NEGOTIATING THE FUTURE: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES IN INDIGENOUS CAUCA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the meanings and social uses surrounding information and communications technologies (ICTs) in indigenous spheres in Cauca, Colombia. Technology takes on meanings and social uses depending on historical, cultural, political and economic situations (Larkin 2008). For the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC), and indigenous media makers, ICTs represent tools to be indigenized in an active way instead of globalized products to be passively consumed. My research questions included: how does involvement in communications programs strengthen indigenous identity? How is CRIC envisioning ICTs and the communications program in their organizational strategy? How do media makers indigenize (or appropriate) ICTs and imbue them with a different framework from Western or commercial use? In Chapter I, I look at how the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC) uses ICTs and media as a part of their organizational strategy to train and educate members of the indigenous movement. The second chapter focuses on practical examples of how radio and ICTs expand from their recording cabins to become indigenized through daily practices outside of the studio. The chapter presents an ethnographic case study featuring an educational radio experiment and interviews from students. I draw from and build on work by visual anthropologists such as Terence Turner, Eric Michaels, Harald Prins and Faye Ginsburg. I expand their arguments to look at how ICTs become indigenized by CRIC as tools to strengthen indigenous identity through the reproduction of traditional modes of culture. This reproduction
allows indigenous people to re-imagine and authenticate their identities in response to their current environment, and ultimately, to imagine an indigenous future within Colombia.
The research and writing of this thesis
is dedicated to everyone who helped along the way.

Many thanks,
Meredith Pierce
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INTRODUCTION

Jorge Luis Campos and I sit in a recording cabin at Nuestra Voz Estereo in Morales, Cauca. The station is located on the second floor of the cabildo, or indigenous governing council. The front of the building looks inconspicuous, a small tienda occupies the first floor and sells everything from school supplies to Tupperware. Motorcycle taxis congregate in front, waiting for their next ride, blasting Andean music, and discussing the day’s news. Next to a ramp, an older lady sells oranges in wooden crates and cheap pirated CDs under a canopy. The ramp leads to the side of a building where a metal gate reveals a hallway to the cabildo. Offices for the cabildo’s programs line the outdoor courtyard, bulletin boards with announcements about upcoming events hang on the walls, and stairs lead down to an outdoor kitchen for large communal meals. A full-wall mural greets me at the top of the unfinished stairs to the second floor. It depicts a pair of headphones on a circle with Pico de Aguila, a sacred peak visible on clear days from the station, the sun, a radio microphone, and a lake. Above it, station members have painted “Nuestra Voz Estereo 98.9 HJZ 81 – Radio Para Todos.” A pumpkin orange stripe borders the wall, painted with black rhombuses, pictorial depictions of birds, and spirals. The station manager occupies an office to the right, just big enough for a desk and his computer. He looks out onto an unfinished open-air portion of the building and can see all who come and go. A hallway leads to three connected recording cabins and a separate meeting room.

The air in the back recording cabin is thick with heat due to the sound insulation and recording equipment. Sounds from motorcycle taxis, buses, and street vendors filter in through the open barred windows. Jorge, my height with caramel skin and smooth, straight black hair drawn into a ponytail, sits engrossed at the computer. I peer around his screen to see a YouTube
video depicting Amazonian indigenous people in loin clothes and body paint, wielding bows and arrows.

Jorge served as youth coordinator for the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC) for two years, before enrolling in the Universidad Autonoma Indígena Intercultural’s (UAIIN) program on languages. When his community asked him to serve as Morale’s youth coordinator, he left the program. He asks, “how could I stay studying when my community needed me now?”

We start talking about the relationship between youth, YouTube, information and communications technologies (ICTs), and cultural identity. Jorge, the perfect person to ask about the role of ICTs in (re)building indigenous identity, has thought extensively about the topic because it surfaces often in youth issues. In response to if he thinks people can use ICTs constructively to (re)build indigenous identity, he launches into a ten minute response covering the erosion of family structures, lack of values in today’s youth, and concludes with:

Yo como joven y que ahorita pues estoy delegado a ese espacio yo diría que tenemos que nosotros utilizar las herramientas también para ponerlas a nuestro favor y fortalecer, porque si nosotros nos encerramos no más y es que de allá si nos están bombardeando todos los días, pero si nosotros no utilizamos herramientas también para fortalecer lo de nosotros, nos vamos a quedar ahí, estancados, entonces yo digo que más que limitarnos a utilizar es más bien orientar a que como los utilicemos mejor y a nuestra manera de fortalecer todo lo que queremos ahorita através de los sistemas, de las políticas que se están fortaleciendo, no habría ningún temor porque si hoy tenemos un pueblo bien orientado, no tendríamos por qué temer a nada.

Throughout my time in indigenous spaces, I heard a multitude of opinions about technology adoption. An older woman, her baby tied to her body in a traditional piece of fabric, lamented at a human rights discussion that Facebook destroyed culture in indigenous youth. Many worry about the globalizing effects of media, but some people argue ICTs can take on different
meanings and social uses depending on context. In Colombia’s indigenous movement, people like Jorge, CRIC’s communications program, and indigenous media makers envision ICTs as tools whose uses depend on the user. They can choose to use these tools like mainstream society, or they can use them creatively to address the needs and issues of indigenous communities.

Many indigenous youth want to use technology and do not see indigenous identity and ICTs as mutually exclusive. It would be more productive, Jorge reasons, to figure out how to use technologies “better”, than to ban ICT use completely. He wants to use ICTs to strengthen maternal languages, value indigenous thinking, provide alternative histories/narratives, and add productively to cultural reproduction. He begins brainstorming projects to put this belief into practice:

Por ejemplo que chévere sería de montarnos un tema audiovisual pero que los mismos jóvenes sean los que graben, los que viajen por el territorio y digo pero ve eso tan interesante, entonces de una graba, listo ...por ejemplo éstas son muy importantes porque que chévere sería por ejemplo el escucharnos nosotros mismos? Que dice el mayor, que dice la mayora y bueno que dice el joven que está sembrando, que está allá trabajando la tierra, qué dice el joven que por uno o otras razones es autoridad. Por ejemplo qué piensa el joven que hoy está por ejemplo en la regional o es docente.

This thesis explores how ICTs take on different social meanings and uses within indigenous communities and organizations in Cauca, Colombia. The word appropriation refers to how indigenous media makers re-think uses and meanings of Western ICTs to address specific needs and goals in their communities. This thesis looks ethnographically at the processes involved in indigenous media making, and ways these processes develop members with political knowledge, leadership skills, and critical thinking. The first chapter explores CRIC’s communications program and use of ICTs. CRIC has used media to educate and train members since the mid 1970s, although the medium has evolved from a newspaper to an extensive
communications platform covering radio programs, short documentaries, international announcements, research reports, and maintains a website with breaking news and organizational information.

The second chapter looks at an unusual experiment in education and radio in Chimborazo, Morales. A Spanish teacher, Luis Enrique Rosero, started a school radio station to improve Spanish literacy skills, however the project transformed into a medium for revitalizing indigenous identity through cultural practices and indigenous language. Additionally, the radio station expanded to include activities outside of the recording studio, such as community gatherings, territorial excursions, and production of written materials. Radio involvement and ICTs thus become a space for indigenous people to envision creative ways to consciously incorporate ideas from the non-indigenous sphere into their worldview and community endeavors.

The following pages introduce an overview of my research methods, a discussion of key terms and literature, and a brief history of indigenous people in Colombia.

Research Methods

I conducted field research for this project over the summers of 2013 and 2014. During these summers, I had different roles with the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC). In 2013, I interned with the Communications Program. From that time, I draw on participant observation, informal conversations, and meetings with communicators. I traveled with the video team throughout Cauca to interview community members and record footage for a series of documentaries. We traveled around the region, sometimes by private car, sometimes by public bus, to interview indigenous radio station workers, leaders and community members, and to film
events for the documentaries. One of the documentaries focused on indigenous radio stations and we did site visits and interviews with radio emcees. Listening to people talk about radio struck a chord with me and I became interested in how radio functions in indigenous communities. As an intern, I assisted CRIC’s communications team with translation, videography, and photography. Throughout the summer, I sat in on meetings with indigenous and government representatives, as well as internal indigenous meetings, focused on creating a public policy for indigenous communication.

Upon my return to Georgetown University, I became interested in how CRIC deployed communications and ICTs in their strategy at the local level (from our interviews with members of the radio stations), and organizational level (drawing from meetings on public policy). During the spring, I developed a proposal and hammered out three research situations to explore when I returned to Colombia that summer. Both summers, CRIC’s governing board had to give me approval to work with the organization and in the communities. CRIC’s communications team requested a separate research proposal after I arrived. My research questions included: What is the role of communication and ICTs in the formation of indigenous identity? What are the principles of comunicación propia? What is the feeling or meaning of indigenous communication? How does the organization (and indigenous media makers) talk about communication as a political tool? How do they combine their own culture and maternal language with ICTs? I proposed to explore these questions via interviews with communicators, archival research, and participant observation.

Dora, a member of both the Political and Communications Programs, commented the topic seemed fine but added pointedly, what was I going to contribute to the communities? CRIC has opened itself to relationships with non-indigenous peoples over the past few decades, but
they remain wary of outsiders, especially researchers and anthropologists. Many people I met recounted stories about foreign researchers who never returned nor presented their work to the communities. The lesson was clear: do not do the same. Clemencia Rodriguez, a media scholar who undertakes research in Colombia, proposes, “academic research should be at the service of praxis” (quoted in Kidd and Rodriguez 2010, 11). She asks: how can our work be used in practice at the community level? Often, this process requires the production of multiple end products – perhaps one for the community and one for the university degree. Other researchers advocate for collaborative research in order to decolonize anthropology. Xotchitl Leyva Solano discusses how collaborative teams become “part of a broader search for co-understanding, co-interpreting, co-producing, and co-theorizing with and alongside indigenous peoples” as opposed to positioning indigenous people as “raw materials” to be analyzed by the non-native anthropologist (Leyva Solano 2011, 121). Forming such relationships requires a specific context and extended time. While I did not partake in such overt collaboration, I tried to collaborate, share and exchange information when possible. I left copies of all my taped interviews, as well as photos and videos with Luis, CRIC, and Nixon Yatacué (then-head of UAIIN’s undergraduate communications program). Some of the videos and photos I took as an intern the previous summer wound up in the documentary project and in CRIC’s archives.

Dora suggested I connect with Luis Enrique Rosero, a professor in Morales, working on a similar project. A non-indigenous Spanish teacher, Luis Enrique started an educational radio station, Radio Identidad, and a research project looking at the role of ICTs in education and political development. He originally envisioned the station as a way to improve Spanish literacy skills, but soon saw it as a vehicle for cultural revitalization and youth engagement in the indigenous movement. The Communications team, including Dora, and I came to the agreement
that for my contribution to the community, I would give them copies of any materials I gathered, as well as assisting Luis to organize and categorize his archives and interviews.

However, time moves on a different scale in Cauca; after multiple failed attempts, Luis and I connected only a few weeks before I left; I never found the archives and interviews previously collected. During my two visits to Morales for a total of a week, I conducted formal interviews with three students, a teacher involved in the radio station, and a three hour oral narrative on the history of Morales’ radio station, *Nuestra Voz Estereo*. Luis and I talked about the educational station and he sent me funding proposals that detailed his vision for the station. While in Morales, I participated in covering a two-day exposition of regional student dances and crafts; I sat in on the planning meetings, spent time in the communications headquarters, and walked around with young communicators, taking photos and helping with interviews.

The majority of my interviews come from a four-day period at the Autonomous Indigenous Intercultural University (UAIIN) in Popayan. Founded in 2003, the university has a variety of programs, from bachelor’s degrees to certificates in indigenous law, bilingual education and other areas to strengthen the indigenous movement and promote indigenous forms of thinking. In June of 2014, the bachelor’s in Indigenous Intercultural Communication (*Comunicación Propia Intercultural*) accepted its first class. The word *propia*, often used as an adjective such as *comunicación propia* or *educación propia*, lacks a direct translation into English. Rappaport offers “community-generated education” as a possible gloss for *educación propia* (Rappaport 2005, 146). In the following pages, I discuss in depth what meanings and connotations *comunicación propia* draws on. For the time being, a basic understanding refers to all the ways indigenous people communicate, including traditional forms via the hearth, family, public meetings, oral traditions, and signs from nature and other beings. The communications
program focuses on teaching and strengthening these forms of communication, as well as intercultural forms like reporting, graphics, editing, and filming.

Interculturalism represents a tool for appropriating and adapting outside elements, or indigenizing them. CRIC envisions interculturalism as “a proposal, not a product, which means that it will always be in transformation and appropriation” (Bolaños, et. al. 2004, 133). Through this process, indigenous communities can continually adapt to the changes in the world around them, but retain a distinct identity. Indigenous activists see it as a process of dialogue between two cultures, or two worlds that have a horizontal relationship instead of a hierarchy of domination. Through this dialogue, CRIC sees the possibility of a new reality, a “political project …that requires horizontal inter-ethnic relations constructed via the creation of new social orders” (Bolaños, et. al. 2004, 132).

During my time at UAIIN, I sat in on a two-day curriculum session with teachers, students, administrators, a Colombian journalist and a German journalism professor. Immediately following that, I joined students for the first two days of their second session. I interviewed seven students in the program, from a fifty plus year old professional journalist to eighteen year olds just entering the communications sphere. Most of the interviews were semi-structured and varied between twenty minutes to two hours. Sometimes we had to end and return to class. I started most interviews by asking for names and hometowns. Then, I asked interviewees to recount their history in communications. From there, questions depended on the conversation, but usually included a question on the role of the radio/communications in the community, the balance between outside technologies and indigenous identities (could they use Facebook and be indigenous?), as well as how and if involvement in communications changed interviewees on a personal level.
Indigenous & Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs): definitions and concepts

Indian, native, first peoples, aboriginal, indigenous, fourth world – academics, politicians and indigenous people use a variety of terms to name this group; regardless of choice, all of the above came into existence only at the moment of colonization (Carneiro da Cunha and Almeida 2000, quoted in Levi and Dean 2003, 5). Indigenous references a variety of people who have experienced colonization in some form from a dominant population. At the same time, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a prominent Maori scholar, argues, indigenous homogenizes a vast area of experiences under imperialism and discounts the different historical contexts of each population (1999, 6). The Aboriginal experience of invasion, colonialism, and construction of the State in Australia differed greatly from the Nasa experience of the same ‘events’ in Cauca. For example, the ‘civilizing’ processes differed in the two countries. In Australia, the government took children away from their families in order to erase their indigenous identity. Furthermore, the laws governing indigenous and Aboriginal people in Colombia and Australia differ. Even within Colombia, the colonization of one group of indigenous people varied from the experience of another due to historic, geographic and cultural differences. For example, some groups in Tierradentro and parts of the Sierra Nevada experienced colonization later because of their geographic separation.

In their introduction to At the Risk of Being Heard: identity, indigenous rights, and postcolonial states, Jerome Levi and Bartholomew Dean (2003) provide a useful problematization of indigenous. They examine definitions based on non-industrial modes of production, stateless political systems, or geographic antecedence; they conclude each definition
includes or excludes groups not normally labeled as indigenous (Ibid, 7). Ultimately, a precise
definition is “neither plausible nor practical” but the term proves useful to describe “a wide range
of peoples whose histories, habitats, and lifeways distinguish them from dominant ‘national’
populations” (Ibid, 8). Additionally, groups like CRIC use indigenous as a political category to
mobilize and make political demands based in local worldviews and cultures (Ibid). Other
scholars highlight the performativity of indigienity and its existence in-between pure creation
and a fixed historical category (Harris, Carlson, Te Ahu Poata-Smith 2013, 7).

With increased mobilization around the term and a connection to political rights in
international and state contexts, people have tried to define the category for legal use. At both the
national and international level, being indigenous carries with it the right to distinct rights – over
the past fifty decades an international body of legal agreements has emerged defining these
rights, including the International Labor Organization’s 1989 Convention 169 on Indigenous and
The UN has a Working Group on Indigenous Populations and a Permanent Forum for Indigenous
Issues. These organizations highlight the importance of self-identification, distinct social and
cultural practices, often a separate language, and ties to land or ancestral ties to people who once
occupied that land. An oft-cited report, the Martinez Cobo Report, defines indigenous as the
following:

Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical
continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories,
consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those
territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are
determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral
territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system.\(^a\)

There are many ways to define indigenous and each indigenous community might fulfill different criteria. However, the term proves useful to reference a group of heterogeneous actors who share some characteristics. Brubaker (2005) uses the term groupism to refer to the tendency to put things in “discrete” social groups with boundaries. However, he goes on to note groupism includes a constant process of change and group identities continually transform – boundaries do not remain static. Grouping people under one term can be problematic, as discussed, giving a bounded definition to identities under constant change and reinvention. But, some groups have assumed it as a political category. CRIC uses the term indigenous on a daily basis. They represent multiple ethnic groups in Cauca and would find it unwieldy at times to mention all eight to reference their members. Following their lead, I use the term indigenous unless I am talking about discrete ethnic groups, in which case I will use their name, like Nasa or Guambiano.

Along with the international movement to recognize indigenous rights, activists and scholars have called for rights specific to the Information Age and digital sphere. In the 1970s


\(^b\) While the State recognizes 87 indigenous ethnic groups as of 2015, indigenous organizations like CRIC and ONIC recognize 102. On their website [<http://cms.onic.org.co/pueblos-indigenas/>](http://cms.onic.org.co/pueblos-indigenas/) ONIC details how the number has changed over the years. In 1998, the department overseeing Indigenous issues in the Ministry of the Interior determined 81 different pueblos existed. In 2002, the Ministry of Defense put this number at 83 and the Departamento Nacional de Planeación confirmed this number in 2004. The 2005 census by the DANE estimated Colombia had 87 indigenous pueblos. ONIC cites issues of identifying one pueblo from another that live in the same area due to historical migration, interests of the extractive industry in ancestral lands, political interests, different definitions and methods of counting, among other reasons for the discrepancies.


\(^d\) In Morales, where I interviewed a number of indigenous media makers, many of them identify as Evangelical. Jorge Luis Campos, the indigenous youth coordinator introduced earlier, justified his lack of fluency in Nasa Yuwe with a brief history. He tells me how many of the great-great-grandparents of the youth in the region left their homes
and 1980s, a variety of media scholars and activists mobilized for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) (Kidd and Rodriguez 2010, 3). In the early 2000s, media scholars created a transnational network, OURMedia to address disparity in national and global media systems between ‘first world’ nations and others. They advocate for strengthening projects related to what has been called community, participatory, radical, alternative, alterative, and citizens media (Ibid, 1). *Making Our Media: Global Initiatives Toward a Democratic Public Sphere* joins a handful of other edited volumes published in the past decade to look at ICTs from various angles, including how marginalized communities appropriate them, ways ICTs increase democracy, and other creative practices involving ICTs across the globe. The projects described in the various chapters span 12 countries over 6 continents. The overarching argument from *Making Our Media* is that these types of alternative media projects have the ability to create openings in the mediascape for subaltern representations.

ICTs allow us to “articulate the universe around us and our place(s) in it” (Rodriguez and El Gazi 2007, 462). ICTs represent tools for symbolic representation – radio, TV, and the Internet become mediums through which we represent information and images. Benedict Anderson (1983) highlighted the importance of print media to create a national imagined community connected via this symbolic text. Likewise, through radio, visual media, and the Internet, people access and create imagined communities that might be local or transnational, and based on non-state social categories, like identifying as indigenous.

During the 1980s and 1990s, a few pioneering media scholars began to argue that indigenous media makers appropriated ICTs, mainly video, in ways that reflected distinct worldviews, or the indigenization of visual media (Prins 2004, 516). Eric Michaels researched Aboriginal television and film with the Warlpiri Aborigines in Australia in the mid-1980s, as
further discussed below (1994). Terence Turner, trained as a filmmaker, helped the Kayapo of Amazonian Brazil learn how to edit and use video through the Kayapo Video Project. He argues that through video, the Kayapo transform and rearticulate the indigenous social and cultural categories they call on to create visual representations (2002, 80). The act of visually representing their own culture and lives through video allows the Kayapo to construct new imaginings of their identities, instead of accepting dominant ideas of a static identity tied to pre-colonial times. Worth Sol and John Adair hypothesized visual representations reflect their creators’ worldview and knowledge system. In 1966, Sol and Adair taught a group of Navajo youth to use and edit 16mm film. They tasked the youths with making a film about “anything [they] want to” (Worth and Adair 1970, 9). The Navajo youth had particular ways of imagining the technology and filming. These early media researchers found that tools of representation like film, can be appropriated in ways that reflect different systems of knowledge and value. For example, one Mexican indigenous communications group produced videos depicting women making tortillas in their homes. This video might strike Westerners as lacking a narrative arc, but for community members, they connect to the act of making tortillas and the video functions to highlight work women do inside their homes (Wortham 2012). Faye Ginsburg, another pioneer of visual anthropology, maintains media technologies have a “double set of possibilities” (Ginsburg 2002, 51). They can act, as some believe, like a neutron bomb or nerve gas to completely obliterate indigenous and subordinate cultures to mass culture, or these technologies can give indigenous groups a chance to “talk back” to dominant society (Ibid).

The above researchers focused on visual representations in their research, however, their approach extends to other forms of ICTs, like radio. Radio one of the cheapest and most easily accessible ICTs, represents one of the most widespread media technologies in the world.
Radio Fields: Anthropology and Wireless Sound in the 21st Century, Lucas Bessire and Daniel Fisher (2012) suggest investigating radio as an ethnographic field as previous scholars have looked at visual media. Bessire and Fisher link their concept of radio fields to the concept of media worlds (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2002) to argue that an anthropology of radio fields opens expansive and provocative ways to rethink foundational assumptions about how media creates social collectives within complex political fields, the changing character of expressive economies in the context of neoliberal state reforms, phenomenological questions about how sound influences the subjective experience of space and time, or radio’s capacity to alter and key distinct contexts of perception, affect, and everyday politics. (Bessire and Fisher 2012, 19)

An ethnographic approach to radio examines the social, political and economic threads that inform how specific groups of people imagine radio. Woven together, these threads lead to diverse social practices, uses and meanings of ICTs in different contexts. Furthermore, the uses and meanings of ICTs emerge from debates between social actors (Larkin 2008), often between governments and people, or in the case at hand, between a dominant culture and indigenous communities. To borrow a term from Mary Louise Pratt (1992; Clifford 1997), ICTs represent a contact zone where Western tools and an indigenous cultural framework “meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (Pratt 1992, 4). Contact zone is an apt word for communication spaces because in these areas, indigenous media makers meet, clash and grapple with an outside audience and technologies. Here, I propose expanding radio fields and media fields to encompass imagined spaces ICTs inhabit. To clarify, using ICTs requires people to imagine representations, and these spaces of imagining can offer insights into how to rethink ICTs. Looking ethnographically at daily practices surrounding ICTs, including Internet, radio, film and other
media, offers a view of how people imagine technologies can affect their lives. I am particularly interested in how ICTs become spaces for imagining and recreating an indigenous identity in the present and for the future, or what comes out of the clash between outside technology and indigenous knowledge systems.

Michaels’ work on Aboriginal media production with the Warlpiri in Australia offers some theoretical frameworks for the above, including the term ‘cultural future’ (1994). Through his work with the Warlpiri, Michaels found they conceptualized television within their own social and cultural frameworks, which focused on oral traditions and kinship. They folded these values and beliefs into their production practices, how they utilized final products, and what products portrayed, instead of purely adopting Western uses and practices. For example, rules exist concerning who can view videos depending on their relationship to the actors. When people pass away, the community shelves videos they appear in until a requisite time period has passed and it is culturally appropriate to show those videos again.

The Australian government hired Michaels because they worried how non-indigenous media, like satellite TV, would affect indigenous communities. As mentioned, many people believe mass media to be a monolithic acculturating force, and sometimes this happens. However, Michaels found the Warlpiri deployed video to imagine a cultural future previously denied through outside representations of them as static images of the past. Focusing indigenous peoples as fixed negates them the possibility to react to environmental changes and revise their identities in order to continue living in the present. Cultural future refers to “an agenda for cultural maintenance that not only assumes some privileged authority for traditional modes of cultural production but also argues that the political survival of indigenous people is dependent upon their capacity to continue reproducing these forms” (1994, 122). Aboriginal resistance and
continuity of identity becomes tied to reproduction of traditional modes, with a focus on process instead of product (Ibid). The Warlpiri have agency to renovate their ‘traditional’ culture to respond to changes in their social, economic, geographic and political environments. Michaels contrasts cultural future with a cultural lifestyle, which commercializes indigenous identity into an object to be sold and bought, a label to apply to products. A cultural lifestyle signifies a passive mode of reproduction that situates indigenous people as audience and receiver instead of as producer and agent (Ibid). Likewise, Turner argues against considering indigenous culture as fixed, in favor of viewing culture as self-production (Ginsburg and Meyers 2006, 28). Both Turner and Michaels advocate for a notion of culture as active, placing indigenous people as agents to reproduce, transform and authenticate productions of culture as they deem necessary for their continued resistance and survival. CRIC’s message of resistance fits into the production of taking agency over their cultural future, which “can only result from political resistance” (Michaels 1994, 123).

On the term culture, Warren mentions a concept that can help us further conceptualize how to interpret this term. She highlights John Watanabe’s assertion that

Rather than objectifying culture as essential traits that endure or erode, anthropologists have come to treat Maya cultures in Guatemala as strategic self-expressions of Maya identity, motivated – and thus presumably more appropriately authenticated – by Maya propensities and possibilities in the present rather than by the pre-Hispanic primordialisms. (Warren 1998, 203)

Watanabe’s assertion proves useful in thinking about indigenous cultures in Colombia and how they maintain ‘authenticity’ while simultaneously appropriating tools necessary to make life possible in the present. Many people contend that changes in indigenous culture represent
ruptures with ‘authenticity’ and ignore that since colonialism, indigenous people have lived in contact with others who have greatly influenced their living conditions. Instead of remaining static in the face of a changing world, indigenous people consciously renovate and renegotiate identities to survive. As Watanabe asserts, culture changes based on context and conscious transformation helps people resist and continue existing. Culture, neither static nor primordial, is a construction that changes depending on the needs of the people whom utilize it and “is produced in a self-conscious manner” (Ortner 2006, quoted in Wortham 5).

Another example of indigenous media projects that negotiate traditional modes of culture through ICTs comes from the 1980s in Canada. In the Canadian Arctic, Zacharias Kunuk led a community based video production group, Igloolik Isuma Productions, founded in the 1980s. They focused on recreating visual representations of stories elders shared about life in the 1930s and 1940s. Their products gained recognition on a national and international level. They produced the first feature length Canadian film in an Aboriginal language, Atanarjuat The Fast Runner. Another project included a thirteen part drama series about five families living traditionally in 1945 (Ginsburg 2002, 42). These video products captured memories of elders, a generation slowly passing away, and gave youth an opportunity to practice language skills and interacted with their community (Ibid). Igloolik Isuma videos document unrecorded memories and transform video into a mode to store and transmit memory. For the Igloolik, video technology allowed for the reproduction and continuation of traditional memory, which precedes imagining a cultural future for present and coming generations (Ibid, 43).

Drawing on the above scholarship, my research focuses on the processes involved in creating these cultural futures through ICTs. What does it mean to be a media maker? What does one do on a daily basis and how does this contribute to transforming indigenous identities? I
focus on the act of being a media maker and part of a communications program, instead of a
textual analysis of the products or how audiences receive and consume media products. The
following chapters add ethnographic detail, but for CRIC, taking on a media maker position
means going to the communities. Media makers attend rituals and events throughout the region,
an important part of community culture and political education and participation. Just as we
traveled around Cauca to talk to community members for the documentaries, most indigenous
media makers accept traveling to events as a part of their duties. Other processes include
deciding what the story will be, who they will talk to, what questions they will ask in the
interview. My research questions included the following: how does being a media maker change
the relationship an individual has with their community? How does it affect the relationship they
have with their indigenous identity? In what ways does the process of making media or being
present in media spaces replicate other forms of ritual in indigenous communities? I spent most
of my time with communicators, and any analysis of the relationship between listeners and
communicators comes from this realm. I did not interview people about their listening habits, nor
did I look into listening practices in communities. Rather, my research focuses on what Ginsburg
has termed “embedded aesthetics”, Juan Francisco Salazar has coined as “the poetics of
indigenous media”, Rebecca Cusi Wortham refers to as “making culture visible,” and what
others might call focusing on “media practices” (Salazar and Córdova 2008; Salazar 2009;
Ginsburg 1994: 368; Wortham 2010; Brauchler and Postill 2010).

Ginsburg argues that media products Aboriginal media makers create derive value and
judgment based on a different system than Western media. She maintains that Aboriginal
products, as representations of a large collective community, receive value from their effects on
social relations instead of a narrative arc or artistic vision. Ginsburg refers to this as an
“embedded aesthetic” (1994, 369). Aboriginal media makers she encountered had to consider the impact of their products on indigenous communities at the local level, as well as internationally and nationally. A Maori filmmaker, Take Waititi asks, “Why can’t I just be a guy who writes stories and puts them in a film? Why can’t I be a tall filmmaker? Or a black haired filmmaker?” (quoted in Hokowhitu 2013, 116). Waititi demonstrates the difficulty he has separating his physical and cultural identity from his products as a filmmaker – he rejects the inherent accountability he has to a larger indigenous collective. CRIC’s Communications Program lies in the “embedded aesthetic” camp and sees their work as accountable to an imagined indigenous community. While Western society promote individuals, many indigenous societies have a worldview rooted in collectivity and connectedness. This approach to video applies to other forms of media like news reporting. For example, Hanusch Folker (2013) argues that journalism represents a “cultural process” that reflects different societies’ values and as such, varies depending on the society within which it exists, echoing the ideas of Michaels, Turner, Sol and Adair on video. Indigenous media makers in Colombia assume the title “indigenous” and with it, the idea they must take a different approach than the mainstream media. Media makers constantly reiterated indigenous media served to “free the words” as opposed to mainstream media that wanted only to sell words as commodities. They viewed themselves as having different values and accountability in their reporting.

Expanding on the idea that indigenous media carries a political stance and value apart from the final product, Salazar and Cordova discuss the “poetics of indigenous media” (2008). They refer to “the way media practices become effective strategies for Indigenous people to shape counter discourses and engender alternative public spheres” (Ibid, 40). Through these processes of creation, indigenous people imagine a cultural future and introduce counter-
narratives into the national imagination and historical record. The process of self-representation and agency over cultural reproduction becomes as important, if not more, than the product. Salazar and Cordova researched visual representation, but this applies to other modes of representation as well, from newspaper, to various Internet forms (blogs, Facebook), to radio. I examine processes of transformation attached to media practices, or at least present in communications spaces. John Postill defines practices as “the embodied sets of activities that humans perform with varying degrees of regularity, competence and flair” (2010, 1). Practices can be activities media makers partake in to do their job. How are people using ICTs to renovate cultural reproductions? What does it mean to be a member of the communications team? What are the activities associated with this role and how do these activities reinforce and transform indigenous identities?

Before I delve into these questions, I offer a brief historical context focusing on indigenous people in Colombia.

**Indigenous Peoples in Colombia**

La resistencia… es en el Cauca Indígena una forma de vida que recoge desde los ecos de las luchas contra el conquistador español, hasta las movilizaciones de hoy contra los diversos agentes que atentan contra su autonomía; autonomía que representa décadas de luchas y que ha sido permanentemente amenazada por todos los factores de poder: culturales, políticos y armados..

—Daniel Ricardo Peñaranda (2012, 14)

A history of indigenous people in Cauca encompasses narratives of resistance, repression, domination, and recuperation. Colombia has 87 state-recognized indigenous ethnic groups who
own approximately 30 percent of the nation’s land and represent 3.4 percent of the population (DANE 2005). Cauca has the second largest numerical population of indigenous peoples in the country, behind La Guajira (DANE 2005). Nine indigenous ethnic groups reside in Cauca: Nasa, Guambiano, Coconuco, Yanacona, Guanaca, Pubenense, Totoroes, Embera-siapiadara and Inga (Archila 2010, 13). Colombia’s constitution, re-written in 1991, represents one of the most progressive constitutions in the region in terms of indigenous rights. However, indigenous people continue to face marginalization and violence. Over the past year, news stories have appeared on CRIC’s website detailing violent deaths of community members, often by masked men and sometimes by the military. A quick Google search turns up three “Urgent Actions” in a two-month time span from Amnesty International about death threats against indigenous leaders in Cauca from paramilitary groups. In April 2015, unknown perpetrators killed six indigenous people in Agua Bonita and Agua Clara, Cauca, and various armed actors have since killed others. While much has changed in the past 500 years as recounted below, indigenous people still face discrimination and violence.

During the Spanish invasion, indigenous groups in modern-day Cauca became renowned for their fierce resistance (Gros 1991, 179). They attacked and killed two Spanish commanders, Pedro de Añasco and Juan de Ampudia, who tried to establish settlements in the area (Arocha and Friedemann 1982; Rappaport 1990, 38-9; Valencia Llano 1991, 103). The Spanish returned

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b While the State recognizes 87 indigenous ethnic groups as of 2015, indigenous organizations like CRIC and ONIC recognize 102. On their website <http://cms.onic.org.co/pueblos-indigenas/> ONIC details how the number has changed over the years. In 1998, the department overseeing Indigenous issues in the Ministry of the Interior determined 81 different pueblos existed. In 2002, the Ministry of Defense put this number at 83 and the Departamento Nacional de Planeación confirmed this number in 2004. The 2005 census by the DANE estimated Colombia had 87 indigenous pueblos. ONIC cites issues of identifying one pueblo from another that live in the same area due to historical migration, interests of the extractive industry in ancestral lands, political interests, different definitions and methods of counting, among other reasons for the discrepancies.

with greater force, but indigenous groups like the Páez (Nasa) continued to resist colonization throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. Spanish elites saw indigenous people as relics of the past, destined to disappear as the nation progressed and modernized (Gros 1991, 7). The Spanish Crown justified brutality, violence, and domination by describing indigenous people as “savages, barbarians, rebels, and cannibals”, terms that remain in indigenous memory to this day (Valencia Llano 1991, 105). While the Nasa and others had their own political, social, and economic systems, the Spanish discounted these as inferior. Consequently, elites used these opinions to legitimize assimilation, domination and taking indigenous lands (Galeano 2006, 31).

Eventually, the Spanish gained territorial control through intensive labor systems, the effects of foreign disease, and religious missionaries; these forces combined reduced the indigenous population through death and assimilation. The Crown introduced the *encomienda* system, which granted conquerors rights to indigenous communities and their lands. Conquerors could demand tribute and labor in exchange for providing services like defense or education (Rappaport 1990, 39).

After the initial stages of the conquest, the Crown wanted to reassert its dominance. The Crown organized indigenous people into *resguardos*, communally owned land overseen by an indigenous governor, to regain control from the *encomienda* system, as well as to provide a tax and labor source (Arocha and Friedemann 1982). Although situated in a colonial system, indigenous leaders carved out a space of autonomy in the *cabildos* and re-envisioned the *resguardo* as a tool for resistance (Ibid). After independence, the new Republic attempted to abolish *resguardos* to create a modern State based on privatization and individual land holding. The State envisioned a Catholic, monolingual national identity and attempted to assimilate any non-national identities (Van Cott 2000, 2). Indigenous people in Cauca resisted the abolishment
of resguardos, although large hacienda owners and peasants had already encroached on many resguardos lands (Troyan 2015, 14). In 1890 the State reconstituted resguardos under Law 89, reinstating the rights of indigenous people to collectively own lands given to them previously through colonial grants. Simultaneously, the law declared indigenous people unfit to live amongst society and envisioned resguardos as a temporary solution to protect them until they became functional citizens (ibid). The State followed the Crown in discounting indigenous people as equal members of society. Law 89 described indigenous people as “incipient”, declared them legal minors, and gave the Church administrative control over indigenous education, health and other facets of their lives (DANE 2005, 16; Troyan 2015, 15). A few years before Law 89, the State signed El Concordato an agreement that conferred upon the Church the task of “reducing the indigenous to civilized life” (Jimeno 1996, 120; Gros 1991, 274). For the State and Church, “civilized life” meant practicing Catholicism, speaking Spanish, and erasing cultural markers of indigenous identity. As a result, many indigenous communities today are monolingual Spanish speakers and devout Christians.

By the early 20th century, many indigenous peoples had lost their lands and worked as sharecroppers for large haciendas. In response to this marginalization, Manuel Quintín Lame organized a series of confrontations between indigenous people and elites in Cauca between 1910 and 1920, known as La Quintinada (Rappaport 1990, 105; Troyan 2015). The son of two

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d In Morales, where I interviewed a number of indigenous media makers, many of them identify as Evangelical. Jorge Luis Campos, the indigenous youth coordinator introduced earlier, justified his lack of fluency in Nasa Yuwe with a brief history. He tells me how many of the great-great-grandparents of the youth in the region left their homes in Tierradentro to cross the mountains and settle in Morales. At that time, most spoke their maternal languages, but the education system forced them to learn Spanish. If they pronounced a word incorrectly, they received punishment. This could include tongue burning, or so Jorge tells me. In order to save their children the shame and pain they experienced, this generation did not pass on their languages. Jorge laments that fewer than 5 percent of the youth in Morales speak Nasa Yuwe (the language of the Nasa) and they are “suffering because there are few of us that understand our maternal language.”
indigenous sharecroppers, Quintín Lame’s organizing continued for many years after *La Quintinada*. He sought to end the *terraje* (share cropping system) and oppressive work conditions, strengthen and expand *resguardos*, strengthen *cabildos* as autonomous indigenous systems of government, and increase respect for indigenous culture (Archila 2010, 11; Rappaport 1990, 105). Quintín Lame planted the seeds for the indigenous movement to come and, many decades later, his ideology would resurface as a cornerstone of CRIC’s manifesto. An indigenous guerrilla group in the 1980s took his name as a symbol of indigenous resistance and autonomy.

During the 1940s and 1950s, Colombia entered a period of civil war known as *La Violencia*. The civil war pitted the two main political parties, Liberals and Conservatives, against each other. Violence became a socially acceptable medium to resolve other conflicts, like land disputes, and rural areas became centers of violence (Zamosc 1986, 15; Pizarro 1990, 111). In response to the targeted violence and the State’s inability to protect its citizens, some people searched for alternatives. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), a guerrilla group, can trace their beginnings to Liberals who took to the mountains to protect themselves from Conservative violence (Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramon, 2002). Both political parties gave the army consent to take control of the State in 1953 in hopes of ending the civil war. In 1957, the Liberals and Conservatives, concerned about General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla’s future political inclinations, agreed to share power through the National Front. In this agreement, Liberals and Conservatives would alternate control of the Presidency and have equal representation in other government bodies (Zamosc 1986, 16). Elections continued, but only the two parties, who represented elite interests, could put forth candidates. Colombia became a “restricted democracy” or a “semi-closed system”: a democracy negotiated between elites, in which other
sectors of society no longer had representation in electoral processes (Pizarro 1990, 117; Wilde 1992).

In 1961, the Colombian political elite passed agrarian reform in an attempt to modernize the country and resolve rural social conflict stemming from land issues (Peñaranda 2009, 14). However, Law 135, the Agrarian Social Reform Law, was meant to be more “palliative” than lead to a radical transformation the land holding system (Zamosc 1986, 35). In 1967, Liberal president Lleras Restrepo created ANUC (Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos / National Association of Peasant Users). At the beginning, the state supported ANUC as “an invitation to exercise rights that had always been postponed” during the restricted period of the National Front (Ibid, 62). ANUC set up union-style associations throughout the country at the local level to allow peasants to make demands and to implement agrarian reform (Ibid, 50). ANUC led to the first nation-wide organizing of peasants, which later provided other movements a backbone to build on. Leaders of the local ANUC branches received leadership and political training by some of Latin America’s top radical social scientists of the 1960s, who pushed for a more radical, Leftist approach to land rights organizing and influenced subsequent branches of civil society (Ibid, 66). Indigenous people, who often identify as peasants, participated in ANUC. For many indigenous people, ANUC represented a way for them to make land claims but they found ANUC had little support for other issues indigenous peasants faced, like the Church’s continued control over education and health, the State’s view of indigenous people as legal minors, and the focus on communally held lands (CRIC 1981, 11).

In February 1971, more than 2000 people – indigenous, peasants and others – gathered in Toribio to found a new organization, CRIC. They reconvened in September of the same year to solidify the organization’s platform. The platform consisted of seven points, the first four echoed
Manuel Quintín Lame’s demands in the 1920s: recovering resguardo land; expanding resguardos; strengthening cabildos; ending the terraje system; making known and demanding the just application of laws governing indigenous people; defending indigenous history, language and customs; and training indigenous teachers to teach in styles appropriate to indigenous contexts and in indigenous languages (CRIC 1981, 12). Furthermore, CRIC called on the State to modify Law 89, which designated them as minors, arguing their place as Colombians and citizens of the nation (Ibid, 11). While CRIC separated from ANUC, they still based their vision on a class-based and pan-ethnic demand for land recuperation and an end to the share-cropping system – they considered calling themselves a “union” instead of a “council” (Findji 1992, 188 quoted in Jackson 2011, 4; Archila 2010, 16). At that time, they admitted, “nosotros mismos creíamos que ‘ser indio’ no era bueno y que para echar adelante había que copiar lo que venía de afuera” (CRIC 1981, 11). Some of the founders had participated in peasant organizations like ANUC, and drew on these experiences to organize CRIC. In the 1980s and 1990s, a new generation of indigenous leaders would help CRIC transition from a class-based to a cultural-based narrative (Gow and Rappaport 2002, 49).

Violence toward indigenous people increased in the late 1970s and early 1980s due to a variety of reasons (Archila 2010, 31). The elite hacienda owners in the region reacted violently to indigenous land takeovers and some hired private mercenaries to attack and intimidate indigenous communities (Jimeno 1996, 123). Furthermore, drug lords, paramilitary groups, and guerrilla organizations had a presence in Cauca and frequently attacked, or otherwise affected, indigenous communities. As continues to this day, armed groups claimed indigenous communities collaborated with other groups and sought retribution through violence. CRIC claimed neutrality amongst the armed actors and the State, but few groups respected their
autonomy and many indigenous leaders, activists, and community members were assassinated (Rappaport 1990, 137). In response to the State’s inability to guarantee safety and armed groups disrespect of autonomy, some members of the movement started an armed self-defense group (Peñaranda 2009, 75; Troyan 2015, 168). The Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame (MAQL), named after the indigenous leader from the 1920s, specifically defended indigenous interests (Peñaranda 2010, 2015).

Due to a variety of factors such as the State’s loss of control over violence and increased mobilization by social movements, a general consensus emerged for constitutional reform. In 1990, the National Constituent Assembly (ANC) formed and represented a door to a new Colombia based on a “new social contract” with the hope of opening democracy and bringing peace (Rodriguez and El Gazi 2007, 450). The ANC had 74 members: 70 elected, and 4 representatives from the guerrilla groups who demobilized before the assembly. Indigenous groups had three representatives, two elected, and one a member of the demobilized MAQL. CRIC and ONIC drew on their decades of experience organizing to gain national visibility.

The constituent assembly represented a turning point in many ways for indigenous people. President Gaviria’s constitutional advisor commented, “Once in the Constituent Assembly, their status grew. They became symbols. They represented more than their constituency: they represented tolerance and pluralism, a rediscovered national identity, historic reconciliation, justice, and the feeling that past grievances should be redressed” (Cepeda 1995:105, as quoted in Van Cott 2000, 72). The indigenous representatives tied their demands for autonomy and recognition of a multiethnic state to the general public and political elites’ desires for a more legitimate, participatory democracy, and reconciliation (Van Cott 2000, 73). Furthermore, indigenous rights gained international attention during this time period and inclusion of
indigenous peoples in the ANC and their proposals in the constitution added legitimacy in international eyes (Ibid, 75).

The new constitution declared Colombia a multiethnic and pluri-cultural nation. The indigenous representatives had fought for the inclusion of various articles covering issues such as bilingual education, recognition of indigenous languages as official in their respective resguardos, the inalienable rights of resguardos, the right to exercise their own justice system, administrative control over indigenous territories, among other rights (Art. 7; Art 63; Art 10; Art 286 as cited in DANE 2007, 19). Additionally, the Constitution ratified the International Labor Organization's Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, which supports "a paradigm of strengthening indigenous cultural rights, languages, schools, and autonomy in development practices" (Wortham 2011, 7). This represents a departure from previous models of assimilation and integration into a dominant national project. In 1996, Colombia passed Law 335 guaranteeing ethnic groups permanent access to radio and the

servicios públicos de Telecomunicaciones y medios Masivos de Comunicación del Estado, la creación de sus propios medios de comunicación en sus diferentes modalidades y la realización del Plan de Desarrollo...con el objeto de garantizar sus derechos étnicos, culturales y su desarrollo integral. (Colombian Law 335 of 1996, paragraph 20)\textsuperscript{e}

Indigenous media makers use this law to call on the State to provide radio stations, as well as a communications and development plan specific to indigenous communities. The meetings I attended in Cauca, during which indigenous and government representatives

\textsuperscript{e} [http://www.secretariasenado.gov.co/senado/basedoc/ley/1996/ley_0335_1996.html](http://www.secretariasenado.gov.co/senado/basedoc/ley/1996/ley_0335_1996.html). A translation from Rodriguez and El Gazi “the state will guarantee that ethnic groups can have continuous access to use the electromagnetic spectrum and the telecommunication services and public mass media; that they can develop their own media according to their own specificities; and that they can realize their own development plans” (2007, 451)
discussed a public policy for indigenous communications, represent the slow realization of these rights. The political climate after the 1991 constitution led to a delay in legislation and implementation (Van Cott 2000). During Uribe’s presidency from 2002 – 2010, he used words like “dark forces,” “subversion” and “terrorism” to talk about indigenous leaders, which represent “coded ways of saying FARC guerrillas” (Murillo 2009, 139). Indigenous communities experienced increased violence (Ibid). In 2008, indigenous groups organized a massive march to protest President Uribe’s economic development plans, human rights violations, and repressive military and security policies. They called it the *Minga Popular, minga* referring to a Quechua word for a collective work system (Murillo 2009, 138). In Colombia, indigenous people use it to refer to mobilizations, seen as collective community action and work. Right before the 2008 protests, a new paramilitary organization, the *Campesinos Embejucados del Cauca* (Furious Peasants of Cauca) used the same language and charges as the government in a seven-page death threat e-mail sent to CRIC and ACIN, another indigenous organization in Cauca. These threats proved to be more than empty words – gunmen killed eight indigenous Nasas over the next two months (Murillo 2009, 138). Indigenous people continue to resist discrimination, domination and violence in creative ways while calling on the nation to recognize their rights.

The first chapter examines how CRIC imagines and appropriates ICTs into their organizational strategy to help achieve their goals. While the mediums have changed over the past 40 years, CRIC’s approach to technology has focused on using it as a tool for education, political stances, and ultimately as a way to ensure the survival of indigenous communities

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See Van Cott 2000 for a description of Gaviria’s failure to fully implement the Constitution and that of his predecessor, Ernesto Samper as well.
within the Colombian nation. The second chapter focuses on a radio experiment in a school in Chimborazo to explore how media makers consciously use ICTs to promote cultural revitalization. For indigenous media makers, communication refers to a holistic approach that requires an attachment to the movement and their community. While they might use outside technologies, they operate from a distinctly indigenous knowledge system.
Throughout the 20th century, newspapers played an active role in Colombia’s political and national spheres. Colombia has a history of citizens’ media projects (Murillo 2008). ANUC had a newsletter, Carta Campesina, from early 1970 until the government withdrew support in mid-1971 (Zamosc 1986, 60). The newsletter, published every two weeks included articles by advisers and peasants on relevant information and events. A few years after CRIC began, they voted to start a newspaper for their members and named it Unidad Indígena. Since 1975, CRIC has greatly expanded their communications program and adopted technologies as they have become available. Today, CRIC has a robust website, updated daily with news, videos and live-streaming of events, radio programs, and links to other indigenous media collectives. They have a communications team that covers photography, radio, video, and other media forms. Over the past few years, CRIC and other indigenous groups have engaged in a series of discussions with the government to develop a public policy for indigenous communications. This falls in line with the Santos administration’s development plan for Colombia – to make it a digitally connected country. As we drove through Cauca, we passed large billboards with photos of Colombians and the words “Colombia connected” and a logo for the Ministry of Technology.

This chapter looks at the historical roots of CRIC’s communications program and how the same ethos permeates its approach to appropriating newer technologies, which is to further the goals of the indigenous movement and educate the organization’s members. Furthermore, I provide an ethnographic analysis of the ways ICT play a part of CRIC’s communications strategy. I look at how the process of being involved in this strategy and in communications
spaces strengthens individuals’ identities as indigenous, connection to the movement/organization, and critical thinking skills.

**From Newspaper to Web Platform**

*Unidad Indígena*, CRIC’s first newspaper, drew inspiration from the popular journalism tradition of the time. Newspapers played an integral role in information distribution for political and union organizations. They became tools for political formation and education of members by covering stories with content about different views on policies or other political issues (Garcia and Caballero 2012, 277). During the 1970s, social movements and civil organizations focused on gaining control of the press and promoting ‘objective’ news (Ibid). The third page of the first edition of *Unidad Indígena* has a story entitled “Como nació y que significa ‘Unidad Indígena’” which details the birth of the newspaper and its organizational goals. The second to last paragraph highlights the need for control over how the press represents indigenous people,

Nosotros necesitamos nuestro periódico propio porque aunque con frecuencia aparecen artículos y libros sobre nosotros casi siempre es ofendiendo nuestra dignidad y negando nuestros derechos. Se nos presenta también como a salvajes e ignorantes, o como a animales pintorescos que solo servimos para adorner museos o para atraer turistas. En UNIDAD INDIGENA hablaremos con nuestra propia voz, como somos de verdad. Hombres, mujeres y niños de carne y hueso con nuestra propia dignidad, nuestro propio idioma, nuestras propias religiones, con nuestra propia tierra y por encima de todo con nuestra decisión inquebrantable de unirnos, organizarnos y luchar por la defensa de todas estas cosas contra los explotadores de hoy en día que quieren seguir robándonos lo nuestro. (Unidad Indígena, 3)
Mainstream media perpetuated stereotypes of indigenous peoples as savages, objects to be admired in museums, or as folkloric objects to attract tourism – categories indigenous people have fought against since the invasion in the 1400s. For CRIC, Unidad Indígena represented a platform to publicize their own voices. Control over media gave them power to show the public what indigenous people were actually like – to talk about cultural and political issues with dignity and respect for indigenous viewpoints. By publishing stories from their perspective, indigenous people offer narratives outside of the dominant paradigm, which stereotypes or stigmatizes them.

Alternative narratives reclaim indigenous identities from dominant views as passive, violent, or folkloric. For example, Darlene Johnson, an Aboriginal filmmaker in Australia, recorded indigenous people’s stories of assimilation and imposed these audios over promotional footage from the 1930s she found in government and mission archives (Ginsburg and Meyers 2006, 30). Johnson provides an example of how ICTs, in this case film, can create new symbols and representations of the past. Through her film, Johnson changed the historically accepted narrative on assimilation policies and produced a new historical record highlighting the violent reality absent in the promotional videos from the 1930s. In a similar fashion, CRIC used Unidad Indígena to publish narratives the State and mainstream media did not cover. Through the newspaper content, CRIC could take agency over self-representation as well as provide a different lens through which to analyze the everyday realities of indigenous experiences. Furthermore, the paper offered a platform to publish indigenous opinions on current events and government policies.

One day at UAIIN during a session of the communications degree program, I had the opportunity to interview Antonio Palechor. Antonio worked with Unidad Indígena in the 1980s
before working as a professional journalist in various private publications. Although he has had a professional career and has won national awards, he enrolled in UAIIN’s bachelor’s program in Intercultural Communications. We sit down on a log beneath some trees a few yards from the classrooms. Antonio identifies as Yanacona from southern Cauca. Like many indigenous people, his parents left their resguardo and raised Antonio in a peasant community. He has a grandfatherly air about him, and could be the grandfather to most of his fellow students. When Nixon introduces us, he seems eager to talk. His cheeks lined with a permanent smile crease, accompany a deep and frequent laugh. It is apparent how he easily creates journalistic rapport with his sources.

Having one foot in the professional journalism world and one foot in the indigenous organization, Antonio has a unique perspective. I ask him curiously, as someone who has studied journalism in non-indigenous spheres, if he thinks there exists a difference between indigenous and non-indigenous media makers.

M: Do you think the journalism indigenous media makers do is different than that which journalists outside of the community do?

A: La diferencia no es mucha, es muy parecida. Los elementos finales, o lo que llega al consumidor, consumidor entre comillas, es muy parecido a lo que hace uno en la parte comercial. La diferencia está en que ellos deciden que es lo que quieren que la gente conozco. Si a mi me pasa una noticia yo pudo hacer las dos manejos. Entonces que es lo que quiero con la radio comercial? Vender, y yo puedo coger la noticia y venderla bien vendida pero yo puedo coger esa misma noticia, trabajarla, a como le gustaría verla a las comunidades y como le gusta algunos oyentes, lectores, televidentes, que es ver la realidad.
Antonio begins by saying that the products, or final elements, are very similar. Yet, he says he makes media to tell the truth for communities and media to sell for commercial stations. When he says there is little difference, Antonio refers to the format or the way it looks, but his approach as a journalist changes. He reiterates a sentiment I have heard from many others: indigenous media shows the truth and the reality, and non-indigenous media wants to sell a commodity.

Yo pienso que una comunicación, desde los comunicadores indígenas, permite llevar el pensamiento a las comunidades, transmitir su propio pensamiento, transmitir su propia problemática, o sus propios avances, sin que eso se convierta en un espectáculo, en una parte folklórica. Porque, por ejemplo, en nuestros días están los rituales, para el comunicador comercial esos son un espectáculo, bien bonito porque ahí danzan y ahí toman, y hay música y fotos buenas, entonces todo eso es espectacular. Eso es la visión de [inaudible], pero la visión de adentro es que eso es una activad sagrada, que eso podría decirse una cuestión religiosa, en la que se va toda la creencia, con toda la devoción y con todo el respeto, para él que va de afuera eso es un atractivo turístico.

Antonio highlights cultural sensitivity and awareness as an inherent difference between how an indigenous and a non-indigenous media maker would cover a ritual. For a commercial journalist, rituals are spectacles seen as folkloric representations. Indigenous media makers have the cultural context to see these rituals as sacred and can represent them in a respectful and sacred manner in the media. At least, Antonio believes that is the difference between an indigenous and non-indigenous media maker. The former has almost primordial connections to the community and acts as an interlocutor between the media and imagined indigenous communal knowledge.
He continues, along the same lines as Unidad Indígena’s creators, that non-indigenous media use a narrative arc that often stereotypes and stigmatizes indigenous peoples.\textsuperscript{8}

The creators of Unidad Indígena, a mix of indigenous and non-indigenous collaborators, envisioned the paper as a tool for political education despite the low levels of literacy in indigenous communities. In the 2005 census, Colombia had a national literacy rate of 91.6 percent, compared to an indigenous literacy rate of 71.4 percent, the lowest of the groups polled (Indigenous, Afro-colombian, Rom, and no ethnic identity) (DANE 2005). CRIC leaders imagined the newspaper could lead to community practices like reading articles aloud, drawing on the importance of oral forms in indigenous society. At the end of their introduction paragraph in the first edition, they said

\textbf{Es muy importante que los compañeros indígenas que reciban nuestro periódico se preocupen mucho de verdad de hacerlo conocer a otros compañeros, de estudiarlo y leerlo juntos, de traducirlo a sus propios idiomas para que todos pueden entender bien, de escribirnos para que nuestro periódico sea cada vez mejor. Para \textit{que conociéndonos mejor podamos unir mejor nuestras luchas}.} (original emphasis, Unidad Indígena, 3)

The writers called on community leaders and those who could read to disseminate information to other members, and they did this through the creation of community study groups (Garcia and Caballero 2012, 282). Garcia and Caballero do not offer details, but it appears that these groups provided spaces for the community to listen to someone read the articles, and discuss their opinions. Public discussions are very important in indigenous processes. CRIC

holds many public meetings during which any member of the community can speak up and offer opinions. I traveled with the Human Rights Program one day to Yaquivá, a small town near Inzá a few hours from Popayán. It was a Monday but everyone was off work because they were holding a town *minga* to address issues. When we arrived, everyone had gathered under the roof of a covered area that served as the community’s basketball court. The agenda included a list of community happenings, regional updates, and sentencing of a community member who had committed rape. After the community leader had offered his opinion, and Walter (a member of CRIC’s human rights program) had presented the organization’s view, they opened up the space to community members. Anyone present could use the microphone to voice their thoughts and opinions. One woman denounced the community’s silence about sexual assault and education. Others commented that imprisoning the offender would separate him from the community and thus would not be constructive in helping him change. I cite this example to show that open discussion is integral to the way indigenous communities in Cauca operate. Through these public spheres members make important political and social decisions. They negotiate values and identities. Likewise, the newspaper opened up a space for oral debate through study groups. *Unidad Indígena* accepted and published written responses from these study groups, although it is hard to say how often this occurred.

As the movement's first publication, *Unidad Indígena* had three goals: to provide analysis from communities, produce educational stories and enjoy a wide distribution (Garcia and Caballero 2012, 280). They hoped to disperse information to communities who previously had a lack of access to non-dominant media. Indigenous communities in Cauca are spread out along a vast and rough terrain. The government has built and improved roads linking the towns dotting the Sierra Nevada and Andes since the 1970s, but travel remains difficult. To get to a community
meeting spot, the communications team and I had to drive down a dirt road, impassable in the rains, to a dock where we waited for an hour in hopes a boat big enough to carry us would come by. We climbed into this shallow wood boat, wide enough for two people to sit on its plank seats, and long enough for six of us to crowd in with our mattresses folded behind us. The water looked like it might overwhelm the edge of the boat at any moment. After a half hour ride, we dismounted on a muddy bank and walked thirty minutes uphill to arrive at the meeting spot, where no cell phone service reached. This is not a highly unusual travel story; many indigenous resguardos are in remote areas, nestled amongst mountains that make travel by car difficult and have little cell phone reception.

Newspapers, and other forms of media, connect geographically separated communities. People can easily carry and pass on printed materials. The proliferation of community radio stations offers people another way to access information and communicate with one another even if they live in different geographic locations. For example, Unidad Indígena’s first edition had a cover story reporting on the first congress of the Arhuaco people from the Sierra Nevada in northern Colombia. It included a history of their mobilization, and a supplement detailing the conclusions of the congress, denouncements, and a letter to “nuestros compañeros indígenas.” Many isolated indigenous communities connected through the newspaper, and could share their specific experiences with issues like language retention, recuperation of culture, and denouncements of rights violations. To draw on Anderson (1983), it created the sense of belonging to something larger, an imagined indigenous community – heterogeneous but in resistance throughout Colombia. This helped CRIC consolidate itself as an indigenous organization that represented multiple indigenous communities. While heterogeneous, they still united in resistance against a dominant other and the newspaper helped develop this unity. The
center-fold of the first edition had blurbs about what was going on in different regions and sectors, it covered: Amazonas, Cauca, Putumayo, Sierra Nevada, Tolima, Vaupes, in general, peasant struggles and farmers struggles. From the beginning, CRIC saw media as a way to unite indigenous people by informing them about the struggles and events in each other’s communities.

CRIC’s communications program has had international ties from the very beginning. Survival International’s French chapter helped finance the first issue of Unidad Indígena (Garcia and Caballero 2012, 279). By 1975 the indigenous movement in Cauca had developed relationships with international non-profits. This relationship allowed them to publish their newspaper, for mostly internal distribution. As I will explore below, CRIC’s communications program today continues to leverage international connections, although this brings with it ideological tensions as well. International organizations provide funding and training for many projects and programs. Furthermore, CRIC’s communications members are aware of the presence of an indigenous mediascape and the impact of their media on international audiences.

CRIC’s communications program has historically operated in two spheres: to publicize and create transnational relationships, and to inform within indigenous communities.

In 1982, indigenous communities came together to create the Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia (ONIC) to represent indigenous people at the national level, and they took over publishing Unidad Indígena (Garcia and Caballero 2012, 279). However, the indigenous people in Cauca felt the loss of the newspaper and in 1985, decided to start publishing Unidad Álvaro Ulcué, named after an indigenous activist priest assassinated a few years before. They saw the paper as a “respuesta a la necesidad de la dinámica del Cacua que enfrentaba muchos enemigos mientras se fortalecía su accionar social” (Ibid, 279). By that time, CRIC had
incorporated news media as a critical part of their strategy for political resistance. Their communications strategy became a key political component of the organization at the regional and international level, and in the consolidation of CRIC as an organization. CRIC continued to print *Unidad Álvaro Ulcué* until 1992 when they stopped for a variety of reasons including lack of funding. At that point, CRIC had already started to diversify their communications strategies.

Antonio Palechor became involved with *Unidad Indígena* during his tenure as secretary of CRIC. He had taken distance courses in writing, typing and journalism in his youth. Those involved in the newspaper invited Antonio to join because he could write and type, skills scarce in indigenous communities. As Antonio recounts these first years, he emphasizes they wanted to write articles with ideas in them. Ideas propelled the movement forward and the newspaper’s goal was to promote the movement. Antonio describes them as a ragtag bunch, who learned the skills they needed as they went along. He does not often add dates as he recounts CRIC’s communications history, but sometime in the mid 1980s they added a black and white 16mm film, *Nuestra Voz de Tierra* to their communications repertoire. He and others traveled to different communities with the film rolls and projector to screen the film.

When *Unidad Indígena* transferred to the national organization ONIC, Antonio continued his involvement in communications with *Unidad Álvaro Ulcué*. He and other members created this new paper as a channel to distribute information about CRIC’s different programs (health, education), as well as important news at the regional and national level. He became involved in writing, photography, designing and printing. They had to travel to Bogotá every two months to print the paper. During the 1990s, CRIC accepted the government’s offer of a radio slot. The Ministry paid for a half hour every Saturday morning at 9 on two commercial stations in Popayán. Antonio and the others involved in communications would write out programs on
various themes like everyday occurrences, information about CRIC, recounting past events, and sometimes include musical segments. They recorded the programs in the commercial stations because CRIC did not have the tools at that time – they didn’t even have a recorder. But, someone from the team went to the station every Saturday and recorded this half hour program. A little while after that, the communications team started printing other materials. Antonio notes again that the needs of the organization caused them to expand their communications program. At that time, the organization was involved in a great deal of mobilizing and Antonio notes that they needed printed materials like posters, and pamphlets to promote the events and to easily handout at events. Even though there were photos in the previous newspapers, Antonio highlights that these new printed products required they learn how to take photographs.

A: Con lo de las cartillas va surgiendo otra necesidad, fotografía. Necesitábamos tener fotos para los eventos y no había gente que manejara fotografía, que fuera buena fotografía.
M: Ah sí. Entonces, ¿qué hicieron?
A: Entonces, le aumentamos otra área: fotografía. Entonces, era toma de fotos, revelado, entonces teníamos cuarto oscuro.
M: ¿Aca en ...?
A: Aquí en la oficina. Y ahí revelábamos las fotos. Entonces, ya teníamos fotos para alimentar las cartillas y el periódico. Y a raíz de eso, surgieron también los audiovisuales. Entonces, foto y audio para llevar a las comunidades. A las comunidades les gusta ver y oír. No leer. Entonces, claro, eso nos solucionaba en parte el problema. Entonces, hacíamos los que le llamaban audiovisuales que eran unas fotos, unas transparencias, que se proyectaban y se le ponía sonido. Se le ponía audio.

He goes on to say that these primitive audiovisuals led to video, which led to learning how to edit and use more complicated technologies. Antonio presents the flow from newspaper to video
as a natural and organic move that happened to meet the organization’s needs. They also adapted the communications program to the communities’ needs and desires – they started making audiovisuals and later video to address the communities’ preference for visual and oral media. For the most part, Antonio paints a portrait of the communications members learning these technologies on their own out of necessity. They saw needs in the organization and filled them to the best of their ability. He tells me they taught themselves and whoever knew a little bit more would teach the others. Sometimes collaborators would provide extra knowledge, and CRIC did have access to some trainings. Specifically after the new constitution the government offered some trainings in the late 1990s on media use. Otherwise, they learned by doing and many people could not believe it. One year, they decided to add in a budget for the radio program to the renewal of their Bread for the World grant. Bread for the World had originally provided money for various training programs, which did not include radio although CRIC used some of this money for radio training anyway. When the Bread for the World representative arrived in Cauca, he exclaimed, "¿Programa de radio? Están locos. ¡Indios haciendo radio! No pues, no. Eso no. No entendemos.' [Antonio laughing] Cuando eso ocurrió, nosotros hacía seis años que hacíamos radio." When Antonio and others took the representative to the radio station to record their program, he refused to speak due to fear, while the indigenous members confidently delivered their radio messages. For the previous six years before this occurred, government had paid for a thirty minute radio time slot every Saturday morning at two private regional stations in Popayán. CRIC did not have the tools to edit audios professionally so indigenous communicators would write out their programs and bring them to the stations on Saturday morning to read out loud on air. Antonio does not remember when they stopped relying on these private stations, but
notes that eventually community stations began to emerge. While CRIC supported these endeavors, the individual communities began these stations through their own efforts.

**Indigenous Radio**

While Antonio never told me the year they started doing radio, in 1995 the government passed Law 335 (discussed earlier) that provided the legal structure for indigenous communities to claim rights to radio and a public policy for communications. As noted above, some communities had decided to form radio stations on their own accord, some as pirate stations and others under community licenses. Law 335 made it slightly easier for communities to receive licenses. During the summer of 2013, I sat in on meetings between the government and indigenous representatives discussing features of a public policy for indigenous communications. In these meetings, I saw indigenous representatives employ communications and ICTs as tools to achieve political and social goals as a movement. Or, as Michaels (1994) and others might say, to take an active role in reproduction of their traditional modes of culture to create a cultural future for themselves. First, I present a discussion of radio adoption by indigenous communities, and delve into what radio looks like today in indigenous Cauca. After that, I look at meetings for a public policy for indigenous communications and how indigenous people use them to actively renovate indigenous culture and identity in changing contexts.

Aside from giving ethnic groups rights to radio stations, Law 335 guaranteed rights to their own means of communication and distinct development programs. Indigenous communities reject the term development as an outside concept that indicates linear progression based on Western values (Gow 2008). They advocate for planes de vida, or holistic long-term social, economic, and development plans that situate past, present and future as interconnected in time
Planes de vida project a “vision for the future by implicitly answering three questions: Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going?” (Gow 2008, 98). These three questions connect a sense of present identity to the past and the future. CRIC’s 2007 regional plan de vida describes this more poetically as, “to reconstruct the past to affirm the present and give life to the future” (CRIC 2007, 8). Planes de vida focus on guaranteeing the continuation of indigenous communities as autonomous and represent the practical presentation of dreams that envision ways of coexisting with mother nature (Almendra 2010, 2). In other words, planes de vida allow indigenous people to create strategies for the continuation and transformation of their communities.

Under implementation of Law 335, in the late 1990s, the Ministry of Culture’s Unidad de Radio (Office of Radio) oversaw the expansion of radio stations. Law 335 expanded radio from commercial licenses to include public interest and community radio; while my focus is on the conversation amongst indigenous communities, Colombian society as a whole debated the role of radio stations in civil society. Rodriguez and El Gazi present materials from Unidad de Radio’s archives that shed light on the process. Following the new constitution, Unidad de Radio helped open a national dialogue about citizens' media (2007, 454). The unit proved to be progressive and dynamic. They set up meetings with indigenous representatives to discuss how and in what form radio would enter indigenous communities. In many ways, Unidad de Radio’s approach was novel compared to Australia and Canada where the government introduced satellites above indigenous territories without consulting communities (Ginsburg 2002, 45).

In a very different approach, Unidad de Radio sought to help indigenous people think through what radio would mean to their communities. They coordinated an international meeting with indigenous members from radio and media programs in other countries, like the Shuar in...
Ecuador, Inuits from Canada, and some representatives from indigenous groups in the United States (Ibid, 455). The representatives discussed the positives and negatives of appropriating ICTs, and exchanged international experiences. It was the first Meeting on Indigenous Radio in the Americas. Since then, indigenous communities have convened multiple continent-wide summits on communication, including one in Cauca in 2010, one I attended in Oaxaca in 2013, and another in Cauca in 2014. They have renamed these Summits for Indigenous Communications of Abya Yala. Many indigenous people use Abya Yala to refer to the American continents because they do not want to use an illegitimate name imposed by invaders. During my time in Oaxaca at this summit, I met indigenous media makers from all over Abya Yala – from various states in Mexico, Argentina, Bolivia, Honduras, and across the continents. Many had met before, or were familiar with each other’s online work. This highlights the transnational connections that exist within the indigenous media sphere – or mediascape. The conference focused on sharing experiences and orienting how they could collectively pursue a plan to strengthen indigenous communications.

After this first international meeting held by the Unidad de Radio in the mid-1990s, each Colombian indigenous leader returned to their community. In their communities, leaders organized assemblies to have public conversations like the one I described earlier on punishment for crimes. These discussions focused on if and how each community would accept the State's offer of a radio station (Rodriguez and El Gazi 2007, 455). From the beginning, indigenous people followed their own forms of decision making, with a heavy focus on oral tradition, to think through whether or not to create a radio station. Public consensus has a very important place in indigenous communities as a from of decision making, and not all communities decided to accept the government’s offer at the end of this process. Those that did had a sense of
ownership and a clearer vision of what role they wanted the radio station to play in their communities.

Rodriguez and El Gazi provide a brief case study on the Wayúu in Northern Colombia, and their process of considering the government’s offer. Remedios Nicolasa Fajardo, a Wayúu leader, traveled with a small team around Wayuú territory in the mountainous Sierra Nevada for six months, visiting each Wayúu community in range of the future radio signals. In each community Remedios presented the government’s offer and mediated a community conversation. The meeting culminated in the production of a written document detailing the community’s oral discussion and decision reached by consensus (Rodriguez and El Gazi 2007, 456). Communities debated the social meanings and uses of radio before they even had radio stations, which offered them agency to actively decide how and if they would appropriate radio. In some ways, this mirrors what Michaels’ called Warlpiri’s invention of television. Each community invented radio by figuring out what it would mean in their specific context.

Different indigenous ethnic groups, and even communities within the same group, had different visions for the role a radio station would play. For example, a community near the border with Venezuela imagined the station as a way to keep in touch with relatives across the border (Fajardo et al., 2001:20, cited in Rodriguez and El Gazi 456). A member of the Wayuú in the community of Zaino in southern Guajira imagined a station to inform members about various events, like deaths (Ibid). Other Wayúu decided their radio station should investigate "the main sounds of the Wayúu culture, and bring them into the stations' programming" (Ibid, 459). They envisioned radio as a platform to reproduce sounds of their culture and broadcast these sounds to a larger audience. On the other hand, indigenous groups from the Amazon lived in areas where they had to rent boats and navigate rivers to see other members of their communities. They
decided fast and cheap communication was a priority over radio and the government responded with the introduction of a rural telephony program. The Arhuacos followed a community decision-making process based on the *mamos*, traditional religious leaders, which had not yet come to a decision in 2007 on the government’s offer. But, the community meetings concluded that if they did have a radio station, it would communicate messages to non-Arhuacos who had started to farm in the Sierra Nevada (Rodriguez and El Gazi 458). A rural Awá community wanted an AM station in indigenous language, whereas a more urban Awá community wanted a FM station in Spanish (Ibid, 458). The process supported by the *Unidad de Radio* allowed each community to have a significant role in imagining what radio could mean for them and how they wanted to integrate it into their daily lives and communities. It highlights the heterogeneity in the needs and desires of Colombia’s indigenous communities that exist within different social and geographical contexts.

Indigenous communities were very intentional about accepting the State’s offer of radio stations and each community made a decision based on hyper-local contexts. This process gave communities space to imagine the effects radio might have on their communities and to think about how they would want the station to operate if they were to accept the offer. In this way, radio was (or was not) brought into communities for specific reasons and with specific idealized roles. Rodriguez and El Gazi relate this to Salazar’s concept of the “poetics of ICTs” or the way media comes into being and functions in a given community, group or culture through its practice, or poiesis. It is concerned with the way social practices of technology are grounded in cultural politics and social action, generally rooted in local social solidarities. This poiesis or making of communication technologies is both a process and product of cultural representation (Salazar, in press:9-10, as cited in Rodriguez and El Gazi, 456).
Some communities, like Jambaló and Toribío, decided to have radio stations before the government offered them. The Nasa and Guambianos are often the first to experiment with different ICTs and appropriate them into their strategies for resistance (Rodriguez and El Gazi 2007, 458). They reframe ICTs within their *planes de vida*, which allows them to use this framework to apply ICTs to address their needs as a community. In the case of radio in Jambaló and Toribío, the communities came together to create and support these stations early on. When I talked to members of the stations, much too young to be involved in the creation of the station, they reiterated this tie to the community. Leonardo stands a little taller than me, with wide set shoulders and a close crew cut. He works at *Voces de Nuestra Tierra* in Jambaló. He is a student in UAIIN’s communications program and Nixon picked him as a student I should interview.

Class has ended for the day and I sit on a bench in the main administrative building with Leonardo. He has a stout build, spikey black hair and wears a white t-shirt with a non-descript logo and jeans. I ask him to tell me his history in communications, and he begins, “Pues recordemos que al inicio es un plan de comunicación que ha sido también, bueno, construida por la misma comunidad.” He begins his history in communication with the history of his community’s radio station. His was one of the communities that decided to create a station on their own before the government’s offer through Law 335. Leonardo highlights that because the community created it, station members feel obligated to address the needs and opinions of the community. They plan their programs based on community requests. Throughout our discussion, Leonardo refers often to the community in his responses, indicative of the Nasa focus on community over the individual. Leonardo goes on, without prompt, to continue to tell me the importance of the radio station:
Leonardo cites the radio as having a practical use – their community exists in a mountainous region where cell phone service does not always work. Instead of calling people, the community uses the radio to communicate with each other. People often pass along messages to the radio to say hello to a family member. The radio informs them about events in the community, news from the region, announcements from CRIC, world events, local music and a variety of other topics. Leonardo reiterates the community has strengthened their own forms of communication but they also use ICTs. He acknowledges the power of ICTs to destroy indigenous culture but contends that if one knows how to use them, ICTs can help reach outside of the community. In Leonardo’s answers I find echoes of what I hear from most media makers. Many spend time in communications spaces and have picked up the rhetoric coming out of communications collectives like ACIN and CRIC. These organizations have folded communications into their strategies under the assumption that members need to be trained how to use ICTs properly in order to benefit from them. Juan, CRIC’s videographer, reiterated that Facebook and ICTs can be detrimental to indigenous cultural reproduction if used incorrectly.
But, with training, people can utilize these tools in productive ways to benefit the community and provide alternatives to mainstream media culture.

When asked for a concrete example of how he would use Facebook “correctly” versus “incorrectly”, Juan replies that he uses Facebook to reach more people in the movement. Looking through his posts, most are photos of him or others during rituals, meetings, and other organizational processes. Juan speaks Nasa Yuwe and his posts often include phrases in Nasa Yuwe, to which others respond in kind in the comments. Juan’s Facebook wall includes links to news stories from CRIC’s website, as well as announcements about events. As he tells me this, he reflects that publicizing the activities of the movement and CRIC on Facebook helps his friends on Facebook, and their friends, learn about events and organizational activities. Below one event announcement, a friend asks where the event is located so she can attend – his strategy works. “Correct” use for Juan means using social media to increase the organization’s reach. Facebook provides Juan a platform to visually present his participation in the organization with photos of him in various parts of the region, interviewing community members, and traversing the territory with his fellow UAIIN classmates. Mabel, a young woman who recently entered the radio project and a student in the undergraduate program, thinks one way to use Facebook constructively is to write names and other messages in Nasa Yuwe. She exclaims

uno ahí ve y dice bonito porque uno sabe que esta persona, eso es publico y que una persona no le da pena publicar, poner un significado en nasa yuwe y que todo el mundo después va a decir: ¡ay que bonito! y ¿esto qué significa? ¿tiene un significado?. Desde ahí uno ya ve de que eso se está, así sea en las redes sociales, la lengua y todo ese significado sigue ahí, o sea, existe allí y la idea es no dejarlo perder.

For Mabel, seeing Nasa Yuwe on Facebook erases the shame historically tied to the language during the State’s attempts to create a monolingual Spanish-speaking nation. Posting
photos or writing in maternal languages on Facebook represents a process of “making culture visible” (Salazar and Córdova 2008; Wortham 2011). Through public reproduction, indigenous people “challenge long-standing cultural stereotypes and create novel forms of healing historical disruptions in traditional knowledge, social memory, and cultural identity” (Salazar and Córdova 2008, 31).

Over and over again, media makers tell me the experience of working in the radio station, or other involvement in communications spaces, has strengthened their identity as Nasa or Yanacona or Guambiano. I asked Leonardo why he continued to work at the radio station if it represented so much work for so little pay. He responded that many people have left for this reason, but for him, involvement in communications means immersing oneself in a community vision and in indigenous knowledge systems. To be involved in communications is to be aware “de que uno es nasa y uno tiene que trabajar con el fin de visibilizar lo que no se queda allí, sí?” Having the power to represent the community via the radio causes Leonardo to feel connected to his community. His role as a communicator makes him aware of his Nasa identity, perhaps because media making involves representation. One has to make decisions about how to present issues, or what topics to cover in a radio program. If Leonardo’s community calls for educational programs, Leonardo has to draw on cultural modes of knowledge in order to answer these calls, which strengthens his own connection to these traditional modes. Leonardo reflects on communicators he has met from other parts of the country – he thinks they do not have the same connection to an indigenous identity as communicators in northern Cauca because they do not have the same relationship with their communities. ACIN has a reputation as a more militant organization with a well-developed and mature communications program. Leonardo goes on about their approach to communications.
por eso nosotros en los diferentes espacios, diferentes asambleas, nosotros hemos sido muy claros, el tema de comunicación en las comunidades indígenas se debe fortalecer desde el corazón, desde el pensamiento. Porque si nosotros no lo hacemos desde el corazón y el pensamiento, pues obviamente nosotros estamos por unos recursos o por una bonificación, y no haríamos el trabajo como debe ser. Entonces nosotros estamos como más para la protección de la misma comunidad, para la protección de nuestra cultura, de nuestras tradiciones y de nuestras costumbres.

*El pensamiento* translates to thought, or thinking, and Leonardo uses it to refer to thinking from the Nasa perspective. *Pensamiento* often accompanies a descriptor like Western or Nasa to indicate a knowledge system – Western thought, or indigenous thought. Although ICTs might be borrowed, Leonardo envisions the process of communications as an act from the heart, from an indigenous way of thinking that connects to indigenous systems of thought, values and beliefs about how the world works. Many media makers receive little to no pay for the hours of work they do; their motivation is a moral one– the protection of their community, culture and traditions. To be a media maker is to commit oneself to working for the survival of the community. I ask Mabel to tell me her history as a communicator, and she talks about the process of consciousness-raising she experienced upon entering the indigenous movement via communications. The armed conflict has greatly affected her hometown, Toribió, and when the mass media cover violent incidents in the area, she reflects:

they don’t do it from the perspective of why, why is this war in this territory? And why is the community continuing to be the ones affected when we don’t have anything to do with the conflict? … one sees a constant violation of human rights and one begins to look, and well, we were raised here and we aren’t going to leave here. There is a need for communicators who can be in all of the spaces, who can live what the people are experiencing in reality in the territory, and who can traverse the land.
Mabel believes non-indigenous media cover fail to inquire into the roots of violence and to ask why the victims are often indigenous. Sometimes, she notes, journalists know the answers but cannot include them for political reasons in their stories. For indigenous media makers, this represents a ‘truth’ that indigenous media seeks to investigate and publicize. Furthermore, Mabel privileges the connection she has to her community as situating her as better equipped to write about the truth and reality in the community. Hanusch Folker suggests indigenous journalism has five dimensions distinct from non-indigenous journalism: “empowerment, counter-narrative, maintaining indigenous languages/ language revitalization, creating a culturally based epistemology/methodology (cultural survival and using culturally appropriate frameworks), and watchdog function” (2013, 85). When Mabel and Leonardo talk about what it means to be an indigenous radio producer, a form of journalism, aspects of these five dimensions float in their answers. For example, radio empowers them to feel more connected to their Nasa identity, and to think critically about the issues and problems in these communities. CRIC, ACIN, and other information collectives act as watchdogs and constantly publish advisories to highlight threats from armed actors or infringements of rights by the military. Ultimately, Mabel seeks to improve the situation of her community because, as she asserts, she grew up in that community and will continue to live in it. So, for her, communications needs to address the problems affecting that community in order to create solutions, and not simply to inform people about what is happening.
USAID Interactions: That’s Valid for You, but not for Us

During my first summer in Cauca, I assisted CRIC’s Communications team with a documentary video project. The project came from ACDI/VOCA, a non-profit economic development organization from the United States that works world-wide. They received the grant from USAID. The grant had two goals: to strengthen the indigenous radio/ media network AMCIC (Association for Indigenous Media in Colombia) through communications workshops, and to support a media campaign to reclaim the “good name” of indigenous groups (USAID pamphlet). AMCIC is a network of 12-13 indigenous radio stations in Cauca. Every Thursday, as I began to leave CRIC’s communications office to go home, Dora and Adolfo would begin recording the weekly AMCIC news program. Through the network, each radio station shared a 30 second to one minute clip covering important news in their community. Dora and Adolfo put these clips together into a program that included a section on relevant news at the national and international level as well. One facet of the grant focused on strengthening this network and their collective work. The USAID pamphlet Juan Pedro, a member of ACDI/VOCA, handed to us during a meeting stated the grant sought to improve the way Colombian society viewed indigenous groups. I arrived in the middle of this project, but these points came to my attention during a series of meetings. My first exposure was to the internal discussions among the CRIC communications team about the themes of the media campaign. The terms of the project included a series of radio and television segments, to be aired on national media.

The team, excited to have an opportunity for national media coverage, asked, “what do we want to highlight to the nation?” They wanted the videos to be relevant to indigenous communities, as well as address a national audience. For CRIC, having access to a national media network represents an opportunity to present the topics they think are most important. We
met with the Human Rights program to discuss the most salient issues to highlight in the communities. The discussion focused on issues mainstream media did not cover, or chose to cover from a dominant narrative that ignored indigenous points of view. This project represented an opportunity to show an aspect of indigenous reality otherwise untold. Communications members use the term “visibilizar”, or to make visible, to refer to what they want to emphasize to the public. When Dora and Alfredo say we have to “visibilizar” what is going on, they mean to show the reality of how indigenous communities experience that topic – whether it be encroachment of territory by international mining companies, or the hardships of daily life in a town with a constant military presence. Additionally, to make visible opposes the historical erasure in the public sphere and national history that indigenous communities have experienced.

The team decided to make documentaries about topics that mainstream media had misconstrued, or had covered without addressing indigenous points of view. We created a script and set out to the communities to gather the footage we needed. A few weeks later, we had a meeting with representatives from ACDI/VOCA in the Communications office. The CRIC Communications office is an 8 by 16 room connected to two smaller rooms with glass windows. The middle room has two computers for video editing, and the back room has recording equipment for producing radio programs like the weekly AMCIC program. A large oval table occupies most of the space in the main room, with file cabinets stacked with papers filling the end of the room. We sit around this table with the members of ACDI/VOCA, most have traveled here from Bogotá. I catch some of their names – Juan Pablo and Jimena. Juan Pablo and Jimena both have an urban air about them, they wear airy button ups and jeans. There is a man who must be our direct point of contact, because he comes into the office often. He is about my height, bald, with an easy smile revealing braces. CRIC’s representatives include Jorge Caballero, a non-
After a brief discussion about the trainings and meetings the grant covers to strengthen AMCIC, the regional indigenous media network, Cyril presents the topics of the videos and radios for the other part of the grant, the national media campaign. The video themes include the encroachment of international mining companies on indigenous land without prior consultation (a violation of a constitutional law); looking at causes for why the armed conflict has intensified in certain indigenous communities like Caldono and Morales; and presenting an indigenous perspective on what happened at Cerro Berlin.\(^h\) The military occupied Cerro Berlin, a sacred mountain in Toribió, as a strategic site for attacks against the FARC guerrilla. Nearby indigenous communities had asked them to leave because military presence affected members’ abilities to traverse the territory and positioned the community between the military and guerrilla. When the military refused, some members went up and forced the military to leave their positions. The mainstream media covered this as an incident of indigenous aggression and ignored the context. CRIC wanted to interview community members and present their point of view. I watched the

\(^h\) On July 17, 2012 a number of indigenous guardia (an unarmed indigenous community security force) demanded that military members leave Cerro Berlin, a sacred site for the community. The mass media portrayed the story as violent indigenous people aggressively removing soldiers who were trying to protect them. An official communication from ACIN (an indigenous organization in the north of Cauca, available here: [http://www.pazcondignidad.org/es/trabajandoenred/colombia/973-los-medios-oficiales-se-hacen-eco-de-las-mentiras-de-lo-militares](http://www.pazcondignidad.org/es/trabajandoenred/colombia/973-los-medios-oficiales-se-hacen-eco-de-las-mentiras-de-lo-militares)) details how indigenous groups asked the military to leave by a certain date, and some members of the military left but others did not. Media coverage in La Semana and other mass media outlets never mentioned this and instead portrayed the event as a random act of indigenous people storming a mountain to remove soldiers who were trying to protect them. Videos and photos of the soldiers crying were circulated and general public consensus sided with the soldiers. However, indigenous media makers had video footage of the violence from the riot police the next day and another perspective of the event. Most mainstream media channels did not cover this, nor did they quote indigenous representatives in their stories. The Communications team went to Toribio where this occurred and interviewed members of the guardia and community who had been present. We also collected video footage from the radio station to incorporate in the documentary segment.
faces of the ACDI/VOCA members register concern, mouths drawn, glances flitting between them, signs of objection already on their lips. A woman, whose name I never caught, responded that the grant should highlight positive aspects and she worried the above sounded like denunciations. She wanted to show the cultural richness of the communities. Juan Pablo, another representative, cut in saying we could show, for example, the planes de vida that won UNESCO recognition, or traditional dances and musical acts. He informed us we could include, “There, a leader was killed,” but could not have that as the focus. We had already started filming and every video could be considered a denouncement. Juan, the CRIC videographer, countered, “We want to show what the mass media does not show.” The woman responded, “that is valid for you but not for us.”

This exchange represents a fundamental difference between how CRIC and outside organizations envision the purpose of media. For CRIC, the communications team operates by the “embedded aesthetic” that they are accountable to a larger collective. As such, they judge success based on the ability of their products to produce change, or to improve the situations of the communities. All of the tasks, projects, filming, and products have as their goal to strengthen the organization and indigenous communities. This means highlighting issues or narratives other media channels choose to ignore. After the meeting, we discussed how to transform the footage we had into videos that might fit ACDI/VOCA’s “positive messaging.” Jorge Caballero indignantly interjected, “CRIC is always the loud voice. CRIC doesn’t do pretty things, we are here to make things visible, to denounce.” His reaction underscores that ultimately CRIC’s communications team has a political and moral responsibility. ACDI/VOCA and USAID wanted visual representations that separated culture from politics – showing dance and music without showing the political, economic and social issues those dancers and musicians dealt with in their
daily lives. For CRIC, their social, cultural, political and educational platforms are all connected so producing media products that only show “positive messaging” such as dancing is irresponsible. CRIC’s political positioning requires it to discuss the pressure communities face from international mining companies, the micro-aggressions individuals experience on a daily basis, and other aspects of life as an indigenous person in Colombia.

When we recounted the exchange to Adolfo, a member of the communications team who missed the meeting, he replied that these outsiders wanted to “folklorize” indigenous people instead of representing their political and cultural lives.

A Public Policy for Indigenous Communications

La comunicación indígena puede verse desde varias perspectivas. Como una estrategia para fortalecer la cultura y la identidad; como un proceso de construcción de la resistencia indígena frente los embates de la globalización; como un espacio de construcción de nuevos escenarios de desarrollo y vida de los pueblos indígenas; como un mecanismo para favorecer la interculturalidad; como un poder, y como el ejercicio de un derecho público. Ninguna de estas perspectivas debe ser evitada por el ejercicio de las demás, sino practicarse desde un enfoque de totalidad, según lo requieran las diversas situaciones que viven los pueblos indígenas y de acuerdo con las realidades específicas donde la comunicación indígena se hace presente.

Franco Gabriel Hernández

Política de comunicación indígena, características y compromisos.

2012: Año Internacional de la Comunicación Indígena

As Hernández mentions, indigenous people see media and communications as a political right. In the past ten years, CRIC has made various agreements with the government that led to decrees to realize these rights. For example indigenous communities in Colombia have debated
and constructed a proposal for a public policy for indigenous communication. They worked on it for many years and the final proposal, released in May 2014, cites in the first sentence the legal agreement, “convenio 547 of 2013” between the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC) and the Ministry of Information and Communications Technologies (MINTICs). Throughout the meetings I attended in 2013, people constantly referred to these legal and juridical marks by their numbers (auto ley 4, ley 1450, etc). The indigenous movement adopted legal frameworks as key instruments to call on the government to fulfill its duties and to push for fulfillment of their rights.

Some academics cite media access as a way to give marginalized populations a ‘voice’. Digging deeper, Jethro Pettit argues media access can “work to redefine dominant social and cultural norms, and boundaries of power that marginalise and exclude. By having access to their own forms of media and communication, people can actually define, claim, and give meaning to their citizenship, and re-create the social and political openings and alternative spaces where their voices might be heard” (2009, 445). By creating a distinct public policy, indigenous groups push for access to Western forms of media and for society to value indigenous forms of communication. Through the public policy, media makers hope to actively redefine, claim and give meaning to indigenous communication within the Colombian nation. Salazar (2010) borrows the term ethnic citizenship from Guillermo de la Peña (1995) to reference indigenous people asking for participation in the nation as Mapuches (Chile), or in Colombia’s case, as Nasa and Guambianos. For indigenous people, equal rights would mean negating their distinction as indigenous. They want rights as citizens that recognize them simultaneously as Nasa, or Guambiano, and Colombian. This thinking extends to communication. They want access to the resources other citizens have, in addition to State recognition of their own forms of
communication. The public policy is a conscious attempt at cultural reproduction and renovation of modes of tradition that are weaker than appropriated modes of communication.

It is July 5, 2013. I have been in Popayán a total of five days, and I have spent those days waiting to discuss the terms and goals of my internship with a member of the communications team. Finally, Vicente, the communications director, tells me to come to a meeting with indigenous communication organizations and the government. I go to the wrong address and search through every room at the courthouse for a familiar face before my host calls me to ask where I have gone. I left home before him and he just arrived at the meeting.

When I arrived in the right place, I entered a long room, everyone backlit by the windows on the opposite side of the doorway. The lights in the room, if on, were very dim. Vilma, an indigenous communicator and self described “laptop guerrillera” stood in front of the thirty or so white and brown faces sitting around the table. Large plastic frames sit on her nose, fashionable amongst my peers, and her long smooth black hair is pulled back into a ponytail revealing earrings that might be handmade by her or a friend. She has cut the neck off of the bright orange shirt she wears, a logo visible but indecipherable just inside her black cardigan. She wears a beaded necklace that has orange yellow and green beads in a sunburst design. Many indigenous people make these necklaces and bracelets with designs that reference indigenous symbols, myths and thought. I slip into a schoolhouse style desk on the side of the room next to my host. Vilma continues her speech,

We are not talking about communication programs like we were ten years ago. No. We are talking about tejidos de comunicación, we are talking about communication spirals, we are talking about a quantity of concepts that identify us and that reveal Mother Earth. This is another part of the way we conceive of our communication.
The public policy proposal has a section demanding resources for Western forms of communication, such as strengthening indigenous radio stations and access to television programming. But, indigenous representatives, like Vilma, passionately clarify they want more than just government programs. For them, programs depend on money and exist for a defined period of time; a program has a beginning and an end date. Spirals and *tejidos* refer to indigenous concepts outside of Western ideas of time and space. *Tejido* represents a woven piece of fabric, used to describe the interweaving of various threads, both actual threads and metaphorical threads representing different aspects of life or community. Furthermore, through this process indigenous groups want to strengthen their concepts of communication as relating to mother earth. This translates into six policy lines or topics to be worked out:

1. cosmovision – redefining the notion of indigenous communication based on a consensus from the cosmovisions of all indigenous groups in Colombia in order to signify that indigenous forms of communication are equal in the national perspective to dominant forms
2. gathering proposals and problems from the communications collectives at the local level
3. indigenous movement – figuring out their internal policy and political stance to present to the government
4. Legal instruments like laws and decrees to solidify agreements with the government and other legal institutions
5. To connect their communication to the needs of others occupying the same lands, like peasants and Afro-Colombians; to make sure that the communication they are advocating for can defend all of the sons and daughters of mother earth
6. What a communications policy looks in resistance to the dominant model – like the free trade agreement

Vilma presents the above as topics communications groups need to discuss strategically to produce concrete proposals for inclusion in the public policy. Thematically, her lines of
discussion highlights that communications represent an arena for political and cultural reproduction. On another level, it represents concepts and conversations indigenous communities will have to undertake. Throughout these discussions, I wonder often about the next phase, after a policy creation, how will these policies play out locally? How will a legal policy strengthening indigenous forms of spiritual communication translate into something Western legislation can communicate and legally uphold? Or, perhaps it will translate into other discourses, like environmentalism.

**Conclusion**

Ultimately, from their first newspaper to their multi-platform communications strategy today, CRIC has adopted outside technologies as tools. They have appropriated these tools in ways that reflect their cultural, political and social goals. Strategically, communication has been tied to promoting communities’ *planes de vida*, holistic social, cultural and economic development plans. CRIC uses ICTs as an organizational tool, a means to an end. Although, ICTs do function as an ends in some cases to disseminate news and information, CRIC stresses that indigenous media makers should always approach ICTs as tools to promote, publicize and envision a cultural future for indigenous peoples in Cauca. ICTs are powerful tools of representation and through these tools, media makers draw on indigenous bodies of knowledge and thought to transform cultural identities. This transformation allows them to not only survive, but to envision a future situated in their own cosmovision, distinct but in parallel with the rest of the Colombian nation.
Bueno, mi historia en comunicación, pues, fue a través del colegio. En el colegio, hay un profesor donde él llegó a enseñar lo que es el español, la material español. Entonces, pues, él ahí notaba que los estudiantes eran, por ejemplo, en leer tenían dificultades, para escribir tenían dificultades, para... O sea, en la ortografía, en la redacción, a la hora de hacer una exposición, eran muy tímidos. Entonces, esa palabra "timidez" fue la que nos llevó a que creáramos una pequeña emisora allá en la institución. Entonces, de eso pues nosotros hemos ido así grabando, sacando fotografías de reuniones, congresos, de así, de fogatas que se hacen reuniones con los mayores en la comunidad.
Pues bueno, a mi me gustó lo que era la comunicación porque en los pueblos indígenas nosotros decimos que comunicación no es ir a coger un micrófono, a estar ahí sentados, sino que comunicación es todo. Es, o sea, es mejor dicho, todo porque con la comunicación no seríamos nada. O sea, si uno no se comunica de una persona a otra, pues no sería nada, o con los animales.

—ChrisDayana

Luis Enrique Rosero came to the Chimborazo Educational Institute to teach Spanish, and he noticed his students, mostly indigenous, struggled with reading and writing. Oral forms of communication have carried more importance in indigenous cultures, and many people have commented to me that visual media are more popular because communities, in general, do not like to read. Luis noted his students seemed disengaged from the Spanish materials, the majority of these texts depicted non-indigenous characters in contexts different from daily life in Chimborazo. He wondered, “is it possible to motivate students to read using texts where the protagonists are the elders of their resguardo, their own family members, and acquaintances?”
He decided to find out. He asked the students to write mini-books featuring themselves and the members of their community as the protagonists, set in the school or the community.

Students wanted to read these books and hear stories about themselves and people they knew. Luis is hazy on how they transitioned from mini-books to radio, but he and a group of students present it as an organic evolution. In some ways, Luis and the students have “invented” indigenous radio. Eric Michaels’ titled his report on Warlpiri use of television as “The Aboriginal Invention of Television in Central Australia” (1986). Michaels used the word invention to argue that the ways in which Aboriginals appropriated television into their cultural repertoire invented new social meanings and uses. Likewise, in the next few pages I explore how this experimental educational radio station promoted cultural renovation and reproduction based on traditional notions of culture, as well as helped create articulate, critical students.

Clemencia Rodriguez’s (2011) research on citizens’ media in conflict zones in Colombia provides another framework through which to view this radio experiment. Rodriguez discusses the performativity of radio outside the recording cabin. She gives multiple examples of how citizens’ media projects break through the airwaves to embody physical practices within the communities. In one case, Radio Andaquí decided to have a Christmas decorating contest in their community. Instead of judging individual houses on their decorations, the station decided to judge the competition by blocks (Rodriguez 2011, 65). The presence of the armed conflict in the community had caused people to avoid public spaces and be wary about interacting with neighbors. During the competition, Radio Andaquí attached a radio to a bicycle and biked around the neighborhood to encourage people to check out the other blocks and interact with one another. In this way, the radio became performance. The station produced a shift in community interactions, if only for a day. It represents an example of how media makers interact with the
community outside of the radio cabin. In a similar fashion, I examine how through radio, Luis and his students change cultural patterns and practices outside of the recording cabin. Radio becomes a tool, a means to an end, to transform cultural practices and strengthen community interaction.

Radio Identidad’s beginnings

Yo creo que fui de las primeras, fuimos como siete, con mi compañera Lucila, ella fue la primera y luego la seguimos con mi otra compañera Gina y vinculamos, con la instrucción del profesor Luis. Y pues como a él le surgió la idea de tener una emisora, pero primero empecemos con una altoparlante, bueno [¿hace cuantos años?] creo que fue un año con los altoparlantes. Después del 2011 gestionamos para que ahora sí por el radio transmitir, comprar un transmisor. Bueno entonces ahí ya empezamos, ahí ya nos vinculamos.

– Majeli

*Radio Identidad* started humbly as a small group of students and a loudspeaker. Ana Lucila, one of the first participants, remembers in the beginning they broadcast notes and greetings through the loudspeakers during lunch and before school. Students came by with notes to read or to say hi over the speaker to someone else in the school. The students reacted with excitement to hear their messages or their names over the speakers. Many of them listened to radios in their homes but rarely heard their own voices on air. Interest piqued and students became more involved. Soon, Ana Lucila found herself spending hours after school recording and editing radio programs. Creating a program takes a long time and involves research, interviews, a script, recording and editing. Students had little technical training but shared what knowledge they had with each other and learned by doing. Members of the local station in Morales, *Nuestra Voz*
Estereo, collaborated to share skills. After a year or so, Luis had someone affix larger loudspeakers to a pole so the community surrounding the school could hear the broadcast.

A year later, Luis and the students negotiated funds for a transmitter and began broadcasting via radio. They had limited programming, but it connected the students to a wider audience. The community gained a radio station that focused on educational programming. The radio producers from Nuestra Voz Estereo continued to train the students to edit programs and create professional products. Some of the members of Nuestra Voz Estereo had completed certificates in technical audio courses and had worked at the station for many years.

Radio Identidad positioned itself as an educational station and differentiated its project from stations like Nuestra Voz Estereo. Majeli explains,

Nos organizamos con profesor Luis ya le comentamos al rector que vamos a hacer una emisora pedagógica que era diferente que las otras emisoras que ya tenían y así iniciamos, Entonces ahora que ya tenemos cupos a la universidad, a la UAIIN (Universidad Autónoma Indígena Intercultural), entonces ya seguimos con diferentes procesos, así con la comunidad, pues ahí la parrilla de programación estamos ahí fortaleciendo, caminando la palabra como se dice.

Radio Identidad differentiates itself as focusing on collaborating with the community and producing cultural products. In other meetings, I heard Nuestra Voz Estereo members complain that one of their toughest challenges is the heterogeneity of Morales. Morales is a large municipality, one of the largest in Cauca and includes indigenous people, peasants and afro-descendants. To compete with other regional stations and cater to the municipality, Nuestra Voz Estereo has to appease this heterogeneous audience. If they focused on programs in Nasa Yuwe, they would lose part of their listenership. In contrast, Chimborazo has a majority indigenous
population and is a much smaller community. Students can more easily work with the community to create programs of interest; furthermore, the station has limited programming so they can spend more time making each program without worrying about filling a day of airtime.

I ask Majeli what she means by “caminando la palabra,” a phrase tossed around often in communications circles.

¿Caminando la palabra? pues se dicen los mayores, bueno pues mi concepto es como seguir, o sea no seguirte lo que hacían los antepasados, si no es como una instrucción para uno seguir el proyecto que uno tiene. Eso es caminar la palabra, o sea con las instrucciones de los mayores bueno tal cosa, o sea no perder la identidad. [caminando la palabra es como tejer la comunicación y la identidad] eso, recuperar, fortalecer, ir reconstruyendo. [¿y cómo lo hace por la comunicación?] bueno, es la comunicación, pues con caminando la palabra esto, o sea bueno ir a los conversatorios con los mayores, o sea interactuarnos con los jóvenes, o sea con la comunidad también y allí y ya o sea entrevistar a las personas que llegan de afuera, a los docentes.

Caminando translates as ‘walking’ and la palabra as ‘the word’; put together it could mean “walking the word.” Palabra is also used to refer to Nasa Yuwe, considered the basis for culture and cosmovision. In this way, it refers to a larger subset of social rules transmitted in the memories and knowledge of the elders. In indigenous communities, elders symbolize guardians of wisdom. Mabel, another young communicator from a different community, once explained to me that there exists a connection between the youth and the elders. The elders have worked hard during their lives to sustain and strengthen the indigenous movement; now, the youth have to take up the struggle in their wake. To do this, the youth need to consider the instructions from the elders as guides to inform their decisions.
Mayeli teases out this interpretation and corrects herself that it doesn’t refer to walking in the sense of following those who came before her. It refers to a set of instructions, or guidelines of how one should continue into the future consciously referring to the past. Perhaps the idea of walking expands to mean how one spends one’s time, how one is living one’s life. Drawing back to an earlier discussion in the introduction, Majeli’s flexible interpretation of the instructions as guidelines reflects the argument that indigenous people renegotiate and reproduce culture in response to their post-colonial environment (Michaels 1994; Turner 1979). Hinkson argues for the Warlpiri in Australia, radio offers a tool “for reproducing the defining values and subjectivities of a contemporary” indigenous community “within the complex conditions of a postcolonial” nation (as quoted in Bessire and Fisher 2012, 26). For Majeli, honoring the past means strengthening her identity as Nasa, and pursuing projects from the Nasa point of view and thought.

**Bringing Radio out of the Station**

In Luis’s 2014 proposal requesting funds to support the station, he describes the station as an educational tool to motivate students and strengthen reading and writing skills within the agenda of indigenous community education. Aside from passing along messages on the radio, students create content-based programs to broadcast. To produce the programs, students interview other each other, teachers and members of the community about various themes, the latter generated with Luis’ help. Students undertake outside research and reading in order to generate information for the program. Diana, a young media maker in another collective, recounted that before her involvement in ACIN, she did not read. Upon entering ACIN, the collective tasked her with reading before she learned any technical aspects of radio. These
communication spaces act as centers for education and call on media makers to be well informed. By requiring students to do interviews for the school radio station, Luis has students work on critical thinking and inter-personal skills. Producing radio programs requires many skills outside of technical knowledge, and these skills, being able to communicate effectively, read and comprehend, be knowledgeable about current issues, think critical create good citizens and organizational leaders.

Furthermore, Luis chooses topics that require students to interact with the community, learn about indigenous culture and revitalize waning traditional practices. The first project focused on oral histories with the elders. As Jorge Luis Campos, the youth coordinator for the region, lamented to me,

...desconocemos muchas cosas quizás los mayores lo saben pero como hoy se ha perdido ese proceso de comunicación, donde antes los mayores lo hacían. Por ejemplo, uno podría entender que el reunirse por ejemplo en la casa, en familia, y más cuando lo hacían alrededor del fogón y todo eso, tiene unas riquezas muy importantes.

Jorge, and others, mention that many elders pass away without sharing their knowledge and memory. In indigenous communities, elders represent the “guardians of wisdom” (Rosero 4). Jorge blames the degradation of traditional family structures for this phenomenon. He says people want their own houses instead of living with their elders, and they move to cities. Indigenous communities lose these areas of communication where elders used to pass on knowledge. Specifically, Jorge laments the loss of the hearth (fogón). The hearth represents a physical and conceptual space in Nasa culture where elders transfer cultural knowledge to youth. Jorge calls it the heart of the Nasa people and says,
El fogón ya no está como antes, o sea el fogón en el suelo como antes hoy ya no, ya está en las hornillas y todo eso entonces ya no hay ese conversatorio [la gente no esta...] no está en ese espacio de conversar y de comunicarse. Por eso cuando por ejemplo se habla del tema de comunicación, y a veces se habla que era a través del fogón por ejemplo y uno ahí encontraría que por ejemplo sentarse alrededor del fogón uno quería mantener la historia, o sea la memoria. Si el abuelo que le contó [10:20] al abuelito que hoy está contando, o sea que hace unos 60 años todavía está viva ahí, 60 años y quiere decir que ese abuelo que le está contando a los nietos que tienen por ahí diez, entonces esa historia va a transcender otros cuantos años, pero si hoy no se da, esos abuelitos que hoy la saben, ellos se van y ahí terminó la historia. Entonces por qué nosotros decimos que es tan importante rescatar esos procesos, pero para eso toca hacer un proceso de sensibilización de que entendamos porque es importante la cultura.

Jorge explains sitting around the hearth allows grandparents to pass on their memories to the next generations. For indigenous people, time and history exist as spirals connecting past, present and future generations. To ensure the future, the children of the present must be in touch with the memories of the past. In this way, history is not linear. The indigenous movement has consciously revitalized the hearth as a cultural symbol. In her book Intercultural Utopias, Joanne Rappaport discusses how the tul, the house garden, became a consciously deployed “vehic[l[e] for cultural revitalization” within schools (2005, 142). Luis made attempts to revive, or recreate, the gathering around the fogón, with a technological twist.

He sent students into the community to interview every elder. The interviewing process connects elders and youth, which strengthens the sense of community and revitalizes spaces for them to interact with each other. When people share histories, they become linked. As students learn histories of community elders, they learn a section of history schools do not teach. Students become connected to an indigenous past, which is culturally important for the future. After the
interviews, Luis organized a gathering with all of the students and elders around the fogón to reproduce the traditional mode of cultural transmission.

How does Luis’ reproduction alter this traditional cultural representation? In the Warlpiri community in Australia, Michaels (1994) observed the Warlpiri recuperated a series of dances that had been lost or put away for a period of time. He observed that the process of reproducing these dances led to changes in the dances, but people accepted them as “authentic.” Authenticity is not tied to a static reproduction, but what changes with these small transformations? When Luis gathers elders and youth around the fogón to record it, how does this change this tradition? Students used their interviews to create a series of radio programs and simple books in Nasa Yuwe. The use of technology to mediate the gathering leads to a series of questions. What does it mean for elders’ oral stories to be recorded? Is this a one-time event, a performance? Will students interview elders on a regular basis? Alternately, the process simply revitalizes the tradition of sitting around the hearth once, to record it for all eternity via a tape recorder. Does this recording then replace the need for youth exchanging memories with elders? Or, like Faye Ginsburg argues for Inuit video, does it become transformed and indigenized as a new mode of memory keeping for the community?

Students had to engage with their community via interviews and visits in order to gather the information necessary to create an interesting radio program. While many journalists leave the office for interviews and to investigate stories, for indigenous people, traversing the territory is to traverse memory. For example, Maria Teresa Findji (1991) researched mapas parlantes, picture maps that communally construct histories based on geographic locations, in Nasa and Guambiano communities. When she visited the elders in these communities, they almost always invited her to traverse the resguardo
and the elders would recite from memory the history of the land titles (Ibid, 128). The land became a medium for storing memory and traversing the land with an elder unlocked these memories. Thus, traveling around the resguardo, and visiting sacred locations represents a conscious reproduction of culture and transmission of knowledge, another form of communication. Luis consciously reconstructs this aspect through his programmatic content for the radio station, a good example of what it means to “caminar la palabra”. Luis’ radio curriculum requires students to leave the station to do interviews. Furthermore, he takes students to cover organizational events from political gatherings to cultural rituals, and they traverse the territory in this way.

Involvement in these processes creates students who are more politically aware and connected to their community as indigenous identities. During our interview in a recording cabin at Nuestra Voz Estereo, I inquire how and if involvement in the radio station has changed KrissDayana personally:

Bueno pues, antes, o sea, cuando estábamos en el colegio, nosotros sólo éramos del colegio a casa y de casa a colegio. Entonces pues, eso era. O sea, nosotros estábamos como digamos en un encierro que no sabíamos nada. Pero uno, por medio de esto, de esta comunicación, de estos medios apropiados, uno se ha ido dando cuenta de verdad cómo va la comunidad, qué le falta, en qué han avanzado, porque si uno pues, por ejemplo, personalmente cuando estaba en el colegio no sabía, por ejemplo, qué proyectos habían en la comunidad o qué...o porque estábamos en esa comunidad. Entonces pues, gracias a la emisora y al profesor que nosotros hemos ido siguiendo, pues personalmente a mí me ha ayudado mucho. Ya uno, ya no piensa como en uno sólo, sino como en todo la comunidad, como que yo no soy sola y mi familia, sino que yo soy la comunidad también.
Rodriguez and El Gazi suggest that when someone like Chris Dayana begins to produce media, she moves from a consumer to a producer. This change “opens opportunity for indigenous people to find their own ways of appropriating information and communication technologies, and to learn to use them to strengthen their own articulations of reality” (454). Her involvement in the radio station has changed how Chris Dayana’s makes sense of her reality within a larger context. She claims before she remained unaware of the larger social and political context within which she and her community existed. She paints herself as ignorant of the community’s problems and projects. As a producer of media, Chris Dayana becomes aware of the community’s issues. Practices associated with producing radio, like attending events, talking to community members and reporting on important issues, expose Chris Dayana to her community. In order to put together a radio program, she has to make choices about what she wants to represent and how she wants to represent it. This symbolizes taking control of articulating her reality. To use tools of representation, one has to create a narrative and give meaning to objects and events. Her involvement in the station has connected her to identity not as an individual, nor even simply as her family, but as the community. Her words represents a key political teaching from CRIC and illustrate how communication spaces and media practices enforce certain political ways of being.

**Comunicación Propia**

Earlier, I proposed a translation of *comunicación propia*, as including all the ways indigenous people might communicate, including traditional forms via the hearth, family, public meetings, oral traditions, and signs from nature and other beings. UAIIN’s undergraduate program is in *Comunicación Propia Intercultural*. Every time I talked to someone about communications and ICTs, they mentioned the importance of *comunicación propia* alongside
appropriation of ICTs. Can technology and media recuperate and strengthen this historical form of communication focused on an architectural space and face-to-face interaction? This section explores some ways indigenous media makers think of comunicación propia and how this concept plays out in their use of ICTs.

Indigenous people have been communicating to one another, and with earth and nature for hundreds of years. ChrisDayana, who is enrolled in UAIIN’s undergraduate program in intercultural comunicación propia, recounts,

nosotros también decimos que en la parte de la cosmovisión, que el medio ambiente, la naturaleza, o sea que la persona con la naturaleza también hace comunicación. Por ejemplo, a veces aparece el arco con una poquita de lluvia, y sale al mismo el sol y dice, “A va a ver un muerto.” Entonces nos esta indicando eso. Entonces, ya sabemos, o cuando chilla un pájaro por allí dice, “Ah se murió” o “hay un muerto” o “va a ver un muerto.” Entonces también es comunicarse, es a través de la naturaleza, mejor dicho, como decimos: en todo hay comunicación.

Indigenous peoples have a connection to the land constructed through cultural renovation and reproduction; additionally, they have consciously linked to transnational environmental discourses (Nash 2001). Astrid Ulloa argues that indigenous people in Colombia have changed from “savage colonial subject” to “political-ecological agent”, or “ecological natives” (Ulloa 2005, 1). ChrisDayana explains how non-ICT forms of communication include listening to signs from nature and interpreting these based on a cultural repertoire, perhaps passed on via the family or via participation in the movement and indigenous spaces.

In my interviews and discussions, I tried to probe the connection between these ethereal forms of communication and more tangible forms, like Facebook, taking photos or making videos. During an interview, I commented to Leonardo, another communications student
involved in Jambaló’s radio station, that he had told me he liked communications, but he had not divulged why. He proceeded to say,

No sé, es como me gusta porque yo veo que la comunicación no solamente era estar allá frente a unos micrófonos, frente a la consola, sino que la comunicación, uno la hacía desde la comunidad, desde las bases, desde la familia. Entonces, por eso me gustó la comunicación y pues creo que ese es, como mi función también de seguir trabajando y es motivo por el cual yo me encuentro muy contento, muy satisfecho de hacer parte de un programa de comunicación de nuestro territorio.

Leonardo highlights that communication, even as a radio producer, exists outside of the recording cabin. He highlights the connection to the community. Many media makers told me that sitting in a recording studio or in front of a microphone was not the only form of communication, communication had to come from the community. In many cases though, creating radio programs is solitary and involves spending time away from the community. A radio producer in Morales once commented that creating radio programs was like a woman’s job making dinner – one spends hours making something that someone consumes in thirty minutes. I watched ChrisDayana and Jenni spend six hours recording a ten-minute radio program for Radio Identidad, and I did not arrive at the beginning nor see the editing process. It takes a lot of time to create quality programming. If a media maker wants to include voices from the community, they have to spend time traveling to interview community members. I did this with CRIC’s communications team, but CRIC’s communications team generally has more resources than local individual radio stations. Often, media makers enjoy the process and do the work for a larger reason – like Leonardo feeling an attachment to his community and that working for the radio station is a fulfillment of his duty in his community.
Curious, I asked Leonardo how he brings this ancestral part of communication to his work at the station. He responds that station members are very aware that communication has a spiritual component. Communication includes signals from nature, dreams and interpreting signs from the environment. Leonardo tries to incorporate this belief in his radio programs by talking to traditional doctors and elders, and including educational messages to take care of mother earth, the water, and the forests. Through these processes, he tries to “ir concientizando la misma comunidad de proteger el medio ambiente.” For Leonardo, respecting ancestral communication means acknowledging it in his life outside of the radio and listening to the signs from different parts of the cosmos – dreams, mother nature, other worldly beings. He uses the radio as a medium through which to transmit discussions with elders and messages about taking care of the environment so they can continue to practice ancestral communication.

Perhaps it is similar to the process Eric Michael’s (1994) described. When he went to shoot a video with a Warlpiri member, twenty seven Warlpiri came to the set. Most did not partake in filming nor acting, but their presence was necessary to lend credibility to the film – Warlpiri culture requires certain types of inter-personal relationships to be present during cultural reproduction (1994). The film did not divulge this presence to the audience – they assumed the required rituals had occured. Likewise perhaps the spiritual connection and communication between the media maker and other beings cannot be transmitted through their radio program, but the off-line connection gives them credibility in their community.

For the people I talked to, communication existed on two planes. One through appropriated tools like ICTs, and second, as an ethereal thing that permeated the universe. Similar to indigenous concepts of time and history which represent a spiral more than a line, indigenous communication can be challenging for Western perceptions and descriptive words.
However, the examples above illustrate creative ways indigenous media makers put these two planes in dialogue with one another.

Media makers have appropriated ICTs within their own cultural frameworks. They highlight, as noted above, the importance of bringing their holistic understanding of communications to the work they do on the radio. For media makers like Alex or Leonardo, their work as communicators begins with the communities, not in the recording cabin. This viewpoint, reiterated in Luis’ project as well, allows communications to become a medium for cultural revitalization and reproduction.
CONCLUSION

Language becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with her own intention, her own accent, when she appropriates the world, adapting it to her own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language…but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions…Expropriating, forcing it to submit to one’s own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process.

– Mickhail M. Bakhtin
as cited in Narayan 1997, 2

ICTs, as a symbolic and representational tool, count as a form of language and expression. For the media makers I encountered in Cauca, their communications programs represent processes of appropriating this language and adapting it to fit their own expressive needs and reflect their distinct ways of thinking. One sunny afternoon during a lunch break from class, Nixon introduced me to two young students in the program to interview, Diana and Alex. Alex had gelled spikey hair and wore a choker around his neck. Diana had long, straight black hair, dimples when she smiled, which was often, and an air of softness that belied her serious approach to her work. They both worked at the Tejido de Comunicacion, the Association of Northern Cauca’s Indigenous Cabildos (ACIN) communications program. When I ask Alex his experience in communication, he starts to tell me about what he has done. Suddenly, he stops and interrupts himself to say that first he must start with, “why tejido de comunicacion?”

In the Nasa community, tejido refers to a material made from knitting or crocheting, and usually to the mochila or bag that most indigenous members (and many Colombians) have slung around their shoulders. Alex explains that the old indigenous women knit and make these
mochilas and it is understood to be a form of communication. The women incorporate different designs into their knitting to convey messages. He adds that for him and ACIN, as a communications collective, they call themselves *tejido* because they are interpreting. By this, he equates the act of interpreting to that of knitting – taking information (yarn or material), using tools of analysis (hooks) and creating something useful (mochila). In his metaphor, the threads include the indigenous guard, the community itself, the territory, the professors and others. The indigenous guard is an unarmed civil force that serves to provide security in *resguardo*. Alex equates the professors, other radio stations at the national and international level with the hooks or tools used to make this fabric. He adds, “When you are knitting a mochila, you want to make sure that it is strong, that the threads are pulled tight and there are no holes.” The holes, Alex continues, are the problems the community has, and the communications *tejido*’s role involves finding these problems and helping to fix them so the *mochila* remains well woven and strong.

Alex uses a metaphor tying a strong cultural identification symbol (knitting and the mochila) to the process of using radio and ICTs. He integrates what communication means outside of the technical aspect to formulate what his role in his community is as a media maker and how or for what he should utilize radio and ICTs.

Alex’s metaphor represents his appropriation of this outside language. He has taken ICTs and reimagined them within Nasa thought. Furthermore, he applies this in a very Nasa and CRIC way, to address issues in the communities and produce solutions to improve life as indigenous members of Colombian society. While I saw this metaphor in other documents as well, indicating it might be a part of organization rhetoric taught during communications trainings, Alex organically reproduced it with his own interpretation. Ultimately, Alex, Diana, Leonardo, Mabel, ChrisDayana, and other young communicators appropriate ICTs to mediate
between outside technology and indigenous thought in order to create a cultural future for
themselves and generations to come.
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