible. In the case of language, the process of discrimination has led to a situation of diglossia (that is, a situation in which Maya and Spanish coexist but are used differently depending on the social context) (Leirana Alcocer, 2001, 200). Thus, a Maya author explained that “prejudices have deep roots, the impact of the Spanish conquest is not over yet; there is a sense of self-despisement toward Maya values” (202).

The media are among the bricks at the foundation of linguistic discrimination. None of the newspapers in the Yucatan use the Maya language in their stories. For a short period of time, the conservative *Diario de Yucatán* published parts of the Bible in
Maya (Ligorred Perramon, 1997, 35), but that was the extent of the presence of Maya in the newspaper, where several employees—including photojournalists, reporters, copyeditors, and section editors—are Maya speakers. The sensationalist tabloid Por Esto! limits the use of the Maya language to a daily, small section about the old Maya calendar. Occasionally, it has published literary texts in Maya, such as in 1993, when it ran contemporary Maya poems (Ligorred Perramon, 1997, 35).

In television, Canal 13 (a local station) plays “Ko'one'x kanik maaya t’aan” (Let’s learn the Maya language), a well-meaning but dry 30-minute program to teach Maya. The show airs three times a week. Canal 13 also broadcasts a few minutes in Maya in its daily newscasts. The main TV stations, however, are the affiliates of Mexico’s big media conglomerates, Televisa and TV Azteca. These stations do not include any Maya in their programming. Maya is also absent from cable and satellite TV.

In radio, the presence of the Maya language is also marginal, but larger than in the other media. The cities have almost no presence of Maya, except for a few programs in Mérida and Cancún, usually in the early morning. In any case, in 2002 the cities of the Yucatan Peninsula did not have any stations that used the Maya language with normality.

Only three stations, all of them in rural settings, give an impulse to the Maya language. All three belong to INI: Radio XEPET “The Voice of the Maya,” in Peto, Yucatán; Radio XEXPUJ, “The Voice of the Heart of the Jungle” in X’pujil, Campeche; and Radio XENKA, “The Voice of the Great People” in Felipe Carrillo Puerto, Quintana Roo.

These stations broadcast mainly in Maya, although the percentage of programming in Maya varies from station to station. The monitoring of the percentage of programming
in the native language has been proposed as a research tool for evaluation (Castells & Kent, 2002). In the case of Radio XEPET, in 2000 the station was broadcasting programs in Maya (56.6% of the total programming), Spanish (17.4%), and bilingually (26%) (Ibid.). No data are available about the percentage of Maya programming in XENKA and XEXPUJ.

To fight the discrimination against the language not only in the media, but also in society in general, a group of Maya intellectuals proposed a series of measures. During the closing of the First Conference of Culture and Identity held in Mérida in 1998 (Leirana Alcocer, 2001, 203), participants proposed the following:

- To conduct the formal education of Maya children in Maya, from primary education to higher education
- To teach Spanish as a second language to Maya children
- To have mandatory Maya courses for non-Maya speakers in Yucatan’s primary and secondary school
- To have textbooks throughout Mexico with classical indigenous passages written in the original languages, accompanied by their translations into Spanish
- To have students read contemporary indigenous texts with their translations into Spanish
- To have indigenous students read Spanish-language texts translated into the different indigenous languages.

**Caste War**

One episode that may have most strongly marked Maya identity in modern Yucatan is the Caste War. For a long time, contemporary Yucatecans attempted to ignore this part of history (Cline 1994, viii), as it is one of the most successful indigenous rebellion cases in Latin America.
Yucatan and the Mexican Revolution

The Mexican Revolution, a process that changed the face of modern Mexico, arrived to the Yucatan Peninsula in a peculiar fashion. The beginning of the Revolution had little following in Yucatan, despite a few isolated (and aborted) plots. Yucatan was relatively secluded from the rest of the Republic, which meant that the middle and lower classes were far from conditions that helped ignite the Revolution in other places. Yucatan was too far from revolutionary campaigns, arms smuggling, and rebel threats (MacLachlan & Beezley, 1999, 259).

Rival elite groups, furthermore, still remembered the Caste War and were not willing to organize and arm the Maya to overthrow the status quo, fearing another race war (260). In 1915, General Salvador Alvarado entered Mérida with 7,000 troops; froze the assets, and expropriated the goods of old rulers; dismantled their security and repressive forces; and closely monitored the main former officials (260).

Alvarado’s many reforms included the end of slavery; an education reform that emphasized literacy and citizenship; a series of middle-class-oriented, paternalistic actions (such as initiating agrarian programs and banning prostitution, hard liquor, and gaming) (260-261). The new commander also implemented one of the strongest bodies of labor law in Mexico. The laws granted workers the right to organize and strike, and guaranteed a minimum set of safety standards; regulated female and child labor; and legitimized the demands for improved hours and wages (261). The actions of agrarian reform prioritized ownership of small plots over the great henequen plantations and communal properties (262).

In Yucatan, “the revolution came from outside and from above” (262). Alvarado re-organized the political system by developing an organization of worker and peasant
organizations under the umbrella of the Yucatecan Socialist Party (262). By 1918, the revolution had arrived at Yucatan. Even though the movement was exogenous, the population participated in the negotiation of the revolution, as when it rejected Alavarado’s anticlerical projects (262).

**Peto**

Indigenism was one consequence of the Revolution that over the years arrived to the Yucatan and eventually to Peto, the home of radio XEPET. The following section offers a brief description of the town and its place in history. Peto is a town in the heart of the Yucatan Peninsula, with 21,000 people in 2000, according to the official census. Of the people over 5 years of age, 72% are estimated to speak Maya. Most inhabitants in Peto are bilingual, but 5% are monolingual in Maya, and 27% are monolingual in Spanish (INEGI 2000).

Public school textbooks claim that Peto means “moon halo” in Maya (Gutiérrez Espadas, 1983, 13). The definition, poetic as it may sound, is still being disputed by experts, but it is the most widely accepted one. If the interpretation of the name produces contradictory theories, the origin of the town is just as open to debate (Rodríguez Sabido, 1997).

Peto is not included in the church census of 1580. It is present in the 1582 census, but then excluded again from the 1586 census (48). The name of Peto would have been imposed by Spanish conquistador Juan de Aguilar in the 17th century (47). Before that, Peto’s name was Kantemoy or Kanteemo (after the name of a tree, 44), a village inhabited by a few hundred people that in the 15th century was under the jurisdiction of Maní (43). Until the end of the 17th century, archives from the period showed Peto to be no more than a neighborhood or an “incipient human settlement” (43).
The 20th century brought what became the town’s most prosperous era. With the arrival of the railroad, Peto became the link between the region and Mérida (Rodríguez Sabido, 1997, 19). Because much of the Yucatan depended on Peto for its food supplies, the town earned the nickname “the granary of the state” (119). During that period, the large amount of trade often forced the train to make two daily trips to Mérida, transforming the neighborhood around the station into a vibrant commercial area (120). The real economic boom, though, was just starting.

New opportunities arose from chicle, the sap of the sapodilla tree used as the basis for chewing gum. The new industry turned the Yucatan into a magnet for foreign businessmen and workers from the rest of the Republic (Reed 1994, 254). By the 1930s, more than 5,000 jobs had been created in the region, bringing unprecedented economic prosperity and dramatic social change to Peto (Rodríguez Sabido, 1997, 120).

Reed (1994) notes that the chicle market played a primordial role in bringing “the Maya more or less into the Mexican nation” (255). Chinese and Lebanese merchants moved into the chicle region to sell guns and ammunition; luxuries (e.g., whisky, cigarettes, and jewelry); and novelties (e.g., sewing machines, flashlights, and phonographs) (253). The cultural impact was felt. “It was the millennium. Foreigners were welcome and could travel safely through the jungle. The Wrigley Company of the United States had done what generations of Ladino (i.e., non-indigenous) soldiers had failed to achieve” (254).

The overexploitation of the sapodilla tree sap and the fall of the price of chicle in the international market marked the definite decline of the industry by the late 1940s. New forms of economic activity were sought. One of the main players in Peto was
Armando Medina Alonzo,\(^2\) described either as a “tenacious and visionary man” (Rodríguez Sabido, 1997, 120) or as a member of “a *cacique* (local boss) family that was *encompadrado*\(^3\) with ex President Miguel Alemán” and “feared locally and regionally” (Nahmad, 2000, 43). The Medina Alonzos, owners of the Santa Rosa estate, produced a number of crops that seem to have mitigated the downfall of chicle. They introduced mechanized agriculture in the area; exported crops abroad; and re-converted their land (which had been used for chicle) into fields for tobacco, bananas, corn, peanuts, sugar cane, beans, tomatoes, onions, and strawberries, among other crops (Rodríguez Sabido, 1997, 120).

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Peto was the site for intense economic and social activity. The government paved the road to Mérida, the State capital. The population also saw the installation of electric power and public telephone service, and the construction of the current municipal market. Ten kilometers of Peto streets were also paved (82).

Peto was chosen by INI to install a Centro Coordinador Indigenista (CCI)—an INI local office for regional services. While providing assistance to indigenous populations, INI’s role also brought controversy. Politically, the town became the site of a series of conflicts involving INI staff, the INI local coordinator, and several Maya communities. There were talks of a latent indigenous rebellion promoted by Communist groups, with alleged support from the Cuban consulate in Mérida. According to these rumors, Fidel

\(^2\) Nahmad (2000) spells the name “Alonso” instead of “Alonzo.” Because it has been impossible to confirm the correct spelling, I choose Luis Arturo Rodríguez Sabido’s (1997) as he is the main contemporary, local chronicler in Peto.

\(^3\) In Spanish, literally, the relationship between a man’s and the godfather of the man’s son. In this case, figuratively, close associates.
Castro was planning to export the Cuban Revolution to Mexico via the Yucatan (Nahmad, 2000, 40).

The accusations, which stemmed from inside and outside INI, pointed at key indigenist officials in Peto as the main Castroist instigators (43). While the episode exemplified internal struggles inside the Institute, it also showed the involvement of caciques in regional politics (as on many occasions, their interests conflicted with those of INI’s). Limón Rojas (1988) saw caciquismo (the exercise of power by caciques) as the “knot from which the more diverse forms of exploitation are woven” (82). One of the key elements of the local boss figure, whose origin can be either indigenous or non-indigenous, is his knowledge of the two worlds. He then uses this knowledge for his own benefit, which perpetuates inequity. For many in INI, such as for Limón Rojas, the cacique is “the biggest obstacle to reaching advancement and development” (83).

Since the 1980s, large migratory movements have developed between Peto and the United States. It is estimated that by the late 1990s, 2,500 Peto migrants resided in California (Rodríguez Sabido, 1997, 131) (that is, over 10% of the town’s population). An undetermined but large number of Peto citizens work in Cancun and in the rest of the Yucatan Peninsula’s Caribbean coast (132). Peto has become an economically depressed area in which the youngest look up to the people who leave to work elsewhere.

**Account of Mexico’s Indigenist Policy**

“All Mexicans should have a Cadillac, a cigar, and a ticket to a bullfight.” Perhaps only half-jokingly, this is the way President Miguel Alemán envisioned his project for a renewed Mexico (Krauze, 1997,100). In 1946, when he came to power as the first civilian president of the 20th century, Alemán promised to modernize Mexico at full speed. To reach modernity, he intended to increase both industrial growth and
agricultural production, mainly through large-scale projects and huge public and private investments (Krauze, 1997; MacLahan & Beezley, 1999).

Culturally, the Mexico of the 1940s was witnessing a strong, romantic interest in indigenous cultures. The ancient Aztec and Maya were idealized. The new look at the past was allowing Mexican nationalism to justify itself by rediscovering the country’s roots (Bonfil Batalla, 1996, 89). Mexican films, for instance, were going through their Golden Age with the support of the State; the films projected an idealized image of Mexico, in which the beauty of life in the provinces was often connected to the glorious Indian past.

Within the political framework of national modernization and an inclusive nationalism, on December 4, 1948, the Diario Oficial announced the birth of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) (a branch of the Federal Government) to research the problems of the indigenous populations and “improve” indigenous communities (Congreso de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 1948). The Institute was to replace the Departamento de Asuntos Indígenas, an organization created in 1936 by General Lázaro Cárdenas. Between 1940 and 1946, the Departamento de Asuntos Indígenas was attacked by numerous academicians, who demanded its elimination on the grounds that it was inefficient in implementing its objectives (Aguirre Beltrán, 1988, 11).

In its early days, INI—and the indigenist movement in general—based its work on the concept that the assimilation of native populations into the mestizo society was unavoidable and also desirable. The State could help assure that the assimilation process was successful through programs created and implemented by INI (Limón Rojas, 1988).
Spanishization

To facilitate the modernization of the rural areas, INI created the Centros Coordinadores Indigenistas (CCI), which were regional offices located in areas that were far from the INI headquarters in Mexico City, but close to the indigenous communities targeted by the indigenist project. In 1950, INI established its first CCI in the Tzeltal-Tzotzil region of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. Since the beginning, one of the CCI’s explicit goals was to “castellanizar,” that is, to Spanishize (to make Spanish the normal language of communication of the indigenous peoples) so as to transform the indigenous population into an economically functioning part of the Mexican society (Larios Tolentino, 1988).

To accomplish indigenous integration, the Institute needed the participation of culture brokers, of people who understood “both worlds: the indigenous one and the nonindigenous one” (Larios Tolentino, 1988, 182). In 1952, a team of INI recruiters went through the remote indigenous communities of Chiapas and trained 46 Tzeltals and Tzotzils who had some degree of prestige or popularity among the population. These 46 people became the first “promotores culturales bilingües,” improvised teachers in charge of Spanishizing the children of their villages (182-185).

The number of “promotores” grew as INI established new regional offices. Their mode of operation, according to an account of the San Cristóbal CCI in a 1961 INI publication, was to use a bilingual method in which the native language served as a bridge to learn Spanish:

The first teaching is conducted in the indigenous language: the child learns to read and write in Tzeltal or Tzotzil (which is the only language that he knows) so he can later engage in the study of the national language, which is Castilian. (184)
By 1964, when INI was employing 350 “promotores,” the government decided to transfer their job to the Department of Education, the “Secretaría de Educación Pública” (SEP). The program was gradually expanded to all the ethnic groups in the Republic. By the mid-1980s, a total of 30,000 indigenous teachers followed the footsteps of the Chiapas “promotores,” except that many of them opted for not using the indigenous language and conducted the entirety of the instruction in Spanish (183).

In 1978, INI and SEP intensified their network of “albergues,” boarding schools for children coming from small indigenous communities. “Albergues” were created “as a support service to the Spanishization program” (Ovalle Fernández, 1988, 68). Between 1978 and 1980, the number of albergues grew from 629 to 1,204. More than 61,000 indigenous children received scholarships to study in the albergues (68).

In the case of the indigenous villagers used as culture brokers by INI in the 1950s, it has been suggested that the very idea of modernization that they were trying to promote became a logical personal career goal. This way, becoming a bilingual teacher was just a natural step toward becoming a regular teacher in a city and leading a relatively comfortable, modern life (Bonfil Batalla, 1996, 208-209).

The number of “promotores” became so important, however, that the city could not absorb all of them. Some of them soon realized that they were not accepted in the urban society. Others gained awareness of their “Indianness” by teaching, and began questioning the assimilative work they were performing. In any case, many indigenous teachers began thinking about an alternative project of indigenous education (209). “Spanishization” was under attack.
Criticism and critics

Critics of the indigenist project often accuse the Spanishization programs of being racist ethnocide. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, for example, argued that Spanishization is nothing more than “de-Indianization” (173). Bonfil Batalla identified indigenism as a product of the philosophy of Manuel Gamio (whom he considers the first Mexican professional anthropologist), an anthropologist who believed that cultural homogenization was essential to build a Mexican homeland (170-171). According to Bonfil Batalla, INI’s assimilative goals can be traced back to Gamio’s *Forjando Patria* (1916) and to the first indigenist actions of the 1920s:

In 1922, the rural schools are created; in 1925 the Misiones Culturales start to work; in 1931, Moisés Sanz leads a team to carry out the pilot plan of indigenous education in Carapan, Michoacan; in 1936, President Cárdenas creates the Departamento Autónomo de Asuntos Indígenas; in 1940 the first Interamerican Indigenist Conference takes place in Pátzcuaro; in 1948 the Instituto Nacional Indigenista is created. These dates reveal a continuity in the educational drive of the revolutionary governments toward the indigenous population. The goal never changed: to bring education to those who do not have one. What education, with what contents? Those of national culture, of course, which is, ultimately, a derived modality of the Western civilization. (172-173)

Some intellectuals criticized INI programs and even the founding fathers of the indigenist project (Manuel Gamio and Moisés Sáenz; but also Vicente Lombardo Toledano, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, and Lázaro Cárdenas, among others). Their theories were melted by critics into a homogenous ideological block that was described as both integrative and colonialist, and as representative of an obsolete revolutionary nationalism (Aguirre Beltrán, 1988, 35). Some critics (especially those having been victims of the 1968 repression) accused the INI policies of being part of a dependent way to understand capitalism that creates extreme poverty among enslaved ethnic groups (35).
In the 1970s, INI entered what is generally perceived as one of its worse crises. As Andrés Fábregas (one of the new generation of anthropologists) wrote in 1978, the problem of INI was that society and theory had separated too much from each other:

“Theory became an official ideology” (35).

While the attacks were taking place, or maybe as a reaction to these attacks, indigenism began questioning some of its assumptions. The Federal Government was preparing a new project, which was intended to be less paternalistic toward Indians and more oriented toward indigenous participation at the decision-making level.

Toward a participatory democracy?

President Miguel de la Madrid took a participatory approach to development during his administration (1982-1988). Under the new model, policy was to be implemented in conjunction with indigenous peoples, as opposed to unto indigenous peoples. The new policy meant that it was necessary for INI to maintain indigenous cultures and traditions, halt the reduction of indigenous territories, and in general, enforce indigenous individual and collective rights (Vargas, 1995, 58). Vargas identifies the De la Madrid administration as giving birth to the newly emerging official ideology of participatory indigenism (58). That the concept of indigenous participation was a key part of INI’s discourse during the De la Madrid’s years is no coincidence.

When Miguel de la Madrid became president, Mexico was going through a rough awakening. Mexicans, who just a few years earlier had been told by the government that there was “black gold for everyone,” now had to listen as a newly elected president informed them that the Mexican economy was “a war economy” (Krauze, 1997, 401). In the words of Enrique Krauze, when De la Madrid came to power, he told Mexicans that Mexico was in the emergency room, and that the medicine he would administer to the
patient would be a painful one (401). To overcome the negative mood that was latent in the country, the new president dusted off the concept of democracy, a concept that apparently had been used as a political tool since Madero’s days (Krauze, 1997).

After over 30 years of top-down organization, INI was asked (ironically, from the top) to become a horizontal, participatory institution. During the mid-1980s, the regional indigenist centers were often operating in a semi-autonomous way. Vargas (1995) characterizes this period as one of contradictory projects, the main one being the use of a discourse of horizontal communication and participatory development while implementing a “practice that leaves little room for indigenous people's actions on the other hand” (55). The theoretical crisis was apparently reaching the local centers.

By the end of De la Madrid’s sexenio, INI’s theorists had gone through a radical transformation. One of them, Miguel Limón Rojas, wrote in 1988:

The current situation of Mexico’s ethnic groups finds its fundamental explanation in the phenomenon of Conquest and the long process of colonial domination. The integration of our “mestizaje” represents the permanence of a part of our indigenous self, but it also implies its denial. (Limón Rojas, 1988, 81)

Limón Rojas’ words were, to a large extent, challenging what had been the paradigm of indigenism. One of the historical thinkers in INI was presenting mestizaje, traditionally seen as a solution to “the indigenous problem,” as a problem not only for Indians, but also for the very essence of Mexicanness.

If the discourse of Mexican nationalism had usually been tied to cultural homogeneity, the attacks on mestizaje seemed to be contagious, even among the most established indigenist thinkers. The cultural specificity of indigenous peoples, once seen as a threat for Mexicanness, was now seen as “the most solid defense of our [Mexican] nationality” (88).
Indigenous (indigenist?) liberation

Officialist historian Enrique Krauze writes that when Carlos Salinas de Gortari assumed power under accusations of electoral fraud, Mexico was walking on something that resembled a mine field (Krauze, 1997, 419). The new president lacked credibility and, in the eyes of much of the people, legitimacy. Salinas seemed determined to catapult Mexico into the First World, however. He had studied in Harvard and quickly surrounded himself of graduates from elite U.S. universities. He gave the Treasury Department to Pedro Aspe (MIT); the Mexico City government to Manuel Camacho Solís (Princeton); the PRI leadership to Luis Donaldo Colosio (Northwestern); the national budget to Ernesto Zedillo (Yale); and the Department of Commerce to Jaime José Sierra (Yale) (419-420).

What was surprising was that Salinas did not seem to forget the forgotten ones. The 1990s started with Mexico's signing of International Labor Organization's (ILO) C169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention. By signing the agreement, Salinas committed the Mexican government to legally protect and promote the rights of the indigenous peoples. The Convention came into force in September of 1991.

A few months later, in January 1992, the Diario Oficial de la Federación published an amendment to the Article IV of the Mexican Constitution. The new first paragraph acknowledged the existence of indigenous peoples and protected the development of indigenous languages, cultures, customs, resources, and forms of social organizations (INI).

The general feeling of euphoria was tied to President Salinas de Gortari’s Programa Nacional de Solidaridad, a federal development program that provided poor areas with electricity, pavement, schooling, jobs, and even titles to property. The program was
accompanied with an unprecedented public relations campaign in the broadcast media (Krauze). Besides helping the have-nots, Salinas was also about to join the Ivy League of the Americas by having Mexico join Canada and the United States in creating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

**New relationship**

Then on January 1st, 1994, the southern state of Chiapas saw a guerilla group, consisting mainly of indigenous Maya, take over several towns and declare war on the Mexican army, “the pillar of the Mexican dictatorship” (EZLN, 1995, 34). The rebels occupied the INI station in the town of Las Margaritas, from where they broadcast revolutionary messages (“La voz,” 1999). Within the next two days, after several battles with the Army, the guerillas abandoned the towns and returned to their headquarters in the jungles, far from the army’s reach (López & Pavón, 1998).

The rebellion of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) meant an immediate and radical change of the relations between the Mexican State and the indigenous peoples. Soon after the January uprising, the EZLN had become a player in national politics, and indigenous rights were an important item in the national debate. To negotiate with the rebels, the federal government created a parliamentary commission, which since has signed several agreements with the EZLN.

The rebels implicitly included the role of INI in the negotiating agenda since the early days of the uprising. In a communiqué dated March 1, 1994, exactly two months after the guerrillas’ first public appearance, the EZLN presented a list of demands to the government. The tenth item in the document read: “the guarantee of the indigenous peoples’ right to truthful information at the local, regional, state, national, and international levels with an indigenous radio station that is independent of the
government, managed by indigenous people and operated by indigenous people,” an allusion to the INI radio network (EZLN, 1995, 181).

In February 1996, the government and the guerillas met in San Andrés, Chiapas, and signed a series of documents that came to be known as the Agreements of San Andrés. In the Agreements, the federal government committed itself to work toward creating a new legal framework for the relationship between the Mexican State and the indigenous peoples.

Document 1.3.1 of the Agreements of San Andrés states that the Constitution needs to recognize indigenous peoples, and that “the State must promote the recognition, as a constitutional guarantee, of the right to free determination” (Anzaldo Meneses, 1998, 264).

Furthermore, according to the agreements:

The federal and state governments will promote to the institutions of national debate and decision that the indigenist media become indigenous media, as demanded by indigenous communities and peoples. (293)

The federal government will recommend to the respective national institutions that the 17 INI radio stations be handed over to the indigenous communities in their respective regions, along with the transference of licenses, infrastructure and resources, whenever the indigenous communities so request it. (293)

Since the beginning of the armed conflict, INI has continued its renewed indigenist policy programs. Since 1994, for example, the Institute has installed seven new stations. Currently, 24 stations are broadcasting in 31 indigenous languages (INI, 1999).

**Theoretical Influences on Indigenist Radio in Mexico**

Additionally to the anthropological ideas debated in indigenist circles, the ideologues of INI’s radio project received the influence of communication theories. While reviewing every theory that has indirectly or directly affected INI’s radio network
might not be possible, written records and interviews with practitioners reveal that
indigenist practices might have grown out of at least three theories: Everett Roger’s
diffusion theory; Emile McAnany’s strategies of use of radio in development, and Paulo
Freire’s theories on conscientization.

In the early 1960s, Everett Rogers began developing what he called diffusion
theory, a theory based on previous work on extension, by researchers such as Herbert
Lionberger. Rogers argued that social change would arrive, in part, through “more
modern production methods and improved social organization” (Rogers & Shoemaker,
1971, 11). Based on empirical data from thousands of studies in rural areas, diffusion
theory proposed that the process of technological innovation would undergo several
stages before the majority of a given population adopted a particular innovation (Baran &
Davis, 1995, 171).

Rogers’ theory of the process of adoption of technology (which, Rogers argued,
had worked for the United States) became popular as a working theory for a great number
of development projects in developing countries. During the Cold War, the United States
Agency for International Development (USAID) used the principles of diffusion of
innovations as an influential, political strategy to win countries to its side over the USSR
(172).

Diffusionism, as Mowlana & Wilson (1990, 56) name the practice of diffusion
theory, understands social change as part of a communication process, a process in which
the media will have an effect on the receiver by transferring ideas (56). Although Rogers
(1990) has criticized the paradigm on which he developed diffusion theory, the critique
tends to focus on the shortcomings of diffusion effectiveness, rather than on the philosophy behind it.

For example, Rogers (1990) amended his ideas on development to include equality of distribution; people’s participation in planning and execution of programs; independence by using local resources; and the integration of traditional with modern systems. Critical researchers have argued that the transfer of technology implies transferring ideology as well (Mowlana & Wilson, 1990, 57) and that modernization has not necessarily translated into an improvement in living conditions (García, 1980, 165-168).

The extent to which INI adopted and adapted Rogers’ diffusion of innovation theory lies beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the ideologues of the indigenist radio had read Rogers and intended to use some of his ideas in combination with those of a diametrically opposed (though equally influential) thinker, Paulo Freire.

Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire has greatly influenced Latin American research on communication for social change. Radio popular, a format that literally translates as “people’s radio,” takes much of its theoretical basis directly from Freire’s approach to pedagogy. Some of the most influential Latin American communication scholars, such as Mario Kaplun (1985), relied on Freirean concepts to develop an alternative communication theory.

Freire (e.g., 1973) sees education as communication, as a dialogue (83). One of the central ideas of his thought—an idea most likely picked up by indigenist radio theorists—is the concept of conscientização⁴, by which the traditional receivers of education become

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⁴ The concept means “awareness” or “critical conscience.”
aware of their social circumstances and acquire a critical sense that allows social change.

The philosophy breaks away with the notion of transference of knowledge. Instead, Freire proposes to treat education—and communication—as a co-participatory process, a process in which persons create meaning together (84). A 1992 manual for indigenist stations’ journalists rediscovers and applies Freire’s ideas. The functions of participatory journalism, the manual explains, include to educate, to *concientizar* [raise awareness], and to bring about change (Ruiz, 1992, 23-24).

Finally, Emile McAnany’s (1973) categorization of five strategies of radio use in development has also been influential, especially at the conception of the INI radio project (Ramos, personal communication, 2002). McAnany saw radio as a powerful tool for development if used properly (5). By gathering as much information as he could from cases of radio stations for development throughout the world, he classified the broadcasting strategies. The classifications identified the assumptions about the effects, about the audience, about learning, and about social change. McAnany granted effectiveness to all strategies, if used under adequate circumstances. The strategies follow:

- **Open broadcasting.** Broadcasters send messages unilaterally to an unorganized audience, based on the assumptions that the people listen to the stations, and that the programming has some effect for social change. Although open broadcasting can help sensitize audiences to new ideas, its vertical structure (from educated, urban programmer to listeners in rural areas) and the lack of clear objectives limit its effectiveness.

- **Instructional radio.** Radio stations broadcast messages to an organized learning group. The strategy treats radio as a part of a formal school system, although it can function outside the classroom. Instructional radio claims that it saves costs as it assumes that one teacher plus the radio can perform the job of three or four teachers. The effectiveness of the program, on the other side, requires a system of support materials and trained instructors. Radio instruction also assumes that education will lead to improvement in the community. Some cases reviewed by
McAnany, however, showed that the most promising students of the community perceived the system as a means to prepare themselves to migrate to the city. In other stations, programming was often inadequate, teachers did not follow the method with rigor, or programmers collected little or no feedback.

- **Radio rural forums.** Based on diffusion theory, stations broadcast a weekly 15 to 30 minute program to a rural group of volunteers. Participants dialogue about the topic with the assistance of a locally chosen group leader who moderates the meeting. When possible, the discussion leads to action for social change. In practice, the radio rural forum strategy faced some challenges. Because of the non-existence of a supervisor network, communication and pleas for help depended on written reports; production took place far from rural groups; and rural radio tended to work independently from government-supported development plans.

- **Radio schools.** As discussed extensively in chapter 2, radio schools were born in Colombia, with Radio Sutatenza and what became its parent organization, Acción Culltural Popular (ACPO). Stations assume an active role in the basic education pf an audience of illiterate rural adults. Small groups meet, with the help of a facilitator, following a multimedia approach that often includes booklets, newspapers, charts, and filmstrips. Private donations, The Catholic Church, and governmental funds help finance the projects. Occasionally, radio schools finance themselves.

- **Radio and animation: the participating group.** Born out of a tradition developed by the French, especially in African communities, this method trains a group of community discussion leaders who encourage dialogue among the population. The population identifies their own development problems. The outside plays no role in finding solutions. Each community has to find the solutions that work best. Community participation and social actions are the goals. Facilitators have nondirective roles and should be closely identifies with the communities. These techniques had been applied to radio in Niger (McAnany, 1973, 5-21)

**Terminology**

The terminology I will use throughout the dissertation often differs from the quotidian usage of the concepts. In some cases, such as with the word “Indian,” social scientists do not agree on the appropriate terminology. Even defining questions, such as what constitutes Indigenousness, result in conflicting answers. It is not my intention to attempt to settle these ongoing debates. The following section rather defines how I used certain terms, and clarifies and explains why I used them.
Contested Terminology of “Indigenous”

The word “indigenous” employed to the original inhabitants of the Americas is not preferred unanimously among scholars or indigenous peoples. Some prefer the word “Indian” or “Native American.” Even if an agreement existed on the terminology, its meaning, and especially, who is included under the term, can vary greatly.

A personal field experience may help illustrate some of the intricacies of the word. When I first conducted research in the Maya area of Yucatan, I noticed that many Maya were interested in finding out more about my origins as a Catalan. I could see that people were listening carefully to the stories of my childhood, when Catalan was illegal and Catalans were forced to speak Spanish. The Maya would reply with their eerily similar experiences.

In spite of the difference between my urban, Western European origin and their rural, Native American background, it was not long before I created a solid bond with the most aware Maya. My surprise came one day, when traveling to a remote community I was introduced by one of my friends as “an indigenous guy from Spain.” At that time, it became obvious to me that the word “indigenous” had more meanings than anticipated.

The word “indigenous” poses a double problem. On the one hand, no one single definition seems to satisfy the needs of all social scientists. The question of “who is indigenous?” has produced complex debates in universities, government institutions and international organizations. The complexity of the concept of identity, among other ideological factors, makes it difficult to find a universally accepted definition. Moreover, the lack of agreement on what “indigenous peoples” means is accompanied by a lack of agreement on how to establish a meaning (Kingsbury, 1998).
On the other hand, the mere adjective “indigenous” is problematic as well. Some scholars favor the colonial word “Indian” to refer to the native peoples of the Americas. In some countries, the word “Indian” is used also by indigenous groups as a form of empowerment to emphasize unity among indigenous groups.

**Indigenous vs Indian**

The earliest recorded appearance of the word “indigenous” in the English language dates from 1646, 44 years after the first recorded instance of the noun “Indian” (Barnhart, 1988, 521). Indigenous, which in English can only be used as an adjective but in most Romance languages is also a noun, is formed from Latin: “indigena” (“indu” in + “gen-” root + “gignere” beget + English suffix “–ous”) (521).

Today, indigenous broadcasters in Mexico usually do not refer to their people as “indígena” or “indio” but rather by their specific name (e.g., Maya, Ñahñu, or Tzeltal). Whenever possible, therefore, the specific name of indigenous peoples will be used in this dissertation.

To refer to the Native populations as a whole, however, the term used is usually a translation of the word “indígena” (such as Maasewal in Maya, which means “peasant” in Nahuatl) or the Spanish word itself. For matters that affect all Native peoples of Mexico (such as when talking about “indigenous rights” or “indigenous languages”) broadcasters consistently employ the word “indígena,” never “indio”.

“Indian” still has derogatory implications in the Spanish language, at least in Mexico, where the research took place. The 2001 version of the dictionary of the Real Academia Española, the main authority of the Spanish language, shows how negative connotations have not disappeared from the word “indio” (Indian):

- “indio” (Indian)
3rd definition: indigenous [person] of America, that is the West Indies, who today is considered as a descendant of those who had no mixed blood.

5th definition: (Derogatory) uncultured (of rustic forms).

- “caer de indio” (“to fall as an Indian”): To be cheated for being ingenuous.
- “hacer el indio” (“to act as an Indian”):
  - 1st definition: To amuse oneself or to amuse others with mischief or pranks.
  - 2nd definition: To do something inappropriate and prejudicial for whomever does it. Example: I acted as an Indian when I lent him the five thousand pesetas he asked me for.
- “¿somos indios?” (“are we Indians?”): Colloquial expression used to reprove someone who wants to cheat or thinks he/she is not understood when speaking.
- “subirsele a alguien el indio” (“to have the Indian climb on oneself”): to raise one’s anger. (Real Academia Española, 2001)

Although Natividad Gutiérrez (1999) uses the word “Indian,” she writes, on the demeaning implications of the word “Indian” in Mexico:

Each of these Indian groups, like any other group, possesses a common ethnic name by which members prefer to be called in order to avoid the piercing pejorative connotation of “Indio” (Indian). (5)

In the United States, “Indian” has been appropriated by Native American nations as a self-identifier and unifying term. The most vocal group in the defense of Native rights, the American Indian Movement (AIM), uses the term in its name. The federal government also uses the term in the name of its Bureau of Indian Affairs.

In Mexico, however, the most commonly used word is “indígena.” The institutions of government, the media, non-governmental organizations, and the most visible indigenous rights movements tend to use this word. The Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional uses “indígena” as a noun and as an adjective overwhelmingly over any other synonym in its communiqués (EZLN, 1994, 1995, 1997).
The fifth edition of the publication manual of the American Psychological Association (APA) manual recommends that researchers use the terminology preferred by the participants (APA, 2001, 68). The APA online reference guide further reads:

Authors are encouraged to write in accordance with the principles of cultural relativism, that is, perceiving, understanding, and writing about individuals in their own terms. Thus, indigenous self-designations are as important as designations by others, although authors must be cognizant of the fact that members of different groups may disagree about their appropriate group designation and that these designations may change over time. (APA, 2003)

When referring to the whole of the native peoples of Mexico, I use “indigenous” over “Indian” because it is the word that best translates “indígena,” the concept normally used in Mexico.

**Who is “indigenous”?**

Among the literature on definitions of “indigenous,” one of the most suitable is Mary Lisbeth Gonzalez’s (1994). Because of the problems that the term “indigenous peoples” poses, Gonzalez favors the definition of “ethnic groups” as a starting point to explain what “indigenous” means. This definition usually includes two parts.

First, there is a general agreement that a set of common characteristics, such as language, culture, or territory, makes the group recognizable in a larger society (21). Snipp (1989) borrows a more detailed list of identifying characteristics from the Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups (Thernstrom, 1980). The list includes:

- common geographical origins; migratory status; race; language; religion; ties that transcend kinship, neighborhood, or community barriers; shared traditions, values, and symbols; literature, folklore, and music; food; settlement and employment patterns; social and political organizations; internal and external senses of distinctiveness, and systems of production (Snipp, 1989, 38-39).
Second, the group shares some sense of identity that allows self-recognition. Gonzalez (1994) summarizes that “individuals should identify themselves as members of the ethnic group, and the ethnic group may be externally identified by members of another group” (22).

Riggins (1992) also stresses ethnicity as the combination of common characteristics “symbolic of collective identity” such as ancestry, language, history, religion, or customs and an individual “choice to identify with a group” (1-2).

Within the frame of reference of ethnic groups, Gonzalez (1994) then applies the concept to the Latin American context with indigenous peoples, understood as “the descendants of pre-Columbian inhabitants” (22).

Indigenous has also been used beyond the Americas. The United Nations, for example, used the term to refer to native people throughout the world when it declared 1993 the international year of indigenous peoples. Donald Browne (1996), in his groundbreaking work on indigenous media, also includes groups from throughout the world in his interpretation of “indigenous.”

For the purposes of this dissertation, I will use “indigenous” in the restrictive, Latin American sense that Gonzalez employs to refer to the descendants of the pre-Columbian inhabitants of the Americas. This simple definition, however, does not solve the problem of deciding who is an indigenous person because it does not distinguish between blood and culture. In a biological sense, most Latin Americans are descendants of pre-Columbian Americans, but that does not make them indigenous. Other characteristics, which can differ from group to group, need apply.
Among the many factors that Snipp lists as characteristics of a particular group, I choose language as the decisive one in the definition of “indigenous.” Language has been chosen by a great number of researchers. Briceño Chel (2002) offers two interpretations of the primordial role of language for a group or nation. Either language is (1) one among other traits of cultural identity, with a specific function of transmitting defining aspects of the culture; or (2) the identifying sign of belonging to a culture, its most outstanding and important trait, its own quintessence. Gutiérrez (1999) also puts language as “the key indicator used in the ethnic classification of the indigenous peoples” (5).

The choice of language as a defining characteristic of “indigenous” is not exempt from controversy. Hernández Castillo (2001) warns of the limitations of using language as a defining factor of indigenous identity. In her study of identities in Chiapas, the Mam, who had stopped identifying themselves as Mam, have recovered the term for self-identification. One of Hernández Castillo’s informants, for instance, calls himself a Mam because of his ancestry:

[My grandfather] was pure Mam, a son of Mam, a grand-child of Mam—that is why I tell you that, even if guys laugh, that I am also Mam, even if I do not speak the language. Because, after all, what is a language? I speak English and I am not Gringo, right? (Hernández Castillo, 2001, 78)

In a border setting, the criteria of “authenticity” and “cultural purity” are especially weak (6), but purity (“[my grandfather] was pure Mam”) is the main argument for the informant’s identity as Mam. Perhaps that is why “guys laugh” at this testimony. Another conceivable explanation is that language is important in the definition of what it is socially accepted as Mam.
When defining identity based on a personal resolution ("guys can laugh all they want, I am Mam"), attempting to define what terms such as "indigenous" or "Maya" mean becomes troublesome. No universal criteria can define a national, ethnic, or cultural group. Criteria such as religion, language, bloodline, legal status (e.g., passport), or a combination of several of the above can and do define communities.

I base the definition of indigenous on language because I consider the question of "after all, what is a language?" of utmost importance. The testimony states that "guys laugh" when the speaker says he is Mam. In communities where the majority speaks an indigenous language, can a person be considered a part of the community without knowing the community’s language? Whether the person identifies or not with the community, the response of the community is crucial in the definition of itself.

When studying indigenist radio, or indigenous media in general, language is crucial, to the point that ignorance of the language excludes listeners. A listener who does not understand the language of the broadcasts is generally not considered a part of the target audience of the medium.

I define indigenous in terms of language at the group level and self-identification at the individual level. Throughout the dissertation, an indigenous person means: a person in Latin America who (1) speaks one of the languages spoken by the peoples who inhabited the Americas before European conquest and (2) who identifies him or herself, implicitly or explicitly, as belonging to one of these peoples. In this sense, my definition includes rural and urban populations, whereas, historically, urban populations had been excluded from the definition by early Mexican indigenism.
A language-based definition of “indigenous” is debatable, but it is the most appropriate when studying media. For the purposes of this study, what distinguishes indigenous broadcasting from other types of community broadcasting is some significant use of an indigenous language.

**Maya**

Indigenous peoples who live in the same country are often lumped into one single group. The specificity that is used in Europe, for example, often disappears in Latin America. Basques, Corsicans, or Scots are not described as “indigenous,” “European stateless citizens,” or anything of the like. A study of The New York Times coverage of the 1994 Chiapas uprising, however, shows that specific terms (e.g., Maya, Tojolabal) were used only when referring to indigenous people during Conquest and Colonial times. All mentions of contemporary ethnic groups used the term “Indian” instead, without further precision or specificity (Castells-Talens, 2001).

Because of the importance of precision for social research, the APA recommends using “the more specific rather than the less specific term” (APA, 2001, 68). Whenever referring to an indigenous people, the name of the people will be used rather than term indigenous. In the case of the Yucatan Peninsula, the word Maya is more specific, and therefore more appropriate, than the word indigenous to refer to the native inhabitants.

Self-identification poses an added challenge in the Yucatan, as many Maya, when speaking Spanish, do not refer to themselves as “Maya,” but as “mayeros.” Mayero is a term which would roughly and literally translate as “Mayaist,” but which is rather used as an equivalent for Maya-speaker.

Another common term in Yucatan is “mestizo.” In the rest of Mexico, mestizo is used to mean “mixed-blood.” The term usually implies Spanish speaker. Mexican
nationalism has traditionally relied on mestizaje to build a national identity which is both (or neither) indigenous and European. In most parts of Yucatan, however, the term is a synonym of Maya (Burns, 1998).

I will use the noun and adjective “Maya” because it is the term used by Radio XEPET in its broadcasts. Additionally, Maya is the term researchers generally use (see, e.g., Coe, 1999). As with the word “indigenous,” deciding who is Maya could pose a problem. In Yucatán, indigenous people use the word “Maya” as their first self-identification term (Hervik, 1999, 26; Castañeda, 1996, 14). The term also has its complexity, as often the Maya will tell outsiders that they are Maya, but not “the true Maya,” meaning that their customs have become Spanishized (Press, 1975, 72). The sentence is often accompanied by a reference to a neighboring village, where the true Maya supposedly live.

Language is the means through which the Maya explain the environment, in part because it allows expressing complex concepts in agriculture, religion, and cosmology. Because of this, the Maya culture lives through its language (Güemez Pineda, 2003). As in the past, the Maya language is also the language of communication with the divine (Gossen, 1986, 7). Throughout this study, consequently, I will equate Maya with Maya-speaker.

Explicit Policy

Explicit policy refers to the policy outlined in official documents, which may differ from the one followed in radio stations or implemented by the government. A branch of the government may hold one explicit policy and practice something different. Explicit policy will refer to the policy that the government says it is implementing.
Indigenism

“Indigenism” will refer to the movement, the theory, and the policy implemented by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI). Chapter 2 deals specifically with the driving ideas and practices of “indigenismo” and its transformation. The adjective “indigenist” refers to theories, policies, and practices related to indigenism.

The network of radio stations that broadcast in indigenous languages in Mexico will be referred to as “indigenist” radio, rather than “indigenous” radio, because at the moment, the stations are owned by and operated according to directives from INI. Indigenous staff members operate the stations, but the managers, who are always appointed directly from Mexico City, are often non-indigenous.

Indigenism and indigenist are, therefore, terms used in the Mexican sense of the word. In North America, the term has been used lately as a synonym of Native American identity. Ward Churchill (2003), in his essay “I am indigenist,” sees indigenism as the prioritizing the fight for indigenous rights over other issues and doing so by using indigenous knowledge (275). Churchill equates indigenism as a response to the social, political, economic, and philosophical status quo. In other words, indigenism is the guiding ideology of groups such as the American Indian Movement. One of the main points of Churchill’s indigenism is the right to self-determination.

Churchill writes that indigenism has much in common with Latin American indigenism (“indigenismo,” in Churchill’s own words, 277). He does so by citing Bonfil Batalla’s (1981) plead for indigenous unity in front of Eurocentric hegemony. Bonfil Batalla was a firm proponent of Ward Churchill’s type of indigenism, that is, of a liberation movement for indigenous peoples throughout the Americas. Nevertheless, he never defended indigenism as understood in Mexico, that is, as a state policy and theory.
about indigenous peoples. In other words, Churchill understands Bonfil Batalla’s ideas, but mislabels them as “indigenismo.”

Bonfil Batalla (1996) denounced Mexico’s indigenism as the tool of the Revolution to “de-Indianize” indigenous peoples since the 1920s. Until his death in 1991, Bonfil Batalla questioned the true motives behind INI and indigenism (see, e.g., 1994).

In this dissertation, indigenism is not understood as a grassroots ideology of what is sometimes known as the Fourth World (the world of indigenous, underrepresented peoples), such as Churchill suggests. It is, as mentioned earlier, the set of practices and ideas related to “indigenismo” in Mexico.

**Community Radio**

Recent and abundant research has resulted in a plethora of terms to define the media that are not commercial. Because mainstream, commercial media have become the norm, researchers have struggled to choose terms to identify non-commercial media. If in everyday language, “the media” has come to mean the commercial media, how can we name the non-commercial media? Because of this appropriation, non-commercial media have often been named (and researched) in opposition to mainstream.

In 2000, a group of researchers of non-commercial media decided to use the 2001 International Communication Association’s annual meeting to hold a pre-conference on the topic. The name of the pre-conference, “Our media, not theirs,” became the name for a network of scholars, practitioners, and activists who work to strengthen these media. The very name of the network showed the difficulty of defining non-commercial media, “our media,” without the mention of commercial media, “theirs.”

Most of the terms—and definitions—used for this type of media encounter similar problems. With different nuances in their meaning, these media have been called
alternative media, radical media, non-commercial media, community media, citizens’ media, participatory media, small media, public media, or, in some parts of Europe, local media.

The concept of "alternative media" has, therefore, been coined "in reaction to." The mere adjective "alternative" implies that there is something that is "established." Lewis and Booth (1990) identify the difference between dominant and alternative media in terms of purpose. Thus, the first type sell audiences to advertisers, while the second type produce their programming for their audiences. The term "alternative" is, at least, vague.

Several authors have attempted to classify alternative media, and more specifically, alternative radio. Bouissa, Curuchet, and Orcajo (1998) identify a great number of different types of alternative radio. Rather than attempting to redefine the various categories listed in their study (e.g. pirate, insurgent, feminist, union, peasant), it might be useful to choose one definition that fits the case of Mexico, unique in that both the concepts of grassroots and government-owned are used by the indigenist stations to describe themselves.

In other instances, the term "community radio" is preferred because it emphasizes the close ties of the medium with the community where it broadcasts. Community radio is even harder to define, however. In the Sixth World Conference of Community Radio Broadcasters, held in Dakar, Senegal, in January 1995, the term included rural, cooperative, participatory, free, alternative, popular, or educational radio stations. Their profiles were also vague: "Some are musical, some militant and some mix music and militancy," reads the report of the conference. As for financing, community stations
receive funds from donations from listeners, international development agencies, advertising, or governments (Association Mondiale des Radiodiffuseurs Communautaires, 2000).

In the strictest sense, Radio XEPET cannot be considered a community radio station. The policies come ultimately from INI's headquarters in Mexico City, not from the Maya community (Castells-Talens, 2000). The station has most of the characteristics generally accepted by members of AMARC as indispensable for community stations, such as:

- Participation of citizens in programming and broadcasting.
- Stimulation of cultural diversity over commercial homogeneity.
- Role of women as communicators instead of pretty voices or publicity gimmicks.
- Purpose of social change and community building.
- Non-profit nature.
- Voice given to the voiceless.
- Respect and concern for the environment.

**Hierarchy of INI**

Some of the INI positions can lead to misinterpretations of their relevance and their roles. Following is the list of the most relevant officials in this study, the name of their position in Spanish and the translation that I assigned them.

Table 1-1. Translation of INI’s Hierarchy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position in Spanish</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director/a General</td>
<td>General Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director/a de Investigación y Promoción Cultural</td>
<td>Research &amp; Cultural Promotion Director</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[^{5}\] The back slash followed by the letter a in Director/a refers to the common abbreviation in Spanish for Director/Directora (male and female director, respectively).
Table 1-1 Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subdirector/a de Radio</th>
<th>Director of the indigenist radio network</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delegado/a estatal</td>
<td>State delegate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinador/a del Centro Cultural Indigenist</td>
<td>Local coordinator or CCI coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director/a de radiodifusora</td>
<td>Station general manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Need for Research

Throughout the life of INI’s radio network, radio practitioners and indigenist officials alike have shown concern over of the lack of a clear indigenist policy (see, e.g., Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1996a). Several works have attempted to shed some light on this lack of clarity, but research has tended to favor the description and analysis of explicit policy rather than of the practice of the policy. The study of the negotiation of indigenist policy not only addresses the shortcomings of the study of explicit policy, but also contextualizes the policy into the larger frame of Mexican nationalism and state formation.

Problem

Because the operation of the INI radio network depends directly on the federal government, and because the important decisions stem from Mexico City, critics have questioned the sincerity of the stations’ work. While indigenist officials present the stations as liberation tools for Mexican indigenous peoples, some academics are skeptical of the INI’s true motives. Since 1994, the accusations toward indigenist radio have increased in intensity. Rebels in the EZLN accuse the stations of being tools of government propaganda.

Regardless of the extent to which the government intends to contribute to indigenous advancement or has a hidden agenda instead, INI radio stations have been arguably the most important token of support indigenous languages have received from
the power structure in the past five centuries. Research consistently shows the stations’ popularity among indigenous audiences (Cornejo, 1998; Vargas, 1995; Castells-Talens, 1994).

The complexity of a tense political environment marked by an ongoing confrontation between the government and armed rebel groups, and the unique organizational structure of the medium (vertical versus grassroots), make it difficult to determine whether the media that target indigenous audiences ought to be called “indigenous,” a word that is automatically linked to the audience, or “indigenist,” a term that emphasizes the institutional nature of the project.

To some extent, the government has publicly admitted the challenge of implementing a media policy toward indigenous peoples, especially since the 1994 uprising in Chiapas. During the First Conference on Indigenist Radio held in Mexico City in 1995, INI’s Director of Research and Cultural Promotion, Carlos Zolla, recognized that the INI needed to define a communication policy (Zolla, 1996). In general, participants expressed their concern about the insufficiencies of indigenist radio legislation and about the gap between the actual and the desired policy. Specifically, the conference proceedings emphasize the need “to reform the Federal Law on Radio and Television” and “to invigorate legislation in terms of communication and the right to information” (INI, 1996, 47; Ruiz Ortiz, 1996).

The conference proceedings conclude that “the Mexican State has not drafted a clear and concrete policy toward [indigenous] mass media and, in many cases, the implementation has been contradictory. Indigenous radio stations are immersed in this atmosphere, which could mean the endangerment of the very existence of the project”
(INI, 1996, 47). Analyzing the Mexican media policy toward indigenous peoples can be, therefore, a complex endeavor.

By tracing the history of indigenist radio, however, it is possible to describe how this policy operates. Several INI officials and radio directors suggested that the experiences lived by indigenist stations and internal debate have forged policy, rather than policy dictating the direction of the stations (Cornejo, 1998; INI, 1996; Castells-Talens, 1994).

The 1990s provided a series of key events that affected, in some way or another, the development of the indigenist radio project. The years 1990 and 1992 represented the beginning of “a new relationship,” as INI’s Radio Coordinator calls it (Ruiz Ortiz, 1996). In 1990, Mexico signed the International Labor Organization’s C169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, which legally promotes indigenous cultures and protects indigenous collective rights (INI 1995). Two years later, Mexico reformed the Constitution’s Fourth Article, thus recognizing the “pluricultural” composition of the country (Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 1998 Edition).

In a more conflictive way, 1994 and 1996 also mark the history of contemporary Mexico, especially in terms of policy toward indigenous peoples. In the first case, the January uprising in Chiapas means the beginning of an armed confrontation between the Mexican State and at least a portion of the indigenous population. In February of 1996, the federal government and the guerrillas signed the San Andrés Agreements, a series of documents with joint proposals to redefine the relationship between the State and the indigenous peoples.
Innovative Approach

Although some researchers have analyzed the complexity of indigenist radio policy, the theoretical framework that they have used has seldom differed from indigenist discourse. A notable exception has been McSherry’s (1999) analysis on State culturalism and everyday forms of public sphere formation. Her essay is based on limited research, but the approach she takes places indigenist broadcasting in the larger context of Mexican nationalism and State formation.

Researching indigenous policy in terms of negotiation can bring a more solid understanding of how at least two processes work. First, the research can shed some light on the transformations of policy between the formulation and the implementation. The negotiation between Radio XEPET and the social actors that shape the policy is complex and malleable. An understanding of this process can contribute to the improvement of the policy.

Second, the study can also contribute to the understanding of the role that indigenist media have in State formation. The policy negotiation process in indigenist radio is also a process of negotiation between the stations and the State. Indigenous populations, radio station staff, policymakers, and researchers all know the close identification between the stations and the listeners. Because the stations belong to the government, they cannot be treated as representing indigenous populations. Because of their close ties with the communities they serve, however, the negotiation involves much more than a mere administrative dispute. This research, therefore, helps advance the body of knowledge about the negotiation between indigenous cultures and the State in the media, one of the most important aspects of the survival of indigenous languages.
Although indigenous radio is drawing increasing attention from academic research (e.g., Browne, 1996; Huesca, 1995; Riggins, 1992; O’Connor, 1990a, 1990b), the implications and motives of INI’s radio network remain unexplored at the macro level. Research on specific stations and their audiences has been crucial in describing the project, but an analysis of the policy is urgently needed to understand the objectives of these stations, beyond the local practices of each individual radio station.

Discerning the government’s policy is an intricate and ambitious task. The answers involve shifting throughout the fieldwork, depending on historical events and the point of view of different social actors. There is no easy, ready solution to the problem posed by the lack of clarity of the government’s goals toward indigenous radio, but a study of the policy constitutes an innovative, useful approach.

From a theoretical perspective, policy represents a vastly unexplored area in ethnic minority media. If research has paid little attention to indigenous media in general, the political dimension of native broadcasting has been virtually ignored (Browne, 1996, 193). Most studies in the field of ethnic media have therefore borrowed existing theories from mass communication and related fields, such as sociology, psychology, or anthropology (Rada, 1978). More recently, cultural dependency theory as well as cultural and development studies have gained popularity in the study of ethnic minority media (Browne, 1996; Vargas, 1995; O’Connor, 1989).

In Latin America, however, a new theoretical challenge emerged. Because the concepts of communication used in most studies originated in the United States, communication theory did not explain satisfactorily the reality of Latin American media. The U.S. concepts were often alien to the domestic realities and inappropriate to
understanding the role of communication in Latin America (Huesca, 1995). The frustration of several Latin American scholars set the agenda for a new trend of research. Beltrán (1975) set the groundwork for mass communication research theories based on non-commercial media. Huesca & Dervin (1994) outline the evolution of this new school of thought, from its birth as a reactive movement to counter U.S. academic dominance to the development of an original theory for media practice.

In spite of its productivity for alternative communication theory, Latin American research still fails to address ethnic minority media as such. Indigenous broadcasting is systematically analyzed within the framework of comunicación popular (grassroots communication), and even though indigenous mass communication fits most aspects of the concept (Castells-Talens, 1994), the additional cultural and political complexities of the ethnic factor tend to be under-emphasized.

The proposed project will assess and add to what may be the only theoretical model that explicitly addresses both indigenous media and their political relationship with government. The model has its roots in sociology. Its author, Stephen Harold Riggins (1992), suggests that ethnic minority media need to be analyzed within the larger socioeconomic system to which they belong. The state is studied as a key player because of its policies of subsidization, regulation, and legislation. Ultimately, “the state makes possible the technological and economic transfers that permit minorities to assume the means of media production” (Riggins, 1992, 8). The case of Mexico will evaluate Riggins’ models of state strategy toward indigenous media in an exceptional way because of the predominant role of the government in indigenous media.
CHAPTER 2
INDIGENIST RADIO: NEGOTIATION OF STATE FORMATION

The vast majority of indigenous-language radio stations in Mexico have the unique characteristic of belonging to the State. I suggest to study the policy process in these stations in terms of a negotiation between the station and the different social actors involved, both governmental and non-governmental. An appropriate theoretical approach to the study of policy toward these stations must take into account the role of the actors involved in the negotiation. Because of the 20th century tradition of Mexico’s indigenism as an aspect of nation-building, theories in nationalism and state formation can help explain the negotiation of indigenist radio policy.

Despite its uniqueness and ownership by the State, however, indigenist radio in Mexico cannot be decontextualized from the larger movement of Latin American indigenous and community stations. In 1992, for example, the World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC) held its fifth annual conference in Oaxtepec, in the state of Morelos, with the participation of INI and its radio stations. The experiences of radios populares and other Latin American non-commercial stations also influenced Mexico’s indigenist radio.

Policy and State Formation

Because indigenist radio depends directly on the Mexican State, recent works in Mexican State formation and nationalism can provide an instrumental framework for the study of indigenist radio policy. Corynne McSherry (1999) offers a first approach to indigenist broadcasting in terms of negotiation with the State. Explain article.
Policy as Negotiation

When conceptualizing the Mexican State, Roseberry (1994) suggests the application of Corrigan and Sawyer’s (1985) theories of state hegemony, according to which the state holds its power not because of popular consensus, but because of its regulative and coercive power. The state, following this reasoning, defines and allows the existence of a certain type of subjects while rejecting others. Although the coercive force of the police and the military play an important role in state rule, the state also accomplishes its hegemony through its offices, routines, taxes, licenses, procedures, and papers (Roseberry, 1994, 357).

Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent (1994) identify a permanent tension between grassroots society and the processes of state formation. Although these tensions have awakened scholarly attention especially in times of far-reaching state repression or of generalized mass rebellion, the case of Mexico requires their analysis in quotidian life, an analysis of the dynamics of state engagements in everyday society (Joseph & Nugent, 1994).

Mallon (1994) adopts the concept of hegemony and interprets it as a process that applies to Mexico. If state hegemony has sometimes been used as an all-encompassing concept, Mallon suggests that politics is the arena where hegemony is negotiated in a complex interaction. Conflict and alliance, coercion and consent are the keys of this process. State institutions are the arenas in which hegemony is simultaneously contested and reproduced (Mallon, 1995).

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6 Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony as rule through a mixture of coercion and consent, is defined by Mallon as both “a set of nested, continuous processes through which power and meaning are contested, legitimated, and redefined at all levels of society” and “as an actual end point, the result of hegemonic processes” (6).
The idea of negotiated hegemony can be applied to Mexican indigenist radio policy. Indigenist radio in Mexico is unique in Latin America because indigenous staff operate the stations, but the State owns, and sometimes distrusts, them. Similarly, dissenting voices criticize, but often respect, the work of the stations, turning broadcasting in the INI radio system into a delicate walk on a tightrope (Castells-Talens, 2000). New works in state formation and cultural policy also offer a useful analytical framework for the most seemingly contradictory aspects of radio policy.

In her work on cultural politics of the Revolution and education, for instance, Mary Kay Vaughan (1997) notes how the formulation of the state’s cultural directives is the outcome of an interaction of actors at the national, regional, and local levels. The contradictions in INI’s radio system can be explained in terms of a negotiation among the actors involved. As with the education system, between the formulation and the implementation of Mexico’s cultural policy, the state directives are “disputed, discarded, reworked, and adopted in unique and varied ways” (Vaughan, 1997, 4).

Following a recent trend in the social sciences, the paradigm of “state formation” is interested in a new approach to the analysis of forms of rule and ruling. The main question to be addressed in this approach is how rule is attained, rather than who rules (Corrigan, 1994). Thus, rather than interpreting nation building as a top-down process of social engineering, the recent literature in state formation takes into account the process of negotiation of rule between the state and the popular cultures (Vaughan, 1997; Joseph & Nugent, 1994).

In the case of indigenist broadcasting, therefore, radio stations can be interpreted as a space of negotiation of policy. This space, conceptual rather than physical, will be the
unit of analysis of this dissertation. It will be necessary, first, to identify the actors involved in the negotiation. Once identified, one can determine the importance of each one (agency) in the everyday operation of the stations and interpret the policy process in the wider context of state formation. Indigenist radio offers a possibility to study the negotiation in a mass media setting.

Additionally, it allows for the exploration of the reasons behind the new forms of indigenism. As Gutiérrez (1999) suggests with the co-opting of indigenous writers and cultural producers by the State, Stephen Riggins (1992) contemplates the use of the media as a preemptive tool of the state to curtail indigenous attempts toward autonomy or independence. Participation of indigenous people both as radio practitioners and as active listeners, however, turns radio stations into arenas of negotiation.

**State-Formation Interpretations of the Revolution**

The literature on Mexican nationalism and state formation, especially as understood since the Revolution, has witnessed several lines of thought (Joseph & Nugent, 1994): the early works that came from the populist vision of the 1920s and 1930s; the revisionist approach of the late 1960s; the neo-populist (also called post-revisionist) that followed; and a new analytical framework that attempts to understand the relationship between state formation and popular cultures. The most recent interpretations of the Revolution are of great use because they allow for an understanding of the ductility of indigenist radio policy.

The first historical interpretation of the Mexican Revolution treats the revolution as a single event. It is a moment in history that started in 1910 and finished in 1917, 1920, or 1940, depending on interpretations, but in any case, the Revolution is a unified event of popular resistance. This populist view describes an anonymous, popular rebellion
against dictator Porfirio Díaz. The outcome of the Revolution eventually proved its success as agrarian reform and nationalization of foreign-owned industries were achieved under General Lázaro Cárdenas in the late 1930s. The rulers of Mexico codified this vision and used it since the 1920s (Joseph & Nugent, 1994).

During that period, official Mexican nationalism presents indigenous peoples and peasants as fueling the three great eruptions of Mexico’s modern history (independence, the Liberal Revolution, and the 1910 upheaval). Historians and intellectuals contributed to create a discourse in which the aspirations of the popular classes are exposed as indeed being fulfilled by the state (Mallon, 1995). This view, held by the official Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), received the challenges of critical scholars after the repression of the student movement in 1968, in which hundreds of students were killed by state repression (Mallon, 1995; Joseph & Nugent, 1994).

Concentrating on the relationship of the state and the Revolution instead, revisionist researchers took a critical approach. The centralized state was seen as repressing indigenous peoples and peasants (Mallon, 1995). During that period, regional studies abound in an effort to decentralize the study of post-revolutionary Mexico and understand the history “from below” (5).

Revisionists, such as Womack (1986), recognized the truly popular spark of the Revolution, but saw a manipulation of the peasant masses by aspiring bourgeois chiefs, often in authoritarian fashions. These local leaders were in turn subordinated to a centralized state, which was, mutatis mutandis, a continuation of the old régime. State co-option of social organizations or the continuing capitalist domination of the modes of
production would exemplify the defeat of 20\textsuperscript{th} century social movements and their ideas (Joseph & Nugent, 1994).

Although revisionist scholars were helpful in breaking the populist view of the Revolution, their view conferred a meager role to popular classes. If one of their successes was to decentralize scholarship in favor of regional studies, one of their shortcomings was to undermine the role of the popular aspects of the Revolution. By concentrating on the politics of the State, the people almost disappeared from their work (Joseph & Nugent, 1994).

Critics of the revisionists rejected the notion of the popular forces being a tool of an aspiring bourgeoisie. In fact, post-revisionists recuperated the popular element of the Revolution, often basing their claims on the study of revisionists’ decentralized research. As with the populists in the 1920s and 1930s, however, the grassroots social movements became almost romanticized. Joseph & Nugent point out that the articulation of social consciousness, one of the main contributions of the popular classes, has not always been recognized by post-revisionists. Instead, a new wave of researchers proposes rescuing elements from revisionists and post-revisionists to interpret the Revolution. This new approach looks at the process of state formation through the daily ways in which the state engages the popular classes and vice versa (Joseph & Nugent, 1994).

Inspired by James Scott’s work on Southeast Asia (Scott, 1994), the new analytical framework proposes to focus on the negotiation of rule between the state and the people. As Corrigan (1994) puts it, the “state-formation” approach breaks the dichotomies of analyzing the Revolution: “between Constraint and Consensus; Force and Will; Body and Mind; Society and Self” (xviii). Joseph and Nugent (1994) see in this
approach a way of “bringing the state back in without leaving the people out,” a way which combines a view from above (the state) with a view from below (popular cultures) (12).

Nationalism

Nationalism can be seen as a discourse to achieve state formation. This discourse is a set of “intellectual and political practices that makes sense of events, object, and relationships” (5). In her study on nationalism and identity, Natividad Gutiérrez (1999) remarks a basic contradiction in Mexican nationalism. If on the one hand, nationalist discourse uses the figure of the old glorious past (“dead Indian people,” in Gutiérrez’s work), on the other it is confronted by the linguistically-fragmented, socially-marginalized indigenous present (“living Indian people”).

Policy

Although official nationalism bases itself on indigenous (Aztec) myths, the state’s long-term objectives are to construct a uniform nation through its policies and institutions (Gutiérrez). Since the 1920s, the policies of “indigenismo” have often tried to assimilate and integrate indigenous populations to construct the nation. Two kinds of policies have been instrumental in the state’s purposes: (1) cultural politics such as indigenismo and its institutions (e.g., the Instituto Nacional Indigenista, or INI) and (2) a single, mandatory education system (Gutiérrez, 1999; Vaughan, 1997).

If nationalism has been the tool of the state, however, the most recent literature in Mexican nationalism and state formation has also looked at how nationalism was interpreted “from below.” The approach from below shows that the construction of hegemony is not just imposed from the state unto passive peasants and indigenous peoples. At the grassroots level there is a consciousness which Mallon calls an
“intellectual history of peasant action” (1995, 10). This approach confers to peasants an active role in state hegemony, a role that extends beyond the traditional role of rebelling in case of hunger (Ibid.).

Gutiérrez’s work on nationalism takes the official policies one step beyond. The state objectives of modernization and assimilation of indigenous peoples have been adopted by indigenous intellectuals and professionals to respond to official nationalism. Gutiérrez suggests that nationalism, therefore, cannot be seen as a unilateral, deterministic imposition from the state, but as an unpredictable process influenced by ethnicity (24).

As products of the Mexican education system, indigenous intellectuals and professionals use a discourse that resembles official nationalism but questions the objectives of the state and demands cultural representation. In spite of indigenous intellectuals critical of the state, Gutiérrez proposes that Mexican nationalism has not failed, as shown by the absence of an ethnopolitical project asking for autonomy or separation from the state (204).

Rather, the demands of the indigenous respondents tend to include the use of the state apparatus to accommodate their cultural needs. Additionally, nationalism has been effective in the acceptance of modernization. Indigenous intellectuals reject some of the content of textbooks, but do not oppose literacy, distribution of free books, bilingualism, or basic skills (205).

One of the main transformations in the re-conceptualization of Mexican nationalism has been the adoption of a “state formation” analytical framework. This approach avoids presenting the Revolution as an event of the anonymous masses against
the rulers or as a tool of local chiefs to become part of the bourgeoisie. Rather than seeing the state as the only political actor or romanticizing the power of the people, this framework proposes to analyze the relationship between the state and the various popular cultures.

The Revolution—and political rule in general—is seen as a process in which peasants and indigenous populations constantly negotiate their domination with the state institutions. This negotiation, additionally, takes place in a quotidian way, not only in times of turmoil (with dramatic mass rebellions or widespread repression). Nationalism can be understood as the discourse through which the state attempts to impose rule. In the Mexican case, nationalism was attempting to impose linguistic unity, and ultimately, assimilation and integration of the indigenous peoples based on the idea of *mestizaje*.

It was precisely this idea that was contradictory, however. In the 1970s, indigenous professionals and intellectuals, formed precisely in the public schools promoted by official nationalism, began questioning the content of Mexican nationalism. Ironically, however, the reforms that indigenous intellectuals propose would take place within the bureaucracy of the Mexican State. Indigenous intellectuals reject the nationalist goals of a mestizo race emanating from a continuous, pre-Columbian past. At the same, however, because this rejection takes place within the system, it is, in itself, a triumph of nationalism.

Because indigenist radio operates with a majority of indigenous staff, the discourse of indigenous nationalism needs a close analysis. The iconographic representation of the stations (especially in terms of their discourse of self-representation) will provide a picture of the role of nationalism in indigenist broadcasting.
New Forms of Indigenism

If *indigenism* has been one of the driving forces of Mexican nationalism, then the theoretical changes in indigenism will be instrumental in understanding the re-conceptualization of Mexican nationalism. In the case of indigenist radio, the stations may or may not have been installed in the late 1970s and early 1980s as tools of assimilation. Several radio practitioners, policy makers, and researchers, including myself, concluded that the stations started broadcasting as mere tools of Spanishization of the indigenous populations. Recent findings suggest that perhaps these assertions need to be revised.

In any case, by the 1970s and 1980s the discourse of indigenism had already been transformed and was radically different from that of the 1920s. In the 1990s, both before and after the Zapatista uprising of 1994, INI was employing an apparently non-hegemonic discourse, in which diversity and multi-culturalism were favored above homogenization and assimilation (e.g., Limón Rojas, 1988).

For Gutiérrez, the new forms of indigenism respond to the criticisms from indigenous peoples and academia. In a case of negotiation and re-formulation of policy, INI has opted for reviving indigenous languages and literatures, appropriating indigenous writers and literatures, and pressing for changes in legislation, and especially in the Constitution. The change in the indigenist approach shows a double change in Mexican nationalism (Gutiérrez, 1999).

On the one hand, the new forms of indigenism mean that the state continues to control and curtail the development of indigenous cultural self-determination, which in turn prevents the development of political self-rule. On the other hand, these changes
also mean that the progressive abandonment of the concept of mestizaje and the first notions of indigenism (Gutiérrez, 1999).

**Post-Independence Mexico**

Before their independence, Latin American countries were, at best, sketches of nations, countries which created first the state, and then the nation (Guardino, 1994; Guerra, 1994). Starting from this premise, the most recent literature in Mexican nationalism does not treat the Independence period as one of “national liberation,” but conceptualizes it as a period of revolution. The revolution becomes a modern understanding of politics in which the people (interpreted in a restrictive and ambiguous way) are the main players (Guerra, 1994, 12).

In the face of the apparent legitimacy of the European powers and the United States, Latin American states needed to build their own nations (Guerra, 1994, 12). During the Porfirian era (1877-1910), nation-building became an imperative for the Mexican elite, eager to see the country enter the international circuits of capital (Tenorio-Trillo, 1996, xiii). Because the modernization of the population was not feasible, nor was it a goal of the elite, an image of a Modern Mexico was created to increase the national and international acceptance of the country (xiii).

Since the beginning of Mexican nationalism, the national feeling was constructed by promoting an identity opposed to “the other” (Guerra, 1994, 12). In this sense, nationalism can be interpreted as the cultural component of state formation (Guardino, 1994) or the discourse to achieve state formation (Mallon, 1995). Recent literature has defined nationalism as “all the processes to build modern, collective identities associated to a project of nation state” (Annino, 1994, 553) or as “a broad vision for organizing society, a project for collective identity based on the premise of citizenship—available to
all, with individual membership beginning from the assumption of legal equality” (Mallon, 1995, 5).

In the mostly traditional society of 19th century Mexico, nationalism needed to transmit the concept of the nation through as many channels as possible: school, symbols, art, ceremonies, urbanism, architecture, and international events (Vaughan, 1997; Guerra, 1994; Tenorio-Trillo1996). In the 20th century, the growth of Mexican nationalism was parallel to the development of the audiovisual media (Lempérière, 1994).

Based on the international prominence of world fairs in late 19th century, Tenorio-Trillo (1996) examines Mexican nationalism through its international projection as a cosmopolitan and modern nation. If for the nation-empires the fair constituted a venue to display their power and their expansionist and racist ideology, poor countries such as Mexico saw it as an opportunity to join the concert of nations (8).

Vaughan (1997) recounts the ways in which nationalism operated in schools during the first half of the 20th century. Mexico’s Department of Education, the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP), implemented a nationalist policy that progressively expanded from Mexico City to the states. Between 1930 and 1942, for instance, the number of teachers increased from 6,504 to 19,134 (25).

Myths

After independence, the elite needed to fight the stronger corporations of the old regime, notably the Church and peasant communities, to build the nation. For this purpose, it became urgent for the nation to share a series of myths: a history of its birth, accounts about its heroes and enemies, and a history of the horrible past left behind (Guerra, 1994). The myth of a common past was particularly instrumental in facilitating
common goals and promising a glorious future for Mexico (Guerra, 1994; Gutiérrez, 1999).

The myth of origin and descent was transmitted by Aztec-based narrative and symbolism (Gutiérrez, 1999). Mexico possessed a remote past of high cultures that had developed within its borders (Quijada, 1994). The archaeological ruins allowed for the construction of an identity that could claim to be millenary. The archaeological artifacts were witnesses of the roots of Mexican identity, which could be traced back 30 centuries, just like the old civilizations of Europe. This retrospective form of nationalism made Mexico like no other country in Latin America, except Peru. Not even the United States could compete with such roots (582-583).

In spite of the myth of an Aztec origin, a basic contradiction is latent in Mexican nationalism, as Gutiérrez (1999) points out. Nationalist discourse has used the figure of an old, glorious, indigenous past, while fighting a marginalized, illiterate, and uncomfortable indigenous present. The early days of Creole nationalism in Mexico developed this approach to advance the independence movement. The argument contended that the indigenous fall from a superb past to a “degraded” present was caused by Spanish rule (Thurner, 1997, 11).

Independence from Spain was, therefore, morally justified by the atrocities of the Conquest and the colonial period (Thurner, 1997). After independence, however, Creole nationalism continued to blame Spaniards for the situation of indigenous peoples. At least in Peru, the 19th century saw a new, Anglo-American interpretation of indigenous poverty that blamed both the Spanish colony and a supposed “oriental despotism” on the part of the indigenous cultures for the present situation (12). In any case, Thurner notes, the
shared view was that in a sense the indigenous peoples were deprived from a role in history. That is, indigenous peoples were dehistoricized and could not, therefore, contribute to the national project (12).

The myths of creation helped ignore or displace the demands of indigenous peoples throughout Latin America (Lomnitz, 2001, xiii). Thus, besides searching for the origin of the nation in a remote, indigenous past, 19th century nationalism found symbols of creation in nature itself (in Mexico, in the romance between the volcanoes Popocatépetl and Ixtaccihuatl). The mythological and natural representations of creation helped exclude the voices of indigenous peoples (xiii).

At the same time, the myths fostered cultural identity and developed emotional solidarity at the local level, placing the local reality in the national context. Guardino (1996) noted that the symbolic identification between what is local and what is national shows itself in the Spanish language, with the coincidence of meanings of two words: pueblo and república. The word pueblo in Spanish means both people (national level) and village (local level). Similarly, the word “república” can be associated with the Mexican State or with the “República de Indios,” the way in which indigenous peoples were organized during the colony (11).

The symbolic linkages between local and national are complemented by practical elements as well, such as politics. Because national and local politics influence each other, a local election, for instance, constitutes an act of legitimization of the nation (Guardino, 1996). It is precisely in this link between local and national that 20th century nationalism fixes one of its main differences with the Porfirian State. Through cultural politics and other modes of intervention (e.g., agrarian reform, integration of unions into
the official system), the State enters sectors that were off limits to the Profirian State (Lempérière, 1994, 611). A new, intermediary “small elite” is born out of the State omnipresence: school teachers, ejido leaders, mayors, and union leaders all work as State ideology transmitters at the local level (611). Mexican “corporativism” served, thus, a double function. On one hand, it allowed for the power of the authoritarian regime to prevail. On the other hand, it also instilled a solid sense of belonging and national cohesion into Mexican society (Ibid.).

The combination of finding unity in the depth of the roots of mythology while silencing the indigenous voices has led Lomnitz (2001) to state that “in national societies, ‘depth’ and ‘silence’ are mutually implicated” (xiii). This statement unveils an implicit national secret, that is, that popular sovereignty and democracy may ultimately be unattainable. Although Lomnitz’s view is arguable, because the State bases itself in the relation between state, people, and territory and these three elements seldom, if ever, coincide, the relation is bound to be conflictive (xiv).

In the case of Mexico, the problems of creating a nationality were intensified by several factors: the vastness of the territory, the lack of economic integration, the diversity of peoples, and the value of its natural resources in the eyes of foreign powers (xiv). As Lomnitz (2001) notes, even Octavio Paz, in the 1950 classic The Labyrinth of Solitude, shares the belief that the majority of the population does not share a Mexican identity:

My thoughts are not concerned with the total population of our country, but rather with a specific group made up of those who are conscious of themselves, for one reason or another, as Mexicans. Despite general opinion to the contrary, this group is quite small. (Paz, 1961)
The situation has changed today, but nationality, the identification of citizens with a Mexican identity, is not an established fact. It is a moving goal of the state, a goal that the state tries to impose and that varies according to time and people (Lomnitz, 2001, xiv-xv).

**Archeologicalization of the Maya**

In Central Mexico, the 17th century witnesses the early stages of the idealization of an indigenous past, which sets the foundations for Mexican nationalism (Castañeda, 1996, 107). The same period, in contrast, is still a period of “first contact” and Conquest in some Maya areas of the Yucatan and the Petén. Because the fear of indigenous rebellion was felt more intensely in the Yucatan than in the central regions, the colonialists made every effort to disconnect myth and reality (108).

Aggravating the situation, some of the Maya myths were prophecies that predicted the return of Maya autonomy, which added a great deal of anxiety to Yucatec Creoles (Castañeda, 1996, 108). The myths needed to be wedged from the indigenous population for at least two reasons. On the one hand, the disassociation would legitimize colonial rule because the concept of autonomy would no longer belong to the indigenous population. On the other hand, the separation would mitigate fear, as the colonialists, and perhaps later even the Maya, would forget the myths on the return of Maya autonomy (108).

The incorporation of the indigenous past into the nationalist discourse did not appear in Yucatan until the late 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries (Castañeda, 1996, 108). It is then that the concept of “lost cities” justifies the need to be “discovered.” Unlike in Central Mexico, though, the invention of an archeological past comes from abroad, not from local or regional theorists (109). The work and
interpretations (or inventions) of archeologists and travelers from the United States and Europe became instrumental for the Yucatec intelligentsia to form a nationalistic discourse (109).

Western archeological explorations of the Americas often mirrored the model of Egypt (Pratt, 1992). At the beginning of the 20th century, Yucatan received the revealing description of “American Egypt” (Castañeda, 1996, 109). As in Egypt, archeologists reinvented history “through, and as” ruins and monuments (Pratt, 1992, 134). Additionally, the context of Western imperialism and expansionism in which these explorations were carried out allowed for a romantic interpretation of older empires (134).

Archeology contributes to the dehistorization of indigenous peoples in the Americas. The American indigenous cultures are “reassigned to a departed age” (Pratt, 1992, 134):

As with the monumentalist reinvention of Egypt in the same period, the links between the societies being archeologized and their contemporary descendants remain absolutely obscure, indeed irrecoverable. This, of course, is part of the point. The European imagination produces archeological subjects by splitting contemporary non-European peoples off from their precolonial, and even their colonial, pasts. To revive indigenous history and culture as archeology is to revive them as dead. (134)

In that aspect, the appropriation of the Maya past by Yucatec Creoles through archeology was analogous to the appropriation of the Aztec past by the Mexican elite. In fact, if Mexican nationalists adopted the discourse of a glorious indigenous past to advance their independence aspirations, Yucatec nationalists turned to the old Maya civilizations to legitimize their claims for an independent Yucatan (Castañeda, 1996, 5).

The Yucatan Peninsula is home to three indigenist radio stations, one in each state: Radio XEPET in Yucatan, Radio XEXPUJ in Campeche, and Radio XENKA in Quintana
Roo. The issues of Mexican and Maya nationalism, myths, and archaeology are far from omitted in the everyday broadcasts of these stations. As examples, the logo of Radio XEPET is a representation of a conch, a pre-Columbian Maya communication tool; some broadcasts in the past have included explanations of who the ancient Maya Gods were, and the 19th century Caste War has present in broadcasts and self-representations of the stations.

**Indigenous Radio in Latin America**

The amount of research on indigenous media has multiplied in recent years. In some occasions, case studies on indigenous media form part of more comprehensive works on community media, such as in the compilations by Girard (2001), Gumucio Dagron (2001), and Geerts & Van Oeyen (2001). In other cases, especially those concerning indigenous video, research stems from disciplines other than mass communication and are included under works of anthropology or film studies (e.g., Wortham, 2000; Frota, 1996; Ginsburg, 1992). Finally, a handful of works that have dealt with indigenous media consider ethnicity the main unifying factor (e.g., Browne, 1996, Riggins, 1992).

Although indigenous communication takes a vast range of forms, radio is still the prevailing medium. Newspapers, magazines and books have historically been too costly to produce. Additionally, some indigenous peoples have had high illiteracy rates, making print ill suited for diffusion. Other peoples did not have printed versions of their language or conferred higher authority to the spoken language than to the written word (Browne, 1996, 15).
The Origins of Indigenous Radio: Radio Popular

Indigenous radio trailed the growth of radio as a medium by a few decades. Although the medium would have been an ideal tool for communication since its early days, legal and financial restrictions did not allow for indigenous participation or ownership of radio stations until later (Browne, 1996, 15).

The development of indigenous radio is generally associated with the 1940’s experiences of peasant and miners radio stations in Latin America (Gumucio Dagron, 2001). The broadcasts of the period marked the birth of the radio popular (people’s radio), a radio format characterized by community participation and by objectives of social change.

Merino Utreras (1988) defined radio popular as “an attempt to use a mass medium in a process of grassroots, alternative, and participatory communication” (137). For a station to fit ideally in the category, it should be managed by the people, or at least, by leaders of grassroots organizations (137). Although tin miner’s stations in Bolivia and Radio schools in Guatemala closely approached this characteristic, it might be impossible to find a perfect fit for the definition of community radio.

Radios populares have in common their close ties with the communities in which they operate. Broadcasters and listeners continuously exchange their positions (Merino Utreras, 1988, 19). Community members become radio practitioners and radio workers do not lose their sense of belonging to the community.

Merino Utreras (1988) lists six characteristics of radio popular:

1. Broadcasts: Usually in AM, stations broadcast locally, provincially, or regionally; exceptionally, some stations broadcast at the national or international levels.
2. Audience: Popular sectors participate in the programming; the audience lives in rural communities, marginal urban neighborhoods, or populated areas of the countryside.

3. Programming: Programs follow non-commercial formats, such as news radio magazines, educational programs, or grassroots news. Content focuses on education, entertainment, orientation, mobilization, and *concientización* of the popular sectors.

4. Financing: in most cases, stations depend on advertising, or international and local donations, which obstructs their structure and content.

5. Staff: generally, the staff come from commercial radio stations, which means they could have “the defects” of professional announcers; in other cases, they come from the communities and have worked as grassroots journalists.

6. Property: Stations usually belong to Catholic or Protestant organizations, or educational and social institutions. (138-139)

   Because of their close identification with the audience, popular radio often broadcasts in the indigenous language (Ramiro Beltrán, 1995, 8). For the purposes of the study, therefore, many popular stations fall into the category of indigenous radio.

**Church and Unions**

The concept of radio popular, which gained popularity in the 1970s and early 1980s, refers to the encounter of two ways of understanding the role of radio among popular cultures (Geerts & Van Oeyen, 2001, 33). Some researchers write about the “two sides” of radio popular: Catholic stations and union stations (Geerts & Van Oeyen, 2001; Peppino Barale, 1999; Ramiro Beltrán, 1995).

The two sides may respond to two legendary cases rather than to an actual, all-encompassing division among radio stations. The two sides, nevertheless, deserve a close look as they embody the generally accepted as first cases of radios populares in the late 1940s: Radio Sutatenza in Colombia and the tin miners’ radio stations in Bolivia.

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7 Raising awareness among the population as a way of empowerment for social change.
Radio Sutatenza began when José Joaquin Salcedo Guarin, a Catholic priest and amateur radio operator, set up a 90-watt transmitter with educational programming for the marginal community of Sutatenza in 1947. In its first program, local peasants performed some music. The innovative format of the station gained national attention. Months later, the president of Colombia inaugurated the station officially (Gumucio Dagron, 2001, 37-38).

The station grew as a program of Acción Cultural Popular (ACPO), an association for development through distant education programs, and with the financial support of General Electric. Programming included hygiene and health care, literacy, mathematics, increasing productivity, and the recognition of personal dignity (Gumucio Dagron, 20001, 39).

As the station grew, its premises moved to Bogota. With the centralization of the offices and the installation of transmitters throughout the nation, Radio Sutatenza became the most powerful station in Colombia. The educational broadcasts reached eight million adults (Gumucio Dagron, 2001, 39-41). The left accused the station of serving as an anticommmunist tool and of broadcasting harmful messages to peasants (41).

Nevertheless, stations throughout South America (e.g., Chile, Peru, and Brazil) followed its example by using the medium for educational purposes (Gumucio Dagron, 2001, 40). The multimedia approach of Radio Sutatenza also reached rural areas in Asia and Africa (40).

Tin miners’ radio stations in Bolivia exemplify the other aspect of radio popular. The stations have drawn the attention of a great number of researchers (e.g., Huesca,
Participatory Philosophy

Kaplun (1985) also divides popular media in two types, but instead of making the distinction by ownership (religious versus unions), he notes two different philosophies of popular communication: dominant and participatory (73). Although popular communication is participatory by definition because the audience actively engages in the programs, when Kaplun refers to a participatory philosophy of the media, he attributes a meaning related to direct democratic practices. Instead of media for the people, Kaplun argues that participatory communication involves media by the people, or at least, with the people (74).

According to the participatory philosophy, therefore, alternative, popular content alone does not necessarily imply a participatory medium. As a popular media practitioner said:

[Dominant mass media] are negative not only for their content, but because of the way in which they communicate. Because they monopolize speech. Because they alone speak and they leave the people mute and without the possibility to respond or participate. If we also do the same in our popular media, if we media producers are the only ones talking, even if we say different things from what is said in [dominant] radio and television, we will be reproducing the same vertical and authoritarian style of communication. (Kaplun, 1985, 75)

Participatory communication challenges the sender-receiver opposition between communicators (staff of popular media) and the community. Popular media practitioners work, instead, as facilitators or organizers of the communication (Kaplun, 1985, 76-77). Kaplun’s conception of popular communication, like that of other scholars and activists, emanates in part from the pedagogic theories of Paulo Freire (23).
**Challenges to Radio Popular**

The 1970s and 1980s represent the peak of popular communication in Latin America (Alfaro Moreno, 2002). The end of the Cold War and the intensification of globalization eroded the ideas on which radio popular rested. Alfaro Moreno (2002) attributes the erosion of the class-struggle content of popular communication to the downfall of world socialism. As a consequence, social actors ceased perceiving themselves as antagonistic or opposed. The dominant economic model contributed to the new perception as its discourse claims social integration and avoids radical opposition (Alfaro Moreno, 2002). Similarly, Camacho (2001) notes that the new logic of capitalism set forward the idea of popular communication as a synonym of mediocrity because of its characteristics as anti-technological, anti-professional, anti-urban, and anti-mass audience.

The questioning of the work of radio popular stations caught the attention of the Asociación Latinoamericana de Escuelas Radiofónicas (Latin American Radio School Association), ALER, which in its 1994 general assembly in Quito met to analyze the situation (Ramiro Beltrán, 1995, 8). ALER identified the main accomplishments of radio popular:

- Many stations had left marginality and had an increasingly high number of listeners.
- Stations had gained the trust of local grassroots organizations and were perceived as allies.
- Information management had reached levels akin to commercial stations, but the information received an interpretation that served the interests of the people.
- Listeners had accepted the stations as integrators of regions, promoters of native languages, defenders of marginal communities, and promoters of identification and legitimization. (Ramiro Beltrán, 1995, 8)
The main challenges that the station faced were:

- Insufficient adjustment of the programming to the audience.
- Poor quality of several programs.
- Small penetration of the stations among urban and young audiences.
- Lack of clarity in the audio signal, sometimes interrupted by technical difficulties.
- Deficient training of the staff.
- Dependence on external financing sources. (Ramiro Beltrán, 1995, 8-9)

**Indigenist Radio in Mexico**

Different analyses have shown that in Mexico, radio studies amounted to less than 5% of communication research. Radio from the periphery or for indigenous audiences accounted for less than 2% of total communication research in the past 30 years (Cornejo, 2002, 82).

In the past few years, although an increasing number of theses have dealt with indigenist radio, the amount of published research on the topic is limited to a handful of scholarly articles and books. In one of these books, Inés Cornejo’s (2002) *La radio indigenista en México*, the author traces a history of indigenist radio research.

**Research**

The pioneering studies, in the 1980s, are scarce, but deal mostly with the effects of particular indigenist stations (Cornejo, 2002, 84-85). With a limited number (18) of papers and theses available on the topic, Cornejo distinguishes between three periods of research: 1985-1990 (reception), 1991-1995 (participation), and 1996-2000 (theoretical search for answers to questions from the previous period).

During the first period, studies explored the field through audience analyses. Reception studies concluded that indigenist radio stations had great potential as a source of information and knowledge. The stations shared common values with indigenous communities and the communities felt that they could participate in the programming by
sending songs, stories, or messages (Cornejo, 2002, 87-91). Research was mostly quantitative, favoring surveys as methods of inquiry (111).

The second period was descriptive-explanatory and advanced the body of research. The main interest shifted to study the mechanisms of listener participation in the stations, the priority of INI’s radio project at the time. Lucila Vargas’s (1995) work brought a new, critical look that denounced racism in the stations and in the structure of the INI radio system in general (Cornejo, 2002, 91-97). The studies started using qualitative methods, such as focus groups, in-depth interviews, and ethnography (112).

The third period was marked by the EZLN uprising of 1994. The proposals of the San Andrés agreements led to a deeper analysis and a questioning of INI’s role in the radio system. Cornejo’s classifications showed an increased sophistication of research on indigenist radio. A characteristic of what she calls the third period was the placement research in the larger social and political context of today’s Mexico, just as Vargas (1995) had done in her study of INI’s radio station in Las Margaritas, Chiapas.

Cornejo’s classifications may constitute indeed the backbone of indigenist broadcasting research in Mexico. Her book represents a much-needed historical analysis of the entire INI radio network and the body of academic research that has accompanied it. Some of the studies that she mentions, though, deserve a closer analysis, while other studies are left out her classification or had not yet been published when she wrote her book.

**Audience**

Since the birth of the radio system in the early 1980s, researchers have favored audience studies. Besides the appeal that this kind of research had for radio stations that
were starting to broadcast with little knowledge of their audience, audiences often fascinated researchers because of their active role in the life of the station.

In a way, indigenous audiences appropriated INI’s radio stations. The stations were (and are) perceived as belonging to the audience, not the State or the federal government. This feeling of appropriation did not merely respond to the instrumental needs of the audience. It was an answer to the everyday work of the stations as their broadcasts established an emotional and practical interaction with listeners (Cornejo, 2002, 27-28).

According to Cornejo (2002), two underlying theoretical approaches have guided indigenous audience research of the “other radio”: effects, and uses and gratifications (80). Lately, a third current proposes to study the audience in terms of symbolic interactionism (80-81).

Race

One of the key works in indigenist radio research is Vargas’ 1995 study. Besides the rigor of her methods, Vargas may have provided the first critical analysis of indigenist radio. Most research on indigenist radio has relied excessively on INI-related sources and has reached conclusions that made suggestions for improvement, but did not question the system. In many cases, studies were authored by INI employees or former employees, which does not necessarily mean lack of academic independence, but which certainly conditions the conceptualization of INI’s work. One of Vargas’ merits is precisely taking her research out of the framework of INI’s interests and internal debates and placing it into the larger context of racism and domination in Mexico.

In Social Uses and Radio Practices: The Use of Participatory Radio by Ethnic Minorities in Mexico, Lucila Vargas analyzed the creation and transformation of the INI
radio network from its creation in the late 1970s to its expansion in the early 1990s. While Vargas conducted her field research entirely before the armed uprising and is, therefore, outdated, her book set the groundwork for future research on Mexican indigenous radio. Additionally, her study is one of the first to analyze indigenous media by undertaking detailed observation of both station personnel and indigenous audiences (Browne, 1996, 258-259).

Social Uses and Radio Practices is organized in three parts. The first part, “The Social Value of Participatory Radio,” introduced the topic of indigenous radio and defined the methodology. Part Two “Indigenous Participation in Production Processes” traces the history of indigenous radio in Mexico. This part, a valuable work of reference, focused on the institutional aspects of native broadcasting. The evolution of the policy of INI has been connected with the evolution of indigenous radio in Mexico. The author scrutinized the origins of “indigenismo,” the driving ideology behind INI’s policy since the time of the Institute’s creation in 1948, and its evolution toward a participatory model. Vargas concluded Part Two by identifying the players in Mexican indigenous broadcasting. In Part Three, Vargas presented the findings of an audience study conducted with the Tojolabal Maya listeners of Radio XEVFS, “The Voice of the Southern Frontier,” in the town of Las Margaritas, Chiapas. In this part, the author discussed her findings with harsh criticism and presented recommendations to improve INI’s network.

The researcher’s interest centered around participation, one of the key concepts in indigenist radio. The definition of participation, however, is problematic because of its “conceptual flexibility” (258). Vargas borrowed the view of Georgette Wang and Wimal
Dissanayake (1984), which aims at the improvement of the quality of life. To deal with the imprecise concept of “improvement of the quality of life,” Vargas addressed two considerations: 1) some one makes the decisions, and 2) some one decides the criteria to make the decisions. The people affected by the development process are the ones who should answer both issues (258).

As a working concept of participation for her study of the INI network, Vargas worked with two dimensions: participation as both a means (equated to liberation) and a goal (equated to moral and psychological empowerment) (268-269). Outside agents can be catalysts for grassroots participation.

In the case of INI, the Mexican government would be in charge to promote participation. In Vargas words, though, “authentic participation in projects sponsored by the government has been seen as more difficult to achieve than participation in projects sponsored by other outside agents, such as the Catholic Church and non-government organizations from European countries” (270).

One of the main aspects of INI’s radio network is grassroots participation. Vargas’ research question attempted to determine the mechanisms that promote or prevent participation. The question contemplated the possibility that the stations (which supposedly were created to contribute to indigenous advancement) could actually prevent indigenous participation. The question, therefore, presented a critical approach.

Vargas approached indigenist radio both from the point of view of power (and, therefore, in terms of the broadcaster) and from the point of view of the indigenous peoples (audiences). In particular, the author chose five domains of analysis: institution, staff, programming, users (people who actively participate in the station), and audience.
In the last two domains, Vargas also analyzed the key aspects of audience uses of participatory radio. The analysis included types of listening (attentive versus distractive); patterns of listening (time, location...); patterns of taste and response to programming (music, news, agricultural, health...); interaction between radio listening and other aspects of family life (chores, relaxation...), and audience perception of the station (reliability as a news source, attractiveness as a medium, use as a tool to reinforce identity...).

Between 1989 and 1991, Vargas traveled to six stations of the seven that made up INI’s network at the time, and concentrated her audience study on Radio XEVFS in Chiapas. She combined participant observation and in-depth unstructured interviews, which she complemented with archival research, focus groups, short survey questionnaires, and a the administration of a short questionnaire to gather data about the staff.

Some of the difficulties that Vargas encountered while conducting field research deserve close analysis. At first, access to the network was open. The director of the project at the time was interested in research. He provided Vargas with extensive documentation and granted her official access to the stations. Almost three years later, Vargas had lost her official access privilege and found that her presence was not welcome in some of the stations.

She attributes the change to several factors:

There are a number of things that account for this: I felt that people in the managerial levels expected me to share my raw data with them, and after three years of periodically seeing some of headquarters’ employees, I became involved in their personal conflicts with one another. But most importantly, the more specific my questions or my requests for data became (e.g., the payroll), the more secretive the network’s officials became. The network is a bureaucratic organization and [...] secrecy systems are an integral part of bureaucratic life and elites are usually uncooperative with researchers. (Vargas, 1995, 29)
Vargas’ findings constituted a thorough compilation of opinions about and reactions to the station. Through the field interviews, she determined that indigenous prime time was early morning, (4:00 AM to 7:00 AM), late afternoon (3:00 PM to 7:00 PM), and Sundays. By comparing her findings to the broadcasting schedule, Vargas concluded that part time was not used at its full potential (the station stopped broadcasting at 3:00 PM on Sunday and daily broadcasts did not start until 6:00 AM, that is, two hours after respondents were up (160-164).

As far as patterns of taste are concerned, listener perception of the station was positive overall, with some criticism by several respondents who answered that they did not like the station when the music was “not pretty” (170-173), a rather vague term to improve musical selection. The station was, for the most part, seen as working closely with the indigenous peasants. When asked about the programming, an interviewee explained: “There was Radio Comitán but we didn’t listen to it because it’s a station for the ricos [the rich], but now there’s Radio Margaritas!” (176).

Uses of the radio were grouped under “diversion uses” (177). Vargas warned that diversion users had been underestimated by INI. One of the important uses that must be recognized was psychological relief. Music and other programs were interpreted as an effective way to deal with the stress and hardship of peasant life (economic exploitation, ill health, racial discrimination...) (177).

When presenting the findings about INI, Vargas concluded that the Institute had a structural bias toward keeping indigenous peoples in disadvantaged positions. Seventy percent of the staff in radio system was indigenous, and yet managerial positions were occupied by non-indigenous officials (245-248). Additionally, INI presented a romantic
view of the indigenous peoples that prevented social change. The social space within stations itself duplicated the racism of Mexican society (248).

INI’s practices, the author concluded, were hierarchic, racist, classist, and sexist, and they therefore hinder participation. Political programs are non-existent, and some segments of society are poorly- served, such as women, male children, elders, and teenagers (241-250).

In spite of the harsh criticism of the institution, Vargas argued that although INI reaffirmed inequality, it was impossible for it to have complete control of the stations because it was not monolithic, nor efficient, enough to achieve its goals. Stations could actually contribute to an awakening through their indigenous staff (241-242).

One of the main shortcomings of the work by Vargas was that interpreting the whole INI radio network as an oppressive system leaves little room for nuance and for finding less-oppressive, or even liberation aspects of indigenist radio. The stations may not be the tools of self-determination that INI claimed they were in the early 1990s, but neither are they the perpetuators of racism that Vargas claims:

Assumptions about the inferiority of indigenous people are a crucial element of the networks; ideology and constitute a formidable constraint to indigenous participation. Though it could be argued that these racist assumptions are the backbone of the network’s ideology and practices, I would like to highlight only the two most salient manifestations of racism at the INI stations: the network’s internal social space of positions and the romantic view of indigenous cultures held and promoted by stations. (245)

Vargas undermined the political force of using indigenous languages in broadcasting. If for nothing else, the stations’ uses of indigenous languages make them something far from a traditionally Mestizo, romantic view of indigenous cultures. The mere use of a minority language in a mass medium has a much more subversive and
symbolic value than Vargas gives it credit for (Castells-Talens, 2003). Overall, however, her study constituted a great leap in the research on indigenist media.

**Identity**

Identity is a crucial aspect of the stations’ work, and yet, most likely because of its elusiveness, few researchers have attempted to approach indigenist broadcasting in terms of identity. Castells-Talens & Kent (2002) used an INI radio station to develop a mechanism to evaluate identity in indigenous broadcasting. Five aspects of a stations programming and operation can serve as indicators of the identity that radio stations promote: language use, geographical focus of the news, type of programming, explicit goals, and mechanisms for community participation.

The five indicators were tested during two studies. Data for these indicators were collected in 1993, a few months before the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, and in 2000, a few weeks before the fall of the official Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI). A multi-method approach combined documentary analysis, in-depth interviews, and participant observation (Castells-Talens & Kent, 2002).

Ramos Rodríguez (2002) conducted in-depth interviews with the audience and content analyzed the messages sent for broadcast to Radio XEZV, “The Voice of the Mountain,” in Guerrero, to determine the role of radio as a means of reproducing ethnicity. Since the station broadcasts in four languages, many of the messages are translated and read in different languages, depending on the origin and the destination of the message. In XEZV, programs that include messages add up to 58% of total broadcasting time (6).

Vargas (1993) also notes the importance of messages from and to the audience as an overlooked way of communication in Latin America. For Vargas, the practice of
personally communicating via radio broadcasts is to communication what informal economy is to the economy, an important component that leading researchers has often undermined.

One of the recent changes in the way listeners send messages to the station is phone. The rise of cell phone usage in rural areas is causing a decrease in the amount of letters and visits to the station to bring messages (Ramos Rodríguez, 2002, 6). Most messages continue to be personal (67%), as opposed to institutional (24%), invitations to events (6.2%), and lost and found (2.8%) (7).

The study concludes that messages could help rise social cohesion, by reinforcing community life at the local and regional levels (Ramos Rodríguez, 2002, 8). Additionally, messages in the station play a key role in maintaining the links between the local population and indigenous migrants. Close to 20% of the messages received come from the United States, far from the area covered by XEZV. An additional 15% come from other regions in Mexico (8). Thus, a participant in the study stated that he listened to the messages because “this way I can find out about acquaintances and relatives who are away and who are sending messages home” (9).

Besides increasing social cohesion, the study found out that the translation of messages into different languages was accepted as necessary and normal (Ramos Rodríguez, 2002, 9). This normalization was tied to the lack of stigmatization of indigenous languages common to other regions (10).

The interviews allow to conclude that the message service has had and continues to have an effect in the re-affirmation and construction of ethnicity (Ramos Rodríguez, 2002, 11). Listeners perceive the station as accompanying them in their community life
in a way that reinforces ethnic belonging (11). The radio, thus, would not be attempting to rescue a lost identity, but construct and develop ethnic belonging along with its audience (12).

The findings seem to corroborate a study by Vargas (1993). Based on research conducted in Radio XEVFS, “The Voice of the Southern Border,” in Chiapas, Vargas concluded that messages broke the sense of cultural isolation of many indigenous listeners (especially women), while at the same time, preserving indigenous cultural mores. By broadcasting messages from various communities, the sense of belonging to an ethnic group (“a larger speech community, as Vargas names it) is reinforced.

The Mexican State

Lately, a few researchers (Cornejo Portugal, 2002; Ramos Higuera, 2001; Chan Concha, 2000; McSherry, 1999) have aimed their research toward policy and the role of the Mexican State in indigenist broadcasting.

Ramos Higuera’s (2001) thesis describes in great detail the tensions of Radio XEVFS in Chiapas. Operating in a tense and violent environment, XEVFS probably is the indigenist station that broadcasts under the most politically delicate conditions. The station has been taken over by the EZLN or Zapatista organizations, the region has witnessed the killings of hundreds of indigenous rebels by military fire, and political violence and pressure has caused the exile of thousands of people (96).

For these reasons, Radio XEVFS can be considered the exception, not the norm. In spite of its singularity, however, the study is at the forefront of one of the main debates in indigenist media: the transfer of government stations to indigenous communities.

In her study, Ramos Higuera found out that the most innovative policy proposals did not materialize (122). Indigenism was found a paternalistic and controlling approach
to the relationship between the government and indigenous populations. Although the indigenist radio station in Chiapas did probably not participate in the controlling efforts in a premeditated way, it indirectly became a form of control in itself by exercising self-censorship, emphasizing cultural issues, and avoiding political or social topics such as social justice, the power of caciques, or authority abuse (122).

Community participation limited itself to involvement in non-decisive aspects of the station’s life (Ramos Higuera, 2001, 123). Radio XEVFS promoted community involvement as long as it did not threaten the relation between the station and local, state, and federal authorities (123). Because of these limitations, the author concluded that XEVFS and other INI stations were community stations only in theory, but not in practice (124).

As for the transfer of the station to the communities, the researcher concludes that Radio XEVFS stayed in government’s hands because:

- the government chose to keep controlling indigenous communities,
- INI has not presented a viable proposal to transfer the stations to the communities because it defends the government’s interests
- indigenous communities have not expressed interest to gain more space in the radio stations nor have they proposed a strategy to use the medium for their own benefit
- indigenous populations live under conditions of extreme poverty that prevent them from participating in radio activities (Ramos Higuera, 2001, 125)

With a different approach, Chan Concha (2000) concluded in her study of XECTZ, “The Voice of the Sierra Norte” in Cuetzalan, Puebla, that indigenist radio policy obeyed to the six-year programs of Mexico’s administrations rather than to the needs of the people (162). As Ramos Higuera, Chan Concha wrote that the transfer of the medium would most likely not take place. According to her findings, the current legislation did
not allow for a full transfer. As an answer to the suggestive question “why can’t indigenist radio be indigenous?” (171), the researcher pointed out that:

- Indigenist policy did not aim at literally transferring the stations, but just increase community participation by transferring some functions of the stations

- The stations would have to be sold, not transferred, to an indigenous organization, but to which one?

- Community involvement in the Advisory Council (Consejo Consultivo) does not equal total indigenous representation, so its legitimacy can be questioned.

- Financing would pose a problem, as indigenous communities alone could not sustain radio stations. If community subsidies came from non-indigenous sources, stations might become non-indigenous.

- It is difficult to give the stations to an organization. In the case of two competing organizations, which one represents the indigenous community?

- In some indigenous communities, many people who care for radio have other priorities. (Chan Concha, 2000, 171-174)
CHAPTER 3
METHODS

Policy analysis is at a centrifugal stage, with more methods, more approaches, and more controversy and debate than ever before (Rist, 1994). The sophistication and diversity of methods have made the study of policy more complex than before. I propose a qualitative approach. The study of public policy requires a sound method—or combination of methods—that does not overlook the nuances and intricacies involved in understanding the official version of the policy on one side, and the practice of the policy on the other.

The negotiation involved in indigenist radio policy also requires careful attention, first to identify the agents involved in the negotiation, and second, to describe and analyze the forms of this negotiation in a framework of State formation. Only an ample, but sound methodological approach allowed the translation of an abstract concept such as the everyday negotiation of policy between institutions into the concrete results that I present in this study.

To analyze the negotiation of indigenist radio policy in Mexico, field research was conducted in Mexico City and in the Maya areas of the Yucatan Peninsula. One radio station, Radio XEPET, was selected for in-depth study, although pertinent information from other Maya stations (notably, Radio XENKA in Quintana Roo) complemented the XEPET data. A multi-method approach was applied. Interview and observation research were complemented with two non-obtrusive methods: document analysis and semiotic analysis.
Research Question

The study analyzes the negotiation of indigenist radio policy in Mexico. Although the findings include a great number of examples from indigenist radio stations throughout Mexico, the bulk of the data collected came from one station, Radio XEPET, *The Voice of the Maya*, in Peto, Yucatan. The research question focused, therefore, on this radio station: How was indigenist radio policy negotiated in Radio XEPET during the period 1982-2000?

The general research question was answered through the following nine subquestions:

1. What was the explicit indigenist radio policy?
   a. What was the policy defined by INI?
   b. What was the policy defined by Radio XEPET?

2. How did the explicit policy change?

3. How did the station present itself in relation with the myths of nationalism and state formation?

4. What were the social agents involved in the negotiation of the policy?
   a. At the local level
   b. At the state level
   c. At the federal level

5. What was the extent of agency of each actor in the given context of negotiation?

6. To what extent did the Zapatista uprising shape the negotiation of the policy?
   a. How was the uprising lived in Radio XEPET?
   b. What was the relationship between the Zapatistas and Radio XEPET?
   c. To what extent did the explicit change after 1994?
7. To what extent is there State opposition to radio in indigenous languages?

8. What were the mechanisms of policy negotiation?
   a. How did institutions exert pressure on Radio XEPET?
   b. What were some mechanisms of “defense” of Radio XEPET?

9. To what extent were there discrepancies between formulation and implementation of indigenist radio policy?

Qualitative Methods

A qualitative approach to the study of Mexican policy on indigenous peoples can offer modes of understanding that are, at best, difficult to achieve with only quantitative methods. The uniqueness and complexity of specific events in recent Mexican history, the nuances of a radio policy that has lacked an explicit direction (INI, 1996), and the dissonance between the official rhetoric of indigenism and its practice in the field provide just a few examples of key ideas that might be undervalued by quantitative methods.

Policy analysis methods

Policy analysis research allows the use a variety of methodological tools (Miller & Whicker, 1999). Although policy analysis has relied often on quantitative economic research methods, the recent past has witnessed an increase in the use of qualitative methods (Gabrielian, 1999).

In her study of indigenous radio in Mexico, Vargas (1995) argued that complex questions need the methodological flexibility that qualitative research can grant. Once the fieldwork starts, questions and levels of analysis may change (19).

Though study of indigenous radio has been approached with multiple research techniques, to answer the research questions I conducted archival analysis, direct

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8 Successful methodological techniques have included ethnographies (Huesca, 1995; Vargas, 1995; Castells-Talens, 1994), surveys (Cornejo, 1998), and focus groups (Vargas, 1995).
observation, and in-depth interviews of key actors. INI’s national headquarters and the Juan Rulfo library in Mexico City; the Centro Regional de Investigación, Información y Documentación del Pueblo Maya de Yucatán in Mérida, and Radio XEPET supplied written texts with information complementary to the data collected in an oral form.

Interviews with key players in indigenist radio policy complemented the texts by enriching their interpretation and providing additional information. I interviewed policymakers, radio station managers and staff, experts in the field, and dissenting political actors in Mexico City and the state of Yucatan. Observation of the everyday operation of the station and attendance at numerous meetings with the audience and activities related to the station assisted in answering questions for which I could not find satisfactory answers in the written and oral words. Additionally, a semiotic analysis of the iconography of Radio XEPET and Radio XENKA, two stations that use Maya in their broadcasts, provided additional results.

**The appropriateness of the methods**

While neither ethnographic techniques such as observation nor document analysis constitute an optimal strategy for observing data intended to be generalized to larger populations, these methods help explain complex relationships or phenomena (Hodson, 1999, 9). In the case of indigenist radio policy, the combination of interviews and direct observation, along with unobtrusive methods such as document analysis and semiotic analysis, constitutes the best form to approach the research question for at least two reasons.

First, the combination of methods allows gathering information from different sources. Public records contain accurate descriptions of the official version of the policy, but opinions, interpretations, and factual information about its implementation cannot be
found in written documents. Interview respondents can provide interpretation of the data not available in written records.

Interviewees can contribute information with their own thoughts, feelings, and activities (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, 8). In a way, policy analysis favors quantitative methods over qualitative methods because of the influence of economics and the political science emphasis on generalizations (Gabrielian, 1999, 196). Qualitative methods such as interviews and observation, however, have made major contributions in generating theory and insights (196).

When public administration researchers have analyzed the gap between explicit policy and implementation of policy, they have turned toward qualitative methods (Gabrielian, 1999, 196). Because Mexico’s indigenist radio policy has also shown discrepancies (Castells-Talens, 2000), the combination of qualitative methods seems appropriate.

Second, unobtrusive methods can compensate for the shortcomings of interviews and person-to-person methods (Lee, 2000, 2). The use of public documents or semiotic analysis of radio stations’ representations does not intrude with the data in the way that an interviewer or an observant does. By the same token, interviews and direct observation offer interactivity—and therefore, clarification—in a way that unobtrusive methods cannot.

Rather than treating obtrusive and non-obtrusive methods as alternatives, research benefits from combining both kinds of methods instead of using obtrusive methods alone (Lee, 2000, 6). Johnson (2002) writes that in-depth interviews hardly ever represent the

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9 Gabrielian (1999) calls this dichotomy rhetoric and practice of public administration (196).
only method in a study, but that they are combined with other methods instead, such as naturalistic or direct observation, informal interviewing, documentary records, or team field research (104).

**Why Radio XEPET?**

Radio XEPET, “The Voice of the Maya,” was one of the 24 stations of the indigenist radio system in 2002. The station was chosen for several reasons. Radio XEPET is especially appealing because it is located in Yucatan, the state with the highest proportion of indigenous population in Mexico. According to the 2000 official census, 37.3% of the population of Yucatan spoke an indigenous language, in contrast with 37.1% in Oaxaca, 24.6% in Chiapas, and 23.0% in Quintana Roo (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, 2000).

The Voice of the Maya is also one of the “historic” stations. It began its broadcasts in 1982, just three years after the installation of first station, in Guerrero. Because it is one of the oldest stations, Radio XEPET has been involved with most of the changes in indigenist policy since the early 1980s.

Does Radio XEPET, then, represent the stations in the indigenist system? Most likely in a sense it does not. Each station is unique and responds to the idiosyncrasies of the communities it serves. Most stations broadcast in several indigenous languages. XEPET employs only Maya and Spanish. Some stations operate in mountainous areas with limited power and small audiences. XEPET broadcasts in a radio haven, over a flat

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10 Studying XEPET was also convenient because, after ten years of frequent visits to the station, two of them while living in Yucatan, my understanding of the operation of Radio XEPET is more solid than that of any other station. Moreover, Maya is the only indigenous language of Mexico that I have studied extensively.
terrain with little interference and a potential audience estimated at from 500,000 to 900,000. Some stations operate in a violent environment, either because of guerrilla activity or drug trafficking. Yucatan seems to be much calmer.

Even within the Yucatan Peninsula, where INI installed two other stations, XEPET is not at the same level as Radio XENKA, in Quintana Roo, or Radio XEXPUJ, in Campeche. The two other Maya language stations are smaller and newer and broadcast with less power. The station in Campeche includes broadcasts in the Ch’ol language, to serve the large population of migrant workers from Chiapas. The station in Quintana Roo broadcasts with about half the staff as XEPET.

In terms of policy, however, stations throughout Mexico seem to have much in common. While the relations with local and state authorities may vary from station to station, important decisions in Mexico City such as those on budget cuts or editorial guidance affect all stations. As one example, the Zapatista uprising was most vividly experienced by Radio XEVFS in Las Margaritas, Chiapas, as the EZLN took over the station in 1994. The subsequent tension between the stations, the government, and the Zapatistas nonetheless affected all indigenous communities where there was an INI station.

The negotiation process of the policy will differ from station to station, but most of the federal actors involved in the negotiation at the national level are the same and several of the local actors are similar. On many occasions, the negotiation has also followed similar patterns as those followed in XEPET.

The stations, moreover, do not act as isolated entities. Regional and national meetings among the stations, calls between directors, and staff visits to other stations are
common. A change at the local level that affects XEPET, for example, will probably not go unnoticed by the other stations. Many of the findings could be, therefore, extrapolated to other stations and vice versa: On occasion, data about other stations complemented the data obtained from XEPET.

What (or who) is Radio XEPET?

Throughout the dissertation, human action verbs were applied to Radio XEPET. For instance, Radio XEPET uses documents, employs the Maya language, and relates archaeological Maya icons to the living Maya population. But isn’t a station a building, broadcasting equipment, and a group of people who make it work?

At a first glance, the anthropomorphism of Radio XEPET may seem inappropriate, or at best, coincidental. Humanizing the station responds, however, to the language used by the radio station staff, by INI, and by listeners. Radio XEPET, is more than a physical space plus a group of professional communicators.

Radio XEPET has a deeply rooted symbolic value. For many of its listeners, its workers, XEPET is also its programming, its history, and the first medium that broadcast in their language. Listeners compose and sing songs in Maya for XEPET. Government officials treated it like a hero for its public service role during Hurricane Isidore. In 1997, to celebrate XEPET’s 15th anniversary, the staff offered the station a birthday cake with a doll on top, as if it the station was a quinceañera, a teenage girl turned 15. These illustrations may help understand why Radio XEPET’s anthropomorphism is justified.

Interviews

The negotiation of policy takes place at different organizational and everyday worlds. Because the actors involved in the connections between these sites often do not know each other, however, policy research requires a multi-site approach (Shore &
Interviews in Mexico City and the Yucatan Peninsula became key in determining both the sites at which negotiation took place, and the form of the negotiation.

**Selection of Cases**

In qualitative research, sample selection differs from that of quantitative research. Qualitative research does not attempt to generalize findings to a larger population. Interviews, therefore, do not need to constitute a representative sample of the larger population, as is required of survey interviews (Warren, 2002, 87). Instead, the question of “whom to interview” may be answered by pre-establishing a research design or by seeking specific respondents (87).

In the selection strategy chosen in this study, which Warren (2002) calls theoretical sampling, the respondents serve as theoretical ideals of the analytic criteria (87). Thus, a radio station manager is selected not because she may represent other station managers, but because her testimony and the data she can contribute are key to the study.

In the case of indigenist radio policy, some respondents were selected because of their professional or ideological position (e.g., radio station manager, current and former directors of the INI radio network, the leader of the Zapatista Front in Yucatan). Others were “found” by asking the first respondents, in what is typically known as “snowball sampling” (Warren, 2002, 87). Representative Luis Pazos’ name, for instance, appeared on several occasions when asking respondents to name the fiercest enemy of INI in the Mexican Congress.

It is impossible to research the totality of actors who intervene in the negotiation of a policy. The spaces of decision of policy formulation and implementation are so elastically defined that even a theoretical list of actors would be incomplete.
Even when we know that the actions of a government agency have had an effect on the operation of the station, it is not always possible to identify the source of the decision, and, therefore, the motives. In some instances, decisions respond to a larger governmental policy. For example, the policy of austerity of the Secretaría de Hacienda has had a major impact on the operation of indigenist radio. In other instances, though, policy may respond to a coincidence, to a decision taken by someone at the spur of the moment.

Identifying the actors who shape the policy poses a first challenge when selecting interview participants. The selection should include some of these actors, but who the actors are is part of the question that the research is attempting to answer. Because of this catch-22, some of the respondents were asked about other respondents who could help in the research. As mentioned above, this procedure is commonly known as the snowball technique of sampling.

In the summer of 2002, I conducted informal and in-depth interviews in Mexico City and in the state of Yucatan. Among others, I interviewed: the current director of the indigenist radio project and other INI officials; former local and federal INI officials; radio staff and managers; the coordinator of the Zapatista movement in the state of Yucatan; representatives of Maya, human rights, and peasant organizations; the President of the Budget and Public Accounts Commission of the Mexican Congress; and one of the ideologues behind the radio project.

During my Master of Arts thesis field research in 1993, I interviewed the entirety of XEPET staff, 17 workers at the time, as well as listeners in the towns of Peto, Tahdziu, and Chaksinkin. I also interviewed Nidia Cantún Chi, XEPET’s director in the mid to
late 1980s. As a journalist for a newspaper in Yucatan between 1997 and 1999, I conducted many interviews and held informal discussions with several politicians and indigenist officials, including INI’s secretary general at the time, Carlos Tello Macías, opposition federal representative Gilberto López y Ribas, Chiapas militants of the EZLN, Yucatec members of the FZLN, and most INI officials in Yucatan.

Objectives

Interviews with policymakers, radio practitioners, indigenist media experts, and other political actors added to the multi-method approach. In particular, the interviews responded to the following objectives, some of which are described by Lindlof (1995):

- Fact finding: Collecting data that cannot be observed by other means
- Understanding different social actors’ perspectives
- Verifying, validating, and commenting on data obtained through archival analysis
- Achieving efficiency in data collecting
- Finding other social actors through snowballing technique.

The interpretation of documents has significant limitations if applied by itself to the exclusion of other methods (Lindlof, 1995), but it helps answer the research subquestions when combined with in-depth interviewing.

Cross-cultural interviews

Interviewing in a foreign culture can complicate a research project. Crossing international borders—but also other borders such as cultural, ethnic, class, or sectarian boundaries—can turn an interview into a difficult communication between an outsider and an insider (Ryen 2002, 336). Among the problems and challenges that cross-cultural researchers have encountered, Ryen (2002) mentions understanding local nuances in the languages and cultures of respondents, difficulties of using interpreters, and respondents’ misunderstanding of the researcher’s role (335).
One of the most difficult aspects in interview research, establishing rapport, becomes intensified once in a cross-cultural setting (Ryen, 2002, 337). Seemingly innocuous factors, like the researchers’ attire or their relationship with community members, can make a difference in building rapport (338).

Different codes of nonverbal communication have been seen as sources of potential problems as well (Ryen, 2002, 337). Finding a common language in which to communicate does not necessarily entail sharing the same nonverbal language. Researchers have often failed to interpret nonverbal communication or have misinterpreted what was being told to them as a result of misunderstanding nonverbal communication (341).

**The use of a tape recorder**

Most interviews were recorded on tape. While transcribing the tapes provided high accuracy on what the respondents said, recording the answers most likely affected the answers of the respondents. Gubrium & Holstein (2002) write that during the second half of the 20th century, an increasing number of people got used to expressing their opinions to a stranger through surveys (4). Interviewing has become so prevalent that Gubrium & Holstein state that “interviewing of all kinds mediates contemporary life” (9). Beyond the social sciences, interviews permeate many aspects of a person’s life. The media use interviewing for information and entertainment value, doctors interview their patients, employers interview applicants, and interviewing in itself has become an industry through survey research, public opinion and polling, and market research (10).

Although interviewing might not be as prevalent in Mexico as in the United States, most of the respondents were familiar with microphones and interviews in professional settings, whether as radio practitioners or as prominent public figures. It is likely, thus,
that using a recording device did not affect the interview process in the sense of causing surprise or anxiety.

Because of this familiarity with the interview and the tape recorder, it was also unlikely to encounter defensiveness on the part of the respondents. Defensiveness, Gubrium & Holstein (2002) noted, sometimes rises because of the perceived links between interviewing and oppression (Gubrium & Holstein, 5). Indeed, interrogation, an extreme type of interviewing, has been a technique applied to prisoners and suspects since the beginning of incarceration (4).

Most of the respondents, additionally, either knew my previous research or met me as a result of a recommendation by someone whom they trusted. Rather than from perceived linkages to oppression, defensiveness, in this case, could stem from the sensitivity of the topics involved. As Warren (2002) warns, respondents have “on and off the record associations” with the use of tape recorders.

At the beginning of the interview, I offered respondents the possibility to pause the recording at any time they wished, which I realized reinforced the association between taping and on the record. Although no respondents paused the tape, several gave me off-the-record information once the interview was over (e.g., over a meal, or while saying goodbye). The off-the-record information has been valuable in understanding some key aspects of indigenist radio policy, but does not appear explicitly in this study. In other cases, compromising or delicate information was most likely lost because of the use of a

\[11\] In my previous research experience among indigenous populations in Mexico, identifying myself as a non-Mexican researcher from a foreign university removed any initial, perceived associations of my research with the Mexican government.
tape recorder. This information, however, might not have been disclosed to a researcher without a tape recorder either.

**Documentary Research**

Written texts and other documents have the advantage of enduring physically (Hodder, 2000). Whereas the original, explicit goals of INI’s radio project might be hard to remember in a precise way after two decades, for example, documents can provide evidence of these goals. Not all the evidence comes from official records, however. Lincoln & Guba (1985) distinguish between records (texts created to attest a formal transaction) and documents (prepared for non-official reasons).

That official records can provide important data for policy analysis may seem an understatement, but in the case of indigenist radio policy, official records can provide only a restricted proportion of evidence. Indeed, telecommunications legislation has paid little or no attention to indigenous audiences (INI, 1996). Only in the recent telecommunications act of 2002 does a mention of indigenous languages finally appear (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2002).

The implicit formulation of policy, however, can be traced through a rich body of documents, such as radio programs, conference proceedings, publications, brochures, and memos, many of them available at INI’s Juan Rulfo library in Mexico City or at Radio XEPET’s own library.

The documents that I used included radio programs, brochures, internal memos, educational booklets, news archives, news articles, data collected by other researchers, and a variety of indigenista texts, including official documents, tapes, reports, books, internal magazines, and other publications.
Although INI’s archives do not fit the category of sensitive information, there are legitimate concerns about the feasibility of policy research in a country where access to public records has traditionally been limited. At the time that the bulk of the field research was being conducted, the *Diario Oficial*\(^\text{12}\) published a new transparency law, by which all official records, with a few exceptions, became public (Congreso de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 2002). The law was too recent to be taken advantage of, but the work of several communication researchers has shown that INI’s documents have been accessible for academic purposes (Castells-Talens, 1994; Cornejo, 1992; Vargas, 1995). INI’s headquarters also hosted the Juan Rulfo Library, where documents are available for public consultation.

**Semiotic Analysis**

Vargas (1995) analyzed the spatial distribution of a radio station in Chiapas to show how indigenist policy can constrain people’s participation in the medium (66-69). The originality of her idea (analyzing a floor plan) shows that policy can be analyzed through non-written, non-obtrusive methods.

Because iconography represents a key part of nationalism, iconographic self-representations of the station, such as logos, murals, and music, constitute suitable sources of data. Semiotic analysis has appeared as an alternative to traditional methods of social science research (Lee, 2000, 110). In semiotic analysis, cultural representations are interpreted as texts. As Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) have attempted to show, semiotics can also be treat images as narrative representations (43). Following their footsteps, an interpretation of the images used by the two stations that broadcast

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\(^\text{12}\) The daily official publication that prints the laws passed by Congress.
exclusively in Maya and Spanish (Radio XEPET and Radio XENKA) can contribute
greatly to understanding the representation of nationalism in indigenist radio. Radio
XEPET and Radio XENKA and other indigenist stations have used images in posters,
brochures, stickers, logos, banners, murals, and other souvenir-type objects, such as
plates or vases. The analysis will concentrate on the two most prevailing images: the
stations’ logos and the murals at the stations’ facilities.

The logo of the stations appears in almost all—if not all—the souvenir articles
distributed to listeners, visitors, and staff (T-shirts, caps, banderoles, flags, stickers).
Logos are also displayed in official documents of the station, posters advertising events,
and, in general, almost every written communication produced in the station.

The murals are the first visual display encountered when entering the stations in
XEPET and XENKA. In both stations, murals occupy nearly the totality of the wall
faced by the visitor when entering the premises.

To some extent, visual depictions of the station can be treated as artifacts, as
Scheibel (2003) did with graffiti in his study at the University of Southern California’s
film school.

**Direct Observation Research**

Ethnographic research—and direct observation in particular—as a tool of
intellectual inquiry has traditionally been linked to anthropology. Some have associated
its birth with the travels and writings of Herodotus during the third century B.C. (Clair,
2003). In any case, ethnographic research has transcended its etymological meaning and has been used for more than the description of people. Media studies, including

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13 Lindlof (1995) notes that the roots of the word ethnography explain its definition: “ethno” (from people) and graphy (from describing) (20).
research on indigenous radio in Latin America (e.g., Huesca, 1997, Vargas, 1995; O’Connor, 1990), have relied on ethnographies to describe and explain communication phenomena. Although it may not constitute the most prevalent method, ethnographic research has also entered policy analysis.

The increase of neo-liberal policies in Great Britain in the 1980s and 1990s helped awake the interest of a group of anthropologists in policy studies (Shore & Wright, 1997, xiii). The interest in policy for anthropological study lead to alternative readings and interpretations of policies:

… as cultural texts, as classificatory devices with various meanings, as narratives that serve to justify or condemn the present, or as rhetorical devices and discursive formations that function to empower some people and silence others. (Shore & Wright, 1997, 7)

Because the negotiation of the policy involves both the empowered and the silenced (and because policy does not completely silence nor completely empower the actors involved), observation can help notice revealing details and nuances that might otherwise go unnoticed.

One of the challenges when conducting research in bureaucratic environments, such as when studying indigenist policy in Mexico, emanates from the reticence of officials to give information. Spencer (1982) found five reasons why bureaucratic elites attempt to control information:

- Bureaucratic rigidity and threat to personal careers
- The potential threat to the power of that institution
- The threat to the subjective reality of that institution
- The problem of the legitimacy of the researcher
The problem of exchange (the researcher is expected to contribute something back in exchange for the data, or at least not to damage the organization) (Spencer, 1982, 24-25)

While direct observation by itself cannot circumvent these problems, Spencer (1982) suggests that participant techniques can help researchers obtain data from bureaucratic institutions under environments of hostility of mutual suspicion (28). Unlike other researchers of indigenist radio (e.g., Ramos Higuera 2001; Chan Concha, 2000), I never participated professionally in any Mexican governmental institution, which is where most research of bureaucratic elites comes from (Spencer, 1982, 29). At the same time, non-participant observation can help in several aspects:

- **See through the eyes of:** the data can be understood from the perspective of the actors involved in the research
- **Description:** details help understand a particular context and be a door to other layers of reality
- **Contextualism:** a basic aspect of qualitative research, events need to be located in a larger social and historical context
- **Process:** social life is interpreted as a series of interconnected events
- **Flexible research designs:** open and unstructured designs provide appropriate frames of reference that allow to deal with unexpected issues and a larger identification with the participants in the research.

- **Avoiding early use of theories and concepts:** early attempts to impose theories and concepts may not fit the perspective of the respondents. (Silverman, 2001, 46)

Reliability and Validity?

Validity and reliability are concepts that some qualitative researchers have tended to undermine for being positivistic and reserved for quantitative approaches to social science. The credibility of qualitative research, however, has been addressed extensively. Although reliability and validity understood in the strictest quantitative sense can
arguably contribute little to qualitative research, the search for dependable and credible
data raises some questions that need to be addressed.

Unlike in quantitative research, however, the underlying theme of generalizability
becomes irrelevant in qualitative methods (Silverman, 2001; Lindlof, 1995; Lincoln &
Guba, 1985). Because the purpose is not to generalize the results to a larger population,
the selection of cases in qualitative research differs greatly from the statistical sampling
procedures that guide quantitative social research, as noted in earlier sections. The issues
raised by validity and reliability, therefore, do not require the same responses as in
quantitative research.

**Reliability**

Reliability has usually been discarded on the grounds that constant change in
cultures, perceptions, and forms of action make the concept of little use (Lindlof, 1995,
238). The ultimate application of this premise, however, poses a problem for research.
Assuming that the social world is always in flux could lead to question the usefulness of
research as a whole:

Such a position would rule out any systematic research since it implies that we
cannot assume any stable properties in the social world. However, if we concede
the possible existence of such properties, why shouldn’t other work replicate these
properties? (Silverman, 2001, 226)

Silverman (2001) presents several means to reach reliability in qualitative research.
Thus, the use of texts provides data that are already available without the interference of
the researcher (229). In that respect, a bill passed by the Mexican Congress constitutes
reliable data because any other researcher can access the same document. Silverman
notes that, cases of forgery aside, written texts provide more reliable data than
observation (229). In opposition to Silverman’s defense of reliability for qualitative
research, one might point out that although the sources can be replicated through the same steps of data collection, the analysis and interpretation of the data does change from one researcher to another. Reliability remains, at best, an elusive concept in this type of research.

In interview research, Silverman (2001) suggests to increase the reliability of the data by tape-recording all face-to-face interviews, transcribing the tapes carefully according to the needs of the analysis, and presenting long quotes in the final report, including the questions that triggered particular answers (230).

Even researchers who discard the term reliability for its positivist implications look for ways to secure the credibility of their research by showing that they reach right interpretations\(^\text{14}\) (Lindlof, 1995, 238). In the study of negotiation of indigenist radio policy in Mexico, the technique of triangulation was applied.

Triangulation entails comparing more than one form of evidence about the object of study (Lindlof, 1995, 239). Lincoln & Guba (1985) note how triangulation, which is usually used to increase validity, can also be used for \textit{dependability} (the term they favor over reliability) (317). In particular, Lincoln and Guba differentiate between four models of triangulation: triangulation of sources, methods, investigators, and theories (305). Qualitative research concentrates on the first two, source and method triangulation.

As mentioned earlier, the choice of sources for data on indigenist radio policy included official and non-official data. Information collected over a 10-year period has yielded to variety in sources. Data were collected inside and outside the INI structure; in

\(^{14}\) Lindlof makes a distinction between achieving right interpretations, and “the right” interpretation. The first is what researchers should aspire. The second is impossible because many right interpretations are possible.
Mexico City and in indigenous areas of Mexico; through academics, policy-makers, radio practitioners, dissenting activists, and listeners. Method triangulation was also employed by using document analysis, in-depth interviews, direct observation, and semiotic analysis.

**Validity**

As with reliability, some researchers prefer to avoid the term validity terms because of the traditional association of validity with quantitative methods. Interpreted in the quantitative tradition of social science, the concept of validity contributes little to research because qualitative studies do not assume a set reality:

Applying the concept of validity to qualitative inquiry is also difficult. A world consisting of multiple, constructed realities does not permit the researcher to identify any single representation as the criteria for accurate measurement. And because the inquirer operates reflexively as a participant, it is doubtful whether the usual way of conceiving internal validity has much relevance. (Lindlof, 1995, 238).

As with reliability, however, the concern about the strength of the data is also addressed in qualitative inquiry. Lincoln and Guba (1985) substituted the concepts of internal validity and external validity by credibility and transferability, respectively (300). In my research, I followed the activities that Lincoln & Guba suggested to increase the probability of credible findings (301):

- Prolonged engagement, which includes knowing the context, dealing with the distortions of “being a stranger in a strange land,” building trust by showing that the research doesn’t have a hidden agenda or that research will not be used against respondents.
- Persistent observation, which helps identify the characteristics that are more relevant and provides depth.
- Triangulation, as explained in the preceding section.

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15 Babbie (1992), for instance, defines validity as “the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration” [italics in the original] (132).
Because my research took place over a 10 year period (1993-2003), the issues addressed by prolonged engagement were dealt with. I got to know the context throughout my graduate education by taking courses and seminars on Mexico and the Maya. I also took courses in the Maya language at the University of North Carolina and the Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán. As a reporter for the main newspaper in the State of Yucatan and a correspondent for a Barcelona-based newspaper, I covered local issues related to the Maya (including Radio XEPET activities) and national current events for two years. Additionally, I kept the communication channels open with indigenist radio staff and researchers for 10 years,

I also feel I gained the trust of the people involved in my research, which proved crucial to gain access to new sources when conducting the bulk of the in-depth interviews in 2002. My research was known to many of the participants, as it has been cited in several works on indigenist media in Mexico. Radio XEPET also has a copy of my thesis in its library. Although I have been critical of the INI radio system in the past, I did not encounter problems such as the ones that Vargas (1995) mentions. During her research, Vargas lost access to the INI radio system:

More than anything else, I think that the reason for my losing access to the network were my comments regarding [the labor conditions at the stations’] unfairness, which I was unable to keep from making. (Vargas, 1995, 70)

Transferability, Lincoln & Guba (1995) note, can be a more difficult question to deal with. Whether hypotheses work in another context or at a different time is an empirical issue. It is not, therefore, the researcher’s task to provide an index of transferability. Instead, the researcher’s responsibility rests in providing the data that makes transferability judgements possible by other researchers (316).
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Indigenist officials and radio practitioners have often shown their uneasiness with the lack of direction of the explicit communication policy. After the First Conference on Indigenist Radio held in Mexico City in 1995, the proceedings were published; it was claimed there that “the Mexican State has not drafted a clear and concrete policy toward [indigenous] mass media and, in many cases, the implementation has been contradictory. Indigenous radio stations are immersed in this atmosphere, which could mean endangering the very existence of the project” (INI, 1996, 47).

During the conference, INI’s Director of Research and Cultural Promotion, Carlos Zolla Luque, mentioned the need for an explicit communication policy (Zolla Luque, 1996, 48), a policy that did not follow the acquisition of technology, but preceded it:

Do we have a communication policy for indigenist radio? Sometimes this policy is not explicit in documents—let us hope it is explicit in our work. But after discussing extensively about indigenous communication, we have not always been able to define if the equipment we need is an Instamatic [camera] or a high-frequency piece of equipment. (Zolla Luque, 1996, 51)

Other conference participants expressed their concern about a void in the federal legislation of radio and television, which did not even mention indigenist or indigenous-language media. Thus, at several points, the conference proceedings emphasized that reforming the Federal Law on Radio and Television had become a priority (INI, 1996, 47; Ruiz Ortiz, 1996, 54).

The lack of legislation on indigenist radio, however, represents by no means an absence of policy. The lack of a concrete and clear policy constitutes in itself a policy.
By not legislating indigenous communication, the Mexican State may seem to send a message that the operation of indigenist radio does not deserve its attention. The data about governmental actions toward indigenist radio since the early 1980s, however, suggest that the network does matter to the State.

Despite the explicit policy shortcomings, official records allow the tracing of important changes in the practice of indigenist radio, from the birth of the project in the late 1970s to the end of the PRI era, in 2000. This “official story” has been approached by several researchers (Chan Concha, 2000; Ramos Higuera, 2001; Cornejo, 2002), sometimes critically (see, especially Vargas, 1995). The official policy, regardless how vague and contradictory, can and has been traced with relative accuracy.

To answer a research question about how indigenist radio policy has been negotiated in Mexico, however, official versions of the policy (explicit policy) prove insufficient, precisely because of their ambiguity. Data collected from other sources (implicit policy) may constitute a better indicator on everyday forms of State indigenous communication policy in general, and indigenist radio policy in particular.

The space between explicit and implicit policies constitutes the site for negotiation. If, as stated in the 1996 conference proceedings, the lack of clarity in explicit policy has led to a contradictory implementation of media policy toward indigenous peoples, it has also allowed a larger degree of flexibility in interpreting the policy. Vague policy formulation could allow for a larger field of negotiation in the implementation of the policy. The operation of the stations represents a space of negotiation between radio practitioners and the social actors involved in shaping the policy, from State agencies to local NGOs.
Explicit policy

Official documents provide a first approach to the study of the indigenist radio project by showing the explicit, manifest policy of the State toward indigenous peoples. As stated above, the formulation of an explicit policy has not always implied its coherent implementation. As the documents show, even the formulation of the policy has not been characterized by static guidelines. The explicit goals of the indigenist radio project have undergone constant change. The policies that INI finds insufficient have been documented and the changes have been organized in various manners. Although the extant findings tend to be rigorous and accurate, the following analysis of the explicit policy sheds new light on the changes in policy and addresses some common misunderstandings that were fed by premature interpretations of the policy.

Periods of Indigenist Policy

Several researchers have divided the period of development of INI’s radio network since 1979 into segments. It can be argued that the divisions may be irrelevant to some extent because changes in explicit indigenist radio policy have taken place gradually and because policy is implemented every day, not in periods. Additionally, most divisions followed explicit policy indicators, such as changes in presidencies or inauguration of new stations, while overlooking other indicators that could have been considered hinge events, such as the closing of a station in 1990, the celebrations and protests of 1992, or the declaration of 1993 as the international year of indigenous peoples.

Most researchers will admit that divisions are arbitrary, however, but contend that they serve a purpose by helping to contextualize indigenist radio policy and to organize the data.
Cornejo (1990) divided the history of indigenist broadcasting into five phases, later expanded by Vargas (1995):

- **Origin (1950s-1979):** Since the late 1950s, INI had already collaborated with some governmental institutions, such as the Secretary of Education, to Spanishize the population through radio.

- **Constitution (1980-1982):** A period of growth that saw the installation of five more radio stations. The network started to adopt the ideology of participatory indigenism, but the methods to implement participation remained vague.

- **Transition (1982-1984):** Marked by confusion and contradiction, every station seemed to follow a different model. Some stations had severe conflicts with local institutions, including local INI branches.

- **Consolidation (1985-1990):** The chaos of the third period withered as INI formulated policies, homogenized the stations’ formats, and centralized control. During this phase, national participatory policies emerged with President Miguel De la Madrid.

- **Expansion (Early 1990s):** As more stations were set up, evaluation research was supported and encouraged. The program benefited from the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad, a federal government program that funded projects in indigenous and rural communities. Indigenous participation became more organized as groups were encouraged to get involved. (Vargas, 1995, 51-61)

Chan Concha (2000) chose to divide the interval between 1979 and 1999 into four periods:

- **Implementation of a radio model (first years).** Stations: XEZV and XENAC.

- **Consolidation of the medium (1982-1987):** More stations were installed in areas with indigenous populations. Stations: XETLA, XEPUR, XETAR, XEPET, and XEVFS.

- **Expansion of radio (1988-1994):** Because of the success of the experience, strategies of community participation were implemented. Stations: XEGLO, XEANT, XEOJN, XEZON, XEJMN, XEQIN, XECTZ, and XEJAM.

Castells-Talens (2000), in a study of the changes in policy, also divided the 1979-1999 period into four phases. When presenting the findings for INI’s explicit radio policy, the periods described below, with slight variation, were followed to sort the data:

- **The Early Days of the Indigenist Radio Project (1979-1985):** INI started up a radio network that broadcast in indigenous languages to assimilate the native population.

- **The participatory approach (1985-1989):** By the mid-1980s, the stations had gradually abandoned the assimilative objectives to implement a participatory strategy to economic development and cultural promotion.

- **Indigenous free development (1990-1993):** In the early 1990s, as Mexico officially recognized the need to protect and promote native cultures by signing international treaties and amending its Constitution, the goal of the stations became to contribute to the ambiguous “free development” of indigenous peoples.

- **A new relationship (1994-1999):** The uprising of the Zapatistas marked another shift in policy. In the eyes of the power structure, indigenist stations became suspected of promoting subversion, while the guerillas accused them of being a tool of counter-insurgency. In 1996, the government and the EZLN negotiated the transfer of indigenist radio stations to the indigenous communities, a transfer that never took place. (Castells-Talens, 2000, 12-23)

More recently, Cornejo (2002) proposed a new division, again in four phases, plus a new, future phase marked by the uncertainty of President Vicente Fox’s policy:

- **Project origins (late 1970s-1982):** The project was born with stations set up in coordination with other federal institutions. The goals of the station are set as: basic education and Spanishization; non-formal education; information about institutional services; information about community service; rescuing of cultural heritage; and entertainment.

- **Setting a new course (1982-late 1980s):** From 1982 to 1984, the stations underwent a period of confusion and dispersion. Much of what was proposed was not accomplished. Not much documentation remains. In 1985, INI underwent a critical process as a result of a debate on participatory indigenism, on the one hand, and on the demands of indigenous communities, on the other. Spanishization and

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16 In 1979, XEVFS was installed through the Comisión del Río Balsas. XENAC, in 1981, was financed by INI, but coordinated by teachers of the Dirección de Educación Bilingüe (Department of Bilingual Education). XEPUR, XETAR, and XEPET were co-financed by INI and a program to assist poor regions, the Coordinación General del Plan Nacional de Zonas Deprimidas y Grupos Marginados (COPLAMAR). (Cornejo, 2002)
education were dropped from the objectives. In 1987, three new concepts become the foundation for the project: culture, indigenism, and communication.

- Expansion of the project (early 1990s): The Mexican Constitution was reformed to recognize the cultural plurality of the country. Indigenism’s discourse proposed to transfer the radio stations’ functions from the government to indigenous organized groups. The transfer was translated into an institutional contribution to the participation and organization of the audience. Productive and cultural indigenous organizations began accessing the radio station in an organized fashion. The Programa Nacional de Solidaridad, a federal development program, helped set up eight new stations.

- New relationship between the state and the indigenous peoples (mid to late 1990s): The EZLN uprising in 1994 demanded a new relationship between the indigenous peoples and the State. During President Ernesto Zedillo’s administration, INI worked on the new relationship. Six new stations were installed. INI officials attempted to deal with the Zapatista demand of transferring the radio stations to indigenous communities, but argued that the law did not allow for the complete transfer of the stations.

- Hope for change (after 2000): A Nahuatl anthropologist became INI’s first indigenous manager. After one year, he was replaced by a Mixe. Fox’s policies were not clear at the time of the article. (Cornejo, 2002, 38-58).

Because some emphasis has been placed in tying the periods to the inauguration of stations, Figure 4-1 helps appreciate the growth of the indigenist radio project over time.

![Figure 4-1. Growth of the Indigenist Radio Network](image-url)
Report of the Balsas River Basin

The idea of installing a radio station for indigenous audiences was formalized in 1977. In September of that year, the Comisión del Río Balsas\(^\text{17}\) (CRB) presented a report, co-signed by INI, in which it was proposed to build a radio station in the state of Guerrero. The station would help overcome some of the problems in the area, it was argued (Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos, 1977, 4).

The report stated that most of the zone selected for the project, the mountainous region around the town of Tlapa, was ill-suited for agriculture, with 96% of the cultivable land being usable only intermittently. Agricultural production remained low, with an insufficient production of basic food crops such as corn and beans. Additionally, legal ambiguities led to inter-village conflicts about the communal ownership of the land. The report added that the mountain region of Guerrero lacked adequate communications, electric power, industries that could generate employment, community infrastructure, and medical services (Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos, 1977, 2-3).

The population—85% of whom were Nahuatl, Mixtec, or Tlapanec, with 55% not knowing Spanish—had a higher mortality rate than the national or state average. About half the children in school ages did not attend school. Of those who attended, 80% did not finish primary school. Of those who finished primary school, 1% had the means to continue studying. Seventy-five percent of the population was illiterate (Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos, 1977, 2-3).

\(^{17}\) The Comisión del Río Balsas, a technical and administrative organism of Mexico’s Department of Agriculture and Hydraulic Resources, worked on development projects in the basin of the Balsas River, including the states of Michoacan, Guerrero, Jalisco, México, Tlaxcala, Puebla, Oaxaca, Morelos, and Mexico City.
Installing a radio station corresponded to three observations made in the report. First, natural and human resources had the potential for development in the region. Second, the population did not have access to any mass medium that responded to their needs. The few TV and radio stations that could reach the area were commercial. Third, the report admitted that because of weather and terrain conditions, the programs of the CRB and other governmental institutions were not reaching the people. With a projected budget of three million Mexican pesos to get it started, and an additional 120,000 Mexican pesos per month, the station, it was hoped, would tap into the human and natural resources of the region and solve some of the problems (Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos, 1977, 3-4, 8-11).

The list of goals, a constant in the indigenist radio project, made clear since the beginning that the station was a tool of support to governmental programs and of indigenous integration into mainstream society. The report defined the goals of the radio station as follows:

1. To become a mechanism of support to the development process that the CRB and other governmental institutions are providing in the region, through constant promotion in the programming.

2. To be a medium to sensitize and motivate communities to adopt a favorable attitude toward the innovations introduced by the programs of the CRB.

3. To be a vehicle of integration of the communities through the strengthening of cultural traits that allow the conscious rooting of the peasants to their place of origin.

4. To be a medium through which the peasant population can express its concerns and problems, and can set forth its own forms of organization to reach convenient solutions that will strengthen attitudes of cooperation and solidarity.

5. To support formal education, based on the guidelines set by the indigenist policy. (Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos, 1977, 5)
To accomplish these goals and give them a more-defined content, the report anticipated using radio resources\(^{18}\) in six sections:

1. Diffusion of programs of the CRB and other institutions: information about governmental programs so to encourage population’s participation.

2. Peasant training: educational information relating to topics such as agriculture, nutrition, or health.

3. Peasant organization: information on obtaining loans, commercializing products, and working in and with local government and administration.

4. People’s expression: diffusion of local music, art, and literary values to avoid its disappearance and promote its production so as to counterbalance, as far as possible, the penetration of values, norms, and attitudes alien to the region.

5. Spanishization and literacy: courses of Spanish and literacy, broadcast in Spanish and the indigenous languages, supported by written materials and trained staff. Radio sets could be distributed to schools and development centers.

6. Motivation: persuasion to develop a favorable attitude to adopt change and modernization. This section is included in all the programming. (Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos, 1977, 5-6)

By the time the CRB presented the report to INI to co-sign it, the station was more than a project. The Secretary of Communications and Transportation had already authorized the technical work and had assigned an AM frequency to broadcast with 1 Kw; the paperwork to import a transmitter and begin the construction in Guerrero was underway, and the antenna was already being built. INI had contributed a part of the land of its Center in Tlapa to host the facilities of the station (Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos, 1977, 12).

Although the project was presented as a co-initiative between the CRB and INI, the responsibilities were unevenly distributed. The CRB was going to arrange the legal paperwork, contribute the funds for the installation of the station and for 75% of its

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\(^{18}\) The report mentions soap operas, public service announcements, music, and interviews.
monthly expenses, operate the station, and designate the general manager and the directors of programming and administration (i.e., the general manager). INI, on the other side, was to provide a lot for the installation of the facilities and cover 25% of the monthly expenses (Comisión del Río Balsas & Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1977, 4-5).

The joint responsibilities included:

- defining policies and the concrete direction of the radio station to promote new techniques for the rational use of natural resources;
- promoting and coordinating the production of radio programs to help advance the social and cultural goals of the station;
- promoting equal opportunity access to education and culture through radio;
- meeting the needs of marginalized groups through Spanishization and bilingual education;
- converting the station into a service for the training and continuing education of adults;
- promoting research to improve the station and evaluating the programming;
- promoting the improvement of the culture of the population by fostering:
  - the use of the indigenous languages of the region: Tlapanec\textsuperscript{19}, Mixtec, Nahuatl, Amuzgo.
  - artistic and intellectual creation
  - recreation
  - sports
  - professional training (Comisión del Río Balsas & Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1977, 5-7).

\textsuperscript{19} Tlapanec was the common denomination for the indigenous language of the Tlapa area. According to INI, because Tlapanec comes from Nahuatl and means “those with their face painted,” it is considered pejorative. Since the 1980s, the indigenous group of the area rejects the term Tlapanec in favor of Me’Phaa (Carrasco Zúñiga, 2002).
Half a year after the agreement between INI and the CRB, INI’s Director, Ignacio Ovalle, presented an official report in which he mentioned the project of the radio station in Guerrero. The report made no references to the CRB and stressed the station’s location, in the local Centro Coordinador Indigenista\textsuperscript{20} (CCI). The report also made reference to two other stations that at the time were already broadcasting in the Maya languages of Chiapas and the Yucatan, one in the Chiapas highlands and one in Felipe Carrillo Puerto, Quintana Roo. The report did not include the call letters of the radio stations (Ovalle Fernández, 1978).

As the radio project in Guerrero was being developed, INI’s discourse contradicted the assimilative policies of early indigenism. In its plan of action for the 1977-1982 sexenio\textsuperscript{21} of President López Portillo, INI summarized—and questioned—the homogenizing policies of early indigenism as assimilation, incorporation, and integration (Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1978, V).

In INI’s own definitions, assimilation to national development almost invariably implied losing indigenous traits (Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1978, V-VI). Incorporation meant to obtain a uniform mix of races and cultures (V). Finally, integration aimed at accelerating the process of erasing cultural borders, a process presented as unavoidable and in which the dominant society values and lifestyles would prevail over those of societies that were seen as backward. INI recognized that in spite of

\textsuperscript{20} The Indigenist Coordination Centers (CCI) are the field offices of INI in indigenous regions. Indigenist radio stations have often been built inside the CCIs.

\textsuperscript{21} The sexenio, the six-year period of a presidency in Mexico, has traditionally marked the duration for numerous governmental programs.
the homogenization efforts of the early policies, indigenous peoples had survived and evolved at their own historical pace (V-VI).

The indigenist approach at the time of the first radio projects advocated the organized participation of the indigenous peoples (Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1978, VIII). The explicit policy identified two components of the indigenous situation, ethnicity and class, which needed to be addressed (IX). According to INI’s plan of action, the three goals of assimilation, incorporation, and integration had lost their weight because economic liberation from oppression required the recognition of ethnicity (IX).

The document outlines four general objectives:

• To achieve larger indigenous participation in production and in the benefits of national development

• To satisfy the basic needs of ethnic groups (food, health, housing)

• To increase the capacity of ethnic groups to defend their individual and social rights

• To strengthen national consciousness through the respect of ethnic pluralism (Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1978, index)

Among the activities to reach objective 4, INI’s document lists the use of institutional mass media to promote the indigenous languages in governmental activities geared toward education, culture, entertainment, and information (Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1978, 85). The mass media were also listed as instrumental in promoting the expression of indigenous culture to the local, national, and international level (87). No specific radio station or plan to develop a radio network is mentioned.

**Early 1980s stations**

The early 1980s mark a period that some have rightfully classified as the constitution—or foundation—of the indigenist radio network (e.g., Vargas, 1995). By
1982, INI had installed five radio stations in the states of Tabasco (XENAC), Oaxaca (XETLA), Michoacan (XEPUR), Chihuahua (XETAR), and Yucatan. That same year, an editorial in the official publication of the Institute México Indígena states some the reasons behind the creation of an indigenist radio network:

speech was always the most penetrating instrument for the organization and mobilization of peoples and it is the most dangerous one to destabilize any structure of slavery; that is why, since the beginning of Conquest, Indians were deprived of their speech. Not only were their symbols, iconography, and hieroglyphs destroyed, but their right to speak was snatched and they were muted with the gag of the Spanish language, a transmitter of alien values, ideologies, beliefs, and customs. (“La palabra…”, 1982, 2)

The editorial stated that INI had established six radio stations to “give speech to the Indian so that he can communicate it to whomever he wants” (“La palabra…”, 1982, 3). The role of the INI in the radio project, according to the editorial, is to adapt radio to the indigenous reality, so indigenous peoples can use it for their needs:

The intervention of the technicians of the Institute aims at training and organizing Indian researchers, programmers, and announcers so that, in a near future, they can take care of their own broadcast word [speech] among their people (“La palabra…”, 1982, 3)

The magazine draws attention to XEZV, the Guerrero station, and its three years of service. In 1982, the station was broadcasting 13 hours from Monday to Friday and 8 on Saturday and Sunday “to break the barriers of [indigenous] monolingualism, illiteracy, and the scarcity of roads and breaches” (“XEZV…”, 1978, 5). By that year, the CRB had disappeared and INI was solely responsible for the operation of the station. The staff of the station consisted of “six bilingual indigenous people and a professional team of producers and script writers” (5). Although the report did not mention whether the

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22 In the original Spanish version, the term used is palabra, which means “word” or “speech.”
professional team was indigenous, the distinction between the terms “bilingual indigenous” and “professional” suggest that the team was not.

Besides music, the station’s broadcasts included regional legends, community stories, literary expressions, soap operas with historical themes, shows about Mexican history, Mexican legends, and programs produced by Radio Educación in Mexico City.

As for identity, the report mentioned that the station aimed at revitalizing the appreciation for local indigenous cultures and respect for what’s unknown. The station offers the opportunity for the indigenous peoples to take “consciousness of belonging to a larger, but similar, indigenous group” and to realize that all indigenous peoples face the same problems and could share the same solutions (“XEZV…”, 1978, 6).

The publication also includes a section on XENAC, The Voice of the Chontal, the second radio station of the network. Broadcasting from the Southern state of Tabasco, Radio XENAC began broadcasting in 1981 with only 500 watts. That power allowed for a coverage of 30 kilometers, which included 40 communities (“XENAC”, 1982, 7). An average of 200 audience letters a week to a music program in the station suggests a strong identification between the communities and the station. Indeed, INI congratulated itself for the work of the station:

One year and eight months after having started its broadcasts, it can be said that the radio station has managed to identify itself entirely with the indigenous population, which participates in it and considers it as its own, as something fundamental in all everyday activities (“XENAC”, 1982, 7).

The high participation, an indigenist goal in the radio project since the beginning, is defined in terms of individual participation. Besides the letters received, INI stressed different ways in which listeners contributed to XENAC: local musicians and singers performed in a program and their music was recorded; listeners sent or brought in songs,
poems, riddles, and greetings; and women were invited to discuss their experiences and concerns at a radio show. According to the document, as a consequence of participation in the station a group of women organized a cooperative to grow and sell ducks. The cooperative inspired other groups to make art crafts and sell them (“XENAC”, 1982, 7).

The Indigenist Radio Model

Two of the indigenist radio project theorists, Eduardo Limón Aguirre-Berlanga (director of the network at the time) and José Manuel Ramos Rodríguez, set forward the theoretical foundation of the project in an essay published in the same issue of México Indígena. The document showed a strong academic component, with citations to leading educational and alternative media researchers.\(^{23}\)

Following the official paradigm of participatory indigenism, the essay stated that social development was impossible without the participation of indigenous peoples. Participation needed to increase until full participation was attained and indigenism eventually disappeared. Additionally, indigenous policy could not be vertical and ethnocentric, but must be a dialogue in which consensus is the basis (Limón Aguirre-Berlanga & Ramos Rodríguez, 1982, 3-4).

The communication system was to be based on a symmetrical relationship between the sender and the receiver. Thus, in the radio project, every sender could be a receiver, and any receiver could be a sender. In this horizontal approach, participation had to go beyond listener participation in programs that take requests or stage contests. Instead, the communicator was to select community experiences and put them into a radio format. The community analyzed the message, reflected on it, and made it its own. The

\(^{23}\) Among others, the text cites Mario Kaplun, Xavier Albó, Paulo Freire, Emile McAnany, Armand Mattelart, and Antonio Pasquali.
community had to be the receiver, but also the source of the message (Limón Aguirre-Berlanga & Ramos Rodríguez, 1982, 4-5).

The most relevant contribution the document made to policy, though, came from defining a model of radio broadcasting that, according to the authors, needed to be built (Limón Aguirre-Berlanga & Ramos Rodríguez, 1982, 5). The model presented four lines of action: Community service; strengthening of culture; educational broadcasting; and organized audience groups as a participation alternative (5-8). The details of each line of action are summarized in Table 4-1.

Table 4-1. Four lines of action in the broadcasting model fostered in 1982 by indigenist theorists Eduardo Limón Aguirre-Berlanga & José Manuel Ramos Rodríguez

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Community Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service to overcome obstacles:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reducing distances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Overcoming topographical obstacles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shortening time to communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication among communities:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Senders and receivers:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Person-to-person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Community-to-community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Content:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Greetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Appointments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community cohesion:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• By providing information about local events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• By reaffirming social, ethnic, and cultural information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Strengthening of culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| The role of indigenous communities: |
| • They are in charge of creating and re-creating their own culture. |
Table 4-1. Continued

| The role of Indigenous languages: | • Their defense is the priority.  
• They are the vehicle of communication and expression.  
• They facilitate creativity. |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The role of Spanish:            | • It serves as the lingua franca.  
• It is a tool to negotiate and defend community interests.  
• It links different ethnic groups and the rest of society. |
| The role of Spanishization:     | • The use of the indigenous languages goes beyond overcoming indigenous monolingualism.  
• Spanishization must not be implemented as a way to implement Spanish monolingualism. |
| Indigenous language-competent announcers will contribute to form a regional linguistic identity, beyond local dialects. | |
| Indigenous participation must also include artistic expression: | • Music  
• Legends  
• Stories  
• Interviews to community characters  
• Radio stories about traditional celebrations and art crafts |

### C. Educational Radio

| Radio programs must: | • Stimulate a learning process in listeners rather than inculcate knowledge  
• Help listeners become aware of their social and physical condition  
• Facilitate the elements to understand and problematize reality  
• Stimulate intelligence and reflection  
• Identify themselves with communities  
• Stimulate dialogue and participation, fostering solidarity, unity, and cooperation  
• Stimulate the development of a critical consciousness to take autonomous, mature, and responsible decisions  
• Contribute to raise listeners’ awareness of their own dignity and value as persons |


Table 4-1. Continued

### D. Organized Audience Groups: Participation Alternative

| Based on the experiences of Colombia’s Radio Sutatenza and other stations in India, Canada, and Brazil: |  
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| • A radio broadcast is listened to by a group of peasants who gathers next to the radio set.  
• After the program, listeners talk about the issues raised.  
• The talks constitute the basis for the next program. |  
| The system requires a logistical effort: |  
| • Facilities  
• Radio sets  
• Training of discussion leaders  
• Supporting materials... |  
| Each radio station is responsible to plan and program its own participation policy to constitute organized reception groups in the midterm. |  
| The State’s infrastructure can be instrumental in reaching participation: |  
| • Clinics  
• Public Health System  
• COPLAMAR  
• Rural schools  
• Cultural missions... |  

The text concluded that

- Radio stations will have to base their actions on a clear vision of indigenism and the participatory imperative that indigenism implies.

- There is a need to develop models of participatory communication through radio, models which emphasize the interethnic specificity of the region in which the stations operate.

- Radio broadcasting activities in interethnic regions by INI and other agencies must grow to reduce the negative effects brought forth by commercial radio stations and all other forms of cultural alienation.
Also in 1982, INI’s Department of Radio Planning published three volumes for its first seminar on broadcasting in interethnic regions. The volume dedicated to radio broadcasting includes the text of Emile McAnany’s work on five strategies of radio use for development (Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1982a). A volume dedicated to society and culture, however, sheds more light on the representation of Mexico’s indigenous reality as a case of internal colonization, a colonization in which “us” colonize “them” (Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1982b):

The colonizers are us, the inhabitants of cities, the literate, the mestizos, the privileged—we who admire the artistic sense and the art crafts of the Indians, their colors and their forms, and who take advantage of their misery. Internal colonialism.

The mestizo population, the one that is part of the so-called national culture (that is, the one that speaks Spanish and participates in “Western civilization”) generally despises and discriminates against indigenous people, occasionally with racist tones. That’s because four centuries of colonial heritage are hard to forget. (Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1982b, 101)

The same document refuses explicitly the assimilative policies of earlier indigenist theorists such as Manuel Gamio, Alfonso Caso, or Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán (Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1982b, 102-103) and blames indigenism for the idea of transforming indigenous people into mestizos as a way of reaching national unity (102):

Many indigenous people have internalized this mestizo vision of their human condition. They despise themselves for being Indian, they deny their own cultural identity, they consider—as it has been repeated to them many times—that as long as they keep being Indians they cannot be fully Mexican (Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1982b, 103).

Although the ideas of assimilation and mestizaje were explicitly rejected since the early days of indigenist broadcasting, the politics of Spanishization, i.e., teaching Spanish to indigenous populations, found a new means of diffusion with broadcasting. What may seem a contradiction was justified by INI as late as the 1980s.
Spanishization

Spanishization of indigenous peoples through the education system, implemented since the 18th century, saw in radio an optimal ally (INI, 2001; Secretaría de Educación Pública, n.d.). The Mexican Department of Education produced radio programs with bilingual teachers who adapted the programs to specific regions (Secretaría de Educación Pública, n.d., 6). The goal was to teach Spanish and show "cultural aspects of each region, so that indigenous children value their historical past and recuperate and reaffirm the values of their region" (6).

Divided into 20-minute-long programs, 103 of the units taught linguistic aspects while 20 units addressed cultural aspects. Linguistic units emphasized Spanish for practical aspects such as buying groceries or traveling by bus (7). Cultural units included history, traditional celebrations, or family and community (6). Table 4-2 shows how the goals of the introductory cultural units justified Spanishization as a means to defend indigenous rights and break isolation.

Table 4-2. Goals of the radio Spanishization program for 1st grade students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particular objective</th>
<th>That students see the importance and the need to learn Spanish, as an instrument to break their isolation, defend their rights, and organize.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific objectives</td>
<td>Students will be able to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Value their mother language, analyzing its importance and cohesion for the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Analyze their relationship with groups of a different language and the difficulty to understand one another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Understand the need to use the common language (Spanish) so the can inter-relate to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Deduce the advantages of speaking Spanish to break their isolation, defend their rights, and organize.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4-2. Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggested activities to reach the objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• To discuss with students how they learned their language and emphasize the importance of having learned it at home with their parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To discuss with students that language keeps the unity within their family and their community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To motivate students to keep using their mother language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To narrate stories and legends to students in their mother language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To speak to students in Spanish and ask them if they understood. Based on the answers, explain in the mother language why it is important to learn Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To tell students that very day they will be learning Spanish.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The method suggested to implement the lessons follows the radio-school format. Teachers prepare the class, sit with their students, listen to the unit on the radio, and implement the suggested activities once the program is over (Secretaría de Educación Pública, n.d., 8-9).

**Early and Mid 1980s in Radio XEPET**

In Yucatan, the early 1980s also shaped the scene of radio in the indigenous language. On November 29, 1982, Radio XEPET officially began its broadcasts. During the first years, the station went through a period of instability concerning which little documentation remains (see Castells-Talens, 1994). One of the earliest policy documents available at the station, the organization manual of indigenist radio stations, dates from 1985 (INI, 1985), which is the period in which formulation of policies, homogenization of formats, and centralization of control began (Vargas, 1995, 57-58).
The document listed three general objectives:

- To contribute to the rescue, promotion, revalorization, and diffusion of indigenous cultures and indigenous groups.
- To support and strengthen the work of the different divisions of the Institute by broadcasting division-related educational content to promote the improvement of the living standards of the population.
- To provide a communication service to the inhabitants of the communities, one that fills the shortcomings of local systems of information and overcomes the barriers of [indigenous-language] monolingualism and illiteracy (INI, 1985).

Nine specific areas complemented the general objectives:

- Conservation of indigenous languages
- Cultural heritage and artistic creation
- Cultural and intellectual development
- Institutional information
- Traditional organization
- Appropriate technologies
- Food, hygiene, and health practices
- Educational services
- Information

Because the theoretical foundations of indigenist radio advocated a horizontal communication model, the internal structure of the station constitutes revealing data on the explicit policy. Radio XEPET, like the rest of indigenist stations, had four operating units, all under the management, as seen in Figure 4-2.

Source: INI, 1985

Figure 4-2. Structural organization of indigenist radio stations in 1985
The functions of the management unit (essentially, the job of the general manager) included 16 tasks:

- To direct, coordinate, control, and oversee\textsuperscript{24} the activities of the station’s units
- To implement the policies, norms, and guidelines dictated by INI’s Dirección de Comunicación Social.
- To submit for consideration projects and budget proposals to the Dirección de Comunicación Social for consideration.
- To carry out studies and projects on technical improvement together with the Departamento de Capacitación y Mantenimiento\textsuperscript{25}.
- To establish and maintain coordination with INI’s state and local chapters, and with other organisms and institutions.
- To verify that broadcasts observe the legal and juridical dispositions,
- To evaluate the quality of the radio programs produced at the station.
- To promote programs to support INI’s policies and project
- To authorize and supervise daily programming
- To review and evaluate the programming with the staff
- To facilitate training of the staff
- To oversee the proper functioning of the equipment and materials
- To program and supervise activities and staff schedules
- To manage, control, and keep records for financial resources; to keep informed the Dirección de Comunicación Social and the Secretaría de la Tesorería
- To participate in the meetings of the technical council
- To inform the Dirección de Comunicación Social about the development and progress of activities.

\textsuperscript{24} The Spanish word \textit{vigilar}, in the original version, can also be translated as \textit{look after} or \textit{watch over}.

\textsuperscript{25} Department of Training and Maintenance, a sub-department of INI’s Subdirección de Radio.
The document that Radio XEPET used internally was produced by INI in Mexico City. The goals of the station during the late 1980s were, therefore, set by the 1985 edition of INI’s manual.

**Solidarity Program and C-169**

During the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), INI lost its exclusivity in dealing with indigenous affairs. The National Program of Solidarity (Programa Nacional de Solidaridad, PRONASOL), which was dismantled by the following administration, became responsible for a great number of programs in indigenous areas (Conejo, 2002, 34-35). President Salinas claimed that the program expressed the ideals of his “social liberalism” and would meet the demands for basic social services without paternalism (Salinas de Gortari, 1992, 97).

Indigenous populations and the rural and urban poor became the main target of this program, which received the help of the World Bank. Devineau (2002) found two explanations for the renewed interest of the Mexican government in indigenous populations. On the one hand, a former indigenist official and social activist, Carlos Rojas, directed the social aspects of Carlos Salinas’ political campaign. Rojas became the coordinator of PRONASOL. On the other hand, the 1990s saw the international recognition of an indigenous movement (32).

One consequence of PRONASOL was the creation of INI’s Regional Solidarity Funds, which transferred resources to independent councils made up of indigenous organizations (Fox, 1994, 181) and increased INI’s resources exponentially. It is

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26 “Liberalismo” in Spanish is what is generally known as “classic liberalism” in English. Fox (1994) explains Salinas’ “social liberalism” as an ideology in which the State buffers the social costs of economic liberalization and structural adjustment (179).
estimated that during the first three years of Salinas’ presidency, the government multiplied INI’s budget by 18 (188). In the 18 months between November 1990 and April 1992, five new indigenist stations began broadcasting: Radio XEGLO, in Oaxaca, and Radio XEANT, in San Luis Potosí during 1990; Radio XEONJ, also in Oaxaca, and Radio XEZON in Veracruz during 1991; and Radio XEJMN, in Nayarit, in 1992.

Simultaneously to the increase in funds in the indigenist project, the international scene seemed favorable to indigenous peoples. On June 27, 1989, in Geneva, the International Labor Organization (ILO) adopted C 169, Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention. The convention was ratified by Mexico in September 1990 and came into force in September 1991 (International Labor Organization, 1989).

Many articles in C169 became particularly relevant to indigenist radio policy. Because Mexico ratified the convention, but also because the ratification received close attention in INI’s circles, including the radio stations, the following articles were considered explicit policy for the study of indigenist radio:

- **Article 1:** Governments shall have the responsibility for developing, with the participation of the peoples concerned, coordinated and systematic action to protect the rights of these peoples and to guarantee respect for their integrity.

- **Article 2:** Such action shall include measures for:
  
  - ensuring that members of these peoples benefit on an equal footing from the rights and opportunities which national laws and regulations grant to other members of the population;
  
  - promoting the full realization of the social, economic, and cultural rights of these peoples with respect for their social and cultural identity, their customs and traditions and their institutions;
  
  - assisting the members of the peoples concerned to eliminate socioeconomic gaps that may exist between indigenous and other members of the national community, in a manner compatible with their aspirations and ways of life.
• Article 6.1.c: [governments shall] establish means for the full development of these peoples’ own institutions and initiatives, and in appropriate cases provide the resources necessary for this purpose.

• Article 7.1: The peoples concerned shall have the right to decide their own priorities for the process of development as it affects their lives, beliefs, institutions and spiritual well-being and the lands they occupy or otherwise use, and to exercise control, to the extent possible, over their own economic, social and cultural development. In addition, they shall participate in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of plans and programs for national and regional development which may affect them directly.

Part VI of C169 deals explicitly with means of communication:

• Article 30.1: Governments shall adopt measures appropriate to the traditions and cultures of the peoples concerned, to make known to them their rights and duties, especially in regard to labor, economic opportunities, education and health matters, social welfare and their rights deriving from this Convention.

• Article 30.2: If necessary, this shall be done by means of written translations and through the use of mass communications in the languages of these peoples.” (International Labor Organization, 2004)

Free Development and the Zapatista Uprising

In January 1992, a few months after C169 came into effect, the Diario Oficial de la Federación published an amendment to the Article IV of the Mexican Constitution. The new first paragraph acknowledged the existence of indigenous peoples and protected the development of indigenous languages, cultures, customs, resources, and forms of social organizations (INI, 1995):

The early 1990s showed that the policy toward indigenous peoples in Mexico, at least in its explicit version, was undergoing changes. The new text read:

The Mexican Nation has a pluricultural composition, sustained originally on its indigenous peoples. The Law shall protect and promote the development of their languages, cultures, uses, customs, resources, and specific forms of social organization, and shall guarantee the effective access to the State’s jurisdiction by their members (Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 1998)
The amendment made no reference to the media, but the idea of “promoting indigenous development” found its way into the indigenist radio project.

At that time, the participatory approach to the medium was taking a tangible form. The stations had created mechanisms to foster organized indigenous participation. The most ambitious instrument was probably the Consejo Consultivo, an advisory body made up of community leaders who shaped the direction of the station. In 1993, the station in Yucatan, the state with the highest proportion of indigenous population, defined the council as “an alternative way of community participation in the definition of the station’s orientation. This type of participation focuses on the analysis and evaluation of the broadcast messages to propose and recommend adequate radio actions in response to the existing problems [among the indigenous population]” (XEPET, 1993).

To encourage participation, the station invited representatives of indigenous organizations to attend the council’s meetings, covering transportation costs. The meetings, held in Peto in 1993, included a diverse array of organization representatives that ranged from health and agricultural organization officials to cultural and Mayan rights activists. Whether the council served its participatory purpose is open to interpretation, even today, but it soon became part of the explicit policy.

The existence of such a body alone proved the change in INI’s official approach toward the medium. The explicit language that described the goals of indigenist stations also took a radical turn. The INI station in Yucatan, for instance, defined the new general objective of the radio system as “contributing to the free development of indigenous peoples of Mexico through radio communication actions that involve community
participation and that respond to [the community’s] needs and expectations to consolidate the plural and diverse nature of our nationality” (XEPET, 1993b).

Radio, therefore, aimed at the “free development” of the indigenous people, a rather vague term that offered a wide range of interpretations, but that differed from the assimilative language used just a decade earlier. Although “free development” was not defined, three sub-objectives offered more detail on the station’s explicit goals:

1. To promote indigenous access to the medium.

2. To transfer the functions of organization, research, production, and evaluation of the radio message to indigenous organizations.

3. To strengthen the indigenous culture by:
   a. Stimulating the expression of its manifestations
   b. Contributing to the accomplishment of the objectives of the programs of indigenous rights, health, and social wellbeing
   c. Promoting sustainable development. (XEPET, 1993b)

A few months later, Mexico awoke to a dramatic New Year’s day. On January 1, 1994, the Zapatista uprising in the southern state of Chiapas shook the country. Within a few weeks, the indigenous peoples had been catapulted into to the top level of the national political agenda, in what has been called by some the politicization of the indigenous problem (Devineau, 2002, 40). The explicit indigenist radio goals, however, changed little.

The general objective of the 1994 Indigenist Radio Project, reproduced by Ramos Higuera (2001), almost mimics the general objective described in the 1993 XEPET document:

To contribute to the free development of the indigenous peoples of Mexico through communication actions that convey community participation and respond to [the community’s] needs and expectations. (Ramos Higuera, 2001, 140)
The term of “free development” appears just like in 1993. The concepts of granting indigenous access to the medium and of transferring functions to the communities, however, are absent in the 1994 official project.

Additionally from the subtle gaps in INI documents, the main changes in explicit policy after 1994 can be noticed in the installation of new stations and in the signing of the San Andrés agreements.

The extent to which the Zapatista uprising helped the installation of new stations, or whether the installation of the stations took place in spite of the armed rebellion, is hard to determine, at least by reviewing the explicit policy. In any case, as shown in Table 4-1, additional stations were installed after 1994: three in 1994 (most likely planned before the uprising), two more in 1996, six in 1997\(^{27}\), and the last two in 1999. The other change in explicit policy, signaled in the signing of the San Andrés Agreements, requires a more extended explanation.

Soon after the January uprising, the demands of the Zapatistas included the transfer of the indigenist radio stations to the indigenous communities, a demand that seemed a direct interpretation of the first and second goals of Radio XEPET at the time. Ramos Higuera (2001) analyzed the debate over the transferring of Radio XEVFS, the indigenist station in Las Margaritas, one of the Chiapas towns taken over by the EZLN on January 1, 1994. Her analysis shows how the negotiation between the Zapatistas and the government affected the stations, and how these talks began soon after the uprising.

As early as February 1994, the government and the guerrillas sat down to negotiate possible outcomes to the conflict (Ramos Higuera, 2001, 97). After that meeting, the

\(^{27}\) Two AM regular stations and four low-power experimental FM stations in boarding houses.
legislative branch designed a congressional peace commission made out of representatives from different parties, the COCOPA, to represent the State before the Zapatistas (97).

After a tense process of over two years, in February 1996, the COCOPA and the EZLN agreed on a series of proposals to send to Congress for debate and approval, known as the San Andrés Agreements in reference to the Tzotzil town of San Andrés Larráinzar, Chiapas, where much of the negotiation process took part. The agreements help describe one of the major contradictions faced by the indigenist radio project at the time. As noted by Ramos Higuera, talking about transferring the stations alone did not imply that indigenist radio belonged to the community (124).

Document 3.2 of the Agreements of San Andrés stated that indigenous peoples needed their own mass media to communicate among themselves and with the rest of society. The document proposed the drafting of a new communications law that would allow indigenous peoples to acquire, operate, and manage their own media (Anzaldo Meneses, 1998, 293).

Furthermore, according to the agreements:

The federal and state governments will promote to the institutions of national debate and decision that the indigenist media become indigenous media, as demanded by indigenous communities and peoples.

The federal government will recommend to the respective national institutions that the 17 INI radio stations be handed over to the indigenous communities in their respective regions, along with the transference of licenses, infrastructure and resources, whenever the indigenous communities so request it. (Anzaldo Meneses, 1998, 293)

In an address before the Mexican Congress in May 1999, INI Communication Coordinator Eduardo Leaman outlined some of the most important points of the radio project:
To promote the dignification of indigenous peoples and cultures; to provide listeners with elements so as to assist in their personal development, both in family and cultural matters; to be objective, and to be respectful and tolerant of all the ideological, political, or religious positions of each community.

The ultimate goal of this project is that the community be the one who, in a reflexive process, defines the adequate decisions to take about the operation of the station (Leaman, 1999).

Leaman made no reference to the transfer of the stations.

**Stations and the three levels of INI**

The policy of INI’s radio system policy is unified, but how the policy is implemented in each station varies. As Eduardo Leaman (1999) put it:

The 20 radio stations are an integral part of a system that has single standards, policies, guidelines, and objectives and that also has the same instruments and methodology to reach them in every case. However, because of their inherent characteristics, their application is different and adaptable depending on the circumstances. (Leaman, 1999)

One of the areas in which this difference stood out was in the relationship between the stations and the local and state levels of the INI bureaucracy. This relationship often varied from station to station. While the explicit policy assigned specific roles to each level, to some degree the door of policy negotiation between each radio station and the local and the state branches of INI was left open.

**Federal level: INI headquarters**

INI’s hierarchy shows a clear vertical structure (Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1996b). Much in the same fashion that the Institute drew a vertical organigram for each individual station (see Figure 4-2), so did it build the structural organigram for the entire radio network. The structure illustrates the explicit policy hierarchy of INI’s radio network, as Figure 4-3 shows.
Figure 4-3. Organigram of the INI radio network in Mexico City’s Headquarters.

Under the arm of the Direction of Research and Cultural Promotion (DRCP), four subdirections managed the areas of research, image and sound, cultural promotion, and indigenist radio. In the area of indigenist radio, the DRCP designated the subdirector of radio and sanctioned the communication policies for the stations.

The Subdirection of Indigenist Radio, in turn, had a direct impact on the operation of the network, as the norms of the stations, the choice of the radio station managers, and the management of purchases all were conducted within its offices in Mexico City. Specifically, the *Norms and relations of the stations with the rest of the Institute*, appended in Ramos Higuera’s work (2001), determined that the Subdirection of Indigenist Radio:

- Established the norms of operation for the network.
- Purchased the stations’ equipment.
• Provided support to the stations with training, research, programming, information, and technical assistance.

• Designated the stations’ manager.

• Facilitated and managed the technical, human, economic, and material resources of the stations.

• Coordinated the production of radio programs of national reach.

• Evaluated the operation of radio stations and made observations for their improvement.

• Organized calendar meetings for the Radio Technical Council in the states where the stations operate.

• Visited the stations periodically.

• Contribute to the exchange of experiences and materials among the stations.

• Provide technical maintenance to the stations.

• Conduct the necessary paperwork with the Secretary of Communications and Transportations.

• Coordinate radio actions required by other areas of INI. (Ramos Higuera, 2001, 138)

**State level: The Delegation**

INI’s offices in the states were also granted a role in shaping the policy of the radio stations. Whereas the stations tend to broadcast from relatively remote rural areas, the delegations were in the urban settings of the state capitals. Again, the level of contact and collaboration and the relationship between the state delegations and the stations changed from place to place. Following are the norms established by INI to define this relation:

• State delegations must facilitate the implementation of the stations’ programs and projects by:
  
  o Supplying economic and administrative support
  o Facilitating relationship with other official institutions as needed
o Providing information on the state’s political situation

- Radio stations will contribute to linking the delegations to the indigenous communities through its strategies and programs in indigenous languages.

- The installation, enlargement, and reparation of the stations will be carried out jointly by the state delegations, the Subdirection of Radio, and the stations, respectively.

- The state delegations must contribute to the mutual support between the local INI branches (CCIs) and the stations.

- The state delegation will participate in the Advisory Board of the station.

- The stations must inform the Subdirection of Radio and the state delegations about the development of the program in the region. (Ramos Higuera, 2001, 137-138)

Local level: The CCIs

At the local level, INI established Indigenist Coordinating Centers (Centros Coordinadores Indigenistas, or CCIs), physically located in indigenous towns and areas. Many stations, such as Radio XEPET in Yucatán, were installed inside the CCI. The relationship with the CCI tends to be, therefore, very close, at least physically.

As with the state delegations, INI’s headquarters attempted to establish the nature of the relationship between radio stations and CCIs:

- There must be mutual support between radio stations and CCIs that operate where the stations broadcast.

- Radio stations will contribute to linking the CCIs to the indigenous communities through its strategies and programs in indigenous languages. (Ramos Higuera, 2001, 137)

In addition, the CCIs keep the accounting of the radio stations, supply them with the needed resources, conduct administrative paperwork in coordination with the state delegation, and advise the manager of the station on budget matters (Ramos Higuera, 2001, 139).
Changes in explicit indigenist radio policy show the importance that indigenous-language mass media had gained for the Mexican State. From one station in 1979, the indigenist project had grown to include 20 AM stations in 2000. With time, the explicit policy has become more detailed and has advocated for the inclusion of indigenous populations in the project, following larger political trends at the national and international levels. Implicit policies, however, suggest a different landscape.

**Implicit Policies**

Although policy documents provide descriptive information on how things “ought to be,” the operation of the stations since 1979 suggests that policy is also formed and implemented in other ways. In fact, the concept of implementation limits the findings of the following section, as policy, more than implemented, is negotiated.

“Implementation” suggests that the government attempts to exercise rule of the radio stations, with more or less success. “Negotiation” implies not only that the exercise of rule is flexible, but also that the vertical structure of the policy can be questioned. Although the findings on explicit policy show that INI functions in a vertical structure, indigenist radio policy received the influence of a greater number of agents than INI’s federal, state, and local offices.

The self-representation of the stations and the testimonies of some of the actors involved in the negotiation process allow for a different view of how these stations operate, what their goals are, and how the policy is negotiated in general.

**Iconic representations of the Maya**

Two of the stations of the indigenista network, Radio XEPET in Yucatan and Radio XENKA in Quintana Roo, employ the Maya language as the main language in their broadcasts. A third station, Radio XEXPUJ in Campeche, combines Maya with
Ch’ol. Logos and murals, two of the main iconic representations in Radio XEPET and Radio XENKA, show some commonalties in spite of the age difference\(^{28}\) between the stations and some differences, despite the mere 85 miles that separate them.

**Logos**

Indigenist stations use their logos in hats, shirts, pottery, banners, posters, stickers, and other souvenir objects. The entrance to the stations is usually adorned by the painted call letters of the station, the nickname (e.g., “The Voice of the Maya” for XEPET), the frequency, the power, and the logo, as shown in Figure 4-4.

![](image)

Figure 4-4. Entrance of Radio XEPET, *The Voice of the Maya*, in Peto, Yucatan. (Photo by Antoni Castells-Talens, 2000)

The logo of Radio XEPET, seen in the center of the pennant in Figure 4-5, is a stylized blue conch on white background. The conch, believed to be used in pre-Columbian times by the Maya to produce sounds, has come to symbolize both a musical

\(^{28}\) XEPET, inaugurated in 1982, is 17 years older than XENKA, which began broadcasting in 1999.
instrument to assert indigenous roots and the most ancient medium of non-interpersonal communication in the Peninsula.

Figure 4-5. Souvenir pennant of XEPET’s 20th anniversary celebration, 1992 (Photo by Antoni Castells-Talens, 2004)

As with the logo of Radio XEPET, the logo of radio XENKA also suggests a connection with the past. Figure 4-6 shows the logo painted on the outside wall of the station. The right half of the logo represents the map of the state of Quintana Roo. The shape of the Eastern side of the map, which corresponds to the Caribbean coast, has been changed, however, to symbolize a Maya silhouette facing to the left with its mouth open.
A scroll, resembling the shape of a comma, usually interpreted as the symbol for speech in contemporary archaeology, comes out of the mouth and stays in the center of the map. The left side of the map shows four concentric semicircles, which look like a rainbow or, most likely, like airwaves. In the exterior part of the logo, each of the four cardinal points is marked by another speech scroll.

Figure 4-6. Entrance of Radio XENKA, *The Voice of the Great People*, in Felipe Carrillo Puerto, Quintana Roo. (Photo by Antoni Castells-Talens, 2003)

**Murals**

When visitors enter either Radio XENKA or Radio XEPET, a mural covers the first wall they see. The wall—and the mural—in XEPET are relatively small, as seen in Figure 4-7. In contrast, the vast size of the mural of Radio XENKA (Figure 4-8) reminds the visitor of great Mexican muralists such as Diego Rivera or Yucatec Fernando Castro Pacheco. The mural in XEPET has been present in the station since the early 1990s, and
probably earlier. The one in Radio XENKA was painted in 2003. The contents vary greatly as well.

Figure 4-7. Mural in Radio XEPET, Peto, Yucatan. (Photo by Antoni Castells-Talens, date unavailable)

Radio XEPET’s mural shows a woman going to fetch water from a well in a Maya village. Three traditionally built houses and colored-leaf trees frame the scene. The woman wears the *ipil*, the Yucatec Maya dress. The landscape seems proportionally larger than the woman. The well, the houses, and the walls around the yards appear bigger than the ones seen in the Yucatec villages.

The scene communicates peace. No movement other than the woman, no animals, no noisy distractions, no sign of modernity breaks the harmony of a scene that could
represent the 21st century as well as the 18th. The woman walks to get water, a symbol of life, in a social and historical vacuum. She is alone in the landscape. One cannot appreciate a sense of community, other than houses without the presence of the inhabitants, nor any threat from enemies. The bucolic painting seems to represent the state of Yucatan’s common answer to the stranger who asks how everything is in the state: “muy tranquilo,” very calm.

In contrast, the mural of Radio XENKA (Figure 4-7) can be described with many adjectives, none of which is “tranquilo.” As a central theme, a bare-chested, muscular Maya man stands in the center of the painting, a machete in his right hand and a gun in his left hand. He emerges from behind a holy cross. Under his armpits two soldiers die, as if the emergence of the Maya man had created an imaginary explosion that killed them.

Framing this image, from left to right, the rest of the painting tells a story, as customary with the works of many Mexican muralists. On the far left, coming from behind a globe, three caravels sail from a fire behind a globe. The middle caravel carries a huge wooden cross with a skull in the middle. Descending from the ship, a monk is holding a baton in his right hand and a chain in his left hand. The monk steps on a sculpture of what seems to be Yum K’aaax, the pre-Columbian Maya God of corn. The chain extends itself to the trap the leg of a Maya man, who is standing atop a pyramid.

The man is playing a conch, generally interpreted as a tool of communication of the ancient Maya. A huge snake crawls from inside the conch forward to the left part of the mural, passing right behind the central character of the painting. The pyramid looks like the main structure of the archaeological zone of Chichén Itzá, with a reminiscence of the main structure of Uxmal.
Another Maya is sitting on his knees in front of the Maya who stands on the pyramid. The sitting Maya is raising half a gourd, possibly with balch’é, a ceremonial liquor made out of honey. His head is down, as if he were offering the drink to the man on the pyramid, suggesting that this man could possibly be a priest or a leader. The sitting Maya is next to the cross from which the central figure of the armed Maya emerges.

From behind the pyramid, a huge hand with vulture-like fingernails penetrates the map of the state of Quintana Roo. The hand comes from the sleeve of a business suit. Next to it, a vulture with human-like hands with claws caresses one of the fingers of the penetrating hand. The vulture, dressed with a blue tie, is grabbing money bills with his other human-like hand. Under the bird, there is a huge egg. From the egg, seven hands emerge, attempting to grab some bills. Two of the hands are fighting for the same bill. Another hand is holding a parchment.

The parchment displays a forest, a lake, and a stele with a hieroglyph of what could look like an archaeologically Maya version of a radio. Under the stele are found the signature of the painter and the date of the painting (September 10, 2002). Above the parchment is the head of the snake, presumably Kukulkan even though the feathers are absent, that came out of the conch. The open mouth of the snake lets out another Maya man with a scroll emanating out of his mouth, as in the logo of the station.

A huge radio transmitter antenna emanates from the parchment and from behind the talking head that came out of the serpent. The antenna rises into the sky until it reaches the sun, or perhaps, its actual broadcast is the sun. On the lower left corner of the mural, a Maya man watches the whole mural.
Figure 4-8. Mural in Radio XENKA, Felipe Carrillo Puerto, Quintana Roo. (Photos by Antoni Castells-Talens, 2003 / Montage by Claudia Katz)
From the Ancient Maya to the Caste War

The iconic representations in the logos and murals often recuperate symbols of the pre-Columbian Maya. Whereas access to the archaeological sites seems generally reserved to tourists and researchers, the stations often use archaeological iconography, as Mexican nationalism has been doing since the Revolution. The difference for Radio XEPET may rest in the closeness of the station to the actual sites. Right outside the station, staff members have their mid-morning snack next to a pre-Columbian Maya stelle. XEPET seems to have made an effort to relate the old and the new Maya.

In a 1993 campaign to commemorate the international year of indigenous peoples, the station broadcast short public service announcements, in Maya and in Spanish, to boost Maya identity. One of the PSAs described the main ancient Maya Gods, briefly explaining their function. The following two PSAs also attempted to make a connection between the present and the past:

When in 1492 Christopher Columbus arrived to our lands, there already were people who had their own and unique way of life, a very advanced culture: The Maya. Our ancestors managed to acquire very advanced knowledge in mathematics, astronomy, and astrology, and they were the inventors of the most advanced writing system. 1993, International year of the originary peoples. (XEPET, 1993c)

We are part of a big tree with a very strong trunk and deep roots. 1993 International year of the originary peoples. (XEPET, 1993d)

The past of the Maya is also present in the representation of the 19th century Caste War and of a legendary Maya rebel hero of the 18th century, Jacinto Canek, after whom XEPET’s auditorium was named. Besides a radio series on the Caste War, the station decided to tie the celebration of its 15th anniversary to the Caste War. The poster that announced the festivities read: “1997: 150 years from the claim for Maya identity.
XEPET: 15 years broadcasting Maya identity.” The poster implicitly made reference to 1982, the year of the inauguration of XEPET, and 1847, the year of the Caste War.

The reference to the Caste War continued in the opening remarks of the celebration, when XEPET’s manager began his speech to a live and radio audience by saying: “There is no armed movement in Yucatan, but the demand that originated the Caste War is a demand that continues to be current.” In that same speech, the director justified that the idea of including the commemoration of the Caste War is “that the station be a space where the Maya people demonstrates that it’s a living people, that works, that struggles; that the Maya are not just archeological artifacts. The radio works for the dignity and the freedom of the Maya people.”

Research has shown that the Maya audience identifies with XEPET (Cornejo, 1998), but the station also makes an effort to identify with the Maya. The words of the manager in 2002 illustrate the self-representation of the station as a medium that advances close to the audience. When asked why the result of the 2000 election had shaken some governmental institutions, but it seemed like XEPET had been unaffected by it, he answered:

The radio is like avant-garde. I don’t know if it’s because I work here, but that’s the way I see it. There have been changes, but when people come here to see the work we are doing, they realize that here there is no need to restructure the station to adapt to the times. That’s something we already went through and experienced, and several times, too. I’m not going to tell you that we’re in heaven. Here at the station, every year we try get together with the staff to analyze the functions of our job and adapt them to the yearly demands of the government, because that is the way the budget works. Every year in January we have to do an operative manual where we re-assign functions and adapt the things we do. It is in that sense that the people who come here is impressed. It is the station’s dynamics itself, the work itself, the relationship with the community itself that makes us always be one step ahead (Víctor Canto, .
The station’s self-perception as an avant-garde tool at the service of the Maya feeds itself in opposition to the station’s dark past, a time in which the station went against the interests of the Maya, or so it claims.

**Project Without a Project**

The beginning of the indigenist radio project began, as shown by the documents, with the Balsas River Commission, not quite with INI, which joined the program later and finally appropriated it. The enthusiasm of a group of young college graduates and the experiences of alternative radio stations elsewhere in Mexico contributed to the creation of XEZV.

In the mid and late 1970s, Mexico’s mass media generally ignored indigenous audiences and did not include any indigenous languages. At least two exceptions were mentioned in a 1978 report by INI’s director Ignacio Ovalle Fernández: a radio station in Chiapas and another one in Quintana Roo (Ovalle Fernández, 1978).

The Chiapas station was integrated in the Chiapas State Development Project (PRODECH). Because it was an official station geared to indigenous audiences, José Manuel Ramos Rodríguez considered it the “first indigenist station,” even though it was never operated by INI. Installed in the mid 1970s, the station used to broadcast in Tzeltal and Tzotzil and had a strong emphasis on education, including Spanishization programs. PRODECH’s funding came from the government funds for marginalized zones, the COPLAMAR. The station was visited by members of the CRB to get ideas for what would become INI’s first station, Radio XEVZ in Guerrero (José Manuel Ramos Rodríguez, personal communication, January 24, 2004).

The other station mentioned in Ovalle Fernández’s report was a commercial radio station in Felipe Carrillo Puerto that broadcast many hours in Maya. The owner, a
wealthy and influential local man, wanted to get rid of it because it was not profitable. Although at one time there had been talks to sell the station to the government, the transfer never took place (José Manuel Ramos Rodríguez, personal communication, January 24, 2004).

The best-known source of inspiration for Radio XEZV is Radio Mezquital, a radio station that began broadcasting in indigenous languages in Ixmiquilpan, Hidalgo in 1963. Duval Cárdenas (1985) described the goals of the station as follows:

- rescue the Nahuatl and Otomí values to favor their development,
- favor the integration of the autochthonous and Western cultures through information about scientific, technological, and artistic advancements,
- favor an integrating type of communication to help initiate and sustain social change
- awake the critical consciousness and the solidarity of the population
- foster horizontal communication to increase the social participation of the population (Duval Cárdenas, 1985, 36)

In 1989, the manager of the station said that although the station has a high participation, especially through phone calls and letters. The station also aired an entertainment program for local artists to promote local values (Peppino Barale, 1989, 196).

**Origins**

As described in the section on explicit policy, the origin of the INI network dates from 1979, when the station XEVZ, The Voice of the Mountain, began its broadcasts within the CRB. José Manuel Ramos, one of the theorists behind the project, recalled that the project was born outside of indigenist strategic plans:

I said: “why don’t we start a non-commercial radio station?” It was to support development in the Balsas River Commission, to support development with this
vision. Our vision, because our training in the Universidad Iberoamericana, with Jesuits, was of openness and presenting [Paulo] Freire and this type of ideas. There was also [Everett] Rogers and modernization. With the ideas of a recent graduate, let’s start a station to support the development actions of our indigenous peoples. I’m saying this because there was no indigenist policy at that time. (José Manuel Ramos Rodríguez, personal communication, June 24, 2002)

The CRB involved INI in the project to guarantee the station’s future. The director of the CRB, Rodolfo Echevarría, was the son of President Luis Echevarría. Rodolfo Echevarría supported the radio but knew that the government planned to dismantle the CRB, so with the support of his father, he invited INI to the project so that the radio project would not be lost. When the CRB invited INI to join, the CRB offered the funds for the project and requested a piece of land from INI to install the facilities and the antenna. As the station was still being built, the federal government dismantled the CRB and channeled its funds to INI.

The Voice of the Mountain became fully owned by INI without the Institute’s planning: “INI received this project without a project. INI did not have a project. It did not have the slightest idea of what to do with it. They did not have the slightest idea nor did they manage to see its relevance” (José Manuel Ramos Rodríguez, personal communication, June 24, 2002).

Immediately after receiving the station, INI contacted the Ministry of Education (SEP) to keep the project alive without assuming its full operation. The origin of the radio project had, therefore, three components: the CRB, INI, and the SEP. At that time, at least, INI does not seem to have prioritized the use of radio to achieve its goals: “INI really ceased to take any part in the project and made the SEP delegation in the mountains of Guerrero operate it” (José Manuel Ramos Rodríguez, personal communication, June 24, 2002).
In spite of the involvement of the SEP, the project could not be considered a radio schooling project. The four-person team that was moving the project forward, among whom was Ramos Rodríguez, had in mind a station that would support governmental projects, but the governmental institutions understood neither the idea nor the utility, so the station ended up broadcasting the ideas of the team.

From the radio practitioners’ viewpoint, a new challenge emerged as the project’s goals needed to adapt to three, not one, governmental programs. To justify the station’s original goals, Ramos Rodríguez explained, “the way to sell the project was by saying we were going to support their programs” (José Manuel Ramos Rodríguez, personal communication, June 24, 2002).

The idea of a network of radio stations that supported institutional projects has been consistently noted by much of the available research and by the explicit policy documents described earlier. The everyday work of the stations, however, may have diverged substantially from their role as development media for institutional support.

José Manuel Ramos: At the beginning, the idea was to use radio as a tool for development.

Question: INI’s goals were the goals of the radio station? The station was in charge of implementing the objectives of INI?

JMR: That’s what they said; that’s what they said…

Q: It’s not what happened?

JMR: Not really, because there had never been, it seems to me, a real articulation of this development-oriented and modernizing perspective. There never was among the articulated work plans, [a place] where they said: “well, INI is going to do this and the radio station is going to support it by doing that.” No. Really, very spontaneously, this is not the way it was. (José Manuel Ramos Rodríguez, personal communication, June 24, 2002)
The stations and INI had a common area, however, that made their work complementary. In the mid to late 1970s, the notion of a participatory approach to indigenism had already taken force in INI through the generation of anthropologists of 1968 (José Manuel Ramos Rodríguez, personal communication, June 24, 2002). As seen in the 1977 document of the CRB, participation was also a fundamental component of the radio station in Guerrero from the beginning (Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos, 1977, 5-6). The emphasis on participation in the original CRB project and at least in a part of INI constituted an important intersection for the future success of the project:

There was [Paulo] Freire, there was [Mario] Kaplun and all these things, and one would say “yes, participation.” There, in that point of participation, at the discourse level, there was a total fitting between the ideas of INI and what the station wanted to do: fostering participation. (José Manuel Ramos Rodríguez, personal communication, June 24, 2002)

In spite of the coincidence, according to Ramos Rodríguez the project only began for INI when the Institute found itself with an important amount of extra funds from the governmental program for marginalized zones, the COPLAMAR. The money was used to install three new stations: in Cherán, Michoacan; Guachochi, Chihuahua; and Peto, Yucatan. INI followed a distinct set of criteria in its choice of locations. Michoacan received a station because it had been a long demand of local indigenous organizations. Guachochi was chosen because of the area’s poverty, the difficult topography, and the marginality conditions in general. As for the Yucatan, the main reason was the reach of the Maya culture. One single station in Peto could reach a large number of indigenous listeners. To some extent, therefore, Radio XEPET was born out of the need to spend some extra governmental funds.
Of the original team of Radio XEPET, only one staff member still worked at the station twenty years later. He recalled the goals of XEPET in 1982 as including giving support to the indigenous communities so they could get out of their marginality. To accomplish that goal, the staff of XEPET used the Maya language, field visits, interviews with community members, meetings, and assemblies. The station sought close contact with the people since the beginning: “We used to go out in a snail form. First closer, and then we would get farther and farther” (Filemón Ku Che, personal interview, July 9, 2002). The staff member conducted 140 hours of interviews in 140 communities and asked people about their needs, their jobs, the problems they were having with the crops and the land, and their local history.

Nevertheless, at first the station did not have the approval, let alone the trust, of the traditional Maya authorities in the Quintana Roo villages that neighbor Peto. The station staff would find out about a religious ceremony, for example, and they would not be allowed to enter and record the music. The presence of XEPET was not welcome in some communities. If the reporters attempted to talk to somebody and the nohoch maako’ob, or community leaders, objected, they would not allow the interview to proceed. In part, the reticence came from the perception that the station could have had a hidden interest.

They said that much of their culture, much of their knowledge had been stolen by people who had spoken their language. They had been recorded. They are aware that there are publications abroad about them and they are never mentioned. They have not even been thanked. That was 18 years ago [1984]. Then we were not allowed to record. (Filemón Ku Che, personal interview, July 9, 2002)

Another part of community mistrust for the station was that the station was not perceived as Maya, and was, in fact, not Maya:
What happened was that they didn’t know us. They did not believe us. They did not know exactly the goals of the station because there had never been in the entire history of the Maya a station that talked like them and thought like them. Here, the radio began working with people from Mexico who were not Maya. We had a programmer, a researcher; we had a manager, assistants, but they were all school people, people from Mexico. What we [the Maya staff] had to do was to write the translation of their work to be able to broadcast it in Maya and record it in Maya. (Filemón Ku Che, personal interview, July 9, 2002)

XEPET progressively gained the acceptance of the Maya communities. First, the station’s staff received invitations to attend ceremonies and celebrations. The staff was allowed to witness what went on, but could not record, photograph, nor write during the events. After the ceremony, they wrote what they had seen, then read it on the air. The station began publicizing the meaning and origin of ceremonies to thank the Gods of the harvest or the God of rain, ceremonies that had been conducted in secret for as long as communities could remember (Filemón Ku Che, personal interview, July 9, 2002).

From the station, the staff would send greetings to the authorities, mentioning their names. Slowly, the Maya music of Quintana Roo, *Maya paax*, began appearing in the station’s programs. Twenty years later, the station has broadcast live entire religious ceremonies and community celebrations (Filemón Ku Che, personal interview, July 9, 2002). In 1994, INI produced a CD, *Mayapax*, of the ceremonial music recorded by XEPET.

**Spanishization**

In 1988, an eight-minute program produced by XEPET talked about the station’s history. The early years of the station were presented as the years in which XEPET taught the audience how to count in Spanish, use money, ask for products in a store, and discuss prices. They were the years of educational radio and Spanishization.
Spanishization, thus, also arrived at XEPET. However, it does not seem that Spanishization was the main purpose of the station, as implied by a 1988 radio program:

Yes, there was [Spanishization]. At the very beginning of the radio station. From the inauguration of the station there was a consortium, I’m not sure if it was with the SEP, I don’t know. There was a man from [the town of] Oxcutzcab who used to coordinate Spanishization here. He even brought recorded programs made in Mexico City that were broadcast here. They were half an hour programs that mentioned how to say money in Spanish, how to greet the teacher, what does 10 pesos mean, “how much does this cost?” in Spanish, “how much does sugar cost?,” “how much does corn cost?” Like this, in Spanish. It was a program for people who did not know Spanish. A bit contradictory, right? (Filemón Ku Che, personal interview, July 9, 2002)

Although it seems contradictory now, at the beginning of the radio broadcasts, Spanishization seemed normal. Many Maya interviewed by the station refused to speak Maya. In the same way that some parents refused to teach Maya to the children and preferred to speak to them in incorrect Spanish, some Maya speakers wanted the station to broadcast in Spanish (Filemón Ku Che, personal interview, July 9, 2002).

**Zapatista Uprising**

The 1994 Zapatista uprising took Mexican society by surprise, and the indigenist stations were no exception. On New Year’s Day, Radio XEPET, like other stations, awoke to an unexpected situation that the station was not prepared to handle. During the first hours, stations that until then had held high credibility among indigenous populations were not reporting on the events in Chiapas. Silence became the norm in some stations. The INI State Delegate of Oaxaca, for instance, reportedly ordered an informative blackout on the events of Chiapas (Citlali Ruiz, personal communication, June 26, 2002).

At the same time, the station in Chiapas, XEVFS, was taken over by the Zapatistas during the first hours of the uprising to broadcast their demands, so it is safe to assume a
certain degree of nervousness among the stations’ staff and, especially, among the federal government.

How the Subdirection of Radio in Mexico City reacted to the rebellion has two diametrically opposed versions, both involving a heavy usage of fax machines. According to the subdirector of radio at the time, INI was providing information for all the stations to broadcast:

[From the Subdirection] we sent by fax all the information that we got from the newspapers so [the stations] would have information. Why? Because it's better for people to be informed [in the communities] than for them not to know anything. So we had only one fax machine, and there were the girls, sending faxes and calling the managers of the stations, so that: "-what do I say now?" "-how about the words of so and so? I'm sending them to you." And [they] would spend hours sending faxes because there was no other way to do it at the time. If we had had a good network, it would have been much easier. Even more, it would not have been necessary. You just download the information and that's it. But at that time it didn't exist and we sent hundreds of newspaper clips to the stations. (Citlali Ruiz, personal communication, June 26, 2002)

The version of Radio XEPET's director, who was the station's director of programming in 1994, also involved the use of fax, but with an opposite flow of information, that is, from the station to Mexico City:

No, we did not have to send the entire story, just a summary and the headline. And this is the way it worked for one year, more or less. But I don't think that it was a matter of mistrust because I imagine this information was required from higher instances, right? Perhaps the Presidency of the Republic. (Víctor Canto Ramírez, personal communication, July 10, 2002)

The orders from INI’s headquarters were for XEPET to fax a summary and the headlines of anything that was broadcast about the Chiapas crisis (Víctor Canto Ramírez, personal communication, July 10, 2002). Angel Díez, director of XEPET during the uprising, recalls the day of the uprising in a similar way, with information travelling from Yucatan to Mexico City:
I was in Peto. First, it was a surprise for everybody. And when they asked me to write a report on what we were broadcasting, yes, I did it. I analyzed it, I looked at what we were broadcasting, what we were doing, y without any problems, I sent my report. There wasn’t anything to hide nor anything that was outside the law. Then the following days, perhaps the three or four days after the uprising, the requested our reports, and that’s it. And then something like once a month: “Can you tell me what you’re broadcasting in relation to…?” (Angel Díez Mendoza, personal communication, June 26, 2002).

At XEVFS, the indigenist station in Chiapas, the staff also recalled sending faxes to inform the government about what was being broadcast. The information that came from Mexico City, a Mam radio announcer recalled, were governmental briefings with the official view on the conflict (Augusto Lorenzo Salas Morales, personal communication, March 11, 1996).

Whether the mistrust toward the stations emanated in INI’s Subdirection of Radio or whether the orders came from somewhere else is hard to tell. Inside XEPET, both the presidency of the Republic and INI were suggested as institutions that mistrusted the stations. The 1994 subdirector of radio denied any involvement from higher instances and assumed all responsibility for INI (Citlali Ruiz, personal communication, June 26, 2002). She also implied that because INI was in possession of the remote control, the device constituted less an example of censorship than an attempt to protect the stations:

It was very criticized. It was something that was not understood. But these are the reasons they gave me and these are the reasons I gave, especially since the remote control was not in the hands of anyone outside INI. If they had told me, this secret is going to be in the hands of Secretary X, who from a helicopter is going to… Then maybe yes, it could have been interpreted as censorship. But if it was in the hands of INI people, of the same INI people, of the state delegations, or the CCIs, or … Then it was all different. These are the reasons they gave me and these are the reasons I gave And yes, it was criticized. (Citlali Ruiz, personal communication, June 26, 2002)

Although it is plausible, though unlikely, that INI was covering its back from possible attacks from other governmental institutions by gathering information on what
the radio stations were up to, INI had its share of responsibility in promoting a sense of control. The Institute installed devices on the stations’ transmitters that allowed killing the signal at a distance with a remote control. The measure was criticized, but INI justified it:

It got started for several reasons. One to protect the stations’ staff and to protect the radio station itself. This as in the sense that if there were any violent takeover of the stations or something like that, one could on the discretion of the manager, or I think it rather was the delegate turn it off from somewhere else. I think the remote control, I can’t remember if the delegation has it, or the coordinator of the CCI, or the manager of the station. If they saw that things were very, very, very hot, at their discretion, they could get the signal off the air. And yes, it was very criticized. It really was very criticized. (Citlali Ruiz, personal communication, June 26, 2002)

The other reason given by Citlali Ruiz was to make sure that the radio was not used to promote violence. Before the device was put in place, there had been several attempts to take over indigenist stations. In one instance, in the station of Michoacan, a political group that disagreed with the local election results took over the radio station. The director was held over for hours in what became a tense situation:

It was a very harsh experience for the station’s director, who ended up resigning, but in that time the device did not exist. But I’m telling you [the use of the device] is at one’s discretion. If they had seen this problem could have provoked a larger conflict in the sense of there being injured or dead people or, whatever, call for a lynching… Well. That’s not what the radio stations are for. And there have been lynchings lately. In such cases, too bad, you can’t call for the lynching of a police officer or a kidnapper or whomever through the radio station. With this [device] we kept the radio staff and the station in itself safe. After all, it is better to have them working always than to have them invite the mob to a lynching and that the radio is never used again (Citlali Ruiz, personal communication, June 26, 2000).

**Zapatistas and Indigenist Radio**

No records suggest that the EZLN operates in Yucatan. The direct impact of the uprising on indigenist radio policy, however, surfaced in the first months of 1994, when the rebels included indigenist media in the negotiating agenda. In a communiqué dated March 1, 1994, exactly two months after the guerrilla’s first public appearance, the EZLN
presented a list of demands to the government. The tenth item in the document read: “the guarantee of the indigenous peoples’ right to truthful information at the local, regional, state, national, and international levels with an indigenous radio station that is independent of the government, managed by indigenous people and operated by indigenous people” (EZLN, 1995, 181).

**From Radio Rebelde to Radio Insurgente**

The EZLN and the indigenist radio network crossed paths on January 1, 1994. The guerrillas took over Radio XEVFS, INI’s station in Las Margaritas, Chiapas, and broadcast their communiqués from there. The station resumed its broadcasts after the rebels left. Programming was limited to a few hours per day, however, because of the fear the conflict was provoking. In a 1995 conference, Carlos Romo, manager of the station during the uprising, explained how the station lived the first two weeks in January 1994:

> We were very scared. One needs to remember that there was combat until January 13—on the 14th a cease-fire was declared. The radio station was kept closed with a lot of fear from the co-workers. As information arrived, we would go and broadcast the news. The [other] media in Chiapas were telling people not to get alarmed, and from your window you’d see the bombs falling on the mountains of San Cristóbal. Everything was burnt down. We lived in uncertainty, but we were on the air, for two hours, three hours. (INI, 1996, 217)

At first, the rebels gave the government 60 days to provide a station operated and managed by indigenous peoples (López & Pavón, 1998, 102). The EZLN goals in terms of radio, as shown by the San Andrés agreements, was for the indigenist network to be transferred to indigenous communities. As an armed organization, the main propaganda effort of the EZLN seems to have focused on the Internet and the movement’s international projection. The EZLN’s experiences with radio as a tool of struggle have been meager when compared with the main Latin American guerrilla movements.
IN 1998, the EZLN announced the creation of its own radio station, Radio Rebelde, to broadcast every Saturday, from 2 to 8 PM in four FM frequencies (DPA, January 25, 1998). According to a German news agency story, the Zapatista station sent its first transmissions in November 1997 without a set schedule. The content of the programming was to include about human right violations, and inform about and comment the political situation in Mexico. The story read that on January 1, 1998, Radio Rebelde took over the transmitters of three legal stations and used them to broadcast its signal (DPA, January 25, 1998).

The name of the station, Radio Rebelde, had already used it in the Cuban Revolution and to date still identifies the official station of the Cuban government which broadcasts from Havana. Another report from a German Zapatista support group mentions the EZLN installed “10 mobile radio stations” to broadcast news, human right violations, and communiqués through Radio Rebelde de La Verdad (“El EZLN…”, 1998).

More research is needed to determine the outcome of the EZLN radio experience. In any case, unlike other revolutionary movements in Central and South America, the EZLN favored Internet over radio to advance its campaign. The idea of a Zapatista radio station re-surfaced in July 2003. In a communiqué of the EZLN, Subcommander Marcos, the best known spokesperson of the guerrillas, announced the re-structuring of the Zapatista movement during a great meeting named Los Caracoles (“the snails,” in Spanish). The communiqué encouraged visitors to take a short wave radio set with them to the meetings to listen to “the first intergalactic broadcast of Radio Insurgente” on
August 9 (EZLN, 2003a). Radio Insurgente’s broadcast was set for 5,800 kHz in the 49 meter band.

Although a great number of people showed up to the meeting with radio sets, the “broadcast” finally came via a CD that was played through loudspeakers. The style of the program, closer to a parody of guerrilla radio than to the legendary broadcasts of Radio Venceremos in El Salvador, began:

This is Radio Insurgente, voice of the Zapatista National Liberation Army, broadcasting from the mountains of the Mexican Southwest. Radio Insurgente broadcasts in the 5.8 MgHz, in the 49 meter band. And when we are interfered by the supreme government, then we circulate in pirated CDs. (EZLN, 2003b)

After welcoming the audience in several languages, and saluting the troops and their supporters, the recording played a varied mix of music which included B.B. King (“one of the undercover ideologues of the EZLN,” according to the announcer); Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young; Manu Chao; Tania Libertad; and the Mariachi Vargas (EZLN, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d). The program combined the music with criticism and mockeries of, among others, U.S. foreign policy, Silvio Berlusconi, Tony Blair, José María Aznar, the King of Spain, and Judge Baltasar Garzón. At one time, the humored content continued:

We continue in the special intergalactic programming of Radio Insurgente. The intergalactic programming means that we broadcast with such little power that not even electronic Viagra we can raise it. And one can only listen to us with intergalactic technology (EZLN, 2003b).

“Good, but not sufficient”

The EZLN and some critics of Mexican power structure have often accused INI in general, and the INI radio system in particular, of being a counterinsurgency tool of the

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29 The word for radio power in Spanish is “potencia” (potency), which lead to the double entendre of the sentence.
federal government. In January 1996, several indigenous organizations participated in a
meeting with the EZLN to draft a negotiating agenda. One of the propositions expressed
the need for the INI stations to be transferred to the indigenous communities because they
were the acting as “instruments of control” (López & Pavón, 1998, 436).

In spite of the Zapatista animadversion toward the indigenist stations, the events of
1994 hint a certain degree of respect—no matter how questionable—toward them. In the
Chiapas insurrection, the EZLN occupied XEVFS, the INI radio station in Las
Margaritas, and another official station in Ocosingo, belonging to the state government.
When the Zapatistas left the stations, they trashed the facilities of the Ocosingo station.
The installations of XEVFS were left intact, however (Carlos Romo, personal
communication, March 3, 1996).

For the manager of the INI station, the explanation lied on the work that the station
did. In his words:

The radio station was born eight years ago, the EZLN, ten. They [the indigenous
communities] know our work, they know very well what we do. A very clear
example is the musicians that came. It’s the second time that I talk to them. I
invite them to come and they come because they listen to the radio, they trust it.
We’re not going to lie to them nor rob them. (INI, 1996, 217)

INI has done and is doing the job that other institutions don’t. I am talking about
INI and not the station in particular. With so many years in the field, it has some
recognition. People talk very poorly about it, [they say] that it shouldn’t be there or
that it does not understand indigenist work, and much less what people have been
trough and what needs to be done. But it’s the only [institution] that has been with
them [indigenous communities], and everywhere, people ask about INI. (INI,
1996, 217)

The situation in Yucatan differs from Chiapas in that the EZLN has not operated in
the peninsula. The conflict lives is Yucatan just like in most indigenous parts of Mexico,
but not in an armed fashion. However, the EZLN’s main group of support, the Zapatista
Front for National Liberation (FZLN), is active—though nearly invisible—in Mérida and
in some Maya towns, including the area where XEPET broadcasts. Asked about indigenist broadcasting in the Yucatan, the state coordinator of the FZLN—who is not Maya—stated:

Our Maya brothers have nothing. I say nothing in all senses, and specifically in [not having an opportunity to] say their words of truth through the mass media and especially through radio. Considering that, the existence of a radio station that is named the Voice of the Maya is good, but not sufficient.

[The Agreements of San Andrés] established that indigenous peoples and communities had the right to own their own media. Because that law has been betrayed, that is, the rights and cultures of 10 million indigenous Mexicans, the existence of a radio station named the Voice of the Maya is good, but not sufficient nor correct. (Gerardo Camacho Suárez, July 5, 2002)

Summarizing his words, the positive aspects of the station include that the problems and the resistance of the Maya is being broadcast. The culture and their words are being heard. The message is limited because the station has not been an initiative of the Maya: “It will never be better than listening to a radio that really belongs to the Maya, that is, a stations that really be the voice of the Maya, that they build, that they own, and through which they speak their words of truth to all of us” (Gerardo Camacho Suárez, July 5, 2002).

The Zapatista leader also objects to the lack of indigenous power inside the station:

Information, communication is power. He who has in his hands information and the possibility to communicate has power. In the concrete case of The Voice of the Maya, who holds the power? The Maya announcers? Or those who are in charge of the station? And besides, they get paid. Probably poorly, I understand, but that’s the way it is. As long as the [the Maya] don’t have their mass media as demanded by the San Andrés Agreements, as established in the law of COCOPA 30, everything that they do will continue to be what has been done and that has been called indigenism. (Gerardo Camacho Suárez, July 5, 2002).

30 Law of the Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación (Peace Commission) that resulted from the San Andrés talks.
Like the EZLN, the FZLN refuses to collaborate with INI or the stations. When asked if there has been any contact between Radio XEPET and the Yucatan FZLN, the response was as follows:

No, not at all, not at all. Not at all because the way in which we see things in relation to governmental institutions is completely independent. Our project is autonomous, our project is self-managed. That is why we have not become a party nor will we. We don’t fight for power. That’s why we don’t have a reason to be in contact with the power institutions, be they called The Voice of the Maya, be they called Yucatan delegation of the National Indigenist Institute, INI at the national level, or the office of indigenous affairs of the presidency of the Republic, whose secretary is a lady who says she is indigenous, but who is not, Xochitl Gálvez. (Gerardo Camacho Suárez, July 5, 2002).

In fact, Radio XEPET and the FZLN have had more contact than either is interested in admitting. On the occasion of a popular referendum organized by the Zapatistas throughout Mexico, two Maya members of the Zapatista Front told me that they gave a tape to the station calling for community participation to the referendum. The station, they complained, had not broadcast the Zapatista recording. When I went to Peto to ask the manager of the station, he showed me a tape with the letters FZLN, and told me that they had broadcast it indeed, but that maybe the Zapatistas did not hear it.

Independently from whether the tape hit the air, the incident reveals that the Zapatista Front respected the station enough to take a tape to the manager to be broadcast. The station, at the same time, respected the Zapatistas enough to say that their messages were broadcast.

Similarly, answering a question on the relationship between the Zapatista Army and INI’s XEVFS in Chiapas, the manager of the station said:

None, there cannot be any relationship. I believe that we share initiatives, and not only with the Zapatista Army, but also with the civil society, organizations, institutions.
The station has dealt with topics such as economic development, justice implementation, promotion of the cultural heritage, and other forms of organization that we find in communities. Attending these general needs will take us to democracy, peace, and justice. That would be our relationship. (INI, 1996, 216-217)

As for the EZLN communiqués, XEVFS translated them into the four indigenous languages of the station and broadcasts just as they broadcast the communiqués of the Ministry of Interior (Carlos Romo Zapata, personal communication, March 11, 1996). Although both the Zapatistas and INI seem interested in not showing a relationship, the insurgent movement is present in everyday indigenist radio policy.

Censorship

Censorship has adopted many forms since the beginning of the indigenist radio project. The potential of indigenous language media has not escaped to those who fear it or would like to take advantage of it for personal or political goals. The content of the programs has been affected by external pressures, but also by the fear of these pressures. Twenty-five years after the creation of the system, self-censorship could still be found in the indigenist airwaves.

The Maya listeners of XEPET may have been exposed to more types of music than the average listener of a cosmopolitan city. For years, a semi-random system of programming guaranteed that every song in every record that the station owns could be played, no matter how obscure or unpopular. Thus, XEPET’s airwaves have carried hard rock tunes from Mexico City, reggae songs in Maya, Miami’s Gloria Estefan hits, and Islamic seven-minute-long prayers. The diversity of XEPET’s music programs had seen more meager days, however.

Converted in involuntary historical testimonies of the early history of the station, some LP back covers still have marker notes of the songs that could not be played for
ideoical or moral reasons. The Latin American anthem song “Gracias a la vida” was forbidden. Although the lyrics constitute a seemingly inoffensive tribute to life, the song and its creator, Chilean artist and songwriter Violeta Parra, are usually associated with revolutionary movements of Latin America. In some cases, the manager of the station banned whole protest songwriters, such as Chile’s Víctor Jara and Mexico’s Oscar Chávez. The records of danzón music that the station had—Acerina, Mariano Merceron, Orquesta Nacional de Cuba—were prohibited because they were considered cabaret music. Although it is unclear how long the bans lasted, it probably was not for more than one or two years. When I first visited XEPET in 1993, “Gracias a la vida” was the name of a weekly program dedicated to the song movement of Latin America, which included artists banned years before.

The content of the rest of the programming also underwent through scrutiny. Like many other media outlets in Mexico during the 1980s, in indigenist radio stations, talking about the wrong subject or interviewing the wrong candidate could lead to an uncomfortable call from above. To avoid political manipulation, stations like Radio XEPET adopted an implicit policy of avoiding the broadcast of party politics. This decision protected the station from having to open the microphones only to PRI candidates who intended to proselytize, like many commercial and official stations were doing.

The policy was complemented by to other don’ts, in what came to be informally known as the policy of the three no’s: no politics, no religion, and no commercialism. By politics, they meant party politics and by religion, Catholicism and Protestantism form the evangelical missionaries that have arrived to Peto, often from U.S.-initiated groups.
Radio XEPET has also been offered considerable amounts of much-needed money to run commercials, either overt or covert, but its goals prevent the staff from accepting it.

The most dramatic instance of censorship took place with Radio XENAC, in Nacajuca Tabasco, the second station in INI’s network. Radio XENAC, which now is not even listed in the official list of INI’s station, and which could soon disappear from the memory of INI’s history, allegedly became heavily involved with party politics. As a result of political struggles and after receiving accusations of using the station to support the official party’s campaigns, INI took the station off the air in 1990.

Based on press stories, McSherry (1999) offers a brief account of what happened in Radio XENAC, which used to broadcast from the CCI premises. When an unpopular politician was appointed to coordinate the CCI, indigenous activists occupied the CCI in protest. Although the protesters did not try to interfere with the station’s operation, that is when XENAC stopped its broadcasts (McSherry, 1999).

When remembering the events, José Manuel Ramos, one of the first theorists and researchers of the INI’s radio project, admitted that the station turned out to be “the ugly daughter” and “the black sheep” of the network. His version, the one that I have heard with little variation over the years, involves Andrés Manuel López Obrador, a Tabasco politician who a decade later became the mayor of Mexico City, representing the PRD, the main leftist party in Mexico.

Andrés López Obrador was a red-boned PRIist and the coordinator of the Nacajuca CCI. He himself requested funds from the state [of Tabasco] government to open his own station to take indigenous people to the party meetings. That’s really what it was. I argued once with López Obrador in the palace of the government in Villahermosa [the state’s capital] and told him: “that’s not fair, it’s not right, it’s not for this.” “What do you care if it’s money that I got. It’s from a negotiation that

31 Like many PRD members, López Obrador formed himself politically in the official PRI.
I had with the state government.” So that station got started this way, and that’s why it ended this way. It started as an absolute instrument of manipulation. (RR, 2000)

INI’s role in the operation of Radio XENAC, according to Ramos, amounted to almost nothing. Because López Obrador had its well-established power base, INI would have been scared of him and of the local PRI. So INI let the station act on its own until it decided to close it. Within six months, because of the heat and the humidity of the Nacajuca region, the equipment and the transmitter became unusable, and the station’s state of abandonment, irreversible (RR, 2000).

Some have accused INI of censoring political views that differed from its own:

It was also said about this that it was repression against… No, no, no. What happened is that they put it to work to politically manipulate the movement. It was not closed down because indigenous people arrived with libertarian flags and they were repressed (RR, 2000).

Whether the closing of the station responded to political manipulations or to an attempt to silence dissenting voices, the governmental action sent a clear signal to other indigenist stations. Just as easy as the stations received their funding from the government, the government could unilaterally choose to shut them down at any time.

Ten years later, Radio XENAC is still remembered—and used. During the internal campaign for the PRI candidacy for governor of Tabasco, one of the candidates, Arturo Núñez Jiménez, promised that if elected candidate and then governor, he would make the appropriate paperwork with the Ministry of Communications and Transportation to re-open the station (López, 2000).

Agents of the Negotiation of Policy

Indigenist radio practitioners tend to describe themselves as community media. After all, in 1990 XEPET sent a Maya radio producer to the Fourth Conference of the
World Association for Community Radio Broadcasters, AMARC, held in Dublin, Ireland. INI also had an active role in the organization of the Fifth World Conference, AMARC 5, celebrated in Oaxtepec, Morelos, in 1992, something that, judging from the records, both INI and AMARC prefer to overlook 10 years later. After all, participants in AMARC 5 included uncomfortable stations for the Mexican government, such as Salvadorian Radio Venceremos or Radio Patria Libre, a station connected to the Colombian guerrillas of the National Liberation Army, ELN (“Community…,” 1992; ELN, 2004). One of the theorists of indigenist radio participation during the late 1980s and early 1990s, Eduardo Valenzuela, has been identified as a casualty of the AMARC meetings. Valenzuela allegedly lost his job because he made political enemies in INI when he obtained a $100,000 government subsidy for the AMARC meeting (Ramos Rodríguez, 2002, personal communication).

In spite of the community media rhetoric, indigenist radio practitioners know that the Mexican case differs from other community radio stations in Latin America. The stations belong to the Mexican State. The explicit policies are set up by the government’s INI, with a degree of officially recognized negotiation with the communities via the mechanisms of participation described earlier. The negotiation of the implicit policies, however, poses a more difficult challenge. Who intervenes in the radio stations’ operation? Although every station constitutes a world of its own, an approximation of Radio XEPET’s negotiation of policy, shown in Figure 4-9, shows the main actors.

The totality of social agents who participate, either directly or indirectly, in the negotiation of the station’s policy would be impossible to determine. The taxonomy of Radio XEPET’s negotiation shows the main actors identified through the application of
the method, that is, the social agents that I observed or that the respondents to the interviews mentioned.

Figure 4-9. Taxonomy of the social agents involved in Radio XEPET’s negotiation of policy

**Local Actors**

Radio XEPET and the other indigenist stations work in much closer touch with the local communities than any other INI program. As seen in the explicit policy section, INI assigned the stations the role of linking the state delegation and the local coordinating centers (CCIs) to the community.

The staff of XEPET, and of INI’s radio network in general, takes particular pride in the role of radio as a social service. In September 2002, Hurricane Isidore destroyed
8,800 houses and over 60,000 hectares of corn and bean fields in Yucatan (Espadas Sosa, 2002). During the storm, Radio XEPET became the only information source for people in the area where the states of Yucatan, Quintana Roo, and Campeche converge (Canto Ramírez, 2002). Although the station was off the air for a general blackout, the Federal Electricity Commission in Peto considered a priority to re-establish service for the station, and after nine hours, the broadcasts resumed. For a week, XEPET gave daily uninterrupted broadcasts of 20 hours, with up-to-date information from the wire service and the Internet. Improvised correspondents began calling the station with reports about the damage to their community. In a short period of time, XEPET became the vital link between rescue teams and the victims of the hurricane (Canto Ramírez, 2002).

Two months later, XEPET chose as its 20th anniversary motto: “K-muyahtik maan chak iik’al... wayano’one” (“We confronted the passage of the hurricane and... here we are!”).

Besides the service XEPET offers in cases of emergency—such as with hurricane Isidore, or hurricanes Gilbert and Roxanna before that—the station has gained the respect of the audience because it uses the Maya language, it promotes local music 32, it is a source of information, and it invites the population to participate actively (Cornejo Portugal, 1998, 50). The population knows that XEPET exists and listens to it. The government affiliation remains a little-known fact.

In her audience study of XEPET’s area of coverage, Cornejo Portugal (1998) found that 92% of the respondents did not know who the owners of XEPET were, while 8% identified the station as belonging to the government, INI, or “the indigenous people”.

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32 In 1999, XEPET’s music library housed 17,000 performances by local and regional artists.
Cornejo Portugal concluded that the audience valued XEPET because of the trust and credibility that it had built among listeners (50).

The prestige of XEPET and other stations is well known in their area of coverage, and so local agents attempt to influence the operation of the station. The extent of power that these actors exert on the station is also negotiated on an everyday basis between the station and some of the most influential social actors at the local level.

**Peto’s politics**

In Yucatan, local politicians have attempted, often successfully, to use segments of indigenous populations with partisan purposes. Salomón Nahmad (2000), former coordinator of the CCI in Peto, recalls how his arrival to the Yucatan in the early 1960s was tied to pressures from local politicians:

> Upon arriving to the Centro Coordinador Maya in Peto, Yucatan, I clearly perceived that the use of INI resources to the service of the state and national elite was a manipulation of indigenous people, who would receive assistance and education services in exchange for their political docility toward the system. At that time, [President] Díaz Ordaz was carrying out an intense, political campaign to become the president of the country. Locally, journalist Carlos Loret de Mola aspired to become a federal senator (later he became governor [of Yucatan]), Maya-origin doctor Francisco Luna Kan aspired to be a federal representative (he also became governor), and University of Yucatan’s student leader and agitator Víctor Cervera Pacheco aspired to be a local representative. All of them, PRI members, approached me to request and demand material support and the mobilization of indigenous people for political campaigning (Nahmad, 2000, 41-42)

> The phenomenon of caciques is not an exclusive to Peto. Other stations have had to deal with them, as Citlali Ruiz explained:

**Question:** Do states put pressure on the radio stations?

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Victor Cervera Pacheco also became governor of Yucatan. He was the last PRI governor before Yucatan elected a governor of the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), the right-wing opposition, in July 2001.
Answer: Yes, of course. They do and the exert from the smallest powers, such as the mayor, the town’s cacique, the church… Anyway, all the small powers there have been in these places have an influence and exert pressure on the radio station.

Until 2001, Peto could be characterized as yet another PRI bastion in the interior of Yucatan. In time of an election, the municipal government put if effect a vast array of fraudulent mechanisms to win the people’s vote. Forty-eight hours before the historic 2000 presidential election, Peto’s municipal authorities gave away tons of corn and rice for free. After voting, citizens were invited to eat one of the free meals for which the local government had killed dozens of pigs and cattle (Cornelius, 2000).

Reports of more intimidating tactics abound. During the same campaign, Peto PRI members had conducted a door-to-door campaign to ask voters for the numbers of their voter identification in what had been interpreted as an intimidation tactic, the idea behind it being to lead voters to believe that computers could track down personal votes (Cornelius, 2000).

In such a climate, Radio XEPET’s implicit policy of the three no’s described in the censorship section takes a new dimension. One of the challenges for journalists in Peto, as in the rest of the Yucatan and in much of the Republic, is how to treat these topics. Victor Canto, XEPET’s director, noted that in Peto:

You cannot talk about one party without offending the other. You cannot say: “I am not…” If you’re not a supporter of this party, then you are a supporter of the other. There is no middle ground. And this has sometimes brought us problems. (Víctor Canto Ramírez, personal communication, July 10, 2002)

In spite of the precarious political climate, though, the “no politics” rule has slowly been loosened up. In 1998, during a local election, Radio XEPET asked for press passes to cover the campaign. Some staff members traveled around the communities and
informed about the campaign events and the party’s platforms, “but yes, the matter has always been delicate” (Víctor Canto Ramírez, personal communication, July 10, 2002).

After the election, PRI’s victory was questioned by PAN opposition members, who went to the station to demand that they be given airtime to denounce electoral fraud. Radio XEPET, which claimed it had informed about the controversy, did not allow the nonconformists to speak about it because they did not want to get caught in the crossfire. The station was then accused of being protected by PRI (Víctor Canto Ramírez, personal communication, July 10, 2002):

The PAN people came in a very belligerent tone to demand that we’d broadcast the fraud, something they never presented evidence for. Because we refused on the grounds that it was not—nor it is—the purpose of the radio station, we did inform about the disagreements but never took part in the conflict, well then that brought us the reputation of being a “blessed” station. But the situation has been changing with time. The last time, PAN won, and our relationship with PAN governments has been very good. With PRI it never was so good. But all and all they are situations that show the period through which the country is going. (Víctor Canto Ramírez, personal communication, July 10, 2002)

Listeners’ participation

Individual listener participation has been high since the first days of the station. The input of the community constitutes an obvious part of the negotiation of the Radio XEPET’s policy. The high number of Mayas who everyday visit, call, or e-mail the station has a direct impact on the programming. The songs the community members request, the poems they write, the announcements they make, and the songs they compose and sing all make it to the programming of Yucatan’s and other indigenist stations. As mentioned earlier, XEPET has made an effort to get to know who the listeners were and what they wanted since the creation of the station. Audience research has always been welcome by the station.
However, the impact of listeners on policy decisions (i.e., beyond their individual participation in programs) is most obvious in the organized mechanisms of participation. These mechanisms of participation have been described extensively in previous research. What follows is a summarized description of their mode of operation. In the early 1990s, the main mechanisms of organized participation were *foros* (open meetings to discuss community concerns), the *Consejo Consultivo* (a community advisory council to help shape the direction of the station), the *corresponsales comunitarios* (voluntary community correspondents), and the *cabinas* (radio production units, equipped by XEPET, operated by trained volunteers).

Over the years, the Consejo Consultivo (constituted in 1990) had experienced a slump. Participation had decreased. Some possible reasons included lack of resources: A one-to two-day meeting of the Consejo meant for many a one-to two-day period without working—and, therefore, without an income. “People will not stop eating to come to the station,” stated XEPET’s manager (Victor Canto, personal communication, June 22, 2000). Another possible explanation for the problems of the council was the lack of response by some advisors, who were sent to represent their organization (e.g. a peasant’s association), but had little interest in radio programming (Victor Canto, personal communication, June 22, 2000).

The situation called for a new approach to participation. If until 1997, the Consejo had relied solely on representatives of NGOs, now listeners too were invited to participate directly in the shaping of the station’s programming.

The new project created a *sistema permanente de consulta* (permanent advisory system), which started to operate in January 1998. One of the main differences between
this decision body and the old council was that this new organization, made up of 21 permanent members, managed a budget of over US $3,000, which gave it a certain degree of autonomy from XEPET and INI. The budget helped organize workshops.

The new workshops took place outside of Peto in the communities that either requested to host them or in those that participated the most in XEPET through individual letters to the station. The meetings took the form of focus groups to determine what programs are the most (and least) popular, what topics should be included in the programming, and what kind of music the station should broadcast. XEPET broadcast the results. After eight workshops, the Consejo met to take action.

Whereas the Consejo was one of the success stories of fostering participation, the system of correspondents was one of the failures. Radio XEPET has never had a strong system of community correspondents (Castells-Talens, 1994). In 2000, most of the little information received from correspondents came from INI offices throughout the state, not from volunteer-journalists in other towns (Victor Canto, personal communication, June 22, 2000).

Finally, the system of cabinas (independent production units installed by XEPET but operated by community volunteers), which seemed to have started on the right foot in the early 1990s, progressively lost its momentum. In the summer of 2000, only one production unit was operating. It was in the town of Maní, where students in an agro-ecology school produced a weekly 5-minute program on what they had learned in school.

State Actors

The station signal did not reach Mérida, the center of Yucatec politics.

Nevertheless, social agents in Mérida also played a role in the direction of XEPET’s
policy. State actors included the State of Yucatan through its governor, INI’s state delegation, and a state radio station with which Radio XEPET signed an agreement.

Governor

Governors have often played an influential role in indigenist radio stations. A radio broadcast in a remote area with a message in one or several indigenous languages can become a powerful tool for proselytism. In contrast, a station that refuses to play the game of state politics may receive pressures from the governor’s office.

During the first 18 years of XEPET (1982-2000), Yucatan had a PRI governor. For the second half of those years, the governor was Víctor Cervera Pacheco, an old-school local PRI member. The governor’s attitude toward the station was cold, when not antagonistic. When asked if the state governor liked Radio XEPET, the manager of the station ironically answered: “Well, I don’t know. Nobody ever told me he didn’t like it. But they didn’t tell me that he liked it either [laughter].”

The perception of the INI state delegate at the time is that Cervera Pacheco opposed any attempt at indigenous autonomy or indigenous self-administration that was not under his direct control (Arturo Caballero Barrón, personal communication, July 4, 2002). The former indigenist official suggested that hostility may have been triggered by XEPET’s refusal to become a political tool of the PRI. Yucatan’s ruling politicians approached the station, but XEPET had closed the door to them:

This, obviously, caused the enmity of the politicians under the auspices of Cervera. In particular, a candidate wanted to use the station for his campaign and we [Radio XEPET] closed the doors to him. There was no access.

The fact that we had marked a distance with the government of Cervera, that we had not accepted his line of work, and his indications took us very far from his esteem and very close to his hatred. That was felt somehow at the station. And sometimes we had police patrols intimidating us in front of the station. Several times. (Arturo Caballero Barrón, personal communication, July 4, 2002)
One such incident took place in early 1998, a short time after FZLN militants took over two commercial radio stations in Mexico City for a few hours. An antiriot unit appeared at the radio station to the bewilderment of the Peto community. The police stayed in front of the station for days, keeping 24-hour watches. At the time, a station journalist told me:

The anti-riot police protected the station, but it seemed intimidation. Our station is not like the ones in Mérida. Here it’s different. We give information from different sources. We offer options. The point is being analytical and objective, both in regional and national aspects, so they [listeners] can find the truth on their own. (“La voz…”, 1999)

Another worker of XEPET remembered how the incident made the staff feel controlled. The police had the names of XEPET’s workers and made sure that they would find out about it.

One day I arrived and they asked me my credential to be able to get in. I told them: “No, I don’t have it because we don’t carry this around here, in Peto. When we go out we carry an ID, but here, two minutes away from my home, I don’t carry any ID.” And he asked me: “What’s your name?” And I told him my name and he called his boss in Mérida by radio and he said: “So and so wants to open the gate.” And they answered him that yes, that I am an employee here. And that means that they had our names. I don’t know who gave them to them, but they did have them.

The police also intimidated the visitors that XEPET receives on a daily basis. Although the officers claimed that they were protecting the station, most likely from a possible Zapatista takeover, many listeners who were taking their letters to the station, when seeing the anti-riot units, would prefer to turn around and leave (Filemón Ku Che, personal interview, July 9, 2002).

I asked them for an interview, for them to come inside the station and say [that they were there to protect the station] on the air, but they did not want to do that. They did not want to get burned. They did not want to say. They did not want an interview so it was known why they were here. But the people saw that [the station] was full of police. They [police officers] even put their hammocks under
the *palapa*\(^\text{34}\) to rest at night and they stayed for a while. (Filemón Ku Che, personal interview, July 9, 2002)

**INI state delegate**

When the project started in Guerrero, the Mexico City offices of INI did not realize its relevance. INI high officials became aware of the project through the state and local offices. Since the first moment, some knew that a radio station could be beneficial for political reasons:

INI had no project. In fact, it did not understand what the radio station was good for. It began understanding it because the people at the field, the state delegates, and the directors of the CCIs immediately saw that it was an alternative to their work in the widest sense. Some interpreted that this was going to give regional or state political power. (José Manuel Ramos Rodríguez, personal communication, June 24, 2002)

That view was far from unanimous, however. The way to generate support for the station seems to have been by promoting it as a public service rather than as a political tool:

And others did not [interpret the project as a means to get political power]: “Great! There are no roads here.” And the station was going to be useful to send messages. The classical example used at the time, I remember, was to send messages. When they are going to vaccinate, have the community wait for them. Tell them that INI’s doctor is going to go to vaccinate (José Manuel Ramos Rodríguez, personal communication, June 24, 2002).

In INI’s hierarchy, the subdirector of the radio project is not above the state delegate. In any given station, therefore, any conflicting goals between the subdirector of radio in Mexico City and the state delegate are hard to settle. The delegate, moreover, has power over the CCI and over important local matters. In turn, the CCI administers most radio station budgets, including the salaries of the station managers.

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\(^{34}\) Outdoor area next to the station covered by a dry leaf roof. In XEPET, it is used to take breaks outside while being protected from the sun or the rain.
In my 10 years researching indigenist radio, I witnessed a particularly vicious attack from a corrupt state delegate on a station manager who resisted his policies. The pressure that the delegate exerted to oust the station manager included a salary cut of 25 percent and a unilateral modification of the manager’s housing lease, which was provided by INI. INI’s Subdirection of Radio in Mexico City sided with the station’s manager, but because it had no jurisdiction over the delegate, its attempts to protect the interests of the manager failed. On this occasion, the delegate won the arm-wrestling contest. The manager resigned.

Relationships between delegates and the stations do not need to be as tense, however. In Yucatan, state delegates often participated in the station activities and the communication was more fluid than in the above-mentioned incident.

During the Ernesto Zedillo administration (1994-2000) the state delegate in Yucatan became particularly close to Radio XEPET:

When I arrived, I thought that the most important thing, that one of the most important tools that we had to be able to conduct a real policy of support of the Maya people, was the radio. (Arturo Caballero Barrón, personal communication, July 4, 2002)

The station’s management reciprocated to the delegate’s interest in the station. Upon his first visit to XEPET, the manager and the programming director interviewed him live and without notice to find out about his intended policies:

I had a very interesting experience with the station because the first day I visited them, they took me to the studio and they interviewed me. And that interview was almost like a professional exam to see how much I knew about indigenism, about indigenous peoples, and what my political position was in relation to the indigenous movement. It was a very interesting experience because I perceived in

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35 The modification included converting the station manager’s two-bedroom house into a house with two tenants who shared the kitchen and bathroom. The station manager lived in one room. The other was occupied by the delegate’s secret lover and her son.
them the concern of having a change in delegate. And it was a change in delegate
with a change in regime. (Arturo Caballero Barrón, personal communication, July
4, 2002)

Other stations in Yucatan

A more amiable face of the relations between the state of Yucatan and the Peto
radio station is the Radiocadena en lengua maya (Maya-language radio network). The
Radiocadena and four low-power indigenist FM stations constitute XEPET’s
collaboration in external radio projects.

The Radiocadena constituted an important concept in increasing listenership and
interest. In April 1998, INI, the Instituto Mexicano de la Radio (the public Mexican
Institute of Radio, IMER), and the Instituto de Cultura del Estado (State Institute of
Culture) signed an agreement to broaden the coverage of broadcasts in Maya. The
theoretical idea involved exchanging programs in Maya and collaborating in the
production of Maya programming, especially with Radio XHYUC, Radio Solidaridad.
An IMER-affiliated FM station, Radio Solidaridad has broadcast since 1991 with ten
times more power than XEPET and a coverage that includes the city of Mérida
(population: 700,000) and most of the state of Yucatan. In practice, XEPET sent five
programs in Maya36 to Radio Solidaridad, which rebroadcast the shows a week later at
5:00 a.m.

The time of the shows responds to the misperception that an indigenous audience
gets up early in the morning to go to work at the field, so it is the perfect time to
broadcast in Maya. XEPET’s manager explained that:

36 U Yahal Mayaob (The Awakening of the Maya), cultural; Arux k’at (Ask the Maya Elf), sustainable
development; Ich Kool (In the Field), small-scale agriculture; Poesia Maya (Maya Poetry); K kuxtalil (Our
Life), gender issues.
On several occasions we have made the observation that, well yes, there are indigenous peasants, but there are also indigenous teachers, indigenous construction workers, indigenous students, right? And that generalizing and saying that they all get up at five in the morning is an error. But, oh well, let’s hope that in the future this situation can be changed. (Víctor Canto Ramírez, personal communication, July 10, 2002)

Another experience of Radio XEPET with other broadcasting venues was what was officially known as experimental low power stations. XEPET created a new and original mechanism of radio participation by setting up four low-power (pirate) FM stations in the towns of Samahil, Chemax, Yaxcopoil, and San Antonio Sodzil. With 10 Watts, these stations broadcast from *albergues*, boarding schools for children of low-income-families. XEPET provided the necessary training for the children to conduct the shows.

The programs at these stations are far from innocent. In 1998, I witnessed one visit of INI’s general director, former Mexican ambassador to the Soviet Union Carlos Tello Macías, to the shelter of Samahil. During the walking tour of the shelter, a child approached him asked him if he was willing to be interviewed. Tello agreed and walked with the young announcer to a tiny studio. The first question was about Tello’s opinion about the shelter, to which Tello answered how great it was. To the astonishment of INI’s director, the second question was about how the conflict of Chiapas was affecting the indigenous population of Yucatan.

The albergues broadcast both in Spanish and in Maya, depending on the school. In 1999, their broadcasts became legal. The federal government recognized them as *experimental radio stations* and gave them a license to broadcast 24 hours a day (which was more than XEPET is authorized to broadcast).
Federal Actors

Besides the structural connection of Radio XEPET with INI’s offices in Mexico City, several federal institutions played an influential role in the policy of the station. The Secretaría de Hacienda (Ministry of Treasury), the military (especially since 1994), the Secretaría de Gobernación (Ministry of Interior Affairs), and hostile legislators also participated—either directly or indirectly—in the negotiation of indigenist radio policy.

Secretaría de Hacienda

During the 1990s, 14 stations were installed, but no new professional positions were approved for the radio project. By 1999, the same number of jobs had to satisfy three times as many stations as in 1990. INI officials usually blame the Ministry of Treasury (Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público, SHCP) for the policy.

The budget for new positions, the argument goes, must be approved by the SHCP. Because the neoliberal policies of the government do not allow for the creation of new jobs in most government institutions, INI is forced to lay off people at the older radio stations. The positions are then free and can be transferred to new stations, where INI will hire other people to occupy the positions.

In less than 10 years, the XEPET staff was reduced almost in half:

In 1990 we had a first [personnel] cut, which is not a real cut because the positions are still there [in the INI radio system]; it was more like a reassignment of jobs. It must have been in 92 or 93, I can’t remember… three people from the radio leave. There were 21 of us then. It went down to 18. Later, in 96, there was another one, and 15 were left. In 98 there’s a new cut, but this time 5 people left, so from 15, only 10 of us were left. (Víctor Canto Ramírez, personal communication, July 10, 2002)

The consequences in XEPET have been severe. The station has cut back on dramatizations and on visits to the communities. When I first visited Radio XEPET in
1993, the station workers traveled to small villages with frequency. In 2000, the trips were rare, unless to cover a particular event.

XEPET’s manager explained how else the decrease of professional staff had an impact on the operation of the station:

[The cuts] have affected the quality. One cannot make big productions. We do not have radio novels nor a lot of production. They [the staff] all have to stay in the broadcasting booth. (Victor Canto, personal communication, June 22, 2000)

One of the solutions to the lack of staff had been to rely on volunteers. The volunteers served as announcers in music shows, however, so they were closer to free labor than they were to a participation mechanism. Additionally, volunteers tended to speak Spanish, even though XEPET encouraged them to use Maya, whereas paid staff were required to speak Maya, unless it was indispensable to use Spanish (e.g., when interviewing a non-Maya guest).

Secretaría de Gobernación

When in the early to mid 1990s, INI’s headquarters adopted measures that they claimed protected the stations and their staff, the feeling of control and censorship inside the stations intensified. Shortly after the uprising, in one of my trips to Mexico as a researcher, I met with some managers who thought that the station’s telephones were being bugged and that the Secretaría de Gobernación, Mexico’s ministry of Interior, was monitoring their conversations.

The INI subdirector of radio during that troubled period denied any external involvement in the indigenist response to the Zapatista threat:

-Question: What was the policy of Gobernación toward the stations. Did you have visits or did you have…?

-Answer: No.
-**Question:** Telephone calls?…

-**Answer:** No, no, no, no. No, we didn’t have any type of calls. I’ll tell you that these things are managed in a very curious way. At the state level they are managed in a different way. At the central level there was no intervention from Gobernación, nothing regarding communication, nothing regarding radio. Not even: “record this for me to see what they are saying.” No, not at all. Nor: “Oh, translate this for me because, what if they say something that … ?” No, not at all, not at all. We did not have that sort of things. (Citlali Ruiz, personal communication, June 26, 2004)

The state delegate in Mérida said that he did not recall any pressure from Gobernación, either, except for a ban on broadcasting programs that could benefit one party. This ban followed the strict guidelines of the Electoral Federal Institute to guarantee impartiality in the media. “Gobernación was always aware, but I never had a signal or restriction from their part” (Caballero Barrón, personal communication, July 4, 2002).

However, the Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional (CISEN), Mexico’s intelligence service, showed an interest in the activities of the station:

I know that [Gobernación] was attentive to what was happening at the station. And, very frequently, I received the visit of a character who … with whom later we even became friends because I saw him everywhere. And that was the character that CISEN had commissioned to oversee INI’s things and our trips to communities or with unknown people. And, anyway, I already … We knew each other well and I used to warn him about what we were going to do or not going to do. I do not know whether they had equipment to monitor us or not. I do not know. What I can tell you is that when we went on the air clandestinely [with the low-power stations at shelters], they never monitored us and no radio broadcasts was stopped by any cause. (Caballero Barrón, personal communication, July 4, 2002)

The version of the story in Peto also suggests monitoring by Gobernación:

**Question:** After 1994, were there other changes in policy, at the local or state levels? From Gobernación? From the military?

**Víctor Canto Ramírez:** Well, here there really wasn’t any … Maybe the presence of Gobernación increased a little. They would ask us for something specific, in relation to a story, to a comment. They were listening to the radio and they came to ask us from where we received the information. And we would send them the data,
and that’s it. But there was never a bigger problem with the state government, nor with the army. There was nothing here that affected the activities [of XEPET].

Q: Had this thing with Gobernación happened before 94?

VCR: That I can remember, it hadn’t. But since then and until now [2002], occasionally, they come visit to ask us things.

There have been events that I suppose they have to cover. They are sent to cover them and, even if the events are not related to the station or to INI, they come to the station to ask for information about where they are going to be, at what time, what for, because they know that here we have this information. And lately the contact is reduced to this. But there have been moments in which they have asked us to clarify information that we have aired, without any reprisal. (Víctor Canto Ramírez, personal communication, July 10, 2002)

This type of pressure is not exclusive to the Yucatan. The former station manager of Radio XECTZ, in Cuetzalan, Puebla, recalls similar episodes with the judiciary police:

In Cuetzalan, the officers of the judiciary police arrived to ask whether you needed something, whether the station was secure, whether you had a security guard or not, whether you had a night watchman … At times it was uncomfortable, but well, you realize that it is a job that they are supposed to do. And well, let them do it. No, it’s alright. It does not interfere with the station; it does not interfere with the station. It’s simply a routine that they have to carry out, and they do it and that’s it. But pressure, in the sense of “don’t do this,” “do that” there never was. (Angel Díez Mendoza, personal communication, June 26, 2002)

**Indigenist radio and national security**

The 1994 Zapatista uprising catapulted indigenous peoples and issues to the forefront of the national security debate in Mexico. Benítez Manaut (2000) sees endemic poverty as the variable that most directly affects Mexican national security (5). The

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37 It is not uncommon for an average Mexican citizen to associate the judiciary police with corruption, extortion, and impunity.

38 Benítez Manaut notes that extreme poverty and indigenous peoples are almost synonyms because in Mexico, the rural poor are poorer than the urban poor, and among the rural communities, indigenous communities are the poorest (6).
State, consequently, has addressed the problems of indigenous peoples also as a matter of national security:

From a governmental point of view, the appearance of an armed movement, per se, must be assumed as a problem of national security. It, therefore, must be neutralized and contained by the means that the State has for this type of situations: the employment of the army, intelligence systems, social policies to try to take the fish out of the water, and other mechanisms, so this type of movements do not raise sympathies. (Benítez Manaut, 2000, 6)

The preceding text would not draw any more attention than any other intelligence or military report if it were not because it was published by INI and co-edited by Melba Pría, general director of INI at the time of publication, and because it was followed by the following commentary.

When a guerrilla movement amasses a considerable amount of support among the population and advocates socially acceptable demands, such as the EZLN did, it cannot be stopped with coercive, military, or repressive measures (Benítez Manaut, 2000, 6). According to the author, Mexico has produced at least two interpretations of national security to deal with the indigenous peoples: an excluding, coercive interpretation in which “cancer is eliminated with military chemotherapy” and a political and social interpretation (7).

The first reading advocates the use of force. The second reading favors social policies. The approach of the later includes a democratic and participatory component with actions to:

- combat poverty;
- establish solid justice systems;
- democratize indigenous communities while respecting traditional forms and means of organization;
- strengthen indigenous cultures, values, and traditions;
and develop a strategy to make indigenous micro-economies viable to break the culture of paternalistic assistance. (Benítez Manaut, 2000, 7)

Whereas the Mexican State has used both approaches to national security in dealing with indigenous peoples, INI’s official rhetoric has tended to follow the social view. In any case, INI explicitly accepts the connection between indigenous affairs and national security.

In the mid and late 1990s, after the uprising, military roadblocks were common in some strategic parts of the Yucatan Peninsula. As a part of the Law of Arms and Explosives, the military were granted the power to search vehicles. Often, they also self-assigned the role of doormen to themselves and asked questions about the destiny and origin of the drivers or the motives behind their trip.

Often, the armed forces chose to place one of the roadblocks in the 10-mile road between Tzucacab and Peto, a road that at the time only lead to Peto. Whether Peto had some unknown military strategy importance escapes most inhabitants, but a common interpretation is that the military had the roadblock because of the radio.

On at least one occasion, a military man entered the station: “He asked permission to enter and see the station, he visited the offices, he visited everything, and then he left” (Filemón Ku Che, personal interview, July 9, 2002).

In fact, in 1994 the military placed a military camp in the outskirts of Peto. It looked provisional at first, but it turned out to be one of the twelve training camps of conventional units that the Army and the Air Force have throughout Mexico, and the only one installed in the Yucatan Peninsula (Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, 2003a). The soldiers who go through the camps receive theoretical and practical training, rifle practice, and combat drills, with an emphasis in:
- developing physical fitness and resistance to fatigue
- using individual weaponry
- applying first aid techniques
- close order drill
- operation of broadcasting devices (Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, 2003a)

The military stresses that the training will take place “according to the precepts established by military legislation without incurring in human rights violations” (Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional, 2003b). Human rights violations by the military, however, seems to be what INI had in mind when it printed an unconventional interpretation of the 1992 Constitutional amendments.


The vague constitutional sentence “the law shall protect and promote [indigenous] cultural development” thus took practical meanings. In one of the drawings in the booklet, as two police officers hold an indigenous man, an armed soldier says: “We are going to accuse you of being a drug dealer for transporting peyote [narcotic plant used by some indigenous groups for religious purposes]” (see Figure 4-10). INI’s interpretation of the Constitution read: “Civilian and military authorities must respect and enforce the respect for indigenous religious offerings and pilgrimages” (Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1995a, 22). The drawing illustrated how the police should not act, with the purpose of educating indigenous readers about their constitutional rights in case of an illegal detention.

Four pages later, a police officer and an armed soldier take away an indigenous man as a second soldier pushes a woman. The soldier who is arresting the indigenous
LA LEY PROTEGERÁ Y PROMOVERÁ EL DESARROLLO DE SUS CULTURAS…

Las autoridades civiles y militares deberán respetar y hacer respetar las ofrendas y las peregrinaciones que realicen los indígenas en ocasión de sus ceremonias religiosas.

Figure 4-10. An indigenist interpretation of the constitutional protection to religious ceremonies (1995)
Es necesario que la medicina tradicional pueda preservarse. Corresponde a los pueblos indígenas identificar quiénes son sus médicos. El Estado podría apoyarles en los proyectos que promuevan y garantizarles el libre ejercicio de sus prácticas curativas.

Figure 4-11. An indigenist interpretation of the constitutional protection to traditional medicine (1995)
man says: “He is a witch! And he is using forbidden herbs.” The indigenous people who are witnessing the scene reply: “He is the one who has always healed our people” (see Figure 4-11). Again, INI interprets the constitutional segment in its own words: “It is necessary that traditional medicine to be preserved. It is up to the indigenous people to identify their health practitioners. The State could support them through projects to promote and guarantee the free implementation of their healing practices” (Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1995a, 26).

As with the previously described example, the armed forces are portrayed as the violators of the law by showing them performing an illegal arrest. Again, the purpose is to teach indigenous individuals about how their constitutional rights can theoretically not be violated by the authorities, and specifically by the army.

Foes of indigenist radio

Among the informants to this dissertation was Luis Pazos, president of the Budget Commission of the Mexican congress and a federal representative of the ruling Partido Acción Nacional (PAN). Pazos’s views, which are contrary to the construction of a multicultural state, do not represent the official position of the Mexican congress nor the position of PAN toward indigenism and the indigenous peoples. In 2002, Pazos was one of the main foes of the INI.

According to some INI officials to whom I spoke, however, his views may be shared by a larger group of legislators who prefer not to be perceived as holding uniformist conceptions of the State. Until recently, these conceptions were the official policy of the Mexican State, but today, after the constitutional reforms that recognized the value of indigenous cultures, they tend to be viewed as extremist. Pazos himself subscribed to the idea of a silent majority of legislators who support multicultural
legislation only “to disarm leftist groups in Chiapas” (Luis Pazos, personal communication, June 27, 2002), but who agree that multiculturalism is a mistake for the formation of the Mexican State:

Neither PRI nor PAN wanted [the constitutional reforms to recognize indigenous rights and cultures]. [The reforms] came out as a consensus to de-activate the radicals in Chiapas. (Luis Pazos, personal communication, June 27, 2002)

Luis Pazos’ opinions can contribute to the understanding of a different conception of the Mexican State, a conception that may be more widespread than publicly admitted. Additionally, his views are significant as he served as the president of the Budget Commission of the Chamber of Representatives. His opinion articles, moreover, appear with frequency in the Diario de Yucatán, Mérida’s most widely read newspaper—and could, therefore, be read by the local and state agents of policy in the state of Yucatan.

Pazos is the former governor of the state of Veracruz. As such, he claims that he has been in touch with the indigenous reality and that indigenous peoples do not aspire to maintain their own culture, as the explicit discourse of INI—and the State—now advocates—but to assimilation:

Backwardness and marginalization of indigenous people are not solved with special legislation nor with autonomy, as preached by their fake saviors, but by respecting their traditions and their free will, integrating them to modernity, offering better communications, education, and jobs to them, as wanted by any group of poor Mexicans.

In an indigenous community in Northern Veracruz, near the Chicontepec mountain range, I asked one of them if he was interested in the teaching of autochthonous dialects. The indigenous man smiled and said: “We want our children to be taught Spanish well, and if possible, English, we teach them the dialects at home; for that they need not go to school.” (Pazos, 2002, 109)

For Pazos, the indigenist movement is a group of free riders of the State who use indigenous populations to seek political spaces, manage costly plans for their own benefit, or present themselves as fighters against poverty, but who only follow personal
self-interest (Pazos, 2002, 111): “The PRI governments used a fascist-type organization of the indigenous [people] to use them politically through their caciques” (111).

Pazos has often called for the dissolution of INI or any other governmental branch of indigenous affairs, claiming that indigenous peoples are just poor Mexicans, with no more special needs than any other poor Mexican. About the indigenous demand for indigenous-language radio, Pazos claimed that the demand did not exist:

These are not demands by indigenous people, but manipulations by political groups. What they [indigenous people] want is water, roads, and schooling. I have never heard any indigenous person ask for a radio station. It is not an indigenous demand. It is [a demand] of politicians who are using indigenous people as a flag with political goals. (Luis Pazos, personal communication, June 27, 2002)
Indigenist radio policy is often oversimplified. A complex process with labyrinthic interests is often portrayed as a fight between oppression from the government and resistance from indigenous peoples. In this all-or-nothing perception in which one needs to be either “for” or “against,” indigenist radio stations pose an uncomfortable dilemma.

Some have accused the stations of functioning as State tools to reach indigenous populations. State ownership, non-indigenous management, and censorship are some of the arguments presented to make this case. Others, including many inside INI, have seen the stations as a paradigm of indigenous tools of struggle and liberation. The fact that a significant number of listeners are not aware of the official affiliation of the stations, the normal use of indigenous languages in the broadcasts, and the high levels of community participation would support this assertion.

Rather than attempting to settle the dispute, it might be more useful to use a different approach to the problem and treat the role of the stations in terms of negotiation of indigenist policy. To interpret and discuss the findings, the nine subquestions of this dissertation served as a guideline.

**Explicit Indigenist Radio Policy**

The explicit radio policy of INI has undergone important changes over the years. The documents reviewed, however, suggest that these changes radically affect the form, the organization, and the functioning of the stations, but that, in a sense, they not affect the essence as much.
Indigenist radio was meant to function as a tool to advance the development of indigenous areas. The explicit goals have always included community participation and the defense of indigenous cultures. This does not mean that the changes in explicit policy of the radio project are superficial.

What changed? The specific means to achieve the goals and the organization of the project have adapted to the times. The influence of more general policies—such as new administrations or constitutional amendments—and the change in ethnic minority philosophies—such as the international recognition of indigenous rights—have played a key role in the transformation of explicit indigenist radio policy. The policies have changed with the times. The development of the indigenist radio network, however, was not as well planned as the explicit policy suggests.

Neither was the policy a tool planned to Spanishize indigenous populations, as it has been suggested in the past. Although the initial goals included Spanishization, the official directives stated explicitly that these actions should not be implemented as a way to implement Spanish monolingualism. At least in theory, therefore, the ultimate goal was not to teach Spanish as a first step to abandon indigenous languages. The case for the elimination of indigenous languages would be incongruent with the goals of promoting culture and fostering the use of indigenous languages via radio, goals already present in 1977 documents.

The implicit policies reviewed do not provide enough evidence to confirm that the role of the stations was to preserve indigenous cultures. They do not provide evidence that a plan exist to eliminate indigenous languages either, however. Throughout Mexico’s history, indigenous languages have been perceived as an obstacle to overcome
one of the major problems in State formation. Indigenous populations were treated as if they could not participate in the State system unless they abandoned their cultures and embrace a Mexican “mestizo” form of living. It is plausible that in the indigenist radio project some held such assimilative views.

It is highly unlikely that the majority of the radio team at INI held this view, though. Advocates of linguistic and cultural assimilation would not have needed to justify their actions by adding a clause in the policy urging the defense of indigenous peoples and languages. Moreover, the theoretical and philosophical influences on the communication model do not suggest a hidden anti-indigenous plan. Spanishization was probably a means to provide monolingual indigenous peoples with what was perceived as a tool to fight marginality, not a tool to guarantee a long-term, definitive transition from the use of indigenous language to the use of Spanish.

One of the surprising findings is that the 1994 uprising did not affect any substantial aspects of the explicit policy. Other than slightly taming the language so as to avoid the ambiguities of the term “transfer,” the early 1990s claim that the stations sought the “free development” of the indigenous peoples survived the EZLN uprising.

Finally, Radio XEPET’s goals coincided with INI’s. In that respect, it seems clear that individual stations have little autonomy in defining an explicit policy independently from INI’s. Station managers may have had an input in shaping explicit indigenist radio policy, but once the policy was adopted, the stations only changed it to localize it. For instance, Radio XEPET might change the general sentence “the free development of indigenous peoples” to “the free development of the Maya people.” As discussed below, the change in implicit policies was much more evident than the change in explicit policy.
Self-representation of the Station

The connection between the past and the present goes beyond the folkloric interpretation of archaeological icons. The mural at Radio XEPET gives a peaceful welcoming to a quiet land. “Muy tranquilo” (very calm) is a common answer that the newly arrived outsider encounters when asking about the Yucatan. The surface is as calm and peaceful as the woman who fetches water from the well in XEPET’s mural. The idea of indigenous calm, however, hides a more agitated layer.

In Radio XEPET, the effort to connect the present and the past aims at strengthening Maya identity, and, probably, at inspiring confidence and self-esteem among a people that is often portrayed by popular culture as victims. The use of the past serves a much stronger function, though. It is recuperated to interpret the present. This interpretation may seem a bit far-fetched when attempting to link the pre-Columbian Maya to today’s Maya, but it acquires much more relevance when reaffirming the Caste War.

When XEPET’s posters made the analogy between the period 1847-1997 (150 years of the Caste War) and 1982-1997 (15 years of XEPET’s history), the agitated layer beneath the calm surfaces. A war and a radio station are put at the same level. When XENKA’s mural presents its central image as a rebelling Maya with a machete and a gun, it is doing the same. In both cases, the radio stations give themselves the same status as the Caste War, that is, of an indigenous fight against oppression.

The story in XENKA’s mural is a history of the Maya since Conquest. In that respect, the mural ironically portrays a rather “Mexican” view of history, with history starting at the moment when utopia is broken. The three parts of the mural—which can be interpreted as past, present, and future—show a continuum of oppression and
resistance from the time the Spaniards arrived to the present. Resistance is fierce and armed, with icons straight out of the Caste War (a gun and a machete) contextualized in the present. The armed Maya warrior is located in the center of the picture, at the same temporal space as the exploitation of the Quintana Roo map by greedy business hands.

Radio is a liberation tool, a tool of resistance that comes straight out of the Maya enchained by the Spaniards via Kukulkan, which, according to mythology, is the latent serpent that one day will rise and lead the Maya to rebellion.

The idealization of the Caste War, like the idealization of the pre-Columbian past in the rest of Mexico, has also been used by the official rhetoric. The walls of the Palace of the Governor in Mérida, for instance, display idealized murals of historical events such as the Caste War without raising any suspicions of subversion.

Are the stations’ portrayals any different from the official discourse of nationalism? At one level, they are not. The ideological content of the mural in XENKA does not differ that much from that of the murals in Mérida. The walls of both XENKA and the Palace of the Governor belong to State institutions.

At a different level, however, they are different. The who visit the stations and see the murals or listen to the station’s messages are the descendents—sometimes separated by only two generations—of the warriors portrayed holding a machete or a gun. The nationalism of the station is different because the audience of the message is different. The myths of Mexican nationalism can talk about “our indigenous brothers” or “our indigenous ancestors.” Maya nationalism—even state-promoted nationalism like that of XEPET or XENKA—can rely on myths in the first person and in the Maya language.
The main difference between the Caste War depicted in downtown Mérida and the Caste War depicted in the indigenist radio studios is not the form of nationalism (e.g., a mural, a speech, or a narrative), nor even the discourse (Caste War as liberation), but the context. The understanding of the Caste War by the audience of XEPET and XENKA differs from the understanding of the same event by the tourists and visitors of the Governor’s Palace.

Finally, the identity fostered by the XENKA is not pan-Maya\textsuperscript{39}, an exotic concept among most Yucatec Maya. The logo and mural do not, however, reflect a Yucatan Peninsula Maya identity, either. The exploitation of the Maya land by money-hungry vultures is symbolized by a map of Quintana Roo, not of the entire Yucatan peninsula. The geographical delimitation of the exploited is defined in the political terms of the Mexican State rather than by cultural or linguistic criteria. In Radio XEPET, this division is inconceivable, as the staff, the programs, and even the station jingle, explicitly reflect that the Maya live in Yucatan, Campeche, and Quintana Roo.

**Social Agents Involved in the Negotiation**

The quantity of social agents involved in the negotiation of indigenist radio policy varies from station to station. The degree of agency of each actor also differs. The decisions of the Secretaría de Hacienda to not increase the staff budget have had a very tangible impact on the stations, for example, whereas determining the extent of agency of the Zapatistas poses an empirical challenge. It is safe to assume, however, that all stations negotiate their operation at the local, state, and federal levels.

\textsuperscript{39} The pan-Maya movement, more popular in Guatemala than in Yucatan, refers to the political unity of all the Maya peoples in MesoAmerica.
In the case of XEPET, the degree of negotiation analyzed in this dissertation involved at least 20 social actors. Umberto Eco (1981) wrote that radio had a great potential as an *acephalous* means of communication, that is, a directly democratic medium in which a head is not needed (213-230). At the time of writing these words, Eco most likely did not know of the existence of an indigenist radio project in Mexico, but the term could be adapted to XEPET and the other stations. Not that the potential for direct democracy is being explored in indigenist radio stations, but the notion of the stations’ dependence from INI’s Subdirection of Radio needs to be revisited. Indigenist radio policy is acephalous, not only because of the quantity of actors involved, but also because the policy is negotiated on a quotidian basis.

If interviews and observation allowed identification of the main local, state, and federal agents, these methods did not always allow determination of the level of negotiation in every case. Some of the negotiating processes seem counterintuitive. Federal agents of policy, who may seem at a first glance less flexible to negotiation than local or state actors, did not necessarily behave that way for at least three reasons.

First, the physical distance between the federal agents in Mexico City and the indigenous realities of Peto provided some shielding. For example, the anti-indigenist moves of congressman Luis Pazos affected the radio stations only indirectly. Indigenist officials cautioned me not to ask him directly about indigenist stations, as they believed that he did not know about them. Although I thought they were joking, interviewing Luis Pazos made me suspect that, indeed, he had never visited an indigenist station and that he may not have known that there was a radio project in indigenous languages at all.
Second, the federal agencies do not expect the radio stations to follow every rule that is formulated. If a rule is broken without posing a threat, such as when XEPET installed pirate FM stations in boarding homes, state institutions can be lenient. In a sense, federal institutions are aware of and accept the negotiation process.

Third, most actions that the stations can take were perceived as insignificant by federal institutions, especially before the uprising. To federal authorities, the importance of indigenist stations rested not on their daily work, but on the location of their operation in indigenous zones. In a sense, federal agents were paternalistic with the stations, just as they were paternalistic with the indigenous peoples in general. As one of the theorists of the project said, “The project was born without a project.” INI did not see the utility of the stations until the late 1980s. It took other federal institutions even longer. After the uprising, the picture changed for this third point.

On the other hand, local and state actors immediately saw in the stations an ideal medium for the advancement of their own political agendas. The acceptance of stations by the communities contributed, without a doubt, to turning them into envied aspirations for politicians and other local and state groups. It could be argued, though it has not been shown, that the intensity of the negotiation is proportional to the physical distance of the social actor.

**Influence of the Zapatista Uprising on the Negotiation**

The Zapatista uprising probably marked the most dramatic change in indigenist radio policy. The goals of the stations and the explicit policy changed little. The growth of the network seemed unaffected by the conflict, or if anything, helped by it, judging by the number of stations that INI installed after January 1994. The main change in explicit policy was the loss of ambiguity of the term of “transfer of the stations.” Even that
change, it could be argued, was not as dramatic as it may sound, as the official
documentation from before 1994 showed that INI never intended to transfer the stations
to the communities. Instead, from INI’s point of view, the transfer included the
delegation of most of the functions of the stations to the communities. The management
was to be kept under INI’s power.

The “before and after” 1994 could be noticed, therefore, in implicit policy
practices. First, censorship surfaced with extreme measures. The free speech record of
the stations before the uprising was far from exemplary. The early days of XEPET
included banned songs for ideological and moral reasons. The closing of Radio XENAC
by INI, independently from the causes that motivated it, constitutes a hard-to-miss
precedent for other stations. The implicit policy of the three no’s suggest a certain degree
of fear on the part of the broadcasters.

The 1994 measures intensified the pressure on the stations’ staff, however. The use
of the fax machine and of devices to kill the stations’ signal with a remote control sent a
strong, unilateral signal that the content of the programming mattered. INI’s claims that
these measures were meant to protect the stations had a diametrically opposed reading in
Radio XEPET, and presumably in other stations.

Besides the issues of censorship and repression, however, the EZLN uprising could
have meant for the stations a less candid approach to the issues. Just like the Zapatistas
put the indigenous peoples in the top priorities of political debate in Mexico, the
indigenist stations became less afraid to treat issues of rights and power abuse. The
pamphlet drawings portraying the armed forces as violators of the law, the 1997 poster of
the anniversaries of XEPET and the Caste War, and the mural in Radio XENKA suggest
a confrontational approach to the government. Indigenist radio has questioned neither the State nor the status quo, but after 1994, it showed a more non-conformist and confrontational role vis-à-vis State-sanctioned injustice.

**Extent of State Opposition**

The extent of State opposition is hard to determine. More interviews, especially in the Mexican Congress, might help determine whether congressman Pazos’ views represent, as he claims and many suspect, a significant part of Mexican Congress. In any case, the opposition to the INI stations would be similar in numbers to the opposition to indigenous rights, languages, cultures, and autonomy.

In other words, the State is no more opposed to the indigenist radio project than it is to any other advancement of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. Because the indigenist radio network grew slowly, steadily, and quietly, it has become a well-founded project without serious enemies. By now, most indigenist stations have become so strong and so deeply-rooted in the communities that even a powerful enemy could not oppose them without provoking a counter-productive shakeup.

**Mechanisms of Negotiation**

The concept of negotiation usually implies reaching an agreement. In the case of indigenist radio policy, how the agreement is reached (when it is) depends on each actor involved and on circumstantial conditions. An actor could have different types of leverage in different aspects of the negotiation and the leverage could also change at different times. Thus, the local INI centers (CCIs) had power on the administrative decisions, but this power diminished greatly in deciding the programming of the station.

The mechanisms used in the negotiation also differed. Social actors used money, coercive measures, and probably favors that assured a smooth operation of the station to
influence the stations. Radio XEPET, like other stations, can base the negotiation on several arguments. When dealing with local actors, the dependence on Mexico City is often used as a mode of protection. If a local politician seeks biased coverage during an election, XEPET can fall back on the laws of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) or on the station goals as established by INI. In both Mexico City and in some stations, the often-loathed dependence on Mexico City is also seen as a way to protect the interests of the station from local caciques and politicians. When dealing with federal agents, the opposite might be done. The participation mechanisms or the claim of local political pressures can be used as a defense mechanism not to implement an inconvenient policy. Finally, the stations also tend to protect themselves from the San Andrés Agreements. When the agreements were signed, opinions supporting the complete transfer of the stations were not uncommon within INI. Time has changed this view. Nowadays, two key obstacles are mentioned as unavoidable when discussing the San Andrés Agreements. First, how can one define the “indigenous communities” who are supposed to take the stations? Second, how will the stations find an alternative source of funding while preserving their community-oriented goals if the communities are often impoverished? If INI lets go of the radio system, the stations foresee problems in who is to control and fund the stations.

**Discrepancies between Formulation and Implementation**

The indigenist radio project was born out of a divergence between explicit policy and implicit policy. Although the official goals of the station included a strong educational dimension and the support of INI, the station theorists may have been more concerned with improving the living conditions of the indigenous population than with their learning Spanish.
As the project grew, the discrepancies between formulation and implementation continued, one of the main ones being the supposed expansion of the indigenist radio project. The expansion is a myth. The project only expands quantitatively, with a steady and spectacular increase in the number of stations. Qualitatively, the stations operated with less professional staff than in the past, which meant a decrease in locally produced programs and fewer visits to the communities.

In the case of Yucatan, the lack of paid staff affected more than the programming. It also affected the capacity of XEPET to reach its goals of participation and promotion of the Maya language. To become participatory, the station needed professional facilitators who could train volunteers and encourage community participation. At the same time, to foster the use of the Maya language the staff must be required to use it, something more easily implemented with paid staff than with volunteer staff.

In general, most questions about the difference between the formulation and implementation of the policy can find their answers in the contradictory nature of the stations. Simplifying, the stations are simultaneously owned by the federal government and operated by indigenous people. The message broadcast, one of cautious neutrality, has therefore given rise to suspicion among Zapatista sympathizers and government officials.

Both rebel voices and official messages find their way into the medium, however. Stations neither confront nor criticize (at least not publicly) the State nor the guerrillas. The work of indigenist stations is respected, and audience research is consistent in showing the popularity of indigenist airwaves among indigenous audiences (Cornejo, 1992, 1997; Castells-Talens, 1994).
In indigenist radio research, the indigenous peoples and the government are often treated as two uniform, antagonistic blocks. In that sense, INI has been criticized for various reasons, sometimes with more legitimacy than others. From the indigenous point of view, the Institute has been paternalistic in its approach to indigenous peoples, and the non-indigenous staff is not always committed to the indigenous cause (Quechulpa, 1996). Additionally, managers of the stations have tended not to be indigenous (Castells-Talens 1994; Vargas, 1995). In 2002, the manager of XEPET was originally from Mexico City, although recent observations hint that this criticized trend may be changing in many stations.

Some of the policies of INI are, without any doubt, contradictory. Grassroots participation is encouraged from the very top. Can a medium be truly participatory when it belongs to the State? A station worker once expressed, in the station in Guerrero, that “the station encourages the people to participate through their music, stories, and traditional knowledge, but when they want to talk about their reality, the station stops them” (Vargas, 1995, 242). When Radio XEPET attempted to create participatory mechanisms to encourage grassroots journalism, the implementation of community correspondents and organization-run production units throughout the region failed (Castells-Talens, 1995).

Vargas (1995) saw in INI an inherent structural bias toward keeping indigenous peoples in a disadvantaged position. The INI network, accordingly, promoted “hierarchic, racist, classist, and sexist practices,” especially when considering the staff’s salaries, the allocation of resources, and the Institute’s romantic and exotic portrayal of indigenous peoples (242-245). Vargas’ field research, however, dates from before the
1994 uprising, and I contend that, if the situation was ever as atrocious as Vargas suggested, it has changed.

The stations have become aware that they form part of a nationally planned negotiation agenda. The San Andrés Agreements plan the transfer of INI radio stations to indigenous communities, although the negotiating process is stalled and so is the implementation of the Agreements. In Chiapas, and probably in the rest of the Republic, the indigenist radio stations serve the purpose of relieving tension between the actors of the conflict. As former manager of Chiapas Radio XEVFS said: “As long as the station is on the air, as long as the radio keeps talking, it will allow for calm to be in the zone” (Romo, 1996, 207).
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

This dissertation describes and analyzes the complexity of indigenist radio policy in Mexico. Past research has tended to concentrate mostly on INI’s documented policies, including written records and official documentation on the opening and closing of radio stations. I have understood and treated policy in a broader sense, as a negotiation between radio stations and an undetermined—and most likely undeterminable—number of social actors at the local, state, and federal levels. Based on this conception of policy as negotiation, I have attempted to answer the question of how indigenist radio policy was negotiated.

The béel⁴⁰ I chose for this journey consisted of a comparison between what I called the explicit and implicit policies in several stations, but mostly in Radio XEPET. Explicit policies referred to official records; implicit policies made reference to the practices that influenced the general operation of each station. The policy analysis for XEPET included the period 1982-2000, that is, from the year XEPET was created to the year in which the seven-decade-long one-party rule in Mexico ended.

My compass was composed of theories on nationalism and state formation in Mexico and on state strategies toward ethnic minority media. My roadmap consisted of qualitative methods in documentary analysis, interviews, semiotic analysis, and ten years of observation.

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⁴⁰ Béel, the Maya word for road, has a much wider meaning than in English. For instance, the Yucatec Maya expression to ask “how are you doing?” is “Bix a béel?” (literally, “how is your road?”).
Summary

Since 1979, Mexico has been developing a radio project to broadcast in indigenous languages. Often inspired by Latin American indigenous and community radio stations, the project gradually developed into a network of 20 AM stations and 4 low-power experimental stations. Unlike in other Latin American countries, however, Mexico’s stations were created, owned, and managed by the government’s National Indigenist Institute. The seeming oxymoron of State-owned community media has led to questions about the legitimacy of these stations and the government policy.

The daily operations of the network can be read in a framework of State formation. Because of their close ties to indigenous communities and to the State, each radio station becomes a site of encounter between indigenous peoples and the Mexican State. In these sites, the governance of the stations is constantly being negotiated.

Researchers have tended to handle indigenist radio policy as a project imposed by the State, a reasonable supposition considering that the documents that govern the radio stations emanate from INI’s headquarters in Mexico City. If policy is interpreted in a broader sense, however, official documentation alone provides an incomplete description of the policy. The explicit policy (i.e., what documents say) shows an overly unilateral relationship between the State and the stations (and, therefore, the audience).

The explicit policy does not necessarily reflect the complexity of the policy with accuracy. In contrast, the everyday operation of the stations reflects an implicit policy in which many more social actors intervene. The combination of explicit and implicit policy analysis led to the research question of how indigenist radio policy has been negotiated. Drawing from the entire network, but concentrating on Radio XEPET—INI’s
station in the state of Yucatan—during the period 1982-2000, the research question was answered through the use of qualitative methods.

The INI radio project was born “without a project,” that is, from a governmental development program, the Balsas River Commission (CRB), not from the Indigenist Institute. The CRB was dismantled as the station was being installed, and so INI found itself the owner of a radio station in the state of Guerrero. Although the explicit goals of the station showed that the station was to support governmental programs, the station rapidly turned itself toward listeners to foster participation and improve the standards of living of the indigenous population.

Because INI invited the Secretary of Education into the radio project, programs of Spanishization (teaching Spanish to indigenous communities) took place at some stations. INI justified the campaigns theoretically by presenting Spanishization as a means to exit marginality. No documentation showed that the stations attempted to eradicate or further marginalize indigenous languages. The promotion of the native tongues appeared as far back as 1977 as an objective of the stations. Similarly, community participation was an explicit goal since the project’s early days, influenced by the works on pedagogy by Paulo Freire and on popular media by Mario Kaplun.

With increased funding in the 1980s, the radio project developed into a network. The participatory goals took a more tangible form as the stations developed formal mechanisms of community participation. The approach of 1992, the fifth centennial of Columbus’ arrival to the Americas, marked an unprecedented international awareness of indigenous cultures and rights. The Mexican Constitution was reformed and INI’s
explicit goals included the transfer of the stations to indigenous communities, an end that received multiple interpretations.

The Zapatista uprising of 1994 marked a turning point in indigenist radio policy. The explicit goals changed little when compared to the changes in implicit policies. Monitoring of the stations and self-censorship became widespread. In Peto, the military installed a permanent camp.

Meanwhile, the Zapatistas put indigenist radio on the negotiating agenda. The COCOPA (the parliamentary peace commission that was negotiating with the rebels) agreed to transfer the stations to the indigenous communities, but the government backed off, arguing that the transfer was incompatible with the respect for the current legislation.

Throughout the conflict, the stations had to broadcast on an unstable tightrope, a rope tensed by both the Zapatistas and by agencies of the government, including INI’s subdirection of radio. The position of the stations is more complex than being caught in the crossfire of two sides in an ongoing conflict, however.

The stations have to negotiate their policy every day with local, state, and federal actors. In the case of XEPET, local actors included Peto’s politicians and caciques; listeners; Maya authorities; INI’s Coordinating Center (CCI); and the organizations that get involved in the radio through its participation mechanisms, in general. State actors included the office of the governor (which most of the time showed a distant attitude toward the station, occasionally broken by measures perceived as intimidation), INI’s state delegation, and other stations in the state, notably the publicly-owned Radio Solidaridad and four low-power indigenist stations. At the federal level, the agents involved in the negotiation included INI’s headquarters (as shown in the explicit policy
section), the Ministry of Treasury, the Ministry of Interior (Secretaría de Gobernación), the military, and Congress. Within Congress, indigenist radio would have its worse foes, exemplified by conservative representative Luis Pazos, president of the Budget Commission of the Chamber of Representatives.

**Conclusions**

Riggins (1992) described the debate over the *dual role* of ethnic minority media as an argument in which these media are seen as either tools of cultural resistance or tools of assimilation (276). Although the role of the government varies depending on its commitment to multiculturalism, the State uses its power to intervene if the message is perceived as subversive. The findings of this dissertation confirm that the State reacts with any means necessary when it perceives a threat from the media.

Policy, however, is defined in everyday actions, not just in extreme cases (such as when a radio station is closed or when censorship shows its most overt shapes). Explicit indigenist radio policy tends to be vague, much more centered on philosophical goals such as participation and development of indigenous cultures than on concrete measure to implement these goals. Although practitioners have often complained about the lack of definition of explicit policy, this impreciseness has helped maintain open negotiations.

The findings on implicit policies suggest that everyday policy is simultaneously flexible, malleable, and diffused. Indigenist radio policy is flexible because the State, which defines the explicit policies, does not expect every rule to be followed and leaves some room open for dissent, even if just symbolic. It is malleable because the station knows that the rules can be shaped to fit its own needs. It is diffused because the actors involved in its negotiation are not concentrated in one space, and the agency of each actor is not always obvious.
In this process, it is hard to identify a single weight that upsets the balance of the negotiation. True, the ultimate power of closing down the station rests on the State, but many more agents at the local, state, and federal levels determine the policy. Radio XEPET, like the other indigenist stations, has to accept some imposed decisions but knows at the same time it can break the rules.

The following table shows the conclusions drawn from the comparison between the explicit and implicit policies.

Table 6-1. Discrepancies between explicit and implicit indigenist radio policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPLICIT POLICY</th>
<th>IMPLICIT POLICY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stations perceive INI’s explicit policy as relatively vague</td>
<td>Stations are aware of the role of the State as owner of the network and policymaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes corresponded to shifts in Mexico’s indigenism and international attitudes toward indigenous peoples</td>
<td>Changes also corresponded to shifts in the stations’ relationships with social actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994 did not change the essence of the policy</td>
<td>1994 affected the operation of the stations radically. The stations felt pressure from both the State and the Zapatistas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stations contribute to the free development of indigenous peoples</td>
<td>Stations see themselves as tools of indigenous liberation within the legal framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous participation is encouraged as a philosophy of development</td>
<td>Indigenous participation also serves to alleviate shortcomings from budget cuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The State genuinely supports indigenous media</td>
<td>The State has no option but to support indigenous media, as long as these media do not threaten the State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The State promotes indigenous media</td>
<td>The State also exerts media control and encouraged censorship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Explicit policy is:
- Relatively vague (rules and regulations do not affect the programming)
- Participatory (indigenous participation is expected through specific mechanisms)
- Localized (around indigenist institutions)

Implicit policy is:
- Flexible (the State does not expect every rule to be followed)
- Malleable (each station shapes and adapts policy to its own needs)
- Diffused (the spaces of policy negotiation are not centralized)
Implications

Although INI has disappeared, the research is still relevant for its methodological, theoretical, and practical implications. This dissertation proposes an innovative approach to indigenist radio policy analysis. Rather than concentrating only on explicit governmental policy, this approach looks at everyday implicit policies and the way in which they are negotiated. In past research, the number of actors involved in shaping the policy has included INI, the radio stations, and in more comprehensive studies, the Zapatistas. By treating policy as negotiation, however, the number of actors involved grows considerably.

Documentary analysis and interviews about the goals of the stations are no longer the exclusive methods of indigenist policy research. The implications for research include a challenge to keep developing methods to study the negotiations at the different levels. This dissertation opens the door to new interpretations of indigenist radio policy, interpretations in which the explicit governmental self-praise can be challenged as alternative voices are heard.

The theoretical implications in the context of nationalism also raise issues. If the stations were ever meant to serve as tools of State formation, they also fostered some sort of indigenous nationalism. When I put a station manager in Chiapas in the unfair position of having to choose sides and asked him whether stations were tools of government propaganda or guerrilla stations, he answered: “We are both.”

Perhaps one of the main theoretical contribution of this dissertation is the application to policy of Riggins’ (1992) claims that “the long-term effect of ethnic

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41 In studies of EZLN-government conflict, however, indigenist stations are often granted a role of currency in the negotiation between the government and the EZLN.
minority media is neither total assimilation nor total cultural preservation but some moderate degree of preservation that represents a compromise between the two extremes” (276). In policy, this translates as a negotiation in which traditionally antagonized forces—the State and indigenous cultures—both exert influence in the stations, and the stations end up serving both.

Radio XEPET differs from other attempts by the Mexican State to reach indigenous populations. Low audience identification of Radio XEPET with the Mexican government, high community participation in station-promoted activities, and close contact of the programming with everyday life indicate that the station has become a part of the community. Unlike other government programs, perceived as paternalistic by critics or as external by indigenous communities, indigenist radio has managed to permeate the social life of the interior of the Yucatan Peninsula Maya.

As for practical implications, the dissertation illustrates very real examples of pressure and censorship on radio broadcasting, many of which have not been publicized. If anything written here can help reduce pressure on free speech and increase the autonomy and participation of indigenous peoples in the radio stations, this study will have been worth the time and effort invested.

It also shows the role of indigenous population in the policy negotiation process. In the case of Radio XEPET, the Maya population participates as local level actors. Almost every category described in the findings of the dissertation had an exclusive or strong Maya component, such as in the official participation mechanisms (i.e., Sistema Permanente de Consulta, Consejo Consultivo), local political parties, municipal power, traditional authorities, NGO’s, and local INI offices.
Assumptions and Limitations

Several assumptions and limitations need to be expressed. The assumptions have guided the research and will help identify personal, theoretical, and methodological biases. The limitations, along with possible solutions, can be of help to other researchers and to future studies.

Methodologically, the concept of negotiation poses a challenge for at least two reasons. First, the term involves will at each end of the process. Policy, however, is not always a conscious process of the intervening actors. Everyday operation of a radio station responds to many more factors than to the mere negotiation of the station with the social actors around it. Negotiation implies the search of an agreement after competing (often colliding) goals have come to terms. Some of the policies, however, are not the product of any negotiation, but of a unilateral decision that did not take into account other agents. Second, the word negotiation implies a degree of agency of the station and of a high number of agents. In most cases, as seen throughout the dissertation, this “give and take,” involves both sides. The term could hide the unilateralism of some policies, however. Most stations were not born out of a negotiation between the State and indigenous communities. Because of this “original sin,” the term negotiation could seem misleading.

As I have expressed before (Castells-Talens, 1994), a research project conducted in a land other than one’s own requires that the researcher knows the language of the area under study. This is especially true in a study of policy such as this one. Policy is treated as an elastic concept, a concept in which context plays an essential role. Most of Radio
XEPET’s policy is negotiated in Spanish, but my limited knowledge of Maya does not allow for a more accurate observation of the indigenous side of the negotiation. Everyday interactions and programming would provide data that could alter some of the conclusions.

Funding also posed a limitation. More funding would have allowed for more time in the field, needed to interview additional social actors. Further interviewing would: (1) confirm or disprove information, (2) present a more thorough description of the role of certain social actors, and (3) provide more detail on the mechanisms of negotiation.

The taxonomy of policy negotiation (Table 4-9) does not distinguish between the extent of agency of each social actor. The state delegation of INI in Yucatan, for example, does not have the same influence on XEPET’s operation as the Yucatec FZLN. The arrows do not reflect accurately the lack of symmetry in relationships between actors and the station. The arrows also fail to show all the interactions between actors. Much more complex methods of data analysis would be needed for such a diagram, including the ones proposed by network theory, a relatively new branch of anthropology.

A considerable limitation of the study is the statement that the explicit policy of INI and Radio XEPET often coincided. The findings do not allow the assumption that INI set the explicit policy of indigenist stations unilaterally. The explicit policy came from INI, but that does not mean that the manager and staff of XEPET did not participate in the drafting of the policy. I was not able to attend any of the meetings of the management of indigenist stations with INI’s Subdirection of Radio officials. Those meetings might

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42 I learned Maya through one intensive six-week course at the University of North Carolina, two semester-long courses at the Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, and numerous conversations in the field.
have provided some insight on the extent of agency of each station in the drafting of explicit policy.

The dissertation assumes that culture in general, and language in particular, plays a fundamental role both in the oppression and liberation of a people. This point has been source of disagreement in passionate conversations with other researchers of alternative and community media. Perhaps because of my own ethnocentrism and my personal experiences as a Catalan and as a researcher, I am troubled by the disassociation of language and politics.

This dissertation also assumes that language use is related to power and domination, and therefore, to liberation. The imposition of a language usually obeys political objectives of domination. A language provides a form of understanding a culture. Once the culture has been deprived of its language, the culture makes sense through the language that has been imposed. Spanishization, therefore, is understood in this work not only as a response to integrate marginal, monolingual, indigenous populations into the economic life of mainstream society. It is also seen as an attempt to create a homogenous society and reduce resistance (not just cultural, but also political) by indigenous peoples.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Since the data were last collected in 2002, the policy toward indigenist radio has witnessed a drastic event. The Instituto Nacional Indigenista was dismantled in July 2003. In the explicit sense of the term, indigenism had disappeared. In 2001, the Office of the President had created the new National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI), a new department that in 2003 assumed the entirety of INI’s functions, including the control of radio stations. The direction of the new CDI stations
is unknown and provides a fertile ground for research. Research will be needed to assess the extent to which post-INI changes of policy mean an increase or reduction of radio broadcasts in indigenous languages.

Further research is also needed to explore the potential growth of the experimental projects. So far, research has ignored the role of boarding house radio. The four low power FM stations in Yucatan constitute both a school for future radio broadcasters and a model to explore and perhaps export to other regions.

The new transparency laws in Mexico allow for an essential line of work that has been hard to conduct so far: the study of funding of the stations. The amount of resources that the State assigns to each radio station yearly shows the commitment to the project. This information has been kept secret, but legislation changes now allow for free access to public information. Analyzed in retrospective, the allocation of money to the stations will provide valuable evidence on the changes in policy.

Programming is an aspect of indigenous language radio that needs more research, both in Mexico and in Latin America. Can any integral approach to media studies be conceived without analyzing the message? A full understanding or assessment of primordial aspects of radio such as participation, self-representation of the station, policy, or censorship requires an analysis of the programming. In indigenous language radio, programming is often overlooked. The cause for this serious limitation can be found in (1) the lack of language training among most researchers of indigenous media and (2) the insignificant number of indigenous researchers. As long as this situation continues, indigenous media research will be handicapped.
Additionally to the study of the programming, the stations’ self-representation could be further developed by interviewing the staff and the creators of the stations’ iconography. A good starting point would be to interview the logo designers and the artists who painted the murals at the stations.

Finally, an array of subjects related to indigenist radio policy will permit a better understanding of indigenous-language radio, subjects such as the treatment of indigenous identity in the stations, the perception of the stations by indigenous peoples, the long-term social and cultural changes that stations cause in community, and the symbolic value of the stations. In other Latin American countries, radio stations do not operate under governmental ownership. Research can provide further, detailed answers to the question of who negotiates the operation of these stations’ everyday practices.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

A native of Barcelona, Catalonia, Antoni Castells-Talens holds a Bachelor of Arts from Ursinus College, Pennsylvania, and a Master of Arts in Mass Communications from the University of Florida. Before moving to Florida, Castells-Talens lived in Mexico, where he worked as a freelance correspondent for Avui (Barcelona) and as a reporter and copyeditor for the Diario de Yucatán (Mérida). He has taught communication and languages at the University of Florida, Ursinus College, and the Instituto de Estudios de la Comunicación de Yucatán. While at Ursinus, he also served as the director of the college’s International Learning Center. He has presented his research at academic conferences in the United States, Europe, and Latin America. Castells-Talens has directed two short films, Tu k'aaxal ha' (2001) and Ramon (2003).