

Mediation and Protest Movements

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Chapter 5

Transmedia mobilization in the Popular Association of the Oaxacan Peoples, Los Angeles

Sasha Costanza-Chock

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Introduction

Social movements are more effective when they adopt what I call *transmedia mobilization* strategies as a means to challenge symbolic power in complex media environments. As pointed out in the introduction to this volume, social movements increasingly appropriate new communication tools as they struggle for visibility. Transmedia mobilization involves engaging the social base of a movement in participatory media making practices across multiple platforms. Rich media texts produced through participatory practices can be pushed into wider circulation to produce multimodal narratives that reach and involve diverse audiences, strengthening cultural, mobilization and policy outcomes. While some ad hoc social movement formations are already engaged in transmedia mobilization, most traditional social movement organizations deem it too risky. In part this is because transmedia mobilization requires opening up communicative practices to diverse voices rather than relying primarily on experienced movement leaders or communications professionals to frame narratives by speaking to print and broadcast reporters during press conferences. However, as the media opportunity structure (Sampedro, 1997; Gamson, 1998; Ferree, 2002) is transformed by diverse transnational broadcast channels, increasingly visible 'ethnic media' (Cottle, 2000) and the steady growth of read/write digital literacies, effective transmedia organizers are learning to shift from speaking *for* to speaking *with* social movements. Transmedia organizers operate from locations within both formal social movement organizations and social movement networks or ad hoc movement formations.

Transmedia mobilization thus marks a transition in the role of movement communicators from content creation to aggregation, curation, remixing and circulation of rich media texts. Those social movement actors that embrace decentralization of the movement voice can reap great rewards, while those that attempt to maintain top-down control risk losing credibility.

To support these arguments, I draw on interviews with actors in the immigrant rights movement in Los Angeles conducted between 2006 and 2009, focusing on a case study of daily movement media practices within the *Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales* (Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations – FIOB) during the translocal protests of the *Asociación Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca, Los Angeles* (The Popular Association of the Oaxacan Peoples, Los Angeles – APPO-LA). APPO-LA emerged in solidarity with a wave of popular rebellion in the Mexican state of Oaxaca during 2006. At the time, I was

conducting semi-structured interviews with 30 actors from this and other immigrant rights movement formations, across a range of age, gender, class and social locations. Interviewees included community organizers, journalists, day labourers, domestic workers, students, independent media makers, funders and mobilization participants. This research is informed also by my experience from an ongoing series of hands-on digital media workshops with low-wage immigrant workers, held between 2005 and 2010, and from information gleaned from the movement media archives I collected. This material formed the basis for my doctoral dissertation (Costanza-Chock, 2010), which explored the concepts presented here in more depth.

Transmedia mobilization: theoretical framework

Before engaging with the case study, I will briefly discuss three key theoretical terms: *social movement formation*, *media opportunity structure* and *transmedia mobilization*.

Social movement formation

I use the term *social movement formation* to refer to any set of actors engaged in a shared process of collective action. A movement formation may be composed of various kinds of actors, including (but not limited to) individuals, informal collectives, non-profit organizations, projects, formal networks, ad hoc networks and political parties. In the present context, the concept is akin to the idea of a mesomobilization organization (Gerhards and Rucht, 1992; Roth, 2003), since it describes a linkage between multiple movement actors. However, a social movement formation is not necessarily a formal organization, it may be ad hoc and temporary in nature, and it is not always organized around a discrete mobilization. Movement formations also often include a range of actors largely ignored by social movement scholars: those focused on the creation and circulation of communications about the movement, including everyday people who document and share information on mobilizations, bloggers, professional journalists, newscasters and show hosts, independent and community media makers, filmmakers and many others.

Media opportunity structure

Sydney Tarrow (1998: 18) defines the political opportunity structure as ‘consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national – dimensions of the political environment which either encourage or discourage people from using collective action.’ Tarrow and other social movement scholars argue that the key factors that alter the political opportunity structure are changes in ruling coalitions, the presence of powerful allies and splits among elites (McAdam, 1982; Klandermans, 1990; Tarrow, 1998). Movement actors can exploit shifts in these factors

in order to help build new social movements. Building on this approach, Sampedro (1997) raises the idea of a media opportunity structure, although he does not propose a definition. In an analysis of 25 years of anti-military draft campaigns in Spain, Sampedro finds that the mass media may provide a 'space of representation' (Melucci, 1996) for new demands. However, he also finds that this space is defined mostly by elites, except in the initial moments of spectacular protests when the movement is able to use the mass media to broaden the boundaries of elite disagreement. Gamson (1998: 63) extends this idea to the study of the cultural impact of social movements, and defines the media opportunity structure as 'the linkage between the mass media subsystem and the various carriers of symbolic interests'. Myra Marx Ferree (2002) refers to the media opportunity structure within a comparative analysis of the discursive opportunity structure for abortion rights activists in Germany and the United States, and finds that abortion rights activists in the latter have more access to framing and standing in the US mass media than do German activists in the German mass media. However, the rapid transformation of communication technologies and practices requires us to question these understandings of the media opportunity structure since, for the most part, they are synonymous with the ability of social movement actors to achieve visibility in the mass media (usually elite newspapers and broadcast television). Contemporary social movements have access to a wide range of media outlets, platforms and channels. Against a static reading of media (or discursive) opportunity structures that shifts the focus away from the agency of social movement participants, in this chapter I highlight the agency of social movement actors in seizing digital media tools and practices and appropriating them to achieve their ends. In this way, movement participants take part in the transformation of the media opportunity structure by exerting horizontal pressure on information flows that previously were organized vertically to reflect the interests of the most powerful class of actors.

Transmedia mobilization

Transmedia mobilization is a mash-up of the concept of *transmedia storytelling*, popularized by the media scholar Henry Jenkins (2003), and ideas from social movement studies about the ways that social movements use networked communication to support mobilization efforts. Marsha Kinder (1991) developed the term *transmedia intertextuality* to discuss the flow of branded and gendered commodities across television, films and children's toys. Henry Jenkins reworked the concept for an era of horizontally integrated transnational media conglomerates, and defines transmedia storytelling as

[A] process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story [...].

(Jenkins, 2003: n.p.)

Jenkins goes on to articulate the key points of transmedia storytelling in the context of a converged media system. Transmedia storytelling is used by media conglomerates to distribute their franchises across platforms; it involves 'world building' rather than closed plots and individual characters; it involves multiple entry points for varied audience segments; it requires co-creation and collaboration by different divisions of a company; it provides roles for readers to take on in their daily lives; it is open to participation by fans; and it is 'the ideal aesthetic form for an era of collective intelligence' (Jenkins, 2003: n.p.).

Lina Srivastava (2009) proposed that activists and media artists might apply the ideas of transmedia storytelling to social change, through what she termed transmedia activism: 'There is a real and distinct opportunity for activists to influence action and raise cause awareness by distributing content through a multiplatform approach, particularly in which people participate in media creation.' To build on this proposal, extend it from the media arts context to a community organizing context, and to reframe it through social movement theory, I suggest *transmedia mobilization*. The term can be defined as the process whereby a social movement narrative is dispersed systematically across multiple media platforms, creating a distributed and participatory social movement 'world', with multiple entry points for organizing, for the purpose of strengthening movement identity and outcomes.

I argue that transmedia mobilization is a critical strategic tool for networked social movements to circulate their ideas, narratives and frames across platforms; it involves consciousness building and the production of shared social movement identity; it requires co-creation and collaboration by different actors across a social movement formation; it provides roles and actions for movement participants to assume in their everyday lives as well as during moments of mobilization; it is open to participation by the social base of the movement, and it is the key strategic media form for an era of networked social movements. While the goal of corporate actors in transmedia storytelling is to generate profits, the goal of movement actors in transmedia mobilization is to strengthen movement identity, win cultural, political and economic victories, and transform consciousness. Before discussion of how my findings from an in-depth study of media practices in the Los Angeles immigrant rights movement led to these ideas, I briefly review the literature on social movement appropriation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

Transmedia mobilization and social movements

There is a growing literature describing how social movements use ICTs in general, and the Internet specifically (Sey and Castells, 2004; Downing, 2001; Dyer-Witford, 1999; Juris, 2008; Kidd, 2003). This review, for reasons of space, cannot be exhaustive, but this edited volume as a whole provides a good overview of the field. Castells and Costanza-Chock (2006) provide an analytical review of tools and practices in horizontal communication (many-to-many media) deployed by social movements around the world. The key findings of our analysis can be summarized as follows:

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- There is extreme *access asymmetry* to communication tools and skills both within and between social movement organizations; this is true both in the global North and South.
- There is widespread *multimodality* (cross-platform or transmedia use) in social movement communication practices; social movements all over the world are actively using ICTs across media platforms including audio, video, mobile and social networking sites.
- The biggest impacts of ICT use often come via *agenda setting* for the broadcast media.
- New ICT tools and practices *circulate* through networked movements via key events (major mobilizations), tech-activist networks, face-to-face places (like HackLabs), online spaces, and recorded resources (Castells and Costanza-Chock, 2006).

Given such widespread adoption of networked communication, state and corporate actors face a series of threats from non-state actors, including non-governmental organizations (NGO) and social movements. In general, the increasingly globalized nature of the networked communication system also facilitates transnational activist networks (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Some social movements, such as the environmental movement, have organized transnationally for decades, and others – such as labour, the first wave of the women's movement, and the abolitionists – arguably have organized across borders for well over a century (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Gilroy, 1993). More recently, the transnational network form has become one of the most visible modes of social movement activity. Arquilla and Ronfeldt (2001) identify transnational NGO activity in support of the Zapatista uprising in southern Mexico as a 'War of the Swarm', in which vast numbers of relatively small and weak actors converged in a non-hierarchical organizational form of solidarity activity that was able to modify state actions. They posit that social 'netwar' and 'swarm' tactics may be a key Internet-enabled innovation facilitated by social movements, and they encourage movements consciously to adopt and develop swarm theory and practice.

Indeed, the social netwar of the Zapatistas inspired a new generation of anarchist activists to seize ICTs and deploy them at a strategic moment in a highly visible media event-scene: the 1999 mass mobilization of anti-corporate globalization protesters against the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial in Seattle. This was the birthplace of the Independent Media Center (IMC, or Indymedia) network of radical journalism, which spread rapidly across the world and exists today with over 160 IMCs, on all five continents (Kidd, 2003). The innovations of the Indymedia network and other early participatory media experiments were rapidly incorporated into the web strategies of traditional news organizations, to the point that nearly every major modern day news company hosts some version of a branded 'participatory' platform.

While corporate control of participatory media platforms is deeply problematic in terms of the exploitation of user labour and content, data-mining and surveillance, and corporate and state censorship of privately owned social media sites (Terranova, 2006; Lowenthal, 2007), the rapid spread of the techniques and tools pioneered by groups such as Indymedia, and mainstreamed by commercial Web 2.0 firms, works against the interests of those who try to control communication vertically. In an initial stage, around 1999–2003, most state and corporate actors ignored the spread of horizontal communication; between 2003 and

the present things have changed rapidly, especially with the expansion of read/write digital literacies among younger demographics (boyd, 2007). Networked social movements use ICTs to strengthen nearly every aspect of movement activity (Sey and Castells, 2004; Juris, 2008). However, most scholarship in the area focuses on movement ICTs used in isolation from other communication channels. In the next section, I examine media creation and circulation across multiple platforms by one social movement formation, and explore how transmedia mobilization played out in the case of the FIOB and APPO-LA.

Transmedia mobilization: the FIOB and APPO-LA

Although immigrant rights organizers continue to be largely ignored by Anglo print and broadcast media, the rise of Spanish language broadcasters and increased access to social media is marking a transformation to the media opportunity structure in Los Angeles that provides new mobilization avenues. At the same time, the media opportunity structure is undergoing radical shifts in terms of geographic scale, as corporate players become transnationally converged media firms and 'ethnic media' take on an increased role in maintaining connections between migrant communities and their places of origin. As media go global, and 'ethnic media' link diasporic communities, social movements can take advantage of the *translocal* media opportunity structure to circulate their struggles and leverage support from their geographically dispersed, but highly networked, allies.

The FIOB is a key example of the dynamics of transmedia mobilization within the translocal media opportunity structure of the immigrant workers' movement in Los Angeles. Indigenous immigrants to the United States from Oaxaca founded the FIOB in 1991. Starting in the 1970s, thousands of indigenous Oaxacans migrated to northern Mexico and the United States in search of work and better living conditions; currently, about 500,000 of 3.5 million Oaxacan-born people live outside their home state (Fox and Rivera-Salgado, 2004). FIOB was created in order to provide a transnational structure for indigenous communities, split between Oaxaca and the United States, to better organize around their needs and advocate for resources. FIOB Communications Director, Berta Rodríguez Santos (2009), states that

FIOB has approximately 5,000 accredited members in both Mexico and the United States. FIOB members come from various ethnic groups including Mixtecos from Oaxaca and Guerrero, Zapotecos, Triquis, Mixes, Chatinos, Zoques from Oaxaca, and Purépechas from Michoacán. The members are organized into community committees in the Mixteca, Central Valleys, and Isthmus regions of Oaxaca as well as in Mexico City, Estado de México, and Baja California. FIOB is also present in Los Angeles, Fresno, Santa María, Greenfield, Hollister, San Diego, Santa Rosa, and Merced, California. Support groups can be found in the states of Oregon, New York, Arizona, and Washington as well.

Jonathan Fox and Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, Mexican indigenous academics who work with the FIOB, have done extensive work on emergent transnational civil society among indigenous migrants, and they have described the important role of media practices. They discuss the binational newspaper, *El Oaxaqueño*, which was first published in 1999 and is distributed in Oaxaca and Los Angeles, with a twice weekly print run of 35,000 copies. The paper reports on everything from 'local village conflicts and the campaign to block construction of a McDonald's on the main square in Oaxaca City, to the binational activities of hometown associations (HTAs) and California-focused coalition building for immigrants' right to obtain driver licenses and against cutbacks in health services' (Fox and Rivera-Salgado, 2004: 22). Fox and Rivera-Salgado also write about the radio programme produced by FIOB, *Nuestro Foro* (Our Forum), which aired for a time on KFCF 88.1FM in Fresno, and they highlight *El Tequio* magazine, which carried stories of activism across the US–Mexico border. They show that 'migrant-run mass media also report systematically on other community initiatives [and] they promote "virtuous circles" of institution building within indigenous migrant civil society' (Fox and Rivera-Salgado, 2004: 22). An important concept in their writing is *cultural citizenship*, which is not necessarily tied to a particular geolocation, but may be centred on cultural, ethnic, gender and class identities. They emphasize the importance of *transnational community*, which for them means binational identity sustained over time, but their preferred focal point is *translocal community citizenship*. This refers to 'the process through which indigenous migrants are becoming active members of both their communities of settlement and their communities of origin' (Fox and Rivera-Salgado, 2004: 27).

An example of translocal community citizenship is the case they describe of Nahua migrants from the Mexican state of Guerrero, who in 1991 organized a campaign to block construction of a hydroelectric dam that would have resulted in the destruction of their villages, the displacement of 40,000 people, submersion of an important ecosystem and the loss of a major archaeological site in the Alto Basas Valley. The campaign capitalized on the upcoming quincentenary of the Spanish Conquest to mobilize funds, social networks and media attention; participants purchased video cameras (at the time, bulky shoulder-mounted VHS cameras) in order to document their direct actions. Fox and Rivera-Salgado (2004: 29) describe it thus:

This tactic not only served to inform paisanos [countrymen] in the United States, it also inaugurated what became the Mexican indigenous movement's now widespread use of video to deter police violence. Migrant protests in California also drew the attention of Spanish-language television, which led to the first TV coverage of the Alto Balsas movement within Mexico itself.

The appropriation of video technology by FIOB in the early 1990s contributed to an important policy outcome, and demonstrated to movement participants the crucial role of achieving wider circulation of movement-produced media via broadcast media.

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Alongside video activism, FIOB has long history of media production across multiple platforms. In 1991, FIOB began publication of a newspaper called *Puya Mixteca*; in 1995, they inaugurated a radio show called *La Hora Mixteca* (The Mixteca Hour) broadcast in the San Joaquin Valley; soon after, they began to co-produce a show called *Nuestro Foro* (Our Forum) on KFCF 88.1.¹ FIOB also helped to set up two community radio stations in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca.² In 1997, FIOB established a web presence at <http://fiob.org>, with help from *La Neta*, a Mexican NGO that is part of the international Association for Progressive Communications and which helped network the Zapatista communities (Stephen, 2007). However, as an explicitly binational organization that organizes indigenous migrant workers in Los Angeles and in their communities of origin, FIOB faces severe digital access challenges. ICT access in rural Oaxaca, where many of the HTAs operate, is much lower than among even the most excluded populations in urban Los Angeles; as one FIOB staff member emphasized, many of the communities they work with have no access to electricity.³ In this context, FIOB organizers see the website as primarily a resource for movement leadership and allies, rather than for their membership and base:

Definitely the leaders and people that aren't at the base, because unfortunately, I mean Oaxaca is the third poorest state in Mexico, so it's hard in a village up in the Sierras to have access to Internet. But sometimes when they come to the local city there, the FIOB members show them hey, this is what we have. They might not be able to fully access it all the time, but they know it's out there because when they come to our meetings, when we have a binational meeting, we show them the Internet, this is how it works, this is where everything is at. But not everyone has access to it, it's actually for others. Friends and allies of the Frente to know our work. And also to make a political stand that we are here as indigenous people, there's an indigenous organization that does all this work.⁴

For FIOB staff, the fact that their membership is not online does not diminish the importance of the net as a tool. Like many organizations, they use the net extensively in their work, spending much of each day online, communicating across their network, circulating key information and working on strategy and campaigns. At the same time, they have intentionally developed other forms of media in order to reach their digitally excluded base. For example, in 2000 FIOB began production of a TV show called *El Despertar Indígena* (Indigenous Awakening) for Fresno's KNXT. In 2003 they began a coproduction partnership with filmmaker Yolanda Cruz, who made the documentaries *Mujeres que se organizan avanzan* (Women Who Organize Make Progress), *Sueños Binacionales* (Binational Dreams), and *2501 Migrants: A Journey* (See Figure 5.1). Cruz makes documentaries about the FIOB and the indigenous communities that constitute its base, using participatory video methods to involve the communities in the filmmaking process.⁵

FIOB and its allies have a history of using VHS for social movement ends and are now exploiting web video for new translocal movement media practices. They deploy a broad

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Figure 5.1: 2501 migrants.

Source: petate.org.

range of media, including Web videos, theatrical documentary releases and community screenings, as well as radio, print, popular theatre and other media, to create a movement media 'world' with space for participation from their social base (Rodríguez Santos, 2009). In other words, FIOB engages in practices of transmedia mobilization. These daily communication practices within FIOB help inscribe indigenous identities across media platforms and articulate translocal community citizenship.

However, migrant indigenous communities appropriate digital media tools not primarily for social movement activity, but based on a desire to share records of cultural events with people in their home towns. One interviewee describes how Oaxacan HTA members communicate extensively through YouTube, share videos of musical events, celebrations of saints' days, funerals and other cultural activities, and send links via email to their families and friends:

In my community it started probably in what, 2004, 2003? We started seeing all these events, whatever was happening back home. Somebody's funeral, they would put it there, you could go see it. Or if something happened here, a saint patron's party or celebration, they would put it on the YouTube and the people back home would kind of – you kind of know now that you go on YouTube and you find it. My mom, she doesn't know how to

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read and write. So she says hey, can you go to the computer and put the pueblo stuff on there? And I say 'sure, let's put it on!' So she'll have other comadres call and say hey, can you tell [your daughter] to teach me how to get into our webpage? So it's really interesting that YouTube is a way to maintain, to inform and gossip on your HTA.

Q: When was the first time you saw something like that? Or, what was the first thing that you saw?

Oh, the parties! Because, well I shouldn't call them parties. They're celebrations of the Saint. So if someone donated a cow to feed the community, a certain band showed up to do their *guelaguetza* [celebration of indigenous culture] in the community, it would be put on the YouTube. This is how we receive the *banda* [group] from *tzotzil* communities that came to the *Guelaguetza* with us. They would put it there and you would see it.⁶

Social media spaces are used to reproduce migrant binational and translocal identities. However, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that the social web has introduced 'radically new' tools, or has completely transformed the communication practices of FIOB and HTA. One interviewee described how essentially the same practice – videotaping and sharing recordings of key family and cultural events across borders – was achieved using VHS camcorders and sending tapes through the mail – and in fact, this practice continues to exist alongside video sharing via the Net.

I remember those huge video cameras when they first came out. Everybody had one to document all their events, all of the meetings.

Q: Oh, at that time would they send the tapes to each other? Like between here and there in the mail?

Yeah. And they still do now, some. Like *quinceañeras*. For example my sister's one in the US was completely like this big thing and it was sent to all my family in Mexico, so when something happens, a wedding happens there, everybody gets a copy here.⁷

The experience of FIOB illustrates how audiovisual tools and skills develop through the desire to document and share life experiences and popular cultural events such as weddings, *quinceañeras*, *guelaguetzas* and funerals. These same practices are applied subsequently to transmedia mobilization. Daily community media practices thus accumulate over time to shape new pathways through the media opportunity structure. These practices might also be read as everyday forms of digital resistance against the erasure of translocal community citizenship (Scott, 1987). It is the regular use by FIOB of digital video to circulate cultural practices combined with its history of using video as a tool for struggle that proves decisive for immigrant workers' effective use of digital video during moments of translocal mobilization.

APPO-LA

The previous section examined the translocal media opportunity structure occupied by the FIOB and by Oaxacan migrant workers in Los Angeles. This section explores how that structure enabled transmedia mobilization among indigenous migrant workers who otherwise have very limited access to digital media tools and skills, by focusing on the movement formation called APPO-LA.

Ulises Ruiz Ortíz, Governor of Oaxaca, took office in 2004 following a questionable election victory (Norget, 2008). By June 2006, a mass mobilization by the Oaxacan Teacher's Union against job cuts was joined by other unions and the indigenous, women, students and other sectors, in a general strike and occupation of Oaxaca City. The movement coalesced around the APPO, a social movement whose major demands were, first, Ortíz's resignation, and second, that a constituent assembly be called to rewrite the state constitution (Norget, 2008). In August 2006, at the end of a women's strike and a *cacerolazo* (a march accompanied by the beating of pots and pans) involving some 20,000 participants, Oaxacan women in the movement leadership entered and took control of the studios of Channel 9 at the Oaxacan Radio and Television Corporation. They also occupied several commercial radio stations. The government responded by expelling activists from the first radio station, and this resulted in the movement generalizing the media insurrection by seizing commercial radio stations across the state (Gold and Renique, 2008). Police attempts to invade and shut down Radio APPO were met with determined resistance from a blockade of several thousand people who fought a pitched battle that lasted for several days and ended with the police in retreat and the radio station still in the hands of the movement. This series of events, now referred to as the *toma de los medios* (taking of the media), inspired movements and media activists around the world, and increased the visibility of the media infrastructure as a key space of contestation for Oaxacan activists in Oaxaca and in the diaspora in Los Angeles. The *toma* is documented in the film *Un Poquito de Tanta Verdad (A Little Bit of So Much Truth)* and in *The Taking of the Media in Oaxaca*, two films that screened widely around the world at events organized by local global justice activists (See Figure 5.2; and see Freidberg and Mal de Ojo, 2007).⁸

'Traditional' forms of movement media, such as feature-length documentary films, continue to serve as key vehicles for the global circulation of media strategies and tactics, within newer, transmedia mobilization practices.

As the cycle of struggle in Oaxaca City intensified, the state government escalated its tactics and began to employ armed gunmen to attack the APPO. On 27 October 2006, New York City Indymedia video activist, Bradley Roland Will, was shot and killed in Oaxaca City, in the neighbourhood of Santa Lucía del Camino, while filming an armed attack by undercover state police (Simon, 2006). Will's death, although only one in a string of political murders that occurred in the 2006 cycle of struggles, resulted in greatly increased international attention to the mobilizations in Oaxaca. At least 18 Oaxacan activists were murdered, with many more detained and disappeared during this mobilization wave (Physicians for Human Rights, 2009).

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Figure 5.2: Still from *La Toma de Los Medios en Oaxaca*.

Source: *La Toma de Los Medios en Oaxaca*, <http://vimeo.com/6729709>.

Since Will was connected to the global Indymedia network, his death brought the situation in Oaxaca into the consciousness of global justice movement networks (See Figure 5.3). In Los Angeles, the FIOB organized a series of protests and actions against the increasingly violent repression of the movement, first by the Oaxacan government and later by the



Figure 5.3: Bradley Roland Will.

Source: New York Independent.

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Mexican federal forces. APPO-LA appropriated the Christmas tradition of the *posada*, involving groups of friends and family walking together to other community members' houses, playing music and singing carols and, in return, being offered hospitality in the form of food and drink. On 16 December 2006, APPO-LA organized an *APPOsada* at the church of St. Cecilia in Santa Monica, which was attended by around 300 people who gathered to celebrate cultural resistance against the slayings in Oaxaca City. The event raised thousands of dollars that were sent to support the movement in Oaxaca. At the height of APPO-LA mobilization, the Koreatown Immigrant Worker Alliance (KIWA) lent its sound system and video projector to FIOB. One of KIWA's staff was Oaxacan and had spent a great deal of time organizing the Oaxacan community in the Koreatown area. Video screenings of material from Oaxaca (much of it shot by the video collectives *Mal de Ojo* and Indymedia Oaxaca) became regular events during the winter of 2006 and the spring of 2007, with screenings held at KIWA offices in the evenings and in front of the Mexican Consulate on the Northwest corner of Macarthur Park.

One such gathering involved 40 to 50 people, clustered in the park across the street from the Mexican Consulate. Several music groups and a group of Aztec dancers performed. People bought tamales and *atole* (a hot drink) from FIOB members, who sold them to raise funds to send to the movement assembly in Oaxaca City. Signs and banners were hung around the space, crosses were placed on the ground to signify those killed in political violence and a video screen was set up. One of the FIOB organizers placed a mobile phone call to an activist in Oaxaca, and amplified the ensuing conversation through the sound system. The audience was then shown a video from the previous day's mass march of some 20,000 people in Oaxaca City. One FIOB interviewee, who was also a key organizer of the APPO-LA, described these media practices as follows:

Q: What about in the political work that FIOB does? Do people document that with video cameras?

We do. We don't document everything because we do so many things, but that mobilization that I was talking to you about on November 11th, we got video. I actually have the video how they leave, and show up to Oaxaca City. And the pictures, I could share with the members here.⁹

Activists also printed photos of the violent repression in Oaxaca, downloaded from Indymedia Oaxaca and other sites (such as the blog *El Enemigo Común*) and taped them to the gates of the Mexican Embassy. Similar actions occurred outside Mexican Embassies and Consulates around the United States, and especially in New York, Los Angeles, Houston and Portland, as well as in other cities worldwide.

Figure 5.4 depicts the mobilizations that took place in Los Angeles on the North edge of Macarthur Park, across the street from the Mexican Consulate. Note the video screen that

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Figure 5.4: APPO-LA.

Source: Images from <http://la.indymedia.org/news/2006/11/186082.php>.

was used to show videos produced by FIOB and its allies (e.g. *Sueños Binacionales*), and raw footage from recent mobilizations in Oaxaca City, often shot just hours or days before. Although the mobilizations did not directly force Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz out of power, on 14 October 2009, the Mexican Supreme Court found Ortiz ‘culpable for the human rights violations that occurred in Oaxaca as a result of teacher protests and political and social unrest in May 2006–January 2007 and July of 2008’ (Wooters, 2009).

These examples are all illustrative of transmedia mobilization in a translocal space between Oaxaca and Los Angeles. The repertoire of digital contention is not limited to online media, but includes the spread of media elements across digital distribution channels as well as into offline (‘real world’) spaces. At the same time, while it is true that digital literacies enable new practices of richly mediated translocal mobilization, earlier media practices provide an important foundation. Everyday practices of media use (e.g. VHS) by the transnational Oaxacan migrant indigenous communities served as important precursors to, if not preconditions for, the effective use of new digital media tools during key moments in the mobilizations. This is especially important in the context of a community that has one of the lowest general levels of Internet access among all demographic groups in the United States. The immigrant rights movement is best able to use digital media when the base of a particular movement formation is already familiar with the tools and practices of network culture.¹⁰ For indigenous migrant workers, this familiarity evolves out of the practices of translocal community citizenship. Within APPO-LA, everyday practices of video sharing by indigenous migrant workers laid the groundwork for transmedia mobilization.

Transmedia mobilization: conclusions

Shifts in the media opportunity structure provide openings for new forms of transmedia mobilization within the immigrant rights movement in Los Angeles. Some immigrant rights movement formations already deploy transmedia mobilization to circulate media across platforms, while engaging their base in media making that strengthens movement identity

and builds stronger movement outcomes. Participation in social movement media production often provides an entry point to further politicization and movement involvement, and this has expanded with the growing accessibility of digital media tools and skills, which make it easier for movement actors to create and circulate rich media texts. At the same time, in the context of huge ICT access inequalities, my interviewees emphasized the importance of using multiple communication platforms to reach various audiences, and also the fundamental and irreplaceable importance of face-to-face communication in community organizing and movement building.

Analysis of the FIOB and APPO-LA shows that transmedia mobilization can take advantage of practices of translocal community citizenship by migrant workers. Migrant workers often remain linked to their communities of origin through Internet-based access to the media outlets they identify with, via existing practices of translocal video sharing, and through new digital media tools and platforms. Indigenous immigrant communities and their organizations have long deployed a wide array of media across various platforms including radio, print, video and, more recently, the Web. Daily practices of digital media making and translocal community citizenship, an existing community of documentary filmmakers based in the community and previous experiences of successful transnational media campaigns combine to provide a rich foundation for present-day transmedia mobilization by indigenous migrant movement formations.

Under these conditions, the crisis and mass mobilizations in Oaxaca served as a crucible for tactical innovation. When the movement in Oaxaca physically occupied state radio and television stations, events were circulated rapidly through transnational networks of diasporic indigenous communities via a wide range of media platforms. Live radio streaming over the net from Oaxaca City allowed these networks to follow and identify with the movement in real-time, while raw video footage from actions and mass marches was uploaded, downloaded and screened – sometimes within hours of capture – at protests outside Mexican consulates in Los Angeles and around the world. In transmedia mobilization, each form of movement media thus serves as a key audience entry point. The murder of Indymedia activist, Bradley Will, generated a rapid and massive spike in the visibility of the struggles in Oaxaca City, pushing events there to the forefront of the consciousness of transnational activist networks and the global justice movement. Activists in these networks performed extensive media bridging work, boosting the circulation of movement videos, photos, audio and text even further.

Thus, social movement formations can serve as transmedia mobilization nodes within broader networks, transporting movement media texts from one platform, location or modality to another. This media bridging work has become increasingly important as movement participants and audiences fragment across the hypersegmented and multimodal mediascape. In addition, effective transmedia mobilization in the immigrant rights movement works across broadcast platforms, especially radio, to later build participation via social media and text messaging. At its most powerful, transmedia mobilization manages to engage people across all media platforms in generating a narrative about the growing momentum of the movement, while providing concrete actions and

entry points for diverse audiences. Yet many movement organizations and formations in the immigrant rights movement, as in other social movements, continue to operate with firewalls between their participatory media practice, assuming they have one, and their communication strategy, which often is based exclusively on top-down public relations tactics designed for previous media opportunity structures. Meanwhile, social movement scholars often continue to operate under the assumption that the (mass) media exist as a static subcomponent of the political opportunity structure, governed by elites. The experience of FIOB and APPO-LA, and of other immigrant rights movement formations in Los Angeles, should encourage both movement scholars and activists to shift from top-down models of communication control towards a focus on the horizontal strategies of transmedia mobilization. Transmedia mobilization strategies are already contributing to cultural, mobilization and political outcomes, while movement participants are actively reshaping the media opportunity structure to their advantage. It remains to be seen whether organizers will integrate transmedia strategy into their daily practice, and whether scholars will creatively rethink their approaches to the relationship between social movements and the media.

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Notes

- 1 Interview, PS, CS.
- 2 Interview, PS.
- 3 Interview, PS.
- 4 Interview, PS.
- 5 Interviews, PS, DS and CS.
- 6 Interview, PS.
- 7 Interview, PS.
- 8 See <http://vimeo.com/6729709>.
- 9 Interview, PS.
- 10 Interviews, CS, PS, DM, BH.