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Community Radio in Guatemala: A Half-Century of Resistance in the Face of Repression

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Community Radio in Guatemala: A Half-Century of Resistance in the Face of Repression

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in History from
The College of William & Mary

by

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Accepted for _____
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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Introduction

Perched in front of a microphone with a cherry-colored cover, a young K'iche' woman thanks her listeners for tuning in, speaking in Spanish to individuals across her Guatemalan municipality. In the department of El Quiché, the municipality is home to a population that mainly identifies as K'iche', a Maya group from the central western highlands. The excited bounce of marimba music accompanies her. Hung on the adobe brick wall behind her, a piece of crimson fabric complements the microphone. Emitting a familiar blue glow, her PC displays two windows: the mixing software that allows her to queue up songs, and Facebook, where eager listeners message her song requests. Next to her, a phone lights up with calls coming in with more song requests. She rests her hands on a wooden desk and sits in a wheeled office chair. But the wheels have little ability to move, because the floor is earthen. I am scribbling in the notebook across my lap, settled on a ripped vinyl seat that presumably spent most of its life in a car. Through the adobe brick walls echo the muffled whinnies of the horses that once lived in the room we now inhabit. A former horse stall, the space is now the municipality's community radio station. It reaches a mix of thousands of monolingual and bilingual speakers in K'iche' and Spanish, presenting a native-language alternative to the "verbal, written, and televised media [of Guatemala that] is realized only in Spanish language," which overlooks the nation's twenty-two Maya languages.¹

It is unexpected that a radio station would be located in a small horse stall. However, it has few options for location, because it is "illegal," broadcasting underground. The station lacks the necessary license to broadcast legally over government-controlled radio frequencies.

¹ Movimiento de Radios Comunitarias de Guatemala, *Radio comunitaria: Su historia ante un estado racista en Guatemala y sus fundamentos jurídicos*, 3, 2611, Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica (CIRMA), Antigua, Guatemala.

Accessible primarily to wealthy media corporations, licenses cost hundreds of thousands of quetzales (Guatemala's currency: 7.33Q:\$1.00USD in 2017).² As a result of operating without a license, the radio station has faced the same fate as several other community radio stations across Guatemala, becoming subject to raids, arrests, and closure. Put simply, as a small locally operated radio station, they have been criminalized for not being able to buy a license priced far beyond their financial capacity. Criminalization in this case is a form of legalized repression: there is no feasible way for community radio stations to procure licenses, despite signed national and international accords that ensure state-facilitated indigenous media access. Recognizing a national problem in this criminalization, a number of broadcasters, activists, lawyers, and advocates have mobilized nationally and internationally in a network known as the Community Radio Movement of Guatemala. As a movement, they confront the unjust repression of community radio and promote policy change to protect stations and broadcasters.

Before turning to the storied, intense history of Guatemalan community radio, a basic explanation of community radio is necessary. Community radio is an international phenomenon, and, in the context of Guatemala, it refers to radio stations that are operated by local citizen organizations, essentially *by the community for the community*. Although the Guatemalan Community Radio Movement states that community radio is a secular institution, that was not always the case and remains a contentious claim.³ The first community radio stations in Guatemala grew out of parishes in the 1950s and 1960s with priests and catechists at the helm. Secularization appears to have occurred in the 1980s, with a divide in nomenclature between religious radio and “community” (secular) radio becoming evident in print media in the late

² “USD to GTQ,” XE, last modified 29 Mar. 2017, <http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?From=USD&To=GTQ>.

³ Movimiento de Radios Comunitarias de Guatemala, *Radio comunitaria: Su historia*, 23.

1990s. Community stations typically use a mixture of Spanish and the region's respective native language, discussing and advertising local happenings, sometimes broadcasting live from events in the field or interviewing community officials. Amplifying the happenings of the community, they narrate the rhythm of daily life. This project specifically studies radio, because it is a uniquely accessible medium of communication. Because radios are auditory and use native language, listeners are not required to be literate, either in Spanish or native language. Beyond that, they are affordable in a way that computers, televisions, and cell phones are not, and they only need a few batteries to operate. The range, too, is critical, as they can reach remote spaces and keep isolated community members up-to-date, particularly in small, rural hamlets where electricity may not reach. On the local level, radio broadcasting is a tool that promotes unity and contributes to a sense of community autonomy. Depending on who controls the station, radio can be more than a social tool, assuming a political character as well.

In April 2015, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) reviewed Guatemala's implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, drawing attention to contemporary cases of discrimination in the country. Addressing the committee and an international audience, Georgetown law professor Carlos Manuel Vázquez, serving as an independent expert and the rapporteur for Guatemala, called attention to the fact that community radio stations in Guatemala have become explicitly criminalized: "The criminalization of community radio, and subsequent detention of Indigenous journalists and closure of radio stations, which are an integral part in the communication of Indigenous peoples, is a new phenomenon."⁴ He rooted the problem in 1996, the year that peace

⁴ *Cultural Survival*, "UN Denounces the Criminalization of Indigenous Community Radios in Guatemala," 18 May 2015, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/un-denounces-criminalization-indigenous-community-radios-guatemala>.

accords ended nearly forty years of armed conflict in Guatemala and the year that the nation's new Telecommunications Law made it necessary to purchase frequency-use licenses at auction rather than from the government for a fixed price.

While Vázquez described a contemporary and urgent problem, it is one that arguably has a longer history than he suggests. The 1996 law was and remains a repressive legal force that bars community radio stations' access to frequency licenses and permits the use of force to prosecute them, and it drove the aforementioned station into its current clandestine status. However, while community stations have been *legally* repressed or "criminalized" since that date, there is a longer trend of military repression of community radio stations that reaches back to the 1970s. Looking at an extended narrative of repression lends context to the present day fight for policy change; it illustrates a continual exclusion and sustained repression by the state against the institution of Guatemalan community radio.

Summary

Community radio broadcasters, capitalizing on radio's flexibility, politicized stations almost as soon as community broadcasting appeared in Guatemala. Guatemalan community radio emerged in the late 1950s, almost parallel to the start of Guatemala's thirty-six year armed conflict that began in the early 1960s. In this decades-long struggle, Guatemala's binaries became glaringly apparent as urban was pitted against rural, *ladino* (a term that can be read in this context as 'non-indigenous') against indigenous, elite against *campesino*. The conflict culminated in "acts of genocide" carried out by the military state against the indigenous population of the nation, oftentimes with members of communities coerced into executing

violence against their own neighbors.⁵ The conflict and community radio also arose in tandem with ongoing US involvement, which had facilitated the overthrow of Guatemala's democratically elected leader, Jacobo Árbenz, in 1954. Triggering not only a deeper exploitation of the country's resources and people, continued interventionism also resulted in a succession of military leaders as head of state. From local, national, and international perspectives, the second half of the twentieth century stands out as a politically tumultuous period in Guatemala, and this turbulence continues, masked in a variety of guises, up to the present.

Within this political context, community radio became particularly useful in heavily indigenous *campesino* rural areas, where populations have been hierarchically disenfranchised and marginalized for generations. In the highlands, parish broadcasters opened radio schools, linking them to other similar projects across the region. These schools took the form of educational broadcasts that worked to spread literacy locally, using specifically targeted lesson plans that applied biblical teachings to daily life in terms of rights, ability, and pride. The intent was to propel local indigenous *campesino* populations into recognition of their agency and to draw their attention to daily discrimination and prejudice. While radio schools and similar programming shared both social and political messages meant to advance the wellbeing of communities, national figures also manipulated community radio for explicit political purposes over the years. These include Efraín Ríos Montt, the notorious former head of state in 1982 and 1983 accused of crimes against humanity, and the URNG, the guerrilla organization the

⁵ Using the metrics outlined in the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the UN-sponsored Commission for Historical Clarification determined that, although the state used rhetoric of counterinsurgency against subversive guerrillas to define the conflict, the army in reality executed "acts of genocide" against Maya civilian populations, targeting entire communities as the enemy, particularly in the highlands during the early 1980s. In total, roughly 200,000 civilians were killed or disappeared at the hands of the Guatemalan army in the name of quelling insurgency. Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico (CEH), *Memory of Silence* (Guatemala City: CEH, 1999), 38.

government was attempting to stomp out throughout the 1980s. Using radio broadcasts to orient themselves as members of communities, as peers, these parties also acknowledged the efficacy of community-style radio in reaching the people of Guatemala.

Military action against populations deemed subversive provoked the politicization of community radio, yielding in turn a military repression of stations during the war years that was even more bloody than what is occurring at present in community radio stations. Again, for modern activists and politicians assessing Guatemalan community radio, the “detention of indigenous journalists and the closure of radio stations” is a current and pressing problem.⁶ However, it is important to understand that tactics of repression against outspoken community stations have existed since at least the 1970s, just over a decade after the first appearance of a formal community radio station in the country. There is continuity between the modern criminal repression of community radio and the former military repression of community radio. Though repression is now exercised in the form of legal criminalization, it has existed since the most severe years of the conflict. When discussing the government’s targets in the conflict, The Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH)—a UN-sponsored truth commission that meticulously detailed the violations and violence of the conflict period—asserts, “above all, radio stations were linked to the insurgency,” meaning they were seen as particularly dangerous and subversive and were therefore victim to silencing.⁷ The more vocal and political a station was, the more at risk it became. While repression was not a reality for all stations, it was the experience of many. In a number of cases, it became a question of life and death at the peak of the conflict. Repression during the armed conflict, though it took many forms, appears in this

⁶ *Cultural Survival*, “UN Denounces the Criminalization.”

⁷ “sobre todo las radioemisoras, estaban vinculados a la insurgencia.” CEH, *Memoria del silencio* (Guatemala City: CEH, 1999), Cap. 2:161.

thesis often as blatant violence, involving raids, equipment seizures, interrogations, threats, kidnappings, disappearances, and murders.

In 1996, the narrative changed its tune. The year of the conflict's legal "resolution" with the signing of peace accords, 1996 was also a moment when Guatemala solidified its neoliberal policies, including commodification of radio frequencies. The government auctioned off licenses for frequency use to the highest bidder, always a wealthy media conglomerate or mogul, often for millions of U.S. dollars, several times the starting point of the auction. Although some small stations closed as a result, others—including stations sponsored by both religious and community groups—that could not afford to participate elected to operate without licenses. They did so because community radio access is an explicit right ensured in the Peace Accords and international conventions signed by Guatemala. However, these agreements have not protected the right in practice. The 1996 Telecommunications Law, on the contrary, has been enforced through high fines since it was passed.

In 2008, the Telecommunications Law's punishments became more severe: police gained the right to raid stations operating illegally, with the intent of confiscating equipment and arresting implicated broadcasters. While they are now entering radio stations to stop frequency usage rather than to eradicate insurgent messages, there is continuity in this sustained silencing of stations. It is repression based on different claims, but it remains chillingly effective: a sociopolitical tool important to community operation is threatened or lost, and broadcasters representing the community face danger and violence. As a whole, this thesis traces incidents of overt and covert violence and constructs an overarching narrative of repression from the 1970s up to 2016, putting experiences of radio politicization, subsequent repression, and the resulting tensions of both the past and present into conversation with one another.

Methods

An internship I completed in summer 2015 with indigenous human rights advocacy N.G.O. Cultural Survival inspired this project. Cultural Survival has a branch that works specifically with indigenous community radio in Guatemala, supporting a network of stations and advocates engaged in the fight for frequency license access. Taking what I learned about indigenous activism from this internship, I met with Professor Carla Buck, discussing the uses of media in indigenous identity movements. From there, I worked with Professor Betsy Konefal to create a project to study community radio. Cultural Survival generously facilitated a connection for me with two community radio stations in El Quiché, Guatemala. When I traveled to Guatemala in summer 2016, I had only a faint conception of community radio criminalization and no understanding that these specific stations would be facing repression. However, as soon as I met the first set of broadcasters at what I assumed was the station, it became clear that my project would be taking a different route than anticipated.

Rather than meeting with just the broadcasters, I arrived to find the board of directors of the community organization sponsoring the station waiting to interview me as well. As they asked about my background and the nature of the project, the theme of trust emerged again and again. Eventually they agreed to participate in my research, telling me they trusted me and were willing to *take* me to the station. I inquired as to why trust was a matter of concern and where the station was located, still assuming that it was in the community organization's compound where we were at that moment. To my surprise, they replied that they had gone underground, because they could not afford a frequency-use license. The station had been raided in 2015, twice going into hiding after most of their equipment was confiscated and a young broadcaster was arrested, pushing them to the previously described horse stall.

The other station I worked with was run by a local women's advocacy group. Police raided it on the same day in 2015, though none of its broadcasters were present. After considering the devastating results of the raid in the other station, its directors decided to close indefinitely for safety after a short period of reopening. Both stations gave me excellent insight into what it is to be a target in this repression, as well as into how stations engage with community, inviting participation from firemen, policemen, midwives, leaders, and others involved in local resources. They strive to keep people in the community up-to-date on events and also create programming focused on native-language restoration and knowledge of Maya beliefs and customs.

While in Guatemala, I also spent time doing archival work in the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica (CIRMA) in Antigua. I pulled all the records it had relating to community radio, taking home over 200 Spanish-language documents in the form of newspaper clippings, broadcast transcripts, and memoranda. With this primary source base, I was able to construct a history from the late 1950s through 2003, which I then carried to the present using my fieldwork and literature produced by the Community Radio Movement. To that end, all of the translations included in this are my own, unless otherwise indicated, and the original Spanish can be found in the corresponding note. In my strategic decisions of translation, I attempted to stay literal in meaning and faithful in structure to the original. Part of this project is also based on Betsy Konefal's research on the activism of Radio Quiché and La Voz de Atitlán in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the remaining histories come from my own archival research.

While I had remarkable exposure to criminalized radio stations and although I found a wealth of relevant archival documents, there are holes in my research. This project covers a long

time period and only speaks to select moments from select stations, which cannot reflect the experience of all community radio stations. Beyond that, there is little secondary source information on Guatemalan radio. Monographs and anthologies discuss radio only in passing, causing this project to be centered on primary sources. The lack of scholarship on the topic of Guatemalan community radio indicates a need for more academic work to be done, in order to establish a scholarly source base that the Community Radio Movement can utilize. The ultimate goal of this project is to be a resource for community radio broadcasters defending their legitimacy against the government. Hopefully this project, or a future text based on it, can help illustrate that there is indeed a repression when it comes to community radio and that it is not a new reality, but rather one decades old, filled with both violence and resistance.

Chapter 1: The Beginning

1 PM, Sunday, February 8, 1959. A series of photographs captured the following moment: Guatemalan President Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes, one year in office, looks over a crowd that includes scribbling journalists, pleased clergy members, and excited *campesinos* in the highland municipality of Colomba, Quetzaltenango. “*Me gusta ayudar a quien se ayuda*”—“I like to help he who helps himself,” he comments with smile in the direction of Colomba’s delighted priest.⁸ Moments later, he hands a bulky radio, the size of a modern toaster oven, to an unnamed *campesino*, who wears a smile in the exchange. This moment marks the founding of Colomba’s radio school, one of Guatemala’s earliest community radio stations.⁹

Radio schools—educational radio programming—from Sutatenza, Colombia served to influence how Latin America promoted education to rural populations. According to the 1959 *El Imparcial* article that includes the above photographs, the Colombian radio schools helped significantly decrease illiteracy thanks to mass radio literacy campaigns via radio broadcasting. In her book on Colombian media, Clemencia Rodríguez confirms that Radio Sutatenza in Colombia is “commonly known as the first alternative radio station in Latin America.”¹⁰ However, she disagrees that it should be considered the first, given it did not foster community broadcasting participation, arguing that it was instead a form of “one-way, vertical communication.”¹¹ Radio Sutatenza arose under the direction of a local priest in 1947, twelve

⁸ Rafael Escobar Argüello, “Escuelas Radiofónicas Fundadas por el Párroco en Colomba Inaugurados; Luchas Cultural Religiosa,” *El Imparcial*, 9 Feb. 1959, CM S/16, 650(4)3-4, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

⁹ Escobar Argüello, “Escuelas Radiofónica Fundadas.”

¹⁰ Clemencia Rodríguez, *Citizens’ Media Against Armed Conflict* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Publishing, 2007), 26.

¹¹ Rodríguez, *Citizens’ Media*, 27.

years prior to the photos from Colomba, Guatemala. Rodríguez defines the radio school model that the station fashioned: “unschooled peasants were organized into what Sutatenza called ‘radio schools’; these literacy groups gathered around a radio receiver to listen to lessons on writing and reading and to complete work booklets and homework.”¹² In the late 1950s, Guatemala began to adopt the radio school model, similarly under the leadership of Catholic priests, to help elevate literacy across the nation, particularly within the rural indigenous *campesino* population.

The 1959 article depicts an early Guatemalan radio school’s founding in Colomba, Quetzaltenango, an area mainly populated by the Mam, a Maya group of the Guatemalan western highlands and southern Mexico. Founded and operated by a local parish priest, the Colomba radio school worked out of the local radio station, TGAC, operated by the parish, and was called *La Voz Parroquial de Colomba*—The Parish Voice of Colomba. An early problem the priest faced was determining how to finance local access to radio, as personal radios were not yet common household goods across Guatemala. Partnering with the Dutch technology company, Philips, and the Colombian creditor, Banco del Occidente, the priest helped *campesinos* buy radios, batteries, and antennae. President Ydígoras Fuentes, too, donated 25 radios with batteries and antennae. According to *El Imparcial*, the priest also enlisted the military, having the army donate 1,000 literacy workbooks for peasants, 1,000 corresponding records to be broadcast, and 30 instructional guides that explained how to use the materials. Beyond this, the minister of education, independent of his ministry, provided 1,000 pencils, 1,000 notebooks, and 75 quetzales (the quetzal and US dollar were 1:1 until 1987) to pay a hired literacy teacher.¹³

¹² Rodríguez, *Citizens’ Media*, 26.

¹³ Escobar Argüello, “Escuelas Radiofónica Fundadas”; OANDA, “Guatemalan Quetzal,” accessed 24 Mar. 2017, <https://www.oanda.com/currency/iso-currency-codes/GTQ>.

Over the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, many radio schools of the same style arose under the direction of parish priests, similarly seeking to help raise Spanish literacy across their parishes. These radio schools stayed localized and also broadcast themes important to local culture and relevant to Catholic adherence. In 1965, the *Federación Guatemalteca de Escuelas Radiofónicas (FGER)*—The Guatemalan Federation of Radio Schools—began as a coordinating body for Catholic radio schools, with a stated mission to educate the indigenous population and the broader peasantry about Spanish literacy and evangelization. The radio schools associated with FGER continue to work out of seven stations, predominantly located in the western part of the nation. The stations as of 2003 included La Voz de Colomba (Quetzaltenango); La Voz de Nahualá (Sololá), Estaciones Tezulutlán Estereo Gerardi (Alta Verapaz), La Voz de Atitlán (Sololá), Radio Mam (Quetzaltenango), Radio Chorti (Chiquimula), and Radio Ut'an Kaj (Petén).¹⁴ As a direct result of radio schools, Maya were welcomed to the Guatemalan broadcasting world in the 1960s. Catholic priests had trained local Maya community members to be catechists, to spread the teachings of the Bible to the heart of the community. With parishes supporting the stations, Maya catechists found radio to be an effective medium by which to reach their peers, becoming some of the first community broadcasters in the nation.¹⁵ With the introduction of local Maya catechists as broadcasters in radio schools, Guatemala moved away from the Colombian top-down model, which was replaced by a lateral inclusion of community participants.

The reorientation of the Church brought by Vatican II encouraged a number of Guatemalan community broadcasters, specifically catechists involved with FGER, to adapt the

¹⁴ Jacob Thorsen, “Community Radios in the Process of Democratization in Guatemala: A Network Governance Approach,” (Thesis, Copenhagen Business School, 2003), 12.

¹⁵ Betsy Konefal, *For Every Indio Who Falls* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010), 31.

theology they broadcast to promote social advancement for the poor. Rather than using their frequencies to teach merely reading, writing, and the Bible, they began to include content in writing exercises that highlighted the injustices and prejudices that kept much of Guatemala's indigenous *campesino* population in marginal positions. In a nation ruled by politicians who embraced military brutality in order to sustain their leadership and isolate power in the hands of a few, these radio stations were made by the people for their own community advancement. FGER broadcasters employed Vatican II philosophy to mobilize their listenership, emphasizing the value of education and knowledge in finding empowerment. A rising social literacy of justice was transmitted through concrete literacy training. On this topic, Betsy Konefal explains, "young Mayas developed and led lessons" in the radio schools that "focused on literacy training, agricultural techniques, and the cooperative movement, as well as spiritual lessons inspired by liberation theology."¹⁶

Radio Nahualá, a founder of FGER, opened its doors in Sololá in 1962, using a transmitter donated by the Catholic Relief Service. A 1968 article explains that the function of the station was to educate "the *aborígenes* of Nahualá, Santa Catarina, Ixtahuacán, Santa Lucía Utatlán, Santa María Visitación, and Santa Clara La Luna, all in the department of Sololá."¹⁷ Its radio school programming aimed to inform the local indigenous population about: health, agriculture, literacy, Spanish fluency, labor economics, and religion. Importantly, Radio Nahualá broadcast in the K'iche' language in order to reach the area's monolingual native-language speakers. To assess the efficacy of their Spanish literacy programming, the broadcasters made a point of visiting and polling their listeners. By late 1968, about 2,000 listeners, according to the

¹⁶ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 44.

¹⁷ unidentified newspaper clipping, "Nuevos Equipos y Estudio Fueron Inaugurados por Radio Nahualá," 25 Nov. 1968, 17004, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

article, had responded positively that their Spanish had improved, illustrating the impact and breadth these community radio stations had even in their first years.¹⁸

Radio Quiché, a popular radio station that helped stimulate community mobilization in the late 1970s, began with a 1961 fundraising campaign led by a local priest for a parish radio in Santa Cruz del Quiché.¹⁹ The priest, along with his fellow campaigners comprised of local youth, came up short of their goal with a total of just 260 quetzales. Disheartened, he proposed that they should buy a vertical religious banner for inside the church instead, using the small amount collected. Chanting, “emisora sí, estandarte no”—“station yes, banner no”—the youth convinced the priest to continue the campaign until they fulfilled the goal. In 1965, the station became operational when the Radio Broadcasting Authority granted them a license to operate from 6:00 AM to 10:00 PM.²⁰ Once they received word on the license, the priest enlisted the help of a Quetzaltenango broadcaster to set up the necessary broadcasting equipment. On September 9, 1965, the station began transmitting as Radio Santa Cruz, mainly staffed by volunteers who did programming on Catholicism, culture, and agriculture, as well as produced news, sports, and music segments. They also shared broadcasts specifically intended for children and, much like the other community radio stations that had recently sprung up, had a focus on improving Spanish literacy.²¹ Radio Santa Cruz was one of the founding members of FGER, along with Radio Colomba and La Voz de Nahualá.²² Around the same time, the local parish of Santiago Atitlán in the department of Sololá founded La Voz de Atitlán in 1966. The radio school

¹⁸ unidentified newspaper clipping, “Nuevos Equipos y Estudio.”

¹⁹ CERIGUA, “Radio Quiché, primera emisora del departamento, cumple 50 años,” modified 16 Sept. 2015, <https://cerigua.org/article/radio-quiche-primera-emisora-del-departamento-cump/>.

²⁰ CERIGUA, “Radio Quiché, primera emisora.”

²¹ CERIGUA, “Radio Quiché, primera emisora.”

²² Radio Quiché, “Historia de la Radio Diocesana,” accessed 24 Oct. 2016, <http://www.radioscatolicasdequiche.org/radioquiche/index.php/features/menu-options>.

immediately embraced liberation theology and joined FGER. According to a former director of the station, “the idea was to help the population affected by such poverty, slaughter, malnutrition of children, youth without jobs.”²³

Three years later in September 1969, Radio Quiché took Radio Santa Cruz’s place in name and left FGER.²⁴ One of Konefal’s research subjects, a well-known catechist and broadcaster, recalls that Radio Quiché continued sharing liberation theology and took part in education and literacy programs like the radio schools, but quickly moved into community activism, with broadcasters taking their role as community leaders beyond the studio.²⁵ Konefal recounts that broadcasters fought for positions in Catholic Action traditionally reserved for the elite of the church. Through the lay organization, they sought to influence social change and emphasized a positive indigenous self-image.²⁶

National Politics and Radio Broadcasting

Broadcasting legislation signed in 1955 established guidelines for radio stations, with no apparent differentiation between state, commercial, and community. According to a newspaper article from April 18, 1955, the law made all usable radio frequencies the property of the Guatemalan state.²⁷ In owning frequencies, the government took responsibility for distributing and regulating frequency-use licenses to approved applicant radio stations, which was done through the Radio Broadcasting Authority. At this time, a license was valid for two to five years

²³ “La idea era ayudar a la población por tanta pobreza, matanza, desnutrición de niños, jóvenes sin trabajo.” José Celestino Guarcax González, “Surgimiento de la Municipalidad Maya del municipio de Sololá y su demanda por el establecimiento de un centro universitario estatal, 1973-2000,” (Tesis de licenciado, Universidad de San Carlos, 2012), 75.

²⁴ Radio Quiché, “Historia de la Radio Diocesana.”

²⁵ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 37.

²⁶ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 37.

²⁷ unidentified newspaper clipping, “Nueva Ley de Radiodifusión Ha Sido Promulgada Oficialmente,” 18 April 1955, CM S/16, 1771 (4)3-5, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

and required a petition for renewal at the end of the contract, and broadcasters were also expected to have formal academic training. Once made an official radio through the ownership of a frequency license, a station was obligated to have broadcasts that touched on Guatemalan “cultural” and “recreational” aspects.²⁸ Finally, all broadcasts were to be done in Castilian Spanish.

In 1966, lawmakers amended legislation to keep pace with technological advances like television, continuing to adjust broadcasting regulations over the next several years. The 1966 law, the Radio Communications Law, preserved many of the same stipulations as the 1955 Radio Broadcasting Law.²⁹ However, a 1969 *Prensa Libre* article summarizes an important reform made to the law: “an article... so that cultural and non-state radios are not subject to the regulations of this law, but rather to a standard of special regulations established by the executive body.”³⁰ This amendment indicates that community radio was perhaps exempt from the Radio Communications Law following 1969. While it is unclear what legal guidelines community radio followed during this period, it is important to recognize that the government seems to have made accommodations for stations similar to community radio up to the year 1980, when a new broadcasting law was enacted.

Sponsored by the Church, early community radio stations appear to have been received well by the government, with the military facilitating literacy initiatives and the president popularizing broadcasting in the case of Radio Colomba. However, the relationship between

²⁸ unidentified newspaper clipping, “Nueva Ley de Radiodifusión.”

²⁹ *Prensa Libre*, “Reformas a la Ley de Radiocomunicaciones,” 5 June 1970, 16, CM S/16, 780(4)3-5, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

³⁰ “un artículo... para que las radiodifusoras culturales y no comercializadas del estado, no queden sujetas a la reglamentación de esta ley, sino que se sujeten a un régimen que establezca el organismo ejecutivo, en un reglamento especial.” *Prensa Libre*, “Normas Para... Directores y Jefes de Redacción Deben Ser Guatemaltecos Naturales,” 11 Sept. 1969, 15, CM S/16, 780(4)3-5, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

community radio and the military—in power since 1954—would change in the coming decade. Community broadcasting, perhaps not coincidentally, came to popularity as military violence intensified in the country. While community radios established themselves throughout the 1960s, conflict also began to escalate as guerilla organizations that claimed to fight for *campesino* rights took up arms against the military state in the early 1960s.

In recognition of radio broadcasting's wide reach, major players in the conflict often announced their existence and their plans via radio. Commandeering commercial stations in surprise attacks, guerrilla groups converted commercial into community, speaking directly to the people of Guatemala, even if just for a few moments. In 1962, the first of these broadcasts occurred, with the announcement of the existence of *las Fuerzas Rebeldes Armadas* (FAR)—the Rebel Armed Forces. Taking over Radio Internacional, a commercial station presumably located in the capital, militants shared the intentions of the new group with listeners across the nation. With emphasis on the corruption of President Ydígoras Fuentes and other political elites, the broadcast sought to communicate with impoverished *campesinos* and those in similar situations, while declaring hope for an improved democracy. It urged, "People of Guatemala... Rise! One only needs to go 15 kilometers out of the city to see that the dogs of residential zones live better than our *campesinos*. This should not be like this, our people also have the right to a more dignified, secure, and happy life."³¹ FAR addressed all walks of life and a range of members of the Guatemalan community, including farmers, workers, students, bosses, journalists, and soldiers, instructing them not to be complacent and to act.³²

³¹ "¡Pueblo de Guatemala... a ponerse de pie! Sólo es necesario salir 15 kilómetros fuera de la ciudad para ver que los perros de las zonas residenciales viven mejor que nuestros campesinos. Esto no debe ser así, nuestro pueblo también tiene derecho a una vida más digna, segura y feliz." CEH, *Memoria del silencio*, Cap. 1: 270.

³² CEH, *Memoria del silencio*, Cap. 1: 271.

As a whole, the late 1950s and early 1960s demonstrate the varying uses of community radio. These early years illustrated that broadcasting had the power to promote both social and political messages to communities on the local and national levels. Throughout the following decade, charged social programming often became indistinguishable from the political, as community broadcasters critically reflected on the impact the military state had on daily life.

Chapter 2: Politicization and Repression Rise

As the 1970s opened and guerrilla and state violence increased, radio schools dove deeper into the process of creating a social consciousness in the communities they touched. In 1975, FGER published and circulated a document for its broadcasters: *Pensemos juntos*—Let’s Think Together.³³ A workbook, *Pensemos juntos* was used in group settings during radio school programming, encouraging contemplation on daily activities, encounters, and problems. Its indigenous student authors, Konefal explains, “designed simple images accompanied by questions to facilitate group discussion” on topics actively related to helping the community in an embrace of Vatican II Liberation Theology.³⁴

Through interviews, Konefal determined how La Voz de Atitlán specifically used *Pensemos juntos*. According to a member of the radio, the station’s staff consisted of broadcasters and literacy facilitators. The two primary broadcasters would broadcast radio school lessons using sections of the workbook. During the program, members of the community, both young and old, would gather with facilitators to listen together, using the written text to work on reading, writing, and analytical skills. The questions community members worked through began with basic comprehension questions about the lesson and then moved to critical thinking questions that encouraged individuals to consider their own experiences and apply their personal thoughts.³⁵ The workbooks were written in accessible language and were direct in message, with informative graphics supplementing each lesson to depict the topic visually.

Writing, “*Pensemos juntos* is worth a close look because it was so widely used by activists around the highlands,” Konefal emphasizes the popularity of radio schools in social and

³³ Vilma Marleny Aguilar Gómez, “Historia y evolución de la federación guatemalteca de escuelas radiofónicas (FGER),” (Lic. de comunicación, Universidad de San Carlos, 2014), 75.

³⁴ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 45.

³⁵ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 45.

political mobilization throughout the 1970s.³⁶ In her analysis, she highlights the lessons intended to educate participants on national laws that were often ignored, such as underpaying laborers less than minimum wage. The text continued to dig deeper at national frameworks, challenging paradigms of identity in terms of the *ladino*-indigenous binary. Konefal examines “an excerpt [included in *Pensemos juntos*] from the Guatemalan Constitution declaring that all human beings are free and equal in dignity and rights, and that the state guarantees the rights to life, dignity, and freedom from discrimination,” using the example to prove the profound nature of the study guide.³⁷ *Pensemos juntos* successfully made complicated legal standards and academic philosophies digestible in order to confront the concepts of social justice and identity.

As the military authoritarianism that had been reinforced in the 1960s grew to a higher intensity in the 1970s, activists had to be careful in their political engagement in order to remain safe. *Pensemos juntos* “was cautious in its approach to critiquing the injustices that plagued highland Guatemala” in an effort to avoid being marked as subversive or antigovernment, to keep broadcasters safe.³⁸ However, in the highland region that includes Sololá, home to La Voz de Atitlán, the army’s repression reached a point where it was inescapable. Its radio broadcasters, working with *Pensemos juntos* in order to follow their mission of information dissemination and consciousness-raising, addressed taboo topics. Konefal translated examples of their dangerous lesson questions: “Why does the army forcibly recruit soldiers, and take only *indígenas*? Who do the soldiers defend?...What advantages are there to being organized?”³⁹ This commentary made them direct army targets. Less than two decades before, community radio stations had been opened with support from the nation’s highest political and military commander. However, by

³⁶ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 45.

³⁷ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 46.

³⁸ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 47.

³⁹ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 47.

the 1970s, broadcasters—specifically those at La Voz de Atitlán—explicitly challenged the government’s brutality, reinforcing a local criticism of military violence.

While community radio stations affiliated with FGER appear to have existed within legal parameters, other stations also rooted at the local level operated illegally, actively denouncing the government. In October 1975, *Prensa Libre* reported that police had been searching for a covert radio for six months since it began broadcasting in the spring of that year. Police eventually uncovered it in San Martín Jilotepeque, Chimaltenango on a mountain in the small village of Sacalaj, where there was a 25 meter-tall antenna and small outbuilding containing a transmitter. The station primarily aired religious programming, but it also shared quick fifteen-second segments that contained overtly antigovernment messages.⁴⁰ People were rising against the state, wielding local radio as a weapon in their struggle to overturn the government.

In El Quiché, one well-known Radio Quiché broadcaster researched by Konefal was growing frustrated as a community and spiritual organizer at the lack of change he was seeing on the national level. In his own community, he was a popular broadcaster and witnessed great success in reinventing the narrative of the local Catholic Action, but that was not enough to change the regional experience with the army. As a vocal leader, the broadcaster was able to continue community advocacy beyond the microphone by joining a coalition of other prominent activists from both El Quiché and surrounding departments in 1976, helping to found the *Comité de Unidad Campesina* (CUC) — Committee for Peasant Unity.⁴¹ Although just one case, he well-illustrates how broadcasters’ social identities could feed into political identities outside of the station.

⁴⁰ *Prensa Libre*, “Descubren radioemisora clandestine: Operaba en San Martín,” 24 Oct. 1975, 747, DZ, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

⁴¹ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 68-69.

Scholars Santiago Bastos and Manuela Camus aptly define the late 1970s as a time of increasing polarization, with military violence rapidly rising and activist groups responding in turn with local mobilization.⁴² CUC exemplifies a growing local solidarity against the national government and military, where local leaders and organizations recognized the need for a new system to acknowledge their rights. Bastos and Camus clarify that it connected the *campesino* identity with ideas about fundamental human dignity.⁴³ The 1974 national elections resulted in Kjell Eugenio Laugerud García taking the presidency; they also triggered indigenous “consolidation and radicalization” on the local level.⁴⁴ As part of a militancy movement, CUC was grassroots, growing out of a mobilized population searching for an end to systemic violence. Community radio fit in as a puzzle piece as one of the many means used throughout the 1970s to project this speech and action. There were many reactions and strategies employed by various indigenous, *campesino*, and guerrilla groups, but community radio was initially a popular method to broadcast socially galvanizing concepts in the most literal way. However, the feasibility of broadcasting such community messages would decrease rapidly as repression increased even more through the early 1980s.

Despite community radio stations’ apparent legal existence, the national bodies governing radio continued to expand while maintaining only a narrow interest in commercially operated stations. In 1978, the private though influential association of the Chamber of Radio Broadcasting emerged out of a collaboration of broadcasting bodies, and it has since worked to

⁴² Santiago Bastos and Manuela Camus, *Quebrando el silencio: Organizaciones del pueblo maya y sus demandas 1986-1992*, 3rd ed, (Guatemala City: FLACSO, 1996), 30.

⁴³ Santiago Bastos and Manuela Camus, *Entre el mecapal y el cielo: Desarrollo del Movimiento Maya en Guatemala*, (Guatemala City: Cholsamaj, 2006), 92.

⁴⁴ Bastos and Camus, *Entre el mecapal*, 44.

monitor and support Guatemalan radio.⁴⁵ In May 1980, its executive board—members of commercial radio conglomerates—met to discuss the status of radio in the nation, most likely referring to commercial or national stations. A newspaper clipping captured how the president of the association made a profound remark about the importance of radio, a definition that spans the gap between commercial, state, and community stations:

The function of radio is threefold, he expressed, ‘because we are counselors, educators, and transformers for thousands of listeners. Counselors, because through our programming we can guide the listener, who by internalizing, accepting or engaging with our message, can obtain a better education, and later become a productive person for his family and his community.’⁴⁶

He is reported to have underscored the necessity of free speech and thought on radio, calling them “fundamental principles that we all should defend, because in losing them, man loses his liberty and with it, the opportunity for progress.”⁴⁷ Yet despite these words by a leader in the radio world on the national stage, community broadcasters in zones of heavy conflict had little allowance to speak freely by the early 1980s.

In 1980, Congress updated Guatemala’s broadcasting law again, and it appears that the law applied to community radios as well as commercial radios and television. The 1980 Radio

⁴⁵ *CRG*, “Cámara de radiodifusión de Guatemala,” accessed 6 Nov. 2016, <http://camaraderadio.difusiongt.org/camara/index.php/8-informacion-crg/2-historia>.

⁴⁶ “La función de la radio es una trilogía, expresó, ‘porque somos orientadores, formadores y transformadores de los miles de oyentes. Orientadores, porque a través de nuestras programaciones podemos guiar al escucha, quien al asimilar, aceptar o captar nuestro mensaje puede obtener una mejor formación, y luego transformarse en una persona de bien para su familia y su comunidad.’” Unidentified newspaper clipping, “Mesa de Cámara de Radiodifusión Asumió Sus Cargos,” 31 May 1980, CM S/16, 256(4)3-4, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

⁴⁷ ““principios fundamentales que todos debemos defender, pues al perderlos, el hombre pierde su libertad y con ello [*sic*] las oportunidades de progreso.”” Unidentified newspaper clipping, “Mesa de Cámara de Radiodifusión Asumió Sus Cargos.”

Communications Law, as it was known, began with: “Considering that the importance and the technical advances of radio broadcasting require a regulation consistent with its current development and for the benefit of the public and in defense of the interests of the State,” placing it immediately at odds with stations obviously critical of state acts.⁴⁸ In chapter V of the law, which covers the functions and services of broadcasting, the first article of section (27) emphasizes that radio is for public interest with a strong social utility. The following article (28) presents three subsections about what stations should convey:

Via radio broadcasting one should:

- 1) Maintain respect for moral principles, human dignity and family as an institution;
- 2) Contribute to elevating the cultural level of the people, to preserving the properties of the language and to exalting the material and spiritual values of the nation, and
- 3) Promote and disseminate the principles of democracy, of national unity and of international friendship and cooperation.⁴⁹

Article 31 of the same chapter focuses on the role of broadcasting in relation to the operation of state endeavors. Part of the article is outlined below:

In radio and television stations, it is compulsory to prioritize and transmit free of cost:

⁴⁸ “CONSIDERANDO: que la importancia y los avances técnicos de los servicios de radiocomunicaciones, requieren una regulación congruente con su desarrollo actual, en beneficio de la colectividad y en resguardo de los intereses del Estado.” Congreso de la República de Guatemala, Decreto-Ley 43, “Ley de radiocomunicaciones de 1980,” 1980, [http://www.palermo.edu/cele/cele/pdf/Regulaciones/GuatemalaLeRadio1996\).pdf](http://www.palermo.edu/cele/cele/pdf/Regulaciones/GuatemalaLeRadio1996).pdf).

⁴⁹ “A través de la radiodifusión se debe: 1) Mantener el respeto a los principios de la moral, a la dignidad humana y al vínculo familiar; 2) Contribuir a elevar el nivel cultural del pueblo, conservar la propiedad del idioma y exaltar los valores materiales y espirituales de la nación; y 3) Fomentar y divulgar los principios de la democracia, de la unidad nacional y de la amistad y cooperación internacionales.” Congreso de la República de Guatemala, Decreto-Ley 433.

- 1) Government bulletins that pertain to the security or the defense of national territory, to the preservation of public order, or to measures aimed at preventing or remedying any public catastrophe.⁵⁰

Article 41 also addresses how broadcasting content is expected to comply with national rhetoric, outlining content prohibited on stations:

It is prohibited to broadcast:

- 1) News, messages or advertisements of any kind, contrary to State security or public order;
- 2) Messages that are transmitted by circumventing the services provided by the state to individuals in terms of telephones, telegraphs and telecommunications;
- 3) Broadcasts that are degrading or offensive to public spirit and national symbols, that are offensive to religious beliefs and that promote racial discrimination;
- 4) All kinds of vulgar humor or humor that includes rude noises;
- 5) Broadcasts that cause or could cause corruption of language and that are contrary to morality or good habits;
- 6) Broadcasts corruptive of children or young adults;
- 7) Broadcasts that defend delinquency...⁵¹

⁵⁰ “En las estaciones de radio y de televisión es obligatorio transmitir preferentemente y sin costo alguno: 1) Los boletines del Gobierno de la República que se relacionen con la seguridad o defensa del territorio nacional, con la conservación del orden público, o con medidas encaminadas a prevenir o remediar cualquier calamidad pública.” Congreso de la República de Guatemala, Decreto-Ley 433.

⁵¹ “Se prohíbe difundir: 1) Noticias, mensajes o propaganda de cualquier clase, contrarios a la seguridad del Estado o al orden público; 2) Mensajes que se transmitan eludiendo los servicios que el Estado presta a los particulares en materia de teléfonos, telégrafos y telecomunicaciones; 3) Transmisiones que sean denigrantes u ofensivas al civismo y a los símbolos patrios, injuriosas a las creencias religiosas, y las que fomenten la discriminación racial; 4) Toda clase de comicidad vulgar o de sonidos ofensivos; 5) Transmisiones que causen o puedan causar

These various articles, which are a specific sampling of one chapter of a law with 106 articles total, provide a glimpse into what was acceptable content and what the state expected to hear on the airwaves. Put in conversation with the events of the time and the ever-rising intensity of the conflict, which climaxed in violence in the years surrounding 1980, the law encourages ideals that were not being applied in other realms of governance—specifically the army. The law places emphasis on the necessity of programs that must inspire positive reflections of morals and human dignity. The state, moreover, wanted broadcasters to help create public order, one compliant with its expectations. Concurrent to this law’s enactment, however, the army was terrorizing, displacing, and eliminating Guatemala’s indigenous citizens, including community broadcasters.

corrupción del lenguaje, y las contrarias a la moral o a las buenas costumbres; 6) Transmisiones nocivas a la niñez o a la juventud; 7) Transmisiones que hagan apología de la delincuencia.” Congreso de la República de Guatemala, Decreto-Ley 433.

Chapter 3: Violence

Community stations promoting consciousness-raising were not necessarily fighting against the government; instead, they were working to advance the community for their listeners. However, in a time when government-inflicted violence was viscerally stifling daily life, particularly outspoken community broadcasters could not ignore the horrifying acts of brutality that were suffocating their communities. Many advocated on-air for local action to find peace and equality—the political and the social had become inseparable. Though not the same as a guerrilla action, the government nonetheless recognized these broadcasts as subversive and was quick to silence involved broadcasters.

As military counterinsurgency affected the civilian indigenous population more deeply and widely, community radios continued to galvanize community mobilization. Returning to broadcasters in Santiago Atitlán, *La Voz de Atitlán* experienced firsthand the suffocating military counterinsurgency programs of the early 1980s. A former director recalls that the organization raised money to give loans for daily objects that stimulated the economy like thread and agricultural items. He cites this engagement off the airwaves as part of why the army perceived the station as linked to guerrilla activity.⁵² Additionally, Konefal writes that two of the primary broadcasters “began to condemn army violence on the radio, and soon the army targeted the *Voz de Atitlán* Radio Association specifically.”⁵³ Konefal provides a description of how *La Voz de Atitlán* broadcasters integrated language against violence into their religious and community programming. One broadcaster looked to the Scripture as the base of his broadcasts,

⁵² Guarcax González, “Surgimiento de la Municipalidad Maya,” 75.

⁵³ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 48.

titling one native-language Tz'utujil program, *The Words of God*. While exploring the meaning of biblical passages, he worked in themes of equality, both racial and economic.⁵⁴

Konefal translated an excerpt of the program where the broadcaster actively applied the words of the Bible to daily life in his home of Santiago Atitlán. Originally broadcast in mid-fall, the excerpt speaks to the realities of what local listeners would have been facing every day in 1980. The following is taken directly from Konefal, who received a Spanish translation of the Tz'utujil original from members of La Voz de Atitlán.⁵⁵

What do you think?...In the readings we learn that God created man, [but] not to be persecuted by death... We are all now under the threat of death, death stalks us;...we are losing our being,...we are losing our life.

We cannot speak, seek a better life, because death will follow us, will come between us, destroy us. The question is, who...has brought death among us? The only thing the enemy wants is that we fight among ourselves, that we separate, that we hate each other...

Dear brothers, let's think. Are we living in real justice? Are we all equal as the Scripture says? Is there no discrimination? That's not true, among us there are poor, and besides being poor...we [Tz'utujiles] are discriminated against. Why? Because all are not equal...God says, live with equality and without discrimination, but that is not what we are doing, there is no justice, there is no equality.

⁵⁴ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 127.

⁵⁵ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 214, no. 50.

Think a little more deeply: do all of us have goods, ...lands, thousands and thousands of *cuerdas* of lands in our hands? In whose hands are the great quantities of land, ...while others have none?...[Few] people have almost all the lands and the poor have nothing.

That is why there is extreme poverty in our families... Think and reflect because God asks you to exercise love, peace and justice.⁵⁶

At this time in 1980, repression had reached a point where any show of activism jeopardized everyone involved: many were in hiding from the military, and there was little space left for organizing. CEH describes how suppression of free speech became commonplace in this period, with regional newspapers, magazines, and community radio stations disappearing at a rapid rate, as the state tightened the flow of information within the nation.⁵⁷ In fact, CEH highlights that the state ultimately concluded that local media, “above all, radio stations, were linked to insurgency,” and therefore broadcasters and stations were automatic targets.⁵⁸ Informants and pressured community members betrayed activism to the military, and the military consequently closely monitored anyone perceived as subversive. La Voz de Atitlán’s literacy groups had almost entirely ceased to meet due to the army’s heightened presence.⁵⁹ However, in the face of direct violence, *The Words of God* encouraged listeners to continue combating the military’s counterinsurgency. The broadcaster was championing resistance through critical thought, asking his listeners to consider their position economically and socially, to contemplate

⁵⁶ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 128.

⁵⁷ CEH, *Memoria del silencio*, Cap. 2:161.

⁵⁸ “El Estado mantuvo como cierto que los medios de comunicación del interior del país, y sobre todo las radioemisoras, estaban vinculados a la insurgencia.” CEH, *Memoria del silencio*, Cap. 2: 161.

⁵⁹ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 128.

the nature of prejudice. Soon after *Words of God* aired, the broadcaster was disappeared on October 24, 1980.⁶⁰

Within just days of his disappearance, La Voz de Atitlán ceased to broadcast directly as a result of military action, and its board of directors was forced to escape their Lake Atitlán home. The closure and swift departures were prompted not only by the disappearance, but also by an assault on the radio on October 29.⁶¹ Members of the military stormed through the radio station, “searched files, stole tape recorders and type writers.”⁶² Despite their escape, four board members were tracked down in Antigua and disappeared there in November.⁶³ Konefal writes that only one of the four’s fate is known: his body was discovered covered in burns, with his fingers hacked off and his eyes gouged out.⁶⁴

One year later in October 1981, Santiago Atitlán was still suffering immense pressure from the military, with activists being characterized as dangerous subversives. Soldiers forced members of La Voz de Atitlán who had not yet fled or been disappeared, along with those associated with the literacy initiative, into camps, where they were maltreated and subjected to interrogation. After weeks of this, they were publically declared in *Prensa Libre* to be “confessing subversives.”⁶⁵ The radio station was condemned as being complicit in the promotion of insurgent thought. With this, its members were coerced into stating that they were unaware of the leftist impact of *Pensemos juntos*, casting themselves as ignorant of the effects of

⁶⁰ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 128.

⁶¹ CEH, *Memoria del silencio*, Cap. 2:162.

⁶² Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 129.

⁶³ CEH, *Memoria del silencio*, Cap. 2:162.

⁶⁴ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 129.

⁶⁵ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 129-130.

their initiatives. Eventually everyone was released, save two women who were strong-armed into servitude for the military.⁶⁶

On November 11, 1981, one day after the publication of the article censuring La Voz de Atitlán, *Prensa Libre* again published on the topic of community radio. The article considers native-language broadcasting in relation to the recent events with La Voz de Atitlán. It states that state authorities planned on investigating other community radios that broadcast in indigenous languages, including La Voz de Nahualá, La Voz de Jocotán, and La Voz de Cabricán, in order to confirm that they were not also sharing “subversive” material. The article admits that it was hard for the government to monitor native-language broadcasting. As a result, the government depended on bilingual monitors to verify that content followed sanctioned norms. The article concludes that no station was allowed to operate beyond the bounds of the nation’s laws, and absolutely nobody was permitted to share antigovernment messages.⁶⁷ CEH confirms the article’s content, explaining that the military kept a tight watch particularly on indigenous-language stations.⁶⁸ To demonstrate how the monitoring system functioned, CEH includes the case of K’iche’-speaking Voz de Uatlán. The informant was a prisoner who proclaimed—while incarcerated by the military—that there was an active collaboration between community radio stations and the insurgency. The result of this accusation, according to CEH, was the shooting of two Voz de Uatlán broadcasters.⁶⁹

La Voz de Atitlán members and leaders were unwilling to submit and initially resisted government restrictions, leading to the four-day incarceration and then disappearance of the other primary broadcaster, who—due to his role as president of the organization—the military

⁶⁶ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 130.

⁶⁷ *Prensa Libre*, “Investigan radios que transmiten en lengua,” 11 Nov. 1981.

⁶⁸ CEH, *Memoria del silencio*, Cap. 2:162.

⁶⁹ CEH, *Memoria del silencio*, Cap. 2:162.

deemed subversive.⁷⁰ By spring 1982, his successor received written word from the Ministry of Defense that La Voz de Atitlán could return to air.⁷¹ Beyond that, CEH reports that the army expected frequent meetings with the radio's staff.⁷² The new director conceded; the station reopened, though likely much less outspoken than before, understanding that the Ministry of Defense was listening.

Also critiquing local realities much like La Voz de Atitlán, Radio Quiché suffered similarly intense military persecution.⁷³ Broadcasters were direct targets, and death squads assassinated many.⁷⁴ The bodies of disappeared broadcasters and those associated with the radio were found dumped, often times missing limbs. For example, one broadcaster was kidnapped on October 8, 1980 while leaving the station. Days later, his body was found on the side of a road, covered with marks of torture and riddled with bullet holes.⁷⁵ In one instance, the wife of a Radio

⁷⁰ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 131.

⁷¹ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 131.

⁷² CEH, *Memoria del silencio*, Cap. 2: 164.

⁷³ Also located in Santa Cruz del Quiché, Radio Utatlán faced a string of losses as well. On October 21, 1981, a group of armed men, wielding machine guns, ambushed a broadcaster in plantation fields at la Finca El Carmen in San Pedro Jocopilas, just north of Santa Cruz del Quiché.⁷³ He was shot to death on the spot. Three months later, two of his colleagues suffered a similar fate. They were both assassinated on January 21, 1982. Little is known about the circumstances of their deaths, but newspapers that reported it accused death squads of the assassination. One victim's brother recalls that a team of broadcasters had left the station that morning to do a broadcast remotely in a local community. However, when it came time for the program to air, there was just silence. The family did not think much of it in the moment—glitches happen. It was not until the next day that his family was informed of the murder, and the brother remembers rushing to the hospital in Santa Elena, learning once there that the broadcaster had been shot in the temple and bled to death from his ears. He also recollects how the remaining staff at Radio Utatlán cried over the loss of their deceased friends and colleagues. Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala (ODHAG), *Y la verdad nos hará libres: Reconocimiento a la labor periodística en Guatemala* (Guatemala City: ODHAG, 2005), 186-7.

⁷⁴ CEH, *Memoria del silencio*, Cap. 2: 162.

⁷⁵ ODHAG, *Y la verdad*, 180.

Quiché associate received her disappeared husband's head in a box.⁷⁶ Suspicions were strong that the police were involved in these disappearances. In the case where another broadcaster was kidnapped and killed in 1980, the Archbishop of Guatemala's Office of Human Rights' records note, "police were suspected."⁷⁷

According to Radio Quiché's own history, the station's director, a local priest, faced a serious dilemma in 1980. He had plans to promote new projects with community interest. However, with the intensified violence that resulted in the death of many of his broadcasters, he was forced to reorient the station's agenda. With fear guiding his decision, the priest elected to decrease the station's characteristic consciousness-raising programming. He instead made Radio Quiché echo commercial stations with more neutral programming, attempting to protect the station and himself from more violence.⁷⁸

Designed to maintain military control of communities on the local level, civil defense patrols were militarized bands of coerced civilians empowered under the regime of Ríos Montt. Operational at the peak of civil patrol activity, Radio Kikoten in Sololá originally aimed to return native languages to their original "pure" forms and eliminate Spanish-language influence. However, one broadcaster strongly opposed the forced conscription of local men into civil patrols, condemning it on-air in 1980, the same year one of his peers went into exile after receiving death threats.⁷⁹ Upset by the public condemnations, a local indigenous leader and civil patrol member denounced him to the police, and the broadcaster was subsequently executed that

⁷⁶ "Ellos operaban 'desapareciéndolos y luego dejaban el cadáver, a veces sin partes del cuerpo. Hubo uno de la Radio Quiché, a quien luego a la esposa le enviaron en una cajita la cabeza.'" CEH, *Memoria del silencio*, Cap. 2:162.

⁷⁷ ODHAG, *Y la verdad*, 177.

⁷⁸ Radio Quiché, "Historia de la Radio Diocesana."

⁷⁹ CEH, *Memoria del silencio*, Anexo 1: 359.

same year. Following his death, the station was raided, and all the equipment was taken.⁸⁰ Interestingly enough, CEH reported that the son of this leader, also a civil patrol member, directed the station by 1982. One night as the father and son walked home from a civil patrol meeting in 1982, they were disappeared by what CEH refers to as ‘presumed guerillas.’⁸¹ The same year, while one of the station’s broadcasters was traveling by foot from his village to the station in Sololá, members of the National Police—recognizable in their familiar uniforms—abducted him. Fifteen days later, after community members had searched high and low for him, his dismembered, mutilated body was found in a river, only made identifiable by the shirt he was wearing. The radio quickly ceased to operate.⁸² This example betrays the complex nature of the period, with community radio at the center of the broader conflicts engulfing the highlands.

Inescapable, the unrestrained violence of the early 1980s led to a silencing of many community stations. An important medium for demonstrating leadership and organizing the local population in their own defense, community radio stations were obvious targets in the counterinsurgency of the period. By silencing outspoken broadcasters, the military sought to repress the action of the communities they worked in, publically illustrating the oftentimes-fatal consequences of protest. I have found no available record of public protest on-air against the state by community radio stations following 1982 through the late 1980s. That said, community radio stations continued to broadcast, though without the same conspicuous level of political engagement for fear of ruthless retaliation. Concurrently, however, national actors on both sides of the conflict took to the airwaves in an effort to speak to the wider Guatemalan national community.

⁸⁰ Guarcax González, “Surgimiento de la Municipalidad Maya,” 57.

⁸¹ CEH, *Memoria del silencio*, Anexo 1: 1620.

⁸² CEH, *Memoria del silencio*, Cap.2: 164.

Chapter 4: Community Radio on the National Scale

While these moments of violence were occurring at the local level, General Efraín Ríos Montt seized power in a military coup on March 23, 1982. Although he only held the presidency for seventeen months, his impact ran deep. As a higher up in the military, he was heavily involved in counterinsurgency tactics throughout the 1970s.⁸³ Despite being ousted in 1983, he remained active in the Guatemalan political sphere, particularly in the 1990s and early twenty-first century. During his dictatorial reign as head of state, the violence seen in rural spaces against predominantly indigenous populations increased at a jaw-dropping rate. His government embraced scorched-earth policies in the leveling of villages and the slaughter of thousands of civilians. Consequently, he is internationally recognized as a perpetrator of genocide. Under Ríos Montt, the military grew as members of targeted villages were forced into civil patrols—over a million men compelled into inflicting terror on their own communities, their own neighbors.⁸⁴

When he came to power, he began a campaign of “amnesty,” encouraging displaced people to return to their homes. However, in many cases, assault or death awaited their returns.⁸⁵ Over the state radio, broadcasts trumpeted the existence of amnesty, promoting the government and military as positive forces for the people of Guatemala. Programming described soldiers as “friends of the people,” calling them defenders of the rural *campesino* population.⁸⁶ Coming from the capital and the president, these broadcasts cast the war as over and begged people who had fled and were in hiding to come home. When individuals reflected back on those moments in interviews with CEH, they emphasized that the plea of return made over the radio was a hollow

⁸³ Rachel A. May, *Terror in the Countryside: Campesino Responses to Political Violence in Guatemala* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2001), 61.

⁸⁴ Konefal, *For Every Indio*, 152.

⁸⁵ CEH, *Memoria del silencio*, Cap. 2: 227.

⁸⁶ CEH, *Memoria del silencio*, Cap. 2: 227.

one, intended to lure those seen as subversive back home with the notion of peace and amnesty, in order for the military to “capture and kill” them.⁸⁷ Radio in this case was a propagandist instrument used to reach displaced individuals, providing false information and coloring the conflict for the military’s benefit.

Aside from his role in enabling oppression, Ríos Montt is of particular relevance to this thesis because he himself engaged with radio. As an evangelical Christian, he made weekly broadcasts—via radio and television—every Sunday that focused on morals rooted in evangelical teachings, acting as if he were a community broadcaster. He discussed how morals should apply to one’s personal and family life, as well as one’s identity as a Guatemalan.⁸⁸ He used media to help his mission of crafting a Guatemala that conformed to his evangelical vision, as a way to reach people in every sector of society and to push them into adopting his value system.

While Ríos Montt paralyzed the nation through repeated threats, massacres, and assassinations, guerrilla groups persisted, despite the rising death toll of their members. Far from black and white, the networks of those participating in violence are difficult to untangle. Paramilitary troops and civil patrols committed extreme violence classified as genocide against the nation’s indigenous population, including radio broadcasters. At the same time, individuals and groups who engaged radio on the community level were not exempt from using force; their actions, however, are not comparable to the army’s punishing counterinsurgency tactics.

Also using raids, though in an apparently non-destructive manner, guerrilla groups employed force to overcome commercial stations in order to promote their own community messages, just as FAR did in the early 1960s. In cyclical plays of power, where top-down

⁸⁷ CEH, *Memoria del silencio*, Cap. 2: 227.

⁸⁸ CEH, *Memoria del silencio*, Cap. 1: 195.

structures of commercial radio collided with bottom-up tactics of militants, the guerrilla radio raids reflect true insurgent action against the government. These were moments of broadcasting being used by organizations to fight the government explicitly. In February 1982, multiple newspapers reported guerilla raids on popular commercial radio stations in the capital. The following accounts are taken from a collection of small newspaper clippings, two of which are from unmarked papers. On the afternoon of February 8, armed groups swooped into Radio Fabu-
Estéreo, Radio Progreso, and Radio Rumbos. Taking control of the broadcasting equipment in each station, they rolled a tape of antigovernment rhetoric. In addition to that, they introduced their organizations, publicizing cooperation between FAR, *el Ejército Guatemalteco de los Pobres* (EGP)—the Guerrilla Army of the Poor, *la Organización del Pueblo en Armas* (ORPA)—the Revolutionary Organization of Armed People, and *el Partido Guatemalteco de Trabajo* (PGT)—the Guatemalan Labor Party. This cooperation was known as *la Unión revolucionaria nacional guatemalteca* (URNG) — The Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity.⁸⁹ The URNG soon became the most powerful guerrilla network, an umbrella for all the organizations working for the same end, and the government’s primary target in 1980s counterinsurgency campaigns.

On February 24, ORPA again broke into a station, Radio 5-60. An article recalls peppy music on regularly scheduled programming cutting short, to listeners’ surprise. Suddenly a woman’s voice rang out patriotically as she sang the Guatemalan national hymn. Soon the voices of ORPA members replaced the hymn, and they had a charged message to share. They were addressing young men, asking them to join their ranks as soldiers or as militant youth to fight

⁸⁹ unidentified newspaper clipping, “Incursiones Violentas Hubo en 3 Radiodifusoras en la USAC,” 9 Feb. 1982, CM S/16, 256(4)3-4, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

against the government. Unlike the raid on February 8, the message was sent remotely from a portable FM radio transmitter that diverted the frequency.⁹⁰

Three days later, on February 27, Radio Progreso again faced a guerilla invasion. At 5:00 PM, three unknown armed men burst into the station, intimidating both the guard and the broadcaster, the only two present in the station at the time. The men forbade the employees from tampering with a broadcast that began to play. Much like ORPA had done days earlier, the program shared antigovernment messages from a remote transmitter over the station's frequency. The group remained anonymous, but based on their messages against the government, they were assumed to be a clandestine guerilla group, according to the *Prensa Libre* article that reported it. The hostages recalled in interviews that the men were careful not to touch or take anything, keeping their task exclusively to ensuring that their message was not immediately discontinued.⁹¹

Again, as the 1980s drew to a close, community radio stations became quiet, conforming to the expectations of the government. I found no accessible records of outspoken community radios in the late 1980s, save one. In 1987, from deep in the Sierra Madre Mountains in the department of San Marcos, the URNG—which itself had announced its existence in the February 8, 1982 radio raid—decided to open its own official community radio. With its first broadcast on May 22, 1987, the station, called *La Voz Popular*—The People's Voice—, initially aired on Fridays with evening programs.⁹² The station's broadcasters purportedly had no formal training in radio production, neither in how to operate the technology nor in how to present programs.⁹³

⁹⁰ unidentified newspaper clipping, "Interrumpen Transmisión de Radio 5-60," 25 Feb. 1982, CM S/16, 256(4)3-4, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

⁹¹ *Prensa Libre*, "Tres desconocidos asaltan Radio Progreso y transmiten un mensaje antigubernativo," 28 Feb. 1982, CM S/16, 256(4)3-4, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

⁹² URNG, "La Voz Popular, de Guatemala, a los participantes en AMARC-3," Aug. 1998, CHS, Cartapacio 1, N18, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

⁹³ URNG, "A los participantes en AMARC-3."

However, they claimed to be responding to a serious problem: community broadcasters across the country were being targeted, assaulted, and murdered year after year. The station presented itself as a new generation of community radio, filling a void created by oppression and fear. URNG broadcasters acknowledged the impact these attacks were having on media and the circulation of news. In military threats, disappearances, and assassinations, URNG broadcasters said they recognized the state as concealing brutality and suppressing expression.⁹⁴

The station quickly gained acclaim in the international arena, with broadcasters taking their role as community interlocutors to AMARC's (World Association of Community Broadcasters) 1988 third world assembly (AMARC 3) in Managua, which drew community radio associates from all over the globe. Asked to present on the role of community radio in fights for freedom, La Voz Popular broadcasters arrived as representatives of Guatemalan community radio and community radios engaged in freedom fights worldwide. The station's memorandum sent to AMARC 3 emphasizes that the station perceived itself as a tool for the greater public's advancement: "The feeling, the suffering and the struggle of the people of Guatemala are present in each program of La Voz Popular. La Voz Popular seeks to educate, inform and stand by the people in their struggle, and to be an instrument in their victory and liberation."⁹⁵ According to the document, the station disseminated many of the values of the URNG, carefully outlining La Voz Popular's five core intentions:

La Voz Popular:

⁹⁴ URNG, "La Voz Popular, Guatemala: Emisora Oficial de la URNG," Sept. 1988, 7, CHS, Cartapacio 1, N19, CIRMA.

⁹⁵ "El sentir, el sufrir y la lucha del pueblo de Guatemala están presentes en cada programa de La Voz Popular. Busca la Voz Popular formar, informar y acompañar al pueblo en su lucha, y ser un instrumento para su triunfo y liberación." URNG, "A los participantes en AMARC-3."

- Denounces the repression that the people of Guatemala have suffered and continue to suffer.
- Provides updates on *campesino*, public and union fights being fought across the country.
- Publicizes the development of the people's revolutionary war that is being carried out by the people of Guatemala.
- Offers a survey of the situation of the nation every Friday.
- Brings information and hope to more than 100,000 brothers who were forced to seek refuge in neighboring countries, fleeing military massacres.⁹⁶

With these five initiatives, La Voz Popular portrayed itself as pertinent to both the local and the national, addressing the people locally to keep them up-to-date on national happenings.

In this setting in front of AMARC 3's international audience, La Voz Popular underscored its relationship with the indigenous population of Guatemala, with a specific emphasis on the history that had unfolded in the prior five centuries. At AMARC 3, they opened their presentation with this definition: "One of the elements that defines our people is their Maya history, with their great cultural accomplishments. But we are also defined by a distinctive history of oppression, repression, exploitation and discrimination, which we have been suffering for many centuries."⁹⁷ In this presentation, they tied themselves directly to the greater Maya

⁹⁶ "Denuncia la represión que ha sufrido y sufre el pueblo de Guatemala./Informa sobre las luchas campesinas, populares y sindicales que se libran en el país./Da a conocer el desarrollo de la guerra popular revolucionaria que está librando el pueblo de Guatemala./Ofrece cada viernes una panorámica de la situación del país./Lleva información y esperanza a más de 100,000 hermanos que se vieron obligados a refugiarse en países vecinos, huyendo de las masacres del ejército." URNG, "A los participantes en AMARC-3."

⁹⁷ "Uno de los elementos que definen a nuestro pueblo es su historia maya, con sus grandes realizaciones culturales. Pero también nos define una historia particular de opresión, represión, explotación y discriminación, que venimos sufriendo desde varios siglos." URNG, "La radio en

public, to those who were allied with the URNG and to those who were not. La Voz Popular was also, like the radio schools, a consciousness-raiser, though it pursued a more militant awakening, using cultural history and values as a catalyst for mobilization, “[for] triumph and [for] the liberation of a new society.”⁹⁸ In the lecture, they criticize the divide imposed on Maya cultures of pre- and post-contact, explaining that:

In Guatemala, the system distorts, cuts and divides history. It presents the nation’s history as follows: There once existed hardworking, intelligent and advanced Maya, who developed a great culture. But those Maya died. The Maya of today are uncivilized, backward, lazy and incompetent. The Maya of today have nothing to do with the Maya of before.⁹⁹

La Voz Popular stated it had the mission of affirming the agency of contemporary Maya populations in the face of stereotypes, much the way *Pensemos juntos* did. In their discussion of local communities, broadcasters emphasized to the audience the individuality of every cultural group and acknowledged that their radio station was limited to its own unique context. Despite the concession that they could not speak to the distinct realities of each community they reached, they hoped that the perspectives they shared would facilitate thought and conversation.¹⁰⁰ They said they sought to expose corrupt political systems, the many different forms of discrimination and exploitation in the nation, and the militarization—particularly in terms of civil patrols—of

las luchas de liberación” (presented at AMARC 3, Managua, Nicaragua, 1988), 1, CHS, Cartapacio 1, N17, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

⁹⁸ “del triunfo y de la liberación de la nueva sociedad.” URNG, “La radio en las luchas de liberación,” 6.

⁹⁹ “En Guatemala el sistema tergiversa, corta y secciona la historia. El sistema presenta la historia del país así: Existieron unos mayas trabajadores, inteligentes y evolucionados, que desarrollaron una gran cultura. Pero esos mayas murieron. Los mayas de hoy son incultos, atrasados, haraganes e incapaces. Los mayas de hoy nada tienen que ver con los mayas de antes.” URNG, “La radio en las luchas de liberación,” 6.

¹⁰⁰ URNG, “La Voz Popular, Guatemala,” 1.

the country. Beyond this, they explained they wanted to produce objective news, exposing censored and silenced information with confirmed facts. In sharing the recent happenings of the nation, they hoped to turn truth into ammunition: “to provide information with total objectivity is to transform social, political, military, etc. facts and events into weapons of war.”¹⁰¹ As a whole, the speech was intended to provide an example for community radio stations and broadcasters around the world of how to address and embolden listeners, facilitating engagement in fights for freedom—to show resistance against repression.

A descriptive report produced by the URNG to fundraise for production equipment explains that, not surprisingly, the government and military supposedly were quick to take action against the station, but they struggled to find the clandestine, mobile broadcasting center. In even the station’s earliest moments, the state apparently sought to silence it, before any broadcasts had been aired. The compilers recall that the government pressured other broadcasting firms not to publicize the existence of *La Voz Popular*, attempting to quash the programming before it could begin.¹⁰² However, this purportedly did not inhibit *La Voz Popular* from going on air, nor did it entirely prevent other outlets from advertising the new station and program. The report depicts how, transmitting on-the-go from guerrilla camps, broadcasters hopped between locations, with combat between guerrillas and soldiers never far off: “today we broadcast from here, tomorrow from there. From any mountain ridge, a riverbed, or the remains of a house burned by government troops.”¹⁰³ The report claims that the army, desperate to determine the location of the station, abducted local *campesinos* in the hopes they could serve as informants. However,

¹⁰¹ “Dar la información con objetividad es convertir los hechos y acontecimientos sociales, políticos, militares etc., en armas de guerra.” URNG, “La radio en las luchas de liberación,” 3.

¹⁰² URNG, “La Voz Popular, Guatemala,” 7.

¹⁰³ “Hoy transmitimos acá y mañana allá. Desde cualquier filo, en una vaguada o en los restos de alguna casa incendiada por las tropas del gobierno.” URNG, “La Voz Popular, Guatemala,” 8.

truly not knowing its location, the kidnapped *campesinos* could not supply any information and were, according to the report, killed as a result.¹⁰⁴

The report also narrates a moment from the end of July 1988: 600 members of the Guatemalan special forces surrounded the station, “but after five days of fierce combat, when they succeeded in executing the siege, La Voz Popular was not there and the guerrilla units had already cleared out in an orderly manner.”¹⁰⁵ In order to avoid attacks, the broadcasters allegedly recorded their programs at 10:00 AM and then aired them at 5:15 PM in order to protect themselves and the equipment from being intercepted; this way, the transmission led only to a recording. The authors say that the technical equipment was of particular import, as the local population had apparently provided or funded the ones being used at the time of this report.¹⁰⁶ To get more equipment, they had to smuggle it in from other countries at a steep price. The report explains, “in Guatemala there is no market for [broadcasting] equipment and the small one that exists is tightly controlled by military intelligence,” forcing a revolutionary station like La Voz Popular to turn to external vendors.¹⁰⁷ At the end of the report, they provide a cost analysis, illustrating that buying new equipment to expand their broadcast base would cost a shocking \$85,200 USD.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ “Campesinos ha sido secuestrados por las fuerzas represivas y obligados a decir dónde está La Voz Popular, y al no poder responder, porque lo ignoraban, han sido asesinados.” URNG, “La Voz Popular, Guatemala,” 8.

¹⁰⁵ “La más reciente [ofensiva] fue la de finales de julio, donde más de seiscientos elementos de tropas especiales del ejército tendieron un cerco sobre la emisora. Pero, tras cinco días de encarnizados combates, cuando lograron cerrar el cerco, allí no estaba La Voz Popular y las unidades guerrilleras se habían marchado ordenadamente.” URNG, “La Voz Popular, Guatemala,” 8.

¹⁰⁶ URNG, “La Voz Popular, Guatemala,” 8.

¹⁰⁷ “En Guatemala no hay mercado de estos equipos y el poco que existe está fuertemente controlado por la inteligencia militar.” URNG, “La Voz Popular, Guatemala,” 9.

¹⁰⁸ URNG, “La Voz Popular, Guatemala,” 10.

The archives at CIRMA house a copy of the 79th broadcast produced by the URNG, and the transcript provides insight into how La Voz Popular may have presented its programs. The broadcast was done in Spanish and an unmarked native language, with each segment first said in Spanish and then repeated in native language segued with music. Airing on November 18, 1988, the 79th program opened with music that transitioned into the Guatemalan National Anthem followed by a broadcaster's voice welcoming listeners, particularly "the *campesino* brothers that are suffering army repression."¹⁰⁹ The speaker subsequently rallied the listeners with the call, "Only united and organized will we stop this repression and these abuses that the army perpetrates against us!"¹¹⁰ In the same segment, the broadcaster detailed recent news about soldiers disguising themselves as guerrillas and kidnapping *campesinos* off the road, in an effort to frame guerrillas for attacking civilians.

Focusing on the theme of exploitation of migrant laborers on coastal plantations for this specific program, the broadcasters shared messages illuminating the abuse experienced by workers and the wrongs committed by the wealthy. The following is a translated excerpt:

To our *campesinos* that work picking cotton:

Campesino brother, who works dawn to dusk to make a few cents and to allay the hunger of your children.

Brother, for a long time you have been coming down at five to pick cotton...
...where life is unbearable, because they pay you very little, they rob you when weighing and measuring your product, and they increase your workload. In the plantations, every

¹⁰⁹ "los hermanos campesinos que están sufriendo la represión del ejército." URNG, La Voz Popular Broadcast 79, 18 Nov. 1988, 1, G37.1, 1107, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹¹⁰ "¡Sólo unidos y organizados, vamos a detener esta represión y estos abusos que el ejército comete contra nosotros!" URNG, La Voz Popular Broadcast 79, 1.

day you spend your strength, and with your sweat, you irrigate the land and the great sugar factories—lands that were ours, but were taken from us long ago.

The rich are responsible for this cruel misery, because they get richer with your work, and you go back to your village full of sickness, maybe even leaving one of your children buried at the plantation. You return with little money that can't even cover the basic necessities.

Brother, to go down to the plantations, to work for the rich, this does not make your life better...your family remains worse off, because they don't raise salaries and every day the price of things increases.

Campeño Brothers: this has to end. We have to organize ourselves within plantations, villages, small towns and municipalities, and unite to demand our rights!

Fighting together, we will end the hunger, the misery, the exploitation and the disdain that our people suffer today!

Campeños, plantation workers that are trapped under the exploitation of the landowner; you all have to support this war of the poor, so the triumph of our people will arrive faster.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ “A nuestros campesinos que trabajan en el corte de algodón: Hermano campesino, que trabajas de sol a sol, para ganar unos centavos y calmar el hambre de tus hijos. Hermano, desde hace mucho tiempo estas bajando a las cinco a cortar algodón...en donde la vida es insoportable, porque te pagan poco, te roban en las pesas y medidas y te aumentan más tareas. En las fincas cada día gastas tus fuerzas y con tu sudor, dejas regadas las tierras y las [*sic*] grandes ingenios; tierras que fueron nuestras, pero nos las quitaron hace muchos años. Los ricos son los culpables de esta cruel miseria, porque ellos se enriquecen más con tu trabajo, y tu vuelves a tu aldea lleno de enfermedades, dejando alguno de tus hijos enterrado en la finca; regresas con poco dinero, que ni siquiera alcanza para cubrir todas las necesidades. Hermano: bajar a las fincas, trabajar para los grandes ricos, eso no mejora tu vida...tu familia sigue peor, porque no aumentan el los salarios y cada día suben los precios de las cosas. Hermanos Campesinos: ¡Esto tiene que terminar, todos tenemos que organizarnos en las fincas, aldeas, caserios y municipios, y unirnos para reclamar nuestros derechos! ¡Luchando juntos, acabaremos con el hambre, miseria,

Throughout this segment, the broadcaster uses terms referring to a collective, creating inclusion by using “us” and speaking directly to listeners familiarly with the informal, personal “tú.” The speaker underscores the distinction between the poor and the rich, framing them as the used and the users, respectively. To reinforce the injustice of the dichotomy, the broadcaster returns to the pre-Columbian past, contrasting it with the poverty-plagued present marred by illness and exploitation. In an effort to raise the consciousness of the listener base, the broadcaster concludes with a passionate call for unity and for the overthrow of these repressive systems, done by the *campesinos* for the *campesinos*.

The program moves on to focus on the military’s opaqueness, asking a series of unanswered questions to facilitate discussion among listeners and encourage critical thought on the misalignment of military rhetoric and military action. Questions included, “if the military says that there is no more war, then why are they increasing the number of soldiers?,” “And why do they continue having more than 1.2 million civil patrol members kept in service by force? Wouldn’t it be better to release them so they could dedicate themselves peacefully to their work and family?,” “if they say the guerrilla is divided and lacks political and military direction, then how can the messages of unity from La Voz Popular be explained?,” and “if they say the guerrilla is disorganized without arms or food, how is it possible then that such a guerrilla has caused more than 2.2 thousand army casualties this year?”¹¹² These questions were designed to

explotación y desprecios que sufre nuestro pueblo. Campesinos, trabajadores de las fincas que están bajo la explotación del patrón, todos tienen que apoyar ésta guerra de los pobres, así llegará más rápido el triunfo de nuestro pueblo.” URNG, La Voz Popular Broadcast 79, 2-3.

¹¹² “Si los militares dicen, que en el país ya no hay guerra. Entonces, ¿Por qué están aumentando el número de soldados?” “Y por qué siguen manteniendo por la fuerza a un millón doscientos mil patrulleros civiles? ¿No sería mejor dejarlos en libertad y que se dediquen tranquilamente a su trabajo y a su familia?” “Si dicen que la guerrilla está dividida y no tiene dirección política ni militar. Entonces, ¿cómo se explican los mensajes unitarios de la Voz Popular?” “Si dicen que guerrilla está desorganizada, sin armas, sin comida. ¿Cómo es posible que una guerrilla así, haya

stimulate reflection on the military's motives, as well as the URNG's successes. Through the questions, the broadcaster seemed to have sought to build trust in the URNG, illustrating to listeners that the government and military were not reliable sources of information.¹¹³

There is a certain echo in *La Voz Popular* of concepts dissected in *Pensemos juntos* a decade before on community radio stations like *La Voz de Atitlán*, illustrating in some ways a coherent focus on consciousness-raising strategies over time, space, and organization. Both stations concentrated on relatable experiences, with this specific *La Voz Popular* program considering ideas that had been championed by CUC in the previous decade, like plantation exploitation and inadequate incomes, much the way *Pensemos juntos* lessons analyzed the violation of wage laws. The parallels continue in terms of the way both asked questions meant to direct thought about the state's actions and motives, guiding listeners without overtly stating conclusions. Although they had distinct intentions in different periods, both hoped to inspire the people who were witnessing military actions and working under discriminatory circumstances, creating a thread of continuity between the two realities. They demonstrate in their broadcasts, both in message and literal action, the ways community radio resisted when confronted by the suffocating grip of state repression.

podido causar en este año más de dos mil doscientas bajas al ejército?" URNG, *La Voz Popular* Broadcast 79, 4.

¹¹³ Other segments in the broadcast convey the URNG's proposed remedies to the lack of transparency across the nation. The broadcaster warns youth not to fall under the influence of the army and tells them that if they feel the need to fight, they should unite with their people as represented by the URNG. The speaker follows with a report on recent news to illustrate the necessity of taking caution and staying alert. After the domestic news, the program moves to national and international decisions related to the conflict, reviewing President Vinicio Cerezo's recent international plea for monetary support to buy arms, support that the broadcaster claims was partially pocketed by the President and his Defense Minister.¹¹³ The program wraps up with vivid descriptions of front line encounters between guerrilla and army forces, highlighting scenes of combat occurring across the country from El Petén to Quetzaltenango. URNG, *La Voz Popular* Broadcast 79, 12.

Chapter 5: 1996: A Turning Point in Name

As the 1990s opened, community radio stations remained quiet, aside from the unique example of La Voz Popular, seeming to have succumbed to the state's expectations. However, in 1996, the nature of the repression changed with the incongruous passage of frameworks that supported indigenous rights and a law that commodified radio frequencies. While repression following 1996 is legally legitimated, physical and structural violence reminiscent of the 1970s and 1980s continues to haunt a number of community radio stations across Guatemala. But no longer silent, community broadcasters have become vocal again through the Community Radio Movement and related initiatives, speaking out against the repression many small stations presently face. By the 1990s, the inexorable violence of the army had lessened, and political spaces had opened, allowing broadcasters to voice their legally founded opposition to repression without the fear of vicious retaliation.

In 1996, the government and the URNG came together to sign a series of accords that supposedly put an end to the thirty-six year conflict, after external political and economic forces pressed the government to end state-led violence. On March 31, 1995, the URNG and the Guatemalan government signed the Accord on the Identity and Rights of the Indigenous Population. The accord encompasses a range of topics defined as indigenous, themes specific to cultural identity. Despite this, socioeconomic issues important to indigenous communities feature in other accords. What is particularly noteworthy, however, is that indigenous access to media receives a whole article (Article H) in the Accord on Identity:

1. Much like the education system, media has a fundamental role in the defense, development and dissemination of cultural values and knowledge. The government, as well as all those that work and participate in the communication

sector are responsible for promoting respect for and dissemination of indigenous cultures, for the eradication of all forms of discrimination, and for contributing to helping Guatemalans embrace their multicultural heritage.

2. In order to facilitate the widest access to media for Maya communities and institutions and for all other indigenous peoples, and the widest possible dissemination in indigenous languages of indigenous cultural patrimony, particularly Maya, as well as universal cultural patrimony, the Government will specifically take the following measures:
 - a. Open spaces in official media for the circulation of indigenous cultural expression, and promote similar openings in private media.
 - b. Advocate to Congress the reforms that are necessary to the current Radio Communications Law with the intention of providing frequency licenses for indigenous projects and guaranteeing that the principle of non-discrimination is observed in the use of media. Likewise, promote the elimination of all legal instruments that hinder the rights of indigenous peoples to use media for the advancement of their identity; and
 - c. Legalize and support a system of informational, scientific, artistic and educational programs about indigenous cultures in their languages, through the means of national radio, television, and print press.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ “Al igual que el sistema educativo, los medios de comunicación tienen un papel primordial en la defensa, desarrollo y transmisión de los valores y conocimientos culturales. Corresponde al Gobierno, pero también a todos los que trabajan e intervienen en el sector de la comunicación, promover el respeto y difusión de las culturas indígenas, la erradicación de cualquier forma de discriminación, y contribuir a la apropiación por todos los guatemaltecos de su patrimonio pluricultural. 2. Por su parte, a fin de favorecer el más amplio acceso a los medios de comunicación por parte de las comunidades e instituciones mayas y de los demás pueblos

These measures, while not enforced by active legislation, suggest that there was an acknowledgement on the national scale of community radio's importance. It appears as a tool for indigenous communities in terms of linguistic conservation and revival, as well as cultural promotion. Broadcasting is framed as an instrument, one used in the defense of values and lifestyles, to eliminate stereotypes and prejudice. Subsection H2b also addresses the 1980 Radio Communications Law and the fact that it required alteration to safeguard indigenous communities' access to the resource, implying that community radio had indeed been subject to the law, as well as hindered by it. Overall, the article highlights a consensus that indigenous populations should face no obstacles in reaching the airwaves via community radio.

However, alterations to the 1980 law came in an entirely different form. Throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s, the Guatemalan government began to auction off radio frequency licenses, which had formerly been distributed to applicants for a fee of a few hundred quetzales. The auctions have their origins in the neoliberal policies of the Minister of Communications, Fritz García Gallont, who served in the position January 1996 to July 1999. In June 1996, having been in office only a few months, he announced an initiative for a Telecommunications and Radio Frequency Law, faulting the existing 1980 Radio Communications Law for not being of

indígenas, y la más amplia difusión en idiomas indígenas del patrimonio cultural indígena, en particular maya, así como del patrimonio cultural universal, el Gobierno tomará en particular las siguientes medidas: a) Abrir espacios en los medios de comunicación oficiales para la divulgación de las expresiones culturales indígenas y propiciar similar apertura en los medios privados; b) Promover ante el Congreso de la República las reformas que sean necesarias en la actual Ley de Radiocomunicaciones con el objetivo de facilitar frecuencias para proyectos indígenas y asegurar la observancia del principio de no discriminación en el uso de los medios de comunicación. Promover asimismo la derogación de toda disposición del ordenamiento jurídico que obstaculice el derecho de los pueblos indígenas a disponer de medios de comunicación para el desarrollo de su identidad; y c) Reglamentar y apoyar un sistema de programas informativos, científicos, artísticos y educativos de las culturas indígenas en sus idiomas, por medio de la radio, la televisión y los medios escritos nacionales.” Guatemalan Peace Accords, Government of Guatemala-URNG, 29 Dec. 1996, 263-4, http://www.gt.undp.org/content/dam/guatemala/docs/publications/undp_gt_Acuerdos-de-Paz-O.pdf.

any commercial benefit to the government, reported *Siglo Veintiuno*. The law that existed prior to 1996 required an annual fee of 300-400 quetzales for frequency-use licenses. In these licenses, García Gallont saw a window for government profit in the sale of frequency-use rights and committed to accepting the highest bids at auction for frequency-use licenses called *Títulos de usufructo* (TUFs), whether it be a domestic or an international offer.¹¹⁵ There was much concern and outcry from various parties that this law could be a government “measure to exert pressure on the media” and that it would yield monopolies and oligopolies; yet, García Gallont countered that his law respected previous government-media contracts and that he would employ regulatory measures, respectively.¹¹⁶ Despite dissent from the influential Chamber of Radio Broadcasting, García Gallont pushed the law into action.

By June 1997, the new Telecommunications Law had been passed, and the auctions of TUFs had begun. Auctions were controlled by *la Superintendencia de Telecomunicaciones* (SIT)—the Superintendence of Telecommunications—, whose employees *El Gráfico* described as “young and very dynamic people, but with little experience in this field, inasmuch as they know a lot about telephones and wireless communication, but very little about radio broadcasting.”¹¹⁷ The first round of auctions in June resulted in the government earning more than 17 million quetzales (in 1998 6.39Q:\$1.00USD).¹¹⁸ The second round of auctions of 33

¹¹⁵ Carlos Castañaza Rosales, “García-Gallont: Frecuencias de radio y T.V. serán adjudicadas por medio de licitaciones,” *Siglo Veintiuno*, 8 Jun. 1996, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹¹⁶ “una medida para ejercer presión sobre los medios de comunicación.” Castañaza Rosales, “García-Gallont: Frecuencias.”

¹¹⁷ “gente joven y muy dinámica, pero con poca experiencia en este campo, ya que saben mucho de telefonía y comunicación vía radio, pero muy poco de radiodifusión.” *El Gráfico*, “Radiodifusoras departamentales contra libre subasta de frecuencias,” 16 Feb. 1997, 13, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹¹⁸ *Siglo Veintiuno*, “Concluye primera fase de subasta de frecuencias para operadores de radio,” 13 Aug. 1997, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala; International Monetary Fund, *International Financial Statistics: Yearbook 2004* (Washington D.C.: IMF, 2004), 258.

TUFs was spread over August 1997 and required that parties interested in licenses for the capital be prepared with a base deposit of 275,000 quetzales, with departmental frequency deposits costing anywhere between 10,000 and 55,000 quetzales.¹¹⁹ While bidders were instructed to come primed with those amounts to deposit, the auctions drove the prices up, with the lowest winning cost being 167,000 quetzales in the first phase for a frequency in Chiquimula. This phase total earned the government 3.5 million quetzales.¹²⁰ In the following phase in mid-August, the government earned 6.7 million quetzales, with over half of that coming from Central de Radio's 3.5 million quetzal bid for a capital frequency originally set at 81,000 quetzales.¹²¹ The final phase of the second round concluded with the total of the whole round grossing at 13,047,254 quetzales for the government, which was divided 70-30 between the Radio Social Fund and SIT, respectively.¹²²

In early February 1998, Guatemalan President Álvaro Arzú formally issued the TUFs to the highest bidders, and various national print media outlets immediately began running stories criticizing inequalities in distribution. The question of monopolies remained front and center. An *El Gráfico* journalist observed, "Someone could control all possible frequencies, form a sort of monopoly and practically have control of radio in Guatemala."¹²³ Beyond this economic worry was a social one, one pertaining to the inclusion of local communities. Writing for *El Periódico*,

¹¹⁹ Victoria Alvarado, "Q275 mil cuesta una emisora en FM," *El Periódico*, 7 Aug. 1997, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹²⁰ *Siglo Veintiuno*, "Concluye primera fase."

¹²¹ *Siglo Veintiuno*, "Gobierno recaudó Q6.7 millones en subasta de 11 frecuencias de radio," 20 Aug. 1997, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala; *El Periódico*, "Tres millones por frecuencia en FM," 20 Aug. 1997, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹²² Victoria Alvarado, "Termina la subasta de frecuencias para FM," *El Periódico*, 22 Aug. 1997, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala; *Siglo Veintiuno*, "Gobierno recaudó Q6.7 millones."

¹²³ "Alguien pueda acaparar todas las frecuencias posibles, forme una especie de monopolio y tenga prácticamente un control de la radio en Guatemala." Carlos García Urrea, "Venta de frecuencias provocará monopolios," *El Gráfico*, 2 Feb. 1998, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

a journalist commented that TUFs were only accessible to those who could pay and that “community radios cannot compete.”¹²⁴ He clarified that small community associations could not rival the bids of thousands or even of millions of quetzales made by commercial groups. He worried that “the [Telecommunications] law sanctions that telecommunications should only be for the benefit of the few that have the economic ability to buy frequencies, disrespecting the right of communities that use frequencies for the purposes of education, culture and exchange.”¹²⁵ From the very initial rounds of the frequency auctions that would continue through the turn of the millennium, it was evident that community radio organizations had little opportunity to engage financially against large domestic and international private organizations in auctions for TUFs.

A few days later on February 11, 1998, *Prensa Libre* specifically spoke to the political implications of the auctions as they related to indigenous rights, reporting on behalf of a community radio group called *Asociación de Comunicadores Comunitarios de Guatemala* (ACCG)—The Association of Community Broadcasters of Guatemala. The article considered how the auction system lacked an effective way to ensure that indigenous community radio organizations were able to purchase TUFs and posed that the law needed to be reformed in order “to assure compliance with the principle of no discrimination in the use of media,” as the Peace Accords state.¹²⁶ With that, indigenous access to frequencies was presented as a political

¹²⁴ “Las radios comunitarias no pueden competir.” Miguel Angel Albizures, “Puerta libre a un monopolio más,” *El Periódico*, 6 Feb. 1998, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹²⁵ “la ley contempla que las telecomunicaciones deben ser para el beneficio de unos pocos que tienen capacidad económica para apropiarse de las frecuencias, irrespetando el derecho de las comunidades que utilizan con fines educativos, culturales y de intercambio.” Albizures, “Puerta libre a un monopolio más.”

¹²⁶ “Asegurar la observancia del principio de no discriminación en el uso de los medios de comunicación.” *Prensa Libre*, “ACCG pide otorgar frecuencias a comunidades indígenas,” 11 Feb. 1998, 18, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

demand, highlighting the Telecommunications Law as a violation of the Peace Accords. The article shared the sentiment against the commercial monopolization of frequencies as well, quoting a magazine editor: “We as alternative media do not agree with the auctioning of frequencies that the government is carrying out, because those who are acquiring [frequencies] are those who possess more financial resources, which creates a large disadvantage for the communities that do not have sufficient resources.”¹²⁷ ACCG was not the only early organized group worried explicitly about the incompatibility of frequency sales and indigenous rights. Two days after the *Prensa Libre* article, *El Gráfico* reported that, during a Worldwide Association for Christian Communication convention attended by international indigenous organizers in the capital:

Representatives from indigenous communication projects from Mapuche, Aymara, Quichua, Miskito, K’iché, Kaqchikel, Tzútujil, Mam and Zapotec peoples presented ...their concern about the situation that indigenous peoples experience in Guatemala, where, through the mechanisms of the market economy like the auctioning of radio frequencies, the initiatives of indigenous communities were eliminated.¹²⁸

Much like the ACCG, these representatives pointed to Article H on indigenous access to media in the Peace Accords. They commented that there should be a range of “different voices [and]

¹²⁷ “Los medios alternativos no estamos de acuerdo con la subasta de las frecuencias que está llevando a cabo el Gobierno, porque quienes la están adquiriendo son quienes poseen más recursos financieros, lo cual significa una gran desventaja para las comunidades que no cuentan con suficientes recursos.” *Prensa Libre*, “ACCG pide otorgar frecuencias a comunidades indígenas,” 18, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹²⁸ “Representantes de proyectos de comunicación indígena de los pueblos Mapuche, Aymara, Quichua, Miskito, K’iché, Kaqchikel, Tzútujil, Mam y Zapotecos, manifestaron...su preocupación ante la situación que viven los indígenas en Guatemala, donde, a través de mecanismos de mercado, como la subasta de frecuencias radiales, fueron eliminadas las iniciativas de las comunidades indígenas.” Mario Rivero, “Proyectos de comunicación: Ven marginación de pueblos indígenas en otorgamiento de frecuencias de radio,” *El Gráfico*, 13 Feb. 1998, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

different ideological, political and religious opinions” heard on the radio and that they intended to organize and fight for the “democratization of mass media.”¹²⁹

According to *Pulso*, on April 8, 1999, SIT auctioned off nine more frequencies for a total of 38,100 quetzales. However, around the same time it became clear that the number of illegal stations operating in the nation was growing, with at least 80 underground—unlicensed—stations known at that point. A lack of TUF changed a station’s status from “community” to “pirate.” This cast unlicensed community stations as illegal institutions that deliberately rebuffed the auction system, meaning they be could be lawfully fined and closed if discovered by authorities. Of those 80, only eight were being penalized, as SIT then lacked a functional system for determining the names of employees or the location of the stations. Once SIT uncovered their whereabouts and had more concrete evidence of illegal operation, it would issue fines ranging from \$10,000 to \$100,000 USD as established in the Telecommunications Law.¹³⁰ In May 1999, four more unlicensed stations were fined by SIT.¹³¹ By June, SIT reported that it had already closed 17 unlicensed stations mainly in Sololá, most of which were religious. *Pulso* explained that in some cases unauthorized stations had fraudulent TUFs that claimed to be worth 25,000 quetzales. From the reported perspective of the various authorities, these radio stations were not only causing economic damage by not paying, but were also infringing on the right of free speech of stations that had lawfully purchased TUFs.¹³²

¹²⁹ “diferentes voces, a diferentes posiciones ideológicas, políticas y religiosas.” “La democratización de los medios de comunicación.” Rivero, “Proyectos de comunicación: Ven marginación.”

¹³⁰ Luis Enrique González, “Ochenta radiodifusoras operan en forma clandestina,” *Pulso*, 8 Apr. 1999, 54, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹³¹ *Pulso*, “Cuatro emisoras *fantasma* enfrentarán procesos penales,” 19 May 1999, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹³² Luis Enrique González, “Sancionan a 17 radiodifusoras ilegales,” *Pulso*, 4 Jun. 1999, 58, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

Siglo Veintiuno reported on May 5, 2000 that President Alfonso Portillo ordered the suspension of the upcoming auctions scheduled for May 16 and 17. Santiago Cantón, from the Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (OAS IACHR), triggered this decision during his visit to the country as IACHR Executive Secretary. While reviewing the state of human rights in the nation, he expressed a number of concerns, notably that the sale of frequencies needed to be democratized, marketed in a “comprehensive and transparent” way rather than just “to one group or person in particular.”¹³³ Despite the immediate protests of community radio advocates throughout the late 1990s and the May freeze, the auctions ultimately continued into summer 2000 with similarly low levels of community radio inclusion.

In August 2000, *Prensa Libre Domingo* broke down the distribution of TUFs in every department. Nationally, out of a total of 646 frequencies, 498 were controlled by commercial stations, and only 42 were labeled as “cultural”—though that does not necessarily even denote community or indigenous radio stations.¹³⁴ The remaining TUFs belonged to religious or state stations. In other words, non-commercially affiliated groups made up just barely over 20% of the nation's legal radio stations. Recording complaints from community broadcasters, the article described, “The little radio broadcasters—above all those who work in distant communities—,

¹³³ “amplia y transparente... no a un grupo o persona en especial.” René Góngora, “Gobierno ordena suspender subastas de frecuencias,” *Siglo Veintiuno*, 5 May 2000, 6, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹³⁴ Manolo García, “Ondas bajo control,” *Prensa Libre*, 20 Aug. 2000, 9, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

complain that the public auctions will enable the concentration of radio frequencies into a few hands.”¹³⁵

With no capacity to gain legal access to frequencies through auctions, a large group of community radio stations continued to operate despite a lack of license. Quoting the president of a Sololá radio association, *Prensa Libre* determined that the number had grown to 135 known community radio stations broadcasting with neither TUFs nor legal aid in August 2000.¹³⁶ To that end, on August 15, 2000, *El Periódico* reported that SIT fined 120 community radios on the basis that they were operating without legal authorization.¹³⁷ Notified in July 2000, community radio broadcasters in the 120 stations in question learned that SIT was providing a ten-day period for them to pay \$10,000. After the window closed, the fines had the ability to rise up to \$100,000. According to the article, SIT defended this hefty financial punishment with the fact that the stations lacked proper legal justification for not having complied with the TUF auctions.¹³⁸

However, community radio organizers protested that these fines were out of line, because many stations did not have coverage beyond five kilometers and relied solely on local donations. Beyond this, representatives of community radio argued that “the places where the stations operate are so remote that radio is the only means of communication between their inhabitants, their uses are purely social,” not for profit.¹³⁹ And moreover, there was true legal justification:

¹³⁵ “Los pequeños radialistas—sobre todo quienes trabajan en comunidades distantes—, se quejan de que las subastas públicas acentuarán la concentración de las frecuencias radiales en pocas manos.” García, “Ondas bajo control,” 9.

¹³⁶ García, “Ondas bajo control,” 10.

¹³⁷ Paola Hurtado, “SIT multa a 120 radios comunitarias,” *El Periódico*, 15 Aug. 2000, 6, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹³⁸ Hurtado, “SIT multa a 120 radios comunitarias,” 6.

¹³⁹ “Los lugares donde operan son tan alejados que es el único medio de comunicación entre sus habitantes, sus usos son puramente sociales.” Hurtado, “SIT multa a 120 radios comunitarias,” 6.

these auctions blatantly disregarded the Peace Accords by barring access to frequency use through conspicuous financial exclusion. In many of these stations, broadcasters themselves apparently constructed much of the equipment, spending no more than 500 quetzales. The article contrasts the low cost of the equipment with the devastatingly high fines of \$10,000 to \$100,000—a fee entirely beyond the means of stations that could not necessarily even afford to buy professional equipment.¹⁴⁰ At the time the article was published, the stations were refusing to pay the fines or to close. With a passionate conclusion, the article states that, “if broadcasters have to go to jail [for rejecting SIT’s fines], they are ready to go.”¹⁴¹

That same month, *Prensa Libre* expressed that the Telecommunications Law “is a clear example of the absurd and culturally disastrous regulations, also of blocking *campesinos* and the residents in small communities from listening to their own radio, with their own programs and their own broadcasters.”¹⁴² Due to this structural exclusion, SIT’s actions, and unrealizable fines, one community broadcaster group “declared that the Telecommunications Law does not have room for community radios, which restricts their right to freedom of expression.”¹⁴³ The solution suggested by some community radio leaders at the time of 2000—including FGER’s executive secretary—was to create auctions where bid amounts were capped within a reasonable financial grasp of small community organizations.

In October 2000, 150 associations that promoted community radio rights banded together to form the *Consejo Guatemalteco de Comunicación Comunitaria* (CGCC)—the Guatemalan

¹⁴⁰ Hurtado, “SIT multa a 120 radios comunitarias,” 6.

¹⁴¹ Hurtado, “SIT multa a 120 radios comunitarias,” 6.

¹⁴² “es un ejemplo claro de las regulaciones absurdas y culturalmente nefastas, además de impedirles a los campesinos y los residentes en pequeñas comunidades, escuchar su propia radio, con sus propios programas y sus propios locutores.” Mario Antonio Sandoval, “Multas injustas,” *Prensa Libre*, 16 Aug. 2000, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹⁴³ “declarado que la ley de telecomunicaciones no tiene un espacio para las radios comunitarias, lo cual restringe su derecho de la Libertad de Expresión.” García, “Ondas bajo control,” 11.

Council on Community Communication. According to a brief history produced by community radio advocates engaged in the Community Radio Movement, its function was “to contribute to the construction of democracy, to encourage citizen participation with equality and to promote the free expression of thought and the democratization of the media.”¹⁴⁴ The CGCC served as the predecessor of the current Community Radio Movement, beginning initiatives that the Movement continues to pursue presently.

An image printed by *Prensa Libre* in November 2000, about four months after SIT issued the steep fines to the 120 radios, depicts a large group of representatives gathered outside Congress. Hundreds of men and women, many of the latter dressed in *traje*, had gathered to demand frequency access for community radio stations in rural parts of the nation. According to the accompanying article, they had assembled in order to present a draft for a community media law. Ríos Montt, then sitting in congress, met with them in the streets, accepting their petitions himself while affirming the importance of community radio in “strengthening local identity and acknowledging the cultural value of the communities.”¹⁴⁵ He reportedly announced to the representatives:

As a State guarantee, we want all of us to uphold the same notion of development, and the most appropriate way for the State to fulfill this function is through community organization, where radios play a very important role... [if the law cannot be put into

¹⁴⁴ “Con el objetivo de contribuir a la construcción de la democracia, fomentar la participación ciudadana con equidad, promover la libre expresión del pensamiento y la democratización de los medios de comunicación.” Movimiento de Radios Comunitarias de Guatemala, *Radio comunitaria: Su historia*, 16.

¹⁴⁵ “para fortalecer la identidad local y reconocer el valor cultural de las comunidades.” Myriam Larra, “Se compromete a dar frecuencia.” *Prensa Libre*, 23 Nov. 2000, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

practice due to some legal problem], Congress will have to buy a frequency, for community radios.¹⁴⁶

The article describes that those scores of men and women applauded when he stated this. Given that Ríos Montt had led the nation at the time of the most brutal radio station closures, it is unclear what his motives were in this moment. Nonetheless, this is an important scene, because radio advocates are visibly asserting themselves against national leaders in a show of solidarity.

In May 2001, CGCC rejected the Ministry of Communications' new proposition of six hours of community radio programming daily under a two-year permit on the state station, called TGW. CGCC's spokesperson seemed skeptical that this offer was even legitimate, explaining that the radios would come under the umbrella of TGW. Disturbed by this flimsy compromise, he exclaimed, "The agreements from the Ministry of Communications are a mockery of the Agreement of Identity," referring to the Indigenous Rights Accord.¹⁴⁷ *El Periódico* explained that there was also controversy over how this would even work in reality.¹⁴⁸

In February 2002, CGCC continued the fight for frequencies and law change by presenting another community radio law initiative. They demanded that SIT halt auctions until an appropriate legal framework for community radio frequency access—one based hopefully on the drafted law initiative created by CGCC—had been established. In the initiative, its ten legislative drafters urged that community radio be allowed to operate under the same conditions

¹⁴⁶ "“Como Estado garante queremos que todos estemos dentro del mismo concepto de desarrollo, y la forma más apropiada para que el Estado cumpla esa función es a través de la organización comunitaria, donde los medios radiales juegan un papel muy importante.”... ‘si la ley no se puede poner en práctica por algún problema legal, ‘el Congreso tendrá que comprar una frecuencia, para las radios comunitarias.’” Larra, “Se compromete a dar frecuencia.”

¹⁴⁷ “los acuerdos del Ministerio de Comunicaciones son una burla al Acuerdo de Identidad.” *Prensa Libre*, “Rechazan acuerdos de Comunicaciones,” 12 May 2002, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹⁴⁸ Marja Valdés de Arias, “Radios comunitarias se rehúsan transmitir en la frecuencia de la ‘TGW,’” *El Periódico*, 16 May 2001, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

as commercial radio and that community radio stations receive 25% of the nation's available frequencies via grants. In this model, they expected that community stations would receive enough watts to give them the ability to reach the entirety of their respective communities, while sold publicity and ads during airtime would cover their operational costs.¹⁴⁹ A CGCC representative explained to *El Periódico* that this policy "is the only way. We don't have the economic resources to participate in the auctions. The Telecommunications Law excludes us."¹⁵⁰

However, the president of the Chamber of Broadcasting, which as a firm had been a partner and consultant on the initiative, scoffed at the idea of 25%, commenting that only 8% could possibly be available. He preferred the previously presented TGW model, where community radio operated under one national frequency. He saw this as a solution both to sacrificing an enormous portion of frequency-use license sales and to unjustly marking community radio stations as pirate.¹⁵¹ In June 2002, as the law initiative was still under review, a congressional leader expressed that there was no way to make the law feasible. Explaining that there simply were not enough available frequencies, he stressed that it would be unjust to take frequencies from organizations that had already paid for them just to give them away for free to others. He preferred the idea of a private fund that both secular and evangelical community radio organizations could dip into in order to buy frequencies while also gaining legal legitimacy in the process.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Paola Hurtado, "Radios piden el veinticinco por ciento de las frecuencias," *El Periódico*, 7 Feb. 2002, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala; Rocío Bonini, "Una voz que se intenta acallar," *Prensa Libre*, 18 Feb. 2002, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹⁵⁰ "Es la única forma. Nosotros no tenemos los recursos económicos para participar en las subastas. La Ley de Telecomunicaciones no excluye." Hurtado, "Radios piden el veinticinco."

¹⁵¹ Hurtado, "Radios piden el veinticinco."

¹⁵² Paola Hurtado, "Radios comunitarias rehúsan aliarse con emisoras evangélicas," *El Periódico*, 25 Jun. 2002, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

That same month, just a few days after the law initiative was presented and barely a week before another round of auctions that would take place on February 27, SIT again fined community radios that were operating without licensed authorization. Publicized by *Prensa Libre*, this time the case involved at least 35 stations in the southwest corner of the country being curbed by steep fines again of \$10,000.¹⁵³ According to an interview with a Radio Estéreo Libertad community broadcaster, running a community radio station required in 2002 about 3,500 quetzales (in 2002 7.80Q:\$1.00) a month to pay for space and electricity, most of which community members donated.¹⁵⁴ To fund equipment and staffers, Radio Estéreo Libertad took out a loan and was slowly paying it off. Beyond this, many employees typically went unpaid, resulting in their having to work other jobs elsewhere to receive an income.¹⁵⁵ While it is only one example, Radio Estéreo Libertad demonstrates the difficult financial position many community stations continue to find themselves in, with the Telecommunications Law perpetually exacerbating the situation. Although they claimed to be broadcasting on otherwise empty frequencies, stations without any legal authorization were and continue to be viewed as thieves who interfere with commercially owned frequencies by the authorities. While unlicensed community broadcasters negate that their programs cause interference, in 2000, *Prensa Libre* did report that an unauthorized station's signals were affecting the broadcast of the one licensed evangelical station in Totonicapán, which resulted in the closure of the unapproved station by SIT.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Bonini, "Una voz que se intenta acallar."

¹⁵⁴ IMF, *International Financial Statistics: Yearbook 2004*, 258.

¹⁵⁵ Bonini, "Una voz que se intenta acallar."

¹⁵⁶ Luis Tax, "Radioemisoras no autorizadas," *Prensa Libre*, 18 Sep. 2000, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

This wave of fines, however, had another thorny layer: the question of religious affiliation and its implication on “community” status. *Prensa Libre* reported that these persecuted radio stations were associated through a coordination of evangelical radios.¹⁵⁷ Just as tensions existed between government authorities and community radio, so did controversy between secular stations and religious stations that both laid claim to the title of “community.” They had once been intertwined, with early community radio stations existing under the Church’s domain. However, secular community radio representatives perceived that the two had separated entirely by the twenty-first century: “we promote citizen participation, and they, a religion.”¹⁵⁸ Secular stations argued that religious stations had financial backing from their respective church while secular ones depended solely on money contributed by the community. Rebuking this notion, religious stations defended that they received no money for their religious programs and that donations went to equipment maintenance.¹⁵⁹ It continues to be a heated debate, one that still affects how community organizations and stations interact with one another. The divergence between them also shows a move away from the community radio operations of the twentieth century, which depended heavily on the Catholic Church for support.

Days later on March 1, 2002, the Chamber of Radio Broadcasting issued a paid release in *Siglo Veintiuno* that expressed its support for community radio stations, acknowledging specifically CGCC and its fight to legalize community radio through the drafted law. The release expressed that community radio was an important counterpart to privatized commercial radio in

¹⁵⁷ Bonini, “Una voz que se intenta acallar”; Elda Sucely Sajquim Ruano, “Función social de las emisoras comunitarias en Guatemala,” (Licenciado in Communication Science, USAC, 2010), 18.

¹⁵⁸ “Nosotros promovemos la participación ciudadana y ellas, una religión.” Hurtado, “Radios comunitarias rehúsan.”

¹⁵⁹ Bonini, “Una voz que se intenta acallar.”

both “rights of communication and expression of the communities.”¹⁶⁰ In their call for support, the Chamber recognized a UNESCO agreement called the Declaration of Panama, which promoted granting legality and frequency access. Along with agreeing to facilitate free training sessions for community broadcasters, the release expressed that both groups wanted to analyze and work on the existing law project suggested by Congress. The Chamber also claimed to want to meet with members of SIT, Congress, and the congressional body called the Indigenous Peoples Commission, in order to find a compromise that worked for all groups, while following the practices outlined in the Peace Accords.¹⁶¹

In April 2002, Cantón, the OAS IACHR Executive Secretary, visited Guatemala again at the behest of President Portillo. There to investigate the widely criticized monopoly of frequencies, specifically for national television, Cantón ultimately “suggested that auctions be avoided until access to media is guaranteed to indigenous groups,” reported *Siglo Veintiuno*.¹⁶² However, officials involved in the auctions disagreed with Cantón’s conclusions, arguing that because auctions were public and did not favor a specific sector, they were inclusive and “generated trust between domestic and foreign investors.”¹⁶³ Beyond this, a former SIT leader commented that people in support of easier access for indigenous groups “justified their request

¹⁶⁰ “los derechos de comunicación y expresión de los pueblos.” CGCC & La Cámara de Radiodifusión de Guatemala, “La Cámara de Radiodifusión de Guatemala en favor de la radio comunitaria,” *Siglo Veintiuno*, 1 Mar. 2002, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹⁶¹ CGCC & La Cámara de Radiodifusión de Guatemala, “La Cámara de Radiodifusión de Guatemala en favor.”

¹⁶² “sugirió evitar las subastas hasta que se garantice a los grupos indígenas.” *Siglo Veintiuno*, “Frecuencias de radio y TV: Suspensión de subastas causa polémica,” 22 May 2002, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹⁶³ “generado confianza entre los inversionistas locales y extranjeros.” *Siglo Veintiuno*, “Frecuencias de radio y TV.”

with the Peace Accords, but they should understand that an accord is not superior to” the Telecommunications Law.¹⁶⁴

Despite years of outcry by members and supporters of community radio, as well as the suggestions made by Cantón, auctions continued in August 2002. On the first day of that month, SIT released an announcement in *Prensa Libre* that confirmed their adherence to the Telecommunications Law. It stated that frequencies were only allowed to be used by those who had received authorization from SIT via auctions and confirmed that stations using frequencies illegally were still subject to fines of \$10,000 to \$100,000.¹⁶⁵ While previous auctions had focused on both the capital—where the majority of major commercial stations broadcast from—and departments, the August 2002 auctions “prioritized frequencies with departmental coverage, especially with frequency bands that can be used on border departments,” reported *Siglo Veintiuno*.¹⁶⁶ SIT set base bids at 30,000 quetzales for department-wide frequencies and 15,000 quetzales for municipality-wide frequencies.¹⁶⁷ As true in previous auctions, some bids skyrocketed up to over a million quetzales. Even the lowest winning bid landed almost four times the reserve, at 118,000 quetzales in the municipality of Santa María Ixhuatán.¹⁶⁸ In an apparent attempt to be more inclusive, Portillo designated nine AM frequencies to members of civil society in September 2002. However, according to the Community Radio Movement, the

¹⁶⁴ “Ellos justificaban su solicitud en los acuerdos de paz, pero deben comprender que un acuerdo no es superior al marco jurídico.” *Siglo Veintiuno*, “Frecuencias de radio y TV.”

¹⁶⁵ SIT, “La superintendencia de telecomunicaciones de Guatemala-SIT-al público en general hace saber,” *Prensa Libre*, 1 Aug. 2002, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹⁶⁶ “priorizó frecuencias con coberturas departamentales, especialmente las bandas que se pueden utilizar en departamentos fronterizos.” Luisa F. Gonzáles, “Subasta llega a Q13 millones,” *Siglo Veintiuno*, 30 Aug. 2002, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹⁶⁷ Luisa F. Gonzáles, “Subastarán frecuencias radiales,” *Siglo Veintiuno*, 2- Aug. 2002, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹⁶⁸ Gonzáles, “Subasta llega a Q13 millones.”

plan failed. Not all were purchased due to their steep price, and the ones that were did not necessarily end up being used, because it was even pricier to put them into effect.¹⁶⁹

In February 2003, as the law initiative in support of community radios was still awaiting deeper scrutiny by Congress, the issue of falsified TUFs continued, a problem that had been noted by *Pulso* four years prior. In a *Prensa Libre* release, the Chamber of Radio Broadcasting condemned 341 radio stations operating without SIT authorization. In the release, they exposed an association that created false TUFs and sold them to stations for around 15,000 quetzales. A different *Prensa Libre* article described that an association of community radio stations was circulating these false licenses marked with a forged seal of SIT and Congress. In the release, the Chamber called on the government to close the stations using these counterfeit TUFs and to arrest their creators. With a long list of accused stations, the release ends with a demand that SIT fine each radio station the established \$10,000 and that the equipment of the 341 stations be confiscated, while the Public Ministry arrest the responsible forgers.¹⁷⁰

In response to the Chamber's public indictment of the 341 stations, *Prensa Libre* published an article that termed the situation a "war of radios."¹⁷¹ The Chamber's president defended the condemnation: "The trouble is not that community radios exist, but rather that in the past months tens of radios have appeared that rob us of the frequency we acquired legally."¹⁷² CGCC, despite its partnership with the Chamber, jumped to defend community radios, returning

¹⁶⁹ Movimiento de Radios Comunitarias de Guatemala, *Radio comunitaria: Su historia*, 19.

¹⁷⁰ Cámara de Radiodifusión, "La Cámara de Radiodifusión de Guatemala-CRG-denuncia ante las autoridades correspondientes y ante el pueblo de Guatemala: Que actualmente operan 341 radiodifusoras ilegales en la República," *Prensa Libre*, 21 Feb. 2003, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹⁷¹ Conié Reynoso, "La guerra de las radios," *Prensa Libre*, 7 Apr. 2003, G30.2, CIRMA, Antigua, Guatemala.

¹⁷² "La molestia no es que existan radios comunitarias, sino que en los últimos meses han aparecido decenas de radiodifusoras que nos roban la frecuencia que adquirimos legalmente." Reynoso, "La guerra de las radios."

the discussion again to the Peace Accords and the sociocultural importance of community radio in remote spaces. The same themes that had been argued since the turn of the millennium remained, with questions of frequency interference, monopolies, and indigenous rights clashing. Another clash that appeared centrally in the “war” existed within the community radio world itself, pitting different types of “community” stations against one another—secular versus religious. Despite conflicting opinions on the situation, FGER and the Chamber agreed that a breakdown of illegal radios showed that 10% were secular community stations, 5% were Catholic stations, 70% evangelical stations, and 15% were for personal interest in 2003.¹⁷³

2005 appeared to be a productive year in the fight for community radio rights. In March 2005, representatives from the government, including SIT, attended a conference hosted by the OAS IACHR, which focused specifically on Guatemalan community radio. According to the Community Radio Movement’s summary of the meeting, SIT representatives explained the logistical issues of changing the system, emphasizing how auctions and regulations were not easily changed.¹⁷⁴ Despite this, the meeting seemed at the time to be a positive step forward, as it indicated a level of governmental cooperation. Four months later, in June 2005, the IACHR freedom of speech reporter, Eduardo Bertoni, backed community radio broadcasters’ now almost decade-old request that the Peace Accords be upheld, especially the Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and that reforms be made to the Telecommunications Law to make frequency-use licenses available to community stations. Consequently, the Guatemalan Presidential Commission of Human Rights established a round table of indigenous radio advocates. As a group, the round table again tried to draft a new community radio law that

¹⁷³ Reynoso, “La guerra de las radios.”

¹⁷⁴ Movimiento de Radios Comunitarias de Guatemala, *Radio comunitaria: Su historia*, 17.

adhered to the Peace Accords and incorporated suggestions made by international human rights experts', specifically following Bertoni's, recommendations.¹⁷⁵

Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, army raids of community radio stations were common practice. Raids again emerged as a governmental tactic against unlicensed stations in 2008, becoming legal that year. A product of Oscar Berger's presidency, the Prosecutors of the Radio Spectrum serve as a body that helped arraign and facilitate raids on unlicensed community stations.¹⁷⁶ The Community Radio Movement's report writes that "in February of [2008] the government of Guatemala passed a resolution to develop a governmental policy by which [the police were] instructed to occupy radio stations and confiscate equipment of stations that operate without authorization, which implies the closure of community radios."¹⁷⁷ Despite the progress made in the round table of 2005, the government approved the resolution without informing members of the 2005 discussion and ignored the Peace Accords once again.¹⁷⁸

As a result, the groups involved in the conversation from 2005 determined that stronger counter-legislation was necessary to ensure that community stations were able to operate. They revised the proposed reforms from the early 2000s and 2005, creating what is now called law initiative 4087, The Community Media Law, an initiative that the Community Radio Movement is still promoting nine years later.¹⁷⁹ In December 2007, the Movement had gained another tool in its arsenal to protest the injustice of the Telecommunications Law: The UN Declaration of the

¹⁷⁵ Movimiento de Radios Comunitarias de Guatemala, *Radio comunitaria: Su historia*, 17.

¹⁷⁶ Movimiento de Radios Comunitarias de Guatemala, *Radio comunitaria: Su historia*, 19.

¹⁷⁷ "en febrero de este año el gobierno de Guatemala aprobó una resolución para desarrollar una política gubernativa por la que se instruye a ocupar y decomisar las estaciones de radio y equipos de las emisoras que operen sin autorización, lo que implica el cierre de radios comunitarias."

Movimiento de Radios Comunitarias de Guatemala, *Radio comunitaria: Su historia*, 18.

¹⁷⁸ Movimiento de Radios Comunitarias de Guatemala, *Radio comunitaria: Su historia*, 18.

¹⁷⁹ Movimiento de Radios Comunitarias de Guatemala, *Radio comunitaria: Su historia*, 18.

Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Article 16 of the declaration signed by Guatemala states:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-indigenous media without discrimination.
2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that State-owned media duly reflect indigenous cultural diversity. States, without prejudice to ensuring full freedom of expression, should encourage privately owned media to adequately reflect indigenous cultural diversity.¹⁸⁰

Established a decade after the beginning of the auctions and supported by the government of Guatemala, UNDRIP serves as a modern legal affirmation of indigenous rights, bolstering the arguments of the Community Radio Movement and legitimizing 4087's push for frequency-use license accessibility. Rallying broadcasters across the country and advocates worldwide in support of community radio, 4087 promotes an end to the exclusions that have hindered community broadcasters for years.¹⁸¹ However, it still has yet to be passed in Congress, leaving unlicensed community stations trapped indefinitely in legal repression. That being said, community radio as an institution has not been silenced and remains in resistance, speaking against the government's repression.

¹⁸⁰ UN General Assembly, 61/295, "UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," 10 Dec. 2007, http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf.

¹⁸¹ Congreso de la República de Guatemala, Iniciativa 4087, "Ley de Medios de Comunicación Comunitaria," 12 Feb. 2016, <http://www.observacom.org/iniciativa-4087-ley-de-medios-de-comunicacion-comunitaria/>.

Conclusion

To understand the forms criminalization can take in the present, it is helpful to look at two unique cases in El Quiché. They do not represent the experience of all criminalized radios, but they well demonstrate the violence of modern repression, as well as the dynamic tension of fear and resistance in response, which is a theme dating back to La Voz de Atitlán and Radio Quiché in the early 1980s. In an El Quiché municipality, the most popular community radio station began to broadcast around 2002 out of the local community center, a small compound with a series of offices opening out to a grassy courtyard. Aside from broadcaster-prepared programming, the station featured numerous local guests from the community who were invited to discuss themes important to them, such as public health or the role of midwives. On February 25, 2015, while the majority of the station's broadcasters were in the field, reporting live from an event in a nearby community, only one man was left in the station, a substitute for those out in the field. He was young, like all the station's broadcasters, late teens or early twenties, and it was his first day on the job. With the station's door closed, he lacked the ability to see that members of the police had surrounded the studio from the outside.

The police had come on a court order from the capital; a charge had been filed against the station for operating on a frequency without legal authorization, without a license. Rather than alert the station of the charge, the police had been sent to raid and confiscate the station's equipment. However, they took not only the equipment, but also the young man. According to present broadcasters who shared this story, the police were only allowed to arrest him if it appeared he was touching the equipment, as that would implicate him in active frequency theft. As the story's present day narrators tell it, he was not actually near the equipment when they entered, but the police ordered him to go touch it, photographing the action. Due to his

inexperience and confusion about what was occurring, he complied and was promptly arrested. Taken to jail, he was incarcerated for two weeks while the community scrambled to make bail—his family could not afford it alone. Since his release, he has not returned to the station, having barely used verbal communication at all. His peers who shared the story are adamant that his silence is a product of being tortured during incarceration.

Despite the shocking results of the raid, the station was fortunate that most of the team was in the field. Not only does this mean the majority of broadcasters were safe, but also a portion of their equipment, most significantly recording devices and microphones, was secure. So while the station lost its major, less portable devices, it was able to continue by using its field equipment. Due to the compromised location, the community association agreed relocation was necessary. They moved to a new space, broadcasting as before, still with no frequency-use authorization and now with few, if any, guest appearances.

But once again, a charge in the capital was made against them for frequency theft, and police—unaware of the relocation—returned to the community association compound to find an abandoned studio. Of course, the broadcasting team and organization were unsettled by the quick return of the police. They elected again to move locations, this time transferring to the horse stall. Up to the present, this third location has been safe, but there is the ever-present fear that another charge could be made and another unforeseen attack could happen. Their current programs are primarily based around local, national, and international music, but each radio host brings his or her own flair to his or her show. Broadcasters use a mix of K'iche' and Spanish, incorporating information about the Maya calendar and local events into many of their

broadcasts. The broadcasters are eager to restore what they call “Maya values,” focusing on cultural traditions and introducing those concepts to younger listeners.¹⁸²

Just a few miles north, a women’s advocacy organization had erected its own radio tower, an obvious marker to the community of their commitment to radio. When operational, they worked hard to have programs run by members of community resources, such as firemen, policemen, and midwives, and to address topics like adolescence, health, and economic stability. By sharing these programs, the station intended to strengthen community trust in these public figures and to affirm their importance in the community. While they shared the same community base as Radio Quiché, the organization sought to speak specifically to indigenous women in the community, especially those who may be facing abuse or did during the conflict.

Radio Quiché had at one point helped the organization broadcast public announcements. However, being Catholic and having become quieter during the most violent years of the conflict, Radio Quiché was unwilling to share more taboo information, such as content pertaining to reproductive rights or abuse. In fact, Radio Quiché does not even address the multiple broadcaster disappearances and murders it faced in the 1980s in its own online history. Beyond that, Radio Quiché is unwilling to share themes related to Maya spirituality, given its Catholic base. Because of a glaring gap in information available for women and Radio Quiché’s religious qualms with the content, the organization decided to open its own station. Operational for less than five years, they were raided the same day as the aforementioned station. They were fortunate that no broadcasters were in the station. However, as the majority of their workers are female volunteers from the community, the organization did not feel comfortable remaining open

¹⁸² Information collected from a series of interviews conducted in June 2016 with broadcasters in El Quiché.

for fear of another raid and the misfortune that could bring. They reopened for a brief while in winter 2016, but closed again indefinitely in spring 2016.¹⁸³

These two stations, though only small examples from one distinct part of the country, well represent the focuses of modern radios and the challenges they face. They carry forward the legacy of early community radios. Not only do they promote native language, but they also emphasize the rights of their predominantly indigenous communities, working to encourage pride in and deeper knowledge of Maya history. In terms of challenges, they have dealt with raids similar to those seen in the 1980s, but instead now for a lack of frequency license rather than subversive content. They reflect both practices and trials faced by their forerunners from the 50 preceding years, illustrating a ceaseless fight on the side of the community radios and an unremitting persecution on the side of the government.

Spanning just over half a century, the history of Guatemalan community radio is actually a complex and nuanced series of histories distinct to specific places, stations, and actors. This thesis does not claim to provide a full history of community radio, because that would not be possible for an undergraduate given only a few months in Guatemala to research and a year to write. Instead, this project weaves together a succession of moments and legislation to create an overview of the broader experience of community radio as an institution over the past half-century. While these moments do not portray the full reality of each and every community radio station in Guatemala, together they indicate there is indeed a sustained repression against community radio stations. With violence by the oppressor and resistance by the oppressed evident since the beginning, the struggle for community radio rights has its roots not in 1996, but

¹⁸³ Information collected from a series of interviews conducted in June 2016 with broadcasters in El Quiché.

rather in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The present movement should claim the full history of community radio, all the way back to the first days of the Colomba station, in order to contextualize its fight more fully while simultaneously honoring those who gave their lives for community radio.

When Carlos Manuel Vázquez explained, “The criminalization of community radio, and subsequent detention of Indigenous journalists and closure of radio stations, which are an integral part in the communication of Indigenous peoples, is a new phenomenon,” he assessed it from a modern lens.¹⁸⁴ However, from an historical lens, they have been persecuted not since 1996, but rather since the 1970s. Closures, equipment seizures, arrests, and assaults have persisted over both periods, even though repression changed from military to legal violence with the 1996 Telecommunications Law and the Peace Accords. While the motives for repression are different—to terminate “insurgent” activity versus “illegal” activity—the ends of both indicate a continued prejudice against and exclusion of marginalized indigenous *campesino* communities. The government is stripping them of a primary form of media while ignoring basic rights that ensure access to it.

That being said, political conditions are different in the twenty-first century than they were in the later twentieth century. In the context of a military-ruled, genocidal state, community radio stations of the 1970s and 1980s had to be discreet in their pushback: it is unclear if any stations presented outspoken or confrontational broadcasts after 1982, because the military was ruthless and had few bounds. While the violence certainly did not end in the 1990s, the military became more restrained, and political spaces tolerate more dissent, meaning that broadcasters can publically challenge the injustices they witness. The Community Radio Movement marks a

¹⁸⁴ *Cultural Survival*, “UN Denounces the Criminalization.”

time of open opposition, a time of standing up and fighting back. Community radio has proven resilient, demonstrating time and time again its ability to counter repression and find alternative ways to resist.

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