

## OUTLAW LANGUAGE: CREATING ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC SPHERES IN BASQUE FREE RADIO<sup>1</sup>

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Recent rethinking of Habermas' *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* by Negt and Kluge (1993), and feminist and social historians Nancy Fraser (1993), Joan Landes (1988), and Geoff Eley (1992), among others, has argued persuasively that the bourgeois public sphere has, from its inception, been built upon powerful mechanisms of exclusion. The idealized image of a democratic theatre of free and equal participation in debate, they claim, has always been a fiction predicated on the mandatory silencing of entire social groups, vital social issues, and indeed, "of any difference that cannot be assimilated, rationalized, and subsumed" (Hansen 1993b: 198). This is especially clear in the case of those citizens who do not or will not speak the language of civil society. The linguistic terrorism performed with a vengeance during the French Revolution and reenacted in Official English initiatives in the United States more recently, reveal to us how deeply monolingualism has been ingrained in liberal conceptions of Libert ,  galit , and Fraternit . But perhaps silencing may not be the best way to describe the fate of linguistic minorities or other marginalized groups. For, as Miriam Hansen (1993b) notes, what the more recent work on public spheres suggests is that "the" public sphere has never been as uniform or as totalizing as it represents itself to be. Proliferating in the interstices of the bourgeois public -- in salons, coffeehouses, book clubs, working class and subaltern forms of popular culture -- are numerous counterpublics that give lie to the presumed homogeneity of the imaginary public. Spurred in part by ethnic nationalist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, speakers and writers of "barbarous" tongues and "illegitimate patois" can be seen as one among the counterpublics who avail themselves of any number of "media" - from novels to oral poetry, from song and regional presses to, more recently, various forms of electronic media - to give expression to other kinds of social experience and perspectives on who the public is, what its interests might be, and what its voice sounds like.

This article examines the contemporary formation of one such counterpublic

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the many members of Molotoff Irratia in Hermani and Paotxa in Usurbil who welcomed me to their stations and gave generously of their time. I owe a special debt to Jakoba Rekondo, who first brought free radio to my attention and has provided guidance, prodding, and support throughout this project. Thanks also to Jokin Eizagirre, Olatz Mikeleiz, Ana Altuna, and Javier Esparza for their help in Euskadi, and to Kathryn Woolard and Susan Gal for intellectual inspiration and editorial advice.

in the small towns and cities of the southern Basque country. Here, in the years since Franco's death, one finds among Basque radical nationalist youth a self-conscious attempt to make use of intentionally marginal or "outlaw" publicity - street graffiti, zines, low-power free radio - as well as a lively rock music scene, to give voice to their minoritized language and their not-so-polite critiques of the state, consumer capitalism, police repression, and a host of other social concerns. The alternative media and expressive culture of radical youth can be seen as creating a public sphere in the sense of a discursive matrix within which social experience is articulated, negotiated, and contested (Hansen 1993a). However, as I hope to show, the sphere they have created differs significantly from the kind of public typically imagined within minority language revitalization and/or ethnic nationalist movements. The latter typically are bourgeois and universalistic in nature; the nation or linguistic community is imagined in the singular and envisioned primarily as a reading and writing public. Furthermore, in the Basque nationalist movement, as in many other linguistic minority movements, language politics tend to be oriented towards normalization, expanding literacy, and gaining legitimacy within the terms of state hegemonic language hierarchies. The past century has seen ethnic minority intellectuals form their own language academies, literary and scientific societies, and mobilize the tools of linguistic analysis, orthographic reform, mapping, and even the census in order to document the "truth" of their language and to reform the language according to notions of what constitutes a "modern" or "rational" language (Urla 1993). The kind of practical exigencies and urgency minority linguists and planners feel to transform their language into what Bourdieu (1991) calls a "*langue autorisée*," to demonstrate its equivalence to other "world" languages, leads them to a concern with boundary drawing, purifying, and standardizing more commonly associated with the language ideology of the dominant public sphere.

Scholars have tended to focus upon these normalizing processes, yet if we look to other arenas like the marginalized publicity of radical youth, we find a very different picture. What follows is an exploration of the public sphere of radical free radio, its distinctive ideology of radical democratic communication, and how these are reflected in a variety of linguistic strategies. Existing on the margins of legality, ephemeral, and often nomadic in both a geographic and temporal sense, free radios provide a soundtrack for minority languages, values, and cultural expression by pirating the airwaves, appearing and disappearing on the f.m. dial. The public constructed by radical youth is perhaps better described as a partial public, a segment of a plural, rather than singular, counterpublic sphere (cf. Hansen 1993b: 209). Secondly, it is decidedly oppositional, challenging both the Spanish state and the Basque regional government's control over the terms of public discourse and the exclusions that control entails. Thirdly, while one of the aims of free radio stations is to open new avenues for the circulation of Basque, programmers embrace a more hybrid, playful, and anti-normative set of language practices than do language activists in other areas of language revitalization. Looking beyond formal language politics, beyond the academies and literacy programs, to the particular modes of address and other linguistic forms used in these kinds of experiments in local media, I suggest, reveals a more heterogeneous conception of publics and language than our studies of minority language movements might otherwise convey.

### The mini fm boom

In a particularly poignant passage from *A Dying Colonialism*, Frantz Fanon paints a vivid portrait of the radio as an instrument of revolutionary consciousness. Crowded together in front of the radio dial, straining to hear through the static the French army used to jam the transmissions, peasants, not-yet-Algerians, heard more than fragmentary accounts of battles, writes Fanon; tuning in to the Voice of Algeria they were witness to and participants in the rebirth of themselves as citizens of the new nation of Algerians.

Besides fueling anti-colonialist sentiment in France, Fanon's text established a link between radio and insurgency that was to inspire many of the originators of the free radio movement that emerged a decade later in Western Europe. Sometimes called illegal, rebel, or pirate radio, free radio began in Italy as an underground movement of the autonomous left in the wake of May '68 and spread quickly among a variety of oppositional groups, young people, and ethnic and linguistic minorities.<sup>2</sup> Anarchic and ephemeral by nature, free radio captured the attention of intellectuals on the left like Félix Guattari, who, inspired by the work of Fanon and Bertolt Brecht (1964) saw in the free radio movement, the makings of "a molecular revolution" capable of triggering a profound social transformation from below (Guattari 1984).<sup>3</sup>

Free radio came somewhat late to the Basque provinces of northern Spain. The first ones appeared in the early eighties and by 1987-88, at the height of the movement, there were about 50 or so stations in operation.<sup>4</sup> The passage of new telecommunication legislation, known as the LOT, (*Ley de Ordenación de Telecomunicaciones*) in 1988 with the attendant tightening of controls over the airwaves, has been a major contributing factor in the closing of many stations. But they are by no means all defunct. At a meeting of the free radios of the Basque Country, held in January 1994, there were representatives from 16 radios some of which have been in existence for ten years. While it is undeniable that the movement has waned significantly, new radios continue to be created while other stations are renovating their studios and have managed to become permanent fix-

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<sup>2</sup> For general overviews of the alternative radio movement in Western Europe and how it compares to pirate and community radio projects see Barbrook (1987) Bassets (1981), Crookes and Vitet-Philippe (1986), Lewis (1984), and McCain (1990).

<sup>3</sup> "Molecular" and "molar" are terms Guattari uses to contrast different ways of organizing social movements. Molecular collectives are composed of independent autonomous individuals while molar collectives are homogenized and one-dimensional (Guattari 1984). One might also find these to be useful ways of contrasting publics as well.

<sup>4</sup> Sabino Ormazabal reports that a group of Basque nationalist youth had visited the infamous Radio Alice in Italy, which Guattari worked at, and set up their own clandestine radio station in San Sebastián (Gipuzkoa) as early as 1978 (Ormazabal n.d.). Certainly in its origins, Basque free radio has been closely linked to the abertzale or nationalist left. Though most now prefer to maintain independence from any political party. Other accounts place the first free radio in Euskal Herria, that is, independent of any direct political affiliation, as being created in 1984. How the history of this movement is written depends in part on one's definition of free radio. For some, affiliation with any political party disqualifies the station as a free radio.

tures in town life.

The appearance of free radios is related directly to the radical youth movement of the eighties. In the expansive years after the statute of autonomy was passed in 1979, youth, disenchanted with party politics, began to form youth assemblies, *gazte asanbladak*, in many towns across the southern Basque provinces. Drawing on the political philosophy of the autonomous left movement of Italy and France, youth assemblies meld a radical democratic assembly structure with an eclectic blend of nationalist, anarchist, left, and green politics. Anti-authoritarian and bound to no party discipline, their activities call attention to the problems of youth: Problems of unemployment (hovering between 50-60% among people under 25), alienation, lack of housing, compulsory military service, drugs, and repressive Catholic morality. In concert with youth elsewhere in Europe, Basque youth assemblies have been very active in the *okupa*, or squatter's, movement. They have occupied abandoned buildings demanding the right to have a youth center, or *gaztetxe*, where they could have meetings, socialize, listen to music, and organize concerts or other kinds of events outside the framework of political parties. In some cases, depending upon the political climate of the town hall, youth houses were established easily, and in others, as in the case of the *gaztetxe* of Bilbo, the squatters were engaged in a long, drawn out, and violent battle with the police and conservative town council that was ultimately unsuccessful. Youth assemblies and youth houses in many ways draw upon and gain strength from social institutions already well established in Basque social life. Local bars, for example, have long been critical public spaces facilitating a healthy tradition of Basque associational culture (cf. Kasimir 1993). Typically, radical youth will have one or two bars that they frequent on a daily basis. Most often run by individuals sympathetic to the nationalist left, these bars, not unlike gay bars in the United States, function as gathering places and community bulletin boards. The walls are plastered with pictures of political prisoners, posters announcing upcoming demonstrations, sign-up sheets for various activities. Here the owners will play the kind of music youth like to hear and generally tolerate them sitting for hours playing cards, hanging out without ordering much. In some respects, then, bars have served informally as spaces for youth to find one another and interact. But the idea behind the *gaztetxe* movement was that something more than a hang-out was needed. As one woman explained to me, she felt young people like herself needed an alternative to the bar, someplace where individuals could come to read, organize talks, and do something other than drink alcohol without having music blaring in your ear. Bars were good for meeting your friends and organizing concerts, she felt, but they ultimately were in the business of making money by selling drinks. They could not provide the kind of environment for some of the things she was interested in like film screenings, talks on sexuality, holistic medicine, or creative writing. It is just the desire for alternative public space which lay behind the creation of *Likiniano*, a bookstore/coffeehouse in Bilbo which describes itself in the following way:

Likiniano is a cultural project of a group of young people located within the orbit of the antiauthoritarian and assemblarian left. The almost quixotic aim is to break with the stupefying commercial culture they have accustomed us to accept. Likiniano is not a store. It is the result of a rethinking of what our centers of debate and traditional culture could be (Asensio 1993).

Free radios, like the media experiments of autonomous collectives elsewhere in Europe, need to be understood as part of this larger effort by youth to create spaces for alternative modes of communication and cultural life (Kogawa 1985). Many radios in fact were begun by youth assemblies and operated out of the youth houses. And there is considerable overlap in the ethos and individuals who work and frequent the radios, *gaztetxes*, squatter's communities, and radical bars. Free radios, for example, place the schedule of programs on the bulletin boards of the bars youth go to, they sell buttons and tee shirts there, and will typically have a *kutxa*, or collection box for donations for the radio on the counter. Free radios perform an interesting role vis-à-vis these alternative spaces. For the radios are themselves sites of cultural production and a technology which makes it possible to take the ideals, communicative practices, aesthetic forms, and cultural values of radical youth, and broadcast them beyond the spatial limits of any specific site.

In contrast to large well-financed regional Basque radio stations that have emerged since autonomy, free radios are unlicensed, low-cost, low-tech initiatives with a broadcast range of no more than a few miles. Being low-tech is not just a function of inadequate money; low-tech is a part of free radio's political commitment to democratizing access to media, making it as cheap and easy as possible to set up and sustain. Similarly, having a narrow broadcasting range corresponds to free radio's attempt to use radio to create an egalitarian communicative sphere. As Kogawa, an activist in the Japanese free radio movement explains, "the service area should be relatively small, because free radio does not *broadcast* (scatter) information but *communicates* (co-unites) messages to a concrete audience" (Kogawa 1985: 117). Because they are local creations and locally controlled, each one bears the imprint and reflects the interests of those who create and run the station. Those, and only those people who participate in the radio manage the station's daily affairs, finances, and determine what will go on the air. Programmers have virtually complete control over the content of their shows. All policy decisions regarding content or language are made by the general assembly. For example, the use of sexist language in some of the programs came up often as a problem in my discussions with women radio programmers. But instead of writing a language code or policy, it was their feeling that the best way to address this problem was to raise the issue at general assembly and to raise awareness among members about the way in which this kind of language use reinforced gender hierarchies. What unites free radios is a fierce commitment to freedom of expression, economic independence, and democratic control by assembly. In this respect, free radios are quite different in practice and in their ideology from the British offshore pirate radio stations that were so important to the development of Afro-Caribbean music and cultural styles (Barbrook 1987; Gilroy 1987). In contrast to the pirates, which were largely commercial music stations, free radios are vehemently non-commercial and refuse advertising of any sort. Part of what distinguishes free radios is a notion that freedom of expression requires freedom from any form of economic control. Most radios therefore prefer to raise money for operations directly from local residents through weekly or monthly raffles, or by running a bar, *txosna*, during the annual fiestas. This produces, of course, a very precarious hand to mouth existence. Many stations have been able to supplement their income by squeezing subsidies from local town halls by formally declaring themselves as a cultural group that runs workshops in radio production. It is

common knowledge that the stations also broadcast without a license, which is technically illegal. Tolerance for the radios seems to vary widely: Some radios are constantly being shut down and harassed by the police, while others operate much more freely and openly with financial support or at least tacit acceptance from local officials. Depending on the prevailing political winds, some free radios will be very open about the station's location, leaving their doors unlocked and inviting anyone to come and participate, while others have to be more secretive, fearing the loss of their leases or possible shut downs by angry neighbors and landlords.

Free from state regulation on the one hand, or the tyranny of the top forty on the other, Basque free radios take on the identity of unruly "provocateurs" (*zirikatzaile*). This is reflected in the names radios adopt, which range from the incendiary to the irreverent: For example, one station calls itself "Molotoff Radio", after the favored weapon of urban guerrilla warfare; another calls itself "Zirika", or Pesky Thorn, while others have chosen more nonsensical or humorous names like "Monkey Radio" or "Kaka Flash." In the words of Jakoba Rekondo, one of the newscasters in the free radio of Usurbil, "we didn't want to make just another normal radio with lots of music and so on. For that, you can listen to a commercial station and get better quality anyway. We saw our radio as a way of contributing to the movement, *la movida*."

Being part of the movement for free radios means first and foremost, in their words, "giving voice to those without voice" and to provide what they call, "counter-information." In practical terms this entails opening the airwaves to all the *herriko taldeak*, that is, local cultural and grass roots organizations - feminists, ecologists, amnesty groups for Basque political prisoners, Basque language schools, mountaineering clubs, and literary groups - to take part in the radio. Currently, for example, free radios are, together with political comic-zines like *Napartheid*, an important forum for one of the largest youth movements today, the *insumisos*, that is, youth who are refusing to comply with the mandatory military service requirement. Free radios see their function in large part as one of community bulletin boards, providing a public forum for otherwise marginalized political and cultural perspectives which previously have had to rely on demonstrations, graffiti, and posters in the street as their primary media of public expression.

Sustained by and firmly rooted in an array of oppositional social movements, sympathetic to, but independent of, the Basque nationalist left political parties, free radios constitute an alternative public sphere that challenges the exclusions of the liberal bourgeois media, both Spanish and Basque. Curiously enough, tension surrounding these exclusions is becoming more, not less, heightened in the autonomous Basque provinces. There is no doubt that the transition to a democratic regime in Spain brought about a tremendous expansion of the media and a lessening in censorship codes. Radical, leftist, and nationalist organizations were legalized and a flood of newspapers, and magazines and other publications emerged onto the streets. Among the more notable developments was the creation of the Basque Radio and Television Network, *Euskal Irrati Telebista* (EITB) which includes a regional Basque language radio and two television channels, one in Basque and one in Spanish, both of which are controlled by the Basque Autonomous

Community's regional government.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, under the new statute of autonomy, many non-governmental Basque language publications and cultural organizations were able to apply to the Basque Government's Ministry of Education and Culture and receive at least some partial funding to produce Basque language publications that would not otherwise be economically sustainable. An increasingly acrimonious struggle has erupted in the last several years as the Basque Government, controlled by a coalition of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and center-right wing Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), has begun to cut back on its support for non-governmental cultural workers and their publications.

At the center of the struggle have been two daily newspapers: *EGIN*, representing the perspective of the radical nationalist left and many of the autonomous social movements, and *EGUNKARIA*, the first all Basque language newspaper. Both papers have been the subject of a boycott on the part of the Basque government which refuses to place any official announcements - which represent handsome sums of money - in either of these papers. That newspapers would be at the vortex of this struggle is not accidental. Dailies are, as Benedict Anderson (1991) has argued, emblematic of the imagined community. The retraction of the government's official announcements not only cripples the papers by taking away a major source of revenue, it also functions as a meta statement that the newspapers, and the publics they represent - that of the radical nationalist left and progressive n.g.o's on the one hand (*EGIN*), and the radical Basque language movement on the other (*EGUNKARIA*) - violate the conservative government's terms of belonging in the sphere of rational political speech. The reasons for this are complex and different for each paper. What both papers share is a vision of the nation and its imaginary readers that incorporates all seven of the Basque provinces in both Spain and France. Other factors clearly intervene: *EGIN*'s recognition of ETA's actions as armed struggle rather than terrorism, and *EGUNKARIA*'s monolingualism run contrary to Basque government's policies regarding anti-state violence and official bilingualism. In the case of *EGIN*, the dispute appears irresolvable, while *EGUNKARIA* appears to be reaching some accord. But the overall chilling effect of the boycott has mobilized many smaller local publications and media. Under the banner "*Adierazpen Askatasuna*" [Freedom of Expression], and "*Gu ere Herria Gara*" [We, too, are the People], free radios have joined with writers, intellectuals, and artists throughout the southern Basque Country in protest against what they perceive to be an attempt to exert ideological control over public discourse.

The latter slogan, "We, too, are the People," is a particularly clear indication of the ongoing contestation in the Basque Country over who will get to speak as a public citizen, and whose concerns or interests come to be regarded as matters of the commonweal. Free radios, together with other grass roots organizations, Basque language and cultural revitalization groups, understand themselves to be serving the

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<sup>5</sup> The Basque Autonomous Community, *Comunidad Autónoma Vasca*, is an administrative unit within the Spanish state created by the passage of the Statute of Autonomy of 1979. It comprises the three provinces of Alava, Guipúzcoa, and Vizcaya. The fourth Spanish Basque province, Navarre, was established under separate jurisdiction with its own Foral Government. Three other Basque provinces are located within the territory of the French state.

cultural interests of "the people," the *herria*. *Herria* is a semantically dense and highly resonant term in Basque nationalist discourse, which, as a noun, can mean, "the town," "the people," or "the nation," and, when used as an adjective, as in *herriko*, or *herrikoia*, may mean "popular," "public" and even "patriotic" (Aulestia 1989). Free radios claim to be the voice of "the People," the *herria*, that has been left outside the imagined community of the middle class Basque media. And what is left out, in their view, is not only the perspectives of oppositional groups, but also the perspective and participation of local communities in defining public knowledge.

At stake for free radios and other experiments in local or community based Basque language media is something more than *access* to the public sphere. Especially important in the eyes of free radio activists is not just finding a public space to express themselves, but getting members of the community, especially teenagers, to become *producers* rather than simply *consumers* of public knowledge. If, under consumer capitalism, mass mediated forms of publicity construct the public as viewers or spectators (Lee 1993; Kogawa 1985), free radio imagines the public as *participant*. In interviews I had with programmers, they would often describe the radio as trying to be an open mike, where anyone "from the street," as they say, could come and express their opinion. The ideology of communication in free radios, according to Guattari, is to maintain a system of direct feedback between the station and the community. This can happen in a number of ways; radios encourage people to participate in creating the news by phoning in a piece of information and, in some cases, they will broadcast directly on the air. Listener call-ins are encouraged during many programs and especially when there are demonstrations or confrontations with the police, the radio will try to get reports from participants who are on location. In contrast to the mainstream media, individuals can speak publicly on free radio, but they do so not as designated representatives, experts, journalists, or official spokespersons. There is a kind of counter-authority attached to free radio's defiant non-professionalism. People who speak the reality of the street, who speak as the common man or common woman, appear to be valorized and endowed with an authority that comes precisely from their marginality to any institutional authority. Such individuals are seen as possessing more authentic knowledge based on lived experience, and to contribute new perspectives and fresh truths via their direct plain speech.<sup>6</sup> More than just an alternative news outlet, free radios imagine themselves almost like a Habermasian ideal sphere of open communication: A communal space where local residents and especially youth can speak *as citizens* and engage in defining public knowledge and public culture.

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<sup>6</sup> This commitment to "free speech", explains Guattari,

Basically represents a danger to all traditional systems of social representation; it questions a certain conception of the delegate, of the deputy, the official spokesperson, the leader, the journalist... It is as if, in an immense permanent meeting - that stretched as large as the limits of hearing would permit - someone, anyone, even the most indecisive of the lot, the one with the most shakey voice, found himself with the means to take the floor whenever he wanted. From that moment, we can begin to hope that some new truths [end] the basis for new forms of expression will emerge (Guattari 1981: 233-234).



## Irreverent speech

This brings us directly to the question of language ideology and practice. How are these ideological commitments expressed in the linguistic practices of free radio? The political ideology and organizational structure of free radios seems to be fairly consistent from one station to the next. However, the variation in sociolinguistic make-up of communities across the southern Basque Country makes generalization about language use impossible. Some stations based in predominantly Castilian speaking towns - *Hala Bedi* in Gazteiz (Alava), *Eguzki* in Iruna (Navarre) or *Zintzilik* in Renteria (Gipuzkoa) - operate almost entirely in Castilian, while others based in areas with high numbers of Basque speaking youth use much more Basque in their programming. The analysis which follows is based on observations of two radio stations in the province of Gipuzkoa: "Molotoff" located in the town of Hernani, (population 20,000) and "Paotxa" located in Usurbil, 7 kilometers away (population 5000). Paotxa operated entirely in Basque, while Molotoff had approximately 80% of its programming in Basque, the other programs were identified as "bilingual" or Castilian.

Language policy is probably one of the most controversial issues among Basque free radios. During my research at Molotoff in the spring of 1994, the radio's general assembly had reached an impasse over whether the station should adopt a Basque-only language policy. Some members closely connected to the language activist organization, Basque in the Basqueland, had proposed this, arguing that the radio had a moral responsibility to assist in the struggle to normalize the usage of Basque in public life and that without such a policy, Basque would continue in its minoritized status within the station and in Hernani as a whole. For others, this policy went against the ideology of the station which is to be open to all youth, regardless of their mother tongue. Furthermore, it was argued that a formal language policy went against the station's commitment to freedom of expression and autonomy from any kind of political doctrines, including that of language revivalists. Few stations, in fact, have opted for a Basque-only broadcasting policy, and those that do operate in Basque tend to be in towns where Basque speakers are in the vast majority. Nevertheless, there is a clear solidarity between free radios in the Basque Country and the language revival movement. This is signalled by the fact that virtually all the free radios adopt Basque language names (*Txantxangorri*, *Tximua*, *Eguzki*), even if many of their programs are in Spanish or bilingual. This kind of emblematic or titular Basque identity is actually one of the distinguishing features of membership in many grass roots organizations in the radical or abertzale left. Basque functions as a sign of alterity and oppositionality to the Spanish state and its institutions. At Molotoff, for example, there are several programs in Castilian whose programmers do not know Basque. Yet a conscious decision has been made to have all *kuñas* or program call signs, and station identification like, "You're listening to the voice of Molotoff Irratia," be in Basque, *Euskeru*. Commonly used in mainstream radio broadcasting, the introduction of these devices domesticates the anarchic pleasure Guattari celebrated in free radio's uncontrolled free-form broadcasting aesthetic by giving a sense of order and pacing within and between programs. It is significant that while the station could not agree to a language policy for all the programs, the code choice of call signs and station identifications did become a subject of explicit debate in the general assembly of Molotoff. While

individuals are believed to be entitled to complete freedom within the context of their programs, call signs occupy a special status as the voice of the radio as a whole. Interjected into programs, the use of Basque call signs, together with station identifications, work as framing devices for the ensuing talk, establishing for the radio and its audience symbolic membership in a Basque speaking, *euskaldun*, public, even if later, Castilian could be used inside the program and certainly was frequently used in joking and other off-the-record comments.

In keeping with their anti-institutional and oppositional politics, free radio broadcasters interject a great deal of slang, and colloquialisms, that mark themselves as closer to what they see as "the language of the street." One of the more interesting places to look for this is, again, in the pre-recorded opening and closing of programs. At Usurbil's Paotxa radio, for example, in the opening to the community news program, announcers use Basque informal modes of address, *aizak*, *hi!* (for males) and *aizan*, *hi!* (for women), roughly translatable as "Hey You!", to address each other and by extension, the listening audience. In Gipuzkoa, this informal pronominal system is found most frequently among native speakers in rural areas where it is most commonly used among siblings, same sex peer groups, and for addressing animals on the farm. The use of *hitanoa*, as it is called, indexes familiarity associated with intimate friends of equal status. Opposite sex siblings will use *hika* with one another, but men and women, especially married couples, generally maintain the more formal, respectful *zuka* pronouns with one another.<sup>7</sup> *Hika* may also index lesser status; children, for example, may be addressed frequently as "*Hi*" by adults, but the reverse would elicit a reprimand, especially if the adult is not a member of the family. These forms have been lost in many, especially urban areas, and are not generally known by non-native Basque speakers. However, recently, *hitanoa* has enjoyed somewhat of a renewed interest among some politicized *euskaldun* (Basque speaking) writers, intellectuals, and youth interested in maintaining this distinctive aspect of spoken Basque. My observations of speech patterns in Usurbil indicate that radical *euskaldun* youth in this community, particularly males, make a point of using *hitanoa* in most of their everyday interactions with each other and with women in their *cuadrilla* or friendship circle. They will also occasionally use *hika* with store keepers, teachers, the mayor, the priest or other individuals who would normally be addressed more formally. Strategic use of *hika* pronouns in these circumstances, I would argue, is one among several ways that some radical *euskaldun* youth express their rejection of the traditional status hierarchies that have dominated Basque society including much of nationalist political culture.<sup>8</sup> When Paotxa newscasters use these

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<sup>7</sup> *Zuka* was also described to me as being sweeter (*goxoa*) than *hika*. It is the preferred form to use with infants, for example, while *hika* may be used when the child gets older.

<sup>8</sup> Another example of the appropriation of *hika* modes of address in radical political culture is found in the use of "*Aizan!*" as the name of a radical Basque feminist organization. However, I should note that my claims to an affinity between *hitanoa* and radical *euskaldun* youth culture are still speculative and not meant to suggest that this is its primary meaning at all times and in all contexts. In considering what the use of *hika* may connote in any particular setting, it must be remembered that knowledge of *hika* forms marks a certain degree of fluency or native control of Basque, since it is not commonly taught in Basque language classes and few non-native speakers ever

salutations, *aizak* and *aizan*, to introduce the local news, they construct the communicative sphere as an imagined community of "horizontal comradeship" that is in keeping with free radio's vision of radical democracy. This is accentuated by the fact that, at Paotxa, like most free radios, announcers almost never identified themselves by name: There was none of the cult of personality of named dee jays found on commercial and some pirate stations. Everyone is nameless and in some sense equivalent in status. Extending the sphere of intimacy to the town as a whole, of course, might just as easily be perceived not as an expression of solidarity, but as a kind of rude speech. Such a reading probably wouldn't bother most radio programmers since they often deliberately pepper their broadcasts with humorous, rude, sometimes scatological expressions. Either way, it sets free radio apart from mainstream broadcast etiquette and differentiates it markedly from the language movement's emphasis on creating a formal standard Basque - on making the Basque a language of science, technology, and high culture.<sup>9</sup>

As part of their commitment to the language revival, most free radio stations will broadcast Basque language classes. But the overall goal of the station's language use is not didactic. Language play seems to be more valued than imparting normative or standard Basque. Parody and humor are valued traits in both programming and in language use. Here again, we see some of the best examples of this in the introductions and titles of programs. For example, a program on Molotoff radio ironically called "Spanish Only?" is put on by the local Basque language activist group, Basque in the Basqueland, and generally features debates, interviews, and announcements of various Basque language cultural events. The program, however, begins with a short little dialogue that parodies non-Basque speakers. Especially interesting is the way it pokes fun at people who consider themselves to be Basque patriots, the *abertzale*, doing their part for the language struggle, by sprinkling a few Basque words into their Spanish.<sup>10</sup> Such ridicule of the

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learn this form of speech. Further study of the uses of *hika* among activists might help us to understand how politicized Basques strategically use their knowledge of the pronomial system as ways of not only asserting egalitarianism, but also staking claims to greater Basque authenticity.

<sup>9</sup> It should be emphasized that use of *hitanoa* varies widely from community to community. Very little *hitanoa*, for example, was used at Molotoff radio only 7 kilometers from Paotxa. Besides considering how this form constructs the listening public, we might also think about how free radio changes the way speakers view *hitanoa*. It is possible that using *hitanoa* in oppositional radio, making it a part of the hip transnational music and culture of radical youth, may also have an effect on the connotations of *hitanoa*, shaking loose its associations with rural life and giving this form of speech a new urban feel.

<sup>10</sup> The program, "Spanish Only?" begins with the following dialogue:

[Sounds of lightening and thunder crashing in the background]

Woman: "*Pues, chico, yo ya hago algo; le he puesto a la tienda el nombre de Garazi.*"

Hey, guy, I'm at least doing my part; I named my store *Garazi*.

Young man: "*Yo al perro ya le digo etorri, y al niño ixo.*"

Now I say *etorri* (come) to my dog, and *ixo* (hush) to my baby.

Male, "grunge" voice: "*Ba, yo paso del euskera.*"

Bah, I'm through with Basque.

Young man: "*Pero, si esa lengua ya no tiene futuro, no?*"

*abertzale* is uncommon in the public discourse of the language movement which has generally tended to use a strategy of welcoming and encouraging people to use Basque in whatever form they can. By juxtaposing the well-meaning but Spanish-speaking patriot with the *pasota*, those who reject Basque altogether, the programmers of this show bring what activists often complain about in private into the public domain. From their perspective, this way of "speaking Basque" is really no better than no Basque at all. Indeed, it might be worse for the way in which using a few Basque words to speak to children or to call a dog, trivializes the goal activists have of creating a living Basque language and Basque speaking culture.

One final example involves the parodic spellings of Spanish words. The most common forms this takes is the use of Basque letters, K and TX, in otherwise Castilian words. Both of these forms are found in Basque orthography, but not in Castilian. They appear in Spanish phrases like *ke txorrada* for *que chorrada* (what a foolish or stupid thing) or *la martxa* for *la marcha* (the rhythm, the movement). I also found them appearing often in the titles of punk music programs like: *El Moko Ke Kamina* (The Travelling Boogar) and another called *Koktel de Mocos* (boogar cocktail). These kinds of orthographic mixings and the kind of Beavis and Butthead humor they engender are found throughout radical Basque youth culture: My examples appear in free radio program schedules, but they also occur in comics, graffiti, and in the lyrics and album covers of Basque music groups associated with Basque Radical Rock movement (*rok radikal basko*), all of which are self-identified as oppositional. In the case of one program title, called *Mierkoles Merkatu* (Wednesday Market), the use of the letter "k" makes it ambiguous as to whether we should classify this phrase as colloquial Basque or local Spanish. Such usages play on misrecognition, blurred language boundaries, and a feigned illiteracy in Spanish.

These examples of "bad Spanish" are very much in keeping with free radio activists' rude language ideology. In their deliberate "misspelling" of Spanish words, radical youth are turning what was once a source of stigma for many native rural Basques - that is the inability to read and write standard Castilian - into a way of mocking Castilian. Recent work on "junk Spanish" by Jane Hill (1993) offers an elegant analysis of how joking imitations do their symbolic work. Expanding on the work of Bakhtin and Spitzer, Hill argues that absurd or parodic imitations perform a dual function of both distancing the speaker from the voice they are imitating, and denigrating the source of that voice, making the source, whether it be women, Hispanics, or working class people, appear ridiculous or contemptible. Hill takes as her case the joking imitations of minority group speech forms by majority language speakers to show that linguistic play can have very serious metalinguistic messages. The linguistic practices of radical Basque youth give us an example of this same semiotic principle in reverse. The impossible spellings of Spanish by radical youth perform a kind of ironic reversal in which it is the language of the dominant group,

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But, that language doesn't have a future, does it?  
 All together: *Erderaz eta Kitto*" EZZZZZZ!  
 Spanish Only? Nooooooo!

Castilian, that is pragmatically lowered.<sup>11</sup> My sense is that within radical youth culture, these parodic hybrid spellings create a kind of symbolic allegiance with Basque oppositionality which allows youth to simultaneously use Spanish while distancing themselves from any associations it has with state hegemony.

### Alternative public spheres

In short, Basque free radios create an alternative form of public culture that differs significantly in its language ideology and modes of resistance from the institutionalized sectors of the Basque language movement. Free radios may see part of their mission as that of "exporting" Basque to the wider community, transgressing the existing geography of the language, but they care little for norms and diplomas. In contrast to the conservative codifying concerns of the academicians and planners who dominate the language movement or the bureaucrats of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, free radio tolerates and at times embraces a mongrel and hybridized "Basque" language and culture. Subversive humor, parody, rude speech, and occasional inventive code mixing are valued skills and markers of participation in this alternative public sphere. It is important not to exaggerate here: Basque free radios are not as linguistically anarchic as Guattari might have liked them to be. Radical Basque youth have not gone the way, for example, of Latino performance artists, rappers, and radio programmers in the U.S. who deliberately seek to blur the boundaries with their artful uses of Spanglish (Fusco and Gomez-Peña 1994). Unlike diasporic minorities, it appears that Basque youth have more of an investment in retaining the boundary between Basque and Spanish even in their irreverent speech.

The fact that youth have turned to radio as a medium of oppositional cultural expression speaks to an awareness of the centrality of media in shaping cultural life. Free radio, like other forms of alternative media, operate on the philosophy that one must take what is dominant in a culture to change it quickly. One of the changes youth are attempting is to put their language and ideas into motion. In doing so, free radio uses the media not to disperse information to people - the consumer model of mainstream broadcast media - but to draw them in to local communicative networks. To borrow from Guattari, free radio's motion is centripetal, hoping to foster in those who listen a sense of involvement in local events and local culture (Guattari in Kogawa 1985). This is quite different from the strategy of language standardization, which offers up a single translocal language with which to communicate across towns. As a form of activism, the logic of free radio is bottom-up rather than top-down. It works by poaching on the airwaves, rather than by direct confrontation. For Guattari, free radios were to be extensions of the conversations people have in the street, in the cafe, around the dinner table. This is especially clear in the news reports called *informatiboa* or *albisteak*. At Paotxa radio, for example, programmers attempted to give priority to topics that they believed interested residents. In this way free radio news broke with the

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<sup>11</sup> Keith Basso's study of joking imitations of "the Whiteman" by Apache speakers (1979) is another good example of how subaltern groups may use parody to construct, at least temporarily, a symbolic order in which they are culturally superior to and different from dominant groups.

formulaic categories of news as found in mainstream media: Local, national, international, sports, and weather. Even when radio announcers were repeating news reported in the papers, they were encouraged to annotate the reports with their own opinions and perspectives. They also introduced into their news reports a section on town gossip and rumors - who was getting married when, what they were going to wear, whether they were going to have it videotaped, and so on. This was done very tongue in cheek of course, but programmers claim that of all the shows, the gossip section was the most popular. They also announced on the radio the recent deaths of town residents. One of Paotxa's programmers explained this to me in the following way:

the first thing our mothers do when they get the paper is read the death notices. They used to be posted on the wall of the church. We are just taking that custom and putting it on the radio. We are taking what people actually talk about in town, in the street, and making that our definition of news.

The public sphere of free radio is thus framed as emphatically local. But we have to ask, what does local mean in this context? If we look at the programming as a whole, these "local" expressions of Basque radical youth culture draw upon and are enriched by a wide array of extra-national cultural images, narratives, and modes of representation. In the past couple of years, African American culture and politics were everywhere to be found in the form of rap music, Public Enemy clothing, Malcolm X insignia, and "Fight the Power" slogans which were written on the program tapes members of Molotoff radio gave to me. Radical youth appropriate these images and slogans into symbols of Basque oppositionality, inserting them into local narratives, debates, and modes of representation.<sup>12</sup> A quick scan of public cultures today shows us that such complex cultural brews are increasingly common in the urban neighborhoods of London, Paris, and Berlin, forcing us to rethink and redefine not only "the spatial, territorial, and geopolitical parameters of the public sphere," but also the counterpublics, like free radio, that emerge in its orbit (Hansen 1993b). As Miriam Hansen has pointed out :

The restructuring and expansion of the communications industries on a transnational, global scale more than ever highlights the quotation marks around the terms of national culture and national identity. Indeed, the accelerated process of transnationalization makes it difficult to ground a concept of the public in any territorial entity, be it local, regional, or national (1993b: 183).

This is *not* to say, of course that free radios are not tied to specific places and specific times. They are. Radios are linked to identifiable social networks of radical youth in urban and semi-urban areas; they come out of particular social settings, bars and youth houses, and are linked to contestations for particular public spaces. In this sense, the alternative public sphere they create does have a location

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<sup>12</sup> The appropriation of African American rap music and cultural style by European ethnic and linguistic minorities is not uncommon. For a fascinating parallel case among Franco-Magribi youth see Gross, McMurray, and Swedenburg (1992).

that we need to address in attempting to make sense of their linguistic strategies.<sup>13</sup> It is to say, however, that these "local" expressions of Basque radical youth culture are constituted through a kind of cultural bricolage that is facilitated by transnational flows of media, commodities, images, and people. This is nowhere more apparent than in the musical programming which juxtaposes folk with thrash, funkadelic with *txalaparta* (a wooden percussive instrument), tex mex with Basque accordion music. Through these juxtapositions, radical youth affirm connections to resistance struggles and marginalized groups elsewhere in ways that challenge the bounded and unified representations of Basque language and identity found in nationalist treatises or the census map.

Precisely because they have a history of marginalization, minority language groups have had the burden of establishing their difference from and equivalence to dominant languages. As a result, in certain domains activists have shunned hybrid cultural and linguistic forms as threatening to the integrity of their language (Jaffe 1993). This is not the prevailing attitude for all spheres of minority language production. Free radio works by a different logic creating a space that is simultaneously syncretic, local, and transnational. Free radios open up new spaces at the same time that they address the spatiality of linguistic domination which relegates the minority language to the sphere of private talk. They aim to take the Basque language out of the private domain and into the street, and to take, as they say, the reality of the street into the public domain. Their efforts evoke Lizzie Borden's film *Born in Flames*, where radio is seized as a means of taking another kind of delegitimated talk, in this case the talk of feminists, and putting it into the streets. Radio is conceptualized in both cases as an instrument of back talk/talking back (hooks 1990). In many ways, the imaginary space of free radios is heterogeneous in contrast to the unitary space of nationalism. It is also profoundly urban in the sense that Salman Rushdie gives to this term in his *Satanic Verses*. For Rushdie, what distinguishes the urban experience is not skyscrapers or concrete streets, but the simultaneous co-presence of multiple realities. Free radios are urban not because they exist only in cities - in some cases like Usurbil, the town has no more than 5000 inhabitants. These low powered, ephemeral stations, with their radical philosophy of democratic communication, are urban in the sense that they try, in however imperfect ways, to place the heterogeneity of Basque society on the airwaves. These representations too, deserve our attention as part of the ongoing construction of minority languages.

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<sup>13</sup> I want to thank William Hanks for making this point in his comments to an earlier version of this paper.

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