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Mike Melanson

See also Alternative Media: Policy Issues; Creative Commons; Grassroots Tech Activists and Media Policy; Media Infrastructure Policy and Media Activism; Media Justice Movement (United States); *Radical Software* (United States)

Further Readings

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COR TV, 2006, OAXACA (MÉXICO)

On August 1, 2006, thousands of women took over the installations of the Corporación Oaxaqueña de Radio y Televisión (COR TV) in the city of Oaxaca. They held control for 21 days, transforming the programming, and serving as a voice for their social movement and for marginal sectors struggling against the state's neoliberal government. This unprecedented event shook the nation and undoubtedly changed the ways in which many viewed media. It set a precedent of what women can do when faced with a fundamental need to communicate to defend their and their people's needs.

COR TV's Background, the Teachers' Strike, and the APPO

COR TV is a public broadcasting corporation, operating radios 680 AM and 96.9 FM, and Oaxaca TV, a broadcast television station known

as Channel 9. The goals for these public channels are to produce and disseminate programs promoting the state's development and supporting local cultures. Its slogan, "The radio and television of the Oaxacan people," announces that these public media belong to and serve the people. There is also a general consensus that over time many of COR TV's public service objectives have been undermined to serve state government interests.

COR TV's directors were always from the same political party as the state governor, mostly from the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI; Institutional Revolutionary Party). Other members of its administration, too, were mostly aligned with the elected governor. The profound significance of these alliances became clearer during the dramatic events throughout 2006. It was then that many members of the public, along with unions and various civil society organizations, formed a coalition from which the social movement Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca (APPO; Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca) emerged.

APPO's formation was triggered by police repression against striking teachers. In May 2006, thousands of teachers went on strike asking for better salaries, better school conditions, and provisions of breakfast and books for poor students. Governor Ulises Ruíz Ortiz, elected in 2004 on a platform of promising to not allow marches, blockades, or encampments, rejected most of their demands.

By the end of May, the teachers had set up plastic tents, occupying the main *zócalo* (town square) and surrounding streets in downtown Oaxaca. Although not everybody supported this, sentiment soon turned against Ruíz Ortiz. At dawn on June 14, the governor sent about 1,500 riot police to the *zócalo* to take the sleeping teachers by surprise, which created an unexpected but widespread backlash against him. Brutal police behavior in evicting the teachers sparked tremendous solidarity with them.

University students and citizens went to the streets, confronting the police and demanding the governor's resignation. This turned into a day-long battle between the police and teachers, along with their citizen supporters. Whereas the police were heavily armed, teachers and citizens defended themselves with stones and sticks. Hundreds,

including police officers, were badly injured and hospitalized. To make things worse, COR TV, and corporate media like Televisa and TV Azteca, justified the police violence.

From that moment on, the demand for the governor's resignation united people from different levels of Oaxacan society. A few days later at a large public forum, the movement formally adopted the title *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca* (APPO). The APPO was unusual in not having a leader; rather, it was a grassroots social movement with a representative council.

APPO's council would constantly consult the people through public forums on every new action, whether marches, blockades, barricades, or negotiations with the government. Besides trying to force the governor's resignation, APPO sought to create a permanent space where all citizens could exercise their constitutional rights and engage in transforming their society. Major discussions revolved around the need to attain self-governance, disposing of the repressive government as well as the neoliberal policies that had hit middle and lower classes hard.

COR TV and other mainstream media were meanwhile framing the APPO as a corrosive and destabilizing force.

COR TV's Takeover

Women were an important factor in this social movement because a great majority of teachers are women. However, women were not at center stage until the unprecedented takeover of COR TV on August 1, 2006.

As the struggle continued through June and July, the toll grew of political prisoners, badly injured, and corpses. The women called for a march that emulated women's marches in Argentina and Chile, which had experienced devastating dirty wars in the 1970s. The march, set for August 1, would be named *la marcha de las cacerolas*, or the Saucepans March (a familiar form of demonstration in some Latin American countries). Thousands of women walked to the *zócalo*, banging pots and calling for the governor's resignation. Once in the *zócalo*, the women spontaneously decided to go over to the station to request some airtime to express their views and concerns. Approximately 200 women walked in to speak

with the general director while a thousand or more waited outside.

Although the general director rejected their petition, the takeover that followed was peaceful. The women used the legal argument that the people have the right to revoke the public airwaves entrusted to the state if the state does not serve the interests of the people. They felt that this public media organization was privileging the views of the governor and those in power. Using COR TV's slogan, "The radio and television of the people of Oaxaca," they argued that they, the people of Oaxaca, were now in charge of their radio and television stations.

The general director turned over the building to them, probably because she and other employees felt intimidated by the thousands of women outside the building. This was a unique moment in this social movement and in the history of civil society's demands for rights over spectrum allocation and use of public airwaves. This action challenged both mainstream media as an institution, and the state as rightful possessor of the airwaves.

The women successfully aired their first radio and television broadcasts that very afternoon. A few employees who were APPO sympathizers aided them along with a few communication students from the local university who were called in to help. Over the next several days, employees were not allowed to remain, and university communication students and media aficionados provided all the technical support. With COR TV under their control, women came to center stage, energizing the population to stand firm and forcing the national media to pay closer attention to the conflict in Oaxaca.

Radio Cacerola and Channel 9

The women renamed the stations. The radio station became Radio Cacerola in honor of the August 1 march. The television station was still known as Channel 9, but adopted the slogan, "All power to the people." A group of APPO women and men volunteered to take charge of programming. Some had media experience, others not. The programs were primarily focused on content rather than format. This became one of the most interesting experiments in media democracy. The way in which the movement made use of the public

airwaves served to mobilize thousands across the state. Listeners and viewers seized the opportunity to unite their voices with this emerging social movement.

The women's control over COR TV helped the movement gain momentum and created a central space from which to articulate the movement's purpose day by day, consolidating social and political cohesion. This demonstrated the power of the people over the state, and the actual physical structures of the stations, including the transmission towers, became symbolically reconquered spaces.

One of the most important strategies was to allow people in the state of Oaxaca to access microphones and cameras. They spoke about the long-standing needs and experiences of their communities as well as the current situation. Radio shows operated as an open forum to which people could call in, raising questions about the movement, the governor, democracy, and other pressing issues. For the most part, people called to affirm the movement and denounce social injustice, although there were also those calling to disagree. There was an open debate over the airwaves as never before.

The Programming

Those in charge of programming encountered the familiar challenge: filling airtime. This was a major issue, particularly for the television station. The radio had a more steady flow of programming throughout the day, beginning early in the morning and ending at around 11 p.m. Programs varied from news to music to public forums to gender issues. The television station operated on and off, sometimes from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m., and other times only throughout the afternoon.

As certain radio programs became a staple, some tensions and contradictions at the core of the movement began to surface. The lack of editorial control and programming direction made the radio a site that, for better or worse, different political tendencies could use to debate and disagree. In some instances, this seemed very democratic, but in others, it revealed internal fissures composed of dozens of radical left organizations, a more moderate left, and those in the center who had begun to support the APPO's call for social reform and more transparent governance.

Although such tensions and contradictions were not as evident in the television broadcasts, lack of content began to reduce its use for information or entertainment. For the most part, television programming showed old documentaries about Cuba, Nicaragua, and other countries that underwent major uprisings. There was a constant replaying of videos about the dawn eviction from the *zócalo*, produced by a local video collective *Mal de Ojo* (Evil Eye) and by citizens who had run into the streets with their consumer cameras. Other documentaries featured the work of Canal 6 de Julio, an independent video organization that covers issues not touched by corporate or state-run media.

Sometimes they would produce live roundtables discussing women's health issues, problems facing Indigenous communities, and other social problems across the state. The approach of many of these live programs was radically different to what audiences were used to getting on Channel 9, and many liked these programs.

However, some people within and outside the movement began questioning the tone of some programs because they did not want the movement to appear as a promoter for radical left ideologies, including armed struggle. Many did not want to see the public airwaves become a mouthpiece for those who still believed in authoritarian revolutionary models. The urgency of keeping up the fight against the governor while providing space for different voices and identities did not allow going into depth in the programming or resolving tensions in the broadcasts. Nevertheless, people still made use of Channel 9 and Radio Cacerola.

Finally, on August 22, 21 days after the women's bold and assertive act, the government sent a group of paramilitaries to cut the transmission signal of both radio and television, suddenly leaving the movement without a voice and a center. The women who were at the forefront of the radio and television operations promptly called for action and organized the takeover of 12 private radio stations in town. They had become aware of the significant power of media and were not willing to relinquish this newfound power to control mainstream media. They held control of those 12 stations for a few days until the stations' managers entered into an agreement with APPO guaranteeing the stations'

return in exchange for more balanced coverage of the situation.

Gabriela Martínez

See also Community Radio in Pau da Lima (Brasil); Feminist Media: An Overview; Free Radio Movement (Italy); Indigenous Radio Stations (México); Peace Media (Colombia); Radio La Tribu (Argentina); Radio Lorraine Coeur d'Acier (France); Zapatista Media (México)

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CREATIVE COMMONS

Creative Commons is a nonprofit organization founded in 2001 to promote an expansion of copyright law to allow greater access, use, and repurposing of creative works. Free culture advocate Lawrence Lessig is among the organization's

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