

Cultural Senses of the *Radio Rebelde Zapatista*: imaginaries of other possible worlds

DOI: 10.1590/1809-5844201723

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Abstract

Based on the theoretical-methodological proposal of Jesús Martín-Barbero, the main objective of this article is to analyze the sociabilities of the *Zapatista Radio Rebelde*, understood as the relationship between cultural matrices and reception skills. The broadcaster is a radio station from the *Zapatista* community of Caracol Resistance and Rebellion for Humanity, located in the Mexican State of Chiapas. In its programming, there are strong traits of the symbolic-dramatic matrix of indigenous peoples with critical contents of a rational-enlightened character. Their listeners take ownership of the station through imagery that connects their experiences in collectives and autonomous communities and their memories of engagement in social struggles.

Keywords: Cultural Senses. Social uses. Cultural matrices. Radio. *Zapatistas*.

Introduction

Radio Rebelde is a radio station from autonomous *Zapatista*¹ communities located in Caracol Resistance and Rebellion for Humanity², in Oventic, 30 miles away from *San Cristóbal de Las Casas*. This city has more than 200 thousand inhabitants, and it is located in the *Los Altos* region, considered to be the cultural capital of the Mexican State of Chiapas (PIUG, 2006). The radio station was founded in 2006, at the same time the administration of the Rebel *Zapatista* Autonomous Municipalities (Marez) was transferred to civilians. The station broadcasts at 107.1 MHz, and used to belong to the *Zapatista* National Liberation

1 Zapatism is a movement that became internationally known for being a pioneer on cyber-activism. On January 1th, 1994, the *Zapatista* National Liberation Army - formed by Indigenous of *Mayan* descent from the *Tsotsil*, *Tsetal*, *Tojobales*, *Zoques*, and *Scholes* ethnic groups - occupied public buildings in six municipalities in the state of Chiapas in southwestern Mexico. They also declared war on the Federal Army claiming for land, labor, education, health, housing, food, freedom, independence, democracy, justice, and peace in the First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle. Activists from various groups fought for these demands and tried to avoid a bigger armed conflict. Therefore, they created a global chain on the Internet (which was newborn at this time). This chain not only mobilized public figures from various countries (such as writer Eduardo Galeano and filmmaker Oliver Stone) and entities (such as the UN and the Vatican), but also broke the news boycott (promoted by Mexican television stations) on the movement. Messages of support to the movement sent by e-mail, chats and webpages collaborated to take 150 thousand people to the streets of Mexico City. They were demanding the end of the conflict. This led the Mexican Government to declare a unilateral ceasefire and to initiate the San Andrés Peace Dialogues. Even though the *Zapatista* people did not get the agreement they want, they now have political autonomy, an independent government and self-defense, health care system, judiciary system, schools and their own media in their communities. Although autonomous, the *Zapatista* people are not separatists; they fight for a Mexico more socially fair and politically plural.

2 Caracol is the administrative unit in which *Zapatista* territory is divided. It is formed by a set of Rebel *Zapatista* Autonomous Municipalities (Marez), which are formed by *Zapatista* communities. At the headquarters of Caracol, there is the Good Governance Board (*Junta de Bom Governo*), which is responsible for the administration of this territory, gathering Marez's representatives.

Army (EZLN). Along with two other stations located in the *Tselal* jungle and the Border Jungle, it was named at that time *Radio Insurgente*. It aimed to demonstrate the “advances in the process of autonomy in *Zapatista* areas and to promote the dissemination of indigenous communities’ culture and music³”. Now the goal is for each autonomous municipality to have a broadcast station in order to reach more people living where there is no radio signal.

The *Zapatista* cause is mainly founded on the fight for autonomy, which is understood as self-definition, self-government, self-delimitation, and self-arrangement (BÁRCENAS, 2011). Self-definition is the ability to determine, by themselves, who are the people and the identities that constitute who they are. Self-government is the construction of one’s own management. Self-delimitation is to design territory boundaries by its members themselves. Finally, self-arrangement is promoting social organization in a way that suits its members best interest by designing their own development. In the *Zapatista* territories, other non-movement families also live together with them. There is education, health, security, justice, government, transportation, economy and communication systems, all of them independent of the Mexican government. Even tough, *Zapatista* people are not separatists. The *Zapatista* movement advocates a radical transformation of the Mexican State in order to include the native peoples’ diversity and plurality, including their own political and social identities and organizations.

In the doctoral dissertation “Social Uses of the *Zapatista* Radios: The Night Map of Autonomy in the Communicative Mediations of Culture”⁴, I investigated (between 2012 and 2016) the relationship between the fight for autonomy and *Zapatista* radio stations *Radio Rebelde* and *Frecuencia Libre*, using Martin-Barbero’s theoretical-methodological proposal (1998). According to this Hispano-Colombian philosopher, it is necessary to make two displacements in order to reflect on communicational phenomena. The first one means to understand the process of communication from the mediation, i.e., from the flow within meanings and senses among different groups, institutions, territories and moments. The second one is the way back to the media, reflecting the centrality they gain in contemporary societies, conditioning agencies, flows and rhythms. Martin-Barbero’s (1998) proposal for studying social usages is based on four conceptual operators: cultural matrices, logics of production, industrial formats and reception competences. They relate to each other and constitute the institutions (matrices and logics), technicalities (logics and formats), ritualities (formats and competences) and socialites (competences and matrices). In this article, I outline the study on the socialites of *Radio Rebelde*.

3 Available at: <<http://www.radioinsurgente.org>>. Accessed on Jun. 15th, 2010 – Translated by myself.

4 This thesis was presented in the Communication Graduate Program of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), and it was supervised by Ângela Cristina Salgueiro Marques. Available at: <<http://www.bibliotecadigital.ufmg.br/dspace/handle/1843/BUBD-AB5G69>>. Accessed on Jul. 11th, 2017.

This axis of Martín-Barbero's proposal (1998) is defined as "the scenario where the receptors act and interact, where they exercise their practices and their *habitus*, where subjectivity and identities are built and rebuilt in order to understand what is happening in the reception world" (JACKS et al, 2008, p.36). According to Orozco Gómez (1996), this study analyzes the appropriation of meanings by the receivers. He adds that sociocultural events condition our emotional appropriation of objects. By the same token, I intend to answer in this paper the following: what leads receivers to listen to *Radio Rebelde*? Who are these listeners and what are their cultural universes? What appropriations do they make of broadcasters and media?

Therefore, I will firstly present cultural matrices which permeate the production of *Radio Rebelde* – from the "addressing" of the station's programming. Next, I will define reception competences from the conceptual operator standpoint of the possible worlds' cultural meanings. Finally, listeners investigated will be presented in the "Other Possible World" and "Autonomy is Life" senses. Then I will conclude showing the sociabilities of the radio station observed in the investigation.

In this research, I used the addressing analysis of the radio station's programming (HARTLEY, 2000), which consisted of recording *Radio Rebelde*'s broadcasts, from July 14th to 30th, 2013, in order to listen carefully to them, taking notes down on the field diary and transcribing the excerpts I considered to be most relevant to the research. In this kind of analysis, the priority is to recognize the questions to the public and the audience expectations the broadcaster seeks to attend. In order to know the receivers, I searched for an exploration of ethnographic inspiration that described the observations, conversations, contacts, experiences, life stories and interviews with the audience, from the recognition of alterities.

Although I was not able to get permission from the Oventic Caracol Good Governance Board (JBG) to visit the researched station and interview the producers, I was able to find the radio station audience using pre-exploratory questionnaires applied to e-mailing lists of political and cultural activists from that region. Based on this initial contact, I interviewed 18 receivers. Seven of them listen or have listened to *Radio Rebelde*, and two of them live in *San Cristóbal de Las Casas*. The remaining participants live together – with about 60 families – in the autonomous rural community of *San Isidro de La Libertad* in the municipality of Zinacantán, located nine miles away from *San Cristóbal de Las Casas* (where I conducted field research). I used fictitious names to protect participants' anonymity.

Cultural Matrices in *Radio Rebelde*

According to Sunkel (1987, p.2) it is necessary to understand the cultural matrices that involve *Radio Rebelde* as "a certain expression both at the level of language and aesthetics

and at the level of contents”, making it possible for actors, conflicts and the space to become visible. Therefore, it represents a historical-structural setting of values and meanings that circulate in certain social realities. It has a social role of guiding reports “(...) that activate a memory that puts them in touch with several imaginaries” (AMARAL, 2005, p.7). According to Sunkel (1987, p.14), the matrices act in the making of the popular that people aim to accomplish, not “the study of the popular itself, but the [study] of the popular in relation (...)”. Different concepts of popular cultures are possible configurations for cultural matrices. The author highlights two main matrices: the symbolic-dramatic and the rational-enlightened.

The first matrix arises from a religious conception of the world, and it creates a more cultural view of the popular that is structured in the huge amount of images and in the few amount of concepts. “Language is rich in images and poor in concepts, and historical conflicts are presented as interpersonal. Aesthetics are sensationalist and melodramatic” (AMARAL, 2005, p.7). The rational-enlightened matrix has its “(...) foundations in the Enlightenment and in the Rationalism, developed in the Modern Age in Europe, and its fundamental elements are: reason – means to achieve goals – and progress – the end of history for any given culture” (BARROS; BERNARDES, 2011, p.19). According to Sunkel (1987), this matrix is based on Enlightenment-related ideologies, such as Marxism, Anarchism and Liberalism, expressing “elements such as reason, progress, education and illustration” (AMARAL, 2005, p.7) in their social narratives, which seek to overcome barbarism and to build civilization. Its language is abstract and conceptual, and its aesthetic is serious, weaving a certain unity through generalization and abstraction.

In the *Radio Rebelde*, the symbolic-dramatic and rational-enlightened matrices are intertwined in languages, tales, poems, songs, messages and aesthetic traits. From the context of this broadcast station, the symbolic-dramatic is revealed by elements of the tradition of indigenous peoples, reconfigured in the colonization - mainly by the Catholic evangelization – present in the radio programming. The rational-enlightened matrix presents itself in the critical reflective content, having technical and academic origin, such as discussions on autonomy, exploitation of workers, capitalism and rights – originating from the militants’ presence in 1968. Since the 1970s they are organized in the Front for National Liberation (FLN) in the region.

The station’s programming was observed and recorded from July 14th to July 30th, 2013, and presents two particularities. First, there are no fixed programs or fixed programming. Each day and schedule has a male or female speaker that presents several contents without any regularity or frequency. However, there is some predominance in the schedule. For example, in the mornings of July 16th and 18th, poetry and songs were broadcasted. Also, in the evenings of July 13th and 23rd, messages were broadcasted. The second peculiarity is the discontinuous broadcasting. The station broadcasts only from 5 am

to 9 am and from 5 pm to 8 pm, Eastern Combat Front Time⁵. At other times, the station's transmitter is turned off.

The main element of the cultural matrices that is present in the radio programming is that the content is broadcasted in original languages, *Tsotsil* and *Tsel'tal*. Normally, announcers speak in Spanish at first, and then they translate it into those indigenous languages. According to the Chiapaneco anthropologist Piug (2006), most of the members of these *Mayan* ethnic groups that predominate in Chiapas – *tsotsiles*, *tsetales*, *choles* and *tojobales* – are monolingual. 52.8% of *tsotsil* people and 57% of *tsetal* people speak only their original languages. Despite the various dialects, those languages are comprehensible by everyone who masters them. Even without collecting specific gender data, I realized there are more monolingual women than men, since a small number of women attend school – where Spanish is taught. I also noted that only native languages are used at home and among the members of speaking communities. This predominance is certainly one of the reasons why *Radio Rebelde* has a bilingual programming. Only in five moments the station's recording registered contents in a single language. Only two of these moments were in Spanish only, which caused the speaker to apologize for not having the translation. All of the remaining time it was in *Mayan* languages. In none of the recorded programs pauses or stuttering were observed when the *Tsotsil* or *Tsel'tal* languages were being used. However, they were widely noticed in the broadcastings spoken in Spanish – especially the ones made by women (and a few by men), indicating this to be a barrier for thinking and communicating in the European language.

Tales and the poetry make up traditional contents in the *Radio Rebelde* programming. During the programming, five short stories were found: “How the Bridegroom Dates the Bride”, “The King of Evil”, “Tales of Madalena da Paz”, “The Coyote” and another one whose title was not identified due to broadcast signal failures. As mentioned earlier, while the first two tales were narrated only in Spanish, the latter ones were narrated only in *Tsotsil*. In “How the Bridegroom Dates the Bride” there were pieces of advice on how a young man should approach his future wife. It also shows how to greet and praise her, and her possible reactions. On the other hand, “The King of Evil” had a tone of fear and denounced against the capitalist system.

They both are not narrated by the radio hosts. They are recordings, as their presentation itself emphasizes it. The narrators in these recordings constantly make onomatopoeias, such as animal sounds, footsteps, door knocks, and so on. In the first tale told, there were special sound effects about the environments of the story, such as river currents and crickets in the forest. The short stories clearly address the traditional peasant of the indigenous peoples, structuring themselves in the logic of orality, i.e., the logic of everyday and interpersonal

⁵ Time zone created by EZLN, which is delayed two hours compared to Mexico official time.

speech and talk – traces of the symbolic-dramatic matrix. Drama is another element from this matrix that constitutes the stories that are based on conflicts, whether in the difficulty of a young person to date a future wife or in the social degradation promoted by capitalism. The textual building of these productions are based on the explorers-exploited and gentlemen-lady dichotomies and reveal the opposition logic - another trait from the symbolic-dramatic matrix. These productions also present moral lessons on the relationship between genders and political consciousness.

Poetry is often presented in the morning and played by its authors. The autonomy of indigenous communities, the young people and women related to the government, the electoral system and the capitalism predominate in the following themes: summons, as in the poetry “The Awaken Youth”, an invitation to young people for political participation in the community; denunciations, as in “Antonio the Poor”, a social injustice’ discussion; political criticism, as in “Bomb Bomb”, which presents ironies to presidents and presidential candidates. As in the tale “The King of Evil”, these poems present the rationalist-enlightened of social criticism, allied to the aesthetics of verses, rhyme, and symbolic-dramatic metrics.

Music is another traditional content broadcasted on *Radio Rebelde*. Its first hour in the afternoon programming is dedicated to the songs of *marimba*⁶, which are instrumental compositions played with the homonym instrument. The purpose of the songs is to entertain, as the speaker announces. From July 22nd to 24th, the radio program’s recordings observed traditional songs from communities such as San Juan Chamula, known in Mexico for its population fame of being great sellers, and San Pedro Polhó, one of the largest autonomous municipalities of Caracol *Rebeldia* and Resistance for Humanity. The songs are played in their native languages, having a long introduction that presents their origin and culminates in a closure that reaffirms their local identities. Instrumental dance songs have been recorded, and they are used in performances of groups at local festivals. Both songs usually make up the celebrations of communities, which are celebrated on the day of their patron saints. This is a characteristic of the religious syncretism that marks the symbolic-dramatic matrix of the native people in the region.

I observed the predominance of three types of revolutionary songs in *Radio Rebelde* programming, broadcasted in different blocks of an hour: historical (reconstruction of past periods of various revolutions in Mexican history, always showing natives, peasants and farmers, and their martyrs in a favorable way); Chiapaneco (portraits of the battle and ideals of the *Zapatista* people in autonomous communities and in the EZLN); national and international (songs which criticizes the capitalism or support the *Zapatista* movement of Non-Chiapaneco Mexican artists, Spaniards, Cubans, Argentines, and so on). Although the textual building of these songs is a critical reflection of the rational-enlightened matrix,

6 *Marimba* is an Afro-descendant music instrument that became a regional symbol and rhythm and became a local tradition.

their styles refer to the symbolic-dramatic matrix of popular songs such as *cumbia*, *pasito duranguense*, *corridos* and *rancheras*⁷.

There are bulletins and messages during some moments of the programming and they have an informative feature. The first bulletin come from the Good Governance Boards (JBG) or from the Insurgent Revolutionary Command Council (CCRI) of the *Zapatista* Army, also published on the website *Enlace Zapatista*⁸. In the analyzed material, two bulletins were observed on July 24th. The first one is from the JBG, Caracol *Rebeldia* and Resistance for Humanity. This bulletin was about the celebration of the ten years anniversary of Caracol people, on July 5th, 2013. And the other one talked about the autonomous education of the CCRI, that differentiates itself from the governmental one, thus enabling the history and contextualization of the native peoples. Bulletins and messages are predominantly rationalist–enlightened, especially with regard to social criticism. However, they have symbolic-dramatic elements in some ideas, such as the sacred nature, the man-nature health balance, and the importance of traditional education.

The messages are recordings with short testimonials and musical backgrounds, lasting from 15 to 45 seconds. They talk about health, collective work, and women dignity. In addition to a historical contextualization, this format makes questions and also exhorts to change behavior, conscience, and attitudes. In addition to the theme of youth, there are messages about the environment, such as messages about the exploitation and destruction of mountains; there also messages on community health, such as the ones that attribute causes of diseases to the imbalance between people and nature. Moreover, there are messages on indigenous right to health care in public hospitals and clinics, and also messages on autonomy.

Cultural senses of listening

Radio Rebelde's production and addressings are appropriated by the listeners from their memories, experiences and imaginaries, which make up reception skills. The cultural senses concept is used to understand the audience's cultural universe. This concept seeks "(...) in the present, the organizing principle of everyday experience; (...). In the past, (...) the root and connection with what was once a day lived. For the future, they function as an escape, a dream, an evasion (...)" (GRISA, 2003, p.45). In this way, understanding the senses created by the audience also means taking into account the diversity of versions built from different cultural universes. In order to get to them and reach the relationship

7 *Cumbia* is a rhythm originated in Colombia from miscegenation between Indigenous, European and African rhythms. It became internationally famous by its Mexican appropriation, turning it into a romantic pop song. The *pasito duranguense* was created in musical groups in Chicago by immigrants from northern Mexico. It has a fast and cheerful rhythm and mixes influences of Mexican *cumbia* with *merengue*. The *corridos* are folkloric musical and literary manifestations from Mexico. They are made up by prolog, anecdote, lessons of morality and farewell organized in metric and rhyme. *Rancheras* songs are a traditional genre originated in the 1910's (post-revolutionary period) as a national symbol, typically played by the *Mariachis*, on peasant themes. They are extremely emotional.

8 Retrieved from <<http://www.enlacezapatista.org>>. Accessed on Feb. 10th, 2014 – Translated by myself.

between the trajectory historical conditions, the everyday appropriations of the synchronic and the unpredictability of the imaginary, Galindo Cáceres (1997) invites us to think in a counterfactual way, i.e., to consider the versions of what-could-have-been (HAWTHORN, 1995) if there were other variables that conditioned a different configuration from the current one. From the counterfactuality perspective, cultural senses are understood as the appropriation of meanings by the audience and they are other possibilities of understanding the reality that often diverges from the social conjuncture and from the researcher standpoint because these possibilities are formed in totally different contexts and matrices. In order to get in those universes, the present research needs to consider the diverse probabilities of versions about reality, due to the different historical trajectories, various sociocultural contexts, and the audience's agency power.

To this end, the listening senses from *Radio Rebelde* audience will be presented not only on the basis of their preferences but also on their oral life reports and on the sociocultural conditions investigated from an ethnographic inspiration in different territories and times. 18 *Radio Rebelde* listeners were interviewed. Seven of them listen or have listened to *Radio Rebelde*; five of these live in the autonomous community of San Isidro de La Libertad⁹. From the interview analyses, the participants were gathered in two different groups according to the following versions of the broadcasters: “Another possible world” and “Autonomy is life”. The first one brings listeners adherent to the *Zapatismo*, but who live in a city, i.e., outside conditions of complete autonomy. The other listeners live in self-managed, self-settled and self-determined communities in the rural zone, adhering of *Zapatismo*.

Another possible world

Besides listening to the stations researched, the participants gathered in this group – John and Raul – live in the city and are explicitly sympathizers of *Zapatismo* or adherents to the movement. John is a professor in a university and adviser to an international social organization. Even though he was born and raised in the United States, he also has a Mexican nationality due to his maternal descent. He has a degree in Biology, pursuing a research and teaching career in Agroecology in a university in *San Cristóbal de Las Casas*.

He revealed that his interest in social movements comes from his participation in student organizations in the 1960s and 1970s, when he campaigned against the Vietnam War in solidarity with the Black Panthers political prisoners, and to support the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in Nicaragua. Then, he settled down in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, where he witnessed the *Zapatista* Army of National Liberation (EZLN)

9 These listeners were located in two ways. In May 2014, I sent a questionnaire to e-mailing lists of cultural activists and political militants from autonomous movements and collectives. A total of 23 of them answered the questionnaire, but I was able to make a face-to-face interview with only 13 individuals, which happened in July, 2014. The other five listeners are residents of the autonomous community of San Isidro de La Libertad, where I observed, for an ethnographic inspiration, from January 2014 to July 2014.

raises. From his militancy in the region, *Zapatismo* became his inspiration. “I believe the construction of autonomy by the *Zapatista* people is a very different example of what has been achieved elsewhere”¹⁰.

In order to approach this movement and listen to its voices, he began to sporadically listen to *Zapatista* broadcasters. According to him, *Radio Rebelde* reflects the culture of the native peoples, being a construction from the bases. “The slogan ‘voice of Mother Earth’ itself reveals that the station has a popular organization”¹¹. John explains that he listens to the radio most often when in traffic. “Once I was surprised when I took a taxi that was tuned to the station”¹². A debate on agroecology is one of the memories he has of the radio programming. He also recalls a debate on women and anti-government messages directed at non-*Zapatista* communities. It pleases him the variety of songs and revolutionary themes.

John’s sense of listening is more linked to his recent experiences than to the memory from his student political militancy or his involvement in the Sandinista government. He believes *Zapatismo* is an alternative that must inspire other communities. Thus he follows the *Zapatista* organization so he can share his knowledge through his practices in the social movement and his college teaching. He also acknowledges a strong link between the *Zapatista* experience, its words on *Radio Rebelde* and environmental preservation. Therefore, this can link radio listening to political awareness and professional training.

The other participant’s interest on *Zapatismo* also came from a relation between environment and political organization. He comes from a colony in the Mexican Federal District, full of forests degraded during his childhood and adolescence – what shocked his entire family. “Therefore, when I had access to an indigenous bulletin from the *Zapatista* people, I noticed their concern for the Earth, their brothers and the family culture”¹³. Since then, the interest in the movement has aroused. But he only acquired critical political awareness when he studied Communication Sciences at the University. At this moment, he started to participate in movements such as the Unam student strike in the 2000s and in the Oaxaca Commune. Since then he started listening to free radios of these movements, such as *Ké Huelga* and *Plato*. In 2003, he moved to *San Cristóbal de Las Casas* to pursue a master’s degree in Anthropology, coming to support *Zapatismo* more closely and to live in an autonomous collective community. He began to listen regularly to free radio stations that he was able to tune into. In *Radio Rebelde*, he searches for information about autonomous communities and he likes the tales because they refer to the native’s imaginary as people who live in harmony with nature.

10 Interview with John (fictitious name), on January 13th, 2014, in *San Cristóbal de Las Casas* – Translated by myself.

11 Idem.

12 Ibidem.

13 Interview with Raul (fictitious name), on July 17th, 2014, in *San Cristóbal de Las Casas* – Translated by myself.

These receptors' sense of listening is marked by participation or support to autonomous collective communities in the city. *Radio Rebelde* then fulfills its role of strengthening the vision of autonomy not only with information of movements but with examples of life in autonomy. It also connects this audience to memories of the past, which marks their battles.

Autonomy is life

Participants on this second group live in an autonomous community adhering to *Zapatismo* in *San Isidro de La Libertad*, where they have a democratic and horizontal self-management that occurs through assemblies; organized self-arrangement, with open participation for all members, and opposed to the electoral party government system; self-definition and self-delimitation of their identities and territory. The audience from *San Isidro de La Libertad* has little formal education and technical-specialized knowledge, except for José, the teacher.

The first participant on this group was Juan. He was interviewed during our first visit to the locality. He was born and lived most of the time in *San Isidro de La Libertad*, just like all the other participants I contacted in this town. He got to know *Zapatismo* since the 1994 uprising. When the EZNL took some joint actions to make the community the base of the movement, Juan became even more involved with it. In 2008 there was a separation in *San Isidro*, due to some members of the community choosing to receive benefits from the Mexican Government in exchange for electoral support. Therefore, Juan decided to leave and went to *Playa Del Carmen*, where he worked in a clothing and handicrafts store for tourists. At this time, he became a more assiduous listener of the radio, since it was his main companionship in this new city.

Almost two years later, Juan decided to return to *San Isidro de La Libertad*, where he got married and started to work in construction. He also became more active in assemblies and communal activities and a more frequent participant in events promoted by the *Zapatista* people and adherents, especially at the University of Earth. The habit of listening to the radio followed him, now enlivened by the autonomous reorganization of his community and by the sound of *Radio Rebelde*. According to him, this radio station is “important to transmit the voice of male and female comrades and to have morale for the fight¹⁴”. The contents he likes the most are messages about culture, environment, traditional and revolutionary songs, and denunciations against the bad government. There is a sense of spirit for militancy in the station that inspires the construction of autonomy, lived daily. For him, this is not a future to be pursued, but a present that needs to be consolidated and guaranteed for tomorrow. The broadcaster also connects him to his social memory, especially because of the narrations in his original language. “Speaking in Tsotsil is good for us not to lose our roots”¹⁵.

14 Interview with Juan (fictitious name), on July 15th, 2013, in Zinacantán – Translated by myself.

15 *Idem*.

Like Juan, Diego works with civil construction and listens to *Radio Rebelde*. As a young man he was part of a musical group. He used to play in the *Los Altos* region, playing songs such as *rancheras*, *norteñas* and Mexican *cumbia*. He had to abandon music and dedicate itself to the agriculture for the sustenance of his family. “Sometimes I remember. I want to sing, I want to dance because when you are in a group you teach oneself how to dance, you encourage people”¹⁶. For him, autonomy means independence. “I want to be free from the government system, so I can live with autonomy, as we are now. It’s because I like to live independently”¹⁷. His musical preference and political choice made him a listener of the *Radio Rebelde*. In the past, he was used to listen to *San Cristóbal de Las Casas*’ radios, both the commercial and the state one. “But when *Radio Rebelde* was born I began to listen to the conversations and songs of the station. I like it (...) because it gives me courage. I come home tired from work, and I lie in my hammock. Then I listen to the radio. I’m happy with the songs, with the conversation”¹⁸. Diego is twice motivated to listen to this radio. First of all, he is motivated by *Zapatista* people’s words. Second, he recalls memories of his band, as if daily listening to the station after work was able to relive through memories a discontinued past.

José, the teacher, is another listener from *San Isidro de La Libertad* who was part of a musical group. He is the son of one of the main local leaders who was at the beginning of the construction of this autonomous community. When he was a preteen, he was sent by his father to study elementary school in the *Caracol Zapatista* region. He had to adapt to the rigorous study routine and deal with the distance from his family. After finishing high school and returning to the community, José decided to pursue a musical career by singing in a popular youth music group. He traveled all over Chiapas because of his concerts for two years. He left the band when the musicians decided to change and play electronic music. Back in the community, he married and became a teacher at the Primary School, which operated at the Autonomous Center. José is also a catechist and minister of the word, conducting weekly Catholic celebrations in the community. Because of his performance, he became an education promoter, ending up being responsible for the community school. José said he did not have an opinion on *Zapatismo* anymore. I noticed that he still suffers from the forced displacements he underwent as a teenager and with the pressure due to his many responsibilities in the community. Several times he complained of a migraine, which often persists even after he has seen doctors. He shows a strong desire to consume, especially to buy a car in order to constantly go and shop in *San Cristóbal de Las Casas*, something unusual in his locality.

16 Interview with Diego (fictitious name), on January 13th, 2014, em Zinacantán □ Translated by myself.

17 Ibidem.

18 Ibidem.

José is an involuntary listener of *Radio Rebelde*. He lives with his father, who constantly turns on the radio in high volume. He explains that he does not mind because he actually enjoys the songs that touch the truth. Diego thinks the same way regarding the songs. He also recognizes the role of radio in social organization. “It helps the autonomous community so we can communicate and listen to ourselves.”¹⁹ The sense of *Radio Rebelde* is the encouragement in both personal and community lives. José believes in a form of autonomy that is not necessarily adherent to the *Zapatismo*, but which comes from the way of life of natives who are independent of central governments and political systems. For this reason, traditional songs and short stories are what he most values in the radio station because they contribute to rescue native peoples’ culture.

A teenager called Maria is also an involuntary listener to *Radio Rebelde*. She listens to it because of her parents, usually when she is cooking or taking care of her younger siblings. *Rebelde* is not the only station she listens to, because she likes dancing songs, such as *reggaeton*, which is seldom played in the *Zapatista* station. “They play more band and romantic songs, which I also enjoy”²⁰. In addition to her musical preference, she is delighted with the messages about autonomy, mainly in the form of stories. “Autonomy is a new life that begins”²¹. The meaning of this idea for her is related to motherhood. This relation demonstrates aspects of the feminine view of autonomy. Maria revealed to me that she dreams of being a teacher in the community. Her teachers say it is really possible, since she is indeed qualified. However, as she has not yet got married, Maria is seen as a child, not being able to work in such a job, according to the community’s traditions. Being over 15 years old, she is already at an advanced age for the wedlock, since women usually get married by the age of 14 in the region. Therefore, she lives the dilemma of being necessary in the community due to her competence in education and communication, willingness to contribute, but not being able to because of authoritarian traditions. This situation shows a clear conflict between the ideals of equity and justice of *Zapatista* autonomy²² and the patriarchalism prevalent in the culture of many native peoples. Maria is discreetly against it. I observed that during community parties, women ate sitting on the floor, while men occupied the seats at the tables. Maria refused to stay on the floor, leaving the room to eat alone sitting in the courtyard. Thus listening to *Radio Rebelde* and having autonomy means hope of a new life to her, in which care for the land, women, the community and children can be a priority.

Josiano, on the other hand, is a farmer, the father of three children and one of the

19 Idem.

20 Interview with Maria (fictitious name), on January 12th, 2013, in Zinacantán □ Translated by myself.

21 Idem.

22 Shortly after the 1994 uprising, the EZLN declared the Women’s Revolutionary Act, providing rights for women to decide whether or not to marry (with whomever they want), if they want to and to have how many children they desire. It also guarantees an equal right to participate in the revolutionary battle and in all matters of the community. Also, this act declared women as freely and democratically eligible. It also provides severe punishment for any mistreatment or violence against women.

most enthusiastic listeners of *Radio Rebelde* we interviewed. Several times I watched him listening to the station on his cellphone. Josiano revealed to me that he was planning to become a Dominican priest by the time the *Zapatista* Army rebelled against the Mexican Government in 1994. He asked help from his spiritual adviser, Father Pablo, in order to understand what was happening. Josiano was asked to attend a meeting in Oventic with the *Zapatista* people. Convinced by the words on autonomy, he organized an EZLN visit to his community. Later on, this visit made it possible to make this place a base for the *Zapatista* movement and now it is an autonomous community.

Since the 1980s, he has been listening to radio stations of revolutionary movements, such as the Cuban *Radio Rebelde*, through short waves radios (OC). Before, he could only hear it on his house radio while waking up or before sleeping. Now, because of *Zapatista*'s community radios, he can listen to it anywhere through portable devices and cell phones. This made him an assiduous listener of *Radio Rebelde*. "I listen to what's real. I do not know whether it is true or not what it is transmitted in official radios."²³ *Radio Rebelde*'s messages are his favorite content. "(...) I know that they are true, clear, they represent an uplift for the communities in which it is transmitted".

All listeners of this group have a strong relationship with the symbolic-dramatic matrix, recognizing the addressings in the station, mainly about the relationship between people and the land, autonomy tradition of native peoples and the true word. The word is seen as the sense of reality when it comes from an ancestral knowledge that cultivates a centenary relationship with the earth and the place, having this relation of territoriality.

The willingness for an autonomy life was another motivation for listeners of *Radio Rebelde*, recalled by most of these listeners. This sense refers to the connection between life and autonomy because this is not an ideal to be conquered, neither a utopia nor an imagined future, but a daily battle to consolidate democracy and participation in community management. The battle also aims to face counter-insurgency; to produce cooperatively; to have everybody participating in assemblies and collective actions; to articulate and mobilize in joint activities with other peoples and autonomous collective communities; to ensure education and health, which are not responsibilities of a distant government, but of the community itself. This encouragement is the energy that the radio retrieves from the memory, words, and songs that are necessary for a daily life, i.e., strength and morale to face, to persist, to resist and to advance challenges imposed by the common and autonomous life.

Final considerations

Radio Rebelde's sociabilities are shaped by the interweaving between its cultural matrices and the audience listening skills. The first ones demonstrate a predominant presence

23 Idem.

of the symbolic-dramatic matrix in the expressiveness of traditional cultures from original peoples presented in tales, poems and songs, complemented by the rational-illustrated of critics and denunciations against oppression and social exclusion. The audience takes these traits from their universes, paths and experiences, through radio stations representation in their imaginaries.

Radio Rebelde's matrices are appropriated by listeners in at least two senses. The first one is more reflective and crucial: it links debates and messages of the radio station with experiences of environment defense and the battle to build a fairer society. On the other hand, competencies of listeners from *San Isidro* are more focused on the symbolic-dramatic matrix of songs and dances that represent independence, motherhood and traditions of native peoples. These listeners appropriate the radio both to connect with their life experiences in autonomy and with their memories and dreams.

In this way, the sociabilities of *Radio Rebelde* can overcome the deficit created by ignorance through the broadcasting of information, messages, bulletins, and debates on social reality from the *Zapatista* perspective. Also, the medium allows recalling the past of revolutions of the oppressed people; and the dance and singing in musical bands. Moreover "Voice of Mother Earth" radio station plays the role of future connecting to the imaginary of a fairer, more sustainable and maternal world.

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Received on: 04.07.2017

Accepted on: 07.07.2017