

**COMMUNICATION AND RESISTANCE:
ALTERNATIVE RADIO AND NEW FORMS OF SOCIAL
STRUGGLE IN ARGENTINA**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	3
Problem	3
Objectives and Questions	5
Theoretical Focus	7
Chapters	10
ALTERNATIVE RADIO STATIONS IN LATIN AMERICA	12
Community, Popular, and Alternative Radios	13
Educational Radios	16
Mining Radios	20
Insurgent Radios	21
European Radios	25
Conclusion	28
ALTERNATIVE RADIOS IN ARGENTINA	30
Radios and the Return to Democracy	30
A New Kind of Radio	34
CASE STUDY: LA TRIBU	43
Introduction	43
Objectives and Projects	44
Participatory Practices and Personnel	61
Networks	70
Financing	80
Conclusion	83
CONCLUSION	85
WORKS CITED	89

Introduction

The current study understands communication as an important realm in which to focus anti-systemic struggles and seeks to explore the ways in which such a struggle is carried out by alternative radio stations in Argentina. Utilizing primary and secondary sources, the study places recent experiences of alternative radios within the context of a larger tradition of such radios in Latin America and Europe. In addition, it holds communication as a focus that moves us beyond the nation state to the interconnections between national and international political, economic, social, and cultural transformations that coincide to produce changes in oppositional methods during the 1980s and 1990s.

Problem

Independent media sources play an important role in any democracy. For it to stimulate democracy, such media should be independent of sources of political and economic power in order to provide a critical view of such structures. The media can provide the public with a plurality of views through which people can make informed decisions. Moreover, a decentralized organization of media sources enables the production of meaning that interprets our social reality in different ways. In this way the media has the potential to be a social resource through which citizens can become more

informed and involved in exerting their influence over the processes that shape their lives.

In Argentina, however, the media has been unable to function as a counterweight to dominant political and economic powers throughout its history up to the present. Since its early development in the 1930s and 40s, it faced censorship and cooptation on behalf of military and populist governments. After the return to democracy in 1983, the media encountered a process of privatization that concentrated ownership in the hands of fewer and fewer national and international elites. Geerts, Oeyen, and Villamayor point out the danger of monopolies and their anti-democratic tendencies by stating, “Las megafusiones entre estos consorcios hacen cada vez más difícil ejercer algún tipo de control sobre su mercancía que está compuesta por el corazón del ser humano: su identidad individual y colectiva, su cultura” (50). The increasing adherence of the media to market-demands—and the consolidation of a survival strategy on behalf of the media in which it opted for a less critical political position to ensure its survival in the midst of changing governments and repressive political conditions (Bruschtein 12-13)—makes it function along logics incompatible with social needs. The production of information for profit restrains content to topics that that will produce high ratings and thus produces a homogenizing effect among media outlets.¹ The information becomes increasingly biased as the media is owned by larger corporations that have economic interests well beyond the communications industry. As powerful economic players, their priorities lie in maintaining political, social, and economic stability. It is in their best interest to limit coverage and access to information to superficial levels, which necessarily excludes more

¹ This is well exemplified by a look at the major news channels in the U.S., where one can expect the same stories and a minimal range of perspectives among them.

profound analyses of structural issues. Thus, the mainstream media serve an ideological function as a producer of information that reifies and reproduces structures of power.

The media has always had a strong influence over public opinion as long as it has been a major source of symbolic production. Recent processes, however, established communication as a primary political space and the media as a privileged political player. Transformations in production in the last quarter century were propelled by the incorporation of new communication technologies. Likewise, economic transformations, from a production-based economy to one of consumption (Bauman 80), utilize the symbolic production of the media to develop semiotic systems that reproduce the values of the market (Barry, Osborne, Rose 10). Inherent in these messages are the naturalization of the existent politico-economic system and the production of subjectivities that actively reproduce such a system. The pervasiveness of the media into the daily lives of large sectors of the population requires analysis of the political and cultural implications of the ways in which such media currently functions. This is ever more urgent from the point of view of the opposition to dominant political and economic systems since such opposition necessarily entails increasing the scope of debates beyond the limits imposed by the mainstream media. Consequently, implicit in any oppositional movement is the democratization and decentralization of the means of communication (Bolaño, Mastrini, and Sierra 17).

Objectives and Questions

A case study in Argentina exposes the role of alternative communication as an

anti-systemic movement after Argentina's return to democracy and under the neoliberal project of the 1990s. This type of communication is deemed "alternative" in relation to mainstream for-profit media. Dagron points out that Latin America is a leader in the quantity and quality of alternative communicational projects (5). For economic and technical reasons, such as a relatively low start-up cost and its ability to reach a wide geographic audience with little effort, the radio is regarded as one of the most efficient and effective tools for such projects (21). These reasons aid in the constitution of alternative radios as important political players in Argentina. The breath of experiences of alternative radios, due to its longer history in Argentina and Latin America, also provide a wider backdrop upon which to analyze more contemporary experiences. Thus, as the objects of study, within the umbrella of alternative communication, I focus on non-profit alternative radio stations.

The major questions that guide the present analysis include: In what ways did major national and international politico-economic changes influence a shift within a new generation of political actors towards new forms of expression, organization, and resistance? How is this reflected in the historical development alternative radio stations in Buenos Aires? What is the function of sources of alternative communication within oppositional movements? And finally, how has communication itself, as a site of contestation, become more important today as increasingly concentrated media conglomerates present capitalism and the resulting order as the only alternative? In other words, what is the role of alternative communication in producing the language, historical referents, and challenging the "official" agenda in order to keep the *possibility* of change alive?

A study of the radio station FM La Tribu sheds new light on these questions. La Tribu was founded in 1989, at the height of the crisis of that led to the resignation of Raúl Alfonsín and marked the end of the “primavera democrática.” Internationally, this period also marks the collapse of socialism, the resulting triumphalist proclamations of the end of history, and the deepening of the neoliberal economic model. Thus, the birth and development of the station coincides with multiple and intersecting transformations that provoked changes in the spaces where new generations chose to do politics as well as the ways in which such politics were understood and practiced.

Theoretical Focus

This study builds on theoretical insights into the construction of ideology as well as insights into the development of new oppositional methods within new social movements. Mass communication is today one of the most influential promoters of an ideology that naturalizes the politico-economic system by making it seem as an inevitable outcome. The resistance evidenced in alternative radios is to counter such ideology by deconstructing dominant discourses and emphasizing the constructed nature of the current system.

In “Myth Today,” Roland Barthes uses a semiotic approach to explore the ways in which ideology functions. Barthes regards ideology as second-order semiological system, or myth, that works to preserve and naturalize structures of power. Thus, he explains,

Semiology has taught us that myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal. Now this process is

exactly that of bourgeois ideology [...] myth is constituted by the loss of historical quality of things: in it, things lose the memory they once were made. (142)

By pointing out the construction of meaning within messages, Barthes both exemplifies the ways in which meaning becomes myth as well as the subversive possibilities of interpretation.

Similarly, Tom Steers looks at the manipulative qualities of the media in creating myths and semiotic codes through which people interpret the world. According to Steers, individuals act in accordance with the values and narratives that constitute such codes and in this way actively reproduce the values and the political and social implications inherent in them. Graham Burchell explains how these codes make it possible for the population to internalize “quasi-economic” models of action and thus become an individualized society of self-regulating/self-interested economic actors (27). A focus on the construction of ideology is thus appropriate to an analysis that focuses on communication and the construction of alternative codes of meaning. As I argue below, a primary function of La Tribu is to denaturalize dominant ideologies since the first step in working for change is realizing that such change is indeed possible.

Contextualizing new social movements, theorists such as Immanuel Wallerstein, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, and Chela Sandoval give coherence to the loose networks of associations through which these movements function. The latest generation of alternative radios is indeed part of a generation of social actors whose oppositional projects are no longer founded on a strictly Marxist conception of revolution that holds the proletariat as its driving force. Wallerstein (1992) identifies these social actors as emerging from a crisis of delegitimization and disillusionment within the Left. This

generation seeks to avoid the mistakes of the Old Left, by developing political projects that are more sensitive to the reproduction of inequalities inherent in organizational forms. Critical self-reflection coupled with disillusionment with traditional political channels also led to a reevaluation of politics. This reevaluation acknowledges the political nature of non-traditional political spaces and regards cultural production as an important area of contestation.

Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004) identify new forms of oppositional organization as stemming from changes in production. According to the authors, as production incorporates information technology, it develops decentralized production networks. Likewise, the use of information technology in production begins to shift the production of value from necessary labor time to the production of ideas (Negri 29). As a result of these transformations, social actors are also developing loose oppositional networks based on the incorporation of communication technology. These networks are founded on cooperation through difference. The goal is not unity, but the construction of relationships through which oppositional actors can cooperate through the recognition of commonality in difference.

Chela Sandoval (1991, 2002) analyses new oppositional methods through the experience of third world feminism in the U.S. The author develops the concepts of “oppositional conscience” and “tactical subjectivity,” to describe oppositional strategies based on loose and temporary alliances. According to her, such oppositional strategies are tied to the development of alliances with third world liberation movements—whose legacy continues today in the form of human rights, civil rights, gay, lesbian, and

Chicano(a) movements, among many others—and strategies of lesbians and women of color within the feminist movement (“Dissident Globalizations” 22).

Central to these theories is their acknowledgement of a reevaluation of the meaning of politics within the new generation of social actors. Also important is the construction of alternatives through cooperation that does not strive for unity. Jesús Martín Barbero effectively synthesizes the nature of such cooperation by characterizing it as,

The appearance of a new political sensibility that is neither instrumental nor pragmatic. It is open to the institutions and realities of daily life, to the subjectivity of the social actors and the multiplicity of loyalties that are operating simultaneously in Latin America. It uses a new language to express the interweaving of the economics and politics of symbolic production in the culture. (188)

Together, these theories give us some tools through which we can explore the oppositional methods of alternative radios within their internal organization as well as through their relationship with outside actors. Applying the semiotic method of analyzing messages also enables us to analyze the ways in which radio programs in La Tribu deconstruct dominant narratives and in turn construct alternative narratives that guide further oppositional action.

Chapters

In the first chapter, I analyze the tradition of alternative radio in Latin America and Europe. Here, I trace different stages in the development of alternative radio focusing on their objectives and the use of communication within their larger political goals. In the second chapter I develop an analysis of the most recent generation of

alternative radios in Argentina during the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s. I take a closer look at their use of communication as a political tool and their reconceptualization of politics. Lastly, I use the case of La Tribu to develop an in-depth analysis of how the people who make up the radio create political alternatives through their informational and cultural production, through the aperture of the project to the participation of neighbors and new generations, and through their cooperation with other social actors through networks. Also important is the manner in which they reconcile the long-term sustainability of the project with their political and economic objectives.

Chapter 1

Alternative Radio Stations in Latin America

Argentine alternative radio emerged as part of a longer and wider tradition. It is thus important that we first begin by exploring the historical development of alternative radio stations in Latin America in order to understand the trajectory from which the Argentine experience surges. The social actors involved and the individual goals of each station have transformed and evolved since the first educational radio station around mid century, yet the belief in the importance of communication as an integral part of social and political initiatives has remained constant. This chapter makes evident that the innovative experience of alternative radio in Argentina is indeed closely tied to a rich history of people who use radio as a tool for social change in Latin America. The development of radio projects throughout the century reflects larger historical trajectories of social struggle in the continent such as the influence of the Catholic Church in educational campaigns, the development of critical currents like liberation theology and Paulo Freire's method of popular education as tools for empowering the oppressed and marginalized, the rise of revolutionary movements and the consequent backlash of repression and dictatorships, up until the return to democracy and the rearticulation of resistance after the fall of socialism.

Thus, in this chapter I provide a necessary overview of the development of radio alongside larger historical currents by focusing on exemplary cases. The literature on alternative communication (Geerts, Oeyen, Villamayor, 2004; Lamas and Villamayor, 1998; Vinelli and Esperón, 2004; Dagron, 2001) proposes the categories of educational radios, mining radios, insurgent radios, and alternative, popular, or community radios, as they enable reflection on the chronological development of radio projects while pointing out distinct characteristics that differentiate some radios from others. I emphasize, however, that these categories should not be considered as monolithic since the lines often blur in practice. Lastly, I also give a brief account of the influence of “free radios” in Italy and France.

Community, Popular, and Alternative Radios

The latest projects of non-profit radios are most commonly referred to as “community,” “popular,” or “alternative” radios. Such denominations evidence a shift from earlier projects that focused on promoting education or religion in a didactic and unidirectional manner, to projects whose goals are geared more towards producing changes in the social structure in cooperation with the communities in which they work (Geerts, Oeyen, and Villamayor 34). These radios are thus labeled according to the characteristics evident in the way they function in practice. Each term does not denote a specific project—be it educational, religious, or revolutionary—but instead denotes a relationship with the people who make up the place in which they function and at the same time expresses incongruity with the mainstream media.

The factors that differentiate one label from the others are still open to much debate in the literature of alternative communication (Kejval, 2005; Lamas and Villamayor, 1998; Geerts, Oeyen, and Villamayor, 2001; Esperón and Vinelli, 2004). Ultimately, however, the label of community, popular, or alternative is an autodenomination on the part of the radios. It is up to the specific projects to define themselves. Thus some radios use the labels interchangeably, while others, on the other hand, choose one of the three to emphasize a particular characteristic of the station—be it its relationship with the neighborhood or community in which it works; its relationship with a particular social class, cultural orientation, tradition of struggle, or movement deemed “popular;” or to emphasize its work as being outside of centralized informational and cultural circuits. The latter is indeed the case with FM La Tribu, whose project seeks to produce social transformation primarily through alternative cultural production. Thus, the title of community, popular, or alternative radios is seen to fit under an umbrella category that maintains changing the social structure and working in conjunction with popular organizations as general conditions that individual radios strive to meet in a multitude of ways.

Indeed I understand the lack of definition as evidence of the creativity and diversity within the general movement of such radios. Since categories inevitably divide and at once include some through the exclusion of others, there has been plenty of debate, but little sense of urgency to produce an authoritative definition. For the purpose of study, however, it is helpful to begin to narrow down and systematize some general characteristics. Geerts, Oeyen, and Villamayor propose seven criteria that community, popular, and alternative communicative projects meet. According to the authors, these

projects 1) Support and promote social changes necessary to achieve a society that is more just. 2) Represent life projects tied to struggles and vindications of groups or diverse movements. 3) Construct access to communication sources through which all groups and sectors of the population can speak. 4) Take into account the priorities and needs of the communities which they serve. 5) Represent and defend the cultural diversity of the communities. 6) They privilege the participatory dimension of their communicational and institutional practices. 7) They don't let profit be the motor of their actions (35-36).

Keeping these criteria in mind, and in order to maintain consistency in the terminology throughout the present work, I will refer to such stations as alternative when not expressively stated otherwise by the radios themselves. I choose the term alternative over the other two because it denotes a wider meaning which transcends the geographical restrictions implied in the term community, and possible restrictions of social class or professional vocation implied by the term popular. Thus, the term alternative gives us a more inclusive terminology that expresses the diversity of social actors and specific projects, while also denoting that these projects are alternative in relation to official sources of news and information and provide cultural and political spaces that are alternative to those dominant in society. As the emergence of these types of radios is a relatively new phenomena that is intimately tied to previous experiences of socially-minded radios in Latin America, it is important to look back at such cases and point out their contributions to the present study of La Tribu.

Educational Radios

The first non-profit and socially-minded radios to emerge in Latin America were part of larger projects by the Catholic Church that focused on education. The organizers of these projects saw the radio as the most appropriate tool for reaching a wide population that was geographically dispersed, mostly rural, and often poor and marginalized. The Catholic Church envisioned education as a way to raise the consciousness of the target population and at the same time help curb the growing influence of leftist doctrines.

The first of such stations, Radio Sutatenza, began operating in rural Colombia in 1947. Initially conceived by its founder, the young priest José Joaquín Salcedo, as a venue through which locals could perform live music and around which the community could find alternatives to drinking and other social vices, the radio quickly grew into an important source of adult education for the rural farmers of El Valle de Tenza in the department of Boyacá. The educational programs developed by Sutatenza centered on the areas of literacy, health, arithmetic, work and spirituality. In accordance with these, the radio provided tips on hygiene, first aid, basic arithmetic and record keeping related to the needs of small farmers, reading and writing, ethics, religion, and functioned as a source through which to provide local news and organize community projects. Similar to the new generation of radios of which La Tribu is a part, Sutatenza was a point of reference where the community met to work together. At the level of education,

however, the information was still unidirectional and the audience was still largely excluded from the production process.

In the years following its conception the radio gained popularity among its listeners as well as recognition from major national and international figures including the president of Colombia, Mariano Ospina Pérez, who officially inaugurated the station in 1948 and Pope Paul VI who blessed the radio in 1968 (Dagron 42). The impressive growth of the station was fueled by donations from corporations like General Electric—who donated several transmitters along with a new antenna and other accessories—, European churches, and even the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. While its increasing dependency on outside sources of finance did not compromise its educational project, the new equipment and its new facility in Bogotá did cause it to distance itself from its initial community. This level of support enabled the radio to operate for over forty years, until it was sold to a private radio chain in 1990 due to administrative and financial problems.

Although Sutatenza proved to distance itself from its initial base of support and lose touch with the local material and social conditions of its listeners, the case was quite the contrary for many other religious and educational radios in Latin America.

According to the journalist and researcher of participatory communication, Alfonso Gumucio Dagron,

Los sacerdotes católicos que apoyaron estos proyectos de comunicación comprendieron muy pronto que la supervivencia y el desarrollo de las emisoras de radio debía vincularse a la participación comunitaria y con las verdaderas necesidades sociales, políticas, y culturales del pueblo, y no solamente predicando la fe o contra el comunismo. (19-20)

The fact that the educational radios are usually set up in undeveloped rural areas and are nonprofit requires that they rely more directly on the participation and support of the local communities. In many cases the close relationship with such communities provoked a change in the point of view of the priests and let them see the socio-political system from the point of view of those who were disadvantaged by it.

This change in objectives and worldview on behalf of a radio due to direct experience with the reality of its listeners is evident in the case of Radio Pío XII, in the mining town of Llallagua in Potosí, Bolivia. In 1959 the radio stated among its objectives, “contrarrestar la creciente influencia de la ideología de izquierda que se difundía en las emisoras mineras, responsables de agitar y propagandizar una posición clasista” and focused their efforts in “un campamento considerado como el nido de la agitación comunista en el país” (Geerts, Oeyen, and Villamayor 313). Its position changed, however, when in 1965 it witnessed the massacre of 82 union leaders and miners. Two years later they witnessed yet another massacre in which 27 people were assassinated. The radio publicly denounced both massacres and collaborated with leftist mining radio stations, forming chains that covered most of the mining territory in Bolivia. Its relationship with the labor movement continued to strengthen through the following decades—often forming informative chains with other stations that provided real time accounts of strikes and state repression. The solidarity of the radio with leftist groups was not left unnoticed by the military and Radio Pío XII has had its headquarters dynamited on several occasions.

The identification of religious radios with working class and popular movements and the way their educational projects were put into practice demonstrate the influence in

the late 1960s and 1970s of liberation theology and the method of popular education developed by Paulo Freire. Liberation theology combines religious education with the concrete realities of the learners. Through the study of religious texts, the learners are encouraged to reflect on larger socio-economic structures that construct their lives as poor and marginalized and, most importantly, to organize and take an active role in bettering their conditions. The priests who espouse liberation theology carry out their role in solidarity with the people. The priest facilitates the learners' development of a social conscience and works alongside the community—giving up any clerical privileges to live like the people of the congregation and community.

Paulo Freire's method of popular education coincides with some aspects of liberation theology in that it too facilitates the learner's understanding of his or her own reality in order to develop a self-reflexive practice to change the conditions of their oppression. According to Freire,

Para el educador-educando, dialógico, problematizador, el contenido programático de la educación no es una donación o una imposición [...] sino la devolución organizada, sistematizada y acrecentada al pueblo de aquellos elementos que éste le entregó en forma inestructurada. (113)

The relationship between teacher and learner is horizontal in that it is not the job of the teacher to dictate or impose his or her knowledge, but to provide the conditions for a dialogue in which any subject matter is studied alongside a critical analysis of economic, social, political, and cultural relations that construct the learners' reality. The basic formula of this process is "action-reflection-action." The reflexive phase of the process is of utmost importance in this, and any, project whose aim is liberation. Our analysis of different kinds of radio stations and our case study of La Tribu in the following chapters continue to demonstrate the influence of Freire's method.

Mining Radios

The mining radios in Bolivia are also an important landmark in the history of alternative radio in Latin America. These radios constitute the first instances in which alternative radio projects were entirely owned and operated by the same people who were its target audience, i.e. Bolivian miners. In addition, the mining radios provided a model of organization based on networks of solidarity through which they could mobilize and resist repression. The previous example of radio Pío XII attests to the potential of these radios to work in concert in moments of crisis.

Since their beginnings in 1949, the mining radios developed as grassroots projects organized by the mining workers themselves. Albeit in some cases they were closely linked to political parties, labor unions, or international organizations, in most cases the workers themselves were wholly responsible for raising the money to purchase the equipment and train their comrades. As part of the political vanguard, due to the power of the mining industry in Bolivia during that time, the radios became influential political players during the 1960s and 1970s.

It was during times of repression when the radios came together and served a critical informational and organizational function on behalf of the miners. Dagrón explains,

En momentos de conflicto político, las radios sindicales se convertían en la única fuente de información confiable. Mientras los militares atacaban periódicos, y estaciones de radio y televisión en las ciudades, la única información disponible llegaba a través de las radios mineras. Todas ellas se unían en la “cadena minera” hasta que el ejército penetró en los distritos mineros y tomó por asalto las instalaciones, defendidas hasta el último momento por los trabajadores. (49)

The informational chains, in which the stations picked up and then retransmitted the emissions of another, were effective ways to disperse reports of real-time events and bypass the physical presence of the military. Indeed this is an advantage of the radio as a tool of social struggle, yet it also attests to the liberatory potential of electronic communication technology—not to mention the fact that it is a crucial function that anticipates the structural logic of the Internet.

Insurgent Radios

Insurgent radios are alternative in that they find and construct forms of communication outside of the official media circuits. Intimately linked to revolutionary movements in Latin America, the radios emerged as tools for coordinating actions between dispersed groups, contradicting official accounts of events, and building social networks of support crucial to guerrilla activities. The most sophisticated and well-established insurgent radios emerged in Central America as players in the social upheavals that divided that region during the 1970s and 1980s. Within this group, Radio Venceremos stands out as a powerful example of the ways radio can shape the public image of insurgent groups and of the importance of contestatory symbolic production within oppositional movements in general. Before exploring the case of Radio Venceremos, however, I will develop a brief theoretical account of the relationship between communication and armed revolutionary movements.

Revolutionary struggle, besides the clear material and physical nature of armed struggle, is also a struggle of ideas. Any kind of action is based on an individual's

understanding of social, political and economic realities and his or her position within such a system. This understanding is not guaranteed to reflect the “objective” conditions that position individuals within a given social structure—evident in the often contradictory ways people act in relation to their social, political, and economic position and the competing political views they hold—but instead reflect competing narratives through which individuals understand and give meaning to concrete situations. The adherence to certain narratives is reflected in the actions of individuals.

The importance of communication and the alternative narratives they construct are crucial in building support for a revolutionary movement in the form of civilian support bases, as well as in inspiring recruits to take up arms and play an active role. At the quotidian level of guerrilla wars, where fighting takes place in spurts and almost always out of sight of the general population, networks of support within the civilian population and general morale within the insurgent groups themselves are also affected by the ability of the insurgents to bypass official informational channels and give their own accounts of what is happening on the ground. The advantage of radio as a tool for such communication is evident in the following insurgent’s account of the creation of Radio Venceremos:

La verdad es que en El Salvador, en aquellos finales de los setentas, las cosas se habían ido poniendo color de hormiga. La represión era brutal. Los medios escritos se volvían ineficaces. Si vos tenías un volante en la bolsa, eso te podía costar la vida. ¿Valía la pena, entonces, darle volantes a la gente? Las posibilidades de difundir por escrito las ideas revolucionarias se volvían muy riesgosas para el que repartía y para el que recibía también. Tal vez por eso, por que la voz no se requisa, nació el proyecto de poner una radio. (Vigíl 13)

The immaterial qualities of radio communication make it an efficient and appropriate form of communication during times of repression.

An example that illustrates the role of Radio Venceremos in the struggle to construct a public image in the civil war in El Salvador, is the FMLN's (Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional) assassination of Lieutenant Colonel Domingo Monterrosa. Monterrosa was a target of the radio and was considered their archenemy due to his role as commander and creator of the brutal special forces unit Atlacatl, his close relationship with national political figures including the U.S. Ambassador Dean Hinton, and his role in massacres of civilians—of which perhaps the most famous is the massacre in the hamlet of El Mozote in December of 1981.² The radio often covered stories on the Lieutenant Colonel and also designated airtime to jokes and parodies that sought to discredit and taint his national prestige. Monterrosa became a compulsive listener of the radio, and as Salvadoran reporter Lucía Annunziata explains, “Every night, out in the field, he would listen to the radio, first to the BBC and then to Radio Venceremos, listening to what *they* said he'd done that day” (qtd. in Danner 147). Monterrosa developed a vendetta towards the radio and took to flaunting as personal trophies any recovered equipment from the radio.

Understanding the privileged position of the radio, not only in the national psyche but also personally to Monterrosa, the guerrillas developed an elaborate plan that demonstrated both military and public relations expertise. The military had been accumulating victories during much of 1983 and 1984, and the FMLN was losing face in the mainstream media—some of which declared that the guerrilla army was in its final stages (Danner 149). Taking into account Monterrosa's personal contempt for the station, the guerrillas designed a trap. During a military offensive in October of 1984, the

² The massacre took place during a military offensive in which the Atlacatl unit murdered more than one thousand men, women, and children; most of whom were innocent rural farmers. For an in-depth account of the events see Mark Danner (1993) and for the guerrillas' accounts see Vigíl (1991).

guerrillas provoked a skirmish with a military column in which they staged a retreat and made the military believe that, having been caught off guard, they had been forced to abandon their transmitter. Upon finding out about the capture, Monterrosa arrived victoriously and scheduled a press conference for the following day in which he would present the transmitter to the national and international media as a symbolic victory over the guerrillas.

The news of the capture of Radio Venceremos's transmitter dominated the headlines in El Salvador, pleasing some and devastating others. What Monterrosa and the rest of the country were unaware of, however, was that the guerrillas had packed the transmitter with dynamite that they could detonate by emitting a radio signal. Thus as Monterrosa's helicopter³ took off from the town of Joateca on its way to the press conference, the guerrillas detonated the explosives which in turn engulfed the helicopter in a fire ball that killed everyone on board.

In this way the guerrillas achieved an important military victory that was amplified by the symbolic force of the radio's return to the air shortly after Monterrosa's death. The previous two days were the first in four years that the radio had ceased its transmission. The military had emphasized that as a victory for itself and as a sign of the imminent defeat of the guerrillas. By triumphantly breaking that silence and taking responsibility for Monterrosa's death—declaring it a victory not for themselves, but for those who had died at the hands of Monterrosa at the nearby towns where the massacres took place several years before—, the guerrillas regained a dominant position within the nation's imaginary whatever their actual military potential. By declaring a

³Also in the helicopter were other important commanders such as Major Armando Amitia and Lieutenant Colonel Herson Calito.

victory for those massacred, the radio also became their metaphorical voice and undoubtedly boosted their support by symbolizing the “protectors,” “redeemers,” and “representatives” of the people. This instance clearly demonstrates the tactical importance of the radio in producing concrete results by manipulating symbols to benefit a given position.

European Radios

Although situated outside our specified regional focus, European experiences with alternative radio also influenced the development of alternative radios in Latin America and thus require a brief discussion. European alternative radios influenced the latest wave of alternative radios—and especially those with a strong presence of students (Dagron, 2001; Samarkanda, 2000; Ernesto Lamas, Personal Interview). Thus, according to Ernesto Lamas, cofounder of the alternative radio station FM La Tribu, the experiences of alternative radios in Italy provided him and other students with some models through which to orient their own projects (Personal Interview). As students of Communication Sciences at the University of Buenos Aires, this newer generation widened its horizons beyond the previous continental experiences and also contemplated the more theoretical implications of alternative communication.

Experiments with alternative radios in Italy were intimately linked to the social turmoil during the 1970s and, like many radios in Latin America, were used as communicative tools by workers’ unions, political parties, journalists, and militants of the New Left (Prado 38-44). Umberto Eco describes the role of alternative radios in the May

1968 revolts in Paris and in Italy during the mid-1970s. Eco observed that an important potential of the radios was in providing such detailed real-time coverage that anyone listening could know the position and movement of both the protesters and the police.

Thus, Eco describes the work of the French radio, Radio Montecarlo, where it,

Realizaba el reportaje más perfecto que había oído en mi vida. Bastaba con recordar el mapa de la ciudad: ahí estaban, la manifestación se desplaza desde la Sorborna hasta el Sena a lo largo de Boul' Mich', llega la policía desde Saint-Germain, los manifestantes en fuga toman rue de la Huchette, la policía los ataca desde el Sena a lo largo de rue Chat qui péche... De haber estado allí habría sabido cómo encontrar la manifestación, cómo evitarla, cómo moverme, tanto en el caso de un privado y prudente ciudadano, como en el de un manifestante *enragé*. (213-214)

This description evidences the potential of the radio to provide people on the ground with information with which they can coordinate their movements in real time. Although the reports serve citizens in general—those who want to protest and those who do not—it is also evident that the reporters form an integral part of what is happening. According to Eco, the French government did formally protest the radio's reports claiming that it helped the urban guerrillas. This form of journalism in which the journalist ceases to be a neutral reporter and becomes part of the action is indeed an important characteristic of the latest form of alternative radios and is evidenced in La Tribu.

Perhaps the most important contribution of the European radios to the latest generation of radios in Latin America, however, is the communicational experiments in which they explored the political implications of the aesthetic and linguistic aspects of production. The psychoanalyst and philosopher Felix Guattari articulates the innovative linguistic function of the radios in relation to political transformations. According to Guattari,

Los portavoces del tercer estado, en 1789, para redactar los *cahiers de doléances* [cuadernos de quejas], tuvieron literalmente que inventarse un nuevo medio de expresión, una lengua nueva. El cuarto mundo, actualmente, está buscando asimismo lenguas menores para actualizar determinados problemas que, en realidad, conciernen a toda la sociedad. Es en este contexto de experimentación de un nuevo tipo de democracia directa donde se inscribe el problema de las radios libres. La palabra directa, la palabra viva, llena de seguridad y a la vez de indecisión, de contradicción, o sea, de sin-sentido, es portadora de considerables cargas de deseo. [...] Las lenguas del deseo, en cambio, inventan nuevos medios y poseen una tendencia irrefrenable a pasar a la acción; primero empiezan por <<conmover>>, por hacer reír, por impresionar, más tarde hacen tener ganas de <<ir hacia>> hacia los que hablan y hacia lo que está en juego. (234)

Indeed, the alternative radios abandoned the formal oratory style common to mainstream radio at that time and adopted the informal style of its listeners.

Radio Alice best exemplifies Guattari's description of the search for a new form of language to express alternative political paradigms. Choosing its name from Lewis Carroll's novel *Alice in Wonderland*, a work known for its playful treatment of the absurd, the radio blended literary references, politics, and theatricality in all aspects of its programming—indeed situating itself within a movement it described as “mao-dadaism” (224). While it maintained a level of artistic and philosophical sophistication that testified to the professionalism of the project, the radio often used unstructured discourse, humor, and ramblings in its reports. The following transcript of the radio's last minutes attests to this:

De todos modos, la situación sigue siendo la misma... los policías están intentando entrar, con sus chalecos antibalas y pistolas en mano [...] de todos modos, pedimos a cuantos camaradas conozcan a nuestros abogados que se pongan en contacto con ellos y les digan que estamos sitiados igual que... no sé si habéis visto la película... ¡eh!... ¿cómo demonios se llamaba? [risita nerviosa] aquella de Böll, en Alemania, *El caso de... El caso de Katharina Blum...* pues bien, los mismos cascos, los mismos chalecos, encañonando con las pistolas, y cosas de ésas... eh... verdaderamente absurdo, verdaderamente increíble, algo típicamente de película, y si no estuvieran aporreando la puerta aquí mismo, me creería en el cine... [...] Ven, alcánzame un disco para que podamos oír un poco de música. ¡Dios! [Ruidos.] [...] Aquí hay algo de Beethoven; si os gusta, bien; si no os

gusta, bueno... os vais a hacer puñetas. [Fondo de ruidos y de música de Beethoven] Bien, de manera que la policía ha vuelto ha empezar a aporrear la puerta... [...] Aguarda cinco minutos que los abogados vienen para acá, están ya en camino... Están [los policías] diciendo: <<¡Abrid esta maldita puerta!>> y cosas de esas. [Contestando una llamada telefónica]: Aquí Alice... No sé quien es Alberto, pero... eh... no, mira, yo no soy Matteo, y además tenemos la policía a la puerta... [otra voz en el fondo]: ¡están entrando!... [el locutor]: ya entran, ya están dentro, tenemos las manos en alto [ruidos], el micrófono, tenemos las manos en alto [ruidos y gritos... silencio mortal]. (226-227)

The announcer first contextualizes the police repression against the radio through a reference to a movie. They emphasize the seriousness of the problem yet, through this reference, and through several other references to the movies, they ridicule the part of the police—they don't know whether to see it as entertainment or as a real threat. The speaker never directs a word at the police, but instead, never breaks his dialogue with the audience—using informal language and humor—, and indeed prompts them to act and help them by calling their lawyers. The police are there to break the communication between the radio and its audience, and the speaker's most effective form of resistance in this case is to maintain communication until the last possible instance. Thus, in this case political resistance is communication itself.

Conclusion

This chapter helps us have the foundations upon which to better understand the development of alternative radio stations in Argentina. The cases covered here demonstrate the relationship between socio-political conflicts and transformations and the politics of communication. Placing the various histories of the radio projects within the wider socio-political context enables us to begin to systematize a movement that is very

diverse. Again, the categories within which the radios are placed should not be understood as monolithic and impenetrable. This will be evidenced by the continuation of our analysis below, in which the influence of these earlier radio projects come together to shape the latest generation of alternative radios in Argentina. The following discussion will thus evidence the influence of all these factors through an analysis that blends a larger regional focus with the particular social, political, and economic context of Argentina.

Chapter 2

Alternative Radios in Argentina

This chapter analyzes the surge of alternative radios in Argentina after the return to democracy. Keeping in mind the relationship of these radios within the larger tradition of experiences in alternative radio in Latin America, I focus on important changes that characterize this surge as a new phase. Larger national and global political and economic transformations occurring at that time influenced these characteristics. Such transformations strongly influenced the objectives of the projects of alternative radios as well as the nature of the political alternatives that these radios proposed. Thus, I first begin with a historical account of the ways in which social organizations and students constructed new channels of communication in the form of alternative radio stations after the return to democracy. Here, I focus on the national context in which alternative radios developed. Secondly, I analyze the political proposals of the radios, in the light of the changing conceptions of the “political” after the fall of socialism at the end of the 1980s. I argue that the new generation of social actors, through skepticism and disenchantment, reconceptualized their political proposals as part of critical processes of self-reflection in which they questioned previous oppositional goals and organizational structures.

Radios and the Return to Democracy

The birth of alternative radio stations as sites of political and cultural resistance occurred during the democratic transition in Argentina, after the end of the dictatorship in 1983. As people overcame the fear instilled by the traumatic experience of years of state repression, the country's labor, human rights, student/youth, and feminist movements reorganized, at once retaking the political arena and reshaping it in new ways. The atomizing effects and social disintegration fueled by state repression and the growing adherence to the neoliberal capitalist logic left many groups isolated and with limited numbers. As the community radio station, Aire Libre explains:

Mil novecientos ochenta y ocho amanecía, y Argentina comenzaba a arder con las primeras chispas de la hiperinflación, la creciente deuda externa, militares genocidas perdonados por las leyes de obediencia debida y punto final, paros generales, medios de comunicación cada vez en menos manos, y por una sociedad ronca pero que ya empezaba a gritar basta.

However small, these efforts to reorganize society constituted the beginning of a new and innovative political militancy that grew during the following decade and flourished in the first years of the following century.

Grassroots and student organizations' recognition of their isolation and of the increasing concentration and private control over the production of information led many to defiantly create their own systems of communication. In the city of Rosario the multitude of organizations focused on their particular work but recognized that, although they were different, they all coincided in the goal of promoting social transformations.

As one participant notes:

Yo recuerdo que en aquella época muchos participábamos en lugares disímiles, por ejemplo, en sindicatos, en los barrios, en organizaciones estudiantiles, y de alguna manera todos nos conocíamos. Eso es muy particular en nuestra ciudad. "Ah, yo conozco a fulano que es amigo de, ah, yo conozco a aquel otro que está

en el centro comunitario...", todos estábamos, a través de conocidos, sabiendo que en los barrios estaban pasando cosas, y que no estaban saliendo en los medios.

The recognition of this commonality instigated a series of meetings in which the various organizations pooled their resources and invested in equipment that would let them voice their experiences through the airwaves. Each group remained formally separate but shared the equipment and the airtime. Although it was first conceived as a tool that amplified the demands of other organization, during the months and years that followed the project took on a life of its own and coalesced into the alternative radio station FM Aire Libre.

The resurgence and re-composition of severed social ties that occurred in Rosario is also evident among university students in Buenos Aires with the creation of FM La Tribu in 1989. The majority of the founding members of La Tribu came from the communications department at the University of Buenos Aires. As a member of the group explains in Raúl Zibechi's book, *Genealogía de la revuelta*:

Se constituyó en una primera etapa en un ámbito más de reflexión que de producción, canal de expresión y no tanto de comunicación, refugio frente a lo que pasaba 'afuera' porque nosotros también estábamos en crisis. Las causas que motivaron el nacimiento de La Tribu se mezclaron con los efectos de esa situación desalentadora. La Tribu como refugio. Etapa de experimentos radiales pero sobre todo de encuentro de jóvenes con diversidad de experiencias, expectativas y frustraciones que se juntaban para protestar, proyectar y contenerse. (80)

Social relations are reestablished through a process where young people from diverse backgrounds begin to work together by acknowledging their similar placement within larger political, economic, and social transformations. Moreover, the initial stage in the formation of La Tribu is one of self-reflection and internal development, of creativity and experiments that are later articulated publicly.

Central to the recreation of the social fabric shattered by the dictatorship is breaking the silence imposed by fear and repression. Silence and social disintegration reinforced each other exponentially under the dictatorship—where knowing, seeing, or communicating were enough to arouse suspicion and conclude in torture or disappearance. Thus, it was best not to speak with the neighbors and to close the windows and blinds or turn a blind eye in the case of military raids and kidnappings. The distrust among neighbors, and the citizenry in general, was indeed an axis of the official propaganda. Through the phantasmal imagery⁴ of propaganda that depicted the enemy as ever-presently lurking in the shadows, and through state repression that was equally “just beneath the surface,” the population turned inward and became increasingly isolated. The dirty war was thus a war of perception where the power to control what was seen and influence how it was interpreted played a crucial role.

Using the terminology of performance studies, Diana Taylor describes the framework that structures this kind of perception as the “scenario.” According to Taylor, the scenario “allows for occlusion; by positioning our perspective, it promotes certain views while helping to disappear others”—in the case of Argentina this disappearance can be taken literally (28). Moreover, Taylor acknowledges that “[t]hose who are not victims or perpetrators but witnesses to atrocities [...] are often blinded by governmental

⁴ It is interesting to note the use of this kind of imagery to also describe government kidnappings, torture, and murder. When one is kidnapped by the government he or she becomes “disappeared.” In other words the person leaves the world of the “real” and goes into another dimension; the world of shadows, secrets, and silence. He or she enters a place beyond language, where the experience of those in that realm can never be fully articulated. It must be emphasized that that non-place also carries political implications. By avoiding the explicit language of kidnappings, torture, and murder, the word “disappeared” becomes neutralized and public opinion over what really happened is more easily influenced by those who control access to and production of information. In most cases, upon reading the official accounts, often employing a degree of self-censorship or a purposeful lack of criticism (through the fear of looking directly at the ghost and thus either having to believe in them—recognizing there is a genocide and everyone is implicitly involved— or, even worse, being sucked into the other side—through taking a stance against the government or by putting the pieces together and “knowing too much”) many resigned themselves to saying “well they must have been up to something.”

efforts to contain the situation”, and terms this blinding process “percepticide” (275). Thus, I argue that it was the legacy of the scenario the military constructed during the dictatorship—and its explicit production, through percepticide, of a population that was “deaf,” “blind,” and “mute”—against which the radios directed themselves. The force with which alternative radio stations emerged was a backlash whose goal was to take back the word, to make noise, and break the silence (Claudia Villamayor, Personal Interview). Thus Gastón, the current director of La Tribu, states that,

mucho del surgimiento de La Tribu tiene que ver con poder colaborar en esta ciudad en la recuperación del diálogo destruido por la dictadura, y en evidenciar la posibilidad concreta de que un grupo de gente en un barrio de la ciudad puede llevar adelante un proyecto de comunicación propia. (Personal Interview)

A new kind of radio

During the end of the 1980s, after their initial surge, there is evidence of a transformation within alternative radios that coincide with political and economic transformations at the national and international levels, but also with a generational shift within the radios themselves, and with a reevaluation of the nature of their political projects. Evidence demonstrates that during this period alternative radios begin to be seen as political projects in themselves and thus become more independent from previous organizations to which the radios were only a part of a larger project. This is in part due to the work of a new generation, mostly students, whose political objectives reflect disillusionment with the Argentina’s political system and the global collapse of socialism.

By the end of the 1980s, the optimism that was evidenced in the resurgence of social organizations after the dictatorship was a distant memory. Economic instability

and continued defiance by segments of the military left many feeling as if nothing much had changed since 1983. The government under Alfonsín did try to reform some of the neoliberal policies that put the country at the mercy of speculative financial flows, ravished national industries by opening them up to foreign competition, and left the nation with an insuperable legacy of debt. In 1985 the government implemented the Plan Austral, which sought to control inflation through fixing the exchange rate, freezing salaries, tariffs, and the price of industrial goods (Damill 182). After an initial period of success, the plan proved insufficient and high levels of inflation returned. It is important to emphasize, however, that while these policies were a bit milder than the dogmatic policies of Martínez de Hoz before 1983, they continued to be market-based initiatives that sought to aid the supply side of production by intervening in the name of fiscal discipline and increased competitiveness. The government's failure to control the military and implement justice regarding human rights violations, evidenced by several uprisings and the release from prison of high-ranking military personnel, also contributed to a loss of legitimacy of the political system in general.

This kind of disenchantment with the traditional political system is evident in the following description of the context within which La Tribu was founded. According to Carlos López and Miguel Rodríguez,

Pasados los primeros años de auge participativo post recuperación de la democracia, comenzaba a imperar en la gente el desencanto y el escepticismo frente a la posibilidad de lograr cambios por medio de la actuación política. [...] Los partidos mayoritarios empezaban a <<modernizarse>> transformándose en estructuras elitistas y ámbito para el desarrollo de los profesionales de la política que reemplazaban el contacto directo con las privaciones del pueblo por el diálogo con la <<consultoras de imagen>> o las <<encuestadoras de ánimos electorales>>, mientras dejaban de ser o plantearse ser, ámbitos de participación y debate capaces de canalizar los reclamos de la gente. (18)

Thus, political representation and public participation are transformed into merely matters of appearance. As people began to see through this false image and become more aware of the elitist nature of the major political parties, a new generation of social actors searched for new spaces through which to do politics.

The disenchantment and consequent move away from traditional political channels evidenced in *La Tribu* also needs to be historically situated within larger global processes. Immanuel Wallerstein's analysis of the new anti-systemic movements provides some important insights that attribute the previous shortcomings of the Left as resulting from oppositional methods that reproduce inequality and exclusion. As Wallerstein describes it, the Left has been divided since its conception. Initially, the division centered on the subject of whether capturing state power is a necessary step in revolutionary transformations. Those advocating the need to gain state power won out largely due to the fact that it seems inevitable as a way to defeat the repressive forces of the state and to restructure society. Proposals that sought alternatives outside the state, such as Anarchists, lost out precisely because they could not formulate a way to achieve social transformation through ways that did not entail confrontation with the "legitimate force" of the ruling class (*Geopolitics and Culture* 112).

After 1968, however, there was yet another significant split within the Left. This time it was the result of a new generation that was disillusioned by the failure of national liberation movements, Communists, and Social-Democrats to transform society upon attaining power. This generation, which Wallerstein calls the New Left, criticized the Old Left for continuing to exclude large segments of the population, for having become moderate once in power and not pushed for real transformations, and for continuing to

repress and exploit the working class (Geopolitics and Culture 113-114). These criticisms strengthened after the collapse of socialism during the end of the 1980s. The criticism aimed at the old movements, however, enabled the new generations to be more self-reflexive and critical, often questioning fundamental strategies, concepts, and unequal relations of power reproduced by the organizational structures of the old left. In Argentina they were particularly strong because their disillusionment with the left was coupled with a discredited political system in general. The turning away from the traditional political system and the search for alternative political channels is evidenced in the previous account of La Tribu as a refuge and in the break of many of its initial founders from militancy within the communist party. Thus, Gastón declares, “La Tribu, durante los años 90 sobre todo, ha sido un refugio para un montón de personas que no encontraban en otros lugares un espacio de pertenencia” (Personal Interview). This was a generation who, without established political channels and spaces, began to experiment with alternatives.

Through this process of reflection, the new generation adopts the radio as a political and cultural project in and of itself and no longer sees it as a communicational arm of another organization. In other words, the objectives of the radios were extra-communicational in that communication was seen as a tool that could be used within a larger strategy for social change—such as education, religion, labor unions, or the traditional political system. Within this new generation, however, the communicational projects are seen as the objective. Thus, a previous understanding of communication *for* social change gives way to an understanding of communication *as* political change. Here we see a shift similar to that evidenced in the free radios in Europe. This change can be

seen in the development of Aire Libre, who previously only existed as set of equipment shared by different organizations and by the end of the decade had coalesced into a project that used communication and culture as its main political initiatives. Likewise, a cooperative of journalists in the district of Morón in Gran Buenos Aires founded FM En Tránsito. One of their main objectives was to create a political space that could work through democratic principles and cooperation at the level of everyday tasks, and provide open communication channels that expressed the same values (Dulbecco, Personal Interview).

The most innovative results of the process of self-reflection propelled by the national and international political factors mentioned above, and closely tied to the reformulation of their communicative projects, is the reconceptualization of politics and of processes of social transformation (Svampa 199-201). Evident within new understandings of social transformation is the breaking down of previous hierarchies and boundaries in traditional political discourse. Accounts from different radios demonstrate that the merging of means and ends is an important part of this movement. For these groups action is not something you do to create a change in the future. Change has to begin in the everyday actions of individuals and “how” you do things is just as important as “what” you do— transgressing traditional binaries between the present and the future in which all attention is aimed towards the future at the cost of critical self-reflection of the present. Thus, Gastón declares that “la política no es dissociable de las cosas que uno hace todos los días” (Personal Interview). Politics is not something that happens during specified times through official channels, it is something that is expressed and practiced through quotidian actions. Within an understanding that holds the future as disassociated

from the concrete actions of daily life, the political implications of the way in which projects are organized and carried out in practice are not analyzed as rigorously—and thus, projects of social change remain as hollow goals and the actions as mere activism in the sense of the word used by Paulo Freire.⁵

It is precisely through critical self-reflection that the new social actors in the new generation of radios understand that a different political system in the future is constructed through the actions of the present. Thus, La Tribu declares, “Para nosotros, la organización no es una herramienta. La organización es nuestro presente, es la manera cómo vivimos La Tribu todos los días. Tratamos de hacer del presente lo más parecido a lo que deseamos del futuro” (qtd. in Geerts, Oeyen, and Villamayor 373-374). As Wallerstein points out, the criticisms waged against the old left resulted from their inability and seeming lack of initiative in fundamentally changing not just economic relations, but in producing more profound transformations that addressed inequalities based on categories such as gender and race. The revolutionary theorists of the Old Left maintained that the focus of revolution should be on the relations of production and that other forms of inequality, which they viewed as contingent upon the relations of production, would consequently be transformed (“New Revolts” 266-68). Thus the new generation of social actors, disappointed with a strategy that relegated all forms of inequality under that of class and set them apart as distant goals, demonstrate a tendency to base future social transformations in the present.

Keeping in mind the considerable interdependence between the radio stations and civil society, I will now give a brief account of other important social

⁵ For Freire, activism is the result of action without reflection, through which action is converted in “action for action.” This careless action undermines true praxis and makes impossible the dialogue needed to transform society (106).

organizations/movements in Argentina by emphasizing common characteristics they share with the radios and the ways they express new forms of doing politics. I do this first to emphasize that, although the new generation of radios were no longer the informational arm of a particular organization, the nature of projects of alternative communication and social change require and indeed would not make sense without a close relationship of cooperation with other social organizations. Secondly, it is important to note that, besides being influenced by a tradition of alternative communication beyond their particular place and time, these radios and the people who participate in them are also linked to historical transformations in the realm of oppositional movements. Increasing the connections through which we understand the radios will thus enable a more complete and complex analysis.

Thus, a movement that exemplifies new forms of practicing and understanding politics is the Unemployed Workers' Movement (MTD, *Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados*). Directly resulting from a national process of deindustrialization brought on by the onset of neoliberal policies⁶, during the 1990s there emerged in Argentina the Unemployed Workers Movement as an effort to organize a segment of the working class

⁶ The new economic model thrives on a reinvigorated search for profits accompanied by highly mobile capital. Thus capital takes advantage of cheap and temporary labor around the globe at the same time that developing countries try to increase their "competitiveness" by cutting wages and labor protections. In addition, developing countries are forced to cut social spending and eliminate social safety nets to the most vulnerable sectors of society through structural adjustment programs mandated by the IMF and other international institutions. The results have been twofold. First, the breakdown of the fordist industrial factory results in the decrease in wages and the increase in instability and precariousness of jobs, and forces many people to look for work in the informal economy (Dickinson and Schaeffer, 2001). The growth of the informal sector is producing a generation of workers who have never occupied jobs in the formal economy and are in a perpetual state of economic insecurity. Chronic unemployment is indeed a structural characteristic of post-fordist production under the neoliberal economy (Svampa, 2005). Second, the traditional family is also destabilized as the restructuring produces a "feminization" of the workforce. The feminization is a consequence of capital's thirst for cheap labor, which it can most readily find in the female workforce that is traditionally unprotected and stereotypically docile yet reliable (Peterson, 2003). As the family structure is altered, so are the processes of socialization and disciplining that traditionally occur within the household and inside the factory. (Peterson 2003; Zibechi 2003; Elson 1998; Bakker and Gill 2003; and Beneria 2003)

that was increasingly without employment. Besides the disruptive actions that the MTDs carryout in the form of roadblocks, their most promising actions take the form of new models of political militancy at the neighborhood level (Svampa 252-54). Here many groups experiment with direct democracy and reconstruct a communal identity no longer tied to political parties, labor unions, or the factory. As a member from MTD Solano explained,

Pero la lucha no significa solamente salir a cortar la ruta o enfrentarte con la policía, sino que es una lucha cotidiana, es luchar contra nuestra propia y vieja manera de pensar para ir incorporando otro pensamiento nuevo donde las relaciones sean solidarias, colectivas, de compañeros. (qtd. in Colectivo Situaciones 43)

The statement also evidences an affective component that enables the development of social relations. This degree of affect is also present in the human rights group HIJOS (Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia y contra el Olvido y el Silencio), which was created out of encounters between children whose parents were disappeared during the dictatorship. Zibechi identifies how this group also bypasses traditional boundaries. He states,

En la política tradicional, por ejemplo, hay una clara separación entre fiesta y protesta, o entre el contenido (el discurso, el programa) y la forma (el espectáculo artístico-cultural). En los actos de los partidos hay un tiempo para la oratoria y un tiempo distinto, habitualmente después que ha finalizado la parte <<seria>>, para la recreación y la fiesta. En HIJOS no hay dos tiempos, cosa que resulta evidente en los escraches, y tampoco instrumentalización de una actividad por la otra, sino unidad. En general, en la política institucional lo cultural o la fiesta son adornos, complementos de lo que verdaderamente importa, del tiempo ordenador en el que se juega lo decisivo, vinculado siempre al poder. (50)

Through their ability to move beyond such boundaries, HIJOS are able displace hierarchies between form and content, present and future, and politics and culture, in a manner similar to that evidenced in La Tribu. Likewise, the relationships that form are

not instrumental or limited to the realm of formal political militancy. The inclusion of parties creates affective relationships that last beyond specific projects.

The case of the MTDs and HIJOS attest to a conception of politics in a manner similar to that previously evidenced by La Tribu. These points of convergence can enable us to better understand the relationship of alternative radios with other social organizations and to perceive larger processes of transformation within organizations whose goals are social change. In the next chapter, I will continue to explore the implications of this kind of resistance by focusing on the communicative project of FM La Tribu.

Chapter 3

Case Study: La Tribu

Introduction

Now that we have established the general background upon which the new generation of alternative radios emerged, this chapter explores the political alternatives that FM La Tribu proposes and constructs through the content it produces, the manner in which it is organized, and the way it functions daily. Through a stricter focus on La Tribu, I continue to develop the analysis of this latest phase in the development of alternative radio in Latin America and of both the challenges and innovative implications regarding oppositional political projects under the latest phase of capitalist development.

Keeping in mind the set of general characteristics that guide the work of alternative radios (Geerts, Oeyen, Villamayor 35-36), I explore the ways in which La Tribu exemplifies these characteristics through its radio programs and parallel projects, through its organizational and financial structure, and through the alternative political discourses that are articulated in all of its spaces. In order to systematize this analysis, I look at five major areas: 1) The informational, political, and cultural objectives of the station. I look at the ways in which the radio articulates alternative discourses to denaturalize dominant ideologies. 2) Participation is a central concept within the political proposals of alternative radios. This section analyzes the ways in which participation forms a part in both the historical development of the station and in its day-to-day functions. I give a brief account of the people that participate in La Tribu by focusing on

diversity and on periods of renovation and transformation. Lastly, I conclude this section with a look at the extent that women's rights issues and gender equality form part of the station's objectives. 3) The networks of support and cooperation that the radio establishes are important in developing effective projects that work for social transformation, but also in creating a base of support to deter government repression and mobilize listeners in moments of crisis. This section analyzes the network of relationships of La Tribu through insights from theorists who try to systematize the new organizational forms of recent social movements. 4) In the final section, I look at the ways in which La Tribu deals with issues of financial sustainability. The ways in which stations finance themselves has been open to much debate in the field of alternative communication. The lines between resisting against and actively reproducing the dominant economic system are not readily distinguishable, and the ways in which La Tribu deals with this can help provide us with some insights into how to resolve such contradictions.

Objectives and Projects

The communicative work of alternative radio stations is not one of merely providing access to information that is not covered by mainstream media, but in creating alternative discourses to denaturalize dominant ideologies and articulate political alternatives. Thus, the projects of alternative communication fight their battles on the realm of meaning. In order to better understand this process, it is necessary that we adopt an analytical focus that takes into account theoretical insights from semiotics in relation

to the construction of ideology. Within this analysis, I look at the ways La Tribu constructs alternative discourses through informational and cultural production.

Before developing an account of the alternative systems of meaning proposed by alternative radios, it is important to highlight the function of dominant narratives—what I will also refer to as ideology. Louis Althusser’s “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” is influential in developing contemporary understandings of ideology. I will thus begin with an exemplary quote that helps us orient my use of ideology among others. According to Althusser,

It is indeed a peculiarity of ideology that it imposes (without appearing to do so, since these are ‘obviousnesses’) obviousnesses as obviousnesses, which we cannot *fail to recognize* and before which we have the inevitable and natural reaction of crying out (aloud or in the ‘still, small voice of conscience’): ‘That’s obvious! That’s right! That’s true!’ (129)

One of the main functions of ideology is to make things appear natural or obvious. Things are the way they are because they could not be otherwise. Roland Barthes also analyzes the structure of ideology, which he refers to as “myth,” and declares, “the very principle of myth is to transform history into nature. [Myth] is not read as a motive but as a reason” (129). What distinguishes ideology from other narratives that present themselves as “truth,” is the manner in which it functions to preserve, reproduce, and obfuscate existing relations of power. Alluding to the traces of ideology in actions, Gastón also insists that La Tribu fights against habits, because habitual actions naturalize certain processes that are later thought to be unalterable because they are internalized. He concludes,

Entonces nosotros siempre decimos que en realidad una tarea inicial es desnaturalizar y desmontar esos procesos de construcción de sentido, que de alguna manera lo que hacen es convertir en una costumbre aquello que puede ser transformado. (Personal Interview)

The role of alternative media is to reinterpret dominant discourses—be it in the form of news stories or official government rhetoric—in ways that bring out and demystify the power relations inherent in such rhetoric. In order to do this, Gastón insists that alternative communication must have a critical view over how information is constructed as well as make evident the operations at work in that construction. In this way Gastón calls for a semiotic analysis similar to that of the “mythologist”⁷ proposed by Barthes. For Barthes, the myth is constructed through the process of connotation in which the primary sign becomes the signifier for a second-order semiological system.⁸ The second-order signifier is thus both full—since it is the expression of the relationship in the first-order system—and empty—since, as a signifier in the second-order system, it will only get meaning through its relationship with the second-order signifier in the form of the myth. Thus, Barthes, as the mythologist, declares, “If I focus on a full signifier, in which I clearly distinguish the meaning from form, and consequently the distortion which the one imposes on the other, I undo the signification of the myth, and I receive the latter

⁷ For Barthes, the mythologist is one who understands and deciphers myths (128).

⁸ In the first-order semiological system, the sign is constituted by a signifier and a signified. The sign is filled by the meaning expressed by the relationship between the signifier and the signified. This relationship is denotative when the sign expresses its “literal” meaning. (The word “literal” is problematic in that it implies a connection to an indisputable reality and tends to close itself off from analyses that explore the constitution of signs that make up the concept (Hall 170-71). Keeping this in mind, however, I will keep these categories, as they are adequate for our current purposes.) Connotation occurs when the sign of the first-order semiological system becomes the signifier for a second-order semiological system. The second-order semiological system is the system that constructs the myth. To distinguish between the first-order sign and the second-order signifier, Barthes refers to the former as “meaning” and the latter as “form.”

1. Signifier	2. Signified
3. Sign	
I. SIGNIFIER	II. SIGNIFIED
III. SIGN	

as an imposture” (128). By first making explicit the construction of the message, i.e. the structure of signification, and by making evident the arbitrariness of the second-order system, he or she denaturalizes/demystifies the ideological message, and thus echoes Gastón’s analysis in a theoretical manner. At this level, the subject matter is still determined by the mainstream media, but forms the basis for the denaturalization or decoding of ideological messages. Stuart Hall describes a similar process of interpreting dominant messages in a politically subversive manner. According to Hall, the message consumer is able to subvert dominant codes when he/she:

Detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference. This is the case of the viewer who listens to a debate on the need to limit wages but ‘reads’ every mention of the ‘national interest’ as ‘class interest’. He/she is operating with what we must call an *oppositional code*. One of the most significant political moments [...] is the point when events which are normally signified and decoded in a negotiated way begin to be given an oppositional reading. Here the ‘politics of signification’—the struggle in discourse—is joined. (175-76)

One of the most widely acknowledged cases in which the alternative media coincided in formulating such an oppositional code was after the assassination of two piqueteros (members of the unemployed workers’ movement) by the police on June 26, 2002. The collusion of the mainstream media with the police was evident in the front-page headline of one of the most widely read newspapers, *Clarín*, which announced “La crisis se cobró dos muertos,” and, following the testimony of the police, reported that the piqueteros had shot each other. It is important to point out the depoliticizing effect of such a headline. By attributing the death of the piqueteros on the general state of crisis that Argentina was experiencing at the time, such language depersonifies both the culprits and the dead. By shifting responsibility on the crisis, the headline also denies the possibility of holding someone personally accountable.

The battle over the interpretation of the assassinations on June 26th was clear in the role of the alternative media in the days that followed. The indignation of those who were present at the protest led them to find alternative channels through which to articulate the other side of the story. According to Claudia Korol, journalist and popular educator who was working at La Tribu at the time,

Al día siguiente de la represión teníamos invitados a todos los movimientos piqueteros para dar su versión. Sí, en ese momento estaban dando la versión desde el gobierno que había sido una lucha entre piqueteros por la cual habían muerto Darío Santillán y Maximiliano Kosteki, dos de los piqueteros asesinados en esa represión... y bueno... que fue otro movimiento piquetero que los había asesinado... eso es lo que había salido en todos los medios de televisión ese día. Y bueno nosotros teníamos a los compañeros de ellos (porque habían estado a su lado) hablando por las radios alternativas... y la gente estaba buscando esas versiones para saber lo que había pasado. (Personal Interview)

This was not an isolated effort as other alternative radios, and the alternative media in general, mobilized to challenge the official accounts. The Indymedia website posted reports with the headline reading “Asesinos.” But it was independent photographers, however, who produced photographs that showed the police murdering the two unarmed piqueteros and attempting to destroy the evidence by picking up the scattered cartages. The previous depersonified version of the event now had a face and name in the person of the police commissioner. The public contempt for the murders also converted the two piqueteros into martyrs within oppositional movements in Argentina. This case indeed demonstrates the power of a concerted effort in the part of the alternative media to challenge and effectively discredit official accounts, while at the same time constructing alternative referents upon which to construct a common tradition of popular resistance.

Any project for social change must begin by creating an alternative discourse that demonstrates the constructedness of the dominant ideology and thus the *possibility* of

creating another reality. Implied within this process is also a struggle over vocabulary and concepts; over the words that are used to describe events in the news as well as the words that are used to analyze politico-economic situations. Barthes discusses the ways, within the naturalizing process of ideology, in which limiting a certain vocabulary does not eliminate those words in ideological discourse, but instead makes them implicit and thus universal (138). He uses the example of the word “bourgeois” and explains,

The bourgeoisie is defined as *the social class which does not want to be named*. ‘Bourgeois’, ‘petit-bourgeois’, ‘capitalism’, ‘proletariat’ are the locus of an unceasing haemorrhage: meaning flows out of them until their very name becomes unnecessary. [...] The bourgeoisie merges into the nation, even if it has, in order to do so, to exclude from it the elements which it decides are allogeneous (the Communists). [...] Thus the political vocabulary of the bourgeoisie already postulates that the universal exists. [...] Bourgeoisie ideology can therefore spread over everything and in so doing lose its name without risk: no one here will throw this name of bourgeois back at it. It can without resistance subsume bourgeois theatre, art and humanity under their eternal analogues; in a word, it can exnominate itself without restraint when there is only one single human nature left: the defection from the name ‘bourgeois’ is here complete. (138-139)

Thus, the exclusion of the vocabulary of class depoliticizes discourse in the manner in which it constricts the ability to give a name to social inequality and social conflict, yet it also makes itself universally implicit in other forms of discourse that are not expressively “political.”

In discussing Karl Marx’s “On the Jewish Question,” Wendy Brown also gives insights into the politics of vocabulary through a focus on the foundational moments of the liberal state. If, under liberal democracy, the state is the reflection of the sovereignty of its people, it needs to adopt a “universal” character in which it represents all the people in a given territory—a group that also needs to be assumed homogeneous and is constructed thusly by liberal discourse. As Brown points out, however, the universal character of the state does not rely in truly overcoming social differences and attaining

“universality,” but in depoliticizing such social differences by removing them from political discourse and at the same time naturalizing them within civil society (109). This is evidenced in the double function of the “universal rights of man.” According to Marx, the claims of universal rights create a general discourse of freedom and equality which legitimizes the state as the protector of such rights, while at the same time obscuring real differences and guaranteeing inequality through these very same rights that function to construct an individual political subject. Formal political equality indeed guarantees inequality and strictly self-interested action in the “non-political” realm of the private. Furthermore, Marx exposes the real bias of the state in pointing out that through universalizing the characteristics of self-interested individual, the state, in fact, guarantees the security of the most socially powerful—the bourgeoisie (33, 42-46). In this way the political transition towards the liberal state is also inextricably tied to the economic transformations in the form of capitalism and to the corresponding ideological discourse.

My evidence suggests that those who participate (or have participated) in La Tribu indeed understand the power in recuperating and giving new meaning to vocabulary through which to better analyze current situations and to the practices through which they create different ways to live. Claudia Korol understands the importance of alternative communication in bringing back and keeping alive needed vocabulary when she explains,

Mencionar al capitalismo o hablar de socialismo, o hablar de revolución, o hablar de lucha de clases, está todo fuera de moda. Y sin embargo el imperialismo nos sigue invadiendo, sigue haciendo guerras, no sigue oprimiendo. La palabra feminismo nos dicen que está fuera de moda pero sin embargo el patriarcado sigue existiendo. Entonces a mi me parece que a veces nombrar, aunque suena

raro, es importante, nombrar cosas que se consideran poco aceptadas. (Personal Interview)

Likewise, Gastón emphasizes a function of La Tribu as critically reflecting, recuperating, and resignifying oppositional tactics of the Old Left when he concludes,

Somos parte de una generación que en distintas partes del mundo está tratando de pensar cómo vivir sin reproducir este sistema. Pero por otro lado también sin reproducir viejas prácticas de la izquierda... y por otro lado tomando algunas de esas prácticas y resignificándolas. (Personal Interview)

The process of recuperating and resignifying language, thus provides the tools that enable the stations to bypass the limited role of operating in relation to official information—and letting mainstream sources of information control the subject of discourse—and to increase their autonomy by constructing their own agenda. To limit a program to a purely counterinformative⁹ function still forces such a program to work within the categories set by the mainstream media. These categories are not neutral, but are motivated by and reflect private politico-economic interests. By limiting the contestatory role of the alternative media to one of reaction against the information produced by the mainstream media, the former forfeits the upper hand by ultimately letting the latter frame the issue. It is thus crucial for the alternative media to construct its own agenda outside the realm of mainstream and official sources.

Interviews with the members of La Tribu indeed evidence their acknowledgement of the need to create an autonomous agenda as well as demonstrate their active construction of such an agenda. Ernesto Lamas expresses this when he says the following regarding the news,

Nosotros casi siempre cubrimos cosas que los otros medios no cubren. Si vos tomás los programas de la mañana o las salidas del móvil. La Tribu tiene un móvil que hace dos o tres salidas diarias. Siempre va a lugares o de conflicto

⁹ Counterinformative in the sense of challenging and demystifying official information.

gremial o de conflicto social o de cultura alternativa o a entrevistar a personas no famosas. O sea, te diría que un 90 por ciento de esa agenda se construye de una manera autónoma, sin consultar los diarios. (Personal Interview)

Gastón again echoes this assessment and connects it to the station's overall project when he explains,

Tratamos de convertir este espacio no sólo en un refugio que resiste a un modo de funcionar el mundo, sino en una propuesta ofensiva (ofensiva en términos de propositiva) que pueda también construir prácticas, relaciones, modos, acciones que cambien algunas lógicas de la vida cotidiana, que recuperen ciertos valores, ciertos modos de relacionarse, ciertas prácticas solidarias. Sobre todo que puedan contar esta ciudad desde los espacios que existen que no son nombrados ni visualizados en los grandes medios de comunicación. (Personal Interview)

Within this alternative form of journalism is also a change in the role of the journalist.

Like the journalism evidenced in the European liberated radios, the journalists of La Tribu do not limit themselves to the role of passive observers. As a social actor, the journalists often participate in social conflicts and do not feign objectivity.¹⁰ This was evident in the actions of La Tribu during the social conflicts during December 2001.

According to Ernesto Lamas, La Tribu became not only a source of alternative information, but also an organizational tool. Physically, La Tribu served as a space in which the neighbors gathered, debated, and organized themselves. In the second floor of the station formed a bartering club where people, who were denied access to their savings

¹⁰ Natalia Vinelli and Carlos Rodríguez Esperón point out that by definition, projects of alternative communication are not independent (18-26). According to the authors, “todos los medios que definen su práctica como contrainformativa hacen explícito su carácter dependiente de un proyecto de transformación social.” (18) Even if the radios are independent of political parties or other institutions, having social change as an objective makes them interpret information and take action in relation to that objective. Thus, the term “autonomous” is perhaps better suited because it denotes an internal constitution of objectives to which the action of those involved must coincide for the project to have coherence. It is important to note that that such a lack of objectivity does not forfeit credibility to mainstream media since they too are constrained by political and economic objectives. The difference is the acknowledgement of a bias and the acknowledgement that any form of interpretation involves a degree of choice on behalf of the one interpreting—this choice is undoubtedly also shaped by the factors through which the interpreter understands the world and his role in this world. It is also important to note that through acknowledging a relationship to a political, economic, or cultural project, the alternative media also enable the audience to make a more informed interpretation of the messages emitted by the radio.

due to a restriction imposed by the government, gathered to exchange for basic necessities. The times and places for the neighborhood assemblies were also announced in the radio. Lamas elaborates further,

La Tribu jugó un papel desde micrófono abierto, hasta información cruzada para todos. Hasta de ambulancia... el móvil el día de la crisis en el centro, subiendo a las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo en medio de la represión. Nuestro móvil se quedo en el medio de la plaza y en el momento en que la policía estaba cargando con sus caballos y sus balas de goma... las madres todas arriba del móvil. [...] Nosotros esos días tuvimos la programación abierta y dedicada a esto... Con la radio hecha prácticamente radio asamblea. O sea, por fin hay una crisis, ahí es donde se juega por qué hay estos medios. (Personal Interview)

This excerpt makes clear the importance of the radio beyond a source of information. The journalists were part of the action and at moments abandoned their job as reporters to actively intervene in favor of the protesters. Lamas makes evident that the purpose of having alternative media is to have them serve the citizenry—and indeed develop actions in conjunction with the citizenry—during times of crisis. They are part of the same struggle for social change and thus play an active role in promoting concerted actions towards those objectives through alternative channels that function on alternative agendas.

The radio program *Patologías Culturales* also creates its own agenda focusing on culture. The developmental trajectory of the program demonstrates a movement away from the influence of the mass media and a progression towards the autonomous development of the content of each program. During the first year the program mostly reported on the news from the cultural section of major journals and newspapers. With time, and with more connections with people from the realm of theater, art, music, etc., the program was able to define its objectives and not only cover cultural content contrary to the way it is treated in the mass media, but also cover content that does not appear in

the latter. According to a member of the program, “la búsqueda que estamos intentando en realidad, no es dar otra mirada sobre las noticias que dan los medios (o no solo eso) sino proponer una agenda distinta, nuestra, y tiene que ver con la propuesta de la radio en general” (Personal Interview).

The production of alternative agendas is also of utmost importance in cultural production for social change. Following insights from semiotics, I argue that the cultural production of the radio stations helps produce codes upon which anti-systemic actions can be articulated. According to the semiologist Tom Steers, codes are systems of meaning through which we interpret our and others’ behavior. They are a combination of myths¹¹ that provide us with a coherent worldview. If the way we act is indeed dependent on the ways we understand our actions in relation to the world, and the way we understand the world and our place in this world is through semiotic codes, then the production of alternative or contestatory semiotic codes is fundamental for any project whose goal is social transformation.

The need to produce alternative codes is particularly important since the fall of socialism gave new legitimacy to the liberal capitalist discourse that claimed the end of history. The ideological implications of this discourse are evident when in 1994 Slavoj

¹¹ Tom Steers defines myth as “a combination of paradigms and syntagms that make up an oft-told story with elaborate cultural associations, e.g., the cowboy myth, the romance myth.” Paradigms are semiotic associations. They are “a chain or collection of signs that invoke each other because they are culturally related,” i.e. a paradigm of the cowboyishness involves a horse, cattle, cowboy hat, leather, cigarettes, ruggedness, dust, strength, a quiet type of masculinity etc. Syntagms, on the other hand, are signs that get meaning through their relationship in a given sequence—generally linked to sequence of events that make up a well-known story. For example all one has to say is “once upon a time there were three little piggies...” for another person to finish the story. Putting the paradigm of cowboyishness with the story of the western frontier help construct myths that promote certain values, i.e. self-sufficiency (the “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” myth) and honesty (the honest hardworking American, “if you work hard you will succeed”). Taken together these myths construct the codes around which many Americans give meaning to their lives and use as values that guide their actions. These myths become ideology when they are used to reinforce or reproduce structures of power. For example when the myths of freedom are used to legitimize wars, or when myths of self-sufficiency are used to gain support for government cutbacks on social spending.

Zizek declared “it seems easier to imagine the ‘end of the world’ than far more modest change in the mode of production, as if liberal capitalism is the ‘real’ that will somehow survive even under conditions of a global ecological catastrophe” (1). The power of ideology to make the capitalist mode of production seem more permanent, and thus natural, than the world itself is precisely the challenge that faced La Tribu, and organizations and individual actors for social change during the 1990s—and indeed continue up until today. Thus the importance of the cultural work of those who make up La Tribu in recuperating and recreating systems of meaning to challenge those which dominate.

According to founding members of La Tribu, the project of the radio took shape within general discussions through which they tried to make sense of the political, economic, social, and cultural transformations occurring during the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990a. Carlos López and Miguel Rodríguez list some of the issues resulting from these transformations as including,

la crisis ideológica y la consiguiente incapacidad de sostener el debate con el “neoliberalismo” hegemónico, la desaparición del “socialismo real” que cae frente al avance de las “revoluciones democráticas” en Europa del Este y la asimilación por parte de la derecha del fracaso de estos regímenes al fracaso del socialismo decretando su invisibilidad histórica y declarando a las democracias capitalistas como los sistemas más justos capaces de alcanzar por el hombre, el anuncio en el mismo acto del fin de la historia, el fracaso de la política insurgente de parte de la izquierda latinoamericana, la llegada al poder en nuestro país y en el resto de los países de América Latina de gobiernos conservadores impulsores de “ajustes” económicos que sumergieron en la miseria a millones de personas en función de la “racionalidad” de las leyes del mercado, la destrucción del tejido social y la solidaridad como concepto próximo a ser expuesto en algún escaparate aparato del museo antropológico, el estallido de las organizaciones partidarias a las que pertenecíamos, etc. (22)

The desperation and intersecting crises that gripped this generation is evident in the previous excerpt. This desperation propelled the founders of La Tribu to reconceptualize the meaning of politics and to look for new channels through which to do politics.

This generation begins to widen and reconceptualize the “political” and to explore the political nature of music and other cultural production in relation to the creation of alternative cultural codes. This takes place through a process that transgresses the boundaries between traditional political spaces and discourses and explores the political nature of quotidian activities and cultural production. Thus, cultural production becomes a political proposal in itself. It is through such production that the radios, in conjunction with other social actors, begin to reactivate codes which reestablish a tradition of struggle and resignify these codes to create new forms of oppositional movements.

Jesús Martín Barbero discusses the historical relationship between culture and politics. According to the author, this relationship has been limited due to a conception that understands culture as a pure sphere that would only be contaminated by the intrusion of politics and a mechanical conception of politics that holds culture to be a purely ideological reflection of concrete production processes (210). The author takes his cue from José Joaquín Brunner when he proposes three factors that influence the new relationship between culture and politics in Latin America. The first factor occurred in countries with authoritarian governments in which resistance came from Christian communities, human rights groups, or artistic movements. The second factor was due to the recognition that brute force was not the only weapon of state repression, but that social control was also effectively implemented through ideological manipulations that changed “the meaning of everyday social life by modifying the cultural imagination and

symbols” (211). Lastly is the recognition that as a result of mass education and the mass media, culture is now at the center of political and social debates. The first factor, like the case of the new generation of leftist militants, was the result of a search for alternative political spaces. The outlawing of political institutions, such as political parties and unions, and the control of public spaces led the opposition to create new avenues through which to protest—be it through art or around issues, such as religion and human rights, that could be justified as protecting values that were above politics as such. The second and third factor are tied to the recognition of the influence of ideology in social control, and the constitution of the sphere of communication as a major area for political struggle as a result of developments in mass communication technologies. Thus, while in La Tribu the use of culture as a political tool is not directly linked to projects of human rights, religion, or art under the dictatorship, it is directly linked to efforts that create new political spaces and to relationships of cooperation between oppositional actors that do not consider class as the most important category or the proletariat as the privileged social actor in revolutionary struggle. Important is also the recognition of the potential to intervene politically through the cultural production of the radio.

The reactivation and signification of such codes is evident in the work of La Tribu. Throughout its years the station has created a mystique among a wide range of the population that has transformed it into a symbol of resistance, creativity, and an example of living politics. In this way the station has gained mythic status.¹² The station indeed propels this status not only through its programming, but through CDs, parties, projects with other radios and social organizations, and in 2000 it even published a book on the

¹² Mythic in the sense of becoming a sign for a range of connotations that go well beyond being a radio, but not in Barthes’s sense of being ideological.

history of its first decade. As a reflection of their efforts to democratize communication, they refuse to present the history of the radio through a single narrative and instead tell their story through a collection of articles, photos, newspaper clippings, and interviews from throughout the 1990s—all totaling 80 authors.

The radio, however, also reactivates and resignifies codes within the larger sphere of oppositional movements in Argentina. One such project was a contest that they held to mark the 30th anniversary of the military coup. The purpose of this contest was for young people, who were very young during the time of the coup or who had not experienced the coup firsthand, to create an audio project in which they explored the meaning of the coup and the resulting dictatorship. This project serves to open up the dictatorship to alternative interpretations, and thus opens up to debate and negotiation the historical meaning of this event. It becomes a project to recreate memories of the dictatorship, as well as of the history of social struggle that the dictatorship attempted to erase. In her study of memory of the dictatorship in Argentina, Susana Kaiser argues that the reconstitution of historical referents is crucial in transferring memory to younger generations who did not experience the dictatorship firsthand. These referents function within the framework of myths and codes through which younger generations interpret the past and orient their present actions accordingly.

This construction of history is also present in a program marking the 4th anniversary of the massacre of June 26, 2002. In this program, La Tribu's mobile visits the train station where the shootings took place—Estación Avellaneda, now renamed Estación Darío y Maxi—to retrace the sequence of events and conduct interviews with the people from that area. The recording is a mix of live coverage dubbed over with

audio from the day of the massacre. Each narrator—be it the voice of the reporters, people being interviewed, or archival audio—only speaks for a few seconds before he or she is replaced by a new voice. The effect of this bombardment of voices on the listener is a sense of overstimulation, as if one were listening live to breaking news. The constant movement from live audio to archival audio—which has the same aesthetic since it is audio that was recorded live in 2002—ceaselessly interweaves the past with the present and provokes the feeling in the listener that he or she is not just learning about what happened, but is in fact experiencing it as if it was occurring in the present.

This sense of experiencing the past is what makes this program so effective in recreating and transferring historical memory. When they play a recording of an interview of Darío Santillán shortly before his death, they frame it with the background music of Silvio Rodríguez and thus literally frame it within a symbol of social struggle in Latin America. In this way the historical memory of June 26th is further connected to past generations in Argentina as well as Latin America as a whole. Particularly in the Southern Cone, this history is marked by the brutal repression of the Left through military and police violence—assassinations and cover-ups reminiscent of the assassinations of Darío Santillán and Maximiliano Kosteki. The listener is then prompted to question if the legacy of the dictatorship and of state repression has been overcome or if it indeed is still present. The excuses of the police, the failure to try those responsible, and the demands for justice also evoke the legacy of social struggle and official impunity. In this way the program's aesthetic and its use of symbols contextualize the massacre within layers of history and semiotic paradigms well beyond the events of June 26th, 2002.

In this section I analyzed the work of La Tribu, and alternative communication, in terms of its production of information and culture. La Tribu constitutes a new generation of alternative radios that understand communication as a political project in itself. This understanding is a result of national and international transformations that have made the media—and the battle of ideas—a central player in political and social debates, and also forced new generations to find and construct political alternatives outside of traditional channels. This process has produced changes in the relationship between culture and politics.

As a producer of symbolic content, alternative communication must first work to challenge and denaturalize dominant ideological discourses in order to legitimize the possibility of social change. Following from this, it must also begin to create its own agenda, recover and resignify concepts and vocabulary, and actively create political alternatives. Evidence demonstrates that these functions are indeed central to the work of La Tribu. Moreover, even though La Tribu is a communicational project, its political proposals go beyond producing messages as it indeed plays an active role in organizing and mobilizing people in times of crisis.

In the following section I take a closer look at the people who make up La Tribu. Within this discussion I explore the state of women's rights issues within alternative communication, the influence of different generations within the overall project of La Tribu, and the construction of political alternatives through the quotidian manner in which it functions.

Participatory Practices and Personnel

Alternative communication, and La Tribu in particular, seeks to democratize society by democratizing communication.¹³ To democratize communication is to give the opportunity to speak to those who are excluded from positions of power and are socially marginalized. Giving someone the word, however, still implies temporarily sharing access to the means of communication in which one party still retains control. For communication to transform society it is imperative that the audience be involved in the production of meaning and not remain limited to passively receiving messages. Communication must be horizontal and cannot be unidirectional. Bertolt Brecht emphasizes this when he theorizes the transformative potential of the radio, thus stating,

La radio sería el más fabuloso aparato de comunicación imaginable de la vida pública, un sistema de canalización fantástico, es decir, lo sería si supiera no solamente transmitir, sino también recibir, por lo tanto, no solamente hacer oír al radioescucha, sino también hacerle hablar, y no aislarle, sino ponerse en comunicación con él. (56-57)

Thus, a more fundamental democratization entails not just temporarily giving the word to enable the marginalized to speak, but it entails opening up the project to enable the latter to make the project its own in terms of input and direction. With that in mind, this section explores the issue of participation within the development of communicational projects of La Tribu. In particular, I will focus on processes of transformation within La Tribu brought about by the participation in the project by the local community as well as by a new generation. Within this analysis of participation, I will also look at women's rights issues within La Tribu.

¹³ "Democratizar la comunicación para democratizar la sociedad" is indeed a slogan that both La Tribu and AMARC (Asociación Mundial de Radios Comunitarias) use to define their objectives.

It is difficult to make generalizations regarding the demographics of the station. When the project began, it included mostly students of whom a majority was from the Communication Sciences major at the University of Buenos Aires. Although it was limited to young people during these early days, throughout the years the project has diversified well beyond this initial group. Founding member, Ernesto Lamas, describes early moments of aperture where the radio outgrew its early limitations as a student radio station. The first year of the radio was an internally formative year where the project remained limited in regards to participants. The project remained clandestine and emitted its programs from a 14th floor apartment which they transformed into a studio (Personal Interview).

According to Lamas, the first moment of aperture occurred when the radio was evicted from the apartment and found a space in an old bohemian hotel that had been turned into a cultural center and survived the years of the dictatorship. The radio had begun to make a name for itself by then and, now at street level, the neighbors passed from being listeners to active participants. Lamas explains,

Después la misma gente del barrio que nos sintonizaban nos empezó a pedir por qué no hacíamos programas más vinculados con la comunidad. En algunos casos los vecinos se empezaron a acercar para hacer propuestas para hacer ellos programas. Como los amigos del parque centenario que querían tener su espacio para hablar sobre lo que pasa en el parque centenario, o el centro de jubilados, o los maestros de las escuelas primarias, o dos jóvenes que les gustaba el heavy metal o les gustaba el punk y querían pasar música... muchas organizaciones del barrio, sociales, políticas, o comunitarias, descubrieron que era un centro de comunicación que era gestionado por gente igual a ellos y no por un empresario o por el estado, y se apropiaron de a poco de la radio. Se la fueron apropiando... en un sentido positivo, fueron ocupando la radio. (Personal Interview)

The non-private character of the station let the neighbors identify it as a public domain where they could create their own spaces. In this way the radio transformed itself from “FM La Tribu: la radio de los estudiantes” into “FM La Tribu: la radio del barrio.”

While the neighbors did come forth to produce their own programs and take over spaces inside the radio, the administration remained in the hands of the students. It was not until the mid 1990s that a new generation took over the administrative positions. Larisa Kejval is one of the members who began working with the station during 1995, and today works as the coordinator for La Tribu’s educational center. She first became acquainted with the project through a class at the UBA, where the professor was one of the founders of the station. Gastón tells a similar story as he too became involved with the project through a class at the university. At first through workshops and later through cooperation in their own programs, the new generation of student became increasingly involved. Kejval describes the integration of the new generation, and their corresponding influence on the station, as a re-founding of the station in which it was internally democratized. There is a conscious effort on the part of the founding members to decentralize the internal division of power. The older members open dialogues with the younger generation and socialize the project. Ernesto Lamas expresses the need to produce the aperture, but not without acknowledging some difficulties. He declares,

Claro, no fue fácil, pero siempre tuvimos la decisión política de no apropiarnos, los fundadores sobre todo, del proyecto en un sentido de... ‘Bueno, como nosotros fuimos a los que nos ocurrió y los dirigimos, va a ser nuestro para siempre.’ No... insisto no fue fácil, porque es difícil abrir y entregar cosas que uno siente que le pertenecen... pero gracias a que eso se hizo, está vivo. (Personal Interview)

Evidence suggests that the re-founding of the radio through the new generation provided the radio with creative stimulation and a renovated dedication to the project

during times where other alternative stations were going through a period of crisis and decline. Such was the case with FM En Tránsito, a radio founded in 1987 by a journalists' cooperative. According to Bruno Dulbecco, a current member of the radio, the mid-1990s were marked by creative stagnation due to a general demobilization of its members compounded by economic pressures (Personal Interview). During the first administration of Carlos Menem, many people who had previously been skeptical of the neoliberal economic model began to buy into it as the economy stabilized during the first half of the 90s—particularly in the field of communication, which received an initial boost as the industry was opened up to foreign investment. Economic stability and the individualization of society propagated by Argentina's adherence to Neoliberalism eroded social cohesion and had a demobilizing effect in the radios as well as in oppositional movements as a whole. Larisa Kejval also identifies financial pressures and the internal conflicts as playing a major role in the internal crises of many alternative radios. This was the case with the alternative radio FM de la Calle, in Bahía Blanca. According to Kejval,

Alrededor de 1995 esta emisora tenía altos niveles de audiencia en la ciudad de Bahía Blanca y un espacio cultural que aglutinaba gran cantidad de actividades artísticas. Sin embargo, las dificultades para sintetizar un horizonte consensuado, para construir una organización interna democrática y eficaz y para sostener económicamente el proyecto fueron las principales causas del alejamiento de un gran número de sus integrantes de manera conflictiva. (Unpublished Thesis)

The crisis in this previously successful station occurs because it is difficult for individuals to maintain long-term responsibilities through positions that are not paid and also demonstrates that not all radios were able to avoid the concentration of power in the same way as La Tribu.

The radios that were able to make it through this period of crisis eventually did so through an aperture and the resulting creative impulse. In La Tribu, the re-founding of the radio described above by Larisa Kejval also included opening the radio to other communicational projects. In 1994 the radio opened a bar and followed two years later by opening its educational center and organizing training programs in radio. In 1998 the radio developed another important communication project in the form of a publisher. During this year the radio also began to produce CDs (Ernesto Lamas and Larisa Kejval, Personal Interviews). The creative surge and the level of sophistication that the radio achieved are also evidenced in a journal that developed in close ties with the station. During the mid-90s some members of the radio, in conjunction with prominent researchers and theorists of communication, began publishing the journal *Causas y Azares: Los lenguajes de la comunicación y la cultura en (la) crisis*. This transdisciplinary journal focused on semiotics, technology and culture, cultural studies, art, political theater, and of course, alternative communication, among many other topics. The list of scholars who contributed to the journal include García Canclini, Pierre Bourdieu, López Vigil, Maria Cristina Mata, Armand Mattelart, and Guillermo Mastrini. The breadth of the journal and the other projects that the radio developed are evidence that the radio was no longer “just a radio,” but was a truly important and respected institution which explored communication in all its forms.

The current organizational structure of the radio also gives evidence to the station’s commitment towards democratic structures. Through its current structure, the station attempts to resolve tensions between efficiency in actions and democratic input into the general organization of the radio. The most democratic space is the general

assembly where people from the different areas of the station come together once a month. In the assembly they discuss the project in general terms dealing with reflexive assessments, political and cultural initiatives and campaigns, and financial issues. The assembly helps develop an internal sense of collectivity, affective relations, and a sense of identification with the project as a whole. Indeed, when a project carries out a collective process of reflection and planning, the members develop a sense of belonging and regard the project as their own (Geerts, Oeyen, Villamayor 367). Ernesto Lamas echoes this when he says,

hay una apropiación del proyecto y la gente se siente “bueno yo soy dueño de esto también.” O sea no hay un dueño, no hay dos dueños, no hay cinco... somos cuarenta, somos cincuenta, somos cien dueños. Cada uno de su manera tiene responsabilidad sobre lo que pasa acá. (Personal Interview)

It is this sense of shared responsibility that makes the individual participant feel as if he or she is indispensable to the project. Promoting this sense of identification with the project and a commitment largely founded on affective relationships is crucial in a project like this that relies heavily on volunteers.

Regarding more concrete issues in relation to specific projects, the structure is more decentralized. Each area—the auditorium and bar, the area of publication and audiovisual communication, programming, institutional relations, new technologies, and the educational center—has relative autonomy regarding its everyday function. The level of autonomy is relative because, although there are separate areas, they often overlap in practice. In this, the radio attempts to sustain a level of efficiency since it would be counterproductive in many cases to debate minor factors with the radio as a whole. Each area holds its own assemblies to debate issues internal to the group. The coordinator of

each area forms part of the general administrative group, which also meets weekly—the coordinator also represents his or her area in giving updates to the general assembly. All members of the radio can also form “working groups”¹⁴ with other members regardless of their area. Each working group comes together to carry out a specific project, i.e. produce a CD, publish a specific book, or make a web page. Each working group is dissolved after its task is completed. The station does have a director which meets with the coordinators of each area and, through constant dialogue with all areas, is in charge of maintaining an integral vision of the project in its entirety. Various members of the station emphasized the fact that the position of the director is of coordinating and ensuring the coherence of the project, and it is not his or her job to define the path of the overall project or to lay down a specific line.

Lastly, in this section I will explore the ways in which analyses of relations between men and women are integrated into self-reflexive analyses of power relations within the station as well as into their political projects in general. As Geerts, Oeyen, and Villamayor explain, within alternative radios, “los cargos más ocupados por las mujeres son de apoyo [y] son muy pocas las mujeres que ocupan puestos de dirección” (44). My interviews within La Tribu demonstrate that this is not entirely the case with this particular station since 3 of the 7 members of the general administrative group are women. Moreover, the evidence suggests that the treatment of gender relations mostly centered on the promotion of women’s rights in the form of abortion rights. In this way, women’s rights continue to be conceived of mainly as a political issue remedied through

¹⁴ Called “unidades de gestión.”

institutional policies (formal equality by having a near equal ratio of men to women as part of the administration) and through legal measures (advocating abortion rights).

I must point out, however, that my research was limited since I did not carry out longer-term participant observation of the quotidian functions of the station or within their assemblies. The responses of those I interviewed, as well as the analytical currents found in the books published by the station, evidenced stronger influences from issues of class and not of gender. Gender does not seem to be regarded as an analytical method that enables insights into the construction and negotiation of difference and the production of inequality—not just regarding relations between men and women, but with social relations in general.

The feminist program “Vida pasión y muerte de la vecina de enfrente” demonstrates that giving women a voice on the air is part of the station’s agenda. The financial help that the program receives from the station further exemplifies this commitment. If we compare this program to the number of other programs, however, it is evident that this is still not one of the station’s main priorities. It is clear that giving women a voice in one program does not demonstrate a commitment to making women’s rights issues and gender part of general debates and analyses within the station. At the same time a member of the station points out a tendency to reproduce the gender divide between the public and private within the production of radio programs. This member emphasizes that the majority of the voices on the air are men and in cases where programs are produced by both men and women, men continue to be responsible for the public function as announcers, while women serve a private function as producers. It is important to point out that the radio programs are organized autonomously and the

administration of the radio does not intervene in their internal organization. Thus, the reproduction of the private and public divide, while it is reproduced within the space of the radio, is just as much evidence of the state of gender relations outside the radio itself.

Considerations of gender as a tool through which to analyze relations of power were not evident in the interviews or secondary sources obtained from the station. Gender relations are limited to issues of women's rights and seem to have been excluded from other processes of critical reflection that were applied to issues of culture and communication—processes that constituted the latter two as both analytical categories and tools for social and political change. Although the people who make up La Tribu have been critical of previous shortcomings of the left, here they seem to reproduce a tendency within the left to relegate analysis of gender relations to marginalized positions within alternative political discourses.

In this section I argued that La Tribu indeed incorporates a plurality of voices and in this way demonstrates coherence between its objectives of social democratization and the creation of such democratization in practice. The programs in La Tribu and the people who make it up come together to form the radio. The radio itself is a conglomeration of views and voices. It is not a unified group, but is actually the coming together of many groups. It is the result of the dialogue between different social actors and generations. In the following section I analyze the networks of cooperation within the station as well as with outside actors.

Networks

As a social actor whose objective is social transformation, the radio's relationship with other social actors is fundamentally important. The internal development of the project and its long-term subsistence relies on new sources of creativity and dedication found in the new generations of members as well as in relations of cooperation with outside actors. In relation to the specific function of the radio, I argue that the radio is a space where actors meet and recreate the social fabric and where strategic alliances are constructed. This section analyzes the nature of this relationship through recent theoretical propositions that try to make sense of forms of association evidenced in new oppositional movements. These associations are based on loose networks of cooperation that are based on mobility and plurality. I thus begin with an analysis of two propositions that seek to understand the implications of these forms as oppositional methods.

Communication technologies are largely credited with enabling for the first time the development of oppositional networks in which there are no clear leaders or followers. The RAND Corporation, alarmed by the growth of this new form of activism, developed the metaphor of the "swarm" to describe it. The swarm is identified as a decentralized structure of information flows and temporary alliances.

The political theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri also recognize the potential of these forms of organization. Coming from the tradition of Autonomist Marxism, the authors trace such new organizational forms to changes in production.

According to Negri the “informatization”¹⁵ of production brought forth a new kind of worker—the social or socialized worker. Contrary to the traditional fordist factory worker the “socialized worker was ever more social and co-operative, defined specifically by its mobility and its abstract, immaterial and intellectual nature” (Mandarini 8). As the socialized worker displaced the fordist worker, it also displaced traditional forms of representation, to develop new organizational forms that matched the fluid and flexible condition of globalized labor. Zibechi links this global process with resistance in Argentina when he states,

Pienso que así como los obreros industriales (que tenían como modelo la gran fábrica, masiva y jerárquica) crearon sindicatos masivos y jerárquicos, los jóvenes actuales crean sus grupos en base a lo que tienen a la mano: el tipo de relaciones que establecen en el barrio, la esquina, entre grupos de amigos del colegio o la facultad. (104)

This assessment indeed links transformations in production consistent with Neoliberalism, with the crisis of political representation evidenced during the 1980s and 90s as well as with new forms of organization.

According to Hardt and Negri out of this process emerges a new social actor which they call the “multitude.” The concept of the multitude, in turn, finds its lineage in the theory of multiplicity developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, the concept of multiplicity enabled them “to escape the abstract opposition between the multiple and the one, to escape dialectics, to succeed in conceiving the multiple in the pure state, to cease treating it as an organic element of a Unity or Totality yet to come” (qtd. in Negri, 2003). Likewise Hardt and Negri theorize the multitude as a form of social organization that displaces the ever-present tension

¹⁵ Hardt and Negri use this term to signal the transfer towards models of production organized around information technologies and the production of information itself.

between the individual and the group within any form of organization. The multitude is theorized as always in a movement that, through temporary alliances, does not demand the subjection of the individual to the group. As Hardt explains:

[T]hey can allow full expression of differences within the common context of open exchange. They displace contradictions and operate instead a kind of alchemy, or rather a sea-change, the flow of the movements transforming the traditional fixed positions; networks imposing their force through a kind of irresistible undertow. (232)

While Hardt and Negri's postulations shed light into the relationship between production and resistance, they perhaps give too much credit to this relationship. While it is evident that the restructuring of production provokes changes in resistance, I believe that looking at the legacy of third world liberation movements and minority oppositional methods also illuminates our analysis of the kinds of alliances that characterize new oppositional activity.

The work of Chela Sandoval demonstrates the tendencies for this kind of organization as arising from historical factors prior to the productive transformations postulated by Hardt and Negri. According to Sandoval, revolutionary potential ceased to be located in the traditional proletariat as far as the 1950s, when national liberation movements began to flourish around the world. Within this process emerged the concept and demand for "third world liberation." Sandoval points out that this call for liberation "signified solidarity among new masses of peoples who were differentiated by nation, ethnicity, language, race, class, culture, sex, and gender demarcations but who were allied nevertheless by virtue of sociohistorical, racial, and colonial relations to dominant powers" ("Dissident Globalizations" 22). She marks this as one of the first instances where diverse groups bound together to resist on an international scale because they

recognized their common condition as people who were marginalized, discriminated, and exploited. As these movements lost steam, however, various identity-based struggles continued in forms such as the civil rights movement, student, Chicano, Native American, Asian, women's, and gay liberation movements. Although Sandoval's analysis focuses on third world liberation movements and their effects on oppositional movements in the U.S., I contend that similar processes indeed occurred in Argentina as resistance to the dictatorship arose from groups who were not traditionally tied to revolutionary political parties and who functioned in alliance with other such organizations. Similarly, projects for social transformation after the dictatorship also experienced a shift that did not completely abandon a class analysis, but incorporated it into struggles around issues of race, gender, human rights, and the environment.

By focusing on the feminist movement Sandoval identifies the development of a resistance strategy that strongly resembles those strategies used by oppositional movements in Argentina today. Sandoval finds the model of effective resistance within the work of U.S. third world feminists who have not only developed strategies of resistance against patriarchy, but against dominant ideologies within feminism itself. It is in this context that she introduces her concept of differential consciousness and tactical subjectivity. Differential consciousness is an oppositional strategy that functions through temporary alliances within the framework of specific objectives. According to Sandoval, effective opposition requires "a new subjectivity, a political revision that denies any one ideology as the final answer, while instead positing a *tactical subjectivity* with the capacity to recenter depending upon the kinds of oppression to be confronted" ("U.S. Third World Feminism" 14-17). Implied in this tactical subjectivity is also the

acknowledgement and respect for differences in political proposals and the construction of new political realities through cooperation that does not rely on or seek to create unity. This characteristic is exemplified in La Tribu's cooperation with other actors through various networks.

Internally, La Tribu is a space of encounter for a variety of social actors. Students participate in all areas within the radio. Musicians and artists have radio programs, they write and design books and record CDs, as well as participate in the theater. Human rights groups like HIJOS and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo have their own programs in La Tribu. Neighbors also participate in a variety of areas. Educators ranging from nationally and internationally renowned scholars to popular educators and activists participate in all areas of communication. Never working in isolation, these actors construct relationships through cooperation in which they exchange ideas in a creative process of debate and negotiation. These relationships do not create fixed alliances between groups, but instead function to open lines of communication through which various forms of social networks are established internally.¹⁶ In speaking about this function, Gastón echoes Sandoval's description of differential consciousness when he states, "La idea de ser un punto de reunión para nosotros es clave porque en ese punto de reunión hay un desafío que es pensar en poder construir síntesis a partir de estar juntos desde la diferencia" (Personal Interview). Here is also evident the logic of the multitude where collective construction does not seek to undermine individual differences. The

¹⁶ It is difficult to draw a line with internal and external actors since many participants also form part of other organizations. Indeed what is special about La Tribu is its openness towards the outside, which enables the continuous coming and going of different people. The internal/external division is best defined according to the degree of participation in the station. Thus, participants whose primary responsibilities lay within La Tribu, i.e. through weekly radio programs, through long-term projects, and through administrative positions are certainly regarded as constituting the internal organization of the station.

goal of such cooperation is to find degrees of commonality in difference in order to create alternatives through specific projects.

Alternative radios' participation in networks with other radios is a characteristic evident since mining radios in Bolivia and the communication chains they formed during moments of repression and mobilization. The networks that the mining radios formed are reminiscent of the current networks in that they functioned through solidarity and did not have a centralized administration. An important distinction between the networks of the mining radios and the current networks is that the associative relationship of the former remained essentially instrumental. The radios only formed networks because they had the capacity to do so—and even then did so only in times of crisis. Before and after such moments of emergency, they remained separate and thus did not develop constructive relationships of cooperation.

Important characteristics of the networks that La Tribu currently forms with alternative radios include cooperative associations in efforts to explore the transformative potential of alternative communication and to build projects to make this potential a reality. AMARC (Asociación Mundial de Radios Comunitarias) is one such network, of which La Tribu is a member, and aims to increase the level of cooperation between alternative radios worldwide. The organization is highly decentralized, but forms a space through which radios can dialogue. ALER (Asociación Latinoamericana de Educación Radiofónica) serves a similar function and often develops projects with AMARC. In the case of La Tribu, and many other stations, it enables cooperation between these organizations since it forms part of both.

La Tribu also develops projects with other radios on an individual level. In this way in 2003 La Tribu produced a CD in conjunction with Manu Chao and radio La Colifata to produce financial support for the latter. La Colifata was founded in 1989 by a psychology student who wanted to let the interns at the psychiatric hospital Borda speak about the issue of insanity and consequent social exclusion. Since then, every Saturday afternoon the patients of the hospital produce a radio program in which they have debates and discussions, play music (often live music performed by the patients themselves), read poetry and short stories, and discuss current events, among other things. Thus the CD cover declares,

El encuentro La Tribu/La Colifata es una síntesis para la acción, para ensanchar espacios, para construir un rumbo colectivo, para poder decidir cómo queremos vivir, para que las consecuencias del encuentro sean más grandes que las causas. [...] Ahí van los colifatos enunciando el carácter de sus días y el deseo de vivir de otra manera. Ahí va el sueño tribal: la posibilidad de construir autonomía colectiva para cambiar el mundo.

The relationship between the stations is based on solidarity and mutual investigations into alternative ways to live. Neither proposes a specific plan to follow. The objective of the encounter between the radios is to construct possibilities through collective processes of exchange and cooperation.

In addition, La Tribu has always had a close relationship with external social actors whose methods are not directly linked to communication. At first with the neighbors and then with other organizations, the station developed a wide following and a strong base of support. Throughout the years the station has gained a reputation for being consistent in practicing what it proposes and in this way gained much respect and support. This kind of support and legitimacy is important in developing wider networks

of cooperation through which the project can maintain sources of creative input. As a station without a definite legal standing there is always the possibility of state repression. Thus the networks of relationships that the station develops also serve to deter repression and to mobilize people on their behalf if they are ever repressed.

An exemplary project that the station developed in cooperation with a network of outside sources was the production of the book *Palabras que muerden: Definiciones colectivas*. The cover of the book is made of cardboard and was decorated and assembled by “cartoneros” from the cartonería and art gallery, “No hay cuchillo sin rosas.”¹⁷ The book itself is a collection of meditations on political and cultural topics from 28 contributors. The contributors range from other radios like FM Alas, La Colifata, FM Bajo Flores, and Radio Rebelde from Paraguay; political collectives like Colectivo Situaciones and El Mate; Human Rights activists like Hebe de Bonafini and Las Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo; and various artists and musicians including the renowned composer Liliana Felipe.

Besides being an important source of alternative information, the station also works as a catalyst of popular mobilizations. One such case was during the 2001 upheavals where listeners rushed to the streets after the state of siege was announced and later when the police repressed the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. During the following months the station mobilized its listeners to participate in the cacerolazos and the neighborhood and popular assemblies. As I argued above, the station does not just mobilize others to take action, but becomes involved in the action itself. Claudia

¹⁷Cartoneros are groups of people who make their living by collecting cardboard from throughout the city and turning it in to recycling centers for money. The pay for this service is very low and the work usually entails long hours of searching through the city’s garbage. After the crisis in 2001 the number of cartoneros increased significantly.

Villamayor attests to this when she points out, “Las radios siempre fueron como un recurso estratégico de los movimientos. Porque además eran y son un movimiento particular que participa de la protesta social” (Personal Interview). Claudia Korol also identifies alternative sources of communication in coordinating actions to support assemblies and occupied factories when they faced repression. Korol states,

Las fábricas recuperadas cuando iban a ser desalojadas o cuando las asambleas barriales ocuparon lugares públicos... alrededor de las formas de comunicación alternativas fueron básicamente las radios y el Internet. Las cadenas fueron muy fuertes para decir “ojo está la policía en tal lugar, vamos todos para allí,” y eso salía por redes de radios alternativas y por redes de cadenas de Internet. (Personal Interview)

This evidence suggests that alternative communication provides an important source of support for other social actors during times of emergency.

Besides mobilizing resources on behalf of outside actors, the relationship with such actors can also be used to provide support to alternative stations during times when they are repressed. This was the case with Radio Alas, in El Bolsón. Like FM La Tribu, Radio Alas works in close contact with its local community. The magnitude of popular support was evidenced in the massive protests after the government raided the station and confiscated the equipment. The government, not expecting such a response, quickly gave in to the pressure and returned the equipment. La Tribu also attributes the fact that it has never dealt with government efforts to close the station or confiscate its equipment to the wide support that the station enjoys.¹⁸ Ernesto Lamas explains,

No lo hicieron también porque nosotros hemos construido condiciones de legitimidad muy fuertes. Yo creo que si eso pasara, hubiera algún tipo de rebelión... con los vecinos, con otras organizaciones. No te digo que se va a parar

¹⁸ In the mid-90s the station was actually the victim of a bomb. The culprit was never found, but they suspect that it was the police since, during that time, they had a campaign against police violence and were trying to change a law that allowed the police to detain anyone without a warrant.

la ciudad de Buenos Aires, pero que va a ver un gran lío te aseguro que sí. [...] Nosotros aun siendo débiles, porque somos débiles en ese plano, en el plano de legitimidad somos muy fuertes. Y si nos vinieran a cerrar va a ver lío... y no lo digo de manera amenazante, te lo digo porque va a ver mucha gente que se va a preocupar por eso y va a reclamar. Entonces a ese nivel nunca hubo una represión directa. (Personal Interview)

Thus the support between the station—and other sources of alternative communication—and oppositional social actors is mutually beneficial and is indeed constructed through the networks of cooperation that the station develops through work in specific projects.

This section explored the relationships between the station and other social actors. The station constitutes itself as a space where various people can come together and in this way begins to create the networks through which it works. This functions as a constant source of creative input for the station through the development of specific projects and by bringing in new members on a more permanent basis. Relationships with other radios and social actors extend the creation of political and social realities to spaces beyond the radio itself. The networks function through cooperation based on specific projects. Evidence demonstrates that there is no dominant model that defines the way in which the station works with other groups. The nature of the projects and forms of cooperation change with different actors and develop on a situational basis much like the tactical subjectivity described by Chela Sandoval and the function of the multitude as described by Hardt and Negri. In the following section I conclude my study of La Tribu with a look at the ways in which the station treats issues of financial sustainability.

Financing

As an organization that defines itself as anti-capitalist, it is important to look at the ways in which La Tribu reconciles its issues of economic sustainability. There is still debate regarding what makes a radio alternative or commercial, and whether the sale of publicity necessarily implies compromising the integrity of the project to the pressures of the market (Enzetti, 2003; Vinelli and Esperón, 2004; Pierucci, 2004). The most common options open to alternative radios are to acquire economic support in the form of donations—which mostly come from NGOs from the United States or Europe—or to rely on the sale of publicity. What is certain is that most forms of financing carry with them the threat of cooptation and censorship. In this section I explore the advantages and disadvantages of both of these forms of finance in relation to the goals of alternative radios.

Geerts, Oeyen, and Villamayor bring attention to the problem of acquiring sustainable sources of finance by pointing out that 70% of alternative radios in Latin America run on precarious economic resources (43). Help from national and international organizations is still an important source of funding for many of the radios. In recent years, due in part by instability in Argentina's national economy, there has been a decline in funds received from such sources. As a result, alternative stations are forced to find other sources of finance.

Heavy reliance on national or international organizations for financial aid brings up questions of the autonomy of alternative communication projects. During moments of increased financial need, such sources can influence projects in ways that compromise

the latter's integrity. Kejval identifies certain issues of citizenship and gender as being linked to North American or European intellectual currents that are later integrated into the projects through the influence of foreign organizations that provide stations with money (Personal Interview). Regardless of whether this particular influence enhances or takes away from the project, it demonstrates the ability of outside interests to shape the projects. As financial sources become scarcer and the projects continue to be dependent on such sources, it is possible that their influence will continue to grow. As the autonomy of the radios erodes, so to does their relationship with the local communities—thus fundamentally undermining the project. Some other side-effects include cutbacks in personnel, programming, and projects in other areas. Cutbacks in salaries force some people to leave the stations in search for better pay in other stations. This can lead to a loss of quality in the programming and increases the station's reliance on volunteers—too much reliance on volunteers in certain areas can undermine the stability of the project in the long-term.

The decline of outside financial sources, however, can also have some positive effects when communication projects are able to overcome the difficulties described above and develop parallel projects to become more self-sufficient. Radio Gráfica, for example, bought its radio equipment through funds it raised from concerts that the radio organized outside the station. Likewise, another alternative station, Boca Libre, gets some of the money for its radio through publishing books and showing films in a makeshift theater. These projects provide the stations with supplemental income, but are also consistent with the overall political and cultural projects of the individual stations.

La Tribu, like most stations, relies on publicity as its primary source of income. Publicity is an important resource since in many cases the ratings of alternative radios are some of the highest within their thematic and geographic areas (Geerts, Oeyen, Villamayor 371). According to independent filmmaker Fabián Pierucci, however, radios should not take advantage of this resource since it necessarily implies compromising the alternative nature of the project to the logic of the market. Pierucci indeed identifies publicity as the main cause in what he refers to as a crisis in the movement of alternative radios. Thus he explains,

La primera tentación es que el propio medio, a través de la venta parcial de espacios, sea la fuente de ingresos principal; de hecho los medios masivos de la burguesía obtienen sus ingresos fundamentales de la publicidad y de la venta directa de espacios para terceros. Esta política de ingresos, sin duda, condiciona los contenidos y la coherencia interna de programación, cuando el *rátting* de productos comunicacionales/mercancía es la medida de la supervivencia. [...] [L]os sectores que decidieron el futuro de sus medios ligados a la valorización mercantil, se estructuraron sobre la pobreza de contenidos a partir de la necesidad de consensuar con sus posibles anunciantes o financistas “el qué, cómo y cuándo del medio.” (34)

Pierucci’s analysis, however, does not explain how the sale of publicity *necessarily* leads to cooptation or censorship. It is feasible that that the stations can employ self-censorship in times of severe economic need, but that is also true with many other sources of finance. La Tribu sells publicity mainly to merchants around the nearby community, cultural centers, and bookstores; and Gastón emphasizes that these are economic relationships that try to promote other values (Personal Interview). There is nothing inherently wrong with economic exchange, as it is the social values that structure the exchanges that are important. Thus, the publicity fees that the station charges are lower than their market price and the businesses they promote are directly linked to the well being of their community. In this way, the station secures financial sources without

making profit its objective. Daniel Enzetti, of En Tránsito, supports this approach and asks “¿en qué me convierto yo cuando, queriendo desarrollar un proyecto popular de comunicación, puedo generar recursos como para que esa radio siga en pie?” and proceeds to point out that the responsibility of the radio is not related to selling publicity or not, but to ensuring that the message of the radio is not compromised by those to which it sells the publicity (62). Bruno Dulbecco echoes this and adds that it is the job of the members of the station to discuss the benefits and drawbacks of the kinds of publicity they play on the air (Personal Interview).

Recently stations have been forced to find innovative ways to survive the loss of support from national and international organizations, and this proves to have had mixed results. The evidence thus suggests that, although there are no explicit formulas, there are examples in which stations have been able to ensure long-term economic stability without undermining their political, cultural, and social objectives. Publicity proves to be an alternative that, when utilized critically, can ensure a station’s survival and remain coherent with the stations objectives.

Conclusion

This section used the case of FM La Tribu to explore the potential of alternative communication as an oppositional space. Evident in this chapter is alternative radios’ use of communicative practices to create political, cultural, and social alternatives at both an ideological and concrete level. Crucial to any oppositional project are analyses of dominant ideologies that denaturalize the latter in order to make evident the possibility

for a different reality. The recuperation of oppositional language and vocabulary is also important in this process.

La Tribu successfully unites its objectives with the way it functions at the everyday level. These objectives are reflected in the level of participation as well as the station's strategies for economic sustainability. The station does not espouse a specific ideology or plan for social transformation. It realizes that oppositional alternatives are created through communication and cooperation with other social actors. Thus, the station develops networks through which it carries out specific projects in a way that does not seek unity, but instead recognizes difference and explores commonality within such difference.

Conclusion

Technological developments in communication make the mass media one of the primary sources of symbolic production in Argentina—and indeed in the world in general. The concentration of the media in private hands restricts access to and control over such production. Furthermore, subjecting symbolic production to the accumulation of profit undermines its potential to function as a democratic space where plurality of views are expressed. Once private profit becomes the sole purpose of such production the current politico-economic system becomes the unquestionable basis upon which all else is understood. Moreover, the media ceases to function as a tool that challenges current structures of power and instead reinforces such structures through the production of particular cultural codes. Consequently, communication is an important realm through which to explore anti-systemic activity and, as the present study demonstrates, enables us to investigate the ways in which alternative communication constructs symbolic frameworks through which oppositional actions become more meaningful.

Insights from Semiotics enabled us to further explore the political implications behind the symbolic production of the media. The mainstream media is largely subjected to political and economic pressures that make it within its best interest to uphold and aid in reproducing the current system. As an apparatus that helps reproduce existing power

relations, it serves an ideological function. The case of La Tribu demonstrates that it works to denaturalize and demystify dominant ideological discourses and then constructs alternative discourses through its own agenda. This requires that it politicize dominant discourses by recuperating and resignifying the language that the mainstream media represents as neutral. By developing its own agenda, the production of La Tribu begins to recover and create new historical memory and other referents that guide the oppositional action of the audience.

This study explored the development of the alternative radio station La Tribu in relation to larger political, economic, social, and cultural transformations. By contextualizing the experience of the station within this larger framework we were able to more effectively demonstrate the ways in which La Tribu is influenced by previous experiences of alternative radios in Latin America and Europe. Furthermore we also demonstrated that the history of alternative radios is intimately related to the history of social struggle and the oppositional methods employed by third world liberation movements and other political militants of both the Old and the New Left.

The crisis of Argentina's political system came to a head at the end of the 1980s at the same time when the fall of socialism brought to the fore tensions over oppositional strategies and inter-generational conflict within the Left. The consequent disillusionment of with traditional political channels opened space for a critical reevaluation of the meaning of politics and oppositional methods. In the latest generation of alternative radios, of which La Tribu is included, this reflection also led to the reevaluation of the relationship between culture and politics through which cultural production itself is regarded as a political tool. In this way the new radios are no longer the spokesmen of

projects whose central focus lies outside of communication—i.e. labor unions, human rights organizations, or political parties—and are political and cultural projects in themselves.

The new generation of radios, however, maintains a strong relationship with other social actors and particularly those that make up the local community. This relationship is mutually beneficial since the radios provide a space where people of diverse backgrounds can converge and express themselves on the air and in turn such people form the radio's audience and base of support. The station's support of other social movements is evident in the case when La Tribu challenged official accounts of the massacre of the piqueteros by letting them tell their side of the story in the days that followed. By reporting on state repression such as attempts to evict workers in recuperated factories or the aggression against the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo during the protests in 2001, the radios also mobilize supporters and help organize concerted action. Conversely, the legitimacy that the station earns through these functions during times of crisis, and through projects it constantly carries out with other people, helps build networks of support that deter government repression against the station.

Insights from theorists of new social movements help place the oppositional methods of La Tribu within larger historical developments such as changes in production and oppositional legacies stemming resistance under the dictatorship as well as from third world liberation movements. The networks that La Tribu forms demonstrate methods of cooperation that renegotiate the tensions between unity and diversity inherent in any concerted action. La Tribu cooperates with individuals and other organizations on the basis of specific projects. Such cooperation takes the form of assemblies or small

horizontal working groups that work through consensus. While differences are acknowledged, they find common ground on which to develop and reach common objectives. Unity is not the goal. Instead, they form flexible alliances and affective relationships that are activated according to specific projects.

The function of La Tribu goes beyond just giving others the word and, in a democratic fashion, opens up the project to the audience. In this way communication is not unidirectional, but enables the audience to become active participants of the project by producing their own programs. The evidence demonstrates that this process of aperture is not easy but it is important to maintain the coherence between the democratic proposals of the station and the ways in which it works in practice. As we saw, this process of aperture also entailed opening up inter-generational dialogues and letting a new generation take the leadership role in exploring communication in forms beyond that of the radio. The search for coherence must also include critical analysis of the methods through which the station secures its economic sustainability. Here the projects of alternative communication must walk a line between compromising what they produce to financial pressures and ensuring the long-term survival of the project. So far, La Tribu has been successful in selling publicity and developing other project while maintaining autonomy over its content.

Together the multiple functions of the station prove to be a powerful tool for social change. The extent to which the media is integrated into social life makes it a source of significant political influence. Thus, projects who attempt to construct political alternatives must also contest this influence at the level of communication. The study of La Tribu indeed demonstrates a successful case of such a kind of contestation.

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