INDEPENDENT, ALTERNATIVE, AND COMMUNITY MEDIA AN OPEN READER

Edited and with an introduction by
David W. Park & Meghan Grosse

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INTRODUCTION

The Promise and Vulnerability of Independent, Alternative, and Community Media

David W. Park and Meghan Grosse

When we think about "the media," we frequently imagine problems that we have with the media. Almost everyone is a critic of "the media." Independent, alternative, and community (IAC) media are different. There are defenses of and even manifestos on behalf of IAC media almost everywhere, and it is rare to encounter someone who speaks against the potential of IAC media. IAC media enjoy an unusually positive reputation in the hearts and minds of people across an eclectic array of political and social positions.

Free market libertarians see IAC media as essential components of a competitive marketplace where a multifarious range of options demonstrates how the lack of government interference can allow even smaller operations to become profitable, public-facing organs of culture and opinion. Here the libertarian ideal of multivocality—a thousand gardens blooming—is seen as the ideal means and ends for how media outlets fit into our lives. Picture a classic mid-twentieth-century newsstand, stocked with hundreds of different print publications from around the world, or imagine the World Wide Web itself, with its ponderously vast number of sites dedicated to all kinds of expression. These would be seen, in libertarian terms, as examples of a functioning free market in communication, a market that draws breath in large part from the vigor found in small media enterprises.

Conservatives who find the corporate media too "liberal" or "progressive" turn to IAC media as a way to get away from the mainstream media, who are held to be cozy with technocrats and other elites. Here the internet has received tremendous attention from conservatives,

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and the World Wide Web's association with conservative causes around the world has given voice to a populist belief in how IAC media outlets put the power back in the hands of those who agree with conservative values, uncensored by any elites.

Marxists see IAC media as exemplars of how media labor can be reclaimed and put in the service of the people in the name of opposition and resistance. Here IAC media are understood largely in terms of that Marxian concern for labor, and even for non-alienated labor, as the ideal of IAC media becomes aligned with the grander project of countering the ideological tools of the bourgeoisie. The slogan telling us we should "become the media" aligns with this vision of how IAC media outlets should operate.

Those who believe that media play an essential role in the sustenance of democracy see IAC media outlets as crucial supports in a Habermasian vision of how opinion ought to be worked out through public communication. Provision for the maintenance of IAC media is seen as essential to the sustenance of democracy. IAC media are seen as something like carve-outs that make autonomous journalism and other public-minded culture possible. These are media outlets as a refuge from the more profit-driven big media corporations, whose profit-focused incentives turn them away from democratic goals and public service.

Activists and intellectuals who represent feminist, Black radical, Indigenous, working class, and other movements all make use of independent media outlets and make plain their belief in the necessity of media being in the hands of the people. IAC media operate here as repositories of hope and power, collecting resources for representation of worldviews frequently ignored by corporate media, countering their othering tendencies, and generating community through the distribution of messages that come from inside their own world.

Scholars around the world rely on publishers of books and journals so that they can share their work with each other and with the broader public. As the biggest academic publishers pursue an accelerated strategy of consolidation and market lock-in, installing their own vision of what is profitable as what will suffice for academe, many scholars find themselves turning to an academic version of IAC media in the hope of finding publishing venues that reflect scholars' own interests and that foster a more organic connection to academic work than can be found in working with the big publishers. [1]

Large, for-profit media corporations frequently regard IAC media as bearers of new possibility for their own operations, in the form of ideas to be co-opted or as properties to be acquired. With a prospector's gaze, these dominant media operations see promise not in IAC media in and of themselves, but in terms of what they might offer to their own future profitability, if the material could be "scaled" or distributed to a broad enough audience. It is a familiar narrative in media history, where a small media organization brings something new and dynamic—the next big thing—to light, and then gets absorbed into the dominant media.

This widespread agreement regarding the beneficence of IAC media is the result of an unusual alignment of different philosophical and political standpoints. The sentiment that brings them into alignment is a widespread agreement that large, corporate, mainstream media outlets are not doing things very well. This is of course a well-worn idea in media studies. If anything can be expected to generate widespread agreement among communication and media studies scholars, it would be the idea that the media—understood frequently

[1] We would be remiss if we did not point out that mediastudies.press—the press for this open reader—aligns with these values.

(and somewhat justifiably) to be a shorthand for large, corporate-controlled media operations—create problems. Independent, alternative, and community media become what we can salvage from the wreck of "the media."

IAC outlets occupy an unusual space in scholarship and pedagogy. Though there is certainly abundant scholarship concerning IAC media, these tend not to attract as much attention as the corporate alternative, in large part because they simply lack the power of large media entities. The decisive media operations and cultural phenomena whose actions are most noticeable and powerful—from Facebook to Disney to Beyoncé to federal regulatory boards—take up much of the space of media studies scholarship. This makes perfect sense, of course; media scholarship *ought* to address the most visible issues we face, and while some parts of the humanities struggle to explain why they focus so much on less prominent parts of the culture, for better or for worse, media studies has long been called to the more prosaic and powerful currents in media culture.

In the classroom, this focus on corporate media makes sense in much the same way. Students enroll in media studies courses, instructors teach them about something called "the media," and so our courses often follow the same cues that our scholarship does, with a focus placed largely on dominant media phenomena. One result is that many of the schools of thought that get regular treatment in media studies courses take on a critical cast; the media are posed mostly as a problem. Media studies courses become litanies of what has gone wrong with the media. Courses that focus on journalism detail the dysfunctions and problems in journalism, where we find a target-rich environment. Courses that focus on critical political economy are shot through with descriptions of large corporate entities exerting themselves against all comers. Cultural studies courses usually touch on the potential for oppositional views, but often make this case on a dreary-if-relevant backdrop of cultural domination. In short: For some very good reasons, media studies classes are often excursions in plumbing the dystopian possibilities of media systems and their effects on individuals and societies.

In light of this downcast tendency in media studies—a tendency that has arguably become even more pronounced in recent years, as authoritarianism's global spread becomes a direct challenge to the very idea of critical thinking—something that this open reader can do is provide material for courses that emphasize something more upbeat. The selections in this open reader do not treat IAC media as uniformly or perfectly good things, nor do we hope to uphold any such myth. Still, IAC media are largely focused on the kinds of hopes that we have about how we communicate with each other. The media considered here link up in direct and obvious ways with hopes for democracy, political progress, self-expression, community formation, conflict resolution, advocacy for neglected groups, mutual understanding, cultural innovation, group advocacy, group representation, and much more. A media studies curriculum ought to include the study of IAC media because they remind us that the media themselves are not just a problem, not just a monolithic agent of capitalist, misogynist, *(neo)* colonial domination.

One potential problem with a focus on smaller media outlets, many of them unknown to all but a few, is that these outlets will not be as familiar to students or their professors. So much the better. By considering termite media and not just white elephant media,[2] we get an

[2] See Manny Farber, "White Elephant Art vs. Termite Art," *Film Culture*, no. 26 (Winter 1962): 9–13.

opportunity for a ground-up perspective, one that reveals a more inspiring set of possibilities and potential than an exclusive focus on the dominant. The IAC perspective does not rid us of dilemmas—indeed the dilemmas run fast and deep in the world of IAC media—but even these dilemmas give us a different perspective for understanding than we would have if our attention remained fixed on dominant media.

Because definitions of IAC media involve perilous slippage, many points of disagreement, and a challenging variety of theoretical emphases, it would be worthwhile to consider in some detail how scholars have defined what we have called—in a nod to that diversity—independent, alternative, and community media. Our goal in this definitional survey is not to arrive at precise or correct definitions, but to establish some of the theoretical parameters at work in the scholarship. The scholarly conversation about IAC media has been going on for a long time in a wide variety of contexts, and there is as much to be gained from noticing the differences and points of contention as there is in noticing the significant points of overlap. For the purposes of this reader, we take IAC media to be part of an ongoing conversation. This conversation involves certain ways of looking at the media, and cues particular problematics and potentials of IAC outlets. Because our goals are broad and pedagogical, and because we are charting an expansive global conversation, we do not offer a specific definition of IAC media. Instead, we review definitions of independent, alternative, and community media expressed in the literature. One can find common themes across all of these definitions, while noting the conceptual fault lines too.

Independent Media

One quickly finds the phenomenon of "independent media" to be a multi-dimensional affair. James Bennett helpfully identifies how media "independence may be present, or contested, at one or all of" four sites. The first of these is the sociopolitical, where status as independent media is taken to refer to a certain independence from governments and to the need for voices independent from those governments to play a role in self-government.[3] The second site is the industrial, where independent media are understood to operate "with 'freedom,' from (excessive) state regulation or commercial imperatives" and from "(in reality or rhetorically) the mainstream."[4] The third site is the formal, "whereby independent media produce and mobilize an ensemble of particular aesthetic and taste codes." Many of these codes are difficult to navigate without the requisite cultural capital, so we find talk of media independence lending itself to "niche and elite tastes." The fourth and final site Bennett identifies is the "rhetorical or discursive," which "operates across the other three sites and is mobilized by producers, audiences, regulators, businesses and a range of vested interests in declaring this or that formation to be 'independent media.'" Here the very idea of media independence, a complex and weighted rhetorical construct, is the thing at play, and we often find this ideal

[3] James Bennett, "Introduction: The Utopia of Independent Media: Independence, Working with Freedom and Working for Free," in *Media Independence: Working with Freedom or Working for Free?*, ed. James Bennett and Niki Strange (Routledge, 2015), 3.

[4] Bennett, "The Utopia of Independent Media," 3–4.

of media independence "expressed as a utopian ideal within which a particular 'independent media' might operate—for example, the free press, or 'Indie' music or film." [5]

The sociopolitical site of independent media frequently finds purchase in considerations of independent media that emphasize outlets' functional independence from governments. We often find this usage of the term "independent media" [6] in parts of the world where governments play a prominent and direct role in shaping communication. James Zaffiro uses this term to explain broadcasting reform in Botswana, [7] and Mercy Wambui describes how "independent media" are a response to an "urgent need to move from top-down, state-driven propaganda to message-driven and participatory forms of dialogue and expression." [8] Jenifer Whitten-Woodring uses "free media" and "independent media" interchangeably, as a way to consider "media free of legal restriction, free of censorship or intimidation/violence, free from financial limitations by government, and encouraging plurality of ownership, monitoring function of journalists, coverage of controversy, and work on behalf of/representing marginalized voices." [9] Peter Eng relays how journalists working for independent media outlets had begun "enlarging the political space in Southeast Asia, a space that has been dominated by authoritarian governments." [10] And Oray Egin employs this same familiar formulation to describe Turkey's prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's attack on independent media. [11] The opposition in this understanding of independent media is rather stark: Good independent media are treated as the cure to bad government-run media.

When searching for non-scholarly sources related to "independent media," we found numerous articles that incorporated this independence-from-the-state understanding. This view is particularly common in Western journalism articles concerning news reporting outside of the US and Western Europe. This definition of independent media—especially independent journalism—as hinging on freedom from state control poses a problem. The presumption that independence from the state makes media outlets meaningfully independent can be criticized as a rather shortsighted and US-centered vision. In his treatment of Brazilian journalism, Afonso de Albuquerque connects this concern for independence from the state to what he calls "US/UK Fourth Estate models of journalism." [12] Albuquerque traces how the very idea of "independent journalism" in Brazil came to be coopted by a neoliberal understanding of commercial journalism as meaningfully independent simply because it was not controlled by the government. When the sociopolitical site of independence is identified as non-state-run media, we find the idea of independence itself doing work to elide or conceal corporate control.

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[5] Bennett, 4.

[6] In this context, the term "independent journalism" is often used instead of "independent media."

[7] James Zaffiro, "Broadcasting Reform and Democratization in Botswana," *Africa Today* 47, no. 1 (2000).

[8] Mercy Wambui, "Media Diversity Towards Democratisation: New Forms of Societical Organization," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 72 (2007): 97.

[9] Jenifer Whitten-Woodring, "Watchdog or Lapdog? Media Freedom, Regime Type and Government Respect for Human Rights," *International Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (2009): 598.

[10] Peter Eng, "The Media and Democratization in Southeast Asia," *Current History* 94, no. 614 (1997): 437.

[11] Oray Egin, "The Silence of Surrender: Erdogan's War on Independent Media," *World Affairs* 176, no. 4 (2013).

[12] Afonso de Albuquerque, "Journalism and Multiple Modernities: The Folha de S. Paulo Reform in Brazil," *Journalism Studies* 20, no. 11 (2018): 1546.

While the sociopolitical site of independent media tends to be focused on particular political contexts, the industrial site of independent media is more widespread. Michael Azzerad points to the "punk ethos of DIY, or do-it-yourself" that characterizes independent rock music.[13] Independent film, likewise, has been defined in terms of the "financing, production and artistic intent" that defines filmmaking that "exists in between avant-garde and experimental films," on the one hand, "and studio-financed Hollywood production," on the other.[14] Yannis Tzioumakis acknowledges, and then critiques, the idea that "independent filmmaking consists of the low-budget projects of (mostly) young filmmakers with a strong personal vision," quite distinct from the big-budget Hollywood-style filmmaking.[15] Industrial location also plays a major role in how Geoff King defines independent filmmaking; he describes how many independent films are "produced in an ultra-low-budget world a million miles from that of a Hollywood blockbuster."[16]

The same industrial approach to defining independent media can be found in the worlds of comic books and video games. Gamal Hennessy defines "independent comic book publishing" as something done "without the support or assistance from any larger corporate owner or third party publisher," which he connects to "creator-driven comic book publishing" and "freelance comic book publishing."[17] In the world of video games, Paulo Ruffino outlines the broadly-shared understanding that "independent video games were made by individuals or small companies, with limited budgets, and distributed privately or via online platforms bypassing traditional publishers," an understanding that Ruffino finds disappointing given that it is unclear how this movement's "new modalities of production" represented any meaningful emancipation.[18] Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter find independent video game development to be swamped in a market where the video game publishers have inordinate power,[19] a situation they situate in terms of Vincent Mosco's description of how independent operators in media "absorb high product risks and labor costs for the giants, which maintain control over the critical areas of finance and distribution."[20]

The third site of independence that Bennett applies is the formal. Here the distinctions tend to be more implicit than in the first two sites (sociopolitical and industrial). We find numerous discussions pertaining to how independent media come to be identified in terms of their formal distinction from the content offered by large media corporations. Ryan Hibbett "draws a parallel between indie rock and high art, both of which depend upon a lack of popularity for their value, and require specialized knowledge to be fully appreciated."[21]

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[13] Michael Azzerad, *Our Band Could Be Your Life* (Back Bay Books, 2001), 6.

[14] Linda Badley, Claire Perkins, and Michele Schreiber, "Introduction," in *Indie Reframed: Women's Filmmaking and Contemporary American Independent Cinema*, ed. Linda Badley, Claire Perkins, and Michele Schreiber (University of Edinburgh Press, 2016), 5.

[15] Yannis Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 1.

[16] Geoff King, *American Independent Cinema* (Bloomsbury, 2014), 2.

[17] Gamal Hennessy, *The Business of Independent Comic Book Publishing* (Nightlife Publishing, 2020), 12.

[18] Paolo Ruffino, "After Independence," in *Independent Videogames: Cultures, Networks, Techniques and Politics*, ed. Paolo Ruffino (Routledge, 2021), 2.

[19] Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greg De Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 41.

[20] Vincent Mosco, *The Political Economy of Communication: Rethinking and Renewal* (Sage, 1996), 109.

[21] Ryan Hibbett, "What is Indie Rock?," *Popular Music and Society* 28, no. 1 (2005): 55.

Independent filmmakers, he adds, are those who "create films that stand against the crass commercialism of mainstream Hollywood while often pushing the envelope in terms of subject matters and representation."[22] Independence can be lined up with the "formal/aesthetic strategies" of independent films, wherein these films "adopt formal strategies that disrupt or abandon the smoothly flowing conventions associated with the mainstream Hollywood style" and "offer challenging perspectives on social issues."[23] Something similar can be said about the "distinctive aesthetic traits" of independent games.[24]

The fourth and final site of media independence, the rhetorical or discursive, reminds us that "independence" is a stake in the game, a site to be claimed. Here there is a more pronounced awareness that media independence is put forward as a premise in some argument on behalf of independent media. "Independent film" is a label that comes to be attached even to films produced by major corporations.[25] Alisa Perren describes how "indie film" became a convenient marketing label to brand a particular type of movie for Hollywood studios looking to extend their reach into certain markets.[26] Independent rock music, likewise, can be seen as "a marketing tool."[27] It is the "relationship to the broader social, cultural or ideological landscape" that subtends the "independent" identity of independent films.[28] The rhetorical or discursive site demands an appreciation of the contradictions of media independence, the impossibility of truly nailing down what independence must always mean. These contradictions are indexed by the sheer difficulty in settling on a "fixed definition of independence"; definitions of independence range widely "across various actors involved and their temporary and fluctuating interpretations of their own work" in indie games.[29] Laine Nooney addresses how "indie" comes to serve as "a referent for a curious balancing act between art and business, commerce and creativity." This balancing act generates a host of rhetorical strategies of independence, poised as it is among "varied aesthetic imperatives about the contours of 'personal expression,' a kind of neoliberal hucksterism around the power of individual creativity, and the endlessly scalable conditions which drive our creative desires."[30] At the rhetorical and discursive site of media independence, we are reminded that there is no essential "independence" that operates autonomously in any particular media context, to be measured with scientific precision. Media independence is always already a claim.

Alternative Media

Media deemed to be "alternative" encounter issues that run parallel to the "independent" designation. Certainly, as with "independent" media, there are nagging concerns rooted in

[22] Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 1.

[23] King, *American Independent Cinema*, 2.

[24] Ruffino, "After Independence," 2.

[25] Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 3.

[26] Alisa Perren, *Indie, Inc.: Miramax and the Transformation of Hollywood in the 1990s* (University of Texas Press, 2012).

[27] Hibbett, "What is Indie Rock?," 55.

[28] King, *American Independent Cinema*, 3.

[29] Ruffino, "After Independence," 2.

[30] Laine Nooney, "The Indie is Now: Thoughts on Bennett Foddy's Indiecade East Keynote," LaineNooney.com, June 21, 2014.

demarcation. John Downing decries the term "alternative media" as being "almost oxymoronic" because "everything, at some point, is alternative to something else."[31] It is important, he adds, that we not "idealize alternative media as 'free spaces' that are completely liberated from the day-to-day structural considerations" at work in almost any media operation.[32] Alternative media are often run with commercial constraints in mind, which may make them more like dominant media operations than we might prefer. Linda Jean Kenix notes that "commercially minded alternative media are naturally cognisant of economic pressures and fiscally plan their operations in such a way to (hopefully) ensure their own continued existence—even if the chance of economic sustainability is quite small."[33] As with "independent media," we find ourselves on conceptual terrain where distinctions cannot be taken for granted.

A common issue at work in alternative media definitions concerns their contribution to a broadened and more multivocal media sphere. The common view is that alternative outlets are more inclusive, with a wider range of points of view. The focus on multiplicity can be found in Chris Atton's argument that alternative media "are not simply concerned with presenting a different version of the world; taken together, they offer *multiple* versions of the world."[34] As a rubric, "alternative media" becomes a rather content-neutral way to refer to the range of possibilities for expression. As media that are more easily accessed by creators, alternative media benefit from what Mike Mowbray calls "logics of participation,"[35] wherein accessibility involves "offering broad-based, direct participation in media production, especially to those least well represented in mainstream media and the discourse of dominant publics."[36] James Hamilton argues that the "collective value" of alternative media can be found in "their exploration of new forms of organizing more participatory techniques of media and more inclusive, democratic forms of communication."[37] Alternative media are, then, widely viewed as an important part of what makes a broader cultural conversation possible.

Connected to this idea is a slightly more dynamic appreciation of how alternative media stimulate innovation and "the new," particularly in the context of art.[38] So one can find descriptions of the "heterodox-creative logics" of alternative media, which are "exemplified in a concern with the production of 'culturally radical' content and aesthetic innovations."[39] Though there is reason for skepticism about a connection between innovative aesthetic com-

[31] John D. H. Downing, *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements* (Sage, 2001), ix.

[32] Linda Jean Kenix, "Commercialism and the Deconstruction of Alternative and Mainstream Media," in *The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media*, ed. Chris Atton (Routledge, 2015), 70.

[33] Kenix, "Commercialism and the Deconstruction of Alternative and Mainstream Media," 68.

[34] Chris Atton, "Introduction: Problems and Positions in Alternative and Community Media," in *The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media*, ed. Chris Atton (Routledge, 2015), 2.

[35] Mike Mowbray, "Alternative Logics? Parsing the Literature on Alternative Media," in *The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media*, ed. Chris Atton (Routledge, 2015), 23.

[36] Mowbray, "Alternative Logics?," 24.

[37] James F. Hamilton, "What's Left? Towards a Historicized Critique of Alternative Media and Community Media," in *The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media*, ed. Chris Atton (Routledge, 2015), 373.

[38] Understood this way, art is nothing but a set of media relations. There is an obvious way in which this is true. The term "media" is found quietly at operation in almost all discussion of art, and art departments at colleges and universities are almost always divided according to media (e.g., painting, printmaking, sculpture, photography, and of course "mixed media"). In a less obvious manner, art involves the same structures that other media do. Art galleries and museums are media outlets much like other media outlets, and must be sustained and imagined like other media outlets.

[39] Mowbray, "Alternative Logics?," 27.

munication and meaningful political liberation, it is still worthwhile to appreciate how artistic innovation across all media—from painting to motion pictures to music—depends to a great extent on how those media systems are imagined and structurally arranged.

Alternative media can be defined in terms of how they stand in opposition to dominant media and cultural formations. Here, beyond giving us new voices or a broadened sense of what exists, alternative media come to be associated with, and valued for, their alignment with that which cuts against the dominant way of doing, thinking, or feeling. There is a kind of dialectical appreciation of how alternative media stand opposed to what is dominant. Nick Couldry and James Curran make this an explicit definitional criterion for alternative media when they declare that "what we mean by 'alternative media'" is "media production that challenges, at least implicitly, actual concentrations of media power, whatever form those concentrations may take in different locations."[40] As he lays out the rationale for considering an alternative internet, Chris Atton defines alternative media as "a range of media projects, interventions and networks that work against, or seek to develop different forms of, the dominant, expected (and broadly accepted) ways of 'doing' media."[41] John Downing's description is quite similar to this, with his notion that alternative media "generally serve two overriding purposes: (a) to express opposition vertically from subordinate quarters directly at the power structure and against its behavior; (b) to build support, solidarity and networking laterally against policies or even against the very survival of the power structure."[42] Robert Hackett and William Carroll describe the "ideal" alternative medium as "progressive" and "explicitly opposed to particular axes of domination (corporate capitalism, heterosexism, racism, state authoritarianism)," while also direct about its own "stance of advocacy rather than pseudo-'objectivity.'"[43] Beyond just offering space for new voices, then, alternative media are seen as offering content and modes of being that work against, criticize, oppose, undermine, and denaturalize the dominant way of doing media.

This oppositional tendency in treatments of alternative media can very easily turn into a presumption of the effect of alternative media on the world around them. The impact of alternative media is an important locus of concern. There is tremendous skepticism regarding the extent to which alternative media are in fact effective in bringing about change in the broader world. Scott Uzelman urges caution when sorting out effects. He remarks on the "determinism of technique" that often shapes our understanding of alternative outlets, a determinism that presumes that "certain techniques of organization and struggle," including those exemplified by alternative media, "will produce emancipatory outcomes."[44] A similar concern is raised by Christian Fuchs, who warns about the "danger that small-scale local alternative projects will develop into psychological self-help initiatives without political relevance

[40] Nick Couldry and James Curran, "Introduction and Theoretical Perspectives," in *Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World*, ed. Nick Couldry and James Curran (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 7.

[41] Chris Atton, *An Alternative Internet: Radical Media, Politics, and Creativity* (University of Edinburgh Press, 2004), ix.

[42] Downing, *Radical Media*, xi.

[43] Robert Hackett and William Carroll, *Remaking Media: The Struggle to Democratize Public Communication* (Routledge, 2006), 58.

[44] Scott Uzelman, "Dangerous Practices: 'Determinism of Technique' in Alternative Media and Their Literature," *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* 7, no. 1 (2011): 22.

that are more bourgeois individualist self-expressions than political change projects."[45] It is certainly a good idea to remain on watch for assumptions about the effects of alternative media in the absence of evidence.

Even with a healthy dose of skepticism, it is good to consider how alternative media have been assayed in terms of their effects on the world. Mike Mowbray helpfully sorts out two "levels of impact" that get tied to alternative media: "(1) subjective individual and immediate group-level impacts for participants in production; (2) broad social and political impacts related to public-formation, group representation, political deliberation, contestation and social movement formation/mobilization."[46]

These kind of "inward" effects on the people making alternative media, and "outward" effects for the world around these outlets, give us some sense of how to conceptualize potential effects. The presumption of smaller-level effects can be found, for instance, in the idea that alternative media provide a space for those who stand against a dominant order. "Alternative comics and fanzines," for instance, have been posited as "'virtual' meeting spaces where producers and readers unite in 'communities of dissent.'"[47] Here it is the real-life drawing together of people in the name of some shared meaning or cause—the founding or sustenance of a community—that is the effect. Alternative media can also be considered in terms of the connections they have with the rest of the world. The situation has been compared to Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the rhizome, which "ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles."[48] Alternative media can, correspondingly, be conceptualized in terms of connections they can "establish with (segments of) the state and the market, without losing their proper identity and becoming incorporated and/or assimilated."[49] The effects of alternative media, in other words, can be registered through how they come to be connected, not just to small networks of individuals, but to much of the rest of the world through the workings of rhizome-like—non-linear, horizontal—networks of relations that inevitably connect alternative media to more sweeping power relations.

An important intervention in the conceptualization of alternative media can be found in Nick Couldry's careful attention to how "voice" comes to matter. We are of course accustomed to thinking about how alternative media can be linked to voice, if voice is taken to be the "value that motivates the production of alternative media."[50] As we have already seen, alternative media are valued for their capacity to allow all kinds of individuals and groups to speak up, and by extension, for this communication to be potentially effective and to garner

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[45] Christian Fuchs, "Alternative Media as Critical Media," *European Journal of Social Theory* 13, no. 2 (2010): 189.

[46] Mowbray, "Alternative Logics," 22.

[47] Teal Triggs, "Liberated Spaces: Identity Politics and Anti-consumerism," in *Below Critical Radar: Fanzines and Alternative Comics from 1976 to Now*, ed. Roger Sabin and Teal Triggs (Slab-O-Concrete, 2002), 35.

[48] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (University of Minnesota Press), 7.

[49] Nico Carpentier, Rico Lie, and Jan Servaes, "Community Media: Muting the Democratic Media Discourse?," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003): 61.

[50] Nick Couldry, "Alternative Media and Voice," in *The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media*, ed. Chris Atton (Routledge, 2015), 44.

an audience. Couldry nudges us beyond this, "distinguishing between two levels: voice as a *process* (already relatively familiar) and voice as a *value*." [51]

This second level—voice as a value—becomes a crucial turning point for Couldry. Voice as a value "is particularly important at times when a whole way of thinking about social political and cultural organisation (neoliberalism) operates on the basis that for certain crucial purposes voice as a process does *not* matter." [52] Couldry pivots to argue in the affirmative, to say that "[t]reating voice as a value means discriminating in favor of ways of organizing human life and resources that put the value of voice into practice." [53] Couldry here draws on, and we point to, Clemencia Rodriguez's consideration of "citizens' media" as a touchstone for understanding voice as a value. [54] Rodriguez builds her case for citizens' media on how we ought not to think of "democracy as an ultimate goal, a final state-of-things to reach" but should instead consider "how democratic and nondemocratic forces are being renegotiated constantly, and how citizens' media can strengthen the former, thus contributing to the—although sometimes ephemeral—swelling of the democratic." [55] If we are to think of voice as a value in media processes, Rodriguez shows us what is being valued with her careful consideration of how citizens' media practitioners "may be relabeling the world, reorganizing reality, and reconstituting a new order where preestablished social and cultural codifications of power cease to make sense." [56] To value voice "then involves particular attention to the conditions under which voice *(as a process)* can be effective, and how broader forms of organization may subtly devalue voice," [57] an operation that can be found in colonialism and postcolonialism as much as in neoliberalism. This is subtle work here, benefiting from the reflexivity that comes from both a healthy skepticism regarding presumed effects, and a deeper appreciation of the extent to which regnant modes of social organization can be understood as devaluing our voices. An appreciation of alternative media calls attention to that silencing.

Couldry develops some corollaries regarding the workings of voice. If voice can be defined as "our capacity to make, and be recognized as making, narratives about our lives and the world within which we act, some further general principles follow." The first of these is that "voice is socially grounded," and thus it "depends on shared material resources, and the specifically social resources (including language) that enable and sustain practices of narratives." [58] Second, we can come to understand that "voice is a form of reflexive agency." Our "exchangeable narratives" that come from our voices are not just "random babblings"; they represent "a form of agency for which we take responsibility as agents." Like other things we do, the "stories we tell, . . . as Hannah Arendt argues [in *The Human Condition]*, 'disclose'

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[51] Couldry, "Alternative Media and Voice," 44.

[52] Couldry, 44.

[53] Couldry, 44.

[54] We should point out that Rodriguez suggests that we "abandon the term 'alternative media' and coin a new marker: 'citizens' media.'" She sees "citizens' media" as superior because "'alternative media' rests on the assumption that these media are alternative to something, this definition will easily entrap us in binary thinking: mainstream media and their alternative, that is, alternative media." Clemencia Rodriguez, *Fissures in the Mediascape: An International Study of Citizens' Media* (Hampton Press, 2001), 20.

[55] Clemencia Rodriguez, *Fissures in the Mediascape*, 22.

[56] Rodriguez, 151.

[57] Couldry, "Alternative Media and Voice," 44.

[58] Couldry, 45.

us 'as subjects.'" The third and final corollary is that "voice requires a material form which may be individual, collective or distributed." [59] In addition to "social resources," voice also "requires a form. Both are aspects of the materiality of voice." Couldry points out that the "material form of voice need not be under the exclusive control of the individual." The media, including alternative media, give us many examples of situations—newspapers, movies, and streaming video/television are obvious examples—where voice is "collectively produced." Particularly important for the digital age is the fact that "sometimes we can recognize ourselves in the outcome of a production where specific individual and collective inputs cannot easily be separated from a broader flow: this form of voice is not individual or collective, but 'distributed.'" [60] Voice can thus be appreciated as a socially grounded form of reflexive agency that can be given material form, and can be individual, collective, or distributed.

Another important intervention in the conceptualization of alternative media comes from Wendy Willems, who recommends nothing less than "a shift from an analytical focus on 'alternative media' to 'alternative mediation.'" [61] This shift is largely derived from Jesús Martín-Barbero's efforts to de-center the familiar object of media studies ("the media" or "alternative media") and replace it with a focus on process instead. The focus on mediations, as Omar Rincón describes it, involves no longer "instrumentalizing media as carriers of information" so "we can begin to truly see media as traversed by interrelationships between popular culture, industrial machines, and politics." [62] Significantly, this emphasis on process over categorization in the context of alternative media shares a great deal with Clemencia Rodriguez's rejection of the term "alternative media" altogether, in favor of "citizens' media," a term that she believes will lead us away from merely categorizing different media outlets as "alternative" or not. [63] For Willems, this avoidance of labels helps her to analyze the media in Zimbabwe, where "Western-driven media" outlets—often backed by NGOs—found alternatives in both government-run media outlets and in "popular jokes . . . circulated in public spaces, through e-mail listservs and via SMS messages." [64] The meaningfully alternative approach to communication could be found to a great extent in government-run media outlets, which runs counter to many (Western) understandings of how alternative media operate. She judges the idea of mediation superior to alternative media, in part because mediation can take these kinds of relational dimensions to heart. "A key advantage of the concept of mediation," she writes, "is that it refers to the dynamic process of communication as compared to a more static understanding of institutions." [65] Willems thus helps us find a way out of the question-begging morass of determining what is and is not an alternative media outlet, so that we can instead find our way to the more essential—if more complicated because more dynamic—issue of

[59] Couldry, "Alternative Media and Voice," 46.

[60] Couldry, 46.

[61] Wendy Willems, "Alternative Mediation, Power and Civic Agency in Africa," in *The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media*, ed. Chris Atton (Routledge, 2015), 90.

[62] Omar Rincón, "Martín-Barbero's Style," *Media, Culture & Society* 46, no. 3 (2024): 639.

[63] Rodriguez, *Fissures in the Mediascape*, 20.

[64] Willems, "Alternative Mediation," 94.

[65] Willems, 94. Here Willems draws on Jésus Martín-Barbero, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to Mediation* (Sage, 1993); Roger Silverstone, "The Sociology of Mediation and Communication," in *The Sage Handbook of Sociology*, ed. C. Calhoun, C. Rojek, and B. S. Turner (Sage, 2005); and Sonia Livingstone, "On the Mediation of Everything," *Journal of Communication* 59, no. 1 (2009).

how communication processes can be enacted as meaningful alternatives to dominant communication practices. None of this fully quells the debate regarding the effects of alternative media. It must be admitted that the capacity to effect massive influence is still largely the reserve of a relatively small number of large and usually state- or corporate-controlled media outlets. Nevertheless, this focus on mediation and on voice does help us to consider more fully the significance that alternative media can be understood to have.

Community Media

Where definitions of independent media are complex, definitions of community media in existing scholarship tend to to be more tightly circumscribed. These definitions are closely intertwined with the definitions of independent and alternative media outlined above. As with these other forms, community media are defined by the use of small-scale or non-commercial production and distribution networks. Like independent and alternative media, community media serve groups underrepresented or marginalized by commercial media, but importantly, community media prioritize questions of how underrepresented and marginalized communities can identify and attend to their own interests through local, accessible media networks.[66]

Definitions and considerations of community media tend to be more narrowly focused on practices of direct engagement. Chris Atton describes community media studies as being "primarily interested in social and cultural practices that enable people to participate directly in the organization, production and distribution of their own media" and which "are most often organized and produced by 'ordinary' people."[67] In this volume and across definitions of community media, the idea of "community" can address communities formed around shared interest, but the concept is most often defined geographically even as the form and function of community media can vary greatly.

While local interests may be lost in mainstream media, community media encourage direct engagement with their audiences and, in doing so, create spaces for community voices and community building. For audiences who feel "extreme dissatisfaction with mainstream media form and content," community media can provide avenues for "free expression and participatory democracy" that "enhanc[e] community relations and promot[e] community solidarity."[68] Ellie Rennie identifies both participation and access as distinctive qualities of community media which include "nonprofessional media makers" in production and "provid[e] individuals and community with a platform to express their views."[69] In some cases, involvement by community members goes beyond production to include management and policymaking. Community media serve an important function in providing opportunities for media makers to speak to and about the local communities to which they belong.

Even more than the other categories discussed in this volume, community media consider the democratizing potential of media—as tools that can develop civic identity and encourage

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[66] Peter M. Lewis, "Community Media Policy," in *The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media*, ed. Chris Atton (Routledge, 2015), 179.

[67] Chris Atton, *The Routledge Companion to Independent and Alternative Media* (Routledge, 2015), 1.

[68] Kevin Howley, *Community Media: People, Places, and Communication Technologies* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

[69] Ellie Rennie, *Community Media: A Global Introduction* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 3.

civic participation and as tools that are democratizing media production itself. As noted above, Clemencia Rodriguez defines a related category of locally-focused media she calls citizens' media. Where some studies of community media focus primarily on content, Rodriguez focuses on practice. By becoming active participants in citizens' media networks, as producers and as consumers, groups who are otherwise ignored or marginalized by existing media systems can become active citizens in their own communities. This category of community-focused media foregrounds empowerment as a central goal, encouraging citizens to "participate in actions that shape their own identities, the identities of others, and their social environment," and through doing so "produce power" within their communities.[70]

Access to the management and production of media often depends on the technical and financial demands of different media. Radio often attracts the attention of community media researchers as a result of radio's accessibility. Nick Jankowski argues that "because of the substantially less financial investment and operating costs [of radio] as compared to community television, community radio finds extensive application in development projects and among groups of resistance."[71] Various case studies highlight the importance of community radio platforms for resistance efforts.[72] Around the world, community radio has provided "a new communications paradigm" that shifts citizens' understanding of their own power and which can act as "a vehicle for marginalized communities to stake a claim in territory heretofore unquestionably ruled by the centre."[73] While radio is a powerful community-building tool, we see similar efforts by community TV stations[74]; digital community networks, online resources, and technology training centers[75]; and community filmmaking and film screenings.[76] Community media, then, come to be focused on building and maintaining direct connections to specific communities and are developed in order to serve those communities.

Pulling It All Together

A fundamental assumption that is broadly shared across definitions of IAC media holds that structural features of media organizations matter. This assumption, embraced also by critical political economists of the media, is frequently applied in critical understandings of

[70] Rodriguez, *Fissures in the Mediascape*, 19.

[71] Nicholas Jankowski, "Community Media Research: A Question for Theoretically-Grounded Models," *Javnost—The Public* 10, no. 1: 7.

[72] Patricia W. Elliott, "Another Radio is Possible: Thai Community Radio from the Grass Roots to the Global," *The Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast and Audio Media* 8, no. 1 (2010); Lawrence Naaikuur and Africanus L. Diedong, "Core Dimensions of Community Radio in Action: The Case of Ghana," *Global Media Journal: African Edition* 8, no. 2 (2014); Ian Watson, "Combatting Cultural 'Neve Gas': Maintaining Traditional Media and Culture Through Local Media Production in Australia, Canada and Mexico," *Journal of Alternative and Community Media* 2 (2017).

[73] Elliott, "Another Radio is Possible," 7.

[74] Lola de Koning, Elaine Nolten, and Koen Leurs, "Community Media Makers and the Mediation of Difference," in *Cultures, Citizenship, and Human Rights*, ed. Rosemarie Buikema, Antoine Buyse, and Antonius C.G.M. Robben (Routledge, 2020); Jankowski, "Community Media Research."

[75] Christina Dunbar-Hester, "Frailties at the Borders: Stalled Activist Media Projects in East Africa," *International Journal of Communication* 10 (2016); Jamie Alexander Greig, "Wireless Mesh Networks as Community Hubs: Analysis of Small-Scale Wireless Mesh Networks and Community-Centered Technology Training," *Journal of Information Policy* 8 (2018); Jankowski, "Community Media Research."

[76] Diana Coryat, "Not Just Surviving but Thriving: Practices That Sustain a New Generation of Latin American Community Media Makers," *Journal of Alternative and Community Media* 4, no. 4 (2019).

dominant media organizations—the small number of very large media firms that can reliably direct messages to very large numbers of people. This familiar political-economic critique of big media has been used to criticize these behemoths for undermining democracy, spreading imperialist ideologies, and operating counter to the needs of the public.[77] At the core of the arguments one finds an appreciation for how these dominant media organizations are, because of their size and influence, in many ways insulated from competition and aligned with other powerful forces, including other powerful capitalist entities and political elites. These organizations perpetuate themselves in large part not by responding to audience demand so much as by taking advantage of the benefits that accrue to established firms in twenty-first-century capitalism.[78] Economies of scale have long have long empowered dominant media to outcompete smaller entities, who must face choppier waves. Larger media corporations can plan further into the future, apply leverage more effectively to their competition and to other corporations with whom they collaborate, and take losses for a longer period of time than smaller operations. Larger media corporations can benefit from easier access to finance and to investors' massive troves of wealth. Because their operations are so well-financed, they inevitably develop strategies in media production that are focused on reducing risk, which leads to a reliance on formulaic and proven media products. Risk reduction is often paired with a drive to extend media corporations globally. This risk-reduced sameness becomes a significant chunk of what passes for global culture, undermining local cultures and advancing the interests of the powerful. In broad strokes, dominant media corporations are criticized for operating in a top-down manner: These are large organizations operating hierarchically within themselves and acting to preserve and control their own very powerful positions. While one might hope that such large and well-positioned media firms would have the spine to stand up to, say, authoritarian tendencies in twenty-first-century politics, we find more frequently that the dominant media firms remain too committed to their own interests in profit and risk reduction to justify much hope in their advocacy on behalf of democracy.

Much as the structural analysis of these dominant media organizations lends itself to a critical understanding of their roles in society, a structural understanding of IAC media shows us that "structures" in and of themselves are not the problem. IAC media operate separately from the dominant media and are as a rule much smaller in scale. They may or may not be profit-oriented. Almost without exception they are not publicly traded companies; one cannot buy stock in them. IAC media are accessible in a way that dominant media are not; they can

[77] Classics of the genre in the US and UK include: Ben Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly* (Beacon Press, 1983); Robert W. McChesney, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for Control of U.S. Broadcasting, 1928–1935* (Oxford University Press, 1993); Jeremy Tunstall, *The Media are American: Anglo-American Media in the World* (Columbia University Press, 1979); and Herbert I. Schiller, *Mass Communications and American Empire* (Beacon Press, 1971).

[78] The issue of supply and demand is—or should be—a complicated one in media studies. We hold that dominant media firms enjoy a position whereby their offerings come to be so ubiquitous that the very idea of demand becomes complicated. To turn this on its head, imagine a very small-scale publication, perhaps one that is printed in an edition of five copies. If someone found this and bought it, that would seem to be a more "demand"-originated moment of consumption than when someone elects to engage with media texts produced and distributed by dominant media firms. To be an audience member for something made by a dominant media firm is not much of a choice. It is more likely to be the result of habit, or of surrender. Descriptions of active audiences often miss the point that even the ability to gain access to some texts is unevenly distributed, and that texts do not require tremendous activity on the part of the audience (though they may be subject to all kinds of audience initiative).

be flexible, and they can be approached from without, as when an audience member demands explanation. In this sense, IAC media operate in a bottom-up manner, without substantial power in their respective markets and with less assurance that they can be sustained for very long. We have already seen Nick Couldry and James Curran's definition of alternative media as challenging the concentration of media power.[79] With media power concentrated in the hands of the (very) few, IAC media, simply by operating, come to be part of something "other than" what dominant media offer. IAC media are thus taken to be valuable because they can give the world something other than, something in implicit opposition to, what the dominant media do. They are structurally impelled to be something different. While dominant media operate according to logics of centralization and risk avoidance, IAC media operate according to a logic of diversification, and this puts them in a very risky business, where their operations are never too big to fail.

The existence and sustenance of IAC media in many cases depends on structures in place to preserve them. IAC media need: material resources (including a place to operate and technical equipment), means of generating funds, outlays of time available for media production and distribution, human capital (including all kinds of know-how and on-the-ground skills), social capital (personal connections between members of IAC media organizations and connections to the world around them), and some kind of meaningful linkage to the surrounding culture so that the content they purvey can claim some relevance. Given the tendencies of dominant media, we can see how IAC outlets benefit from low barriers to entry. When it is not extremely expensive to create and distribute media, it is easier for IAC media to operate. Zines are a classic example. Zines (short for "fanzines") are small-scale publications, distributed via mail order or in specialty stores. One reasons zines came into being and still exist is that they are very inexpensive to make. Access to a photocopier, a stapler, and a pen are frequently all that is technically required. This accessibility can be contrasted with broadcast television, in which even a single episode requires far more resources. This expense contrast is instructive for this reader, because it helps to highlight a theme that is often implicit: IAC media are frequently created and sustained when barriers to entry are low.

Much of the difference between IAC media and dominant media is brought out by Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of autonomy and heteronomy in cultural production. The value of autonomy—implied in such phrases as "creative control," "freedom of expression," and even "independent media," "alternative media," and "community media"—is connected to the situation where those who are making the culture are not beholden to or restricted by "outside" forces. Bourdieu describes the "field of restricted production," where "the field of large-scale production . . . is symbolically excluded,"[80] and where the "opposition between the 'commercial' and the 'non-commercial'" comes to be important.[81] This sense of exemption from large-scale production clears the way for a certain autonomy, a concern for something other than profit-oriented goals that are imposed from above. It is easy to go too far with a word like "autonomy"; for our purposes all that matters is that individuals involved in making IAC media are, as a rule, operating according to logics distinct from those that inform dominant media. Also implied here is the idea that IAC media are not isolated from dominant media;

[79] Couldry and Curran, "Introduction and Theoretical Perspectives," 7.

[80] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Columbia University Press, 1993), 39.

[81] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 82.

they are, instead, relationally identified in terms of how they make links to each other and in terms of how they differ from dominant media.[82] Another implication of this understanding of IAC media is that they can frequently be susceptible to certain types of exclusion, to creating symbolic barriers that keep some people out. Exclusion can be a welcome feature for those hoping to breathe life into a subcultural formation. The quality of being set aside from the broader culture can allow marginal groups to thrive. Of course that drive for exclusivity can also reproduce longstanding power relations around race, class, gender, sexuality, language, and more. Simply being set aside from the mainstream is no guarantee that the culture in question challenges dominant power relations. The dream of a world where everyone gets relatively equal access to the media is quite familiar, and this dream is often applied to new media technologies. When the World Wide Web became popular in the 1990s, there was considerable hope that we would all benefit from the enhanced power to create content alongside a dramatically increased range of content to receive. What actually transpired, of course, has been quite different. The web has become a welcoming home for finance-backed corporations accumulating user bases, where the asymmetries in media production have reasserted themselves. The financialization of media—including, but not limited to, the internet—has rearranged much of what we think of as "media industries" and drawn even large companies into strange new terrain inhospitable to variety and to the interests of smaller audiences.[83] Part of this can be understood in terms of Cory Doctorow's concept of "enshittification," which refers to the process by which companies doing business on the web come to place less and less emphasis on individual users or audience members as they focus more on other businesses as customers and then move on to investors.[84] The finance-intensive world of twenty-first-century media processes is rife with this kind of thing. *We suggest that IAC media can be thought of as unshittified media.*[85] They are definitively aimed at and put into conversation with audience members more than they are shaped by the interests of other businesses or shareholders. This reader can serve as a reminder that media can be put into service of the needs and desires of people.

How This Reader Was Assembled

The process of gathering material for the reader was marked by care and critical reflection. We set out to find as many article-length sources as possible. Such a list would, after careful scrutiny, provide the bedrock from which we could extract a volume that fit our interests. We began with databases and search engines such as EBSCO, ProQuest, Google Scholar, and Nexis Uni. We employed a variety of search terms that reflect the diverse IAC nomenclature: indie media, indy media, independent media, alternative media, grassroots media, activist

[82] For an excellent critical take on Bourdieu's notion of autonomy in the media—and especially in journalism—see Michael Schudson, "Autonomy from What?," in *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*, ed. Rodney Benson and Erik Neveu (Polity, 2005).

[83] See Andrew DeWaard, *Derivative Media: How Wall Street Devours Culture* (University of California Press, 2024).

[84] Cory Doctorow, "How Monopoly Enshittified Amazon," *Pluralistic: Daily Links from Cory Doctorow*, November 28, 2022.

[85] With sadness, we acknowledge that in many cases they just haven't been enshittified yet . . . Still we see great value in appreciating both the lack of attention to audience demand found amongst dominant media and the often very direct relationship with audiences found in IAC media.

media, community media, and participatory media. We then added medium-specific search terms ("comic books," "movies," "radio," and so on). We found thousands of candidate sources.

This is an *open* reader, so we winnowed out paywalled materials by focusing exclusively on those that are open access (OA). Here the sorting was, at times, difficult. Many publishers—especially from the dominant media—are intentionally unclear about permissions and copyright status. After checking and re-checking, we narrowed the list of thousands down to 284 OA academic texts.

We then began the hard work of selecting the pieces that fill this reader. We carefully weighed each source, guided by a vision of the kind of reader we want to use ourselves. Here are the criteria we used:

1. ***Relevance.*** Is the source centrally occupied with issues pertaining to IAC media? Or does it only touch fleetingly on the concept?
2. ***Recency.*** Does the source connect with themes that remain relevant today, in 2026? Would its inclusion in a course syllabus make the reader more relevant to undergraduate and graduate students today? Or is it primarily focused on issues that do not leave much to consider in our time?
3. ***Variety.*** Does the source, acting in concert with other sources, add something new to the conversation, something that diverges both from what students can be assumed to already know, and from what other sources in the reader have to offer?
4. ***Conceptual heft.*** Does the source identify concepts that give students and instructors tools for understanding IAC media more broadly? Can the source be put into sympathetic or antagonistic conversation with other items in the reader and elsewhere in a curriculum? Or does the source simply identify isolated parts of what could be a bigger story?
5. ***Inclusion:*** Does the source push the reader away from a reliance on issues coming out of the Global North and specifically from dominant parts of the social formations in the Global North? Is the subject matter or theoretical center of gravity inclined toward demonstrating the relevance of IAC media to oft-excluded groups? [86]

As we identified the texts, we also kept our eyes on the connections among them. We identified categories of texts as they occurred in literature searches. This allowed us to identify eleven sections for this reader:

[86] There is much to be said about how our quarry here—the world of open access articles and books—is capable of a deceptive exclusion. In many ways this mirrors the kinds of exclusion that Mohan Dutta et al. find at work in open science, where the broader rhetoric of "openness," supported by meaningful work to make data available to other researchers, comes to reperform norms of whiteness and Eurocentrism. A similar dynamic can be found in open access, where the open access itself conceals a situation where the availability and viability of open access as a practice is unevenly distributed, with strong power centers in Western Europe, the UK, and the US. It is worth pointing out that Latin American scholars have established meaningful inroads to open access (and one can detect the fruits of this important work by Latin American scholars and journals in this reader). See Mohan Dutta et al., "Decolonizing Open Science: Southern Interventions," *Journal of Communication* 71, no. 5 (2021).

6. ***Conceptualizing Independent, Alternative, and Community Media.*** This section features sources that address fundamental theoretical concerns regarding what IAC media are, how they can be identified, and why they matter.[87]
7. ***History, Memory, and Archives.*** Here we have gathered sources that highlight how IAC media are subject to historical forces, and how they can be linked to efforts to tie together collective memory.
8. ***Policy, Regulations, and Government Intervention.*** It would be wrong to presume that IAC media exist in a state of magical autonomy. The sources in this section demonstrate the often-subtle connections between IAC media and policies that threaten, protect, sustain, or weaken them.
9. ***Production and Distribution.*** The question of how media programming comes to be made and made accessible to audience members is of central importance to all discussion of IAC media. This section includes sources that highlight this part of the media process.
10. ***Labor, Funding, and Promotion.*** This section pulls together sources that deal with the micro-level concerns that confront those who work in the world of IAC media. These outlets could not exist without the work to sustain them through funding, promotion, and other forms of labor.
11. ***Messages, Narratives, and Representations.*** Though structural elements are often used to identify and define IAC media, it is important to consider how different orders of signification and meaning come to be associated with IAC media. What meanings are generated via IAC media? This section is populated with sources that give us answers to that question.
12. ***Audiences: Participation, Engagement, and Access.*** IAC media must be considered in terms of their audiences. Here we have gathered sources that explore and chronicle the activities of IAC media audiences, and how these activities come to matter.
13. ***Journalism and the Public.*** The significance of IAC media in helping to summon a public into existence is a major concern in much IAC media scholarship, and this section features articles that consider this process in a variety of contexts.
14. ***Community and Localism.*** In this section we feature sources that are largely concerned with how IAC media come to relate to space, and to the sustenance of local cultures. If dominant media are largely focused on global expansion, it should come as little surprise that IAC media can be described in terms of how they perform localism.
15. ***Networks and Social Media.*** The place of IAC media vis-à-vis the internet can be difficult to chart. The sources gathered in this section consider how issues related to internet-based media, including everything from social networking platforms to simple web content to actual internet networks themselves, can be connected to IAC media.
16. ***Activism and Resistance.*** Though other sections in this reader touch upon important issues related to politics and the public, we found numerous sources concerned primarily with activism

[87] We wish to acknowledge that, despite our efforts to be inclusive in as many ways as possible in our choices, this section tends to reproduce a global divide between a Western world that is thought of as capable of high-level theoretical work and the rest of the world, where theoretical work is often (very wrongly) thought not to be done. See Wendy Willems, "Provincializing Hegemonic Histories of Media and Communication Studies: Toward a Genealogy of Epistemic Resistance in Africa," *Communication Theory* 24, no. 4 (2014).

and related forms of direct political action. This section is dedicated to sources that attend to grassroots political efforts aimed at some form of direct action via IAC media.

As evidenced by the size and breadth of this reader—with its seventy-six sources across eleven thematic sections—we opted to err on the side of inclusion. We see this as entirely consistent with our own goals as instructors, and with the goals we envision for students. There are lots of ways to learn about IAC media. We hope we have provided a number of avenues for exploring this essential terrain.

Conclusion

We close by pointing out that this open reader has been published by an IAC media outlet, mediastudies.press. mediastudies.press is a community-supported, scholar-led, Diamond OA press (where one of us serves as co-director). Our process of assembling the reader has been in keeping with some familiar themes from IAC media discussed here and in the rest of the reader. Our work has been conducted in a manner that was independent from non-scholarly impulses, and the work is an alternative to volumes published by much larger presses. Perhaps most importantly, the reader represents an attempt to serve a community of scholars and students. It is always a good time to remember that classroom and scholarly communities are mediatized spaces, and this reader's construction drew inspiration from scholars curious about IAC media as well as from a range of IAC media workers around the world.

This open reader includes seventy-six entries. By any standard, this is a *lot* of content. We see this as justified first because we are casting a net over independent, alternative, and community media. This is an ambitious scope for any collection. Another justification for including so much material is that it allows us to demonstrate that there is a lot of high-quality open access scholarly work on this topic. An apparent bug—the wide range of selections, far too large for any single semester's syllabus—is, for us, a feature. We hope that this reader will lend itself to diverse classroom applications, and the abundance of content should give instructors and students more options, more points of contact, than a more tightly curated volume would.

Finally, we hope that this collection can become yet another powerful demonstration of the value of the open reader. Open educational resources (OERs) are already reasonably well established in the academy, but if any topic deserves a powerful demonstration of the utility of an OER, it is IAC media.

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PART 1

Conceptualizing Independent, Alternative, and Community Media

CHAPTER 1

There is No Alternative: The Critical Potential of Alternative Media in the Face of Neoliberalism

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Abstract

This article was written in order to contribute to a discussion about a critical definition of alternative media. Asking what role alternative media could play in challenging neoliberal discourse in an age where capitalism have become immune to criticism, it elaborates on the concept of "the alternative" and the media through three sections. The first section discusses neoliberalism and the connection between neoliberal doctrine and mainstream media. This connection is described as promoting "public amnesia", financialization and economization of news journalism. The second section discusses alternative media from the perspective of new social movements and symbolic resistance, claiming that the symbolic resistance framework undermines the critical potential of alternative media, it also comments on some recent critical literature on neoliberalism and capitalism. The third section takes examples from artistic explorations of capitalism and television to propose how a distinction between social and formalist aspects of "the alternative" could inform a critical notion of alternative media.

Keywords

Alternative Media, Neoliberalism, Critical Theory

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Roughly ten years ago three books were published that became influential in the renewed interest in the study of alternative media (Atton 2002; Downing 2001; Rodriguez 2001). The past decade has witnessed not only the expansion of that field of research, but also considerable changes in the global media, global politics and economy. What is the role of progressive alternative media today, what significance has it and what challenges is it up to?

Looking around, it appears to be no alternatives. Not in political life; not in the economic sector; not in culture or the art world; not in the media. In political life, alternatives to the neoliberal administration which promotes as little public interference in the economic sector as possible have been if not absent, at least powerless in Europe for the past 20 years; in the art and cultural sector, cultural institutions have during this period resigned from their function as cultural public spheres into becoming economic enterprises, as artists and cultural workers have turned "entrepreneurs" in the creative industries; and as for the media and communication, the heady visions of democratization through world wide web and social media seems rather to have developed into new forms of exploitation of labour and further colonization of the life-world.

This article sets out to ask how "the alternative" can be conceptualized and approached, especially in the context of the media. By "the alternative" I do not imply an alternative classless society, as elaborated by utopian socialism or certain interpretations of Marxian theory (Ludes 2012), but more modest, the possibility of challenging neoliberal discourse and the possibility of a radical imagination (Haiven 2011).

The article is intended as a contribution to theory-development in the study of alternative media (e.g. Fuchs 2010; Sandoval and Fuchs 2010) and builds on the discussion of critical alternative media as promoting a radical imagination. Since "alternative" is a negatively defined term, the "norm" that this "alternative" is supposed to be an alternative to easily becomes a vague straw man. My approach in this article is to identify that straw man as neoliberalism, and especially neoliberalism's relation to mass media. Consequently, alternative media is understood as a potential for a critical discourse, challenging neoliberalism. However, the neoliberal version of contemporary capitalism has often proved quite able to co-opt such criticism and incorporate disaffection into capitalism itself, which poses a challenge for progressive alternatives (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; McGuigan 2009; 2012).

Thus the question I wish to pursue in this article is: What role can alternative media possibly play as mediator of counter-hegemonic discourse in an age where capitalism seems to have become immune to criticism?

Drawing parallels to theory and criticism of new social movements, I argue that a critical understanding of alternative media might learn from experiences made in that field. Taking inspiration from artistic engagements with neoliberalism and mass media, the article connects alternative media with the prospect of a radical imagination.

The article is divided into three sections: The first one is called "The only way", and elaborates on the connection between neoliberalism and mass media; The second section is called "No Alternative", and discusses new social movements, anti-capitalist protests and some recent theoretical critical assessments of political economy; and finally "Alternative media or media of the alternative", that discusses formalist aspects of alternative media and relations to art.

The Only Way: Neoliberalism and Mass Media

In the spring of 2010 a group of European artists came together to address questions of contemporary (and historical) developments in capitalism in a project titled There is no Alternative (TINA). The title, referring to a statement originally attributed to Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s and a slogan in neoliberal economic and political discourse is a common point of reference for comments on development of political economy in a global context. The project and the exhibition took the statement serious and offered investigations into the financial market sided with historical narratives on speculative capitalism and performances about neoliberalism. The exhibition could be interpreted as both an illustration of how true the statement is today, as well as to point out that there are actual alternatives around and that the exhibition itself could be the starting point for thinking about alternatives.

The definition of neoliberalism that I use refers to what could be called the paradigm in contemporary capitalism that rests on principles of free markets; privatization, free trade and entrepreneurship (Harvey 2005). In the last couple of years neoliberalism has attracted a lot of critical investigation and discussion within social theory. Almost half (47%) of the 899 papers in the Social Sciences Citation Index with the term "neoliberalism" in the title were published after 2007 (SSCI accessed 2012-08-22). Probably this could be, at least partly, explained by two events. The first explanation is the translation into English of Michel Foucault's (2008) lectures on the birth of bio-politics, which traces the origins of liberalism and presents a discussion of neoliberalism that has inspired new investigations into the topic. The second explanation would be the financial crisis and economic recession of 2007–8 that initiated public discussions about the scope and probable decline of neoliberal doctrine in U.S. and Europe. In the following I will look at some notions of neoliberalism and link them to a discussion about the mass media's part in the neoliberal project.

What Thatcher's statement about "no alternative" points to as the only possible way is the market-liberal capitalism where organizations like the WTO have reached dominance over national legislation. This has been paradigmatic for European political life over the past 30 years and have afflicted the development (and perhaps demolishment) of public service and social welfare institutions in many countries. The expansion of the European Union and the Lisbon-treaty has strengthened the ideology of free markets and privatization of assets in recent years. Even though the world economic system shrugged because of the fiscal crisis of 2008 and many of the world's central economies are still facing a disastrous situation, there seem to be little or no plausible alternatives on the agenda. The economic crisis required large-scale state interventions, but political power has made very few demands and capitalism seems unchallenged.

From the research on neoliberalism one could distinguish between an idealist and a materialist definition and interpretation of the phenomenon. By idealist I mean the perspective where neoliberal doctrine is understood as a theory about the relations between politics and economy that was implemented in various degrees in the U.S. and Europe from the 1970s onward. This idealist interpretation treats neoliberalism as a mental conception, a set of ideas that became extremely influential (through the political course set out by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher) and that it was these ideas that determined the direction of the economy. The materialist perspective, on the other hand, sees the neoliberal doctrine as the theoretical

superstructure of a more fundamental class conflict, and is thereby a more classical Marxist analysis. For this materialist interpretation the set of ideas that is connected with the notion of neoliberalism (free markets, privatization, and minimum state intervention) is rather like a strategic discourse, a rhetoric that, though influential, was not a determining factor for the politico-economical course.

In the article "The End of Neoliberalism", Grantham and Miller (2010) equals neoliberalism with something like a worldview, similar to religion or nationalism, and their argument is that this worldview has come to an end due to the financial crisis and economic recession of 2008. They are representatives of the idealist interpretation of the concept neoliberalism that stresses the effect of mental conceptions over economic practice and material conditions. Put in Marxist terms one could say that in their understanding of neoliberalism, the super structure determines the base. Klein (2006) is another example of this idealist understanding of how the concept of neoliberalism spread across the globe.

Harvey (2010a) offers a more materialist version of neoliberalism. In *The Enigma of Capital* he suggests that neoliberalism should be understood as a struggle for class domination of capital over labour:

> "My view is that it [neoliberalism] refers to a class project that coalesced in the crisis of the 1970s. Masked by a lot of rhetoric about individual freedom, liberty, personal responsibility and the virtues of privatization, the free market and free trade, it legitimized draconian policies designed to restore and consolidate capitalist class power. This project has been successful, judging by the incredible centralization of wealth and power observable in all those countries that took the neoliberal road. And there is no evidence that it is dead" (Harvey 2010a, 10).

With this understanding of neoliberalism, it is possible to say that the rhetoric of neoliberalism could come to an end (or develop into more pragmatic nuances), but that the material class struggle underlying it is far from threatened or questioned by a change in the official discourse.

I might have over-emphasized the polarity between these two positions and a more nuanced approach would be to suggest a dialectical relation between the ideas of neoliberalism and capitalism's advancements. This dialectics between the ideal and the material is already present in a famous quote from Marx's *Capital*: "But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally" (Marx 1867/1990, 284). Hence ideas could be understood as material and the idea of neoliberalism has been as real and present (and maybe even more so) in our everyday life as has been the class struggle underlying them. Given that, our everyday experience of neoliberalism would be a possible starting point for an understanding of what neoliberalism means, how it is implemented and neutralized. This is what has been done in media and communication studies' approach to neoliberalism.

The Role of the Media

When it comes to the media there is some consensus between Grantham and Miller (2010) and Harvey's (2010a) positions: they both hold the mass media at least partly responsible for the promotion and implementation of a neoliberal doctrine. There have been quite a few

comments made on the relation between neoliberalism and the media, and as Couldry (2010) has pointed out, the relation of mainstream media in general to neoliberalism is much more complex than what one could hope to cover in a single article.

One could think of various possibilities to trace this connection. One approach would be to look at how neoliberalism has affected media and cultural policy: In Europe the broadcast media would serve as an example of how neoliberal discourse on privatization and "freedom" motivated a re-regulation of media (and cultural) policy that introduced commercial radio and TV. Hallin (2008) picks up on this and argues that the mass media is one of the most important social institutions to have been subjected to what he calls "enclosure" by the market logic of neoliberalism (Hallin 2008, 43; Hesmondhalgh 2008). Another way of tracing neoliberalism's entrance into everyday life through popular media is Couldry's (2008) analysis of reality-TV that argues that "the cruelties" of neoliberalism are translated into "ritual that enacts as 'play' an acceptable version of the values and compulsions on which that cruelty depends" (Couldry 2008, 3). A third approach, which I will concentrate on in the following, is to focus on what has been said on news and business journalism's role in promoting neoliberalism. Here one can talk of the part played by the media in shaping collective memory, and the (uncritical) economization of news journalism.

Even though he mainly focuses on the class struggle part of neoliberalism, Harvey (2010a) touches on a fundamental experience when he points to the media's role in promoting what he describes as a public "amnesia", an amnesia that makes the public forget and forgive the transgressions of the capitalist class and the destructive elements in the capitalist system. One could read into this statement the notion of "false consciousness" that prevailed in 1970's critique of ideology, but what Harvey is talking about is more manifest than that. Talking about how capital's advancements are framed in public discourse he writes:

> "We are enjoined to rejoice in the rebound in stock values for the capitalists because it always precedes, it is said, a rebound in the 'real economy' where jobs for the workers are created and incomes earned. The fact that the last stock rebound in the United States after 2002 turned out to be a 'jobless recovery' appears to have been forgotten already. The Anglo-Saxon public in particular appears to be seriously afflicted with amnesia. It too easily forgets and forgives the transgressions of the capitalist class and the periodic disasters its actions precipitate. The capitalist media are happy to promote such amnesia" (Harvey 2010a, 219).

The concept of public amnesia does not stop at forgetting systemic faults, but it also limits the possibilities for a radical imagination through forgetting memories of a radical past. Haiven (2011) has pointed to this political dimension of memory and remembrance in an era that has "conspired" toward a forgetting of radical memory (Haiven 2011, 60). Hence, a historical consciousness is a radical project.

The role of news and business journalism in the "making and breaking" of the financial crisis have been acknowledged by various scholars (e.g. Chakravartty and Schiller 2010; French et al. 2009; Grantham and Miller 2010; Lewis 2010). Their argument is that not only did business media play a role in legitimizing the financial processes that preceded the crisis of 2008, but also that "in the last three decades, stories prominent on the pages and screens of the globally integrated financial news media exerted a powerful form of symbolic violence, normalizing and depoliticizing what were not too long ago understood as fringe economic theories" (Chakravartty and Schiller 2010, 686). For Grantham and Miller (2010) too it is in

the mass media's version of "the financialization of everything" (Harvey 2005, 33) that the neoliberal influence reveals itself:

> "Perhaps neoliberalism's most pernicious impact on popular communication has been the financialization of news and current affairs […]. The focus of "news" has become stock markets, earnings, profits, and portfolio management. Journalists stalk politics in order to discredit democratic activities that might restrain capital" (Grantham and Miller 2010, 176).

This tendency of a preoccupation with "the economy" on a content level not only affects news journalism but entertainment as well, as Jim Cramer's Mad Money on American CNBC is perhaps an extreme, yet figurative example of. This could be taken as evidence of the economy's colonization of the public in the media—a colonization that marginalizes the possibility to recall radical events of the past, and to forget those transgressions of capitalism.

No Alternative: Capitalism's Incorporation of Disaffection

In the previous section I pointed to instances where the media was understood to be a part of the problem: both in terms of reproducing a neoliberal ideology through developments in journalism and entertainment, and by limiting a radical imagination through "public amnesia".

One way of seeking for an alternative to this tendency would be to turn to "alternative media" as a space that can maintain integrity and keep an oppositional position against a neoliberal agenda, and support a radical imagination. Alternative media could be described as ways of organizing, producing and using media outside of the established system, motivated by different norms, goals and ambition than those commercial or public organizations that we generally meet in our everyday media use. In other words: "Alternative media is a sphere that challenges the capitalist media industry. Alternative media are way [sic] of organizing and producing media that aim at creating critical content that challenges domination" (Fuchs et al. 2010, 199).

As I mentioned in the introduction, this object of study has attracted much interest from media scholars over the past decades, partly because of the explosion of alternative outlets due to the spread of the internet, and partly because of the interest in extra-parliamentary organizations and new social movements in the early 2000s. One way of framing the interest in alternative media is that it proposes the bridging of a gap between two critical traditions in media studies: political economy and cultural studies. Here was an approach and an object of study that took macro, structural-level critique into account while still acknowledging the agency on an actor-level. Obviously this resonates on the deep and long-standing discussion within the social sciences about structure and agency and where to locate social change on that scale. Atton and Couldry (2003) described the growing interest in alternative media against a backdrop of "loss of momentum through the 1990s of some other critical traditions within media and cultural studies (for example, ideological analysis) in a sea of methodological doubt and militant particularism" (Atton and Couldry 2003, 580).

A recurring theme in the literature on alternative media is that the concept lacks a proper definition (e.g. Fuchs 2010; Sandoval and Fuchs 2010; Bailey et al. 2008; Coyer et al. 2007). In some sense the problem with defining the term might derive from an uncertainty as to whether "alternative media" as a concept is an analytical construction, or if it remains on a spontaneous

level, i.e. that scholarship has imported a term from common language (we somehow "know" what it is, but have trouble defining it) and that it has not left this common-sense-status.

This uncertainty has resulted in researchers replacing "alternative" with another, assumedly more precise, prefix, e.g. "radical" (Downing 2001), "community" (Howley 2005), "citizen" (Rodriguez 2001), "autonomous" (Langlois and Dubois 2005),"tactical" (Raley 2008), "critical" (Fuchs 2010). The benefit of this pluralism is that the problem with the notion of "alternative" (a negatively defined concept) does not need to be dealt with. However, this threatens to lead into a particularism that covers a crypto-ontology about mainstream and alternative that constitutes a fundamental ontology for these types of studies. What is missing (or perhaps present in its absence) is a discussion about the "alternative".

In this discussion about "the alternative" we could benefit from a distinction between a social and a formalist notion of alternative.[1] In the field of the social and the political sphere, an alternative could be linked to such things as "an alternative worldview", i.e. ideas and utopian visions about what a society could be. In the field of aesthetics, in art and entertainment, an alternative more often refers to "alternative modes of expression", i.e. experimental forms, languages and "recodifications". By keeping this distinction in mind it might be possible to think about what kind of alternative a media of the alternative might be. Partly this alternative connects with ideas and political demands by progressive grassroots and social movements.

New Social Movements and Symbolic Resistance

If we define alternative media as the media of social movements (as has been suggested by e.g. Dagron 2004; Downing 2001; Downing 2010), or a means for symbolic resistance, it is important to make clear what kind of social movements we are talking about. Otherwise there is a risk of ending up with something that looks like just another aspect of life style politics, where alternative media becomes the news output for the "alternative" segment of a target audience. Example of this could be found in Haiven's (2007) critical account of AdBusters magazine that reveals how the criticism of capitalism that the magazine (and the movement) presents is ill informed in its activism and criticism of consumerism and capitalism. In the following I will point to aspects in the theory of new social movements and symbolic resistance that have been absorbed by the capitalism that it set out to criticize, and my concern is that we ought to find ways to think "the alternative" that do not fall into the same trap.

This critique is not intended for those popular oppositional uprisings of recent years that have mobilized in e.g. Chile and Mexico, or protests in Spain, Greece, and Great Britain that opposes budget cuts in higher education or resist harsh economical demands of the IMF, nor does it concern the successful revolutions in Northern Africa of last year. Rather it wishes to separate "the alternative" from a certain kind of western countercultural resistance with its roots in the 1960s and that have recurrently been "co-opted" or become a market niche in the capitalist market society.[2] To give an example: for someone engaged in the animal rights movement in Sweden it is probably easier to lead a "cruel free" life today than it was

[1] It is possible to find parallels between this and the distinction made by Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) between social and artistic critique in the anti-capitalist movement of the 1960s.

[2] There are various accounts of this tendency of "co-optation", or capitalism's incorporation of criticism. For a general historical account, see Cross (2000). A more specific case of counterculture and information industry can be found inTurner (2005).

30 years ago: vegetarian alternatives are common in restaurants and grocery stores (even at McDonald's!). At the same time the total consumption of meat in the country increased by 33% between 1980 and 2010 (Jordbruksverket 2012). The paradox is obvious: a lifestyle dedicated to animal rights has been a commercial success, but the aim to decrease the slaughter of animals for food has apparently failed. This example resembles Thomas Pepper's (1972) critique of the underground press in the U.S. of the 1960s and similar cases have been made about the anti-capitalist critique in the kind of symbolic activism associated with culture jamming (Heath and Potter 2004; McGuigan 2005).

There are various accounts that tell us how symbols and representations have become increasingly important for understanding social and political power under postmodernity (e.g. Duncombe 2002). One important aspect of this is the notion of "new social movement", and Melucci's (1997) approach to social movement studies, an approach that took representations and symbolic action into consideration and inspired a cultural turn in social movement research. This was sided with the works of Eyerman and Jamison (1991) who with their cognitive approach offered new insights into the youth movements of the 1960s. This turn is usually described in terms of a shift of interest towards post-material values and a step beyond sociological definitions of class relations. One could argue that social movements replaced class as the agents in the discourses on social change. Where Marx and Engels had claimed that all social history is the history of class struggle, social movement theory proposed a more liberal, non-determinist or non-evolutionist perspective of how societies change (Sztompka 1993, 274 ff.). The social class is historically determined while the social movement has to be mobilized out of singular agents. This turn from class formations to social movements is ambiguous. It may provide a more flexible form of analyzing social change than the structural explanations had done, but it runs the risk of losing the big picture in the ambition to stress the agency found in the actors, it also comes close to a discourse that stresses individuality similar as can be found in neoliberalism (Haiven 2007).

Since new social movements are conscious of a symbolic dimension it is motivated to take a more detailed look into the idea of resisting symbolic power through "challenging the codes" (Melucci 1997). The idea that representational systems and symbols construe an important locus for activism found theoretical support both in postmodern thinking about the importance of signification, and in new social movement theory. McGuigan (2005) has referred to this tactics as "radical subversion". He presents a quite sceptical account of culture jamming where it is questioned whether it can present any real critical effect or political impact at all. Some of his criticism is interesting to take part of as it might also have relevance for a definition of alternative media.

The reason for McGuigan's scepticism lies not only in culture jamming being an idealistic movement working in the realm of signification, but also because it is "élitist and, to many, either downright offensive or simply unintelligible" (McGuigan 2005, 438). It is easy to imagine how culture jammers attacks on consumerism could be interpreted as an attack on the lifestyle of "ordinary people" rather than on the system that makes consumerism a necessity. Since consumption is an integral part of everyday life it is difficult to find large popular support for a movement that opposes it. And, as Haiven (2007) has shown, the individualistic character of this kind of activism is close to neoliberalism.

Culture jamming was a child of the 1990s and seemed to have vanished, or lost its relevance a decade into the 2000s, but interestingly enough, Adbusters—the spearhead of the international culture jamming movement managed to spark a new kind of anti-capitalist protest when the Occupy Wall Street phenomenon entered the public in the fall of 2011. To many, this was seen as a return of a political momentum from the 1990s, lost since 2001.

Various publications (Taylor et al. 2011; Chomsky 2011; van Gelder 2011) have praised the novelty of this movement and as it spread from Wall Street over the world, the term "occupy" became a new slogan for anti-capitalist resistance. The Occupy movement offers something different than culture jamming as it takes the symbolic to the physical. It also differs from culture jamming in that its address is populist rather than elitist. Pointing out the finance capital as the main problem has been a successful strategy of both leftists and right-wing populists during the 20th century, and it is perhaps easier to sympathize with a movement of "the 99%" than with people who make you feel bad about your consumption habits.

But does this mean that the occupy-movement has resolved the contradictions of earlier versions of symbolic resistance? This is hard to say, but one could look to some interesting tendencies. First, there are cases where the populism has made some traditional leftist activists nervous because it is unclear who you are marching (*camping)* with. Especially in those cases where hackers network Anomymous and the Occupy-movement have made common efforts. [3]

Secondly, the stress on the urban makes occupy practices (as well as some recent comments from David Harvey (2012) about the city as locus of radical social change) vulnerable to the fetishisation of urban life that is at the core of gentrifying processes in contemporary society. Again, as with McGuigan's (2005) critique of culture jamming, the popular tendencies of the argument risk facing the same fate as did much of the critique of the 1960s (Rancière 2010; Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; Heath and Potter 2004). The urban character of the occupy-movement could easily be adopted (co-opted) by the same kind of urban development-lingo about "creative class" (Florida 2005) etc.

Alternative sources of information, knowledge and culture are indeed important in order to challenge the ideological standstill in the official media discourse and invoke a radical imagination. But there is also a risk that the abundance in alternative voices made possible by new media technologies leads to what Dean (2009) has described as "psychotic media": communicative capitalism's abundance of alternative voices and talk without response.

Dean has introduced the concept of communicative capitalism, referring to "the materialization of ideals of inclusion and participation in information, entertainment, and communication technologies in ways that capture resistance and intensify global capitalism" (Dean 2009, 2). Dean points to weaknesses of alternative media definitions that over-stress the participation-aspect and the transformed social relation between the producer and the audience is at fore (as in Bailey et al. 2008, and Atton 2002). Over the last decade we have seen how many of those features previously attributed to alternative media have become part of everyday mainstream media use. What is left of the concept "alternative media" if every media practice resembles it? It's engagement with progressive social change?

[3] One example from Sweden was how Anonymous fronted anti-feminist attacks on a small independent theatre's stag- ing of Valerie Solana's SCUM Manifesto (see http://anonopssweden.blogspot.se/2011/11/opscum.html).

It is in line with this argument that we should read Fuchs' (2010) call for a Marxist theory of alternative media. His argument is that the theoretical approaches applied on alternative media studies have stressed process and action aspects of alternative media, understanding them as self-organized, citizen-controlled, self-managed etc. Hence they have been treated more in terms of their organization than on the form and content level. He suggests a shift in focus from process and organization to "critical product content that formulates visions of an alternative beyond capitalism" (Fuchs 2010, 188). This is what Fuchs believes should be required from a critical theory of alternative media.

The Alternative: From Particularism to Communism

It is indeed difficult to outline alternatives. Sharp critics of contemporary politics, economics and culture often fall short on the task of presenting the visions of an alternative route. Couldry (2010) makes an effort to think about culture and politics after neoliberalism through the concept of voice. In his analysis neoliberalism has set limits to the possibilities for humans to give account of themselves and their place in the world. His ambition is to use voice as a way of saving the idea of democracy from its neoliberal implications and he does so through a critique of neoliberal economics and politics, but also through an analysis of the connections between neoliberalism and mainstream media. One could, however, object to his approach by saying that it may go beyond neoliberalism but it does not go beyond capitalism.

In fact, there is evidence that suggests that any attempts at proposing an alternative to capitalism is futile, since such alternatives are effectively neutralized under what Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) have labelled "the new spirit" of capitalism. In line with this argument, McGuigan (2012) asks:

> "Now, radical political culture is much quieter if not exactly silent and the questioning of capitalism's legitimacy muttered only perhaps in jest. Why should such questioning appear to be unspeakable in contemporary discourse, if heard seriously at all in the public sphere, sounding nostalgic and distinctly passé? Is it really beyond our imaginative capacity to countenance an alternative? What imaginary prevents it?" (McGuigan 2012, 430)

Similar claims have been made by Simon Critchley (2011) who suggests that we are living through a long anti-1960s, a four decade long reaction against utopianism. Part of this is explained by the incorporation of disaffection into capitalism itself (McGuigan 2009, 1). Capitalism has become immune to criticism, in the same fashion as communicative capitalism creates a post- democratic pseudo public where all kinds of critique may be voiced without any consistent response. This is also the challenge for alternative media: how remain a critical alternative when the target of criticism seems unaffected, or in some cases even strengthen by the criticism?

Harvey (2010a) has stressed how the importance for an alternative movement is to produce alternative mental conceptions. Some believed that the aftermath of the financial crisis would serve as an opportunity for imagining such alternatives. Thus was the interpretation made by Grantham and Miller (2010) who suggested that the crisis, with its ties to the media, would bring forth the possibility of an alternative:

> "If this latest failure undermines neoliberalism, as we suspect, then the death of Yanqui journalism, destroyed by its own weapon of financialization, will bring into being a new world of popular com-

> munication. We can only guess what that will look like—but we must fight for its future" (Grantham and Miller 2010, 176).

Given the various setbacks of the political left in Europe over the last decades, it may however seem as if the TINA prophecy has been proven right (e.g. the 2009 election to the European parliament where the socialist and leftist groups lost over 20 mandates from the previous period). Many commentators of contemporary politics have noted this lack of momentum in the European left and absence of a strong oppositional movement to the political and economic doctrine of neoliberalism. Some of these commentators do actually go further and insists on pointing to the fact that perhaps the problem is not to be found in neoliberalism but in the capitalist system itself.

While the lack of political opposition to neoliberalism, the theoretical produce in traditional leftist thinking has thrived in recent years, as well as an upsurge of titles on Marx and Marxism (e.g. Eagleton 2012; Hobsbawm 2011; Jameson 2011). One event that was influential for this development was the publication of Hardt and Negri's trilogy *Empire, Multitude and Commonwealth.* In the closing passage in Empire, Hardt and Negri made the bold move to write: "biopower and communism, cooperation and revolution remain together, in love, simplicity, and also innocence. This is the irrepressible lightness and joy of being communist" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 413). From thereon we can see how the notion of communism resurfaces in the literature, not at least with titles such as *The Idea of Communism* (Zizek and Douzinas 2010). This phenomenon would in itself be an interesting object of study; have perhaps the 20 years that passed since the collapse of the Soviet Union made it legitimate to again speak of communism? Or have 30 years of neoliberalism radicalized the opposition? In any way, what those books offered, as well as commentators such as Harvey, Badiou and Zizek, is a return to an attempt to do theory with a capital "T", and draw a "big picture" meta-perspective of political economy on a global scale. At the centre of these books is a developed and thorough critique of contemporary capitalism and even the reintroduction of the concept of communism.

Badiou (2008) introduced the notion of the "communist hypothesis" in an essay in *New Left Review* where he claimed that the communist hypothesis is a regulatory function rather than a programme and that:

> "As a pure idea of equality, the communist hypothesis has no doubt existed since the beginnings of the state. As soon as mass action opposes state coercion in the name of egalitarian justice, rudiments or fragments of the hypothesis start to appear. Popular revolts—the slaves led by Spartacus, the peasants led by Müntzer—might be identified as practical examples of this 'communist invariant'. With the French revolution, the communist hypothesis then inaugurates the epoch of political modernity" (Badiou 2008, 35).

The task of leftists today, says Badiou, is to determine where in the history of this communist hypothesis we find ourselves. Zizek (2009) elaborates on this in First as Tragedy, Then as Farce, and in a similar way Harvey points to the original meaning of being communist: "as those who understand the limits, failings and destructive tendencies of the capitalist order" (Harvey 2010a: 259). This identification of the alternative with communism suggests a path somewhat different than the social movement theory of the 1990s. If the ideas of the 1990s often stressed the spontaneous, carnevalesque and symbolic dimensions to a politics

of cultural resistance (Cohen 1993; Duncombe 2002), the books referred to above suggest a sterner version of critique of capitalism. Whether this is a consequence of "big theory" or an expression of a radicalization of the alternative remains unclear but the fact that the "spectre" has reappeared in political philosophy is quite interesting. We could then ask the question whether "the alternative" should be understood as equal to communism.

Also in the field of media and communication studies, calls for a more elaborate social theory have been made (e.g. Hesmondhalgh and Toynbee 2008), claiming that the field for all too long have existed in a backlash of the heavily theorized 1970s, and therefore avoided to get involved in big picture theory. This ambition is visible in the field o alternative media research as well. As Sandoval and Fuchs (2010) have argued, a minimum criterion for a critical alternative media would be to produce a content that points at "the unequal, dominative and non-participatory character of contemporary society" (Sandoval and Fuchs 2010, 146).

Alternative Media and Media of the Alternative

From the argument presented in the previous section it may appear as if "the alternative" is synonymous to communism, and that a media of the alternative consequently would simply be a communist media. Even though it might be possible to sketch out a normative notion of something like a media that strives for equality and create commons, I would rather add another notion of "alternative" to the discussion, one that presents an alternative to neoliberal enclosure of cognitive resources, as might be found in the realm of art. Artistic interventions have a privileged position when it comes to explore and experiment with forms and expressions. However, I will argue that even if it may be productive, it is not unproblematic to include an artistic dimension in the definition of alternative media.

This is by no means the first time a suggestion to look at formalist aspects of alternative media has been made. For instance, Atton (2002) includes form and aesthetics in his influential typology of alternative media (Atton 2002, 27). Another example is Clemencia Rodriguez, who in a comment on the video-blog *Future of the Book*'s special on alternative media in 2007, stated: "More and more I am convinced that we need to value the revolutionary potential of expression, re-codification, re-invention of languages to express experience."[4] Rodriguez' comment finds a counterpart in Coyer et al. (2007) who suggested that "any truly 'alternative' media work will need to transform the medium itself, change the way in which it is used, an find alternative styles and alternative languages in which to express itself, if it's 'alternativeness' is to be maintained" (Coyer et.al. 2007, 91).

Underlying these claims is the presumption that there is a connection between aesthetical forms and social action. Through its form, alternative media might realize a critical perception that supposedly reaches deeper than does merely a critical content. Fuchs (2010) suggests a definition of alternative media as critical media through a typology of five qualities. Two of those concern formalistic aspects of alternative representations:

> "The second quality of critical media is negation at the form level. The form of critical media products challenges human consciousness so that imagination is potentially advanced and suppressed possibilities of development can potentially be imagined" (Fuchs 2010, 181).

[4] http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/2007/12/11/deconstructing-television-from-within-the-alternative-aesthetics-of-paper-tiger-television (accessed September 3, 2012).

This bears echo of the notion of a "radical imagination" (Haiven 2011), and Harvey's (2010a) call for alternative mental conceptions. On a more concrete level, the formal aspects of critical media are elaborated in aesthetical terms:

> "The fourth quality of critical media is dialectical realism at the form level. Dialectical realism (form) means that the form involves rupture, change, non-identity, dynamics, and the unexpected" (Fuchs 2010, 182).

It might however be appropriate to make a few comments on these suggestions, as both quotes imply a quite instrumental notion of perception. What is absent from the first quote is what we could call a sociological sensitivity in the notion of aesthetic experiences. Bourdieu (1996; 1984) has in numerous works convincingly shown how the ability to "advance imagination" through aesthetic perception is the product of social disposition tied to what in Bourdieu's terms are referred to as cultural capital and habitus.

In the second quote Fuchs exemplifies what could be called "stylistics" of critical media. This list of features bears much resemblance to alternative aesthetics of high modernism and the historical avant-garde, features that in e.g. television studies have been declared stock goods in commercial mainstream television (Caldwell 1995; Butler 2010).

Still there are some parts of Fuchs' proposal that might prove useful for advancing the theoretical work on alternative media. Acknowledging the formalistic aspects is one way of circumventing the dead end in critical media theory set up by the "participatory turn" in mainstream media (i.e. the rise of "convergence culture" and the "prosumer"), where many of the characteristics once ascribed to alternative media now have become part of everyday mainstream media consumption.

On a theoretical level, the introduction of a formalist aspect into the discussion about alternative media's role in promoting a "radical imagination" of the alternative comes across an interesting inconsistency in the meaning of the word alternative. Where it's social connotations concern an alternative mental conception, or view of the world, the more aesthetical connotations are tied to an advanced stylistics of modernism and avant-gardism, an alternative with a purpose of being anti-popular.

There is reason to claim that critical assessment of neoliberal policies are found more in the artistic realm than in the (mainstream) media. As we have noted in previous sections, the mass media has been held partly responsible for the endeavour of promoting neoliberalism (by "public amnesia", financialization of news). While journalism seems to have resigned from the task of scrutinizing the effects of political implementations, contemporary art has shown an increased interest in social and economical issues. Let me return to the exhibition "There is No Alternative" that I mentioned earlier:

> "Following the collapse of communism TINA [There is no alternative] has become something of a slogan, embodying the neo-liberal viewpoint that the only viable economic and political system is global free market capitalism, coupled with the renewal of the creed of individualism. The aim of the project is to challenge the clearly hegemonic intent of Thatcher's statement 'TINA' and examine the contradictory relationship between capitalism and the idea of liberty from a historical perspective" (Plender 2010).

Thus opens the folder for the "There is no alternative" art exhibition that took place in Stockholm, Sweden in the spring of 2010 and that included artists from a wide range of Eu-

ropean coundtries to explore capitalism in its present guise. In a way the program from the exhibition responds to what I earlier suggested for a critical definition of alternative media. We found in the section on neoliberalism and mass media that the role played by the media in promoting neoliberalism could be summed up as "public amnesia", and financialization of journalism. What many of the art works in the "There is no alternative" exhibition did was precisely to historicize capitalism and discuss the experience of neoliberalism in everyday life. Some examples of this include (quotes from the exhibition catalogue):

> "Unnar Örn: 'Capital Drive'
>
> As the title would seem to imply, the works deal with the representation of the seemingly forward motion of capitalism. Based on archival imagery and language appropriated from the promotional brochures produced by Sweden's national bank (Riksbanken) as well as banks in Iceland and the USA between the 1930s and 1970s, Unnar Örn explores both how these institutions chose to describe their activities and represent their own history".
>
> "Petra Bauer: 'Swedish Stories—Part Three: How Can I Resist the Neoliberal Development?'
>
> In this third part, she [Bauer] will reflect on the role reality TV programmes play and will demonstrate how she thinks they are connected to the country's recent political development as the welfare state model is being dismantled. Using examples of programme's such as 'Swedish Idols' and the American 'Extreme Home Makeover', Bauer explores the idea that these shows represent a kind of citizenship training; teaching subjects how to develop the characteristics necessary for a neo-liberal society".

What Bauer's work wishes to show is similar to Couldry's analysis of reality TV's place in the neoliberal society (Couldry 2010; 2008). But what these examples also show, are alternative forms of framing and problematize the relationship between culture, neoliberalism and capitalism. However, while these works deal with the content matter of political economy we should also look at instances where artists address communication and media.

There is a parallel movement to this exploration of capitalism that consists of artistic interventions and investigations into the mass media. Not only does the approach in the works cited above resemble the critical "readings" of popular culture of American Alternative TV-collective Paper Tiger Television (Halleck 1984), but among the participants in the TINA-exhibition, at least three of them have earlier been engaged in projects about the media, and especially television. Olivia Plender, Katya Sander and Petra Bauer have all contributed to the Swedish public access show Good TV, hosted by artists, and was aired between 2004 and 2008. Good TV was a project interested in the symbolic power—political and aesthetic—of television in contemporary society. And it was not alone in this endeavour, there seemed to be a current among artist around 2005 that turned to television in order to explore questions of representational forms and aesthetical power. [5] The early 2000s was also the time when the Italian TeleStreet-movement appeared and began pirate transmissions in the borderland between social and formalist critique of contemporary media culture (Ardizzoni 2010).

These examples of television alternatives might at first seem arbitrary and haphazardous, insignificant marginal phenomena, but I would argue that they present a good example of the dialectics between a social and a formalist definition of "alternative". A strong benefit with these artistic approaches to television is that they radically negate what could be called the

[5] I have elaborated on this phenomenon and the forms of critique involved in television produced by artists in Andersson (2012).

populist impulse of TV. Instead of building transmission around the ideal construction of an audience of "the people" they allow for a complexity in content and form that promotes ambiguity rather than redundancy. Instead of claiming objectivity by providing its audience with stories that are already familiar and confirms established norms they can allow themselves to be subjective and encourage critical abilities of the viewer.

If we were to take Sandoval's and Fuchs (2010) requirement a step further, artistic interventions in television show us how the media can promote contradictions and complexities and thereby also engage its viewer in a critical assessment of mainstream mass media. That would be an alternative media that not only produce a critical content but also present tools for a radical imagination.

Conclusions

I began the article with the statement that there is no alternative. No alternative in politics, economy, culture, art and media. In response to this I asked what role progressive alternative media could play in promoting a radical imagination against neoliberalism.

My inquiry took its departure from a definition of neoliberalism and the connection between neoliberalism and media. While complex, this connection was concentrated on two things: first the promotion of "public amnesia" where capitalist transgressions are effectively removed from public debate; and secondly the uncritical financialization of news journalism that resigns from the task of critically scrutinizing economic development. An alternative media approach to this would then be a type of media discourse that emphasize historical contextualization, and a critical scrutiny of economic policy.

In the section called "No alternative" I discussed some critical approaches to "new social movements" and symbolic resistance. I argued that a definition of alternative media as media of social movements becomes vulnerable to the type of criticism raised against new social movements. I also discussed the "alternative" in relation to recent writings in critical theory and how the notion of communism has entered that discussion.

The third section dealt with formalist approaches to "the alternative" and how some examples of art works have addressed questions of neoliberalism and capitalism as well as media (e.g. television). "The alternative" could be discussed in social and formalist terms, where the former denotes the alternative worldview, and the latter refers to alternative modes of expression.

The (re)introduction of the notion of communism into the critical discourse is an example of defining an alternative in social terms, and it might suggest a new linguistic agency in the critique of neoliberalism. When Margaret Thatcher announced that "There is no alternative", it was motivated by the end (or near end) of communism. Since then the idea of communism has been marginal and politically impossible. Perhaps the works cited in this article points to a radicalization of the critique of capitalism and that alternative media, or a media of the alternative, will tap into that radicalization.

On the formalist aspects I pointed to some artistic projects that addressed capitalism, neoliberalism, culture and the media. Although there are limits to art's possibilities for encouraging a radical imagination (e.g. it's elitist and exclusive realm), initiatives such as the exhibition "There is no alternative" and the public access show "Good TV" are examples of how

social issues could be addressed in a form that is almost as complex as the issues themselves. That possibility for complexity could be a second contribution to a media of the alternative.

This distinction between a social and formalist understanding of alternative might bear resemblance to Boltanski's and Chiapello (2005) concept of social and artistic critique of capitalism. Part of their argument is that the disintegration of these two aspects of criticism laid the foundation to the present situation where capitalism seems immune to criticism. This is visible in the criticism of post-material new social movements that points to how they too often have become absorbed by the system it was set out to challenge. A further task for a media of the alternative would be to avoid becoming too closely associated with such a project where it may find itself an easy target for criticism against countercultural resistance (e.g. Haiven 2007; McGuigan 2005; Heath and Potter 2004).

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CHAPTER 2

Uncommunicative Partners: Social Movement Media Analysis and Radical Educators

John D. H. Downing

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Abstract

While the research literature on alternative media, participatory media, tactical media, social movement media, continues to expand and explore this significant realm of public communication, it tends at the present time to be very heavily analytical. This is vital work but, I will argue, insufficient to meet the social and economic demands of the day. A quite frequent absence in this research literature is, equally, attention to the interface between educational activities and socially committed media. It is as though thinking about media and thinking about education had been placed in solitary confinement, albeit in neighbouring cells. These issues demand urgent attention. The paper will focus principally on the potential in colleges and universities, but not only in those educational contexts, for constructive interactions from all "five corners" of the media firmament. These are, in no special order, media analysis, media activism, media arts, media industry professions and media policy-makers. There are moments and places of overlap between one or more of these, but too often, there are not.

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Sadly, although people and groups in this pentangle are deeply concerned with media communication, they rarely talk with each other, despite some progress in this direction within the current media reform movement in the USA.

Keywords

media analysis, activism, social movement media

Introduction: some definitions

My main task is to address what some in our digital media era have termed "the Long Tail" of media (cf. also National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture 2004), in other words media which have gone under various headings: alternative media, citizens' media, community media, tactical media, independent media, counter-information media, participatory media, Third Sector media, social movement media. Each of these terms carries its pluses and minuses.

Thus from one perspective "alternative" media is a completely vapid designation, since everything is alternative to something; yet from Chris Atton's angle of vision, the term's very vagueness encourages us to acknowledge how everyday cultural practice is suffused with an extraordinary variety of alternative media forms (Atton 2001).

"Citizens' media" for Clemencia Rodríguez is a term that acknowledges the force field of cultural citizenship (Rodríguez 2001); yet in the era of mass refugee movements and undocumented labor migration, the word 'citizen' as applied to media has to be explicitly stripped of its legal connotation.

Ellie Rennie has developed a very effective case for using the term "community media" (Rennie 2006); yet in my view, this term is still always haunted by the "misty-rosy" undertones of the word "community."

"Tactical media" is the term favored by internet activist and writer Geert Lovink (2002: 268), even though his explanation of the term is almost an anti-definition: [tactical media is] "a deliberately slippery term, a tool for creating temporary consensus zones based on unexpected alliances… hackers, artists, critics, journalists and activists… Tactical media retain mobility and velocity."

In situations then where the "post-modernity" concept has genuine analytical traction, "tactical media" is no doubt a viable term, moving and grooving in sync with Hakim Bey's notion of Temporary Autonomous Zones (Bey 1991). I am sorry if I horrify anyone here with the prospect that post-modern Amsterdam with a Social-Democratic administration may not be the Zeitgeist in its entirety, but the further one moves from that arena Lovink's term does risk becoming threadbare.

"Independent media" is the term favored by Herman and Chomsky in order to denote non-corporate, non-state, non-religious news media. The term has a primarily rhetorical motivation, namely to dispute the frequent claim that news media in liberal capitalist polities, especially the USA, enjoy full freedom and independence. So far so good; yet the implicit news bias in Herman and Chomsky's use of the term forecloses on a whole array of grassroots media and cultural expression that have nothing directly to do with news or journalism.

"Counter-information media", originating with the late Pio Baldelli (1977), but still very much current (Vitelli & Rodríguez Esperón 2004) is also a term framed very much within the journalism arena, where "information" is used as a synonym for news. Undoubtedly, the mission to fill in the gaps and distortions in hegemonic news sources and empirical specifics is an important one, as mainstream war and ecological news coverage repeatedly demonstrates. Yet we need much more still than punch-for-punch counter-information, and than an information strategy whose agenda is dictated by the need to respond rather than radically reframe.

"Participatory media" is a term used intensively in global South development projects, and in its original design meant that people affected by these projects should have an active role in framing them and subsequently evaluating their progress (Mefalopulos 2003). This strategy also prioritized the ways in which media of all kinds should be involved to these ends, in other words the dead reverse of top-down communication strategies. Habits die harder than rhetoric, however, and in practice the term "participatory" has mostly become an empty buzzword batted to and fro among development administrators in their RFP documents.

"Third Sector media," denoting media in the voluntary social action sphere, is a term sometimes used in European discussions. It is implied, though not actually used, in the European Parliament's report Community Media In Europe (European Parliament 2008). It is a policy-based term primarily defining these media as what they are not, in other words that part of the media spectrum which is not commercially, governmentally or institutionally funded. It is thus a convenient term for media policy debate, but offers no more than this.

"Social movement media" is the term I tend to prefer (Downing 2008), inasmuch as it anchors these media projects in social movements large and tiny, constructive and repressive, all of the above. On the other hand, it has to be admitted that there is a vast plethora of small-scale media, from parish magazines to mosque bulletins, from zines to fan websites, which only partially or not at all carry any intimate connection with any kind of social movement.

At this point, we might be inclined to agree with Bolivian video-maker, author, poet, film historian and media activist Alfonso Gumucio Dagron (2004) in his cry of despair at the iron determination among academics to produce absolute definitions of social realities—definitions to which those realities are then required to conform. And we need to acknowledge a further basic reality, that defining these media is bound to be far more difficult than defining mainstream media, whose forms and genres and organizational structures are really quite restricted in comparison. It should not surprise us then that the definitions that I have just skated through overlap at points, and are always lacking. It is a direct reflection of these anthropologically polymorphous media forms.

Until the beginning of the present decade, media projects of this ilk—most often small-scale, often ephemeral, almost always under-funded or entirely unfunded—were basically under the radar of conventional media research. They were too messy, too pathetic in comparison to mogul media, and altogether too "nano" to be worth spending precious research energy on.

That scenario has changed quite noticeably, with the publication of more and more research studies in this area, many of them of book-length, and with the emergence of an annual international conference dedicated to such media, the OurMedia/NuestrosMedios conference, which to date has met in the USA, Spain, Colombia, Brazil, India, Australia and Ghana. With the advent mid-decade of the so-called "social networking" sites such as YouTube, MySpace, Facebook and the rest, to sweep airily past this zone of research has ceased to be plausible.

The question now is whether that should be a matter for satisfaction? Should we break out the champagne to celebrate a new healthy bouncing child for the rapidly expanding media research family? Or alternatively, from the vantage-point of Britain's critics of media studies for whom our field is a fertile straw man, is it high time to put media research on the morning-after pill?

I think neither. I want to push debate in an entirely different direction. I am taking the inclusion of the word "humanity" in the conference title and "strategic action" in the panel title to indicate commitment to the social consequences of our research and teaching. Within that frame, I plan to continue my discussion of social movement media within an overview of the frequent current configuration of Media and Communication Studies programs. These, in my view, have a crucial fault-line. Or lines.

The Pentangle

Those intensively involved in media issues outside the academy form, I would suggest, a pentangle. In alphabetical order they are media activists; media analysts; media artists; media industry professionals; and media policy-makers. There are indeed those who double up as media educators and analysts, or industry-based analysts, or government-based researchers, but let us stay with the pentangle for a moment.

What is striking about this pentangle is the frequent degree of suspicion and even worse, mutual depreciation, among these points on the media compass. Media industry professionals roll their eyes at media studies, and the academics return the compliment. Media activists roll their eyes at both, and if either pays any attention, the compliment is returned. Media artists often see media activists as pre-aesthetic, and in turn are defined by them as self-absorbed elitists, though both agree the media academics to be generally removed from anything that matters much. Some media policy-makers bemoan the lack of useful input they seem to receive from these other quarters, while other media policy-makers simply rely on corporate input and get on with it. Either way media policy-makers are like media analysts, frequently a target of scorn and mistrust, seemingly the only common communication currency within the pentangle.

These divisions and still more tend to reproduce themselves flawlessly in the academy, where Media Studies and Media Production are not only separate departments, but often split between the social sciences and the arts, or in the USA where cinema studies and rhetoric studies may be in Liberal Arts, while Journalism Studies fiercely protect themselves against pollution by Communication Studies. Even in departments where media makers of various kinds and media analysts co-habit, there is often mutual suspicion and fear that resources will be unevenly allocated to one wing or the other. Even if there is not competition for scarce resources, as in "we desperately need someone in animation/media economics/journalism/film history", and even when internal relations are friendly and respectful, the curriculum typically juxtaposes analytical and media-making courses but does not seek in any strong way to get them beyond flirtation and actually married. So students often graduate with a gorgeous mosaic in their heads of mutually insulated knowledges.

It's a syndrome with very deep roots. The division of labor between thinkers and doers is etched into our history and social fabric, and affects many more activities than media. As

Richard Sennett writes in his recent book *The Craftsman* (Sennett 2008: 11): "History has drawn fault lines dividing practice and theory, technique and expression, craftsman and artist, maker and user; modern society suffers from this historical inheritance."

These divisions today are actively throttling the real potential of media education programs to enable an engaged rather than superficial dialogue among the five points on the media compass. This issue is not unique to media programs. Glenn Adamson's absorbing analysis of the relation between thinking about craft and thinking about art (Adamson 2008), while never engaging with media production and therefore rarely discussing collective media practice, demonstrates in passing throughout how entrenched is the instinct to establish impassable chasms between real creative workers and mere craft producers. We do not *have* to follow Howard Risatti in his exhaustive efforts to chart the essential differences among art, craft and design in his *A Theory of Craft* (Risatti 2007), or in his failure too to move beyond the individual artist or craft worker to the collective reality of media production, in order nonetheless to recognize in media production the intelligence of the hand, of the experienced brain in action. As Risatti puts it, speaking of the craft worker but by implication about most of us, media makers, media analysts, media educators: "…material… needs to be lovingly coaxed into functional form" (Risatti, op. cit.: 107).

We media educators, especially, are able in many instances to provide a forum for these differing interests and activities to engage with each other, even though participants in such fora may quite often depart shaking their heads and wondering what they were doing there. The potential for mutually illuminating dialogue in such quasi-neutral spaces is nonetheless there, and it is a failure of mission, in my view, for Media programs not to use their facilities to encourage a serious mutual engagement, not least in their own and their students' interests. Of course this knowledge exchange will be riven by social interests, some of them no doubt mutually incompatible. But that's not news and is no reason for not working at making it work. It is a large but crucial agenda, and inasmuch as it flies in the face of history and our proclivity for mutual jealousy, it is a radical education agenda, one that the growing Media Reform movement in the USA increasingly evinces.

Indeed, elements in this argument, though I had not realized so when initially writing this analysis, were first put forward by Canadian media researcher Marc Raboy nearly twenty years ago. He proposed then that in the interests of expanding the reach of substantive, strong democracy, those involved in media issues should aim to link forces in five areas: critical media analysis, media literacy education, creation of autonomous media, support for constructive initiatives within mainstream media, and involvement in media policy-making (Raboy 1991: 169–171).

Social Movement Media and Radical Media Educators

I want in the last segment of this presentation to zero in on just one facet of radical media education, namely the potential interface between the social movement media activism which I reviewed at the outset, and media educators. Us here, in many cases.

First point: a frequent vice of Media Studies educators—and I can't cast the first stone either!—is to disentangle and strip down media praxis in ways students may find initially revelatory and even deliciously shocking, but which often risks educating them in the higher

cynicism, disarming them as citizens rather than kitting them out. Where this happens, media analysis risks leading to severe political disability.

Second point: while many media studies programs likely cannot afford anything approaching a classroom equipped for film or video production, audio production, or student news production, none of us here needs telling that with our laptop we can research, produce, edit, create graphics and audio, and transmit our media content to anyone who understands our language and is connected. That cuts out great numbers of people with old computers and intermittent electricity supply, but still leaves a growing multitude around the planet. As iPhone technologies develop, more and more of us will be able to use them as well as laptops. A recent study, The Horizon Report 2008 (New Media Consortium 2008)—a global network of about 300 educational organizations—flags grassroots video and collaboration webs as technologies currently banging down our doors as educators, and mobile broadband and data mash-ups as only two or so years away from doing the same. Three or four years away at most, they argue, there will be increasingly available collaborative learning technologies, which will prod us to re-cast our still very vertical models of instruction. [1]

In turn this already means that media programs in affluent countries and in major cities in many countries, with no professional or even sub-professional production facilities, and also media studies programs with no connection to media arts programs, are now able to start to offer production courses. Programs in creative advertising are a perfect illustration of what has been possible for years now, but there are many more examples currently available. From the most elementary educational perspective, this dimension of their media analysis coursework will enable students in those programs to think and speak far more sentiently and fluently about the construction of media products than would otherwise be the case. Ideally some would take scriptwriting and production management courses, which would not require expensive equipment either, but would take them into the inner cogs of the media process.

However, my point is more than this. It is that for media educators and analysts who wish to pursue issues to their roots, radicals in other words, this junction of analysis and practice offers a critically important opening to the proliferation of social movement media abilities, experiments and experiences. Now if you are really content with the media systems we have, you should probably slope off and get a coffee or a beer at this point. If you are bored to the coccyx with talk about environmental issues, issues of "race" and ethnicity, gender, class, global poverty, war, you are now officially excused from even trying to keep your eyes open.

For me, our priorities as media educators need to be shaped by recent contributions such as historian Peter Linebaugh's study of the global influence of Britain's 13th century Magna Carta and the Forest Charter. These established certain basic rights against the power of kings and the rights of common land ownership. Linebaugh points out how, invoking these charters, repeated equivalent assertions of common rights have surfaced over nearly eight centuries now, and have provided "the right of resistance to the reality of a planet of slums, gated communities, and terror without end" (Linebaugh 2008: 279). Our priorities also need to be shaped by veteran political scientist Sheldon Wolin's *Democracy Incorporated* (Wolin 2008), in which he dissects with the aid of modern political history and political philosophy what he terms the dangerous contemporary U.S. trend towards an "inverted totalitarianism."

[1] My thanks to my colleague Dr Angela Aguayo for drawing my attention to this report.

He describes this as the U.S. regime's "genius in wielding total power without appearing to, without establishing concentration camps, or enforcing ideological uniformity, or forcibly suppressing dissident elements so long as they remain ineffectual" (Wolin 2008: 57), an argument echoing a book by Bertram Gross on U.S. politics some thirty years back, entitled *Friendly Fascism* (Gross 1980). He restricts himself to the USA, but the Blair, Berlusconi, Sarkozy, Putin, Hu phenomena are hardly unrelated, and collectively serve as cover for despotic regimes from Belarus to Burma. And our priorities need to be shaped by David Harvey's discussion of dialectical utopianism in his *Spaces of Hope* (Harvey 2000).

Yet they may also be constructively shaped by considering the many specific historical cases of the actual junction between education, art, craft and analysis. I will instance just two. One is described in April Masten's new study of the numerous women professional artists of the Unity of Art movement in the period 1850–1880 (Masten 2008), who after their education at New York's Cooper Union became painters, designers, illustrators, engravers, colorists and art teachers, working in newspapers, a wide range of magazines, book-publishing, design and other spheres. The entire philosophy of the movement, to some degree influenced by Britain's John Ruskin, was to overcome the gap between art for everyday media use and art for exhibition, between analysis and practice.

My second example is the collage movement in Central Europe in the period 1918–1945. In Matthew Witkovsky's *Foto* (Witkovsky 2007), the exhibition volume of a collection of collage photography of that period which showed at the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC, and at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh, Scotland, chapters 3 and 7 in particular throw up a fascinating assemblage of projects that brought together artists, media analysis and education, and social movement media. These ranged from Berlin dada and the Bauhaus, which are well known, to groups much less known until this exhibition such as the Blok group in various Polish cities, the Devětsil group in Prague, Brno and Českе Budějowice, and the Zenit group in Belgrade the School of Applied Arts (ŠUR) in Bratislava. Photojournalism was one major expression of this international movement, and John Heartfield's work for the Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung is far and away its best known example, but a huge range of other activities were evident in Central Europe in those 25 years.

To sum up then in two sentences: in the face of the widespread political immobilism that has greeted Bush-Cheney, their clones and their admirers, our media education programs can and must communicate through making media, not only by dissecting them and where the "learning-by-doing" dimension of our program is stamped by the hegemony of commercial media production's priorities and fads, our task must be to encourage our students to develop "constructive schizophrenia," the ability to play the commercial game if need be for survival while constantly retaining critical mental distance from it and the longing to change it.

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CHAPTER 3

Communication and Struggles for Alternatives

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Abstract

This chapter deals with the question of how communication matters in struggles for a commons-based society. First, the notion of praxis communication is introduced (section 14.1). Second, the chapter discusses the role of alternative media as critical media in social struggles (14.2). Questions of class struggles, communication in class struggles, and struggles for alternative communications deliberately form the conclusion to this book. Given that the many problems outlined in this book result from our capitalist world and capitalist communications, the point is to change the system, which can only be achieved through social struggles. Praxis, class struggles, and social struggles are critical political economy's practical implications.

Praxis Communication

Praxis

How humans react to forms of domination (including exploitation) is not programmed. Some endure violence and oppression because they fear consciously or unconsciously that they may lose something. But resistance can emerge over time or rapidly. Humans neither automatically endure nor automatically always resist domination. Humans' existential fears and needs can be instrumentalised so that they accept domination. Social struggles of dominated groups always imply risk-taking and uncertainty. When a large enough number

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of the oppressed take such risks and engage in collective organisation, then resistance to domination comes about. The formation of a collective dimension of consciousness is part of such organisation processes.

In organising politically, humans communicate in order to define goals, identities, and strategies that help them in transformative processes. Political consciousness has the potential to be progressive, but is not automatically progressive. A better society is a possible, but not a certain result of social struggles. Only when objective contradictions trigger the collective political organisation of protests and movements that aim at progressive changes is there a chance for the establishment of a better society.

Critical theory's differentiation between practice and praxis was introduced by Karl Marx. Marx writes in his 'Theses on Feuerbach': '#3 […] The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary praxis. […] #8 All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human praxis and in the comprehension of this praxis'.[1]

For Marx, human beings are practical because they transform society through practices. By praxis, Marx refers to a certain form of practice. Praxis refers to political practices whose goal is a human-centred society. Praxis-oriented humans see such a society as a political need of human beings and try to demystify ideologies that aim at hindering the establishment of such a society. Praxis includes class struggles that aim at abolishing exploitation and domination. Antonio Gramsci argues that the philosophy of praxis critically questions common sense.[2] Praxis wants to establish an 'absolute humanism'.[3] For Gramsci and Marx, praxis is the critical political form of human practice. Praxis is related to socialism and wants to establish a '*free community of free personalities*'.[4]

Marxist humanism combines socialism and humanism. It is based on the insight that critique and praxis 'grasp the root of the matter. But for man the root is man himself', '*man is the highest being for man*'.[5] Praxis is based on the insight that a good society means a good life for all. Based on this insight Marx articulated the '*categorical imperative to overthrow all relations* in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being'.[6]

Praxis Communication

For Jean-Paul Sartre, praxis is purposeful human action. He therefore argues that 'language as the practical relation of one man to another is praxis, and praxis is always language'.[7] This means that, for Sartre, language and communication are always praxis and there is no sig-

[1] Karl Marx. 1845. Theses on Feuerbach. In *MECW Volume 5* (pp. 3–5), pp. 3 & 5. In the English translation of the 3rd and 8th Feuerbach-theses, the term 'practice' instead of the term 'praxis' was used. In the quotation I have rendered the term as 'praxis' following Marx's own usage in the German original.

[2] Antonio Gramsci. 1971. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers. p. 330.

[3] Ibid., p. 417.

[4] Gajo Petrović. 1967. *Marx in the Mid-Twentieth Century*. Garden City, NY: Anchor. p. 133.

[5] Karl Marx. 1844. Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Introduction. In *MECW Volume 3* (pp. 175–187). p. 182.

[6] Ibid., p. 182.

[7] Jean-Paul Sartre. 1960/2004. *Critique of Dialectical Reason. Volume One: Theory of Practical Ensembles*. London: Verso. p. 99.

nificant difference between practice and praxis. For Sartre, communication is always already praxis and does not become praxis through socialist politics. In comparison to Marx, Sartre depoliticises the concept of praxis. If all communication were praxis, then the term praxis communication would be tautological. In contrast to Sartre, the approach taken in the book at hand differentiates between practice and praxis and between communication as practice and praxis communication.

Praxis communication is a particular form of human practice that has an ethico-political character. *Praxis communication is always communicative practice*. But only a subset of *communicative practices* is *praxis communication*. Communication is not automatically good. It is not automatically a means to question domination. Communication is a practice through which humans create and reproduce social relations. They do so by using symbols and interacting symbolically. In communication, humans make meaning of each other's behaviour and utterances. But this mutual referencing does not imply that the participants in a conversation necessarily agree or understand each other. Social struggles and political action can transform communicative practice into praxis communication. Praxis communication takes place within democratic-socialist organisations, groups or structures, or aims at the establishment of such humanist structures. *Praxis communication* is not about society as it is, but about how we can achieve an actual, true society that corresponds to human needs and develops all human potentials so that all benefit.

Activists use communication technologies such as the Internet to challenge exploitation and domination. Alternative online news media such as Democracy Now! or Alternet and digital commons projects such as Wikipedia or Creative Commons question the capitalist character of digital media. Besides such alternative civil society Internet projects there are also potentials for the development of public service Internet platforms. Civil society and public service Internet platforms challenge the corporate Internet giants. They want to create a commons-based, non-commercial, non-profit Internet.

Neither technology nor individual people can radically transform communications so that capitalist communication are transcended and replaced by communication commons. Such a change requires critical individuals who organise politically and engage in class struggles about the character of communications and society. A commons-based society and commons-based technologies can only be achieved by human praxis.

Class struggles in capitalism are a conflict between capital and labour that is expressed in particular practices. It is labour's objective interest to sublate the conflict between the opposing interests of capital and labour so that a classless society emerges, whereas it is the objective interest of capital to uphold the class conflict. There are mechanisms such as lay-offs, rationalisation, strikes, outsourcing, wage negotiations, etc. that do not sublate, but mediate the class conflict. The mediation of the class antagonism only temporarily settles the conflict either more in the interest of labour or of capital. But given that the interests of capital and labour are polar opposites, the class conflict cannot be overcome by mediation. In contrast, the sublation (*Aufhebung*) of the class conflict creates a new whole that eliminates class structures, lifts the individuals to a new existence in a class society, and thereby constitutes a qualitative difference.

Figure 14.1 presents a model that situates the role that communication and communication technologies play in protests and struggles in a broad context.

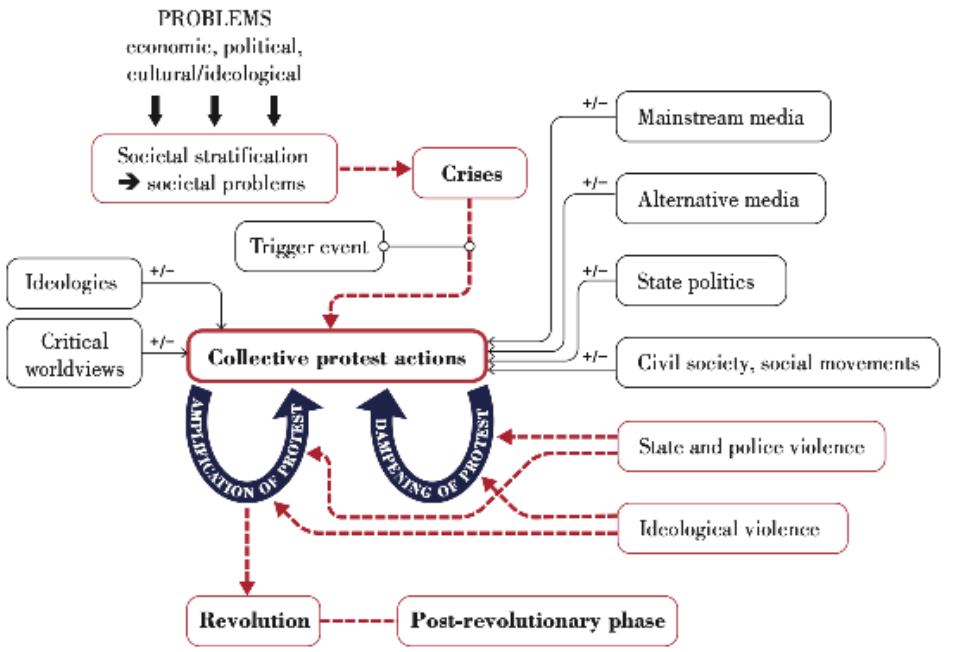


Figure 14.1: A model of praxis communication in social struggles.

Protests are based on the structure of society, especially society's economic, political, and cultural contradictions. These contradictions result from particular forms of domination that bring about societal problems. As a consequence, there are phases when societies enter crises. A crisis is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for the emergence of protests. There are economic, political, and cultural/ideological crises. If such crises interact and converge, then a crisis of society as a whole emerges. For protests to emerge, there must be public recognition of the existence of society's problems, and a significant number of people need to be convinced that these problems can no longer to tolerated and that society needs to be changed. Protests and social movements often emerge from trigger events. Examples are the emergence of the US civil rights movement after the arrest of Rosa Parks, the emergence of the 2011 Tunisian protests after Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation following harassment by public officials, the triggering of the 2011 Egyptian revolution by the police's killing of Khaled Mohamed Saeed, or the emergence of the 2013 Gezi protests after police violence against the occupiers of Taksim Square in Istanbul.

It is precisely in such situations that emotions such as anger, class hatred, socialist love, and hope play a role in the potential transition from crises to protests. Subjective perceptions and emotions are, however, not the only factor, because protests are conditioned and influenced by politics, the media and culture/ideology. The way state politics, mainstream media and ideology, on the one hand, and oppositional politics, social movements, alternative media and alternative worldviews, on the other, connect to human subjects, directly influences the conditions of protests. These factors can have rather amplifying, rather neutral, or rather dampening effects on protests. So, for example, racist media coverage can advance racist stereotypes and/or the insight that the right-wing media and class society are racist in

themselves. In an antagonistic society such as capitalism, the means of communication have an antagonistic character. They have antagonistic impacts and effects, which means they can have multiple effects at once and in general either intensify or diminish protest or not have much effect at all on the level of protest.

There can also be antagonisms and power struggles between various media, such as between capitalist media and non-commercial media. But the media is certainly not the only domain of society that shapes protests. There are also other aspects of the economy, politics, and ideology/culture that shape and influence the conditions under which protests emerge and develop, or do not emerge. Multiple dimensions of society influence protests. Given this complexity, it cannot be calculated whether and when protests will develop. When protests emerge, the various factors and dimensions of society continue to have (often contradictory) influences on protests. And protests can also influence other domains of society. To what degree there are positive, negative, or neutral influences is not pre-determined. In antagonistic society, the state, too, often reacts to protests with police action. State violence and ideological violence (e.g. the scapegoating of protesters in tabloid media) directed against protesters influence protests in ways that are not determined. These influences can bring about the intensification or the dampening of protests, or can have no significant consequences at all.

Under certain conditions, protest can intensify in a spiral so that the movements, occupations, and demonstrations become larger and larger. The result can, but does not have to be, a revolution. Revolution means a fundamental change of society so that the economy, politics, and culture are reconstituted and renewed. Revolutions always have post-revolutionary phases in which society needs to be reconstructed. The legacy of old conflicts and the old society can in this context pose challenges.

Communication technology in an antagonistic society, in which the class conflict and other conflicts between dominant and dominated groups matter, is likely to have a contradictory character: It does not necessarily and automatically support/amplify or dampen/limit rebellions, but rather poses contradictory potentials that stand in contradiction with influences of the state, ideology and capitalism.

The next section focuses on alternative media as critical media.

Alternative Media as Critical Media

A Model of Communication

Figure 14.2 visualises a model of the communication process.

There is a dialectic of structures and practices of communication. They produce each other mutually. The media system is a dynamic system, in which human subjects' communicative practices and communication structures stand in a productive, dialectical, mutually constitutive relationship.

In the media system, we find journalists and other media producers as subjects who make use of particular structures and technologies in order to create content directed at a broad public. They want to shape the consciousness of the members of the public by informing them. Particular media contents have a more or less artistic and aesthetic, news or entertainment character. Created content needs to be organised, stored, and distributed, for which

special structures and technologies are needed. Users and audiences receive and interpret distributed content.

The production, distribution, and reception of content are dialectically connected. Without reception, there is no need for further production. Produced content is not effective if it is not received and interpreted. Produced content needs distribution and reception. Reception is not just the consumption of information, but also produces meanings. Reception is consumption and production. Recipients interpret content in the context of their everyday life. What meanings they give to objects depends on their historically conditioned social contexts and experiences. Meanings are social and historical. Under different circumstances, it is likely that an object will be interpreted in different ways. Producers encode certain meanings into content. But there is no guarantee that the recipients will decode the text in the manner intended by the producers. But at the same time, decoding is not arbitrary, because there are power dynamics that influence meaning-making. Different interpretations of content can

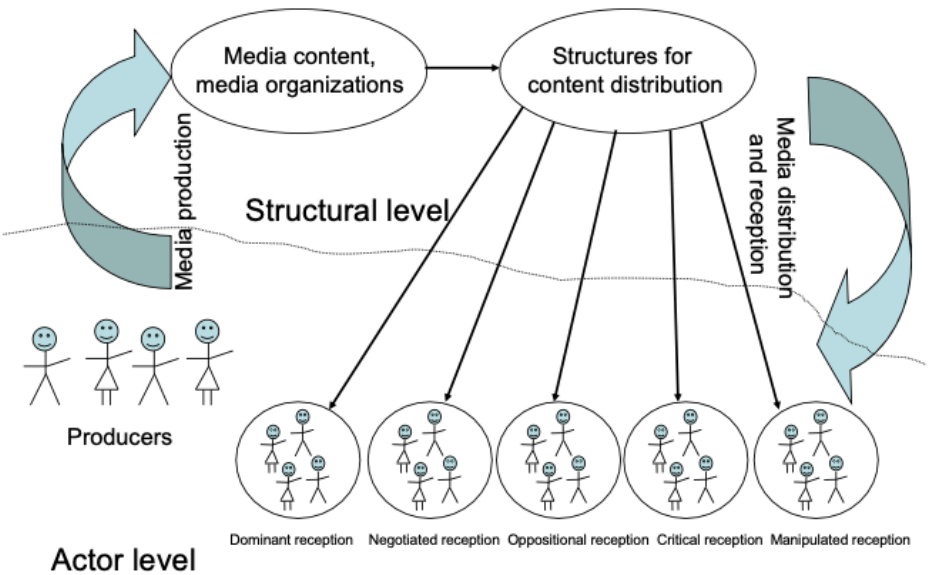


Figure 14.2: The communication process.

coexist and contradict each other. There is neither a necessary convergence nor a necessary divergence of encoded and decoded meanings. Power dynamics can result in recipients reproducing hegemonic meanings. There are different forms of reception: hegemony, opposition, mixed meanings, critical reception, and manipulated reception (see chapter 5, section 5.5). There can be overlaps between first three and the latter two types of reception.

Media and communication systems are not just social systems, they are social systems that reach a wider public and are therefore part of communication processes in the public sphere. Therefore, the notion of the public sphere is important for a social theory of the media in general (see chapter 8) and therefore also for a social theory of alternative media. For their operation, media systems and organisations need producers, recipients, organisation structures, distribution structures, and contents. The communication process of the media is based on the dialectic of structures and actors.

For Stuart Hall, there are hegemonic, oppositional, and negotiated (mixed) interpretations of texts.[8] In order to avoid a relativistic approach, one must assume that there is a degree of objectivity in the communication process. An example: If anti-fascism is the dominant ideology and a message is encoded based on the dominant worldview, then fascism must be characterised as oppositional. Hall's distinction between dominant, oppositional, and negotiated meanings is too restrictive and relativistic. Hence the notion of critical reception/consciousness is added in figure 14.2.

A critical interpretation or meaning is an insight that enables the individual to put domination and exploitation into question and to develop models of society that focus on advancing benefits for all. A co-operative society is the true and essential form of society and human existence. Manipulation tries to advance interpretations that are a form of false consciousness, i.e. that do not put into question exploitation and domination, but rather foster and legitimate class structures and structures of domination in general. Critical and manipulated decoding/interpretation/consciousness are particular forms of consciousness.

The model shown in figure 14.2 has a structural level and an actor level. These two levels interact. Information workers are located on the actor level. They produce content that is publicly communicated. Actors involved in the communication process include journalists, other media workers, and audiences. Media structures include, for example, institutions, products, and technologies used for the production, distribution, and reception of content. Production is the basis for distribution and reception. Distribution and reception in turn are the foundation of further production. In the media system there is a dialectical, dynamic process, where actors and structures interact with each other.

Alternative Media, Critical Media

Alternative media are media that challenge the dominant capitalist forms of media production, media structures, content, distribution, and reception. Table 14.1 is based on figure 14.1. It gives a comparative overview of potential characteristics of alternative media. Not all of these characteristics are necessarily qualities of or conditions for the existence of alternative media. The model shows an ideal-type with a maximum number of characteristics. The central aspects are media producers, recipients, and practices of producers and recipients on the actor level; products, organisations, and distribution structures on the structural level.

In antagonistic societies, we find antagonistic media that at the same time have potentials to advance emancipation and domination. In capitalism, the media always to a certain degree have a repressive character: They sell commodities and distribute ideologies. But the media also have potentials for alternative organisational forms and the distribution of critical content. Such potentials often remain marginal. They do not automatically come into existence, because alternative media face structural inequalities in the capitalist media system. Only social struggles can improve the structural conditions that can help realise such potentials of alternative media. Media and communication are embedded in society's totality and therefore also within social struggles. We need to decentre the media, which means that technological determinism and a neglect of the influence of society on the media should be avoided.

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[8] Stuart Hall. 1973. *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse. Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies Stencilled Occasional Papers #5.* Birmingham: University of Birmingham.

Alternative media question the capitalist organisation of media production, organisation, content, distribution, reception and structures. Table 14.2 provides a summary of the model outlined in table 14.1. Table 14.3 provides another version, where the dimensions are ordered a bit differently.

Table 14.1: Potential dimensions of traditional and critical media.

Dimension	**Capitalist Media**	**Alternative Media**
Media production	**Elite media producers:** journalists and other media producers as a professional wage-labour class that is confronted with corporate and political pressures, media production is conditioned by power	**Citizens' media producers:** independence of media production from corporate and political influences and pressures, true journalistic freedom, ordinary citizens as journalists and media producers, citizen-controlled journalism, individuals or groups that are affected by certain problems become journalists/producers or at least the positive subject of reports, journalistic practice as part of protest movement praxis, consumers as producers (prosumers), active audiences
Media product structures	**Ideological Form and Content:** content is strictly defined by what is considered as popular and sellable. The drive for profit can result in a lack of qwuality, complexity, and sophistication (as e.g. the case in Yellow Journalism that simplifies reality and is focused on singular examples, emotionalism, and sensationalism). Content takes on an ideological form either by the manipulative reporting of reality or by reporting stories as important that aren't really important for society at large. In any case, such content aims to distract the recipients from confrontation with actual societal problems and their causes.	**Critical Form and Content:** oppositional content that provides alternatives to dominant perspectives that reflect the rule of capital, patriarchy, racism, sexism, nationalism, etc. Such content expresses oppositional standpoints that question all forms of heteronomy and domination. Forms of counter-information and counter-hegemony include the voices of the excluded, oppressed, dominated, enslaved, estranged, exploited. One goal is to give voices to the voiceless and media power to the powerless, as well as to overcome filtering and censorship of information by corporate information monopolies, state monopolies, or cultural monopolies in public information and communication. There are forms of presentation that are not one-dimensional, but that make demands of the recipients and challenge them in order to advance their imagination and complex, critical thinking (e.g.Brecht's concept of dialectical form in epic theatre, radical discontinuities that shock people).
Organisational Media structures	**Hierarchical media organisations:** organisational media structures: Capitalist media corporations that aim primarily at making profit, financed by selling content to audiences and/or by advertisements. There is private ownership of media corporations and there are hierarchical structures with a clear power differential that creates influential decision-making actors and less influential roles as well as a division of labour within media organisations.	**Grassroots media organisations:** there is collective ownership and inclusive decision-making by those who work in the organisation, symmetric power distribution and economic self-management. There is a focus on non-commercial, non-profit media that are not financed by advertisements or commodity sale, but by donations, public funding, private resources, or no cost strategies. The division of labour is sublated: the roles of authors, designers, publishers, printers and distributors overlap.

Dimension	Capitalist Media	Alternative Media
Distribution structures	**Marketing and public relations:** high-tech distribution, marketing and public relations departments, specialists and strategies, sales departments, advertisements, distribution contracting.	**Alternative distribution:** technologies that allow easy and cheap reproduction, strategies like anti-copyright, free access (open access), or open content allow content to be freely shared, copied, distributed or changed. Furthermore, there are alternative distributors or alternative institutions (e.g. alternative book stores or libraries) that focus on the distribution of alternative titles.
Reception practices	Manipulated reception: content is interpreted in ways that contribute to false consciousness	Critical reception: content is interpreted in ways that allow the recipients to question domination

Table 14.2: Potential dimensions of traditional and critical media.

Dimension	Capitalist Media	Alternative Media
Media Production	Elite media producers	Citizens' media producers
Media product structures	Ideological form and content	Critical form and content
Organisational media Structures	Hierarchical media organisations, commodity form	Grassroots media organisations with collective ownership
Distribution structures	Marketing and public relations	Alternative distribution
Reception practices	Manipulated reception	Critical reception

Table 14.3: Characteristics of alternative and capitalist media.

		Capitalist media	Ideal alternative media
Media Structure	Economic form of media products	Media product as commodity	Non-commercial media product, non-profit
	Content of media products	Ideological content	Critical content
Media Actors	Consumers	Many consumers	Critical consumers
	Producers	Few producers	Critical producers

In elite media production, there are journalists and other media producers who are wage-workers. They face pressures from corporations and political organisations. Power shapes and influences media production. Professional media workers also have their own professional ethics and often compete for the accumulation of status. In citizen media, the producers are independent from the power of corporations and political organisations. Everyday citizens can become media producers. Citizens and workers control the media organisations. Those affected by society's problems are present in media reports and content. And they themselves can act as media producers. Alternative media are also often part of social movements. In alternative media, consumers are producers of the media.

Traditional media often produce and disseminate ideology. The published content is mostly shaped by sales perspectives. Commercial media's profit orientation can result in oversimplified, low quality and one-dimensional content. So, for example, tabloid media often simplify reality and use sensationalism. Media content is ideological if it distorts reality or focuses

on issues that are presented as important, but distract attention from the focus on problems that are truly relevant for society.

Critical media's content and form are critical. Its content challenges domination, exploitation, capitalism, patriarchy, ideology, racism, sexism, nationalism, etc. Such critical counter-hegemonic information expresses the voices of those who are alienated, exploited, oppressed, enslaved, or excluded. Critical media give voice to the voiceless. They provide communication power for the powerless. They aim at overcoming the censorship and filtering of communication brought about by information monopolies controlled by corporations, the state or cultural organisations. Critical media question one-dimensional forms of presentation. They use forms that enhance complex thought and imagination. An example is Brecht's dialectical, epic theatre.

Capitalist media yield profit by selling access, advertising, content, or technologies as commodities and exploiting communication labour. Such media corporations are privately owned and have a division of responsibilities and labour so that some take all the important decisions and others merely execute labour based on these decisions.

Grassroots media are organisational alternatives to capitalist and hierarchical media. Such organisations are collectively owned; they operate by participatory decision-making, which means that those working in the organisation take collective decisions. Such organisations are forms of economic self-management, where power is more symmetrically distributed. Grassroots media are not-for-profit and often do not sell advertisements or other commodities, but rely on donations, public funding, private resources, low-cost-strategies or no-cost-strategies. There is no rigid division of labour in grassroots organisations; the roles workers have overlap.

Traditional media use marketing, public relations, advertising, branding and high-tech in the process of distribution. Alternative media are open to different strategies, including low-tech and DIY technologies, open access and open content, anti-copyright, free access, etc. There are also alternative distributors that focus on the distribution of critical media. Examples are radical publishers and alternative book stores.

In the reception of information, critical and manipulated reception are two of the ways in which audiences interpret content. Manipulated reception means forms of interpretation that help to create or reproduce false consciousness. In contrast, critical reception means that content is interpreted in ways that make audiences question exploitation and domination. An interpretation of form or content is critical if the audiences are empowered to develop ideas about how to foster a co-operative society.

The models shown in tables 14.1, 14.2, and 14.3 describe ideal-type alternative media. Under ideal conditions, all of the dimensions of alternative media can be realised, including self-managed organisations, and widely available and widely consumed critical content that is critically interpreted and brings about change in society, including animating citizens to become alternative media producers. Ideal-type alternative media work best under conditions that provide citizens with the resources, time, and skills needed for them to participate in the public sphere. If critical media flourish under such conditions, then the division between media production and media consumption disappears. Grassroots media then become the standard form of media. Such conditions cannot be created within a capitalist society, but

rather require the creation of a society of co-operation and the commons that is governed in the form of a participatory democracy.

Prefigurative politics assumes that alternatives to capitalism can already be established within capitalism. Prefigurative politics also believes that within a capitalist framework, alternatives can operate relatively autonomously from capitalist structures. Alternative media, however, often face the problem of resource precarity and voluntary, self-exploitative, precarious labour. This type of media should therefore not be idealised. Self-managed organisations are not always politically progressive. It is perfectly possible for self-managed media to advance fascist or other repressive contents. A communication system must at least have critical content or critical form in order to be an alternative medium. In cases where audiences critically interpret repressive content published in traditional media, one cannot speak of alternative media, only of alternative reception. Certain parts of mainstream media can at times have critical content. The minimum condition for defining a medium as critical is that it is a critical product. But of course, it is desirable that as many dimensions of alternative media as possible can be realised. In capitalism, it is, however, difficult to reach all of these desirable aspects of alternative media. If one rigidly focuses on all dimensions, then one assumes that an alternative society can already be created within capitalism without abolishing structures of exploitation and inequalities. Citizen journalism, self-managed organisation, alternative distribution channels, and critical reception practices are desirable, but not necessary, features of alternative media. Critical content and critical form *(= critical media products)* constitute alternative media's necessary features. Alternative media are critical media.

Types of Critical Media

By using the method of advancing from the abstract to the concrete, we can identify subtypes of critical media. We will now introduce a typology that presents different forms of critical media (see table 14.4). The typology is based on the following questions: (1) what parts of the body are predominantly used in media production and reception; (2) is communication synchronous or asynchronous; (3) does communication take place spatially over a distance, or in the presence of the other communicators.

Table 14.4: A typology of alternative media.

Communication	**Production**	**Reception**	**Formats**	**Time**	**Space**	**Alternative Media**	**Examples**
Print/visual communication	Brain, hands	Brain, eyes	Newspaper, journal, books, pamphlets, leaflet, comics, satirical prints, flyers, visual art, graffiti, dress, textiles, pins, buttons, stickers, murals, etc,	Asynchronous	Distance	Alternative press, critical art	Jacobin, Mother Jones, Oz, Bay Guardian, The Nation, Le Monde Diplomatique, New Statesman, Fifth Estate, Class War; Duane Hanson, Joseph Beuys

Communication	**Production**	**Reception**	**Formats**	**Time**	**Space**	**Alternative Media**	**Examples**
Audio communication	Brain, mouth	Brain, ears	Radio, telephone	Synchronous	Distance	Free radio, independent radio, com- munity radio, pirate radio	Pacifica Radio Network, KPFA Berkeley, KPFK Los Angeles, KPFT Houston, WBAI New York, WPFW Washington DC, National Federation of Community Broadcasters, Grassroots Radio Coalition
Audio communication	Brain, mouth, body	Brain, ears	Face-to-face communication, Conversation, talks, lectures, singing songs	Synchronous	Presence	Radical singing, protest singing	'Oh, freedom' (abolitionism), 'We Shall Overcome',
Audio communication	Brain, mouth, body	Brain, ears, body	Concerts, choir, dancing	Synchronous	Presence	Alternative music concerts, protest song concerts	Alternative music, recorded protest songs
Audio communication	Brain, mouth, body	Brain, ears, body	Sound recordings (records, music cassettes, CD, MP3, etc)	Asynchronous	Distance	Alternative music, recorded protest songs	Mogwai, Godspeed You! Black Emperor, Billy Bragg, Robert Wyatt, 'The Preacher and the Slave' (Joe Hill, socialist), 'Bombtrack' (Rage against the Machine, social justice), 'Sound of Da Police' (KRS- One, anti-racism), 'Kill the Poor' (Dead Kennedys)
Audio-visual communication	Brain, mouth, body	Brain, eyes, ears	Theatre, performance, happening	Synchronous	Presence	Critical theatre	Youth International Theatre (guerrilla-theatre), Brecht's epic theatre
Audio-visual communication	Brain, mouth, body	Brain, eyes, ears	Film, video	Asynchronous	Distance	Critical television, independent cinema, underground film, avant-garde film, amateur videos	*Democracy Now!*, *Crash* (Paul Haggis, 2004); films by Jean-Luc Godard, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Andy Warhol
Audio-visual communication	Brain, mouth, body	Brain, eyes, ears	Live television	Synchronous	Distance	Public access television	Manhattan Neighborhood Network

Communi-cation	**Produc-tion**	**Recep-tion**	**Formats**	**Time**	**Space**	**Alternative Media**	**Examples**
Multi-media, computer, Internet communi-cation	Brain, hands, mouth, body	Brain, eyes, ears	Digital text, digital audio, digital video, real time text/ audio/ video chat, online radio, online TV, wikis, blogs, Internet art, etc	Synchro-nous or asyn-chro-nous	Distance	Alternative online media	Novara Media, Young Turks, The Canary, Another Angry Voice, Indymedia, Alternet

Given that critical form and critical content are decisive for the alternative character of the media, one cannot argue that all community-produced, non- commercial, 'free', independent, self-managed, self-organised, etc. media are alternative, although many of them are because they feature critical content. They are more likely to be critical than conventional media, but they are not automatically critical.

The key feature on which the typology is built is the notion of critical products that have critical content and critical form. Alternative media, like critical media, are critical products, which means that they have critical form and/or critical content. There can be critical form without critical content and vice versa. Critical form and critical content can also occur together. In artworks such as films, music, concerts, literature, theatre, visual arts or digital arts, form is of particular relevance. Art exists through is aesthetic appearance. It is critical if it is non-identical with society and strengthens imagination. Its content is therefore not directly critical. Art's critique lives through its form and art's non-identity with society. But there is of course also critical political art that not only works at the level of form, but also at the level of content that is directly critical of domination and exploitation.

Summary and Conclusions

We can summarise this chapter's main conclusions:

- There is no pre-defined role of communication technologies in social struggles. Because capitalism is an antagonistic society, communication technologies often have an antagonistic role in this society.
- There are potentials for alternative media as critical media to challenge the capitalist organisation of the communication system. Providing access to critical forms and critical content is one of the foundations for critical debate, critical engagement, and critical consciousness.
- Critical media and the use of communications as tools of emancipatory struggles are forms of praxis communication.
- Alternative media face certain structural limits in capitalist society. The history of alternative media is a history of resource precarity and voluntary, self-exploitative labour. Alternative media therefore need to be complemented by public service media as alternatives to capitalist media. Alternative media require public sources of funding in order to be able to constitute a strong counter-public sphere.
- In capitalism, the class struggle is not only between capital and labour, but in the realm of communication also between capitalist media on the one side and commons-based, alternative, critical, and public media on the other side.

- Strengthening critical media must be part of any progressive political agenda.

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CHAPTER 4

What We Talk About When We Talk about "Media Independence"

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Abstract

Media independence is a contested concept that carries different meanings in different contexts. As a normative ideal, independence can be discussed on many levels, and media organisations, journalists, researchers and regulators often invoke the term in contradictory ways. In contemporary European media policy, the conceptual contestation over the meaning of independence has been further reheated by commercial media's attempts to reframe the distinction between commercial and public service media as a choice between "independent" and "state" media. The digital transformations and the emergence of new media actors and platforms also challenge the meaning and relevance of different conceptions of media independence and dependence. In this article, we discuss the changing uses of the notion of independence in current media policy discourse, including controversies between public service and commercial media, but also other settings where the notion is invoked. We then develop a more fine-tuned understanding of the different dimensions that media independence contains in a contemporary media environment. Finally, we discuss how the relational nature of independence makes it problematic to employ as a normative principle in media policy.

Keywords

media independence, media policy, transparency, journalism, public service broadcasting

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Introduction

Independence is a central normative principle in media policy and journalism. It is also a controversial term that carries different meanings and connotations. Media independence is discussed among media industries, activists, journalists, researchers and regulators from varying perspectives. In different contexts, including debates on the position of media in authoritarian societies, the status of European public service broadcasters and "indie" media, different actors understand independence differently. By declaring independence—from state control, market forces or mainstream conventions—media organisations and actors seek to bolster their legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of audiences, peers as well as policy-makers. At the same time, however, as a concept, media independence gets increasingly difficult to pin down.

None of this is news. Independence is an "essentially contested concept", inherently subject to endless revisions and interpretations (Gallie 1956; Karppinen and Moe [2013, 2014] for related discussions of "media governance" and "media markets"). Like other key concepts in political thought, its meaning cannot be settled by logic only. The tug of war over the meanings of media independence is at least as old as the idea of press freedom. Yet in the context of European media policy, the conceptual contestation over the meaning of independence is topical because of two tendencies. First, at both European and national levels, commercial media actors have actively sought to reframe the distinction between commercial and public service media as a choice between "independent" and "state" media. Second, the digital transformations and the decline of legacy media organisations have given rise to new actors as well as new aspects of control and dependence. As a consequence of these transformations, the traditional line between journalism and advertising, for example, has increasingly become blurred by new forms of sponsored content. Furthermore, the increasing power of multinational news aggregators, search engines and social networking sites has also reheated the question of what we mean by media or journalistic independence.

Nick Couldry (2009) among others has argued that the technological, social and political dynamics of the current digital transformations are undermining our sense of "the media" as a privileged site for accessing a common world. For some, these changes mean the obsolescence of traditional media, as a detached institution with its own established professional codes and organisational forms, and their replacement with new models of collaborative and participatory communication.

In this context, the notion of media independence—like other core values of the "high modern" journalistic ethos (see, for example, Hallin 2006)—is now increasingly contested and even put into question. For many of the new actors that now produce journalism, including citizen initiatives, lone individuals or think tanks, independence might simply not be as relevant as other normative values, such as transparency, diversity or participation (McBride and Rosenstiel 2013). So is media independence just one of the mantras that legacy media organisations repeat, hoping it would bring them back to relevancy, even though its meaning remains vague and the practices it refers to are increasingly becoming irrelevant?

In general terms, independence refers to an absence of external control. Independence means freedom from the influence of others, but also describes the capacity of an individual or institution to make decisions and act according to its own logic. As a normative principle,

independence can be debated on different levels, and linked to a variety of frameworks and discourses. On the level of general social theory, independence can be traced back to modern society's functional differentiation of various spheres or fields of social life, discussed in classic sociological works from Weber to Bourdieu. In such contexts, independence relates to autonomy; self-government or the right of an institution to make its own rules and administer its own business. Following the deliberative turn of democratic theory (for example, Bohman 1998), the notion of media independence as a normative principle has often been linked to the Habermasian ideal of the autonomy of the public sphere from the systemic forces of state and economic power. As Habermas (2006, 411) put it, "mediated political communication in the public sphere can facilitate deliberative legitimation processes in complex societies only if a self-regulating media system gains independence from its social environments".

Here, independence is also closely intertwined with other basic ideals of the liberal-democratic understanding of media's role in society, such as freedom of the press, critique of power, media as the fourth estate and journalists' watchdog role. These positive connotations of the term make media independence an attractive idea for both those who assess the functioning of the media and for media organisations themselves to gain credibility. As James Bennett (2015, 2) argues, "media independence functions as a utopian vision of the media's role in society for those who regulate it, own it, work within it and even study it".

This article aims to discuss the changing uses and contexts of media independence, and to scrutinise its value in media policy. We first review some of the different uses of the notion of independence in current media policy discourse, starting with controversies over public broadcasting and then moving beyond that to look at uses in other settings. On that basis, we develop a more fine-tuned understanding of the different dimensions the notion contains in a contemporary media environment. Finally, we discuss how the relational nature of independence makes it problematic to employ as a normative principle in media policy. We argue that, even though it fails to provide a neutral yardstick for assessing all types of media, the concept continues to serve a role as a normative ideal in many media policy debates.

Conceptual Contestation in European Media Policy

The meaning of media independence as a normative value clearly depends on the context in which it is used. Many of the established discourses and connotations around the term can thus be traced back to specific historical and cultural contexts where media organisations have purposefully used the notion to legitimise their position. In countries with a politically aligned press, for instance, party papers' attempts to declare independence from historical party political affiliations can be seen as part of a strategy to widen their readership from specific political segments to a mass audience (see Hallin and Mancini 2004, 26–27). Similarly, other types of media organisations' interpretations of independence are always tied up with their own strategies of distinction.

Besides newspapers, public service broadcasting has traditionally been one of the central contexts where the notion of independence has been employed as political and normative value. Ever since the institutionalisation of the idea of broadcasting as a public service, the

independence from the state, on the one hand, and commercial competition, on the other, has been a central concern in European broadcasting policy.

The ideal of independence can be found, in different forms, among the values and guiding principles of most European public service broadcasters. The Royal Charter of the BBC (2006), for example, states that "The BBC shall be independent in all matters concerning the content of its output, the times and manner in which this is supplied, and in the management of its affairs" (§6). Similarly, the statutes of the Norsk rikskringkasting (NRK) require that "NRK shall have editorial independence. NRK should guard its integrity and credibility in order to act freely and independently in relation to persons or groups who for political, ideological, economical or other reasons wish to influence the editorial content" (NRK-plakaten (2014) http://www.nrk.no/informasjon/nrk-plakaten-1.12253428, §12d, accessed 30 March 2016).

Importantly, however, the specific arrangements set up to facilitate independence have differed widely. Consider West Germany after the end of World War II as an example: while the British in the early 1920s, and later other European countries, opted for a national service, in 1945 each of the Allied occupants set up broadcasting services in their respective sectors of West Germany. The occupants all sought to steer radio and television away from the clasp of private actors, the state, politicians and other sectional interests. They were influenced by the British model, but they all decided on a decentralised solution in keeping with the general administrative and economic structure they were imposing (Humphreys 1994, 128–129; Lucht 2006, 96ff). This lay the foundation for the regional broadcasting system still in force in Germany, a design inherently meant to foster independence from undue political influences.

In practice, public service media in different countries and contexts have struggled to retain their real (political) independence with different means and results. The public media systems in Germany and Nordic countries, for example, are generally considered to enjoy strong *de facto* independence, while in many other places (e.g. in southern Europe, the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand) the procedures for assuring autonomy from governmental control have been seen as increasingly threatened (see, for example, Benson and Powers 2011; Hanretty 2010). Despite different institutional arrangements and their varying success in fostering independence in practice, in scholarly debates public service media have still been regarded, at least in principle, as the institutional space that best approximates the Habermasian ideals of autonomy from both state and commercial pressures (for an overview, for example, Garnham 1986, 1992; Moe and Syvertsen 2009).

In recent years, the debates between public service broadcasters and their commercial competitors over the status and remit of public service media around Europe have re-highlighted the contested nature of the concept. What seems new in recent European media policy debates is that commercial media actors across Europe have systematically attempted to reframe media policy debate by referring to public service media as "state media" and to themselves as the "independent" or "free" media. At the European level, the European Newspaper Publishers' Association, for example, has consistently employed the distinction between the "independent press sector" or "free and independent press" and public service media as "state media" (for example, ENPA 2016). The insinuation is clearly that the main danger to media independence lies in undue state inference or public funding, and that public service media are, by their very nature, less independent and more susceptible to outside political pressures than market-based media outlets.

This line of argumentation has also been widely adopted by national media industry lobbyists. In Germany and Finland, for example, the advocates of private media industry objected to the new tax-based funding system of public service media on the grounds that it would threaten the operating conditions of the "independent media sector" and thus decrease genuine diversity and pluralism in the media (Herzog and Karppinen 2014). What counts as genuine diversity and pluralism, of course, is another example of conceptual contestation in media policy (see Karppinen 2013). Here, it clearly refers more to a market-driven definition of diversity as consumer choice, rather than the more complex ideas of social, cultural and political pluralism that the European public service media have historically advanced.

The independence of media—publicly funded media in particular—from politicians and the government is clearly a relevant aspect of media independence. It is only one such aspect, however. The rhetorical distinction between state media and independent media says nothing about other forms of external control or influence over journalism, such as advertising, media ownership and public relations.

The selective uses of independence in European media policy debates thus reflect the value of the notion as a means of news media organisations' political lobbying and strategic communication (see, for example, Brüggeman, Esser, and Humprecht 2012). In the face of digitalisation, new actors and the disruption of traditional competitive dynamics of media markets, legacy news media, including both public service broadcasters and newspapers, have gradually lost the unquestioned, unchallenged status of "a fact of nature" in the digital age (Couldry 2009, 447). As a consequence, they increasingly need to legitimise and reaffirm their position in the eyes of both audiences and media policy-makers.

The centrality of independence in the strategic communication and lobbying of media organisations can be seen as a way to distinguish them from other types of media; in this case, private media from public service media, but more broadly also from other actors that compete with mass media, such as social media and blogs. Alongside other notions such as quality, freedom and diversity, independence offers a central keyword in these efforts. The interest of different types of media varies, and so their rhetorical strategies also emphasise different dimensions of independence. While the rhetoric of private media industry systematically articulates independence with the context of state funding and government influence, the defenders of public service media tend to emphasise independence from advertising, media owners and other external economic and social interests.

It is important to note that different meanings and framings associated with politically contested notions, such as media independence, do not emerge spontaneously. Instead, media organisations and their interest groups often employ calculated discursive strategies to influence the framing of public and political discourse (see Brüggeman, Esser, and Humprecht 2012).

To be fair, a critique of public service media's political dependence has some merits in various contexts. Comparative work on the relations between political systems and media systems has shown how ways in which independence are operationalised and governed vary between countries (for example, Hallin and Mancini 2004).

In some countries the public broadcasting institutions were deliberatively set up as extensions of pillars of society so that radio and television channels came to closely represent pre-defined social groups, religious or political strands. The Netherlands would be a prime example. Elsewhere, such political parallelism was less of a deliberative design than an unwanted

end result of the public service media system. An often-discussed instance of this would be the Italian system (for example, Hibberd 2001). In yet other places, the organisation of public service broadcasting, and media more generally, included an institutionalised distance from the state. This kind of institutionalised distance from the state is often referred to as "the arm's length principle" (the following builds on Moe and Mjøs [2013]).

In a broad sense, the arm's length principle is "implicit in the constitutional separation of powers between the judiciary, executive and legislative branches of government" (Hillman-Chartrand and McCaughey 1989, 43). More specifically, the principle is often linked to cultural policy, where a system for funding was established after World War II in many countries (Mangset 2009, 276). In these set-ups, the governmental branch—for instance, a Ministry of Culture—is "facilitative not executive, so influence is exercised through setting broad policy and audit guidelines", while "non-departmental public bodies operate and implement policy" (Taylor 1997, 449–451). In effect, then, the arm's length principle entails delegating both the decisions and the contracting of a service, such as cultural activities, including the media. The idea is to institutionalise independence. "Independent regulatory authorities" of the media, found in Europe, represent such an institutionalisation of the arm's length principle in media policy.

Laid out in this manner, the principle might appear uncontroversial. However, this is not the case, as illustrated by, for instance, cultural policy in France. Here, an active government agency has tended to intervene in cultural life by prioritising tasks, distributing funding and initiating projects (for example, Andrault and Dressayre 1987). This is mirrored in the actual governance of the media, such as in public service broadcasting regulations, where historically political interests have also reached within the organisation of the public broadcasters and media institutions more generally—much in line with what Hallin and Mancini described as the "Mediterranean or polarized pluralistic model" (2004, 106).

But even if we zoom in on a region of the world where the arm's length principle is applied in media policy, such as the Nordic region, the actual success of institutionalising independence differs over time and across systems (Moe and Mjøs 2013): the measures taken to hinder political appointments in public service broadcasting institutions, for instance, have not always been taken for granted. It was not until 2001 that the Norwegian NRK got a Director General with a political background from the political right, rather than the left. A similar pattern can be found elsewhere in the Nordic region: the current head of the Finnish Yleisradio (Yle) appointed in 2010 was the first director in 40 years to not come from the Social Democratic Party.

The nuances of independence in public and private broadcasting regulations are interesting in their own right. From a broader perspective, however, both public and private media tend to employ the notion of independence in a very selective manner. If we look beyond the context of European public service broadcasters and traditional newspapers, we see how the notion of media independence has many histories and is used differently in various contexts.

Beyond Public versus Private Media

Public service media and commercial broadcasters or newspapers are not the only media outlets that have a claim on the term independence. Especially with new digital actors, the potential meanings of the term have multiplied.

Besides signifying independence from the state or business interests, independence can also mean distance from the mainstream conventions and the prevailing powers of the media industry itself. Often associated with the term "indie", the notion of "independent media" is used to refer to alternative, often non-profit or subversive media outlets. This label has also been picked up by many online activist, alternative and citizen media formations. Indymedia,[1] a media network established in 1999 associated with the broader global justice movement, for example, refers to "independent media" as grassroots, non-corporate and radical. In this sense, independent thus comes close to what has been called "alternative media" (Bennett 2015, 10–11). Similarly in the domain of film and music, independent has often meant a particular aesthetic style and creative distance from the mainstream or major corporations (for example, Hesmondhalgh 1999).

In comparison with the policy debates between public service media and commercial media around Europe, a distinct understanding of independence comes into play here. In addition to independence from the state authority and/or commercial interests, independence also refers to a particular way of doing things that is an alternative to the mainstream media and its logic. As opposition within the media industry complex, independence thus comes to mean distance from "the mainstream", which is seen as reflecting conventional or mass tastes and restricting creative freedom. If the mainstream media presents itself as independent because it follows its own logic of journalistic culture, for other independent media the same term means freedom from that very notion of mainstream journalistic culture. Instead of non-commitment or detachment, independent or indie, then, can also mean radical politicisation, orientation to social justice or political commitment.

In the digital era, independence can also refer to new voices and forms of journalism that are financially independent from the "legacy" media industry, such as social news or crowd-funding initiatives (Hunter 2015). Distance from institutional and corporate constraints of legacy media can be seen as empowering audiences and communities and allowing stories to be funded that would otherwise not be covered. At the same time, however, it can be argued that the precarious nature of such work and the lack of institutional support mechanisms of large media organisations renders these new forms of digital journalism even more vulnerable to outside pressure from funders or other special interests (Hunter 2015).

Another related use of the term is "independent producers", which, in European audio-visual media, is used for private television production companies who make programme content for broadcasters. For these companies, "independence" signifies distance in ownership from a certain other kind of media institutions, not dependence on the state or other external forces. Equally importantly, however, the independent producers are assumed to make content that differs from the traditional broadcasting institutions—or at least that is implied in EU directives which require certain percentages of broadcast content to be made by the so-called independent sector. But just as close scrutiny of broadcasting regulations

[1] See indymedia.org (accessed 30 March 2016).

uncovers discrepancies from the normative ideal of independence, so does a closer look at the sector of audiovisual media labelled "independent" reveal large, well-established actors owned by conglomerates clearly representing the mainstream.

With the emergence of the Internet as a media and communication platform, another layer of complexity has been added to media independence. Audiences are spread over a larger territory, and the advertising market became much more complicated on the Internet (for example, Turow 2012). The regulators are not contained within the clear boundaries of nation-states. Still, in principle, providers of media content answer to market forces and regulatory bodies in the same way traditional media providers do.

What makes for the complexity is perhaps the hyperbole surrounding online media (for critical perspectives, for example, see Fuchs 2014; Curran, Freedman, and Fenton 2012; van Dijck 2013). As illustrated by speeches and manifestos like the Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace by John Perry Barlow (1996), the promises commentators and industry actors find with the Internet seem greater than with new media technologies in the past. For many, the Internet, or specific services such as social media, harbours the potential to create a radically different media environment. The massive information available through search engines coupled with how easy it is to speak up in public could make us think the Internet provides media independence of a new kind.

Yet the possibilities go hand in hand with limitations: we now pay for our communication services by giving up metadata and data about ourselves and our everyday lives (van Dijck 2014). This has revitalised discussions of privacy and made more people attentive to issues of anonymity online (see, for example, Bartlett [2014] on the problematic aspects of online anonymity). Native advertising and other practices online that blur the line between journalism and sponsored content have also been seen to threaten the fundamentals of journalistic independence (Piety 2015). The power of new gatekeepers, such as search engines and social media platforms, to influence what people see and do not see online constitute new algorithmic or computational dependencies. Taken together, the growth of online media is obviously a key factor that forces us to reconsider the meaning and relevance of media independence.

While different uses of independence discussed here matter across borders, we should not ignore the relations between media independence and the political system and culture that lie within. Just as the current European debates on the independence of public service media are closely tied with specific national political cultures and media systems, and by no means cross-culturally generalisable, the term indie and its connotations are strongly rooted in western popular culture and its institutional and aesthetic traditions. Thus, if media independence is a contested concept in European-level media policy debates, its meanings are even more varied in different media systems and political cultures.

In authoritarian regimes, the term can be used to refer to mere pseudo-freedom. Based on cross-national comparison, Daniela Stockmann (2013) argues that media independence in various authoritarian regimes does not directly follow from the introduction of market forces into previously state-controlled media systems. Instead, the meaning and reality of "independence" and its threats vary greatly between different political regimes and media systems. For instance, a number of "non-official" or "independent" media outlets have been formed in China over the past years. In this case, the label does not mean that these media would be any freer from state censorship than state-owned media. Instead, these outlets use

independence as a label that serves to make them more credible in the eyes of the audiences, which in turn actually improves their efficiency as a tool for state propaganda (Stockmann 2013). Similarly, ideas of media and journalistic independence in Russia have not followed a linear path envisioned by many after the fall of the Soviet Union. Rather, the realities of media independence have been inseparable from the complexities of the political and economic and cultural environment of the country (Rodgers 2015).

Given its varying meaning, then, how can we go about separating and sorting the different dimensions of media independence?

Independence from What, for Whom and by What Means

So far, we have argued that independence is a central rhetorical means for legitimation purposes for various types of media in different contexts. Based on its changing uses, it is clear that media independence is a relational concept. We must always ask by whom and for what purpose it is invoked (Bennett 2015). A relational concept has no essential content; there is no such thing as total or absolute independence in the realm of media. Instead, any media will always have to deal with a multitude of different types of constraints and external influences. Which of these are regarded as the most pertinent, or politically relevant, inevitably depends on the context.

We can heuristically separate these different uses by analysing whose independence, from what and by which means it is that we talk about. On this basis, we can suggest an initial, non-exhaustive typology of different aspects of media independence, listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Aspects of media independence

Whose independence?	**From what?**	**By which means?**
Media system	State/government	Law and statutes
Media organisations	Political parties	Organisational arrangements
Journalism	Special interest groups	Self-regulation
Individual voice/speaker	Market forces	Ethical guidelines
	Major media corporations	Professional culture
	"The mainstream"	

The first column in the table describes who the independent entity is. At the broadest level we can talk about the independence of a media system as a whole, either as a theoretical construct or when comparing different national media systems. Media organisations are the institutions and outlets for media production. These range from established media businesses and public institutions, to less obvious candidates such as telecom companies or online platforms. Journalism can be defined either broadly, encompassing a profession or a culture, or more specifically, as journalistic practices or products. The final entity that can enjoy more or less independence is the individual speaker. This category incorporates journalists, but also actors such as bloggers or citizens participating in public debate.

The second column presents social forces, from which these entities can be deemed more or less independent: the state or government; political parties or interests groups (cf. political

parallelism); market forces or commercial interests; and the mainstream, typically understood as aesthetics, tastes and cultural conventions associated with popular media culture.

While all these forms of independence matter, they can be fostered by a variety of different formal and informal means. In many settings, a constitution lays down basic measures for media independence (e.g. in the form of press freedom paragraphs or freedom of speech more generally). In some systems, the roles of specific media institutions find their definitions in the constitution or in interpretations of it. German public service broadcasting, for instance, is understood to get its remit from the basic law's (*Grundgesetz*) provisions of freedom of opinion and information (for example, Humphreys 1994). Elsewhere, specific acts or statutes cover specific media (such as broadcasting or audiovisual services), specific media regulatory provisions (such as must-carry rules for television) or specific institutional requirements. Laws governing public service broadcasters, for example, typically mention independence as a general guiding principle, but also stipulate more specific organisational arrangements concerning, for example, funding, appointment procedures or external supervision. Within media organisations, independence can also be fostered with other organisational arrangements, such as the separation of the editorial and advertising departments.

Independence can further be anchored in the form of self-regulation or professional guidelines. Ethical guidelines for journalists typically include independence from external influences as a central ethical principle. Individual media organisations or self-regulatory bodies can also issue their own rules or recommendations on journalists' professional status or, for example, gifts or benefits that might compromise journalist's independence. Beyond such formal recommendations, the ideal of journalistic independence is more informally embedded in the self-understanding and everyday practices of journalists almost universally (Reich and Hanitzsch 2013).

Whereas established media organisations might have a legally defined independence, along with a long history that gives precedent when it comes to manoeuvring issues of independence, many emerging actors might not. Importantly, formal does not necessarily equal better, or even well functioning: the independence of journalism as a profession is formally laid down in professional guidelines, statutes, ethical manifests and, in many cases, also laws. Still, the actual functioning of journalistic independence depends on a range of factors, and can be assessed not only based on the prescriptive definitions but more importantly based on actual performance (for example, Trappel, Nieminen, and Nord 2010; Syvertsen et al. 2014).

The categories are clearly not mutually exclusive: a journalist would ideally be independent from state and also commercial interests, and subject to laws, professional guidelines as well as her own ethical beliefs. One could thus draw lines between relevant entities in different columns, depending on the specific case in question. While these aspects are by no means exhaustive of all the different contexts in which media independence may be brought up, what Table 1 helps us do is distinguish between different levels of independence, and how they can work individually or in unison.

It is also important to note that actors can influence independence in different roles: the state can be a media owner but also a media regulator. The state can pose a threat to independence by various means of censorship or through the exercise of its monopoly on the use of force, something which to a saddening extent remains a problem in many parts of

the world. Similarly, business actors can act as media owners and as employers of individual journalists, but also, for example, as buyers of advertising or content.

To sum up, laying out the different meanings, uses and contexts of media independence helps us sort out and explicate whose independence we are talking about, what they should be or are independent of, and by which means. This makes it easier to connect different claims and assess actual independence in specific debates. For the current claims of independent versus state media in Europe, for instance, the distinctions make it easy to see that the commercial companies downplay their dependence on the market, while simultaneously overemphasising the relations between public service broadcasters and the state or political parties.

Such an explication clearly only goes so far: it cannot "solve" the inherently controversial nature of the concept of independence. The meaning and relevance of independence always depend on the setting. In specific contexts, the notion is clearly useful. Besides debates on the political independence of public service media, the influence of advertising or media ownership on journalistic content, for example, continues to be a relevant issue for critical media research. Independence also continues to be a central notion in studies of journalistic culture and its professional norms. Research on journalistic cultures across the world, however, reveals that its conditions, limits and perceived threats vary across countries (Reich and Hanitzsch 2013).

In these contexts, independence clearly continues to be a central principle and in each case we should try to single out what aspects of independence/dependence we consider relevant. But if independence is understood as a thoroughly relative concept that can be invoked by almost anyone for almost any purpose, does it have any value left as a general normative principle in media policy debates? Is there any common standard for evaluating which media are more independent, or do we need to assess them all against their own conception of independence?

Beyond Independence?

Independence can be seen as an example of a "high modern" journalistic principle that many regard now as increasingly irrelevant and unattainable. As Hallin (2006) has argued, the idea that journalism, as the fourth estate, could be truly independent of other institutions and rise above social divisions and contradictions to produce knowledge of universal validity was central to the "high modernism" of journalism. In a postmodern perspective, it is fashionable to instead emphasise subjectivity, relativism and the ubiquity of power relations within which all media and journalists operate.

It may even be questioned whether independence is always desirable. The notion of media independence is almost always understood positively. As already discussed, it has clear critical element associated with self-determination, critique and progress. Yet, at the same time, the notions of independence and autonomy can also be linked to negative associations, like apolitical isolationism, self-sufficiency, lack of commitment, false objectivity or "the view from nowhere" journalism (for example, Rosen 2010). It can be argued that true independence from all outside interests is neither possible nor desirable. All media are interdependent with their social environment and its power relations, and the idea that the media should only be guided by their own insular logic and normative codes is not necessarily even very appealing.

As we have argued, the digital media environment and its complex interdependencies have only underlined this impossibility of genuine or absolute independence. All this raises questions of whether media independence, as a normative value used to assess media organisations in society, should be replaced with other, more fashionable values, such as transparency, openness or diversity.

Kelly McBride and Tom Rosenstiel (2013), for example, have explicitly argued for replacing "act independently" with "be transparent" as a guiding ethical principle of journalism. When journalism comes from varied sources, and not only a homogeneous group of professionals working for established media organisations, they argue that "the concept of journalists as clearly independent of those they cover will be more complex" and, "as a principle, transparency will drive journalists to actions and accountability that independence did not" (2013, 2 and 4).

Amit Schejter (2007) has also called for the media consumers' "right to transparency", implying that the calls for independence should be judged in relation to the stated aims and purpose of different media organisations. Instead of only rhetorical declarations of independence, Schejter argues that the various types of media should openly disclose their loyalties and underlying interest, so that citizens can assess them in their own right. In current media debates, the emphasis on such transparency is prominent in many ways. The debates on native advertising (Piety 2015), for instance, often end up calling for disclosure and transparency, so consumers can clearly distinguish promotional content from editorial content. Similarly, debates on the power of algorithms and new forms of gatekeeping highlight the importance of "algorithmic accountability and transparency" (Diakopolus 2015). In other words, when algorithms increasingly influence our exposure to information, software companies should disclose the ways in which they work so that users can understand their influence.

Because of the difficulty to establish any universally recognised standards for evaluating "media independence", it can be argued that normative judgements regarding the media, whether they concern their structure or the content, have increasingly shifted towards emphasising transparency, diversity and openness. If no media outlet can claim to be truly independent or objective, then the best we can hope for, it seems, is that there is the widest possible range of different types of media available that users can openly evaluate.

Transparency, openness and diversity too, however, are notions that almost anyone can embrace. This can also make them somewhat evasive and vacuous, leading many to believe that they too are becoming catchwords with little critical content. Transparency and diversity do not themselves identify any specific values or objectives that need to be advanced or protected. The problem with replacing independence with these other notions is therefore that they too are equally vague and contested concepts. Transparency alone cannot resolve the problems associated with media structures and democratic regulation of the media any more than media independence can.

Conclusions

It is easy to criticise the notion of media independence for being unattainable and utopian, since no media outlet can truly claim to be absolutely independent. It is also clear that media independence is a concept that does not have a universal meaning. Instead, it can signify radically different, and often contradictory, ideals. As we have discussed, even in the specific

context of current European media policy, its meaning vary between sectors of the media and between different types of media organisations.

Besides this basic ambiguity, the concept of independence can be further criticised for its instrumental uses in political lobbying. The notion is increasingly used by various sectors of the media to promote their own agenda and bolster their own legitimacy against unwanted challenges. What Damian Tambini (2012, 1) has said about the abuses of the term "press freedom" also applies to "media independence": at its worst, "the term is increasingly used to protect the self-interest of one of many converging media sectors, to block reforms, and close down debate about the appropriate form of media accountability".

Does this entail that the meaning of media independence has dissolved with its many uses? We should be careful not to assume that the current period in the history of media policy is more complex than previous ones. Actors have undoubtedly differed in their uses of media independence in earlier periods, too. The fact that the meaning of a concept is ambiguous or contested does not necessarily make it irrelevant. Otherwise, we could argue that many other normative concepts, including media freedom and democracy, have also become irrelevant mantras. It might be that the critical potential of the term seemed more effective at earlier stages of media history, such as the introduction of public service broadcasting from the 1920s or the fading of the party press in the Nordic region in the 1970s. Nevertheless, media independence, we have argued, does have relevance in current media policy debates.

As Bennett (2015) holds, as long as media independence serves as a positive vision or "utopian ideal" for journalists, activists, policy-makers or media organisations, then it clearly matters. Besides motivating people, the debate over the meaning of independence, and the various forces that it needs to be guarded from, is in itself often useful for clarifying the position of different types of media formations in society. But from the perspective of media policy and critical research, it is essential to acknowledge that the meaning of the concept cannot be fixed into any universal definition. Understanding media independence as a relational concept allows it to serve a role in debates about the position of different media in relation to other social forces, but it hardly provides a neutral yardstick that could be used to measure all types of media with common normative criteria.

What we talk about when we talk about media independence, then, are the characteristics of the relations between, on the one side, specific entities ranging from media institutions, via journalistic cultures, to individual speakers, and, on the other, their social environment, including the state, political interest groups, the market or the mainstream culture. Media independence is not one definite thing, and acknowledging that would often lead to a more fruitful media policy debate.

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CHAPTER 5

The Unbearable Lightness of Being Alternative: Idealism-Realism and Purism-Pragmatism in Greek Alternative Media

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Abstract

The article explores alternative media sustainability across a wide range of Greek projects. In this regard, it probes into a number of factors related to both the political economy (funding, organization) of these projects and the nature (real/'imaginary', broad reach/niche) of the relationship with their communities/ audiences. The findings of the research reveal a dynamic and contradictory field regarding alternative media resilience in terms of the dialectical relationship of idealistic/realistic (on the production, organization level) and puristic/pragmatic (on the communication, reach level) features. The article concludes by highlighting the strategies employed by the most successful projects in terms of sustainability in relation to their positioning along the idealism/realism and purism/pragmatism nexus.

Keywords

sustainability, alternative media, Greece, funding, organization, community formation, outreach

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Introduction

In her well-known swamp metaphor, Rodríguez deconstructed the view that the often contingent, ephemerous, 'fragmented and improvised nature' (2001: 22) of alternative media is a reason to dismiss their political potential and disregard them as powerful agents of change. As she writes, alternative (or citizens') media's short life cycles leave 'what at first glance seems to be—no signature, no accomplishments, no successes. […] Instead, what we find is a multitude of small forces that surface and burst like bubbles in a swamp' (2001: 22). Rodríguez is of course right in pointing out the situatedness and historicity of subversive political action. At the same time, however, as much as 'these bubbles are a clear sign that the swamp is alive' (2001: 22), the vulnerability of alternative media is a crude reality, one that has consequences that surpass the life cycles of specific projects and the life experiences of their participants. Sandoval and Fuchs (2010) point out a particular danger they associate with participatory media but can be extended to alternative media in general, namely, the marginality that prevents them from gaining public visibility and establishing a broad counter-public sphere (the 'alternative ghetto' risk).

The literature on alternative media spares no effort in producing different definitions of the projects' social reality (radical, community, participatory, citizens', alternative, social movement, tactical, critical, rhizomatic media, to name some). Objections raised point either to the vagueness, emptiness, or the particularistic frames and connotations of these terms (Downing 2010). Acknowledging that none of these terms can provide a once-and-for-all term of a very heterogeneous, fluid and contested field, this article employs the term 'alternative' to acknowledge this elusiveness rather than as a definition 'to which [social] realities are then required to conform' (Gumucio Dagron 2004: 54).

Questions of sustainability touch upon two factors that have rarely been discussed in tandem: funding and structural organization, and community formation and outreach. The present study attempts to provide a dialectical understanding of these axes vis-à-vis alternative media resilience, exploring how a large number of diverse alternative media projects in Greece position themselves in terms of their political economy (idealism vs. realism) and their relationship with communities and audiences (purism vs. pragmatism). Besides theorizing the dialectical relationship of these axes, best practices and strategies are identified and discussed with a view of tackling the many challenges of the alternative media sector.

Alternative and Community Media

The renewed focus on alternative media has been sustained by approaches that work through syntheses of different areas and positions, evaluating the multiplicity and transformative nature of the research subject. Prevalent is here the employment of the 'alternative and community media' framework. For instance, a recent and vast companion to the subject, Chris Atton's (2015b) edited collective volume, evaluates alternative and community media as analytical categories to work with, reflecting on diverse applications across various contexts. The terms 'alternative' and 'community' reflect on two main reference points of the research subject: its tension with mainstream media (alternative) and the setting it takes place (community).

Several approaches put emphasis on the production/organization and the content/form of alternative media. A number of issues highlighted in the respective literature include alternative news and counter-information (Traber 1985; Herman and Chomsky [1994] 2002), alternative production/distribution (Duncombe 1997; Atton 2002), resistance/prefigurative politics (Downing 2001), activism (Lievrouw 2011) and critical content (Sandoval and Fuchs 2010). Other approaches focus more on the communication/usage and the context of participatory/community media. Here, prominent issues of consideration are community-building/development (Servaes 1999), public communication (Jankowski and Prehn 2002; Rennie 2006), civic engagement (Dahlgren 1995) and the enactment of citizenship (Rodríguez 2001).

Presenting alternative and community media as analytical categories allows us to capture the dynamics developed across such diverse domains (production/distribution, form/content, agents/users, engagement/reception, objective/purpose) of their realization. Studies avoiding a 'prescriptive definition' (Lewis 1993) and a 'reductionist understanding' (Atton 2015a) of the field have drawn on these categories (interchangeably, or jointly used). Lewis' (1993) study on alternative/community's media impact (an UNESCO project on different media projects and contexts) has elaborately sketched a number of modalities (motive, funding, organizational structure, message content, relationship with audience, composition of the audience etc.) upon which 'alternativeness' is constructed (experienced or expressed). In the scope of a broader study on alternative and community media, Atton highlights also multiple dimensions of their implementation, from the political economy of media production (organizational practices, critical content) to community formation and engagement, considering also a number of challenges addressed as 'practices develop and the context around them develops' (2015a: 3). [1]

And Sustainability

Questions of sustainability have a practical relevance to both political economy and relationship with the community/audience. As Coyer et al. (2007) put it,

> sustainability is not just about financial security but it is also about how your project is set up and organised, how it is distributed and who the audience is—and what other means of social support and community participation might be a part of it.

Research on the production and organization of alternative media has pointed out that a very controversial issue for alternative media is whether or not to employ mainstream economic and organizational mechanisms, techniques and skills. In Atton and Hamilton's (2008) words, 'the general political-economic dilemma for any critical project is that it needs resources with which to work, but those crucial resources are present only in the very society that it seeks to change or dissolve' (2008: 26). According to the Comedia (1984) report on the underdevelopment of alternative press, the marginality of the sector ('alternative ghetto') stems from its internal weaknesses:

> the absence of a clear conception of target audiences and of marketing strategies to reach new audiences; the failure to develop necessary skills in the areas of administration and financial plan-

[1] The hybridization of alternative media (see Carpentier et al. 2003) and the ambivalent role of the corporate social web (see Fuchs 2014) figure prominently in this regard. (2007: 261)

> ning; and the commitment to an inflexible model of collectivity as the solution to all organizational problems. (1984: 95)

On the other hand, Khiabany (2000) critically reflects on Comedia's proposal for alternative media to employ mainstream economic and organizational techniques, drawing on the failure of a British leftish publication (*Red Pepper*) that followed Comedia's business strategy; by contrast, leftish publications that followed the more orthodox, Leninist-socialist model (closely tied to working-class or socialist parties), 'have survived longer and have attracted more readers that did the attempt to construct a broader and more commercially sophisticated alternative' (2000: 462).[2] The discussion on the sustainability of alternative media provides a prolific context for further research. These crisp reflections on the financial and organizational levels of alternative media ask for considering and comparing different strategies employed in the political economy spectrum (from idealistic to realistic ones): reject or accept advertising and any kind of funding related to capitalism; collective or more institutionalized organization; volunteer engagement or paid labour models; and de-professionalization or distinct professional roles.

Regarding communication and usage of alternative media, the discussion on sustainability has been addressed in terms of the democratization of communication, satisfying the communication needs of certain groups, from diverse perspectives. In the development paradigms, the issue at stake is the redistribution of communication power, in terms of facilitating access and participation of excluded, marginalized communities in the communication system (see Berrigan 1979), eminently addressed in the MacBride proposal (MacBride and International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems 1980) to consider another human right entitlement, the 'right to communication'. In the western context, community communication is conceptualized in terms of small-scale forms of public communication, promoting communicative exchange and social action (Hollander and Stappers 1992). Both above-sketched frameworks of democratization of communication have fuelled further reflections on the field, acknowledging subtle complexities and dimensions in regard to cultural and social identities as well as to subordinate and specialist groups' interests. Accordingly, different accounts evaluate diverse aspects of reflexive engagement in/with community media, on the grounds of enhancing participatory communication, or the very realm of public sphere(s). In any case, 'processes of empowerment, conscientization and fragmentation of power' (Rodríguez 2003: 190) run through the dispersed nature of engagement in/with citizens' media. That said, the issue at stake is how such an engagement is constructed. Elaborating into the communicative procedures (of production), Huesca points out the 'two-sidedness' of alternative communication: 'participatory media involve marginalizing, as well as empowering, giving voice, as well as taking voice away' (1995: 115). Broadly, this contradiction reflects on the nature of the relationship of alternative media with their communities/audiences/users, in terms of either creating/preserving a niche (purism) or reaching out to broader audiences (pragmatism).

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[2] Still, further questions are raised when considering alternative media that 'pursue radical criticism at the level of content but are not necessarily alternative at the level of economic product form and production processes' (Sandoval and Fuchs 2010: 148). For Sandoval and Fuchs, projects that employ commercial financing, though, while remaining critical content-wise (*Adbusters, Mother Jones, Le Monde Diplomatique*) are representative of alternative media that overcome marginality and reach broader publics.

Research Focus

Few studies have dialectically probed into diverse domains of alternative media, and they do so by focusing on a single-case study. Bailey et al. (2008) contextualize their multi-dimensional approach on alternative media highlighting diverse positions, identities (serving community, alternative to mainstream, linking to civil society, rhizomatic links) articulated in the Brazilian movie *Radio Favela.* Kejanıoğlu et al. (2012), drawing on the Independent Communication Network (BIA) in Turkey, examine participation at both production and reception ends, [3] paying attention at a rather neglected dimension of the alternative media studies, the audience/user (Downing 2003).

The present study, having an interest in alternative media sustainability, probes into a number of factors related to both the political economy of these projects and the nature of the relationship with their communities/audiences. It does so by considering and comparing diverse alternative media projects implemented in a specific social, political, cultural and technological context (Greece), 'tak[ing] account of the situatedness of these media' (Atton 2015a: 9). Specifically, the research evaluates alternative media producers' positions on the production/organization and the communication/reach of their projects, pointing out challenges and tensions in running and maintaining alternative media projects. The sample of the study reflects on diverse inputs (social movements, communities and civic actors) in the production of alternative media projects. Also, the research interest in the communication/reach of these projects cannot but come across the audience side too. As Downing (2003) points out, 'alternative-media activists represent in a sense the most active segment of the so-called "active-audience"' (2003: 625–26). One would imagine that they above all would be passionately concerned with how their own media products were being received and used'.

Against this background, the study explores alternative media sustainability across a wide range of Greek projects [4] (see Appendix for a brief description), reflecting on two research questions:

1. To what extent are the various projects characterized by idealism or realism in terms of their political economy?
2. What approaches and practices (purism vs. pragmatism) do they employ to consolidate or extend relationships with their communities/audiences?

[3] Carpentier (2011, original emphasis) has eloquently sketched these two interrelated spheres by making an analytical distinction between 'participation *in* the media' (participation in production and decision-making) and 'participation *through* the media' (participation in the public debate and self-representation in various public spaces).

[4] Alternative media have a long tradition in Greece, but since the 2008 and 2011 uprisings, there is a growing interest in the literature about these practices. However, most approaches adopt an activism perspective (see Milioni 2009; Vatikiotis 2011; Siapera and Theodosiadis 2017).

Fieldwork

To answer these questions, we carried out interviews with media producers in fifteen alternative media projects.[5] To sample them, we first created a comprehensive map of alternative media projects from various sources (lists aggregating alternative media in Greece, searches in search engines, lists of projects provided by the most well-known alternative media). Sixty alternative media were originally selected and separated into different categories, according to their aim, core identity (e.g., topical focus, political affiliation), frequency of activity and media type (e.g., print, online, radio, TV). According to this categorization and aiming at creating a sample that would reflect the diversity of these projects, a list of 31 projects was compiled. Up to three invitations by e-mail were sent out, followed by telephone calls (where available). Participants from fifteen media projects replied positively and face-to-face or teleconference in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted by the authors (individually or in groups of two). The interviews lasted on average one hour and 45 minutes, ranging from 43 minutes to 2.5 hours. Being part of a larger project, the interview guide included 40 open-ended questions focusing on wide range of topics (e.g., the producers' life trajectories, the projects' characteristics, aims and claims, structure and funding, principles and values, ideological positions, perceived effects and self-criticism). In the current analysis, we draw on materials addressing our research questions. The analysis was complemented with information and documents available in the projects' websites (e.g., mission statements, project description and aims).

Analysis

The analysis of the case studies in relation to their (1) funding and organization and (2) the relationship with their community is deployed across two axes accordingly (Figure 1): (1) idealism (rejection of advertising and any kind of external funding, collective organization, volunteer engagement, de-professionalization)—realism (acceptance of advertising and other sources of funding despite dependencies, more institutionalized organization, rejection of voluntarism, distinct professional roles); (2) purism (creating/preserving a niche and establishing an 'imaginary' relationship with audiences)—pragmatism (reaching out to broader audiences and engaging in interaction with them).

Funding and Organization: Idealism vs. Realism

Idealism

In the idealism-realism axis (see Figure 1), several alternative media projects occupy the one end, exhibiting all features of the 'idealist' condition in terms of their political economy:

[5] The media projects are described in the Appendix. One project is not named—indicated as '*M*' in the analysis—to safeguard the producers' anonymity (as it was produced by only two people). Thirteen interviews were held with eighteen interviewees: five interviews were held with two participants in the same projects, whereas one interviewee was involved in (and covered in their interview) more than one project. Five interviewees were female and thirteen were male. All interviewees cited have been assigned fake names.

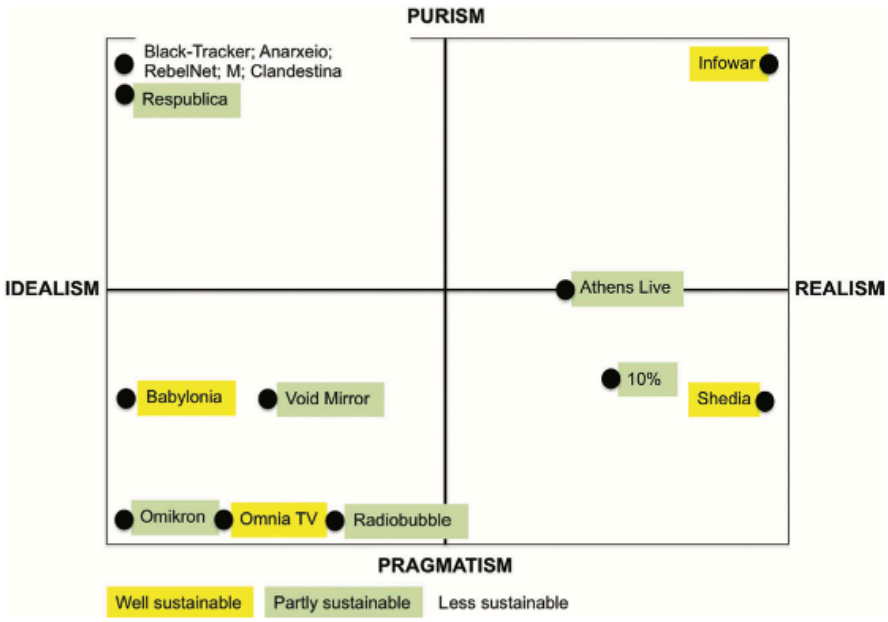


Figure 1: Mapping of alternative media projects in two axes: idealism-realism and purism-pragmatism.

Black-Tracker, Anarxeio, RebelNet, Clandestina, ResPublica, M, Babylonia and Omikron. All these projects are self-funded, mainly through unpaid work by the producers.

> I have supported financially all expenses—and indeed amid unemployment. Because with one and a half months of work per year, you cannot cover the costs of a website.
>
> (Markos, *M)*

As they are all online-only projects (with the exception of *Babylonia* that publishes a print issue of the magazine annually) with low-operating costs, the producers either cover these costs themselves or fund them through events, such as parties and festivals, some donations, and, in the case of *Babylonia*, the sales of the annual issue of the magazine. The decision to create a web-native project was in most cases dictated by cost-related reasons. *Babylonia,* for instance, started as a print newspaper in 2003, shifted to print magazine in 2011 and became an online-only magazine in 2015.

With the exception of *Babylonia,* which is one of the most long-lived projects studied and has a firm presence, the rest of the projects are, more or less, in a state of precariousness. Despite this, they outright reject advertising and any other kind of external funding, such as sponsorships and grants, for ethical reasons as well as to preserve their trustworthiness:

> No, out of the question. This would be a disgrace.
>
> (Pinelopi, *Clandestina)*
>
> No, no, no, this is against all principles! […] Otherwise, our credibility is gone. […] Nothing, nothing, nothing! There is no company behind it, there is no scheme. It's just a group of volunteers who do this.
>
> (Christina, *Omikron*)

Even practices such as crowdfunding are out of the question, in principle (because they have been 'appropriated by capitalism') but also out of frustration for the lack of support by audiences in Greece:

> Interviewer: Have you considered crowd-funding as a model?
>
> Of course not, because there is also an ideological issue […] We are trying to avoid using capitalism's tools […] Where is crowdfunding based? On solidarity. On free financial contribution […] A very good tool for capitalism, that's what it is [nowadays].
>
> (Markos, *M)*
>
> generally, people go to concerts but do not spend money […] It's the existing mentality. They don't support any endeavors […] raising money to support a counter-information project is the worst part […] Not doable.
>
> (Markos, *M*)

Omnia TV also falls under the idealism category in terms of its political economy, sustained by voluntary work, contributions by people close to the producers, donations through the website and, occasionally, by selling products such as T-shirts. Having tried advertising through AdSense (in their view, the only form of advertising that does not create direct dependencies), they soon abandoned it, because of low turnout and high management cost. In general, they outright reject direct advertising because of the dependencies it incurs:

> Whatever principals or rules we establish about what kind of advertising we accept, we would still be operating as a company, more or less. For instance, if a small shop or enterprise places an ad and tomorrow, we realise that there is a complaint by employees for labor exploitation, what will we do? Take the ad down? Return the money? Play dumb? Not publish the complaint? These are the problems that stem from capitalism and we don't want any of that
>
> (Andreas, *Omnia TV)*

Omnia TV's producers have many qualms about the use of corporate social media (Facebook, Twitter) and are very conscious about the inequalities they create. Although they use them heavily, they are aware of their disempowering effect on collective alternative media projects:

> What probably plays a role in the weakening of grassroots information projects is that many users now act directly, individually. I don't know if this is good or bad but social media encourage direct uploading by any user. They build a brand, e.g. user x is a well-known user who takes pictures and informs about what happens in Athens etc. This functions in a dissipating way regarding the past tendency for more collective media.
>
> (Andreas, *Omnia TV)*

Other projects combine idealistic with realistic positions. *Void Mirror* is based on a principle of 'zero economics', meaning no investment in neither profit from the project. While all activities are self-funded (external funding is precluded), more popular activities (e.g., festivals) help fund smaller and more artistic projects. The 'zero economics' strategy reflects an idealistic 'counter-corporatization' ethos within the collective that has helped participants establish'authentic relations', without'allowing capital to come between them' (Damianos, *Void Mirror).* In more realistic terms, *Void Network*, the collectivity that runs *Void Mirror*, assists artists and intellectuals publicize and sustain their art/work by 'dipping into the

mainstream by any means they prefer', beyond the project. *Radiobubble* has also combined various means and models of financing. It started as a self-financed web radio project (later included a citizen journalism project, #rbnews) by two participants, who got a loan to initiate the project. Attempts to attain sustainability included offering courses (the 'hackacademy'), crowdfunding, drinks from a café-bar that was the physical place of the project for a period of time, donations by participants in the project, and advertising local, neighbouring businesses and organizations. Financially unstable but successful in terms of citizen participation, the project underwent a crisis when the prospect of making profit, as well as accepting state sponsorship, created a cleavage in the core team. At the moment, the project works as a social cooperative enterprise and is hosted by a theatre in Athens, compensating for its rent and bill expenses by advertising the theatre.

In terms of internal organization and structures, these projects also resemble the alternative media archetype (see Atton 2002). The preferred model of internal organization is characterized more or less by structurelessness, which takes the form of absence of distinct roles and tasks for participants and firm time frames. Partly due to the small size of the project teams and the friendly relations among the members, a formal organization becomes unnecessary.

> Relationships are made of friendship, camaraderie and politics all at once and this is, let's say, the big strength of any collectivity.
>
> (Pinelopi, *Clandestina)*

Organization is generally collective and de-professionalized, with rotation in allocation of responsibilities, based on the values of solidarity, respect, trust and accountability. The form and intensity of participation is usually decided by the participants themselves, consciously avoiding formal designation of roles:

> everyone knows a bit of everything […] there is a common experience that's shared, because everybody goes through every position.
>
> (Damianos, *Void Mirror)*
>
> Each one puts in whatever time they have. It's just that John [fake name] and I and some of the other guys do a little bit more because we are more attached to it […] It's a collective effort because each one does what they can. Now it so happens that for the meetings us two are more flexible […] For some of the other guys who have jobs, it's a bit harder.
>
> (Christina, *Omikron*)
>
> there is solidarity amongst us, meaning that when someone has undertaken something, there is no way someone won't go to help out.
>
> (Zoi, *Babylonia*)

Omnia TV, despite following the same lines, is the only project in the idealist category that is not afraid of (a degree of) institutionalization. For instance, its producers consider the possibility of creating a cooperative company to implement productions (e.g., documentaries) that could help sustain the main project (*Omnia TV)*. Also, they are open to a partial professionalization of citizen journalism in exchange for being granted some privileges now restricted to professional journalists (e.g., accreditation and subsequently access to official sources).

Realism

At the other end of the idealism-realism spectrum, we find four projects: *10%, Athens Live, Infowar* and *Shedia*—the latter two being the 'purest' types of realist projects. In terms of funding, *Shedia* is the most successful project of our sample. With a business model that combines commercial advertising, subscriptions, fundraising events and donations/sponsorships from the private sector (~50 per cent of the magazine's expenses combined), as well as revenue from sales (the remaining 50 per cent), *Shedia* has achieved financial stability during the past five years. As recounted by one of its producers, the people who had envisioned the project spent six years looking for a start-up funding. Utterly disillusioned by the rejections due to the nepotism of the Greek political system, they applied for a grant to Stavros Niarchos Foundation [6] and submitted an elaborate and well-thought business plan. After scrutinizing the plan, the foundation granted them €80,000 as start-up funding.

10%, a magazine focusing on gay issues and fighting homophobia, attempted to follow a similar path combining advertising, sponsorships and volunteer work, but abandoned this model after two years finding itself in debt due to advertisements that were never paid. Frustrated by the failure of the advertising model and rejecting online ads due to poor revenue and low quality (explicit sexual content), the magazine has now ceased looking for advertisers. Yet, they are still in favour of mainstream advertising despite the possible dangers (e.g., 'pinkwashing'); achieving financial independence to achieve their end objective is preferred over maintaining a pure ideological stance:

> To achieve my goal, I can use whatever means I deem appropriate. Mainstream advertising is one such means. […] It's one thing to have a leftist opinion, I respect it but […] I believe it's wrong because it doesn't help me fight homophobia and repression […] It is possible, of course, that a coca-cola ad will facilitate pinkwashing. I will take this into account, I will take measures not to allow it.
>
> (Pavlos, *10%*)

Similarly, *Shedia*'s producers have few concerns about advertising (state or commercial). Based on their experience so far, they do not believe that advertising interferes with their social mission or their journalistic writing. Therefore, with the exception of extreme cases, they are not selective towards advertisers.

In short, *Shedia* operates in ways similar to a healthy corporate media organization, and its producers do not regard this funding model as antithetical to their function as an alternative, socially oriented media project. *Infowar*, an independent, critical but largely professional news project, is funded by selling its radio documentary to affiliated radio stations, publishing articles in other outlets, by online donations and commercial advertising through AdSense. Online ads were chosen because of the project's inability to attract advertisement through traditional channels: although the journalist attempted to get a share in the advertising market, his project was 'blacklisted' by advertising agencies, due to his radical journalistic stance. *Athens Live*, a project started in 2015 to create an alternative model for independent professional media, employed crowdfunded, earning €25,000 from the campaign, and set up a non-profit organization. Accepting neither advertising nor sponsorships and depending

[6] A charitable foundation supporting various non-profit organizations created by a multi-billionaire shipping tycoon.

mainly on volunteering journalists *(who work as freelancers for other media)*, it is funded so far by international projects *(funded by Google and the European Union)* and similar funding schemes.

In terms of internal organization, *Shedia* is a rather centralized organization with a core team of seven paid professionals. The content of the magazine is produced by volunteering journalists, some of which (those in the most precarious state) get paid occasionally. The people who make up the core team have distinct professional roles, according to a clear hierarchical structure. In general, *Shedia*'s producers view the magazine through the lens of 'professionalism', striving to make a 'product' as good as possible to satisfy the audience—alongside the social goal of supporting the homeless. Likewise, the producer of *Infowar* carries the mentality of the media professional. Being the sole producer of his project (apart from a paid collaborator responsible for the technical support), he objects to volunteers' engagement—in principle (considering it exploitation) and for practical reasons. *10%* and *Athens Live* also embrace professionalism. *10%* has a rather centralized organization with a small core editorial team. There is some hierarchy (there is a director), but other roles are more flexible. *Athens Live* experimented with horizontal organization practices but abandoned them in favour of a model of clear division of tasks and roles.

Relationship with Communities and Audiences: Puris\m vs. Pragmatism

Purism

Several of the projects analysed in this study occupy the 'purist' end in respect to their relationship with communities and audiences of their projects. Purism consists, on the one hand, in maintaining a rather enclaved community and not reaching beyond a niche audience—what Sandoval and Fuchs call 'individualistic spaces of withdrawal'(2010: 143)—and on the other hand, in adopting a fairly monological model of communication and forming an imaginary relationship with audiences.

The projects adhering to anarchist politics (*Black-Tracker/Anarxeio/RebelNet, M*) are rather closed circuits. They exclusively address the anarchist public sphere, and the projects are not actively communicated in the broader alternative media realm. Despite some concerns about how the broader anarchist movement can reach to 'the people', *M*'s producer considers the project's readers as a niche audience *(in ideological terms)*, which is not expected to increase or decrease considerably:

> We have to think in today's terms and conditions, how we'll be able to fight based on our ideology and how we'll approach the people […] [*M*]'s audience is pretty standard. You don't expect it to grow nor shrink. This is a significant matter.
>
> (Markos, *M)*

The producer of *Infowar* acknowledges that his radical/polemical analysis of news 'preaches to the converted':

> This is always the problem of all these efforts, what in English is called 'preaching to the converted'; with Debtocracy [documentary] only a few times I feel we succeeded in opening up to a world we had no relation with […] more or less these projects get stigmatized and […] people who are politi-

> cally and ideologically across from you […] you don't win them over easily, […] very slowly you may expand your reach.
>
> (Leonidas, *Infowar)*

Similarly, the producers of *Clandestina,* when asked about the project's weaknesses, acknowledge the need to further bring together dissimilar groups to form a common front:

> we didn't manage to create many self-organized cells with immigrants and Greeks, all together, all over Greece.
>
> (Pinelopi, *Clandestina)*

The producers of these purist alternative media imagine their audiences in terms of homophily, namely, as broadly like-minded people, open to critical analysis of ideas but within a certain ideological sphere. Envisaged as channels to communicate and strengthen a particular 'voice' or achieve certain goals, they do not typically encourage discussion, at least not in the online spaces their projects operate. For instance, in *M,* dialogue with readers is generally rare, whereas in the immigration-focused project *Clandestina*, the producers have an imaginary relation with their audience—solidarity citizens/ groups, individuals working in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and media professionals on the basis of providing information for immigrants and refugees. Similarly, the producer of *Infowar* engages rarely in actual interaction and discussion with the audience: social media are used mostly for the promotion of his articles and radio documentaries. From a different perspective, the producer of *ResPublica* imagines his audience in terms of 'people who are doing PhD' (Iraklis, *ResPublica).* Moreover, he has reservations about the role of the Internet and social media in communicating a discourse, as they are considered 'suitable for dissemination/promotion, not for discussion'.

Pragmatism

Pragmatism is used here as 'reaching out' to a broader community and involving processes of interaction and discussion so that a 'real' relationship with audiences is formed.

Pragmatism is adopted by several alternative media projects. *Omikron,* for instance, embraces a strategy of open participation in the project by welcoming anyone who is willing to contribute in the group's physical meetings. In terms of reach, *Omikron* producers adopt a tactical approach: they attempt to get their message across mainstream media by, first, creating content that the latter cannot ignore and, second, by working with journalists to show them different viewpoints about political and social issues in Greece, using the language of 'facts' instead of advocating 'opinions':

> We give the data and tell a story with them […] You don't see an opinion anywhere. You don't see an editorial line being forced […] our goal is to make them think twice about what they'll say. Not just the journalists but whoever consumes these media. We are successful in that. […] It's just facts, nothing more. […] You just show two sides of the same coin.
>
> (Christina, *Omikron)*

Omnia TV is the only project in our sample that adopts the open publishing model: anyone can publish an article or create a TV show, without pre-moderation; any objections are discussed

openly in the comments section in each post. *Omnia TV* not only pays particular attention to web analytics to understand the audience but also establishes a real relationship with readers, utilizing the feedback mechanisms of social media. At the same time, it assumes an inclusive approach and invites diverse (political) voices, aspiring to reach beyond the anarchist milieu and not be restricted to 'counter-information':

> we want to reach as many people as possible, beyond specific political camps […]. We always had in the back of our minds another way to make [the project] a bit broader accepted. Meaning you don't have to tell someone 'I am anti-…' beforehand. Not to hide your position but there is no reason to say, 'do you accept me? I'm anti-…' Present information in the right way with the right methodology, without lies, without misinformation, without spin, distortion or isolated truths to support a point of view, and one will decide whether your position makes sense or not.
>
> (Andreas, *Omnia TV*)

Radiobubble has been a very successful case of citizen-led media, in journalism (the creation of the data journalism project rbdata.gr, collaborating to The Migrant Files project that won European Press Prize), and beyond it. It succeeded in forming diverse communities of interest (around music and news), virtually and physically, extending its reach to conventional as well as radical voices across a wide spectrum of perspectives. Like *Omnia TV*, it established a real relationship with its audiences and users through regular interaction in physical and digital spaces alike—what they themselves called 'phygital'. However, this vibrant community subsided over time and the citizen journalism part of the project died away, leaving a smaller group of amateur producers focused on music. *Radiobubble* interviewees reflect on the extreme difficulty to manage in practice, without sufficient resources, such a plethoric and open project—from training everyone in technical issues to maintaining a diversity of perspectives within it. Interviewees express their feelings of 'failure' in this respect:

> We were failing miserably […] to manage the ideas that kept emerging from our people. Because all of this was happening by putting in personal work hours without pay […] whereas it could thrive if there was financial autonomy […] In my opinion we failed to manage all this panspermia because it outgrew us.
>
> (Ermis, *Radiobubble)*

The pragmatic ethos is less explicit, but still noticeable, in *Babylonia, Void Mirror, Shedia* and *Athens Live. Babylonia* has attempted to extend its reach beyond anarchist publics. It organizes the annual, international, anti-authoritarian festival B-Fest and engages in many ad hoc initiatives and collaborations with other alternative media, social centres and journalists from mainstream left-leaning media. The online magazine 'hosts' different voices, sometimes even liberal positions, and facilitates interaction with its users through various channels (e-mail, social media and the circulation of a weekly newsletter). At the same time, however, this outreach is generally situated within the broader institutional framework of anti-authoritarian politics, excluding perspectives that may challenge this framework:

> There are red lines of course […] Anything that contains the notion of power doesn't have a place in [the project].
>
> (Athina, *Babylonia)*

Void Mirror perceives its audience as a community of already active, critical-thinking people, as 'comrades':

> We don't differentiate between ourselves and the audience, in fact, we are addressing comrades, people who are already active […] with critical thinking […] and we are trying to create the conditions where the audience becomes a participant in the production.
>
> (Damianos, *Void Mirror)*

It establishes a 'real' relationship with audiences based on the creation of 'actually lived realities' (events or situations). This emanates from their 'counter-theoretical' philosophy, namely, the conviction that the production discourse should be experiential (lived experiences) rather than textual (articles and speeches). The *Void Mirror* interviewee also stressed the diversity of perspectives and backgrounds of participants in the project and reflected on the project's main aspiration, that is, to bring various subcultures in contact with each other and allow them to blend. The collectivity has initiated various projects with other groups, some of them from different political milieus. However, this diversity occurs within a rather well-defined ideological framework, the 'libertarian culture'. *Shedia* is a street paper and its journalistic content touches upon various topics, news of general interest as well as entertainment, for example, sports, targeted at broad audiences. Although the producers do not have in place mechanisms of regular interaction with readers, they employ market tools such as audience surveys to understand the audience and strive to satisfy their informational needs by delivering a 'product' (the magazine) of high quality by professional standards. *Athens Live* has chosen to report news about Greece only in English, with a clear orientation towards international audiences. Its goal is to highlight and communicative alternative perspectives about political events in Greece and reach broader audiences, overcoming what they consider a short-sighted perspective prevalent in Greece about 'alternativeness':

> We don't want to stay an alternative project. We want to have a truly credible voice and a profile that will bring us a wider audience, that will break free from […] that mentality of the alternative.
>
> (Alekos, *Athens Live)*

Lastly, the gay magazine *10%* exhibits some elements of purism, such as providing limited interaction with readers of the magazine and addressing a particular community (gay men). On the other hand, the producers have seized every opportunity to contribute to mainstream venues in order to get the message across and not preach to the converted (Pavlos, *10%*), even if they have been criticized by purists:

> Because of *10%,* I was asked to write articles for other magazines. Time Out Athens discovered me from *10%* and asked me to do a gay column […] I did it to diffuse the message to the broad public […] To my expense, since I had to write about nightlife and I didn't know anything about that […] When I published this article in Protagon, I was accused of being a sell-out […] [Regardless, I did it] to diffuse the message where I do not have access.
>
> (Pavlos, *10%*)

Despite the absence of mechanisms for regular interaction with readers in the online magazine itself, the producers of *10%* engage in other activities that they regard as synergistic to the media project, such as excursions, dance lessons and board games, aiming at creating shared

realities for gay people. In their view, these activities attract significant numbers of people due to the 'brand name' the magazine has created, in respect to its quality and trustworthiness, which, in turn, has earned the gay community's trust. Participation in these events is, therefore, the means by which the project creates a sustaining relationship with communities and which, in turn, creates a solid basis for further developing the project.

> We have gotten much feedback about all that *10%* has to offer not only as a publication but as a brand name, because our dances are the *10%* dances, our yoga is the *10%* yoga […] So this brand name, with the trustworthiness that has now, provides a safe setting, one knows that he will go there and […] will be safe.
>
> (Pavlos, *10%*)

Discussion: Strategies and Practices to Achieve Sustainability

The sustainability of alternative media projects is assessed in terms of their financial viability and their longevity. In this section, we discuss how the positioning of the various alternative media discussed, in terms of their political economy and their relationship with their audiences and communities, is related to their (prospects of) sustainability. The most successful projects in this respect are found at the bottom and the top right in the respective mapping according to their idealistic-realistic and puristic-pragmatic features (see Figure 1).

Realism-pragmatism

Clearly, the most accomplished project in terms of financial stability is the street paper *Shedia,* selling up to 30,000 copies monthly and attracting significant funds from the market. *Shedia* combines a realistic approach in its political economy with a pragmatic approach in terms of its relation to its audience. More particularly, *Shedia*'s success seems to be a result of crafting a well-thought business model, adopting mainstream tools and strategies such as commercial advertising, sponsorships from the private sector, and professional tools for audience analysis to produce a 'marketable' product. The success of this model allowed them to overcome the volunteering model and sustain a team of paid 'employees', embedded in a hierarchical organizational structure. Key to this success is their decision to reach beyond partial publics, by producing journalistic content with a broader appeal, by professional standards. *Shedia* has succeeded thus far in maintaining a balance between editorial independence and its embeddedness in the market: its producers do not feel that these strategies mess with the social mission of the project or threaten their independence in terms of editorial practices. However, *Shedia* is not engaged in radical political criticism or counter-information reporting practices that can be seen as openly challenging the status quo.

Other projects that combine realistic and pragmatic approaches have less apparent prospects of viability, such as *10%* and *Athens Live*, mainly because neither of them has settled in clear business strategies, although they have been experimenting with many models *(e.g., social, cooperative enterprise, non-profit organization)*. A positive strategy that stands out, despite not *(yet)* translated into a clear model for revenue, is *10%*'s practice of creating a 'real', rather than imaginary, relation to its audience by engaging affiliated communities through events that create shared realities. Here, sustainability emerges mainly out of the trust with which

the magazine is endowed by audiences and is then extended to synergistic activities, which, in turn, deepen this relationship. *Athens Live*, on the other hand, in its quest of novel ways to achieve financial independence, is at the crossroads of a strategic decision—to run as a non-profit organization or as a start-up company *(calling for investors)*. Still, some rather dubious strategies of organizing the project echo practices quite common in neo-liberal markets. For instance, the motivation of journalists volunteering in the project is based on the expectation of building a personal reputation and being 'discovered' by professional media as freelancers for paid assignments. At the same time, participants are expected to 'get rid of the ideology of the freelancer' *(Alekos, Athens Live)* to advance the 'collective good' of the project (which means that the project is credited for news pieces produced instead of individual media workers).

Realism-purism

Infowar, the only project in this sample that combines realism with purism, has also proven viable so far. Basically a 'one-man project', it has managed to build a reputation and sustain itself, as part of a broader network of the journalist's productions, including critical documentaries produced through crowdfunding and articles published in other outlets. Uncompromised in its radical stance of reporting and news analysis, it restricts itself to a specific audience, to which is related in a rather monological manner. Yet, the key factor to this project's viability seems to be professionalism and the subsequent high quality of reporting and documentaries, which has gained the audience's trust, although this is not yet translated into direct revenue. In this sense, purism (addressing a niche audience) is not necessarily antithetical to sustainability, as long as there are some mechanisms of capitalizing audience loyalty.

Purism-idealism

When mixed with idealism, however, purism does not seem to create favourable conditions for sustainability. The purist-idealist projects under study are in a precarious situation as they depend entirely on the participants' continued availability in terms of time and resources. The producers themselves recognize this weakness as they report difficulties in keeping the project updated in a consistent basis, while being active in the off-line world (*Clandestina, ResPublica*), and under-functioning of these initiatives as they realize that they have not reached their full potential (*Black-Tracker, Anarxeio, RebelNet*). Some of them (e.g., *M*) are not particularly optimistic about the future in this respect. Therefore, maintaining an idealistic position, namely, excluding any form of external funding and depending on volunteer engagement of a rather closed circle of participants, while preserving a puristic approach on communication, by refraining from extending their outreach to broader audiences and engaging in interaction with existing audiences, renders the endurance of these projects challenging.

Idealism-pragmatism

The idealist-pragmatist projects analysed show rather good prospects of sustainability, especially *Babylonia* and *Omnia TV*. The former is a project that has survived for a long time (fifteen years, in different formats) and shows no signs of decline. Despite depending on voluntary work, its broad network of collaborations, and the organization of successful events such as B-fest, provides the project with sufficient resources to go on. *Omnia TV* producers'

commitment and enthusiasm, as well as its solid organization (secure space, equipped studio), also create positive prospects. In addition, *Omnia TV* is open to partial institutionalization and conditional professionalization as a potential strategy to develop the project further, without compromising its critical character. Structurelessness, then, does not emerge as an inhibiting factor for these projects. In fact, for the *Omikron* project, its structurelessness, flexibility and de-institutionalization are considered by its producers its strongest assets in terms of its sustainability. Being a project constantly in motion, where a plethora of different people come and go, is considered by its producers the element that averts the danger of the project being shut down; instead, it increases the possibility that it evolves into something different. Structurelessness, however, proved less beneficial for *Radiobubble*, in the long run. In its current phase, *Radiobubble* seems to lurch compared to earlier phases of vibrant engagement of citizens and important achievements. In this case, structurelessness combined with rather spasmodic experimentation with many projects at the same time (live broadcast, podcast, citizen journalism on Twitter) and random choices of ways to secure resources did not increase the project's chances for sustainability. In the case of *Void Mirror*, what emerges as a rewarding strategy (like *10%* discussed above) is the creation of synergistic events, which continuously engage interested groups and individuals in meaningful activities.

In conclusion, the dialectical evaluation of the political economy of alternative media and their relationship with their audiences and communities adds further nuances to the questions of sustainability of these projects, evaluating various interdependent factors that impact the ongoing stability and health of alternative media. The findings of this research reveal a dynamic and contradictory field of less deterministic prospects than the ones implied by the Comedia's commercial strategy and the critique on it. Several resilient projects are situated in the very extreme edges of the research's two-axes spectrum, combining idealistic and pragmatic, or realistic and, more or less, puristic features. These reflections call for further research on how such hybrid practices are associated with their critical-oppositional character and deal with challenges and tensions that arise.

Appendix: Description of the Projects

*10%***:** established in 2000 as non-governmental organization (NGO); in 2004, it launched a print magazine which since 2006 is online only. It cov\ers LGBT issues, against gendered oppression (http://www.10percent.gr).

Anarxeio (2000): digital library of texts and publications that support the broad anarchist, anti-authoritarian movement (http://anarxeio.gr).

Athens Live (2015): independent on-the-ground source for stories, news and images about Greece (in English), cross-platform based—Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Medium (http://athenslive.gr).

Babylonia: launched in 2003 as newspaper, changed into magazine in 2011, and since 2015 online only (and publishing an annual print issue); supports the anti-authoritarian movement.

Black-Tracker (2006): counter-information web project sharing anarchist movement-related resources through torrents (http://www.black-tracker.gr).

Clandestina: launched in 2007 as website and since 2009 a blog of independent information for refugees and migrants coming to Europe (http://clandestinenglish.wordpress.com).

Infowar (2008): independent, critical, professional online news project (http://info-war.gr).

M (2012): anarchist news website (initially blog).

Omikron (2012): website covering the 'untold' side of Greece's crisis (http://omikronproject.gr).

Omnia TV (2011, originated in a blog formed in 2008): independent grassroots news platform, covering various social struggles (http://omniatv.com).

Radiobubble (2007): grassroots web radio—initially a music radio; then initiated a citizen journalism project; now an 'intergalactic radio' (http://radiobubble.gr).

RebelNet (2010): website and publisher (translations) of theoretical texts supporting the antagonistic movement (http://www.rebelnet.gr).

ResPublica (2015): online magazine of political and philosophical theory (http://www.respublica.gr).

Shedia: established in 2010 as a non-profit organization; in 2013, launched a street paper supporting homeless people.

Void Mirror: launched as website in 2004, since 2007 online magazine about the anti-globalization movement, initiated by the collectivity *Void Network* (http://voidmirror.blogspot.com).

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PART 2

History, Memory, and Archives

CHAPTER 6

Hand-Made Memories: Remediating Cultural Memory in DIY Feminist Networks

Red Chidgey

In *Feminist Media: Participatory Spaces, Networks and Cultural Citizenship*, edited by Elke Zobl and Ricarda Drüeke, 87–97. Transcript, 2014.

> [A]mnesia about political movements is not only an innocent effect of general forgetfulness, but is socially produced, packaged, promulgated, and perpetuated.
>
> Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Ann Snitow, *The Feminist Memoir Project*

Feminist Cultural Memory in Grassroots Media

As DuPlessis and Snitow (1998) recount in no uncertain terms in *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices from Women's Liberation*, the State and mainstream media do not typically guarantee collective memories of social justice movements, but subject them to distortion, domestication and erasure. Part of feminism's cultural battle is thus to secure the role of women's movements in popular memory (Heller 2002). Feminist media can become discursive 'weapons' in this struggle: to contest hostile framings and to put forward counter-understandings of what feminism is, what feminism can do, and who a feminist can be.

This chapter considers the practices and mediations of feminist cultural memory within the micro-political sphere of DIY feminist media networks. DIY (do-it-yourself) feminism refers to a loose network of cultural producers who draw their political coordinates from

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anarchism, anti-capitalism, Riot Grrrl, animal rights and queer cultures. Deploying both residual and emerging media forms, such as analogue and digital technologies, these feminists mobilize low-budget resources to create participatory political cultures and to preserve activist memory. The memory work that they establish—documenting their own social movements, critiquing dominant media representations, and making links to broader feminist praxis—creates much-needed counter-memories (Foucault 1977) and sites of feminist identification. Furthermore, these media channels (such as blogs, zines, videos, and podcasts) enact an archival function: they move feminist memory out of the realm of the institutional and create grassroots memory texts that are mobile, shared and networked.

Remediating Feminist Memory

I define feminist cultural memory here as the ways in whih past feminist movements are discussed and understood in the present moment, through the making and consuming of cultural artefacts. In considering cultural memory it is crucial to think about the practices and contexts of remediation. As conceptualized by David Jay Bolter and Rihard Grusin (2000), remediation analyzes how media content is shaped as it moves across medial forms, and how emerging and residual media and networks historically refashion eah other. The web, for example, refashions the book, magazine, radio, film, television, diary and personal letter. As remediation is multi-directional, these analogue forms and practices are also remediated by the digital. These refashionings happen through a double logic. As media forms multiply and are linked together, a logic of hypermediacy heightens the forms' materiality (for example, the user is made aware they are interacting with an interface). Where traces of mediation are erased in order to give a sense of real-time presence, the logic of immediacy is at play (suh as in the use of a webcam). Whilst hypermediacy dominates the web—with its audio-visual possibilities and hyperlinked information—both logics coexist in digital media.

Remediation is an important part of cultural memory practices. As Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith (2002: 9) put it, "Unlike the traditional archives of history, the archives of cultural memory consist not only of the stories, images, or documents of the past but also of the 'acts of transfer' without which we would have no access to them". How cultural memories are transmitted play an intrinsic role in how these memories are fashioned: cultural memory is socially, culturally, and medially produced. As Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney clarify, "Just as there is no cultural memory prior to mediation there is no mediation without remediation: all representations of the past draw on available media technologies, on existing media products, on patterns of representation and media aesthetics" (2009: 4).

In this chapter I explore the concept of feminist cultural memory in relation to two empirical examples: First, through a scrapbook produced by Riot Grrrl Pittsburgh member Nicole Emmenegger in 1996, which was digitized and published on her UK blog, Jenny Woolworth's Women in Punk Blog, in 2010. Emmenegger's cut-and-paste scrapbook is a visual record of mainstream, subcultural and personal framings of the youth feminist Riot Grrrl movement and highlights how remediation plays a key role in DIY feminist media production. My second example is the short animated video We Are Connected by Words and Wires (2009) by Belgian feminist Nina Nijsten. Through articulating feminist identification and action in the "here and now", I argue, this video breaks with post-feminist logics indicating the aftermath

of feminism, and re-imagines a historicized and still active feminist movement on a local and transnational level.

Riot Grrrl: Disputed Memories

An important trajectory within DIY feminism, Riot Grrrl is commonly seen as "a '90s third-wave-feminist punk subculture" that "spat out the image of girlhood in raw experiments in political activism, music, art, and self- invention" (Fateman 2010). Emerging in the United States in Washington D. C. and Olympia, Washington—and soon spreading to other cities and countries—Riot Grrrl was a decentralized youth feminist movement based around punk rock. Riot Grrrls organized conferences, consciousness-raising groups and street protests, dealing with issues suh as sexuality, abortion, rape, harassment, body image, eating disorders, self-harm, sexual abuse, and domestic violence. Beyond mainstream media coverage, Riot Grrrls communicated through their own media and music hannels. These independent networks became even more significant once prominent figures within the movement called for a "media blakout" at the end of 1992, following inaccurate and offensive coverage of Riot Grrrl within the mainstream press (Downes 2007; Marcus 2010). Riot Grrrl reclaimed feminism and fostered a girl-positive network that was both personal and political, introducing thousands of young women, men and queers to feminism.

Whilst the network's music output has received the bulk of the journalistic and scholarly attention, Riot Grrrl was also a scene of writing, art, protest, organizing and creativity, with isolated individuals often finding new groups and support. As Emmenegger tells me, "Riot Grrrl was all about DIY and singular experience within a collective shared moment" (2011). However, multiple instances of unexamined class and race privilege—and blatant classism and racism—wore out the appeal of 'girl love' for many by the mid 1990s. As Riot Grrrl historian Julia Downes notes, "Riot grrrl has been understood as a fashion, a phase, as punk, as dead, as violent, as man-hate, and ultimately, as failure" (2007: 12). The movement is commonly assumed to have fizzled out or been abandoned by the mid 1990s.[1] From Emmenegger's perspective, "There was a time after the 'movement' died out, say from 1998–2008, when there was hardly any mention of it [in the public sphere] except in ghostly remnants such as on a Spice Girls T-shirt or as a Halloween costume" (2011).

This metaphor of "ghostly remnants" seems particularly apt when thinking about the workings of cultural memory more generally: how historical moments are cited in increasingly stereotypical, fragmented, divorced traces, to the point where media representations, historical truth and cultural fantasy become utterly entangled. The commercially produced 'Riot Grrrl' Halloween costume that Emmenegger mentions, for example, is testament to how Riot Grrrl entered public consciousness in North America and how stereotypical assumptions of the "Riot Grrrl look" perpetuated within media accounts helped produce and calcify this awareness. Similarly, 'Girl Power,' the radical slogan of girls' agency and politicization that appeared in a Bikini Kill zine in 1991, became internationally popularized as the (commercial) slogan of the manufactured mid-1990s British girl pop band, The Spice Girls. As Downes

[1] For an overview of transnational and more recent Riot Grrrl practices in relation to zines, see the *Grrrl Zine Network* (http://grrrlzines.net).

notes, "Riot grrrls have had their messages and slogans co-opted, diluted and sold back in the form of girl-powered commodities and all-girl pop groups" (2007: 12).

Despite its underground or subcultural appeal, Riot Grrrl has not been altogether forgotten as a political movement. A renewed journalistic, commercial and archival interest in Riot Grrrl has erupted in recent years, signalled by the movement's twenty-year anniversary and its increasing institutionalization.[2] This public discourse has prompted reflection, documentation, interventions and counter-memories by Riot Grrrls and ex-Riot Grrrls. Women of colour activists have deconstructed and revisited the raced investments of whiteness and nostalgia surrounding Riot Grrrl appeals (Nguyen 2010).[3] Individual disputes concerning the 'official writing of Riot Grrrl' continue to take place on blogs, book review sites, and in newspaper articles (Fateman 2010; Wolfe 2010). And participants have deployed Web 2.0 sites to solicit a range of personal memories from others: to coincide with her Riot Grrrl historiography *Girls to the Front* (2010) Sara Marcus invited people to contribute short videos about the influence Riot Grrrl on their lives (http://www.girlstothefront.com/video.html). Similarly, members of the band Bikini Kill launched a blogging platform to collect and document multiple stories and rare ephemera of their DIY musical career with the help of their fans (http://bikinikillarchive.wordpress.com).

My Riot Grrrl Notebook:

Remediating Feminist Artefacts

Inspired by this renewed public interest in Riot Grrrl, Emmenegger created a three-part retrospective on her *Jenny Woolworth's Women in Punk Blog*, finding it "the opportune time to dig into my own archives and digitize a few lost bits of my personal riot grrl journey" (Emmenegger 2011). Her three posts include a list of Riot Grrrl archives and her digitized scraptbook (2010a); a digital version of an unfinished zine from 1996 ("with the aid of modern technology, here at last is the *Beri-Beri* lost edition!" [2010b]); and an interview with Riot Grrrl historian Sara Marcus (who was also Emmenegger's pen pal during the mid 1990s [2010c]). These posts document a vibrant, personal and mediatized legacy of Riot Grrrl, which still resonates for Emmenegger today. On uploading (and remediating) her teenage zine, she writes: "Embarrassing as it is for me to share this now, some fifteen years later, I have to say I am proud of what I accomplished then and still carry myself with that riot grrrl empowerment in everything I do" (Emmenegger 2010b).

Emmenegger created her Riot Grrrl notebook when she was nineteen years old, "to preserve and catalog all these various scraps" (Emmenegger 2011). A thirty-one paged spiral bound scrapbook, the front cover has "my riot grrrl notebook" doodled over strips of white

[2] Whilst there are too many instances of newspaper articles, films, exhibitions and books to mention here, see Feminist Memory (http://feministmemory.wordpress.com/2010/10/25/riot-grrrl-media-timeline) for an ongoing, interactive chronology. Riot Grrrl has also enjoyed renewed interest in connection with Ladyfest events—transnational arts and activism festivals launched in 2000 by some of the key players of the early 1990s U. S. Riot Grrrl scene.

[3] For an analysis of race and class dynamics in DIY feminist networks, see *Race Revolt* (http://www.racerevolt.org.uk), *Thread and Circuits* (http://threadandcircuits.wordpress.com), and *make/shift* (http://www.makeshift-mag.com).

masking tape and is decorated with Riot Grrrl aesthetic codes such as stars, female paper-chain characters, and the women's symbol (♀). Produced as part of Emmenegger's 'Feminist Presses' course at Antioch College in Ohio, this document enacts a personal 'talking back' to dominant discourses, and was originally shared with Emmenegger's professor, classmates and friends in its analogue form. [4]

This document is a rich historical resource: articles clipped from mainstream publications such as *Newsweek*, *Spin*, and *New York Times* sit alongside underground magazine offerings like *Your Flesh* and feminist coverage from *Ms Magazine* and *Off Our Backs*. All the articles are deconstructed, with sensationalist and sexist comments highlighted. The *Newsweek* article, for instance, is discussed as "a carbon copy of every other bit in the press. There are obligatory references to Bikini Kill [. . .] There is a picture of an anonymous girl with words written on her stomach and arms, displaying the grrrl tendency to use our young white bodies



Figure 1. 'Talking back' to mainstream media discourses in "my riot grrrl notebook"
Image courtesy of Nicole Emmenegger

as confrontational billboards. And there is mention of messy, raw, angry zines that all grrls do. This article is a mass of stereotypes and misinformation and half truths" (see Figure 1).

To counteract the inaccurate, sensationalized (and deradicalized) coverage in these collected media clippings, Riot Grrrl flyers, manifestos and images were also included in the scrapbook, with Emmenegger adding clarifications to the off-page context and resonance of this cultural ephemera. [5] Like zines, which also document 'the movement', Emmenegger's scrapbook acts as an important counter-memory to mainstream media accounts by contesting patronizing frames of teenage rebellion and providing narratives against trend-orientated

[4] See Piepmeier (2009: 29–32) for an analysis of su□ragette scrapbooks in relation to DIY feminist publications.

[5] Such texts need to be contextualized, interpreted and triangulated with other sources to ensure their historical veracity.

approaches in the press. As Emmenegger comments, "The mainstream press needed a leader, a manifesto, a clear path and that is just not what it was about" *(2011)*.

As a form of feminist memory, it is not only the content of the scrapbook that is significant here, but also the process of digitization. Whilst Alison Piepmeier notes that "zine creators don't necessarily view blogs as a replacement for zines but, instead, as a supplement, a format that's doing something slightly different" *(2009: 14)*, I want to emphasize how DIY feminists are using strategies of remediation to bring their hand-made artefacts online, in ways which maintain *(to some extent)* the 'feel' of their cut-and-paste culture.

When digitizing her scrapbook, Emmenegger scanned the document in full colour including the visual trace of the spiral binding holding the notebook together. She then uploaded her file onto the digital publishing platform *Issuu (*http://issuu.com*)* in a format which allows the pages to be flipped through in a codex form, mimicking, as far as possible, the experience of holding the scrapbook in one's hand. This process enacts logics of immediacy and hypermediacy: the digitization of the scrapbook is muted in the interface *(the flip-book feel of the viewing medium providing a different reading experience to a rigid, downloaded PDF file, for example)* whilst the juxtaposition between the yellowing pages of the document and the detemporalized internet platform hosting it *(where documents do not physically age or deteriorate)* serves to emphasize the historical materiality and 'aura' of the original artefact.[6]

Through choosing a process of digital remediation which draws on the DIY impulse towards sharing documents and creating embodied media forms (*Piepmeier 2009*), this act of archiving and transmission is embedded within the "perceptual frames, affective attachments, [and] ideological pre-givens" *(Straw 2007: 3)* of the hands-on maker culture from which it originates, whilst also embracing the representational and archiving possibilities of the digital.[7] Such strategies lend legitimacy to the counter-memories being archived on Emmenegger's blog.

We are connected by Words and Wires: Re-Imagining Feminist Histories

Nina Nijsten's short animated film, *We Are Connected by Words and Wires*, similarly takes the themes of legacies and participation as its core message. Consisting of sixteen illustrated slides edited to a self-made soundtrack, this three minute film provides a definition of DIY feminism ("We can do, make, and organise anything. We don't have to be 'professionals'"), alongside a visualization of the maker's personal history within the scene and references to 'sister' feminist history actions past and present.

This is also a story of activation. The filmmaker is shown surrounded by zines and books, believing "the diy feminist movement was active long ago and far away" (see Figure 2). New media is then depicted as helping to forge cross-border connections between the still thriving movement, as the filmmaker-protagonist finds feminist groups and publications via the

[6] Websites can show signs of aging, however, through pages or items no longer accessible to the server, as flagged by 'page not found' or 'image not available' messages.

[7] Such remediation techniques illustrate peer-led methods for capturing, storing and transmitting feminist ephemera online, reflecting the embodied, cultural economies behind the artefacts' production and reception. PDFs (Portable Document Format) also have important transmission and archiving roles. As my correspondence with Nijsten attests to, PDFs can be considered "closer to hand-made/printed zines," being "easier to print and easier to save on a computer," and therefore "more tangible" (Nijsten 2011b). Digital archiving projects might do well to combine both formats: the presentation aspect of flipbooks and the archival and circulatory strengths of downloadable PDFs.



Figure 2. Remediating cultural memory to activate feminist participation. Slides from *We Are Connected by Words and Wires*

Image courtesy of Nina Nijsten

internet and starts local actions of her own—learning that she too "can participate". Residual (that is, 'old-fashioned' and analogue) media forms such as letters, zines, cassettes and hand-drawn comics are also shown as communication tools between feminists, demonstrating some low-cost entry points for producing feminist media. To rally counter-memories against the myth of post-feminism, Nijsten illustrates an annotated map of the contemporary feminist network, citing a range of zines, groups and events such as Ladyfest (South Africa), *Fallopian Falafel* (Israel), *Jawbreaker* (Philippines), *cyber-femin-club* (Russia), *Mujeres Creando* (Bolivia), and *Cherry Bomb Comics* (New Zealand) as examples of a new transnational feminist movement (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Emerging and residual media are used in DIY feminist networks to communicate globally. Slides from *We Are Connected by Words and Wires*

Image courtesy of Nina Nijsten

An amateur production, Nijsten's video documents cultural reference points that opened up DIY feminism for her personally. By citing little known groups and publications, the filmmaker also creates the seeds of a feminist memory consciousness. This is not straightforward representation, however. The animation showing Nijsten sitting amongst her books (Figure 2), name-checks publications like *Girl Germs* (an early Riot Grrrl zine), *Suffragettes To She-Devils: Women's Liberation and Beyond* (a visual history of feminist graphic design), *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (an academic study of zine networks),

The Power of Feminist Art (an analysis of 1970s feminist art in the United States), and "Dolle Mina," which refers to the *Het Rode Boekje Van De Vrouw(en)* ("The Little Red Book of Women/Woman", a liberationist text by the Belgian feminist group Dolle Mina published in the early 1970s). The slide also shows a book about anarchist-feminist Emma Goldman (1869–1940) that was not itself based on any text that Nijsten had read or come across, but was included to pay homage to an inspiring historical figure and to underscore the anarcha-feminist roots of today's DIY political cultures (Nijsten 2011a).

Furthermore, the oversized "Riot Grrrl Herstory" book shown in this slide may have been influenced by a recent publication at the time (Monem 2007), but the title and cover is pure fabrication (Nijsten 2011a). To interpret this further, the "herstory" title (which does not appear on any mainstream books on Riot Grrrl) links Riot Grrrl to radical feminists of the late 60s onwards, who re-inscribed "history" as "her story" to draw attention to the male bias of the historical record. Furthermore, the cover image of a woman of colour tacitly draws attention to hegemonic and repetitive accounts of Riot Grrrl in which women of colour's voices and participation are routinely marginalized or erased. For example, in the handful of books related to Riot Grrrl that have been commercially published in recent years, many sideline the voices and input of women of colour, and all depict only white women (predominately from the band Bikini Kill) on their covers—evoking Emmenegger's 1996 scrapbook commentary on the *Newsweek* article, cited above, about the whiteness of Riot Grrrl in its tactics and in the media imagination; a critique long-held by women of colour within the Riot Grrrl movement yet still not secured within Riot Grrrl historiography.

We Are Connected by Words and Wires is a mobile text. Nijsten's video has received close to 800 hits on YouTube at the time of writing and has been screened internationally at grassroots and institutional settings such as the Civil Media UnConference (Austria), Ladyfest Liège (Belgium), Gender Fuck Festival (Czech Republic), London Lesbian Gay Film Festival (U. K.) and the Elles Tournent feminist film festival (Belgium) (Nijsten 2011a). Its title, "We Are Connected by Words and Wires," not only reflects the technologics increasingly associated with third wave feminism (Garrison 2000), but also speaks to the logic of immediacy. As Bolter and Grusin (2000: 226) note with regards to remediation, "the promise of 'connecting to other people' suggests transparency—breaking through the medium to achieve human contact". By foregrounding the "happening here and now" aspect of do-it-yourself culture, Nijsten deploys this logic of immediacy as a source of activation, alongside the hypermediality of a mediatized activist culture. This double logic works to promote contemporary feminist identification, participation, and cultural production in the present moment, whilst creating links to an international politicized and historicized feminist past.

Concluding Remarks: Feminist Cultural Memory as Political Consequence

Activists have greater possibilities for researching, producing, and disseminating their own memory texts with Web 2.0 innovations. By deploying emerging and residual media forms via the internet, for example, DIY feminists create personal and remediated cultural memories that serve to reinvigorate feminist engagement in the present through providing links to historical-based resources around suffrage, civil rights, women's liberation, anarchism and riot grrrl. By sharing personal stories of feminist activation and creativity, DIY feminists also

narrate the cultural reference points that signal 'inclusion,' 'authenticity' and 'participation' in these networks.

In Nijsten's video, Emmenegger's scrapbook, and countless other feminist zines, blogs, and grassroots projects, tentative counter-memories are therefore produced, cited, and circulated, creating new archives of meaning whilst also revisiting residual investments. These counter-memories draw on mainstream media accounts, challenge them, and further appropriate commercial platforms such as YouTube and Issuu to popularize and disseminate personal narratives held in a collectivity.

While this chapter has considered the techniques and implications of remediation, it is important to sound a broader note in this chapter's conclusion. An uneven terrain, feminist cultural memory embraces the experiences, artefacts, stories and also silences—from the personal to the institutional, and always mediated—that shape identities, structures of belonging, and affective economies. As such, memories have political consequences.

As third wave feminist histories are still in the making, further documentation and assessment is needed to account for what versions of the feminist past, present and future are being circulated, by which actors, for what purposes, and with what resources. As feminist cultural memory is a site of contestation, it is important to consider how conflicts are narrated and legitimated within these networks, especially when these narratives pass into institutions and are further secured. Challenges ought to be made to DIY feminist narratives around empowerment and participation, for example, whenever celebratory story arcs risk muting antagonism from within.

As to the role of feminist cultural memory in activist networks more broadly, mediated memory can help map resistance struggles and offer feminists much needed resources to imagine alternative possibilities. Re-mediating political memory can also help alleviate strains of amnesia and déjà vu under late capitalism, forces which threaten present day mobilizations for social justice by robbing us of our feminist heritage and diverse connections to the past.

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CHAPTER 7

Being a Child of the Mines: Youth Magazines and Comics in the Copperbelt

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Introduction

The Copperbelt has many claims to fame, not least among them the various forms of popular art that developed there over the course of the past century. As it grew in scale, the mining industry threw up a spattering of new urban centres to which large numbers of people from myriad cultural and linguistic backgrounds flocked, thus providing ample fertile ground for new creative endeavours. Perhaps best known among such endeavours is what has become known as 'Congolese Popular Painting': a new approach to figurative painting which gained prominence in the mid-twentieth century and is known for its brightly coloured depictions of the daily lives and struggles of the Congolese people. Yet, there existed another type of popular art which, though it did not achieve quite the same level of international recognition, was no less prevalent on the Copperbelt: comics (*bandes dessinées* in French). Not only were comics of all kinds widely read on the Copperbelt, but Katanga and Zambia have also seen the creation of several widely available and influential youth magazines that published popular comic strips. In September 1964, Katanga's all-powerful mining company, the Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (known as Gécamines after independence), launched Mwana Shaba Junior, its very own magazine for the youth. The magazine, which had a peak print run of 41,500 copies in the 1980s, was distributed monthly to the families of every Gécamines employee for free.

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Meanwhile, from 1971, Zambian children had access to *Orbit* ('The magazine for young Zambians'), a magazine with an initial print run of over 65,000 copies, [1] which was commissioned by the Zambian Ministry of Education to be circulated in schools across the country. This was followed in 1984 by *Speak Out!*—a bimonthly produced by the Franciscan Mission Press in Ndola with a distribution of 40,000. [2] Not only are these magazines some of the longest-lasting comic magazines on the continent, thus allowing large numbers of children to engage with the medium of comics over an extended period of time, but they also provided local talents with the chance to produce their own.Yet Zambia is not known for its comics at all, while the Katangese Copperbelt continues to be much better known for its popular paintings.

As will be shown in this chapter, comics were a key component of a childhood spent on both sides of the Copperbelt's border. They had played an important role in the imaginative development of the Copperbelt youth even before any of these magazines were published, which, in time, allowed key institutions—in this case, a powerful mining company, the Zambian State and the Catholic Church—to use the medium for their own purposes: as a tool to convey specific messages and values. At the same time, while comics were originally an imported medium to the Copperbelt, and were usually produced to 'educate' or 'steer' their African audience in a certain direction, their target populations were by no means passive consumers. In fact, *Mwana Shaba Junior*, *Orbit* and *Speak Out!* availed the primary space for comics in the region and provided aspiring Copperbelt cartoonists with the opportunity to 're-appropriate' and transform the medium. Crucially, this reappropriation took place against the backdrop of the fast economic, political and social changes that followed the dramatic downturn in copper prices of 1974–75. In this context, comics became an avenue through which to have 'conversations' about these changes. In this way, as will be argued, a medium which had previously been actively deployed to promote a vision for an industrial and 'modern' future became a tool to critique the failures of modernity and the corrosive effects of economic decline.

The Comic Cultures of the Zambian and Congolese Copperbelt

At first glance, there appears to be a clear 'comics division' between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia. Nancy Rose Hunt argued, based on a meticulous study of magazines and newspapers from colonial Congo, that 'comic imagery flourished in Congo in the 1930s, not only in cities but wherever newspapers travelled'. [3] Similarly, according to Andreas Knigge, Congo was the only African country to have started to develop its own comic culture as early as the 1940s. [4] Independent Congo, for its part, has been associated with an explosion of comic forms, ranging from development comics, to Mobutu's life story, and to ephemeral street comics, and has produced some of the continent's best-known comic artists including the man whom the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) described as

[1] According to the *The Europa World Year*, it was published about nine times a year.

[2] Yvonne Malambo Kabombwe, 'A History of the Mission Press in Zambia, 1970– 2011', MA Thesis, University of Zambia, 2015, p. 25.

[3] Nancy R. Hunt,'Tintin and the Interruptions of Congolese Comics' in Paul Landau and Deborah S. Griffin (eds), *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 90–133, p. 97.

[4] Andreas C. Knigge, *Vom Massenblatt ins multimedia Abenteuer* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1996), p. 238.

'the Congolese author best known outside his country', Barly Baruti.[5] In contrast, English-speaking Southern Africa, excepting South Africa, has produced few prominent comic artists.[6] Congo's early start in comic-making has been linked to both the popularity of comics in Belgium and their resulting availability in the Belgian Congo,[7] and the fact that they were quickly identified as a useful teaching tool in colonising educational projects. Semi-didactic comics for Congolese audiences proliferated in the post-war period, especially in Catholic (or Catholic-influenced) newspapers and magazines. Perhaps the most striking example of this didactic brand of comics was *Les aventures de Mbumbulu*, a series created in 1946 for the state-published—though missionary influenced—magazine Nos Images. Each Mbumbulu 'story' ended with a moralising sentence, such as 'on reflection, he understood that in order to be able to complete a job successfully, one must be prepared for it',[8] or 'beware of magicians and witch doctors, they make a living at your expense'.[9] Nothing of the kind is known to have existed in colonial Zambia, though this may in part be due to lack of research on the topic.[10] Yet, oral evidence collected on both sides of the border suggested that by the 1960s and 1970s, the inhabitants of the Copperbelt had access to the full range of whatever comics were available in the British and Belgo-French markets at the time, and more besides.

Jacky Mulenda, for example, who worked for Mwana Shaba Junior in the 1980s, remembers from his childhood in the 1960s and 1970s that 'everything was there: Bécassine, Spirou and Tintin [comic strips], Tintin and Spirou magazines as well'.[11] Other comics which informants recalled reading in the same period included Lucky Luke, Ric Hochet, Buck Danny, La patrouille des Castors, The Smurfs, Alix, Gaston Lagaffe and Bob et Bobette, the latter a French translation of the Flemish series Suske en Wiske. In other words, Katangese readers were familiar with the full range of mainstream comics published in Belgium in the middle decades of the twentieth century. As Jacky Mulenda recalled,

> You know when we read Lucky Luke, my older brothers always sat down on the ground to read them. Then, we would hear a burst of laughter. It was because of the tomfoolery of the Dalton brothers [characters in Lucky Luke].You would hear several waves of laughter as the jokes came in the story. They were in stitches.[12]

[5] Thomas Hubert, 'Capturing Kinshasa through Comics', BBC, 2011, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-11996279 (accessed 19 July 2020).

[6] According to comic scholar John A. Lent, as far as the Southern African region is concerned, South Africa and Tanzania 'stand alone in all aspects of comic art'. See John A. Lent,'Southern Africa: Hardly a Cartoonist's Eden' in John A. Lent (ed.), *Cartooning in Africa* (New York: Hampton Press, 2009), pp. 219–46, p. 223. South Africa has spawned some of the continent's best-known comics, including Zapiro's political cartoons, comic strip *Madam and Eve*, and the underground-style *Bitterkomix*. Tanzania is known for its Swahili comics and cartoons, some early examples of which may have been influenced by Congolese magazines. See Jigal Beez, 'Stupid Hares and Margarine: Early Swahili Comics' in John A. Lent (ed.), *Cartooning in Africa* (New York: Hampton Press, 2009), pp. 137–57.

[7] Hunt, 'Tintin', p. 96, p. 111; Christophe Cassiau-Haurie, *Histoire de la BD congolaise* (Paris: Harmattan, 2010), p. 150.

[8] *Nos Images*, Issue 30, 15 December 1950.

[9] *Nos Images*, Issue 6, 15 December 1948.

[10] Several magazines and newspapers published for Africans were circulating on the Zambian Copperbelt in the early 1960s, some produced locally, others imported. It may be that closer examination of this literature would reveal cartoons and comics. See Hortense Powdermaker, *Copper Town: Changing Africa* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 281–2, p. 340, p. 367.

[11] Interview, Jacky Mpungu Mulenda, Lubumbashi, 14 August 2019.

[12] Ibid.

Similarly, British comics loom large in the memory of Zambian informants who grew up on the Copperbelt prior to the 1990s. Most read *Andy Capp*, a funny strip centred on a wife-beating figure who never works, and Garth, an immensely strong hero who battles various villains across time and space. Both were originally published in the British Newspaper *Daily Mirror*, from 1957 and 1943 respectively, but also appeared in the *Times of Zambia*. Their presence in a national newspaper made them eminently accessible, and several informants remembered having kept a scrapbook. As one recalled, 'I never wanted to miss those … I actually used to cut them out and paste them into an old phone book.'[13] In addition, when prompted about the comics they read as children, informants on the Zambian Copperbelt almost invariably first cited *Dandy* and *Beano*, two children's comics published by the Scottish publisher D.C. Thomson since 1937 and 1938 respectively. Angel Phiri, a comic enthusiast who now works in the televisual field, noted that *Dandy* and *Beano* 'were the go-to magazines for children. If you were bringing anything for the kids, it would have been those.'[14] D.C. Thomson's main rival in the world of British comics, Amalgamated Press *(renamed Fleetway Publications in 1959)*, appears to have been popular in the Copperbelt too. In the 1950s, Amalgamated Press had introduced the 'Picture Library' format, which consisted in one long complete story set in one of several set genres: westerns, detective/thriller stories, sport, science fiction, and war.[15] Peter Kapenda, a cartoonist who later contributed many drawings to *Orbit*, was very fond of 'Fleet Street comics', particularly 'Second World War and detective comics', which, he says, inspired the development of his own style:

> I had a lot of influence from the British comics, the Fleet Street comics…[what inspired me was] the way they told the stories, especially the war comics [and] the artwork. There were some artists who were very good at line drawings. Just black ink on white.[16]

Access to such literature must, in part, have been facilitated by the presence of libraries and bookshops across the mining towns. Even Gécamines' social centres *(known as 'cercles')* and youth centres had their own little libraries. Dominique Ilunga, who worked as a librarian for one of Gécamines' cercles in the 1960s and early 1970s, recalled that comics such as Bob et Bobette and Tintin were his library's most popular items, among adults and youths alike. Gécamines did not pay for these books however. Instead, 'we would go to houses of the Europeans, or of the Congolese who liked to read. [We would collect] the books they had already read to add them to our library collection.'[17] On the Zambian side, while council and mine libraries reportedly prioritised novels over comics, one significant exception was the Hammarskjöld Memorial Library, which is attached to the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation in Kitwe. This was a well-equipped library, which had opened in 1963 with funds from Sweden, and which, crucially, children could access for free.[18] As Angel Phiri recalled, 'almost half of Kitwe used to borrow books there':

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[13] Interview, Henry Chitaika, Ndola, 18 July 2019.

[14] Interview, Angel Phiri, Lusaka, 7 July 2019.

[15] For more on British comics, see James Chapman, *British Comics: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011).

[16] Interview, Peter Kapenda, Ndola, 18 July 2019.

[17] Interview, Dominique Ilunga, Likasi, 10 August 2019.

[18] *Orbit*, 1, 6 (1971), p. 12.

> For me, [the Hammarskjöld library] was like a paradise. Almost half the time, as long as you are out of school, you would go to the library. If you are not playing soccer, you would go to the library. If it's a holiday, the first thing you'll think about is the library. [19]

It is, however, a bookstore which seems to have played the most crucial role in disseminating comics on the Zambian Copperbelt: Kingstons Ltd. The successor to Herald Stationery and Book Store which had established bookstores in Kitwe and Ndola by the 1930s, [20] Kingstons was Zambia's main source of newspapers, records, books, magazines, and comics, and was probably the main route via which D.C. Thomson and Fleetway Publications were distributed in Zambia.This is borne out by the fact that Fleetway comic magazines were published with a note stating that their 'sole agent' for 'Rhodesia and Zambia' was 'Kingstons Ltd'.This also chimes with informants' recollections that 'Kingston was … the source of everything' and 'the sole supplier and distributor of all books from abroad'. [21] Cartoonist Peter Kapenda recalled:

> When magazines came from the UK, they were supposed to sell them for a certain period. If they didn't sell all of them, they used to tear them so that people would not be able to read them and then throw them in the rubbish dump. That's where the boys used to go and pick them up. [22]

In this way, via bookshops and libraries, and as children shared their comics with each other, comics circulated widely on the Copperbelt, reaching even children who did not necessarily have the means to buy books first-hand.

In addition, when asked about what imported comics he read, Angel Phiri immediately came up with a list which suggested horizons going beyond what the former colonial powers produced:

> If you are going to talk about imported comics we had a lot of them. You had *Beano, Dandy, Asterix, Tintin, Apache, Archie and Sabrina ... We had Marvel and DC comics. All those things used to be around and used to have a lot of influence.* [23]

This short list is enough to give an idea of the breadth of material on offer: *Beano* and *Dandy* are from the United Kingdom; *Archie* and *Sabrina* and Marvel and DC Universe are from the United States. *Tintin* is from Belgium, *Asterix* from France, and *Apache* is a photocomic from South Africa. It is perhaps significant that the informants who grew up before the 1960s do not remember seeing any translated Belgo-French comics, as this more or less corresponds to the period when these comics were first translated into English. [24] According to Austin Kaluba, a cultural journalist at the *Times of Zambia*, *Asterix* and *Tintin* were easily obtainable from Kingstons, circulated in schools and were 'massively popular'. He went as far as saying that 'you have not lived in Zambia if you have not read *Asterix* and *Tintin*.' [25] Similarly, American comics were, by all accounts, largely available on both sides of the border. Even

[19] Angel Phiri interview.

[20] William D. Gale, *The Rhodesian Press: The History of the Rhodesian Printing and Publishing Company Ltd* (Salisbury: Rhodesian Printing & Publishing Company, 1962).

[21] Interview, Ben Phiri, Ndola, 15 July 2019.

[22] Peter Kapenda interview.

[23] Angel Phiri interview.

[24] The full process of translating *Tintin* into English was commissioned in 1958 by Methuen, Hergé's British publishers, while the first translated album of Asterix was published in 1969 by Brockhampton Press. Other comics of Belgian origins which Zambian informants cited were *Lucky Luke* and *The Smurfs*.

[25] Interview, Austin Kaluba, Lusaka, 1 July 2019.

the oldest Zambian informant, who grew up in the 1950s, remembers reading *Popeye,* as well as Disney and superheroes comics (Marvel and DC universe) such as *Batman*, *Superman* and *Spiderman.* In Katanga, Jacky Mulenda recalled that,

> [Superheroes comics] were always in the A5 format and every other page was printed in colour and the others in black and white. I did not know their origin … But they did not interest us much … We were used to comics published in colour and we preferred humorous characters. [26]

In turn, South Africa's main contribution to the Copperbelt's comic culture, at least that of the Zambian Copperbelt, came in the form of photocomics. These enjoyed enormous popularity in South Africa in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. [27] In Zambia, according to informants' recollections, the most popular ones were: *Lance Spearman* (aka 'The Spear'), a super-spy character, created in 1968 by Drum Publications; *Chunky Charlie*, a funny inspector character who carried fancy gadgets in his huge coat; and *She*, described as a 'kickass character' who 'was always in a miniskirt with an afro and very high boots'. [28]

From the mid-twentieth century, and especially from the early years of independence, comics circulated on the Copperbelt in many forms. The breadth and diversity of comics in circulation meant that the cultural trends that influenced Copperbelt children were equally wide. They consumed swashbucklers from the United Kingdom, and glossy adventure or humorous *bande dessinée* albums from France and Belgium, sword-and-sandals stories of ancient Rome and cowboy tales of the American West, photocomics from South Africa, and superheroes from America. Although comics appeared in Congo earlier than in Zambia, by the 1960s, they were a key part of the experience of growing up on both sides of the Copperbelt. Many children cut and pasted comic strips, redrew them, played games involving comic book characters, discussed them at school, and lent each other comic books. The fact that Copperbelt children were not passive readers of comics, but instead, played around with them, is an indication of how popular the medium was and how important a part it played in a Copperbelt childhood. In turn, the fact that a certain number of prerequisites were needed for comics to circulate, such as a knowledge of French or English or the presence of specific bookstores, made sure that comics would be, if not necessarily a Copperbelt-only phenomenon, then at least a mostly urban, and fairly middle-class, one. Henry Chitaika recalled that when he lived in Ndola with his parents,

> [I would] buy comics from Kingstons and start drawing with my friends. Even in class sometimes we'd exchange drawings—*Doctor Strange, Captain America, Spiderman. But when we moved from Kansenshi [an affluent neighbourhood] to Chifubu [a poorer township] I noticed that it was a bit different. My friends, when they saw me do this ... it was like magic to them. Even the books when I took them out they couldn't even say, 'Oh, can I read your comic for a few days, I'll bring it back.' No.They would just look at them.The interest wasn't there.* [29]

Still, in the 1960s and the early 1970s, a time when both Copperbelts were experiencing a period of economic boom and its populations enjoyed a comparatively high quality of

[26] Jacky Mpungu Mulenda interview.

[27] See Lily Saint, 'Not Western: Race, Reading, and the South African Photocomic', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36, 4 (2010), pp. 939–58, p. 939.

[28] Angel Phiri interview.

[29] Henry Chitaika interview.

life, the situation was ripe for various institutions to use this very popular medium for their own purposes, as the Catholic Church had already been doing for decades in the Congo. By this point, the youth of the Copperbelt had been exposed to a large variety of comics from various horizons while at the same time a large pool of disparate tastes had developed. This, therefore, is the background against which Gécamines and the Zambian State launched their respective youth magazines: *Mwana Shaba Junior and Orbit.*

Mwana Shaba Junior and Orbit: Science, Paternalism and Expectations of Modernity

In September 1964, UMHK, soon to be renamed Gécamines, became the first Katangese company to produce its own youth magazine, Mwana Shaba Junior. Some seven years later, in January 1971, Orbit was born in Zambia. Though it was originally developed in 1970 under the aegis of Valentine Musakanya, then Minister of State for Technical Advocational Education, Orbit quickly received its own Civil Service department under the Ministry of Education. Despite their different origins, there were significant similarities between the two magazines. Both were educational and sought to ignite interest in science and technology, and both therefore dedicated a significant amount of space to illustrated articles on these subjects as well as history, geography and sport. Yet there were also important differences in tone. When it was first conceived, Orbit's main intended purpose was, in the words of Wendy Bond, one of the creators of the magazine, to 'lay a really secure technical foundation for every child'.[30] This was a very important cause to Valentine Musakanya, who, unlike most prominent members of the Zambian Government at the time, including President Kenneth Kaunda, was known as an opponent to Africanist models and insisted that the future of Zambia lay in the use of Western technology.[31] Mick Bond, Wendy Bond's husband, recalls Musakanya saying: 'When science and technology replace witchcraft, as they must, here, everyone should have the knowledge to understand them and not blindly believe, changing one superstition for another.'[32] There was also a certain emphasis on agriculture. Wendy Bond was expressly asked to include a permanent 'Young Farmers' Club' section by the Ministry of Agriculture,[33] as it was keen to reduce the country's dependence on imported food. The section offered practical agricultural advice and featured many variations on statements such as 'whatever you do in the future, you will be a richer man if you can grow food. … it is useful not just for you—but also for Zambia'.[34] Created as it was at a time of economic expansion, when the future was envisaged as prosperous and technologically advanced, Orbit was designed to steer the youth towards the advanced employment opportunities which the Zambian Government expected would soon need filling.

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[30] Wendy Bond, 'Mporokoso, Chinsali, Bancroft, Mongu, Lusaka, Kitwe' in Tony Schur (ed.), *From the Cam to the Zambezi: Colonial Service and the Path to the New Zambia* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 195–212, p. 209.

[31] Miles Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics: A History of Opposition in Zambia* (Farnham: Routledge, 2011), pp. 40–41, p. 163.

[32] Mick Bond, *From Northern Rhodesia to Zambia: Recollections of a DO/DC 1962–73* (Lusaka: Gadsden Publishers, 2014), p. 187.

[33] Bond, 'Mporokoso', p. 210.

[34] *Orbit, 4, 3, 1975, p. 22.*

While *Mwana Shaba Junior* similarly sought to steer the eyes of the youth towards science, technology and, by extension, the mining industry, it went further. *Mwana Shaba Junior* was published as a supplement to *Mwana Shaba* ('Child of Copper'), a free monthly magazine created in 1957 by UMHK for its employees. Both magazines were part and parcel of the distinctive brand of corporate paternalism which the Union Minière had pursued since the 1930s but which, with the looming prospect of Congolese independence, was going through a new phase of intensification in the late 1950s. While *Mwana Shaba's* role was to give company-related news, it also took pains to paternalistically emphasise topics such as the importance of discipline at work, a stable family life, and good behaviour. In other words, it played the role of 'moralizer of the population', as Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu put it.[35] *Mwana Shaba Junior* was intended to play much the same role for the next generation of Gécamines employees. Every issue was introduced by an editorial, which, in the magazine's own words, intended to give young people 'moral, cultural and scientific' advice.[36] These editorials cover a wide range of topics but it is the related themes of the importance of education and discipline which come through the most frequently and the most clearly. One editorial entitled 'La réussite' *('How to achieve success')* stressed that 'the path to success necessarily involves regular effort', and with 'effort' comes 'suffering, pain and sacrifice'.[37] Even articles on sport were turned into another opportunity to draw an analogy between discipline and success: 'What matters if you want to achieve anything is discipline: to love making effort, work with perseverance, respect the property of others, observe the rules which are necessary for society to function properly'.[38] *Mwana Shaba Junior* thus displayed a rather explicit brand of didacticism, the aim of which was to produce the hard-working employees of tomorrow while encouraging the Gécamines population to think of itself as a community with common interests.

These divergences in tone and choice of emphasis were reflected in the comics *Junior* and *Orbit* chose to publish. Comic strips published in *Junior* were fully incorporated into the magazine's overall didactic mission: they were to serve, as the editorial team of the March/April 1988 issue revealingly put it, 'as a support for the instruction and moral education of the young honest citizens of tomorrow'.[39] In this, they recycled the paternalistic and moralistic qualities typical of colonial comics but also of the mid-twentieth-century Belgian comic tradition as whole. Partly because of the influence of the Catholic Church and partly as a reaction to France's very strict 1949 censorship law which closely regulated depictions of sex and violence,[40] Belgian comic artists carefully policed their work, producing comics intended to entertain the youth, but also to educate it, and to offer it good role models. Accordingly, the first comic strips published in *Junior* were realistically drawn stories set in antiquity, such as *L'histoire merveilleuse,* which depicted the lives of various Biblical characters, and *Ben Hur*

[35] Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu, *Bana Shaba abandonnés par leur père: Structures de l'autorité et histoire sociale de la famille ouvrière au Katanga 1910–1997* (Paris: Harmattan, 2001), p. 86.

[36] *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 349–50, March–April 1988, p. 2.

[37] *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 327, May 1986, p. 2.

[38] *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 178, 1 December 1974, p. 3.

[39] *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 349–350, March–April 1988, p. 2.

[40] This had been enforced in response to the post-liberation influx of American comics, as a thinly veiled measure to protect the domestic comic market. It also came in handy to regulate the availability of Belgian comic magazines in France. See Philippe Delisle, *Bande dessinée franco-belge et imaginaire colonial, des années 1930 aux années* 1980 (Paris: Karthala, 2008), p. 6.

(1965–67), which broadly told the same story of revenge, redemption and Christian awakening as the 1959 Hollywood film of the same name.[41] Along with these, *Junior* introduced in September 1965 a humorous series called *Les aventures de Mayele*, which quickly became the magazine's flagship series. *Mayele* (meaning 'clever' in Swahili) was originally invented by two Belgian Union Minière engineers called Theo Roosen and Paul Baeke. That the makers of Mayele were influenced by the Franco-Belgian tradition is obvious. Mayele is friends with two young adolescents, a boy and a girl, who are dressed just like the two heroes of the Flemish comic *Suske en Wiske.* His 'adventures' consist of one-page gags, with many of the jokes drawing on slapstick-type humour and the main character's clumsiness, just like *Gaston Lagaffe*, a lazy and accident-prone character from the *Journal de Spirou*. Mayele is an urban young man who owns a dog, and whose 'adventures' take place in the realistic setting of a person's 'normal' everyday life, as they do in the series *Boule et Bill.* For example, in 'Pas de chance!', Mayele finds himself stuck between his garage door and ceiling in an attempt to show off his new electric garage door to his neighbour[42] Mayele lives in a big suburban house, owns a car and various technological items, which provide the basis for much of the hilarity *(as they malfunction).*[43] He lives in a city, where he has arguments with friends in cafes,[44] clashes with policemen,[45] and goes to football matches.[46] Mayele's stories, in other words, are largely aspirational aimed at an *(aspiring)* African middle class in the purest tradition of both Gécamines' and mid-twentieth-century Belgian comic paternalism.

The first comic strips published in *Orbit* were more graphically sophisticated than what appeared in *Mwana Shaba Junior,* despite Congo's supposed head start in comic-making, because they were produced by professional cartoonists. Wanting the magazine to be professionally produced, Valentine Musakanya had elicited the help of Peter Clarke, then Managing Director of the London-based news service GeminiScan Ltd. As a result, though the editorial copy was provided by the Zambia-based team and the magazine was printed in Zambia,[47] all the artwork and editing were done in Britain by British artists commissioned or employed by GeminiScan. That this was the case was kept as discreet as possible. 'One of the many things Peter insisted on was that there should be no indication to the young reader that *Orbit* was being produced in the UK', John Egglesfield who was art editor for GeminiScan, recalled. 'We wanted all the focus to be on Zambia.'[48] Thus, though John Egglesfield elicited the services of some of Fleet Street's finest cartoonists and illustrators to produce the comics, their names never appeared in the magazine. 'Space Safari', *Orbit*'s flagship series which featured two Zambian heroes named Marion and Robert, was a space adventure written by Sydney Jordan

[41] *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 14 February 1966, p. 7.

[42] *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 126, 15 May 1972, p. 1.

[43] E.g. in 'Mayele tond sa pelouse' (*Mwana Shaba Junior*, 82, 15 April 1970, p. 1), Mayele gets angry because he thinks the lawnmower his neighbour lent him is faulty when the issue is that he did not pay his electricity bill.

[44] E.g. in 'Elles existent' (*Mwana Shaba Junior*, 178, December 1974), Mayele argues with a friend about whether 'flying saucers' exist, irritating another customer who throws his saucer, a 'flying saucer', at them.

[45] E.g. in 'Une bonne occasion' (*Mwana Shaba Junior*, 57, 15 February 1969, p. 1), Mayele is persuaded to buy a beautiful car for 6 Zaïres. He is then fined 6 Zaïres by a policeman because most of the car's appliances do not function properly.

[46] e.g. 'Mayele Supporter' (*Mwana Shaba Junior*, 21, 15 July 1966, p. 1).

[47] Bond, 'Mporokoso', p. 209.

[48] John Freeman, 'Discovering "Orbit"—Zambia's Unique Science and Comic Magazine', 6 February 2020, https://downthetubes.net/?p=114717 (accessed 21 June 2020).

with art by Martin Ashbury, both well-established British cartoonists known for their science fiction comics. In turn, *Orbit*'s emphasis on space is not random. *Orbit* had been conceived in an era marked by the moon landing (1969), the success of cult phenomenon series *Star Trek* (1966–69) and the release of two major science fiction films which revolutionised mainstream pop culture: *Planet of the Apes* (1968) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). In fact, the very title 'A Space Safari' is a clear reference to Stanley Kubrick's film. Science fiction's appeal thus provided a convenient hook to attract children's attention and ignite their interest in science.

In this way, not only were comic strips given pride of place in Orbit but, like their counterparts in *Mwana Shaba Junior*, they had a clear role to play, designed as they were to reinforce the specific message outlined by the magazine as a whole. Neither were they devoid of moralising contemplations. Tellingly, Marion and Robert's mini-adventures combine science fiction with agricultural concerns. Marion and Roberts are plant experts who work for the 'Pan-African Survey System'. In their first adventure, which ran over the first four issues of the magazine, they are called to help over mysterious meteor showers which have caused crops to die all across Africa. These showers are identified as missiles or 'sand-bombs' and traced back to one of Mars' moons, to which Robert and Marion duly travel on an international space mission. In their second adventure entitled 'Trojan Horse',[49] a mysterious spaceship shows up in African cities and offers all sort of expensive gifts: cars, tractors, etc. Robert and Marion are sent in a special plane to negotiate with the ship's commander and are informed that offering worthless gifts had been used as a way to test people's spirit 'to see if you understand the supreme law of survival': 'to help one another—to work for the creation of the good life—to scorn the ready-made Baubles of the Gift-horse'. Robert is sent back with a spade and ears of corn which he describes as the 'greatest gift'.[50] In this way, science fiction is harnessed to disseminate the government's agricultural agenda. In addition, accompanying Marion and Robert in every issue were two pages of an adventure story drawn in realistic black-and-white style, stylistically similar to Amalgamated comics. These alternated between the aerial adventures of 'Mike Chanda, Charter Pilot' who works for an air company based in Ndola, the investigative adventures of Inspector Mark Phiri, and the sanitary adventures of 'Jenny Moonga, Health Inspector'. These adventure stories must have given their young Zambian audience a sense of possibilities for what the future might hold: all characters have typical Zambian names and all have 'cool' modern jobs.

Early issues of *Orbit* and *Mwana Shaba Junior* followed the comic canons of the former colonial powers. This is not surprising; not only were the artists who produced the comic strips European, but, as demonstrated above, literature of this type had been circulating on both sides of the Copperbelt for at least a couple of decades. As a result, its graphic and storytelling codes would have already been familiar to at least a part of Katanga and Zambia's population, thus making it easier to re-purpose them for these publications' new aims. Gécamines used Belgian-style one-gag-in-a-page and realistically drawn moralising adventures to reinforce its paternalistic vision. *Orbit*, meanwhile, used UK-type space and adventure stories to reinforce the state's belief in a flourishing industrial future. These early comics, particularly *Orbit*'s, are emblematic of an era when, as James Ferguson put it, 'Africa was "emerging"' and

[49] *Orbit*, 1, 5, 6 and 7, 1971, pp. 1–2.

[50] *Orbit*, 1, 7, pp. 1–2.

'no place was emerging faster or more hopefully than Zambia'.[51] This was a time when, as Wendy Bond recalled, Zambia was 'buzzing with optimism and opportunity':

> It was all very exciting because everyone was determined to make a success of the new nation … and to do it fast! Doors were opening for everyone. … Zambia became international … there were new projects and new cars and new buildings going up and new roads.[52]

Thus, while *Orbit* was not a Copperbelt production, nor was it solely aimed at a Copperbelt audience, it is likely that this is where it was most widely read, along with Lusaka. It is also where it found its most fervent fans, as is suggested by the fact that many of those who later contributed comics to the magazines were Copperbelt natives. Besides, the aim was to inspire the country's youth to aspire to live in a 'Copperbelt-like' society, one characterised by well-organised cities, state-of-the-art infrastructures, an educated labour force and—cherry on the cake—a self-sustained agricultural system.

The script of the Copperbelt's 'emergence' via industrialisation and urbanisation was later confounded by the decades of steep economic decline which followed the fall in copper prices of the mid-1970s.[53] By the early 1990s, *Mwana Shaba Junior* had disappeared and *Orbit* had so severely declined in popularity that it was supplanted, at least on the Copperbelt, by a newcomer youth magazine produced by Mission Press in *Ndola: Speak Out! Yet,* until then, they had become the main vehicles through which the youth of the Copperbelt produced and consumed comics. For one thing, these magazines' longevity and accessibility gave them enormous reach, allowing them to become an 'official space for comics', as Katangese cartoonist Tetshim put it.[54] For another, from the early 1970s, when Congo and Zambia went through a period of 'Africanisation' and 'nationalisation', it was Zambian and Congolese artists who became the sole producers of comic art for the magazines. In fact, for a time, comics became one of the most lucrative activities available to visual artists in Katanga. Cartoonist Kika recalled that in the 1980s, while he and other artists continued to work on painting and metal work, comics were 'what paid best'.[55] Similarly, Kinshasa-born artist Michel Bongo-Liz 'got stuck' in Lubumbashi in the mid-1980s when he was on his way to Southern Africa because 'Gécamines paid good money for the comics which we were producing'.[56] As a result, these magazines provided local artists with the opportunity to 're-appropriate' the medium and say with it what they wanted. Fatefully, they did so in a context of fast economic, political and social change.

Re-Appropriation of the Medium in a Changing Socio-Economic Context

A few years into the 1970s, as the two magazines started using homegrown African talents rather than exported ones, there started to be important shifts in the tone and content of the comic strips published in both *Mwana Shaba Junior* and *Orbit.*Though *Mayele* survived

[51] James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 1.

[52] Bond, 'Mporokoso', p. 208.

[53] Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*, p. 6.

[54] Interview, Tetshim, Lubumbashi, 14 August 2019.

[55] Interview, Kika, Lubumbashi, 21 August 2019.

[56] Interview, Michel Bongo-Liz, Lubumbashi, 30 July 2019.

unscathed because of its popularity with the readers,[57] comic strips published in Junior from 1972 showed an increasing 're-appropriation' of Belgo-French narrative and graphic codes in ways that subverted or reversed them. An early example of this are the adventures of 'Mwana' and 'Shaba', two new characters which first appeared in the *Mwana Shaba Junior* in the summer of 1972.[58] The first two of these, *Echec aux Espions* (1972–74) and *Le Trésor de Targaz* (1975–77), follow a fairly similar template in which its two young journalist heroes travel to exotic locales—New York and 'Tibera', a fictional North African country—and are confronted with gangs of villains, whose plans they thwart.These two stories still have many characteristics that connect them to the Franco-Belgian comic tradition. Both are high-adventure stories set in exotic locations and broadly follow the aesthetics of mid-twentieth-century Belgian comics, being reminiscent of Franquin's *Spirou et Fantasio.* Both are full of slapstick humour—Mwana falls down the stairs of his hotel twice in high comical fashion yet never seems to get physically injured—and present Mwana and Shaba as moral paragons. For example, a new character introduced in *Le trésor de Targaz*, a spoiled princess, who is used to her every whim being catered for, progressively learns to emulate the behaviour of Mwana and Shaba who are selfless and help others without expectation of rewards.Yet, on the whole, the usual template is here reversed. While Mwana and Shaba's country of origin has featured in more than one European comic as the exotic destination, in this case, it is the two heroes who are doing the travelling, visiting such exotic locales as the United States, and they are the ones who are greeted as heroes by the 'natives'. Elements of *Authenticité*-era Zaïre, as Congo was known from 1971, are also visible throughout.[59] Characters refer to each other as 'citoyen' or 'citoyenne', Mwana and Shaba conspicuously use 'Air Zaïre' to fly everywhere, and Zaïre is constantly implicitly being presented as a modern nation, a member of the United Nations on par with any other player on the international chessboard. In this way, European codes of comic-making were here used in a way that updated them for a contemporary 'Zairian' audience.

From around the mid-1970s, *Orbit a*nd its comic strips started to change too, both in outlook and in subjects.These changes were claimed by the editorial team of 1977 to have been inspired by readers' letters,[60] yet this was a period when Zambia too was experiencing important political changes. In 1973, Zambia had become a one-party state, and, as economic decline started to bite, its politics became increasingly centred around the person of the President and the ideologies of the nationalist struggle.[61] This new party line was openly advertised in the *Orbit* of October 1974 which celebrated Zambia's tenth anniversary of independence. For the occasion President Kenneth Kaunda penned a letter for *Orbit*'s young readers in which

[57] Paul Baeke continued the series from Belgium until 1987, when he was replaced by Gécamines employee Mukiny Nkemba.

[58] In total six 'Mwana and Shaba' adventures were published between 1972 and 1989. Cassiau-Haurie suspects that the first two adventures were produced by the Chenge brothers, who ran an influential artistic workshop in Lubumbashi. Cassiau-Haurie, *Histoire de la BD congolaise*, p. 39.

[59] 'Authenticité', or 'Zairianisation', was an official state ideology implemented by the Mobutu regime in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In an effort to rid the country of the lingering vestiges of Western influence, the country was renamed Zaïre, and Zaïriens had to adopt new 'authentic' names, and change their ways of dressing and addressing each other. See Crawford Young and Thomas E. Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

[60] *Orbit*, 6, 6, October 1977, p. 1.

[61] Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics*, p. 167.

he grandly stated that 'we older ones fought and won a battle for political freedom' but this, he continued 'was just the beginning—Not the end!'[62] This was accompanied by a 'special insert', a comic advertised as an 'exciting picture-story' depicting

> how the Zambian people became united by the belief that every man or woman has the right to help decide the kind of life they live … to choose their own government! Orbit tells you how the people of Zambia gave voice to that idea through the leadership of Kenneth Kaunda. And how the people, the idea and the man became one nation on October 24 1964.[63]

Soon thereafter, Marion and Robert were taken down from their pedestal as *Orbit'*s star cartoon to be replaced by Fwanya, a young Zambian schoolboy whose two-pages-long stories were meant to be amusing and to educate children on good behaviour. In 'Fwanya learns that laziness does not pay', for example, Fwanya collects copies of *Orbit* which he is supposed to bring to his teacher so they can be sold. He stops to rest and to read them, allowing the wind to blow all the copies away.[64] Just as Mwana and Shaba had stuck close aesthetically to earlier Belgian and Congolese comics, Fwanya's realistic black-and-white aesthetics are only a stone's throw away from the Fleetway-style comic strips which had previously been the norm in *Orbit.* Similarly, despite this aesthetic continuity, there is a change in content, in this case towards a new brand of moralistic didacticism.

The content of these comics also differed at times from their predecessors in being located in a more distinctly Zambian or Katangese context and making references to events and societal change experienced by Copperbelt society. For example, in January 1975, a new comic in *Junior* entitled *Un espion à Lusaka* featured a young girl foiling a bomb attack at a summit held in Lusaka, where delegations of all 'African copper-producing countries' met to discuss the impact of the fall in copper prices.[65] In fact, from the mid-1970s onwards, *Junior'*s adventure and detective stories took a darker turn and, by the 1980s, stories depicting a character struggling against crime and corruption grew increasingly common. Similarly, comic strips in *Orbit* had become much less 'European-looking' by the late 1970s and, apart from *Fwanya*, all now touched upon topics relating to the realities of contemporary Zambian life. The stories of *Constable Mulenga*, for example, highlighted urban dangers, such as going home alone from the cinema after dark.[66] In a story entitled *Choose a Husband* published in 1977, it was the tricky topic of marriage and the rift between cities and villages that was explored. Tisa, a chief 's daughter, decides to marry 'a successful young man from the city who has come back to the land', who, unfortunately, turns out to be a goat transformed into a man.'You had a lot of handsome young men to choose from', the goat-husband teases Tisa.'You just wanted my money and my car and a goat for a husband Ha! Ha! Ha!'[67] This is consistent with the evolution of the depiction of the village-town relationship in twentieth-century Zambian literature identified by Giacomo Macola. Whereas there had previously been a tendency to assign moral superiority 'either to the urban or to the rural space as a whole', he argued, 'the

[62] *Orbit*, 3, 7, p. 5.

[63] *Orbit*, 3, 7.

[64] *Orbit*, 4, 3, p. 10.

[65] *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 180, January 1975, p. 8.

[66] *Orbit*, 6, 6, October 1977, p. 3.

[67] Ibid., pp. 22–3.

demise of social expectations of urban permanence led to both spheres of social relationships' and was increasingly 'perceived as fundamentally deficient and unappealing'.[68] Similarly, the story here serves as a cautionary tale for young women who get dazzled by the lures of the city, while it also criticises both city dwellers for their empty promises and villagers for their naivety and longing for material wealth.

Similar changes in perception were expressed in *Junior's Le Masque de la Tortue* (1989–90), in which a young village man named Sadiki travels to the city to help his cousin, only to be disabused by the reality of crime and squalor he finds there. However, instead of going home as the heroes of such stories often do, Sadiki stays, and the message seems to be that people from the village and the city should help each other and are stronger if they do so. City life was further de-idealised with the arrival, in 1987, of a new comic character named Mafuta. As with Mayele, Mafuta's comic strips are one page long, and consist of jokes derived from the frustrations of daily and domestic life. Yet this comic strip differs from Mayele in fundamental ways. Whereas Mayele's jokes are slapstick-based, Mafuta's play on (changing) societal mores and situations that Katangese readers may actually have encountered in real life. Mafuta jokes cover a large number of topics such as gender relationships, superstition, insecurity, and religion, and a great number find humour in family and social obligations. In *L'heureux papa,* for example, two drunk men come to Mafuta's house and demand he offers them a drink since a child was born in his family. They pester him until Mafuta buys them one glass of beer, and when they complain, Mafuta protests,'what are you complaining about? I bought you "a" drink, didn't I?'[69] In *Les visiteurs*, Mafuta receives the visit of his uncle, aunt and children from the village. While his uncle is busy listing all the items he requires from Mafuta (a sewing machine, a bicycle, a suit, a hoe, clothes for his wife and children), Mafuta thinks: 'what a disaster! Now I have five additional mouths to feed … life has become too expensive … I will get rid of them, and quickly.' In order to do so, he gives them a bad supper, leading the unwanted guests to decide to leave of their own accord.[70] Mayele and Mafuta's jokes have in common that they take place in urban settings, mostly in and around the home. Yet, whereas Mayele's jokes show a life of abundance and middle-class aspirations, Mafuta's highlight all that is lacking.

From 1989, the year that the Kamoto mine collapsed, causing Gécamines' total production to drop by 90% between 1989 and 1993, the implicit social and political commentary of *Junior's* comic strips became distinctly more explicit. *Les tribulations de Mashaka*, published between 1990 and 1991, for example, straightforwardly dealt with the effects of poverty. Mashaka is a perennially unemployed character whose wife urges to go out and find work. Yet everything goes wrong for Mashaka. He loses the little money he had earned, breaks his leg yet continues looking for work, finds a job then gets fired, gets evicted from his house, and even tries to commit suicide. He is only saved when a rich uncle comes back from America and offers him a job on no other basis than the fact that he is family. The suggestion is that the only remaining way to get out of one's situation is through a wealthy relative or going abroad. Similarly, *Msumbuko Le syndicaliste, les victimes de la tentation* (1989–90, by Mukiny

[68] Giacomo Macola, 'Imagining Village Life in Zambian Fiction', *Cambridge Anthropology* 25, 1 (2005), pp. 1–10, pp. 6–7.

[69] *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 366, August 1989, p. 5.

[70] *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 372, March 1990, p. 5.

Nkemba and Nansong Yav), deals with the effects of economic collapse. In this story, the protagonist is Masumbuko, the chief trade unionist for the textile company, I.T.M., which acts as a stand-in for Gécamines. The company originally does well but the salaries are too low and as one employee comments, 'it's impossible to make ends meet'.[71] As time goes by, an increasing quantity of goods goes missing from the company as employees help themselves to them to compensate for their low salaries. Masumbuko then summons all of his fellow employees and lectures them on having endangered the company's survival and by extension the ability of all workers to feed their families. Another worker then takes the stand and expresses what must have a widely shared opinion among Gécamines' employees: that the directors of the company shared a part of the blame since they had sold out to 'the capitalist system of exploiting Man to extract as much profit out of him as possible' and neglected their 'obligation to think about improving the living conditions of workers'.[72] In that way, I.T.M.'s story is a thinly veiled reference to Gécamines' contemporary struggle with debilitating thefts and underpaid employees.

On the Zambian side, meanwhile, *Orbit* had been largely been supplanted by *Speak Out! A Christian Magazine for Youth*, created by the Franciscan Mission press in 1984. It too contained comic strips, though fewer in number and of a very different kind than those contained in *Orbit*, having been conceived in a very different political context. Whereas there had hitherto been no significant challenge to the party and its government, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the unprofitability of the mining industry, rising foreign debt and periodic harvest failures finally led to rising discontent.[73] In this context, Zambia's Catholic Church found itself in the position of mouthpiece for the opposition to the one-party state.This it was largely able to do because of its ownership of independent media including magazines such as *Icengelo* (1971–present) and *Speak Out!* (1984–present).[74] Like *Orbit* and *Mwana Shaba Junior, Speak Out!* had games, a questions-and-answers section ('Dear Kabilo'), and competitions. The overall tone however was very different. Whereas *Orbit* was resolutely turned towards a vision of Zambia as a nation at the cutting edge of technology and fully incorporated in a global (or at least Pan-African) world, *Speak Out!* was very Copperbelt-focused, and resolutely turned towards questions of politics and morality. The educational articles on science, technology or history which were *Orbit's* hallmark, were gone. Instead, the bulk of the articles consisted of thinking pieces, fictional and real-life stories often contributed by readers, and scripted conversations in which two friends debated a topic of interest. While political critiques were present in the magazine, with discussions about the education system[75] or the extent of individual responsibility in the quest of employment,[76] these were now approached through the prism of topics that concerned the youth of the Copperbelt. As Danny Chiyesu, who has been producing comics for Mission Press since 1991, explained, *Speak Out!* stood for 'speak-

[71] *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 364, June 1989, p. 9.

[72] *Mwana Shaba Junior*, 376, June 1990, p. 9.

[73] Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics*, p. 82.

[74] Marja Hinfelaar, 'Legitimizing Powers: The Political Role of the Roman Catholic Church, 1972–1991' in Jan-Bart Gewald, Marja Hinfelaar and Giacomo Macola (eds), One Zambia, *Many Histories: Towards a History of Post-Colonial Zambia* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 127–43, p. 141.

[75] *Speak Out!* March–April 1984, p. 10.

[76] E.g. *Speak Out!* January–February, p. 2, pp. 3–4.

ing out on all the issues about youth: smoking, sex, marriage, romance, jobs … anything to do with the youth'.[77] It is thus meant to be educational, but in a very different way to *Orbit*. Much in *Speak Out!* was to do with life in the city, changing social mores, and surviving in a world marked by economic hardship. These, accordingly, were the topics which the comic strips published in *Speak Out!* also tackled.

Whereas *Icengelo*, the 'adult' magazine, had a recurring comic character called Katona, whose jokes were written in Bemba and poked fun at daily life in a Zambian urban environment, the 'comic' strips that appeared in *Speak Out!* were not based around jokes. Most were produced by the same person, Ndola resident Michael M. Nkaka, and usually involved two characters, often a man and a woman named Friday and Frida, discussing an issue of political or societal relevance. Some of Friday and Frida's comic strips were more on the straightforwardly moralising side. Nkaka, for example, chose to portray the dangers of drunkenness by having a drunken Friday slip on a banana peel and break his leg.[78] Similarly, exhortations to avoid sex outside of marriage would be accompanied by warnings that it leads to abortion and AIDS.[79] Yet, in most cases, the dialogue format enabled the expression of critical opinions on debates which do not have easy answers, and were sometimes used to air controversial points without appearing to do so. Some comic strips, for example, tackled the question of the legacy of colonialism. In that of March–April 1984, Friday comments to Frida that he does not like going to church as he dislikes the noise of the drums, and considers 'Gregorian chant' to be 'the only suitable music for church'. In this case, it is Frida who was given the last word, arguing that 'it seems you're another one of those old colonials who can't sever their ties with Europe. It's about time you became an African!'[80] By far the most covered topics, however, were those of love, sex and changing gender relations. The May–June 1984 issue, for example, had Friday and Frida entangled in a debate about men and women's role in society in which Friday argued that without a man, a woman is 'a lonely old spinster' while Frida exclaimed that 'you men have ruled us like servants for far too long'.[81]

The village-town relationship is yet another topic which recurs regularly *(see Figure 2.1)*. In the very first issue, Friday complained that he is forced to do manual labour whenever he returns to the village, feeling that, as the best student in his class, he is above such work. Frida responded: 'you should be clever enough to see that manual work will make a man out of you. There are more ways of learning than out of books!'[82] These are but a few examples in a long list of such discussions published in comic form *Speak Out!* in the 1980s. The comic strips themselves had a simple graphic style and were drawn in black and white. Similarly, while Friday and Frida share space in *Speak Out!* with a series of other characters, they are all interchangeable: all serve as vehicles through which to discuss societal questions. In this sense, *Speak Out!*'s strips were an illustration of the extent to which comics, had, by this point, been fully 'weaponised.'

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[77] Interview, Danny Chiyesu, Ndola, 15 July 2019.

[78] *Speak Out!* January–February 1985, p. 20.

[79] *Speak Out!* May–June 1987, p. 20.

[80] *Speak Out!* March–April 1984, pp. 12–13.

[81] *Speak Out!* May–June 1984, pp. 12–13.

[82] *Speak Out!* January–February 1984, pp. 12–13.

In her 2016 article 'Belgo-Congolese Transnational Comics Esthetics', Véronique Bragard argued that post-independence Congolese *bandes dessinées* displayed what she calls 'a re-fashioning of the genre's form and themes, leading to new engaged postcolonial aesthetics.'[83] She cites the work of Mongo Awai Sisé, one of the first major comic artists who emerged in Congo in the second half of the twentieth century, as establishing the tradition of 'the same but not quite'. By this she means that he borrowed a series of codes and aesthetics from the Belgo-French comic traditions but subverted these codes and aesthetics to tell his own story.[84] Sisé's Bingo series, for example bore some resemblance to *Tintin*, but in a reverse paradigm. In contrast to Tintin, Bingo does not serve as a spokesperson of any civilising mission but instead suffers the consequences of the colonial inheritance, for example when he migrates to the city to find work, only to be confronted with fraud, corruption and general inefficiency (*Bingo en ville*, 1981) or when a trip to Belgium confronts him with the North-South wealth gap (*Bingo en Belgique*, 1982). In that sense, Sisé used some of the codes of the Belgo-French comic traditions to highlight some of the grim realities which Congolese citizens faced.[85] Similarly, the period of nationalisation and Africanisation, coinciding with a fast-changing economic and political environment, marks the beginning of a process of 're-appropriation' of the medium by Copperbelt artists as they sought to distance it from its Western roots. The manner in which this reappropriation took place, along with the themes and stories tackled by the authors, evolved and varied over time, influenced by the intentions of the institutions for whom the comics were produced and also by the socio-political context in which they were produced. The faith in a future that would be urban, prosperous and technologically advanced, and the subsequent gradual deterioration of that faith, have been key features of contemporary Zambian and Katangese literature.[86] It is not surprising therefore that that they should be central to contemporary Zambian and Katangese comics. *Speak Out!*'s comic strips represent the ultimate point at which, in a context of fast-changing societal and economic realities, comics become a means through which to have a conversation about these changes .

Conclusion

Much like other forms of popular culture, comics constitute complex and ambiguous historical material. In recent comics scholarship, they have been increasingly thought of as cultural forms existing in relation to the social/ popular context in which they are produced.[87] On the one hand popular culture has been seen as instrument of social control: it is one of the means through which members of society are instructed in appropriate values, attitudes and behaviour. On the other hand, popular culture responds to the cultural tastes and social values of its consumers and, in this sense, can be seen as a 'mirror' to society. In other words,

[83] Véronique Bragard, 'Belgo-Congolese Transnational Comics Esthetics: Transcolonial Labor from Mongo Sisse's Bingo en Belgique to Cassiau-Haurie and Baruti's Madame Livingstone: Congo, la Grande Guerre (2014)', *Literature Compass* 13, 5 (2016), pp. 332–40, p. 332.

[84] Bragard, 'Belgo-Congolese Transnational Comics Esthetics', p. 334.

[85] Ibid., p. 339.

[86] Macola, 'Imagining Village Life', p. 23.

[87] See for example Jean-Paul Gabilliet's *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010).



Figure 2.1 'Frida and Friday', *Speak Out!*, May-June 1986, back cover.
Reproduced by permission, Mission Press, Ndola.

comics are both a product of social processes and a medium through which social values are constructed and conveyed, particularly because it is usually aimed at the youth.This tension is visible in the way that comics were produced and consumed on the Copperbelt. Comics were originally an imported form of popular art and, when first embraced by local institutions, it was largely for instrumental reasons, to influence or even manipulate the readers, to inculcate in them carefully chosen values and ideas. At the same time, they had to do so in a way that would 'speak' to its audience. Thus, they not only had to tackle subjects of relevance to Zambian and Katangese society but also had to rely and play on aesthetics already known and appreciated by them. In this sense, the range of comics influences to which the Copperbelt youth was exposed and the extent to which these influences were recycled or updated in comics produced for and by them, is testament to how much of an intercultural crossroads the Copperbelt was, with networks of cultural influences connecting it to several continents. Once Copperbelt cartoonists started publishing, they were able to pick from a wide range of existing codes and themes, and soon adapted them in the way they wished. In the early years, comics in Mwana Shaba Junior mirrored Belgo-French albums both in their graphic and didactic style. Similarly, early comics in Orbit were influenced both by Fleetway comics and the science fiction craze of the late 1960s and 1970s. Yet, as the political horizon shifted, these styles were increasingly subverted and adapted in order to address aspects of the massive societal changes that the communities who read the magazines were experiencing. As a result, though the medium was introduced in a time when there was little doubt that the future would be industrial and prosperous, it became an important avenue through which the effects of the failure of this future to materialise can be observed.

CHAPTER 8

Social Participation in Indonesian Media and Art: Echoes from the Past, Visions for the Future

Edwin Jurriëns

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Abstract

This article uses a critical and historical perspective to examine some of the achievements of Indonesian community media, the problems they have encountered, as well as the solutions they are offering. It analyses the similarities and differences with earlier genres with an explicit participatory agenda, including certain forms of LEKRA literature and art of the 1950s and 1960s, 'people's theatre' since the 1970s, and 'conscientization art' since the 1980s. One of the main challenges for contemporary community media has been to reconcile class differences in the collaboration between media or art facilitators and local communities. These and other factors have affected the accessibility, distribution, sustainability and reach of their ideas, activities and outputs. The article demonstrates how facilitators and practitioners have tried to solve some of these problems through the exploration of alternative media networks, formats and content.

Keywords

community media, social participation, cultural history, visual arts, Central Java

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Introduction

This article focuses on the development of community media in Indonesia. Community media are independent, grassroots-based communication initiatives that are supposed to provide an alternative to the mainstream public and commercial print and broadcast media. These initiatives can be seen as an aspect of the renewed freedom of expression since the fall of President Suharto's New Order regime (1967–1998). They are also a reflection of trends in the international media landscape, particularly the cultures of interactivity and interconnectivity that have been rapidly developing since the introduction of the World Wide Web and mobile technologies in the early 1990s. At the same time, they have their roots in a long tradition of social commitment and participation in a variety of Indonesian cultural genres.

I will use a critical and historical perspective to examine some of the achievements of Indonesian community media, the problems they have encountered, as well as the solutions they are offering. My comparison will not include interactive media that have individual expression and consumption rather than community cohesion or change as their main purpose, such as the bulk of 'social media' using internet and mobile phone applications. It will also exclude traditional art genres that have their own modes of social participation and community building, but not the activist agenda of community media. [1]

First, I will analyse the similarities and differences with earlier genres with an explicit participatory agenda, including certain forms of LEKRA literature and art of the 1950s and 1960s, 'people's theatre' (*teater rakyat*) since the 1970s, and 'conscientization art' (*seni rupa penyadaran*) since the 1980s. Then I will focus on the various initiatives of media activists in the village of Timbulharjo, Central Java, as a specific example of contemporary community media. Not only have these activists been at the forefront of the development of community media in Indonesia since the early 2000s, they have also covered a variety of media, ranging from print bulletins to radio and internet. Their experiences illustrate both the potential and the limits of community media in Indonesia, and resonate with some of the characteristics of the historical participatory genres.

One of the main challenges for contemporary community media has been to reconcile class differences in the collaboration between media or art facilitators and local communities. These and other factors have affected the accessibility, distribution, sustainability and reach of their ideas, activities and outputs. The final part of this article will demonstrate how facilitators and practitioners have tried to solve some of these problems through the exploration of alternative media networks, formats and content.

Community Media

In Indonesia, community media or media komunitas have been described as media 'from, by and for the people.' According to this definition, com¬munity media are a type of participatory media in which 'ordinary' people, that is, non-media professionals, can contribute to content, management and ownership. Following Raymond Williams (1980), Atton (2002:4, 25) describes community media as a form of alternative media, comprising various degrees

[1] An example of the first is people's personal Facebook pages; an example of the latter the Javanese social dance genre *tayuban* (Hefner 1987).

of the 'decapitalization', 'deprofessionalization' and 'deinstitutionalization' of communication. Alternative media would facilitate a more democratic form of communication, as they give access to media production, distribution and consumption to people who are excluded by the financial, professional and institutional structures of the mainstream media.[2] They are not limited to media with an explicit or radical political agenda, but include any media that enable people to reflect on and transform processes of communication in relation to their specific social circumstances.[3]

Community media have their international roots in groups using pamphlets, radio, audio and videocassettes as well as other media for a specific cause. For instance, community radio has been used for demanding better working conditions for Bolivian and Columbian miners in the late 1940s; for fighting government broadcasting monopolies in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s; and for promoting democracy in South Africa after the fall of the Apartheid regime in the early 1990s *(Fraser and Estrada 2001:6)*. Nowadays community media in Indonesia and elsewhere are seen and used as a tool in the struggle against the intensified commercialization, monopolization, and homogenization of the mainstream print and broadcast media.

Since 1998, Indonesia has experienced a spectacular growth in commercial print and broadcast media. While audiences have easier access to a larger quantity of media, they are not necessarily exposed to forms of information, entertainment, and artistic expression of greater variety or higher quality, however. Instead of a true decentralization of media ownership and content, in line with the post-New Order ideal of regional autonomy *(otonomi daerah)*, national players have simply usurped regional media businesses, while successful regional players have expanded their businesses to regions elsewhere in the archipelago *(Ida 2011:14–8)*. The public, formerly state-owned radio and television stations Radio of the Republic of Indonesia *(Radio Republik Indonesia, RRI)* and Television of the Republic of Indonesia *(Televisi Republik Indonesia, TVRI)*, are still in a struggle of redefinition or self-discovery, and have not provided a valid alternative to and on behalf of the general public or specific groups and communities in society. It is in the context of this lack of audience participation and representation in the Indonesian commercial and public media that community media have grown and developed.

Ideas about the history and concept of community media spread to Indonesia through the educational and practical training programmes of international organizations such as UNESCO.[4] Initially only involving a dozen of pioneering print bulletins and radio stations in predominantly Central and West Java, nowadays hundreds of community radios can be found throughout Indonesia. Since the early 2000s, Indonesian community media initiatives have also incorporated other technologies, such as video, television, and internet. The 2002 Indonesian Broadcasting Law (Undang Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 32 Tahun 2002 tentang Penyiaran, particularly part 6, paragraphs 21 to 24) includes community media as a fourth official broadcasting category, besides public, commercial and subscription broadcasting services.

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[2] Dowmunt 2007:1; Howley 2010c:75; Howley 2010a:4; Howley 201ob:16.

[3] Atton 2002:7, 30; Howley 2010b:17–9; Dowmunt 2007:3–4.

[4] In September 2001, UNESCO organized an influential seminar on community radio in Jakarta and Yogyakarta and distributed a handbook on community radio (Fraser and Estrada 2001) in Indonesian and English to radio practitioners nationwide.

In terms of technology and approach, community media reflect some of the main cultural trends and phenomena of our time. Exploiting the communicative possibilities of a single medium, or convergences between multiple media such as radio, television, video, mobile phone, and internet, they promote social interactivity, connectivity, conviviality, and DIY culture on, and sometimes also beyond, the local level. As mentioned, Indonesian community media also build on creative genres in post Independence Indonesia with a political agenda of social commitment and participation, such as forms of LEKRA literature, people's theatre, and conscientization art.

Social Engagement in Art: The Institute of People's Culture 1950–1965

No other institution in Indonesian history has put the issue of social commitment in culture and art higher on the agenda than The Institute of People's Culture (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, LEKRA). LEKRA, which existed from 1950 until 1965, was informally linked to the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI), and encouraged artists to demonstrate social commitment in their works and activities. LEKRA also introduced participatory genres and methods, although in its literature and other art there was a stronger tendency to represent local people rather than engage and work with them directly.

In that sense, contemporary community media are less ambiguous: social engagement is not only something to be represented, but also something to be demonstrated or performed through the actual participation of local communities. The relation between the intentions and interests of local communities on the one hand, and the creation and distribution of art and media works on the other, is usually mediated by third parties with their own approaches and agendas, and therefore not unproblematic. The concept of community media itself, however, encourages coherence between content (social issues) and format or style (social participation).

Keith Foulcher *(1986)* has observed a lack of such coherence in LEKRA literature and other art. Reflecting President Sukarno's discourse *(1949–1965)* on the Indonesian postcolonial state and its position in the world, LEKRA promoted a combination of nationalism, anti-imperialism and modernization that was rooted in the reality and ambitions of the *rakyat ('society' or 'the people')* (*Foulcher 1986:28*), a term also commonly used in the context of contemporary community media. Initially, in LEKRA's Mukadimah *('Preamble')* founding statement of 1950, 'the people' referred to class and material interests, but in the mid-1950s the idea was formulated by the institute in terms of an emotional commitment to values *(nationalism, anti-imperialism, modernization, justice, equality)* that went beyond class divisions (*Foulcher 1986:29*). Artists were supposed to share this 'state of awareness' or 'state of mind' and reflect it in their creative works. Foulcher *(1986:25)* argues that this type of social commitment was restricted pre dominantly to the 'content' of art, but never really translated into a distinct aesthetic theory, style or production method:

> In its development [...], it is the pursuit of appropriate 'states of mind', which marks LEKRA's aesthetic philosophy. Its evaluative criteria were never stylistic or methodological, and it never in practice questioned the material basis of cultural production in Indonesia. This meant that LEKRA engaged with, rather than negated the bourgeois nationalist tradition, adopting some of its products and some of the tendencies within it, even as it condemned others.

LEKRA promoted an idea of socialist realism that was based on the work of the Russian author Maxim Gorki (1868–1936). This socialist realism was a form of realism in its attempt to represent the nature, essence or truth of society and everyday life; it was socialist in presenting an idealist, revolutionary vision of the future with suggestions, changes and solutions for a better Indonesia (Foulcher 1986:23, 37–9, 50, 121, 141). Usually, there was no explicit concern with the construction of a political form of socialism, however, but rather a 'revolutionary realist' focus on 'immediate, concrete issues,' and 'the struggle for justice in a radical nationalist context' (Bodden 2011:463–4).

In terms of style, the socialist or revolutionary realism of LEKRA-related artists shared many characteristics with the modern, if not modernist, outlook of the rival 'universal humanist' camp.[5] The creation and evaluation of LEKRA art was generally based on the same criteria of originality and individuality, although in terms of content and attitude towards reality the work rejected the ahistorical and asocial general values of the universal humanist artists. According to Foulcher (1986:41–51, 122–3, 134–7), the paradoxical and theoretically problematic character of combinations of modem western styles, such as realism and expressionism, and people oriented *(kerakyatan)* content remained largely ignored or unsolved by the LEKRA artists and art critics.[6] Although the integration between message and approach or presentation is at the heart of contemporary community media theory, in practice incongruities remain, as in the Timbulharjo alternative media initiatives discussed later in this article.

This is not to say that LEKRA did not promote innovative artistic methods or formats, distinct from the universal humanist tradition and partly continued in today's community media. For instance, LEKRA provided material, organizational and promotional support to painters and other visual artists that were part of so-called *sanggar (Holt 1967:218; Foulcher 1986: 41–2)*. In *sanggar*, which originated from the time of the Revolution *(1945–1949)*, a senior artist taught painting and other creative skills to young aspiring artists. The artists normally worked as a cooperative and lived as a commune in an *asrama*.[7] They also organized art exhibitions and work shops in the open air that were accessible to the general public *(Spanjaard 1998:120; Foulcher 1986:140)*. Examples of these communities were the Pelukis Rakyat *('People's Painters')*, who used the slogan 'Art for the people' *(Seni untuk rakyat)*, and the Seniman Indonesia Muda *('Young Indonesian Artists')* of the 1940s and 1950s.

LEKRA also published reportage-style short stories by ordinary people who normally would not present themselves as literary authors in the cultural affairs section of the PKI daily Harian Rakyat *('The People's Daily')*. In terms of content, these stories can be seen as

[5] An important statement explaining the Indonesian notion of universal humanism, without using the actual term, is the Surat Kepercayaan Gelanggang (Letter of Gelang gang Beliefs) of October 1950. This statement, issued by the nationalist, non-Communist art collective Gelanggang ('Arena'), expressed the belief that the development of a modem national culture and literature in Indonesia would not be fundamentally different from that in Europe or other parts of the world (Foulcher 1986:2–3).

[6] Michael Bodden (2012:455) has nuanced Foulcher's observation by pointing out that in various theatre and dance genres of the time 'potentially radical aesthetic ideas […] were being formulated and developed through practice on a variety of local "stages"'. These included mobile theatre and dance groups and so-called *sendratari* dance drama spectacles that were meant to be more accessible to the ordinary people than classical performing art genres. Nevertheless, even in these cases, direct and relatively spontaneous audience participation in performances was limited, and often only allowed after a rigorous review process guided by the PKI cadres (Bodden 2012:468–9).

[7] A large main house with smaller nearby structures (Holt 1967:218; Wright 1994:21; Harsono 2009e:101; Harsono 2009b:129–31).

early examples of media 'from and for the people,' although the newspaper itself was not managed or owned 'by the people,' as would be the case in more recent community media. The stories were not published in their original regional languages, but translated into the national language. Most likely, they were also extensively edited and rewritten in other ways. According to Foulcher (1986:54), this genre remained 'a minor tendency overshadowed by the direction of the movement as a whole, and its "proletarian" character is still mitigated by the fundamental "modernizing" and "national culture" elements of LEKRA ideology.'

In the early 1960s, when LEKRA became more directly involved in party and state politics, it demanded a stronger social commitment of artists and cultural activists by encouraging them to 'move down' (*turun ke bawah* or *turba*) and live, work and otherwise fully participate in local communities (Foulcher 1986:107, 110). On the one hand, the usually urban-based artists and activists were to undergo a personal transformation as a result of the physical deprivations and psychological hardships of living in the countryside; on the other hand, they were also prompted to conduct research about and examine the revolutionary potential of regional art forms and culture (Shackford-Bradley 2000). [8]

Shackford-Bradley (2000) argues that 'the very concept of "descent from above" is based on a spatial configuration of class that is uncompromisingly hierarchical.' Ironically, the term itself continued to be used by state officials during the New Order to refer to their official visits to the Indonesian slums, villages, and outer regions (Shackford-Bradley 2000). The aspect of class division would not be solved by the people's theatre and conscientization art of the following decades, and it still poses a real challenge to today's community media facilitators. In general, community media facilitators have a higher education than their target groups, and the length and depth of their immersion in local societies is relatively limited.

Early Participatory Media: People's Theatre since the 1970s

After Suharto took over power from Sukarno in 1965, LEKRA and PKI were banned, and hundreds of thousands of their real or alleged members were imprisoned or killed in a series of violent events that took place in Java and other islands. The universal humanist approach of individual expression and international and decorative styles became the officially approved creative practice, while socially and politically engaged art and media were discredited, censored, or banned. This does not mean, however, that artists and media practitioners did not attempt to express socio-political commitment in various other, often innovative ways.

The New Art Movement (Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru, GSRB), for instance, deliberately distanced themselves from academic, politically accepted, or universal styles, such as abstract modernism, post-impressionism, and classical realism. They were influenced by the 1960s Pop Art movement in the United Kingdom and the United States, the West German sculptor Joseph Beuys (1921–1986) (Hardi 1979:14–5), and early twentieth century Dadaism and

[8] The concept of *turba* was influenced by Maoist thought, particularly the idea of xia fang ('to go out into the countryside'), and marked LEKRA's growing orientation towards Chinese communism since the late 1950s (Shackford-Bradley 2000). This new orientation also influenced the introduction of the slogan *Politik adalah Panglima*, or 'Politics is the Commander', which not only urged artists to retain their socio-political commitment, but also implied that LEKRA would become increasingly involved in state politics as a means to further develop Indonesian art and culture. Only from 1964 to 1965, a stronger, direct impact of PKI on LEKRA became manifest (Foulcher 1986:107–8).

surrealism, and adopted and reinvented genres such as performance art, happenings, installations, mixed media, found objects, and photorealism.[9] They engaged with the daily realities of contemporary consumer culture, and sought to level 'the aesthetic distance between the art of urban mass culture—such as *becak* decoration, folk arts, or *seni rupa di kaki Lima* ("street" art, comprising such expressions as posters, T-shirts, bumper stickers, comics and the many other articles commonly found for sale in urban street stalls and shops)—and contemporary art as practiced by graduates of art academies' (Miklouho-Maklai 1991:1).

According to FX Harsono (2009e), co-founder of GSRB and prolific artist and essayist, the movement had a different, broader idea of people's issues *(kerakyatan)* than the previous generations of socially engaged artists. In their works and statements, the young artists, children of both the New Order regime and the era of globalization, gave expression to issues of national and international concern, such as 'the environment, displacement, labour, humanity, war, the culture of violence and the conflict between traditional and modern culture' (Harsono 2009e:106). Brita Miklouho-Maklai (1991:26) observed that GSRB attached equal importance to form and content for expressing their ideas, whereas earlier movement such as LEKRA focussed on content rather than form. However, similar to the majority of LEKRA literature and visual art, GSRB was about representing social commitment rather than enabling direct social participation. The decision of artist activist Moelyono (1997:124) to create the 'conscientization art' that will be discussed later in this article was also partly in protest against the fact that GSRB seemed to speak on behalf of the 'ordinary people' rather than engage in real dialogue with them.

The principles and sources of social engagement of another art form during the early New Order regime, people's theatre, were much closer to those of the community media of the late twentieth and early twenty first century. An institution that best illustrates the connections between people's theatre and modern community media is the Yogyakarta-based catholic media production centre PUSKAT Audiovisual Studio. PUSKAT has contributed to the development of lndonesian people's theatre through its involvement with the Arena theatre group since 1971 (Hatley 2008:134–7; Bodden 2010:58). In the 1980s and 1990s, it gradually expanded its activities to other art, media and topics, including religion, youth, regional culture, agriculture, and ecotourism. In 1995, it established its own community radio station Balai Budaya Minomartani (Jurriëns 2009:153–4), which focuses on children's programmes and Javanese arts including wayang kulit and *gamelan*, and is based on principles similar to those of people's theatre, such as accessibility, participation, and 'conscientization' or creating social awareness through education.[10]

Arena's version of people's theatre was influenced by various international sources, particularly the work of the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paolo Freire, the Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal, the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA), the German playwright Bertold Brecht and the Canadian theatre activist Ross Kidd (Erven 1992:187; Bodden 2010:59–62, 68). Aspects of these sources, especially Freire's idea of conscientization, are reflected in the people's theatre theory as formulated by Fred Wibowo (Bodden 2010:80–1),

[9] Miklouho-Maklai 1991:2, 25; Harsono 2009a:50; Harsono 2009c:69; Supangkat 1979:99–103.

[10] This idea of conscientization has been developed in Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1970). This book also inspired Augusto Boal's version of community theatre, called the 'Theater of the Oppressed' (1979).

who was the artistic leader of Arena from the early 1970s to the early 1990s, and later became the managing director of PUSKAT. This theory comprises the following six points:

1. The stories of performances must have their origins in local social conditions;
2. The scripts of performances should be created and arranged by the local people themselves;
3. Performances should be kept simple, and make use of easily accessible, locally available resources;
4. They should break down the barriers between performers and audiences, and avoid the use of professional actors;
5. They should not aim at catharsis, but at raising awareness about social problems;
6. They have to effect change and create conditions for a better world by building dialogue between people.

If these six criteria are followed, people's theatre can become, in Wibowo's words, a true 'people's feast' *(pesta rakyat)* and a 'rehearsal' for complete social change, including material improvement (Bodden 2010:80–1). PUSKAT has based its community radio station and community media training workshops on similar ideas. The members of another Yogyakarta-based group, the Indonesian People's Theatre Group (Kelompok Teater Rakyat Indonesia, KTRI, established in 1989), took the idea of people's theatre to a more radical end than Arena, by living and working full-time, in *turba*-like fashion, with local communities (Hatley 2008:136; Bodden 2010:74–6).

Community media facilitators such as PUSKAT have not only worked with local groups, but also trained NGOs to combine their development programmes with theatrical and other cultural techniques for informal education and social conscientization (Bodden 2010:74). It is in this complex interaction between cultural workers, NGO activists and local communities in people's theatre and other cultural activities at the grassroots where conflicts of class and other interests have arisen. One issue that emerged in various forms of 'workers' theatre' *(teater buruh)* in the 1990s, for instance, was that collaborating (well-educated, middle-class) NGO activists valourized theatre groups more in terms of their contribution to a labour movement than in terms of their own artistic development. For the workers themselves, on the other hand, theatre was not only a medium for representing everyday life reality, providing education and building solidarity, but also for enjoying the pleasures of association, recreation, and relaxation (Bodden 2010:227–9). Middle-class artists, art critics, and journalists, for their part, often ignored or criticized the artistic value of workers' and other grassroots theatre. The performances were primarily seen as tools for creating awareness, not for providing aesthetic sophistication or innovation (Bodden 2010:239–42, 256–8).

This type of criticism echoed the conflict between style and content in the creation and discussion of LEKRA art during the 1950s and 1960s. I argue, however, that rather than suffering from a lack of artistic quality, grassroots theatre and, in its following, other community media present a specific, new type of aesthetics. This aesthetics, in line with the con tent and production mechanism of grassroots performances, has a strong contextual, interactive, and dialogical character. It constitutes an important alternative to the universal humanist aesthetics of time- and space-transcending originality and individuality, which became the

dominant and politically endorsed line after the abolition of LEKRA in 1965. According to Michael Bodden (2010:241), 'rather than searching for universal values, workers' theatre embraced the local, specific issues of its primary audience and did so in a way that allowed the audience to join in the fun. This 'intimacy' was then joined with modem notions of theatre as an educational medium.' In the current age of computer-mediated interactivity and connectivity, aspects of this alternative aesthetics have moved more to the centre of creative production and consumption, although, both in Indonesia and elsewhere, community media as a whole are still battling to find social and political acceptance.

Creating Awareness: Conscientization Art since the 1980s

Indonesian artists have applied Freire's idea of conscientization not only to theatre, but also to drawing, installation, and other visual art. The Indonesian pioneer of such participatory visual art is Moelyono. Accord ing to Moelyono (1997a; 1997b), art, as a means of education, expression, and dialogue, can make people critically aware of their position and role in society, and encourage them to voice their aspirations and alter their prospects for the future. He has used various names for his art, which all refer to social participation, social awareness, and social change, including 'conscientization art' (*seni rupa penyadaran*), 'renewal art' (*seni rupa pembaruan*), 'virtuous art' (*seni rupa kagunan*),[11] 'public art' (*seni rupa publik*), 'community art' (*seni rupa komunitas*), 'art at the margins' (*seni pinggiran*) and 'Village Unit Art' (*Kesenian Unit Desa*).[12]

Since the mid-198os, Moelyono has promoted his thoughts about art and education through his work as an art teacher in East Java. For years, he has been rotating between a Catholic high school in the town of Tulunga gung, a teachers' training college in the town of Kediri, an art institute in Surabaya, and a small elementary school serving the tiny fishing villages of Brumbun and Nggerangan in the Tulungagung regency (Wright 1994:216). Since 1993, Moelyono has also run his own art foundation in the town of Tulungagung, called Foundation of Community Art (Yayasan Seni Rupa Komunitas). The foundation provides art education, documentation, work shops, discussions, and children's art festivals and exhibitions (Brangwetan 2011). Moelyono (2005:5) has brought his art programmes also to provinces outside Java, including Aceh and Papua.

Moelyono has used his art classes as a means to improve and create awareness about the material, mental, and physical wellbeing of his students (Wright 1994:214–6; Harsono 2009d:57–62). While drawing is his preferred medium, he also uses other, three-dimensional media such as rattan sculptures as interactive tools for play and instruction (Aditjondro

[11] *Kagunan* here means 'a skill, a technique, and a practice that can be controlled and practiced by all people' (Moelyono 1997a:128–9). In Old Javanese, *guna*, the base word of *kagunan*, has the connotations of 'goodness, good characteristics, character, virtue, ability, skill, expertise, capability, holiness, use, benefit, service, charity, power' (Moelyono 1997a:124). For Moelyono (1997a:129), these characteristics confirm that art is not restricted to the practices and judgments of an educated and/or wealthy elite, but forms 'an inalien able aspect of everyday life' and implies deeply rooted (Javanese) communitarian values.

[12] Kesenian Unit Desa is play on Koperasi Unit Desa, or Village Unit Cooperation, a New Order government economic initiative to improve the living standard of farmers (Moelyono 1997a:93). One of the purposes of Moelyono's Village Unit Art was to provide a platform for protecting and reviving local art traditions, such as traditional horse dance (*jaranan or kuda lumping*) and glass painting (*lukisan kaca*) in East Java (Moelyono 1997a:92–106).

2005:87). He tries to provide education and social change 'from below' by asking children and their parents direct or indirect questions about everyday matters, such as the problem of clean drinking water.[13] By encouraging them to give expression to these issues in art, he hopes that his students can break away from habitual ways of observing and behaving, and produce imaginative ideas and practical solutions (Wright 1994:217–8).

In August 1988, Moelyono organized an exhibition in Jakarta with drawings from the East Javanese fishing village children, which, in line with his idea of *seni rupa penyadaran*, was titled 'Transformative Dialogue'. The exhibition catalogue was not a normal art catalogue, but also included texts, maps, statistics, and photographs that presented a geographical and social portrait of the villages and their residents (Wright 1994:216–7). The money from the art works sold at the exhibition was used to fund local projects such as water storage facilities (Harsono 2009d:61). Moelyono (1997b:86–91) has done projects not only with rural communities, but also urban groups. On 12 August 1993, for instance, he used installation art as a medium to mobilize a group of factory workers in Surabaya for an event at the Surabaya Art Council, called 'An Art Exhibition for Marsinah'. This controversial exhibition, which commemorated the first 100 days since the rape and murder of local worker-activist Marsinah, was closed by the police soon after its opening (Moelyono 1997b:98; Fakih 1997:xxix).

It may be difficult to find the same degree of social commitment as shown by Moelyono among other community media facilitators. Even his supporters do not unconditionally accept every aspect of his approach, however. In an essay for one of Moelyono's books *(2005)*, the well-known Indonesian sociologist George Junus Aditjondro pressured Moelyono along with community media facilitators, local residents, and academics in general to re-evaluate their own position in various forms of social interaction. Aditjondro's critical questions included the following: first, how can the oversimplification and confusion of categories such as 'poor people,' 'people with problems,' 'villagers,' and 'children' be avoided?; second, considering the variety of problems faced by local residents, who decides on the selection of key themes for public display and discussion with the outside world?; and third, what are the target audiences for exhibitions that take place outside the local communities, and what is their connection with the communities and/or community media facilitators? (Aditjondro 2005:85–104).

Aditjondro (2005:84–5) wondered, for instance, why Moelyono (1997b:79–82), for an exhibition touring Java in 1989, highlighted the theme of the diversion of village land and resources for tourism purposes in Nggerangan and Brumbun, while many other issues could have been raised from the art works produced by the local villagers. Referring to the sale of artworks at the 1998 'Transformative Dialogue' exhibition, he also warned for the risk of diverting projects from their original pedagogical and emancipatory purposes to merely becoming fund raising events. Similar to the lessons drawn from the *teater buruh* initiatives, and equally relevant to various forms of contemporary community media, this suggests that the interests of an outside party, no matter the sincerity of its social commitment, do not necessarily match those of the target communities. Aditjondro (2005:92–4) also referred to

[13] Moelyono (1997a:95–6) decided to work predominantly with children, not only for pedagogical reasons, but also out of pragmatic and safety considerations. While living in the Nggerangan and Brumbun villages, he was constantly interrogated by the local bureaucracy and security forces about his background and motives for working with isolated and poor communities. One of the returning, intimidating questions was about his familiarity with the Indonesian political events of 1965. This was a warning for Moelyono to avoid any suggestions that he was trying to revive communist ideology and the ideas and practices of LEKRA.

the more basic problem of community art and media activists needing to decide on the right moment to leave their target group and consider their mission of supporting independence and emancipation accomplished.

Contemporary Community Media: The Case of Timbulharjo

A more recent example of similar issues is the range of local media initiatives in the Central Javanese village of Timbulharjo. In 2000, youth from the Dadapan area in Timbulharjo made use of the relaxed media regulations of the reform era to start a print bulletin, called *Angkringan.*[14] The village youth believed the bulletin would be an effective means to, firstly, assist people in communicating their thoughts and organizing and monitoring themselves; secondly, strengthen the role of local people in control ling corruption in their village administration; thirdly, give specific interest groups a stronger bargaining position in negotiations with other groups; and, fourthly, unite the various village factions (Sulistyowati, Wuryantono and Astuti 2005:171–2).

The *Angkringan* bulletin is published four times a month and costs only Rp. 750 (approximately A$ 0,08) per copy. Apart from the income from sales, the production costs are covered with the money from advertisements of local small trade. In addition to local news, the bulletin publishes national news of local relevance, for instance about an outbreak of a virus. The first edition of th\e bulletin, published on 14 January 2000, critically discussed the way in which the village government had handled money for a poverty reduction project. Partly as a result of the publication of stories about the mismanagement of the poverty reduction funds, the village head was forced to step down.

In July 2000, the *Angkringan* bulletin was the only community medium to receive one of the annual media awards of the Jakarta-based NGO Institute for the Studies on Free Flow of Information (Institut Studi Arus Informasi, ISAI). The prize money of Rp. 2,500,000 (approximately A$ 450) was invested in the establishment of a community radio station, also called Angkringan. The station started broadcasting in August 2000 (Sulistyowati, Wuryantono and Astuti 2005:171–3; Jurriëns 2009a:147–9). Its advantage over the print bulletin is that it has a larger reach and can also be understood by illiterate people. As the villagers are usually busy with their normal work and other activities during the day, the broadcasts take place every night from 8 to 11 pm. The broadcasts discuss issues such as land certificates, social insurances, and public housing (Sulistyowati, Wuryantono and Astuti 2005:174).

Since 2007, the Timbulharjo citizens have also used the community radio infrastructure to broadcast internet signals. The advantage of this system is that users do not have to pay individual internet connection fees, but can share the costs with each other, which amount only to several thousand Rupiah (less than A$ 1) per household per month. To receive the internet signals, the Timbulharjo citizens use so-called 'wajanbolic', or modified *wajan* or frying pans, which are not only cheap but also have symbolic value as basic cookware that can be found in almost every Indonesian household and *warung* (food stall). The wireless internet service, called AngkringaNet, provides the local people with internet links to the outside world as well as an intranet exclusively for the community. The AngkringaNet website contains vari-

[14] *Angkringan* is Javanese for a small outdoor food stall where people come together to eat and chat. Typically, it consists of a bamboo carrying pole with a basket or chest for storing and presenting food on either end.

ous Open Source software programmes for general use, and also enables people to access and contribute to a Village Database with information about local governance, economy, health and other issues. Community members are also trying to use the internet service for the local production, broadcasting and reception of television programmes (Jurriëns 2009b).

The various Angkringan community media receive operational support from the Yogyakarta-based NGO Combine Resource Institution (CRI), which itself receives financial support from The Ford Foundation. As The Ford Foundation requires that every partner organization of CRI has legal status, the Timbulharjo community established the Timbulharjo Citizens' Communication Forum (Forum Komunikasi Warga Timbulharjo, Fokowati), an official body for the coordination of the local media initiatives, on 27 May 2001. Fokowati aims to contribute to a 'participatory, transparent and accountable governance of the Timbulharjo village', and tries to maintain its independence by not accepting any members of the village government (Sulistyowati, Wuryantono and Astuti 2005:174–5).

The Angkringan community media discuss issues that were raised during workshops organized by Fokowati and involving representatives of all the major interest groups in the village, including women and youth. The five key problems highlighted during the workshops were the mismanagement of land certificates, students leaving high school prematurely, unemployment, the lack of financial support for local businesses, and inadequacies in the village's material infrastructure. With support from CRI, Fokowati was relatively successful in bringing these issues to the attention of the village government. Initially the Angkringan community radio station was even provided with a space at the village meeting hall. After a while, however, their phone connection began to be interrupted by members of the village government who disagreed with some of the broadcast content, in particular about the government's mismanagement of land certificates (Sulistyo wati, Wuryantono and Astuti 2005:196).

According to a detailed study of the Communications Studies programme at the Tertiary Institution for Village Community Development (Sekolah Tinggi Pembangunan Masyarakat Desa, STPMD 'APMD') in Yogyakarta, the availability of community media and other public institutions in Timbulharjo has not sufficiently improved people's political participation in terms of 'voice,' 'access,' and 'control' (Sulistyowati, Wuryantono and Astuti 2005:183). 'Voice' here means to be able to express one's opinion about issues related to governance and development; 'access' to be able to influence and participate in the creation of government policies and public services; and 'control' to be able to monitor the operations, policies and financial situation of the government (Sulistyowati, Wuryantono, and Astuti 2005:168–9). Although community media can serve a broader spectrum of more subtle types of politics—the politics of local identity, gender, or the media, for instance—the focus on administrative politics is useful for testing the reach, depth and strength of the ideal of social empowerment through community media.

According to the STPDM 'APMD' report, one of the problems directly impacting the Angkringan community media has been Fokowati's lack of initiatives after the partnership with CRI formally expired. The only people willing to participate in the activities are the local educated elite. The majority of the Timbulharjo population does not understand the idea and function of Fokowati, due to a perceived lack of media literacy, or an antagonism towards a communication forum that was introduced by an external organization. While the total population of Timbulharjo counts more than 16,000 people, the discussion forums are

attended by an average of only 20 to 40 villagers. Because of technical and financial problems, there have also been interruptions in the publication of the *Angkringan* bulletin (Sulistyowati, Wuryantono, and Astuti 2005:196–200).

On the basis of the Timbulharjo experience, the STPMD 'APMD' research team published three recommendations to improve the effectiveness of community media. Firstly, local citizens should be made aware of the presence, function, and benefit of community media, and be given a sense of ownership of these media. Secondly, community media should be supported by 'transformative' leadership that is able to formulate and put into operation democratic policies. Thirdly, education should be provided to help people transform themselves, and become the subjects rather than the objects of communication practices, and consequently also the initiators rather than the targets of local policies (Sulistyowati, Wuryantono, and Astuti 2005:201). In short, some of the main issues have been accessibility and participation, political support and reach, and media education. Indonesian community media facilitators and practitioners are aware of these and other difficulties in their work, and are in a continuous process of self reflection and improvement.

Media Distribution and Institution Building

One clear theme to draw from these contexts is that collaboration between art or media activists and local communities typically involves a complex negotiation of conflicting interests and class differences. The success of these negotiations depends on the transparency of the arrangements and the depth and length of dialogue between the various participants. The failure of some (aspects of) of these negotiations puts the idea of media 'from, by and for the people' in critical perspective. At the same time, however, community media initiatives should be credited with publishing stories and creative ideas to the outside world that would normally not reach the mainstream media.

For the participants in community media initiatives, the distribution of media content is usually a bigger challenge than the production of such content. Indonesian community video facilitators and practitioners, for instance, do not have access to the mainstream channels for the distribution of films and DVDs. In commercial cinemas, there is a lack of digital projection facilities that allow the screening of film as well as video (Videochronic 2009:39). Commercial DVD outlets such as Disc Tarra only distribute videos that meet the required minimum number of copies (usually 1,000 copies or more) and carry a tax ribbon issued by the Film Censorship Board (Videochronic 2009:41). A problem for video artists is that they may not be invited to exhibitions and festivals if their work is already available on the World Wide Web. The organizers of video festivals themselves are often confronted with complex organizational problems and copyright and censorship issues (Videochronic 2009:39).

Many video activists also refuse to have their work broadcast on public or commercial television, because they feel this would compromise the independent or radical character of their activities. Those who do not object to working with mainstream television institutions often miss out on receiving royalties, because their work is regarded as non-profit in nature (Videochronic 2009:40). Community television is still in its early phase of development in Indonesia (Nazarrudin and Hermanto 2009), and video activists and community television practitioners are often not aware of the complementary values of their activities and ideas.

Faced with these challenges, Indonesian alternative video practitioners have come up with many creative solutions to make their work accessible to the public. These solutions include screenings at alternative venues, such as independent cinemas, foreign cultural institutions, art galleries, campuses, political centres, village halls, boarding schools and family homes. Films and videos are also shown outdoors, continuing an Indonesian cinema tradition of projecting movies on mobile, temporary screens or *layar tancap* (literally, 'screens that are stuck into the ground') (Videochronic 2009:38). Another form of distribution is the sale of DVDs or VCDs in alternative bookshops, on promotional internet sites or in so-called distro or small 'distribution' shops for independently produced fashion, music, video, and other creative work (lskandar 2006:106–7; Uttu 2006).

Support for the distribution of alternative video is also provided by the Australia and Indonesia-based NGO EngageMedia. EngageMedia attempts to build an on-line network of video activism in the Asia-Pacific region, so facilitators and practitioners can easily get in touch with each other for exchanging materials and ideas. One of the NGO's initiatives has been an open source video-sharing platform called Plumi. The system makes it possible for local organizations to set up video archives 'which run on a server hosted locally in the office of the organization, making uploading and downloading to the archive extremely rapid. Videos can be watched by anyone on the local area network and easily copied to USB sticks, DVDs and CDs' (Videochronic 2009:49). EngageMedia expects from the organizations that make use of its facilities to publish their work under Creative Commons (CC), which is an alternative copyright system to 'help authors share their work while keeping their copyright and specifying certain conditions' (Videochronic 2009:51).

One of EngageMedia's counterparts and a frontrunner in the exploration and application of alternative video distribution is the Yogyakarta-based community video facilitator Kampung Halaman ('Home Village'). Kampung Halaman (2010c) was founded in 2006 by Cicilia Maharani, Dian Herdiany, Elanvito, Zamzam Fauzanafi, and M. Abduh Azis, and specifically focuses on youth as the key to social transformation. Its main programme, the Youth Media Community Lab, provides participants with training about how to conduct research, make videos, organize video screenings, start up creative media businesses, and set up local media centres. The participating groups receive assistance from Kampung Halaman for approximately two years, after which they are expected to continue their activities independently (Kampung Halaman 2010c). In November 2011, Kampung Halaman received the International Spotlight Award from the US President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities for their engagement programmes with local youth (Youth Program Awards 2011).

In collaboration with EngageMedia, Kampung Halaman has developed Depot Video, a Plumi-inspired facility that enables students, academics, and the general public to easily download and save community videos. It also publishes community videos in the form of DVDs, which are distributed for free to local communities, NGOs, schools, universities, and national and international film festivals. Another distribution strategy is monthly community video screenings, called 'Nonton bareng di kampung' ('Let's watch together in the neighbourhood'). The screenings always take place in other communities than the ones that created the videos, in order to facilitate the inter-local exchange of materials and ideas (Videochronic

2009:38). Kampung Halaman has also been involved in documentary film competitions as a means to produce and distribute community videos. [15]

Two special annual events organized by Kampung Halaman are the Indonesian Youth Media Camp and Jalan Remaja 1208 ('Youth Street/ Path 1208'). The Indonesian Youth Media Camp provides media training to young community leaders, while Jalan Remaja 1208 teaches local youth how to create and share their own videos and video blogs (Kampung Halaman 2010b; 201oe). Kampung Halaman has attempted to give a more sustainable character to community video production and distribution through the establishment of community media centres. An example is Opak House, situated near the Opak river in the Karang Ploso village in Bantul, Central Java. The centre, which consists of a library, theatre and activity room, was founded with help from Kampung Halaman in 2007, when Bantul was still recovering from the severe impact of the earthquake that hit the region on 27 May 2006. The purpose of the centre is to make the local youth aware of both the problems and assets of their communities, and to help them find a balance between individual and communal interests, and between modern and traditional communication and information media (Kampung Halaman 2010d).

An example of a community video from Karang Ploso is *My lovely flowers* (2006). This nine-and-a-half minute video was created by a group of village girls between four and nine years old. The video shows the girls wander ing their earthquake-damaged village in search of people who can be interviewed about the post-disaster reconstruction efforts. From a production perspective, this is a very simple documentary, but it enabled the young girls to re-address the impact of the earthquake with each other and other people they would normally not easily talk with, such as adult neighbours, local decision makers, and visiting students. The video is a telling example of the broader aesthetics used in many community media: relatively short narratives about local events in a local language, presented from a personal point of view, with unfixed camera or other recording positions, and deriving from a variety of fictional and documentary genres. [16]

Some local groups refuse Kampung Halaman's offer to install internet facilities in their villages, because of fear of exposure to pornography and other unwanted materials (Videochronic 2009:45). EngageMedia's plans for building an on-line community video network are not always well-received, either. Some communities have ideological objections against collaboration with other interest groups as a single network, while others fear a lack of human resources for maintaining such a network (Videochronic 2009:34). There are also groups who prefer to communicate directly with other community members rather than to try and address a relatively abstract and unknown internet audience (Videochronic 2009:46). EngageMedia itself rightly acknowledges that 'the fact that the technology exists and certain groups have an affinity for video is not enough to form effective networks. Networks must begin from common political goals and shared understandings' (Videochronic 2009:64).

[15] In December 2008, Kampung Halaman in collaboration with the Documentary Community held a workshop 'Diversity through documentary films'. Five film proposals were selected to compete for a production scholarship of Rp. 25,000,000 (approximately A$3480). The winners created the documentary *Sepintu Pemali, sedulang timah* ('At the door of Pemali, there is a pan of tin') about pluralism and multiculturalism on the 'tin' island of Bangka. In March 2009, Kampung Halaman (2010a), with support from The Ford Foundation and the Tifa Foundation, took the documentary on a highly successful road show in Bangka.

[16] This goes against Henk Schulte Nordholt and Fridus Steijlen's (2007:9) observation that community videos predominantly imitate soap opera and other popular styles from mainstream television.

Creating Common Ground

Community media facilitators and practitioners have tried to meet, exchange thoughts and materials, and create common ground not only through on-line communication, but also through face-to-face encounters. Both on- and off-line meetings provide public visibility to and education about community media, and give these media a stronger position in dealing with the competition and resistance from the social, political, and business establishment. More than just being two of the buzzwords of our time, connectivity and networking can function as effective strategies for community media initiatives to increase their accessibility and social and political reach.

An example of a face-to-face meeting that was specifically designed to create common goals and shared understandings was the community media festival Jagongan Media Rakyat, or 'Social Gathering of People's Media', held in Yogyakarta from 22 to 25 July 2010. The festival was organized by CRI with support from The Ford Foundation, the Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation (Humanistisch Instituut voor Ontwikkelingssa menwerking, HIVOS) and several other institutions.[17] In addition to practitioners from public, commercial, community, campus, and school media, it attracted the participation of civil society activists, community leaders, academics, artists, and primary and secondary school teachers and pupils (Jagongan Media Rakyat 2010a). The festival events comprised a national seminar on village poverty; workshops about handicraft, art, technology, and Open Source software; local music, dance, and theatre performances; and presentations and discussions about community media and other socio-political issues, including environmental sustainability and the rights of women and workers (Jagongan Media Rakyat 2010b).

The participation of organizations such as Sekolah mBrosot illustrated that the festival organizers acknowledged the importance of education in advancing the development of community media. Sekolah mBrosot is an informal education and activity centre in the village of Brosot, located in the Bantul area south of Yogyakarta. The centre organizes many activities, especially for children and women, ranging from theatre and literature to handicraft and cooking workshops. It also comprises a professionally run library with an impressive array of local, national and international literary and academic references.[18] These references provide the community with a means to contextualize historically, socio-politically and/or theoretically their self-representations in artistic activity and other media. The library is not only an invaluable source of knowledge for the Brosot community, but also attracts scholars and students from Yogyakarta and beyond. Although the favourable material and intellectual conditions of Sekolah mBrosot may not be available to the majority of other alternative art

[17] The idea of the festival was developed by Akhmad Nasir, then Head of CRI and a Social and Political Sciences graduate from Yogyakarta's Gadjah Mada University. Nasir originates from Timbulharjo and was the main force behind the various Angkringan community media initiatives.

[18] It consists of the collections of the founders of Sekolah mBrosot, the public intellectuals and human rights activists Hersri Setiawan and Ita F. Nadia, and also includes donations from the Indonesian publishing company Gramedia and one of the Monash University libraries in Melbourne. In the 1960s, Setiawan was the Head of the Central Javanese branch of LEKRA. After years of imprisonment in Indonesia and exile in the Netherlands, he returned to Indonesia in 2004 to re-engage with cultural activities and youth in his home village. Although Sekolah mBrosot does not espouse any particular political ideology or art theory, the community-based character of its library and creative activities is not surprising considering Setiawan's background.

and media initiatives, the school could nevertheless serve as a model for the integration of community media in a wider educational context.

The central event of the Jagongan Media Rakyat, the national seminar of 22 July 2010, was meant to identify and find solutions for problems with the collection of correct data about poverty levels in Indonesia. These problems include the use of different interpretations and variables for measuring poverty as well as delays in information updates. An example was the 2008 Bantuan Tunai Langsung ('Direct Cash Help') government programme for the distribution of cash money to poor people, which, due to a lack of reliable information, resulted in the unequal allocation of funds. The seminar aimed at developing a national information system for the collection and comparison of micro-data and statistics from various Indonesian regions. The discussions drew participants from national and regional government institutions, aid organizations, NGOs and universities (Jagongan Media Rakyat 2010c).

In the context of the development of community media in Indonesia, Jagongan Media Rakyat stood out for two reasons: firstly, an effort was made at building networks of community media and other, governmental and non-governmental, organizations; secondly, the discussion of community media was directly linked to providing education about and finding solutions for specific socio-political issues. The festival can be seen as one of the first focused attempts to strengthen the impact of community media beyond individual institutions and communities.

The use of the concept of 'people's media' rather than 'community media' in the festival's title may also signal a re-orientation from the general principles of alternative media to the more explicit political agenda of 'tactical' or radical media, which are aimed at directly influencing the opinion of the general public and key decision makers. In a research conducted by EngageMedia with the Yogyakarta-based Kunci ('Key') Cultural Studies Center, tactical video is distinguished from two other categories of 'video activism': experimental video and grassroots video.[19] I regard tactical video as a subgenre or an approach rather than a category of its own, as it hovers, by its very nature, between different forms of alternative media (Garcia 2007:6–7).

Jagongan Media Rakyat also seemed to be moving community media into the direction of creative or experimental activism by welcoming the participation of visual artists. This combined focus on education, politics and creative imagination may strengthen community media's effort to break through the dominant paradigms of the mainstream media and to expand its reach to policy makers and the general public.

Conclusion

Indonesian community media confirm Edward Aspinall's (2012) argument that after the destruction of the PKI in 1965, leftist ideas and activities of 'commitment to the interests of the 'little people', hostility to 'the elite', and the high value placed on mass action as a form

[19] According to this study, experimental video tries to change the relationship between the medium and its audience through aesthetic and technological experimentation and the deconstruction of imagery, while grassroots video attempts to transform communities by involving them in the process of media production (Videochronic 2009:26). Grassroots video is synonymous with the in Indonesia more common concept of community video (*video komunitas*), while experimental video is normally referred to as video art (*seni video*) or (new) media art (*seni media [baru]*) (Jurriëns 2009c).

of political engagement' continued to exist, in various form and degrees, during and after the New Order. This means that community media are not purely a post-New Order phenomenon, but build on and diverge from the ideas and activities of earlier socially engaged movements and genres. At the same time, however, for the majority of the post-1965 art and media initiatives analysed in this article it is irrelevant to talk in terms of 'left' or 'right', as they do not express explicit political-ideological thought.

Movements such as LEKRA and GSRB showed their social commitment predominantly by representing socio-political issues and talking on behalf of specific groups. Forms of workers' theatre, Moelyono's conscientization art and contemporary community media, on the other hand, not only provide socio-political content, but also allow social groups to directly participate in creative production, management and ownership. In that sense, there is a correlation between media content and approach or style.

This means that the analysis of social engagement in media and art needs to differentiate between social commitment and social participation. Genres of social participation can be complex, as they have to mediate the different and often conflicting interests of art and media facilitators on the one hand, and local communities and other social groups on the other. Some of the problems include the limited accessibility to and social participation in media initiatives, the lack of education about community media, as well as the limited distribution, political reach and sustainability of works, ideas and activities.

One of the overarching problems of the community media initiatives has been their fragmentation. According to Aspinall *(2012)*, fragmentation is symptomatic of the Indonesian radical movement at large, and caused, among other things, by the activists' over-reliance on NGOs:

> Different NGOs develop specialized expertise in different segments of Indonesian social and political life rather than focusing on broad agendas and alliance building. Most are organizations of professionals and intellectuals with no desire to build a mass base. They also compete with one another for donor funding. The dominance of this NGO model continues to be a chief source of the fragmentation and splintering that characterizes Indonesia's broad left today.

Aspinall (2012) acknowledges, however, that activists in post-New Order Indonesia have played an important role in putting pressing social issues on the political agenda, such as health care and social security schemes. Similarly, community media initiatives have not only brought to the surface some of the major flaws in the mainstream media system, especially the lack of diversity in ownership and content, but also tried to provide solutions in the form of alternative media programmes and structures.

The Jagongan Media Rakyat is a promising initiative to bring NGOs, local communities, government parties, artists, and others together, create a more focused socio-political agenda, and strengthen the viability and expand the reach of community media. The video archives of Kampung Halaman and EngageMedia serve similar purposes, and try to build connectivity between various community media initiatives by exploring and developing on-line technologies. While these initiatives may not be capable of or aim at creating a mass movement according to the principles of the old left, they have partly succeeded in urging and providing alternatives for a more equitable and diverse Indonesian information and communication landscape.

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CHAPTER 9

Learning From the History of Alternative Communication Networks

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Abstract

This article explores the legal, economic and governance challenges to the sustainability of contemporary alternative Community Networks by drawing lessons and parallels from eight historical precedents. Building on academic literature related to alternative and community media, the article lays out an encompassing definition of alternative networks (or 'alternets') and develops a multidisciplinary approach to comparative history. After briefly presenting eight case studies (three independent telephone networks of the late nineteenth century; three Free Radios of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s; two Community Networks providing Internet access in the 1990s), the article then draws from these case studies to identify key recurring challenges that can inform present-day initiatives, namely, the articulation of local community with global connectivity, the development of political advocacy capacities aimed at influencing the law and technology, the creation of appropriate resources aimed at resisting co-optation, and the need to build collective cohesion and mechanisms to handle disagreements.

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Keywords

advocacy, alternative networks, commons, Community Networks, Free Radio, Internet, telecom regulation, telephone

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in Community Networks, that is alternative telecommunications infrastructures deployed and maintained by local communities to serve their needs and build up their communication autonomy (Navarro et al. 2016). Offering a third way between public authorities and market-based providers of telecommunication services (e.g., Internet access provision), some of these initiatives, like Guifi.net in Spain or Freifunk in Germany, contribute to expanding the 'Internet commons' to the physical layer of the network (Benkler 2016; De Filippi and Tréguer 2015). Community Networks, therefore, represent a form of 'alternative Internet infrastructure' with the potential to challenge the political economy of the Internet, one marked by a growing concentration and commodification (McChesney 2013). But Community Networks are only seldom historicized on the *longue durée*, in the context of similar historical endeavours such as community telephony and radio. On the short-term time scale of event-driven history, the literature on Community Networks is also sparse (Tréguer and Trudel 2019). Scholars and practitioners concerned with the sustainability of these initiatives, therefore, miss out on some of the lessons that past alternative networks or 'alternets' may offer.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the telegraph, telephone, radio and television were also disruptive technologies. And as many scholars have shown, contemporary debates over the control of the Internet—issues of access, privacy and freedom of expression, oligopolization and neutrality—are reminiscent of older political conflicts over the development of these pre-digital communication technologies (Wu 2010; Pickard 2013, 2015a). In different ways, these technologies saw the advent of 'alternative networks' built to resist hegemonic models. To do so, they developed strategic action repertoires and cultural-ideological frames, explored alternative technological designs or organizational strategies with the goal of transforming their cultural, political and legal environment.

In this article, we seek to explore the history of these alternative communication networks to inform the action of contemporary community-based networks. Our hope is that through the lens of history, contemporary issues and challenges surrounding Community Networks may benefit from new insights and appear in clearer terms. To do so, we begin by laying out definitions of alternative communication networks by drawing on existing literature. Taking inspiration from various traditions of communication history, we propose an original, multidisciplinary approach to embarking in this form of comparative history concerned with today's struggles for emancipation in the media and telecommunication fields. After briefly presenting the eight case studies (fully developed in a research report from which this article is adapted, see Trudel and Tréguer 2016), we move to the lessons learned and identify four overlapping challenges for the sustainability of alternative networks. Of course, such exercise is risky business: if communication technologies are shaped by their environment, it necessarily implies that all case studies are somehow unique as they belong to very specific contexts. In this sense, all parallels we can offer are nothing much more than parallels as the past and the present never quite coincide. French historian Nicole Loraux (2005: 135) advocates for a 'reasoned used of anachronism', emphasizing that, when working in a regime of

anachronism, there is much 'to be learned from the process of returning to the present'. In that spirit, and while remaining wary of the risk of overemphasizing historical continuity, we seek to enlighten present stakes by drawing lessons from the past. As argued by Pickard, the emerging media reform movement can learn useful lessons from past reform movements, as 'history can provide guidance and help steer this new movement away from past mistakes' (2015b: 124).

Defining 'Alternativeness' in Communication Networks

First published in 1970, Enzensberger's *Constituents of a Theory of the Media* provides a useful starting point for conceptualizing alternative communication networks. Enzensberger (2003) proposed a typology of the 'repressive' and 'emancipatory' use of media that echoes contemporary discourses about the emancipatory potential of Community Networks. While the repressive uses of the media reflect and are characterized by centralization, unidirectional communication, depoliticization, and the control exercised by specialists and bureaucrats, emancipatory uses are associated with and supported by decentralization, multidirectional communication, political mobilization and self-organization.

This typology raises interesting questions. The opposition between repressive and emancipatory uses may be too sharp to grasp the multiplicity of uses and their political dimensions. For example, one may argue that all media are characterized by minimal forms of specialized work and politicization processes. Enzensberger also implies that all broadcasting media (one-to- many transmission) such as radio and television are inherently repressive. Conversely, many emancipatory uses mentioned by Enzensberger (decentralization, multidirectional communication, self-organization) are general characteristics of the original Internet, which is also partially controlled by powerful state and private actors.

Although useful, Enzensberger's typology must be considered with care in order to grasp the dialectical relations between repressive and emancipatory uses of media. In other words, rather than identifying predetermined characteristics of alternative and mainstream media, we should fully embrace the complex dimensions of 'alternativeness' throughout history in order to reconstruct different iterations of alternative media and networks as commons. We should also consider centralization and unidirectionality not as a technical fate or choice of design, but rather a social construct resulting from contingent governance models, for which alternatives are possible (Dulong de Rosnay and Musiani 2016).

Recent scholarly discussions on media alternativeness focus on the specific context of the Internet. Preston (2001: 209), for instance, notes that alternative Internets were found in online applications that 'manage to challenge and resist domination by commercial and other sectional interests', in particular those 'operating as alternative and/or minority media for the exchanges of news and commentary on political and social developments which are marginalised in mainstream media and debates'. In similar ways, Fuchs (2010) argues that alternative media are 'critical media' that questions domination and expresses the standpoint of oppressed groups or individuals. For Sandoval and Fuchs (2010), the defining characteristic of alternative media is to contribute to emancipatory social transformation. In a different manner, Atton (2005) writes that alternative online media are 'produced outside the forces

of market economics and the state' (2005: 3). In these definitions, alternativeness is measured in distance from the centres of state and capital (Tréguer et al. 2016).

Adopting a broader perspective, Bailey et al. (2008) situate alternative media 'in relation to mainstream media; as embedded in the citizenship politics of civil society; as a means for self-representation by communities, and as a hybrid form of independent media challenging established relations of authority and control' (2007: x). Couldry (2015) defines alternative media with regard to voice, understood as

> the expression of opinion, or, more broadly, the expression of a distinctive perspective on the world that a political system could acknowledge […] voice being the value that motivates the production of alternative media […] the possibility to be listened to.
>
> (2015: 44)

These competing definitions may be complemented by Cardon and Granjon's (2010) distinction between 'expressive criticism' and 'anti-hegemonic criticism'. While some alternative media are defined by their mission of giving voices to marginalized groups (what the authors call 'expressive criticism'), other are characterized by their critique of mainstream capitalist media ('anti-hegemonic criticism').

Following up on these different definitions, we posit that alternativeness is best understood through examination of many different dimensions, such as the funding and economic models, the governance schemes and decision-making mechanisms, the underlying content and, most crucially, the political values that it circulates, enables or that is embedded within it. In this sense, there are no strict boundaries between alternative and non-alternative media. For example, at least some of the so-called mainstream media tend to criticize (at least some aspects of) neo-liberal politics or give voice to oppressed or under-represented groups. But does it suffice to make them 'alternative media', even if they are controlled by capitalist corporations and can arguably be counted as guardians of political orthodoxies and of the existing power balance? Of course not.

The same can be said of alternative media which, to varying degrees, are articulating dialectical contradictions. In that spirit, Sandoval and Fuchs (2010: 147) have argued for 'politically effective alternative media that in order to advance transformative political can include certain elements of capitalist mass media'. According to them, subscription fees or even advertising might be necessary to reach a broader audience and gain political efficacy. In other words, 'alternative' is not a substantial quality of a given media or network but a useful starting point to identify a wide range of heterodox discourses and practices aimed at (re)constructing communication technologies as a vehicle for emancipatory politics.

A final theoretical distinction to be made is that between 'alternative media' and 'alternative networks'. Although both terms largely depict the same reality, 'networks' refers to the physical and distributed infrastructure of communication, whereas 'media' inevitably evokes centralized 'mass media', that is a specific socio-technical assemblage making use of that infrastructure. In speaking of alternative networks, we thus aim to expand critical reflections about alternative media to communication infrastructure and their political economy. It is also an attempt to connect our own work and the scholarship on alternative media and their sustainability to the also alternative production and governance model of the commons—in particular to the emerging studies on 'infrastructure as a commons' (Frischmann 2007)—while

remaining bound to the rich tradition of alternative media scholarship and to its focus on the critical function of alternative media.

A Multidisciplinary Perspective

Approached from a multidisciplinary perspective, the analysis of eight case studies selected in this article (three community telephone networks of the late nineteenth century, three Free Radio stations of the 1960s and 1970s, two Community Networks providing Internet access in the 1990s) takes place at the intersection of five different fields of inquiry and proposes a specific contribution to each of these fields.

First, our approach inherits from the historical sociology of social movements. We conceptualize contemporary Community Networks as forms of social movements to the extent that these collectives are made up of actors characterized by a 'set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/ or reward distribution of a society' (McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1217–18). In a slightly different way, Tilly and Tarrow (2015) emphasize the collective political action and practices undertaken by social movements, defined as 'a sustained campaign of claim-making, using repeated performances that advertise the claim, based on organisations, networks, traditions, and solidarities that sustain these activities' (2015: 8). Drawing from these definitions, we seek to study the mutations over time of these movements in constantly shifting contexts. As Deflem and Lee Dove (2013) remark, 'historical sociology is not a mere study of the past, but an intrinsic part of a sociology of the present: in order to explain the structures of contemporary societies, one must investigate their historical origins and development' (2013: 293). For this article, the complex co-shaping of alternative networks, communications technologies and communications law specifically concerns us. Historical comparative analysis is especially suited to our goals since it 'is defined by a concern with causal analysis, an emphasis on processes over time, and the use of systematic and contextualised comparison' (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003: 6).

Second, our approach is grounded in the field of media history. Like most fields of historical inquiry, media history focuses on dominant actors and mainstream uses, while the history of struggles over new technologies still remains largely to be written (see Pickard 2015b). However, various historiographical streams have sought to move away from canonical narratives. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, social history of media began to describe the complex co-shaping of technologies, politics and culture. More recently, Acland's (2006) inquiry into 'residual media' has sought to uncover experiences, meanings and values that are latent in contemporary media cultures and that can potentially be reactivated by means of history. By looking at these latent pasts and to the complex co-shaping processes, our research aims to further develop such historical perspectives showing that even prior to the Internet, communications infrastructure already operated as 'sites of cultural contestation' (MacKenzie 2005: 269).

Third, this analysis is informed by the political history of the Internet. Moving away from single-sided narratives that have achieved iconic status—studies focusing on a handful of over-quoted contentious episodes and generally over-representing North America, or scattered accounts that have so far escaped the notice of Internet researchers (see Tréguer

2017)—we aim to move away from US-centric scholarship to make both cross-temporal and cross-national comparisons. In doing so, we try to break away from the persisting myth of the Internet's radical 'newness'.

Fourth, our perspective inherits from the history and the governance of the commons. In *Das Kapital*, Karl Marx described with great attention the enclosures of the commons in England. Marx's works inaugurated a stream of historiography that was further developed by Marxist historians such as E. P. Thompson and Christopher Hill and, more recently, by Derek Wall (2014). These historians rejected the narrative of the 'tragedy of the commons' according to which commons necessarily fail because of the so-called 'free riders' taking advantage of the shared resource (Hardin 1968). Rather, for these authors, the destruction of the commons was 'a key stage in the creation of a market-based social system' (Wall 2014: 13). Our contribution to the history of the commons also pays attention to the history of communication technologies and inscribed it in the history of information and knowledge commons (Hess and Ostrom 2007), which have been subject to forms of commodification that have led to a 'second enclosure movement' (Boyle 2003).

Lastly, our approach inherits from scholarship coming from the field of science and technology studies. In this field, the social construction of technology developed as a conceptual framework to understand how technologies and media are shaped by numerous actors and their practices (Bijker et al. 1987). Adopting such a perspective, our case studies give equal attention to technical, social, political, economic and legal factors that are shaping emerging communication technologies. We were specifically interested in exploring the so-called 'phases of interpretative flexibility' (Bijker et al. 1987) during which different groups are adopting competing technological designs and practices.

Choice of Case Studies

Our research investigates three different communication technologies and models of communication: the telephone (point-to-point communication), the radio (one-to-many communication) and the early alternative Internet access providers (many-to-many communication). For each of them, we surveyed historical episodes during which actors tried to challenge the stronghold of state or market actors at moments when the future of the technology still seemed open. Presented in more detail in our research report (Trudel and Tréguer 2016), our case studies focus on three independent telephone networks at the turn of the nineteenth century and on the specific challenges they faced. In the American Midwest, independent telephone networks faced the rising hegemony of AT&T. In Sweden, the telephone cooperatives faced the monopoly of the State over long-distance lines. In France, local governments and local business communities enjoyed a large degree of autonomy in developing the telephone before turning over the network to the Ministry of Post and Telegraph. For alternative radio networks, we looked at the case of Radio Pacifica in the United States, created in 1946 and originally anchored in the Pacifist movement. We then moved to the British pirate radios of the 1960s and to the French Free Radio movement of the late 1970s, which both challenged the state's monopoly over broadcasting. Our last two case studies get ever closer to the present by looking at two Community Networks that appeared in the 1990s. Founded in 1992 and still active, the French Data Network (FDN) was the first Internet access provider available

to the general public and played a key role in defining French Internet activism. Founded in 1999, Consume.net was tied to the London counter-cultural scene and took advantage of the apparition of Wi-Fi protocols to subvert incumbent telecom operators' hold on the 'last-mile' of networks.

One may ask, why study the telephone, radio and citizen Internet networks instead of other media technologies, such as the telegraph and the newspaper? Why focus on a country or a case rather than another? These are important questions to answer.

The telephone industry is probably the paradigmatic example of the development of communication networks during the twentieth century. In the United States, the cinema, radio and television industries all modelled themselves on Bell and AT&T (Wu 2010). Following that model, they became centralized industries with monopolistic tendencies, and they were helped by the state all along this process. In this respect, the struggle opposing Bell/ AT&T and the independent Community Networks exemplifies some aspects of the struggles that were fought throughout the twentieth century by other forms of alternative media and networks. Another reason to study the telephone is the profound similitude between telephone networks and today's Internet. Both are communication technologies that enable interpersonal communications, allowing 'co-presence'. In this sense, they are much more alike than broadcasting technologies like radio and television.

The Free Radio movement is quite a different business. Unlike the struggles over the telephone, the Free Radio movement had a transnational component. In Europe, pirate radios were broadcasting simultaneously to various national audiences. They influenced one another and collaborated on several occasions, including through the *Fédération Européenne des Radios Libres*, established in 1986. Consequently, they were repressed with new transnational legal instruments such as the European Agreement for the Prevention of Broadcasts Transmitted from Stations Outside National Territories of 1965. As an international social movement, Free Radio is interesting because it echoes today's global networked struggles over issues such as Net neutrality as well as the transnational coordination of Community Networks (Tréguer and Dulong de Rosnay 2018). Also noteworthy is the fact that the Free Radio movement was connected to larger movements of media criticism and media activism (Brinson 2006). It cannot be separated from new forms of discourse and knowledge, including forms of policy advocacy, political activism and media criticism that were fuelled by academic research and that can be traced back to the post-war radio reform movement (see Pickard 2013). For example, the founders of Radio Pacifica were influenced by the work of Charles Siepmann, one of the most important radio scholar and reformer of the post-war years (Lasar 1999). This echoes contemporary struggles with their forms of cross-fertilization between Community Networks, researchers and advocacy groups focused on defending digital rights and/or information and knowledge commons (Tréguer and Dulong de Rosnay 2018).

Finally, the early Community Networks providing Internet access that developed in the 1990s and early 2000s are the historical matrix and the first experiments leading to today's Community Networks. Most of them did not survive (or were radically challenged and transformed by) the rise of the commercial Internet service providers in the mid-1990s. Unlike the case studies on the early independent telephone networks and Free Radio movement, which were based on existing historiography, our analysis of FDN and Consume.net is mostly based on interviews and primary sources (see also Tréguer and Trudel 2019). Our work, therefore,

contributes to the historiography of the Internet and of community media, which has so far overlooked these actors, one important exception being the late Medosch's (2014) unpublished history of early Wireless Community Networks, The Rise of the Network Commons.

Another guiding principle consisted in selecting cases that differed from each other, in order to better account for the diversity of alternative and Community Networks. For example, as many historians pointed out to the similarities between the Italian and French Free Radio movements—the Italian case representing the 'prototype of a new problem' (Raboy 1993: 132)—we decided to study only one of them. A further criterion was the historical significance of the case: Did this episode had enduring effects? Did it inspire others or marked a breaking point, a 'critical juncture' in the political economy of the media (McChesney 2007: 10)? A last concern was the heuristic and pedagogical value of the case studies to reflect on issues faced by today's Community Networks.

Methodology

Once our case studies selected, we identified and read carefully the relevant literature or, alternatively, interviewed key actors involved in setting up Community Networks in the 1990s (see Table 1 or Trudel and Tréguer 2016 for a detailed account of the bibliographical sources). We approached these writings and these interviews with four sets of loosely defined intertwined questions, as we looked for both transversal patterns and singularities. These questions benefited from an iterative research process that took the form of a cross-reading of the historical literature about our cases studies and of the recent works about Community Networks. First, we looked at the specific repertoire of strategic actions employed by these alternets and on their effects. Second, we focused on the co-shaping of technologies and the political/legal environment, as we were concerned by the capacity of these alternets to change their cultural, legal and political environment. Third, we turned to the relations of these alternets with state and market actors, and on the various forms of co-optation they faced and try to resist. Fourth, we revisited the cases looking for implicit or explicit concerns to the commons (or other related concepts). Drawing from the various answers to these questions, we were able to identify four challenges regarding the sustainability of contemporary Community Networks.

Case studies	**Main historical sources**
Independent Telephone Networks, the United States (1893–1907)	Atwood (1984); Beauchamp (2015); Casson (1910); Gabel (1969); Holcombe (1911); John (2010); Latzke (1906); Fischer (1992); MacDougall (2014, 2015)
Cooperative Telephone Networks, Sweden (1883–1910)	Bennett (1895); Bonow (1938); Brault (1888); Holcombe (1911); Huurdeman (2003); Kaijser (1987); Webb and Cox (1911)
Municipal Telephone Networks, France (1888–99)	Aulas (1999); Bennett (1895); Bertho and Carré (1994); Holcombe (1911); Leroux (1991); Webb and Cox (1911)
Radio Pacifica, the United States (1946–present)	Land (1999); Lasar (1999); 2015; Walker (2001)
Radio Caroline, the United Kingdom (1964–80)	Chapman (1990); Johns (2011); Lesueur (2011); Robertson (1982)

Case studies	Main historical sources
Radio Verte, France (1977–82)	Bénetière and Soncin (1989); Lefebvre (2011); Lesueur (2011); Méadel (1994); Ulmann-Mauriat (2000)
French Data Network, France (1992–present)	Bayart (interview); Chemla (interview) Nicaise (interview); Paulus (interview)
Consume.net, the United Kingdom (1999–2003)	Stevens (interview); Medosch (2014); Priest (2016)

Table 1: Overview of the cases studies and main historical sources.

Challenge #1: Articulating the Local and Global

A first challenge that can be identified from our journey in the history of alternative networks is tied to tensions between the local, national and global geographies of alternative networks. In the late nineteenth century, for the American Independent telephone companies, the telephone became not only a medium for peer-to-peer communication but also a civic media—what Carey (1989: 147) called 'an extended town meeting'—contributing to the social conversation in a world thought to be increasingly atomized. But the ability to establish long-distance links interconnecting local networks quickly became a necessity to make these initiatives sustainable. The US telephone independents' failure to cooperate to build long-distance networks eventually weakened their utility and enabled AT&T to frame itself as a legitimate hegemon in order to realize the full potential of the telephone (Gabel 1969). In France, the original compromise made by local telephone networks with the central state to ensure national and international connectivity eventually led the latter to recentralize the network around Paris, rather than developing connectivity around regional urban centres. Swedish cooperatives initially fared much better, setting up appropriate coordination mechanisms between them (Kaijser 1987). But as we will see, their aspiration for interconnection would also seal their fate.

These tensions regarding to the local and the global were creatively dealt with by Consume.net at the turn of the 1990s, when it brought a major innovation to Internet politics by going against the globalizing tide. Whereas the first motivation of FDN had been to bring global connectivity to French tech-savvy people—one which for some time at least made it vulnerable to turning into a for-profit venture—Consume.net's activists wanted to make a claim, as they saw the Internet being fast-moulded into the macro-economic structures of global capitalism. The alternative, then, would be to conceptualize Internet-like networks organized by local communities. Sure, Consume. net's activists were aware of the fact that they needed to be connected to the global Internet to maintain relevance. But unlike the Independents of early telephone networks in the United States, long-distance interconnection was a feature widely available, and in their specific historical context, it was one they sought to counter-balance. To do so, they experimented new online media forms emerging from local communities, helping them to find their own voice and mediate it through online media, much like Free Radio had done a quarter-century earlier. The irony was that such initiative was made possible by a technical innovation—Wi-Fi brought about by the International Telecommunications Union, an international and corporate-friendly organization, and was first made available to the general public with the launch of Apple's Airport device. But that irony made the initiative all the more subversive: In allowing them to bypass the last-mile

networks of corporate telecom providers, Wi-Fi could almost be framed as the manifestation of capitalism's self-destructive impulse (the ambivalence also reflected in the polysemic name of the initiative). But Consume.net's approach had a much more pragmatic component: like for FDN in its early days, taking part in the global Internet was costly. Sharing costs was a way of making it more affordable, and both FDN and Consume.net understood that the more the participants joined, the cheaper the community's total bandwidth costs would be.

Consume.net also sought for creative ways of bridging the local and the global. As MacKenzie (2005: 281) noted, Consumet.net was key in early attempts to 'engineer the connection of local networks into extensive ad hoc informal meshes of wireless nodes across local and national boundaries'. That joint effort took the form of the Pico Peering Agreement (PPA), a document first presented in 2003 which aimed to safeguard the values of privacy, neutrality and openness promoted by Consume.net and the then growing movement around Wireless Community Networks. The PPA held the potential of creating a network of Community Networks that would represent 'a viable and competitive supplement to the Internet, but one where the system of ownership is decentralised enough for it to remain a common' (Alberts cited in MacKenzie 2005: 281).

The original idea of a Peering Agreement that would allow local Community Networks to federate at the national and transnational levels lives up to this day, but mostly under the form of experiments Community Networks usually prefer to send out their traffic to global networks through traditional telecom operators. But in the face of possible 'kill switches' where these corporate actors could decide to disconnect the community from global networks, the PPA still points to a possible workaround ensuring the resiliency of alternative networks, and a way to gain full autonomy in articulating the local and the global.

Challenge #2: Organizing a Political Defence Through Law and Technology

Reviewing the history of alternative networks points to the importance of the co-shaping of law and technology for the fate and the design of alternative networks. As argued by Lessig (1999), these two different forms of 'code'—legal and technological—create and constrain the affordances of communication networks. In many cases, the normative power of law and technology interpenetrated to open (or foreclose) a path for alternative networks. For example, the case of early telephone networks shows the importance of patents (or their absence) in hindering (or providing) small alternative players' access to key technologies and shaping of telecommunications markets. In the United States, AT&T's early twentieth century claim that the telephone was a 'natural monopoly' would not have been so convincing without Bell's first monopoly (1876–93), based on Bell's patents. The case of Sweden also proves the importance of patent laws over the development of telecommunications. The development of the Swedish telephone industry, including the key role played by the cooperatives, was to a certain extent shaped by the absence of Bell's patents. Thanks to the absence of intellectual property or legal enclosure, the field was open to unexpected technical choices and alternative players.

In the early 1970s, the end of the state monopoly over broadcasting in Italy led to a strong demand for radio broadcasting equipment, which, in turn, made such equipment available to activist groups based in France and fuelled a movement that would eventually end the state monopoly there too. Later, the Free Radio movement would, however, become mar-

ginalized through legal reforms leading to licensing schemes that systematically favoured commercial players over grassroots groups (Lefebvre 2011). In the 1990s, the International Telecommunications Union decision to open up Wi-Fi frequencies to unlicensed use led to the introduction of new radio devices that allowed for significant changes in the political economy of last-mile networks, sparking the so-called Wi-Fi revolution that gave birth to the first Wireless Community Networks. Today, regulations like the 2014 European directive on radio equipment change the liability regime for equipment providers and endanger the freedom of Community Networks to install new software on these devices and serve their specific needs and values, therefore their techno-legal sustainability (Tréguer and Dulong de Rosnay 2018).

Sometimes, technology can also act as a substitute to the law, or a way to force changes to the regulatory framework. For example, in Sweden, a 'technological ruse' used by the Telegraph Board (rather than strict regulation) eventually put an end to the movement. While the cooperatives were mostly using single-wire systems, the Telegraph Board strategically decided to interconnect only the networks using a double-wire system, although the two systems were technically compatible. The Telegraph Board accepted to finance the transition of local networks to double-wire system on the condition that it was given the opportunity to buy the networks. Fearing isolation, the cooperative companies accepted the trade-off one after the other. According to Kaijser (1987: 12), the subscriber's desire to be able to make interurban calls was stronger than their desire to own their telephone networks'. In 1907, there were only seventeen surviving cooperative telephone companies—fourteen of them located in rural areas—connecting only 971 telephones (Holcombe 1911). Three years later, the cooperatives had all been absorbed by the state telephone system or by its private rival, Allmänna Telefonaktiebolag.

In other cases, technology allows to circumvent the law altogether, or make it obsolete. Pirate and free radio stations used radio to subvert the state monopoly from international waters or terrestrial hideouts. In 1984, the *Telecommunications Act* (UK) banned the roll-out of landline infrastructure on the public realm. But Wi-Fi technology did not require physical access and could be used to bypass the tedious conditions and procedures required to roll out physical infrastructure, circumventing the practical chilling effects of the new legislation. In other words, technology might be used to exploit some of the cracks of the legal system or serve as a way to escape it altogether.

These general remarks point to the fact that law and technology are the 'master regulators' of alternative networks. Law appears to be the most important because it can mandate technological change, but technology is the primary driver as it is out of practical feasibility and economic convenience that alternative networks can emerge. According to these observations, Community Networks should self-organize to establish and maintain reflexive strategies than can help them influence technological and legal developments.

Challenge #3: Resisting Co-Optation Through Economic Sustainability

This last point leads to another insight, namely, the fact that alternative networks are likely to be co-opted by market actors or the state. Again, and again, we have seen alternative networks or some of their key players being swallowed up by the very actors, structures or

economic logic they were serving as an alternative for. Co-optation can take many forms. The first US independents that sold out to AT&T weakened the whole movement and provided further justifications for lawmakers to sanction what was becoming AT&T's de facto monopoly. Local telephone authorities in France were from the start ready to devolve their telephone networks to the state, but they eventually found out that the later performed poorly in maintaining and expanding these networks and that co-optation by central authorities came with important drawbacks. For the British Radio Caroline, as soon as the BBC launched new channels, the former star hosts of the pirate stations effectively moved to working for the state. The 'self-co-optation' of many of Consume.net's participants, who left to work in the tech industry, also suggests that when volunteer based, a network commons will often be difficult to sustain in the long run.

Our case studies suggest a possible counter-strategy that consists in establishing partnerships with well-established actors. Here, local authorities appear particularly important. In early US telephone networks for instance, local governments were hostile to Bell's monopoly and did use their powers to the independent's advantage. The strategy only failed when AT&T successfully teamed up with the federal government and was granted the right to buy its competitors and strengthen what many state officials thought to be a 'natural monopoly'.

In her study of Île Sans Fil, a Montreal-based community Internet provider, Powell (2008: 1069) describes how the establishment of a partnership between the city and Île Sans Fil constituted a turning point as it provided 'sustainable funding and a more conventional organisational structure'. Getting the support of public authorities may offer interesting assemblage between the 'public service' logic that the latter are supposed to embody, and the citizen-owned and governed nature of the commons. Building such 'public-commons partnerships' between commons-based networks and a 'partner state' (Kostakis and Bauwens 2014) points to the challenge to overcome the latent—and often justified—distrust of many alternative networks actors towards state authorities and institutional politics.

Other potential solutions consist in fostering alliances between alternets and local professionals and businesses. Of course, this can be done out of shared, disinterested values: FDN and other more recent Community Networks rely on the volunteer labour and generosity of some of their active participants, some of which are connected to small- and medium-sized businesses that offer material and technical support. But governance frameworks can be designed in a way that creates an incentive for businesses to grow alternets. This was key in France's early local telephone networks, where local businessmen partnered with local authorities to find innovative funding schemes. Here again, Guifi has already proved very innovative, building local partnerships with both private and public entities, leveraging taxpayers' support as well as business incentives to grow the telecom commons (Navarro et al. 2016). These alliances with businesses might be controversial, but not only can they bring key resources to alternative networks; they can also help them spread their values within the commercial realm. Through such partnerships, Consume.net might have been able to grow along with the adoption of Wi-Fi hotspots by local businesses (like restaurants), grow stronger, and eventually pre-empt the instance of 'commons-washing' represented by telecom providers' commercial hotspots, like BT's 'Openzone'.

Challenge #4: Building Collective Cohesion

Though often operating at a macro scale, some of our case studies point to the ideological diversity of alternative networks, as well as to the various relationships and strategies of their participants with regard to the political sphere and the action repertoires developed to influence them. Milan (2013) provides an interesting typology to understand these varying approaches to politics in her analysis of emancipatory communication practices: (1) *Beyonders* acknowledge the failure of dominant institutions to answer their needs, and prefer to remain beyond the political system by focusing on the building of self-organized, decentralized and citizen-owned communications networks; (2) *Outsiders* pressure both regulators and incumbents from outside the political system, by means of protests, demonstrations and other campaigning tactics aimed at voicing dissent against the practices of commercial Internet access providers and against the lack of appropriate regulation for Community Networks; and (3) *Insiders* interact with public officials and regulators in order to make them support the deployment of Community Networks. This approach calls for the development and use of capacities for advocacy and mobilization, and the willingness to enter into negotiations with power-holders.

Our case studies suggest that alternative networks typically start as initiatives developing Beyonder strategies, taking the matter into their own hands to meet their need for communications. When the context turns more hostile, for instance when market and state actors coalesce to hinder their development or repress them, they develop oppositional strategies aimed at resisting this trend (legally and technically) and, in such context, generally manage to overcome their political differences.

The hardest part is to maintain some degree of cohesion when alternative networks need to articulate a positive agenda to policy-makers. In France, the Free Radio movement followed this trajectory. After the opening of the first stations, the government sought to crack down on this burst of free radio expression which contravened the government's exclusive right to public broadcasting. TéléDiffusion de France (TDF) sued several free radios in courts and sought to jam their transmissions. And as is often the case in the history of communications and other emancipatory struggles, repression led to technical and legal resistance. In Fessenheim, Alsace, a local Radio Verte was launched in June 1977. After having coped with several jamming attempts and successfully escaped a police arrest in the middle of a broadcast, the struggle became truly technical. As a Radio Verte activist explained,

> our only possible reaction was to have a deeper penetration in all the layers of the population […], to multiply the number of transmission sites so as to be even more powerful than TDF. Our strategy was to oppose decentralization to the centralism of the monopoly.
>
> (Lefebvre 2011: 139)

The movement quickly organized full-fledged legal strategies. In September 1977, some of its most active members created the Association pour la Libération des Ondes (ALO), which benefited from the support of prominent intellectuals, including Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and Umberto Eco (Lefebvre 2011). The organization was meant to coordinate the political and legal defence of the emerging movement while coordinating with their counterparts elsewhere in Europe. In 1978, they fought the French government's bill aimed at boosting

the repression of the movement through petitions, manifestos, court challenges or drafted alternative bills that met their demands. But the movement's bill was aligned with the self-proclaimed 'pragmatist' side of the Free Radio movement opened to advertising, which alienated those who opposed commercialism and more generally represented an important cause of disagreement and fragmentation within the movement (Félix Guattari, for one, left the ALO over its acceptance of advertising to create the Fédération Nationale des Radios Libres). As elsewhere in Europe, the various reforms of the audio-visual sector adopted in the 1980s launched a wave of commercialization and concentration (Hesmondhalgh 2007). The state monopoly had fallen, but a new public-private hybridization would succeed in making the subversive agenda pushed by many in the Free Radio movement a marginal though vocal component of the French media landscape.

Divergence regarding the relation to market actors and resort to commercial-like models is also likely to be controversial for today's Community Networks, which have different political approaches to commoning. Papadimitropoulos (2017) sees three major political currents supporting the commons: the liberals, who anchor their defence of the commons through liberal theory and as middle-way between the state and the market; the reformists, who argue for the gradual adjustment of capitalism to the commons with the aid of a 'partner state'; and finally, the radical anti-capitalists who favour the commons 'against and beyond' capitalism. According to him (2017: 563), if the defenders of the commons are to overcome their contradictions and build solidarity despite their differences, 'a global institutional reform, followed by a number of inter-local and international principles, is sine qua non'. His point further stresses the need for building forms of political organization that can turn Community Networks into an actual social movement, with some degree of coordination, a common agenda and mechanisms to handle political disagreements—or at least push them aside when confronting institutions. The temporary synergies between Consume. net, marked by an anarchist ethos, with the 'reformist' group Campaign for Unmetered Telecommunications—which focused on getting lower prices and unlimited offers in commercial broadband—demonstrate that these can be quite effective: They successfully pre-empted BT's attempt to get lawmakers to outlaw Consume.net by extending the 1984 rule regulating the deployment of wired lines across the public realm to wireless transmission.

Conclusion

Grounded on the analysis of eight precedents of alternative networks, this article has sought to contribute to a definition of alternative communication networks, while identifying several common challenges they face in terms of sustainability. First, alternative networks will always have to manage the tension between the localities they are grounded in and whose needs they should serve and the global connectivity they will most often need to provide to their constituents. Our cases suggest that such global reach will likely rely on large corporations whose values are often at odds with those of alternative networks. Strategies are needed to foster the autonomy and resiliency of Community Networks and decrease this dependence. In this regard, following the pioneering experiments related to the PPA, interconnecting Community Networks transnationally appears to be an important task. Second, alternative networks activists and scholars should be aware that legal regulation and technological de-

sign are co-shaped and co-shaping affordances and services. Community Networks should self-organize to establish and maintain reflexive strategies than can help them influence technological and legal developments. Policy-makers can support the sustainability of these alternatives by making sure to invite them at the table of telecommunications policy reform discussions. Third, there is no single solution to avoid co-optation and ensure economic sustainability. Our case studies suggest that public-commons and private-commons partnerships are valuable options to ensure resilience. Fourth, building up the legal and political defence of alternative networks is an important task. The coordination of Community Networks' actions in the policy field can indeed help tackle big structural issues hampering their growth. Although such coordination needs to account for their diversity to avoid division, alternative networks should establish alliances with advocacy and research organizations with the goal of warding off the forms of collusion diverting telecommunications and media policies from the public interest.

Of course, these are just a few possible lessons that can inform today's activists, researchers and advocates working on alternative networks. More comparative historical research would be needed to help refine and complement these few insights. But if the past can inform contemporary strategies, it is first and foremost by spurring debate, reflexivity and creativity when thinking about the present. The later retains an irreducible indetermination.

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CHAPTER 10

A Brief History of CCLM/CLMP

Pauline Uchmanowicz

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An American invention, the literary form known today as the "little magazine" emerged early in the twentieth century. Small, independent presses evolved in tandem, and by publishing year 2001–2002, the thirty-seventh annual edition of the *International Directory of Little Magazines & Small Presses* listed over five thousand entries. A goodly number of these by and large nonprofit literary enterprises, like others come and gone over the past one hundred years, owe their existence to external funding sources. In the forefront of directing financial support to literary magazine and small-press publishing, the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines (CCLM), enlarged in 1990 and renamed the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses (CLMP), has advanced the literary arts and aided individual writers in the United States for more than thirty-five years. [1]

Pivotal in the national, nonprofit, membership-based literary arts service's inception, founding member and first secretary *(1967–72)* Jules Chametzky had the idea for CCLM's original title. A longtime champion of literary and artistic endeavors that fall outside the mainstream, his role in the naming and ascendance of the organization mirrors the inchoate raison d'etre of the little-magazine movement in general. A CCLM report com missioned by the Ford Foundation and published in 1975 suggests how.

According to the document, the little magazine came about as "the product of idealistic editors, publishers, and writers who were rebelling against [commercial] publishers' indifference to un known writers and their conservative attitudes toward the development of new means of expression" (2). Noncommercial from the outset, these forums for diverse views

[1] I wish to thank Jeffrey Lependorf, Executive Director of CLMP, for granting me access to the organization's archive, housed in their offices at 154 Christopher Street in New York City. I likewise am indebted to CLMP staff members Katherine Sarkis, Robert Casper, and Jessie Koester for providing me on-site assistance.

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and styles published prose, poetry, criticism, and political commentary while surviving "on their philosophy of altruism or the support of patrons and friends" (2–3). The term "little magazine" as applied to such publications came into coinage around the time of the First World War. It pertained not to size, content, or the fact that contributors were rarely paid but to readership, suggesting a "limited group of 'intelligent' readers who could recognize the avant garde" (3). Many great modern and postmodern authors were later "discovered" in the "littles," including Ernest Hemingway, Anais Nin, William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, Ishmael Reed, and Sherley Anne Williams.

The ensuing decades also ushered in writers and mavericks who became thriving independent publishers, notably James Laughlin, who used inherited money to found New Directions in 1936 in New York City; and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who in 1955 launched City Lights' Publishers in San Francisco on a shoestring (Feldman 4). More recent literary projects echoing the fiscal sensibilities of these progenitors include *Glimmer Train,* which Susan Burmeister-Brown and Linda Davies began in Portland, Oregon, in 1990, and support with their own private funds; and the nonprofit, California-based poetry miscellany *Free Lunch*, established by Ron Offen in 1988 and providing subscriptions "free to all serious poets living in the U.S.A." Ferlinghetti mean while remains loyal to his own pioneering ethos, advising artists and writers who came to hear him read at Woodstock Poetry Festival 2002 to eschew "government grants." But competing for audiences in a publishing arena presently dominated by ten multinational media conglomerates—all with annual revenues in excess of $16.5 billion and peaking at a $129-billion high for General Electric ("The Big Ten")—most "littles" and small presses cannot afford the luxury of the Beat granddaddy's financial integrity.

Another mid-century, noncommercial-arts visionary, Chametzky co-founded The Massachusetts Review in 1958 (Volume One, Number One, came out in 1959) to promote offbeat, nontraditional, and under-represented literary and intellectual talent. As the magazine's fortieth-anniversary issue declares, *MR* was committed to "diversity from the start." Its then thirty-one year-old co-founder sought with Sidney Kaplan, its co-editor, to recognize, represent, and give voice to African Americans, Native Americans, and other "so-called minority and ethnic" groups, including feminists and those exploring "the story of the Holocaust" (Chametzky, "Preface" 456). Soon after launching the magazine, Chametzky banded with like-minded individuals, who wished to secure publicity, growth, and solvency for the "littles." Together they engendered CCLM, "the first organization in the history of America set up solely to aid the noncommercial literary magazines in the country," as then president William Phillips noted in his report of 1969 (2).

As the inaugural secretary of CCLM, Chametzky was de facto its first historian. Piecing together a chronology from his reports and remembrances, the genesis of the organization emerges. "CCLM grew primarily out of the efforts of an earlier group, the Association of Literary Magazines of America *(ALMA)*," the one-time recorder documented in his first annual report (4). ALMA had formed in November of 1961, in St. Paul, Minnesota, at a meeting sponsored by the Carleton Miscellany, initiated by its then editor Reed Whittemore and partially subsidized by the McKnight Foundation (4). "I got a call from Whittemore to come to St. Paul and meet with other magazine editors, some what of a sentimental journey for me," Chametzky, a University of Minnesota PhD alumnus, recollected in an interview. Representatives of nineteen magazines and several publishing concerns attended. "It was

an extraordinary meeting," the then MR managing editor continued, citing among the assembled literati Victor Navasky, Allen Tate, Robie Macauley, and Robert "Bobby" Bly, who put out a poetry magazine called The 50s. "He was thinking of changing the name to The 60s. I subscribed and we became lifelong friends."

Over the course of several days, the ALMA members met in separate groups in a downtown hotel. "The people from the little magazines—we were discussing promotion, circulation, money—all those collective problems," Chametzky recalled. "But the 'big shots' were in another seminar room and came up with a statement of lofty goals, setting up a split between the established journals and the littles."

The organization continued to meet every two years, but by the close of 1965, after four years of existence, it was kaput. Commenting on its contributions to the social history of independent publishing in America in his two-year report of 1969, the former CCLM secretary noted:

> ALMA had succeeded in bringing together, in an unprecedented and rather historic way, for mutual exchange, information, [and] support, members of the diverse and various literary magazine community—perhaps thereby helping to create a sense that it was a community—and on occasion dramatizing for the public the fact and importance of their existence [4].

Despite the group's decision to formerly disband, "little" editors continued to cast about for funds, without which they believed "the literary community would cease entirely"(4). To resurrect and strengthen its esprit de corps would require a savior. A succession of brief, CCLM disciplinary annals penned over the years laud a group of men as filling this breach, but few mention the woman without whom the organization might never have arisen: Carolyn Kizer.[2] "I give her full credit," Chametzky stated unequivocally.

When Lyndon Johnson established the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities as government agencies in 1965, Kizer, former editor of *Poetry Northwest* and a longtime active member and officer in ALMA, was appointed Director of Literary Programs; Ralph Ellison and John Steinbeck joined her on the board. As Chametzky related, it was Kizer who had the "original impulse" to channel money from the federal government to little magazines and pay authors out of the pot. Convening in New York City in February of 1966 to discuss "fresh methods" for funding the literary arts, she met with Whittemore and Chametzky, former members of ALMA's executive committee; and William Phillips, editor of Partisan Review and spokesperson for the Council of Literary Magazines (CLM), "an informal grouping of five of the better-known literary mag azines in the country"(4). Also present was Caroline Rand Herron, *PR*'s managing editor. Kizer recommended that the editors draft a proposal for her to present to the NEA and see what would come of it. But sensing the wisdom of first uniting ALMA and CLM as a single nonprofit entity, Chametzky, who had been ALMA's elected president from 1965–67, said, "Let's put together both our organizations." The agreed upon merger's first order of business that day was selecting a new name.

Six years earlier, in the wake of the historic February 1, Woolworth lunch counter sit-in, staged to end racial segregation in the American south by four black freshman students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College in Greensboro, the Student Nonviolent

[2] George Plimpton, in charge of the pilot "literary project;" an anthology of American literature derived from literary magazines and sponsored by the NEA, was an early though not founding member of CCLM.

Coordinating Committee (SNCC) had formed (West 46–47). With student activism against escalating U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War about to explode nationwide, Chametzky thought of SNCC (which he pronounces "snick") in suggesting to the founding delegates, "Let's call it the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines." As he acknowledged to me regarding the moniker, "Behind it was SNCC—but I wouldn't have said it out loud to Phillips; he was somewhat conservative."

By spring of the following year, a three-page statement of intent and request for a grant was submitted to the NEA in the name of CCLM and signed by the executive committee of ALMA (Chametzky, Whittemore, and George Plimpton, editor of the *Paris Review*) and CLM members (Phillips and Macauley, former editor of the *Kenyon Review*) (Chametzky, "Annual Report" 4). Their application was denied. Nevertheless, CCLM pushed to establish itself as a nonprofit, continuing through the summer to secure public or private funds and making a second appeal to the NEA. In December, the Endowment approved a matching grant of $50,000, and CCLM was underway.

A few weeks later, the national Office of Recorder of Deeds, Washington, D.C., issued in perpetuity a Certificate of Incorporation to the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, making official its not-for-profit educational and charitable intent. Dated January 4, 1967, the five-page document lists nine articles of incorporation, chief among them to: advance the literary arts; aid noncommercial literary magazines, individual artists and writers; enhance literary and artistic standards, including of production; provide for literary projects and conferences of writers and editors; and give awards, scholarships, fellowships, grants, and other forms of aid and encouragement to literary magazines, artists, and writers. CCLM also proposed to open an information center, replete with a library to accumulate periodicals (including magazines and newsletters) and other resources deemed important to the literary magazine and small-press community.

Alone in bringing a semblance of diversity to the mostly Anglo cast of five men who signed the certificate of incorporation and constituted the initial CCLM Board of Directors (including Whittemore, Phillips, Macauley, and Carl Stover of the National Institute of Public Affairs), Jules Chametzky's name was misspelled on the charter, an "s" typo-ed in place of "z." The slip-up unwittingly presaged the Council's early growing pains on the road to becoming the inclusive organization the *MR* editor presciently envisioned back in the late 1950s.

Accepting an offer of free office space and administrative assistance from the National Institute of Public Affairs while searching for private funds to match the Endowment's grant, CCLM operated out of a Washington office from June of 1967, to October 1968 (5). "We now met in Washington in comfortable chairs," Chametzky reminisced about the period. Kizer and Whittemore secured the organization's first substantial private grants, and groundwork for its subsequent programs was laid. During its inaugural year, CCLM boasted a budget of approximately $125,000, issuing grants ranging from $250 to $3,000 to thirty-eight magazines ("CCLM Biennial Report 1972/1973" 1).

Phillips meanwhile was lobbying to move CCLM headquarters to New York City; Stover opposed the idea. Ultimately Chametzky, who viewed Manhattan as a Mecca of multiethnic literary arts activity and thus a more appropriate location from which to discharge services and dispense funds, helped Phillips "pry it loose." CCLM encamped first to a New York office donated by Coal Credit Company and then to the American National Theater and Academy.

During this early period of movement and growth, CCLM kept afloat due to the efforts of just three board members, Chametzky, Whittemore, and Phillips. Recognizing the need to broaden the group's base beyond its largely East Coast strong hold, they sought out editors from different geographic regions of the country to create a Board of Consultants to act in advisory capacity on general policy and to consider specific project requests. Early consultants included Charles Newman, editor of Chicago's *TriQuarterly*, and writer Russell Banks among the Midwest contingent, and George Hitchcock, founder and editor of West Coast publication *Kayak*, from Santa Cruz. A system of rotating grants committees drawn from the magazine community was thus established (Chametzky, "Annual Report" 5). For a time the reconstituted CCLM leadership, numbering thirteen, met every three to six months at different locations in New York to make decisions about giving out money. "Phillips was a great operator in the city and with Caroline Herron's help would get us space," Chametzky elaborated.

At one fateful meeting, twelve board members sat in assembly in a New York location and the CCLM secretary was the last person to come in the room. "One of you will betray me," he joked, to ease unspoken tensions. Someone, perhaps Charles Newman, replied, "All of us, Jules, all of us!" For as Chametzky explained to me, "Back then, editors were competitive, but we were trying to cooperate and mostly did." Voicing a perceived stumbling block to the pending success of CCLM in promoting the eclectic spectrum of journals and writers emerging on the literary arts horizons, Chametzky next proposed, "We don't have any black writers or journals."

Phillips replied that the *MR* editor suffered from "white guilt."

Chametzky lobbed back that it was more like "white responsibility." As a result of his initiative, in 1968, CCLM appointed as "special members" to the board a three-person Ad Hoc Committee on Black Literary Projects to oversee the funding of African-American magazines, writers, and artists. They included A.B. Spellman, editor of *Rhythm* and a former Morehouse College faculty member; David Henderson, editor of *Umbra*; and Michael Thelwell, director of the W.E.B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, a writer whose work recently had appeared in the landmark *Best Stories by Negro Authors* (1967), edited by Langston Hughes. [3]

Launching the Black Literary Projects section of CCLM coincided with a tumultuous, uncertain period in U.S. history. Unrest on college campuses in the name of Black Power, Women's Liberation, and the Peace Movement was mounting, and many CCLM-sponsored magazines and writers had begun to speak out against the Vietnam War. Added anguish followed the Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy assassinations. The outcome of the 1968 presidential election loomed, and CCLM board members worried that the steady flow of largesse from Washington would evaporate. As it happened, Norman Sherman, press secretary to presidential candidate Vice President Hubert Humphrey at the time, had been a graduate school friend of Chametzky's at the University of Minnesota. Jules and Anne Halley had gotten married in the Shermans' living room and Anne was godmother to their child. Chametzky called the political aide and arranged to meet him in Washington, prodded at

[3] A companion volume, *Children ef the Night: The Best Short Stories by Black Writers 1967 to the Present*, edited by Gloria Naylor, was published in 1995 by Back Bay Books, an imprint of Little, Brown and Company. As a side note concerning the eventual desegregation of governance amid CCLM: the writers Ishmael Reed and Lorenzo Thomas served as members of its Board of Directors in 1976.

the insistence of presiding CCLM president Phillips, who attended the meeting along with Caroline Herron.

Seated in Sherman's living room, the CCLM secretary voiced the fear that if the Democrats lost the election his organization would lose its money. Sherman assured him, "We'll give you double."

But Chametzky, a Eugene McCarthy Democrat, insisted that they "get serious." Talk turned to Vietnam, and the magazine editors tried to convince Sherman to get Humphrey to move from the LBJ position and attempt to carry the left-progressive vote. Richard Nixon won the race, and a funny thing happened on the way to the White House. "He gave CCLM *four times* the amount of money; to this day, we still don't understand that," Chametzky mused in repeating the story.

The increase in federal funding coincided with CCLM's physical move, in December 1969, to 80 Eighth Avenue (intersecting with Eighth Street, on the border between Greenwich Village and the section known as Chelsea), an expanded facility. Alongside the geographic change, women began to move into the organization's leadership in marginal ways. Behind the scenes, following the departure in less than a year of David Bournes, Caroline Rand Herron, always an important voice in the organization, became CCLM's second executive director, overseeing day-to-day operations with staff assistant Lois Theodorou. A woman would not break the upper ceiling of the organization until January 1, 1970, when June Degnan, sister of poet George Oppen and then publisher of the *San Francisco Review* (associated with New Directions Press), became a consultant to the board. Finally, Beat poetry grande dame Anne Waldman would sit on the primary board of directors and poet Siv Cedering Fox serve as a consultant in 1972–73—the only two visible women in the leadership besides Herron in as many years. By 1976, with poet Leslie Silko among the headcount, only four out of seventeen CCLM board members and consultants were women.

Despite race and gender imbalances within its directing body, the late 60s and early 70s also ushered in a time of strong federal funding for CCLM, almost half the money coming from the NEA. Able to re-grant funds directly to various literary magazines, the organization's boon to the independent publishing world—past and present—cannot be overstated. CCLM grantees with addresses (many listed as New York apartment numbers) as of December 31, 1969, numbered just over one hundred; as of August 2002, the active membership roster exceeded 350. Many listed in 1969, such as *Love Letter* (Berkeley, California), *0 to 9* (New York, New York), *Pebble* (Lincoln, Nebraska), *Mele* (Honolulu, Hawaii), and *Transpacific* (Ft. Collins, Colorado) long since have disappeared, or like *Burning Deck* (relocated from Durham, Connecticut to Providence, Rhode Island) reconstituted as small presses. Others possessed staying power, ascending to now national prominence, including along with *MR*, *Antioch Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Shenandoah*, and *Hanging Loose*. Still somewhat politically stymied during its nascent existence, when Manhattan's Lower East Side Beat-poetry legend Ed Sanders applied for money for his *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts*, CCLM replied, "No—we can't give it to you," according to Chametzky.

At the time, the board's deliberations regarding funding concerned more than an individual publication's supposed aesthetic merit. An anecdote Chametzky tells about those days lends a point of reference to this subject. A short time after Nixon's first presidential victory, Michael Straight, a White House cultural liaison contacted CCLM, requesting a meeting

with its presiding officers. The Washington representative traveled to New York for the occasion, meeting Chametzky and others at a Spanish restaurant near the Chelsea Hotel. CCLM membership then stood above two hundred magazines, and the U.S. president was displeased with much of their content.

"You're getting all this money and they're all against the Vietnam War and Nixon. He's like a cornered rat—he can be very dangerous," the liaison warned the frontline of the literary avant-garde.

In narrating these events, Chametzky conceded that no visible consequences came of the implied threat. "It later came out that Straight had himself been a communist in the 30s in England," he speculated as to why CCLM kept its funding.

Also during the early Eighth Avenue years, as secretary Chametzky documents in his 1969 "Program Activities" report and according to my interview with him, under the leadership of William Phillips and Caroline Rand Herron, CCLM orchestrated and funded pilot projects that raised the visibility of the literary arts for decades afterwards. It set up its first on-location public library (a 26' x 21' room containing fifteen shelving units); established the College Contest Literary Magazine awards (now defunct); and formed relations with the Modern Language Association, exhibiting a selection of literary magazines at their annual national meeting. Additionally, the Council created a New York City reading series called "Poetry in the Park," which drew ethnically and economically diverse participation, including from under-privileged inner-city grade school children. With the help of the Poetry Center of the 92nd Street YM-YWHA, it sponsored evenings of discussions and readings with writers and magazine editors. CCLM also published the *Handbook of Literary Magazine and Business Production*, a model for CCLM/CLMP's latter-day annual *Directory of Literary Magazines and Presses*.

By 1972, the budget for CCLM had climbed to approximately $400,000. Pleased with its funding growth, the organization likewise was scrambling "to respond to the whole range of literary magazines, a remarkably diverse gathering in this country, and ... sought to keep factionalism and ideological biases out [its] judgments" when it came to re-granting and awarding prizes ("CCLM Biennial Report 1972/1973" 1–2). Along with lending support to established quarterlies, CCLM grew more receptive to "new magazines, new voices, new forms," its list of grantees bourgeoning to include the likes of *Aphra* (a feminist journal), *Fiction* (a tabloid publishing experimental stories), *Quetzal* (an American Indian magazine), *Gay Sunshine* (a homosexual tabloid literary journal), *Holy Beggars' Gazette* (a literary magazine exploring Hasidic teachings), and *Nkombo* (an African American magazine with ties to the Free Southern Theatre of Louisiana) (2).

"We were trying to be more democratic," Chametzky concurred about the changing nature of CCLM. "Every other meeting the board of directors tried to gather someplace outside of New York. Every time we went to one of these areas the little magazines would come out of the woodwork and accuse us of being New York elites." Infighting among the organization's leadership also was brewing. According to Chametzky's recollection, then *Antioch Review* editor Lawrence Grauman, slated to write a history of CCLM, called him "looking for the dirt." The *MR* editor further claimed, "He wrote and threatened me; the piece never got written." As the direction of the organization grew more diffuse, Chametzky resigned as secretary in 1972. "I also wanted to do more writing," he admitted.

CCLM did continue to grow through the 1970s, with federal funding in the form of a "block grant" from the NEA (the literary arts service's underwriter since inception), reaching nearly half a million dollars by 1980 ("CLMP Narrative" 1). "In 1980, CCLM began its first ongoing effort to diversify its funding base by seeking support from the private sector" ("Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines" 1). The move was perhaps more necessary than mercenary, since the Ronald Reagan presidential administration would in its early years yank the block grant away from the re-granters, pulling it back-in-house at the NEA ("CLMP Narrative" 1). Among private funding sources during the 80s, CCLM counted Exxon Corporation, the *New York Times*, the Mobil Foundation, and the Liz Claiborne Foundation. Likewise a prominent corporate sponsor, the General Electric Foundation established the G. E. Foundation Awards (1983–1989), a groundbreaking program offering direct support for young and emerging writers that has since become pro forma in the world of sponsored giving to the literary arts, as even a cursory glance at a recent issue of *Poets & Writers* assures. Over the life of the G. E. Foundation Awards, winners comprised a diverse group, including Natalie Kusz, Sigrid Nunez, Gregory Kolovakos, C. D. Wright, John Yau, Rita Dove, Julia Alvarez, Andrei Codrescu, Tama Janowitz, and Paul Hoover.

CCLM's services to literary magazines similarly shifted in focus, making inroads into the commercial world with projects to increase advertising in, and sales of, small magazines as a means of revenue. The organization itself meanwhile pitched for funds in a public way—for instance, by a placing an ad in *Newsweek* that listed the names of twenty-eight well-known modern authors above the plea: "The literary magazines that first published these great writers are going out of business. Unless you help."

Meanwhile, the squabbling Chametzky encountered within the organization during the early 70s had not necessarily abated a decade later. In fact, critics were circling in the late 70s and early 80s, generating what a file in the present-day CLMP archive labels "bad press" in commentaries with names like "Factions Divide Small-Press Movement," "Insidious Intermediaries," and "Perfidy." In 1979, Len Fulton, founder and editor of *International Directory of Magazines and Small Presses*, led the charge, accusing CCLM of self-interest and implying that founding quarterlies such as *MR* and *Partisan Review* were among its "five or six customers on five-figure twice-a-year grants" (3). A year later, Richard Kostelanetz wrote of serving as one of five elected judges to "participate in disbursing funds to literary magazines" and discovering "certain omissions" regarding applications (22). For his part, Nicholas Nyary, then executive director, conceded in a trade journal opinion piece that in its early days CCLM "appeared as a plausible agent" to the Nixon-Ford governments who funded it, "because it represented the East Coast, liberal, Anglo-Jewish literary establishment"; but he also asserted how, from the outset, "this leadership was contested by heirs of the Sixties"*(12)*. Still, Nyary pronounced the small press movement of the 80s "troubling," hoping the literary climate could survive the decade's "heavy bureaucratic hand"*(12)*.

According to CCLM's own record keeping (audited by Samuel Shedler, Certified Public Account), the year prior to Jules Chametzky's formal parting from the organization, "a total of 291 grants were made, ranging from $50 to $8,575" ("CCLM Biennial Report 1972/1973" 1). Between 1967 and 1984, it awarded over $3.4 million to more than 1500 different magazines, from larger, more established university quarterlies to small regional journals. But seven years after Fulton raised the issue of accountability for disbursal of funds, in 1986, CCLM would

in fact act "as fiscal agent for 18 magazines and literary projects for a total of $152, 461," according to information certified by its annual independent audit ("Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines" 5).

Change was inevitable at CCLM, including geographic relocation to a four-office, rent-free space at 666 Broadway, donated by *Harper's* magazine. In 1989, following an exhaustive search headed by then board member and *New Yorker* editor Alice Quinn, a Midwesterner named James Sitter joined the organization as executive director (Bergholz 1). CCLM was then at a crossroads. On his watch, the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines would redirect its mission to advocate more broadly in the field of literary publishing, enlarging its membership to include independent presses and undergoing a name change in 1990 to the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses (CLMP). Sitter, a former director of the Minnesota Center for Book Arts who had many working-years experience in the industry as a book buyer, small-press distributor, and consultant, foresaw the 1990s as a "fertile time for independents" (Andrews 11). He moved to make consultants available on a subsidized basis to little magazines and small presses, recognizing the need to provide technical assistance to independents in the field as "crucial" in the coming decade (11). CLMP's newly affirmed mission was to help literary publishers, as well as to consider technological trends in publishing and small press distribution.

The reconstituted literary arts service later found a new home at 154 Christopher Street in the Chelsea district of Manhattan, still its base of operation today. CLMP headquarters fills a small office space, where young, hip, and unaffected staffers conduct business from within Dilbert-style cubicles, an office dog begging for bites of deli sandwiches underfoot. A terrific magazine rack—as vivid as any in a blockbuster bookstore—rests just inside the entrance door on the right, doubling as a display to promote the buying of CLMP magazines online *(shipping and handling paid by the literary arts service)*. Crowning jewel of the location, a modest library of archival and current publications by CLMP members occupies the freestanding, left-rear corner of the layout.

As if living out a certain fantasy of writers, critics, and others in the literary arts world, the CLMP staff has whittled the archive containing its organizational history down to half a filing cabinet drawer, letting the trail run cold at 1990, as I found on a visit to their offices in July of 2002. "Here are some newsletters," Jeffrey Lependorf, CLMP's current executive director offered me with a disarming smile, all of them dated from the past twelve months. By tracing the organization's textual transition from original typed, hand-corrected paper documents through to desktop published, fine-paper stock brochures, I would have to deduce a probable chronology of the CCLM/CLMP on my own. But first he would join me briefly at a long conference table in the library to chat about recent development at the nonprofit.

"Our goal is to get writing to readers," Lependorf, who hails from a classical music and literary arts consulting background told me, explaining that literature has special needs and special audiences differing from other kinds of publishing. "The reason why almost all new poetry is in the hands of independent publishers and not corning out of big houses is due to the simple fact that a poetry book will not sell as well as a self-help or cookbook." Consequently, providing technical assistance that demystifies processes between writers and publishers—mainly printing and distribution—is central to the organization's current mission of delivering literature to mass audiences.

Among visible innovations, CLMP has added on-line publishers to its membership base in an effort to support "New Media," including sound-image readable texts, e-books, and other electronic methods forgetting literature into print or circulation. A movement to extend the reach of the organization is likewise ongoing. "Why not make it an international community because of internet access? It's a way for our publishers to get their literature overseas, across borders, and vice versa," he enthused, acknowledging that multiethnic literature of the United States started in "little" literary magazines, an observation to which MR stands in testament. "There's a need for a diversity of voices," he continued, echoing the sentiments of CCLM co-founder Jules Chametzky but with a postmodern, global twist: The indie-publishing world, historically viewed as "alternative" when compared to negative-connoting "commercials," should now work in partnership with the economies of conventional publishing to engage new, worldwide audiences. "We now see this as an eco-system between large publishing and small," the executive director said. "It makes sense to go back and forth between the worlds. We're trying to broker more relationships, making this mutually beneficial. Some people are 'farmed out' to the big presses from the indie-media. It makes sense for people to have more books to read." Potentially broad-reaching authors, publishers, and titles served by the organization roll off his tongue nonstop. Recognizing the reigning zeitgeist, he held up a literary journal called *One Story*, its eponymous contents a selection entitled "Sensitivity" by fiction writer Todd Pruzan—the very same volume later profiled and pictured in a publishing brief printed in the October 14, 2002 issue of *Newsweek*.

Making his exit, for the remainder of the afternoon the director obligingly lent me the privacy of the on-site library, where I sat surrounded by recent issues of the two hundred-plus member magazines to which the organization subscribes and dozens of current literature volumes published by small-press members. (Aging books and journals periodically are passed along to the New York Public Library to make way for the new.) A writer could spend hours among CLMP's collection, browsing and reading in the narrow room circled by framed poetry broadsides. As I rose to admire the offerings, *West Branch*, *The Reading Room*, *Barrow Street*, *3rd Bed*, *Poetry*, *Calyx*, *Fence*, and *Rattapallax* all caught my eye. I dawdled over Laurie Foo's *Bingo Under the Crucifix* (2002), a collection of pop stories inspired by tabloid headlines from the likes of People magazine and published by Coffee House Press of Minneapolis. Finally, I stood before a neat row of little magazines with The Massachusetts Review printed along the spines, glad for the hand that Jules Chametzky had in securing their station on the shelf.

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CHAPTER 11

Promising Prospects, and the Hurdles Along the Way: Sharing and Archiving Community Media Content Online

Joost van Beek

In *Transnationalizing Radio Research: New Approaches to an Old Medium*, edited by Golo Föllmer and Alexander Badenoch, 223–30. Transcript, 2018.

Community media, most pithily defined as broadcasting "for, by and about the community" (UNESCO 2001), produce an extraordinary range of politically, culturally and artistically valuable and topical content. Defined by a mission to serve and represent communities rather than generate profit, independence from commercial and governmental interests, and a participatory, volunteer-driven model (Coyer/van Beek 2010: 136–138), they have in particular demonstrated an "extensive and sustained" engagement with migrant groups through (often minority-language or bilingual) community programming as well as programs with an explicitly intercultural or anti-racist focus. (Titley 2010: 141–145) Given its focus on community building and bottom-up production models, this media sector should in theory benefit especially from the increased availability of interactive digital platforms for sharing and archiving content. Since on-air broadcasting is an inherently evanescent medium, digital archives can play a key complementary role in preserving and sharing the stories that are told on community media.

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Even if the impact of community media is by intention primarily local, online access to their content can also expand opportunities for (intercultural) dialogue both regionally or nationally and in diaspora communities. In reality, online publishing practices unfortunately remain patchy, as do efforts to operate communal, networked archives. Consequently, programming that could make valuable contributions to broader cultural and socio-political conversations has remained underutilized.

In this chapter, I will draw on the findings of the EU-funded project *CAPTCHA—Creative Approaches to Living Cultural Archives* (2013–2015, http://livingar-chives.eu/), in which we explored community media archiving practices across Europe, and the study conducted during the project (van Beek 2016), in order to identify best practices for preserving and sharing content online and the challenges standing in the way.

The Promise of Networked Archives

While community media audiences can develop an especially personal or loyal bond with the station through its opportunities for active participation or its focus on grassroots concerns, their expectations have changed in line with the ever-expanding scope of streaming and on-demand content. As *Radio Orange*'s Jan Hestmann warned, people want to be able to listen to "what they're interested in, [..] wherever and whenever they want." (ibid: 9)

In our study we found that community media often struggle to keep up with this sea change in media use. Many are slow to embrace a transformation of what 'making radio' means—from solely producing on-air broadcasts to publishing media content in a variety of formats and interacting with listeners across different platforms. They are constrained mostly by lacking financial and organizational resources, but a cultural disconnect between the realms of radio and online plays a role as well. Those constraints also affect their capacity to not just maintain in-house archives, but ensure their public or online accessibility. All too often, legacies that represent not only a particular station's history but that of whole communities are, as the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland's Anne O'Brien warned, "at risk of being lost forever." *(ibid: 9)*

In this light, online initiatives to exchange and archive programming on joint public platforms like the Spanish/Latin-American Red Nosotras en el Mundo (http://www.rednosotrasenelmundo.org/) play an especially valuable role, but they also face oversized challenges. The examples of EPRA *(Échanges et Productions Radiophoniques)*, which once presented 11,000 hours of French community media content; Cross Radio, which involved radio stations from across former Yugoslavia; the program exchange platform of Ireland's Community Radio Forum; and the Belgian community media database RadioSwap illustrate how they are often confronted with fatal hurdles, falling victim to funding short-falls, technical failures, or lacking organizational capacity.

Nevertheless, Austria's Cultural Broadcasting Archive *(CBA* https://cba.fro. at/) and Germany's Freie-Radios.net, hosting over 80,000 audio files each, have grown well beyond program-sharing tools of the community media federations that support them, into collaborative archives which present a rich documentation of contemporary history. Crucially, they have helped broadcasters publish content online, and highlight or integrate it on their own sites, even when they lack the resources to create their own archiving structures. Most

stations only upload a selection of their broadcasts to them, however. Moreover, they seem designed primarily to serve the needs of participating broadcasters, rather than to provide listeners at large with user-friendly interfaces to browse and search the wealth of community media content they offer (van Beek 2016: 88–2).

Reasons to Excel

In principle, community media should be particularly motivated to ensure the preservation of their content and excellently positioned to optimize online interaction with it. After all, each of the defining strengths of community media finds its parallel potential online.

Community media spring from the same groundswell of DIY culture, in which people claim "the right to be heard rather than be spoken to," as the "acts of […] independent, collaborative or participatory media-making" which have flourished especially online (Deuze 2006: 267, 273). Their participatory ethos, which identifies citizen-producers rather than passive consumers, overlaps with that of citizen journalism (Bosch 2013: 29), e.g. at similarly volunteer- and mission-driven hyperlocal news sites. (Williams 2016) Social media can help them fulfill their key mandate "of engaging with audiences in participatory ways, and allowing audience members to determine content through collaborative journalism." (Bosch 2013: 37)

Community media provide "artists and creative entrepreneurs [with] a platform for testing new ideas and […] content that cannot be conveyed in the mass media" (European Parliament 2007: 9). Austrian Dorf TV, which cofounder Otto Tremetzberger called "a hybrid of TV and Internet," showcases how embracing the online recruitment, development and archiving of "user-generated television" can provide them with a complementary medium. Instead of trying to pull a spatially dispersed community of producers into in-house production structures and set broadcasting times, its portal allows them to store, work and interact on their videos remotely as well.

Community media capture unique content that is "intrinsically interwoven with the lives of local community members" (Raveendran 2016) and gives voice to grassroots communities that are underrepresented in mainstream media and institutions. Theirs are the memories that are most vulnerable to being lost. Archiving this content "will ensure the voice of the 'ordinary' people will be recorded and available for future generations" when "the majority of mainstream archives […] tend to be the voices of those in power and authority" (Loughran 2015). Otherwise, Jörg Depta of Berlin's Pi-Radio warned, "while the public service broadcasters enjoy the luxury of having their own archive at the German Broadcasting Archive, nothing will be left for historians […] from the 'free radio stations' and their predecessors, the pirate stations" (van Beek 2016: 9–10).

Community media help "strengthen the identities of specific communities of interest" (European Parliament 2007: 6), presenting locations of cultural encounters as well as platforms for "the participation and emancipation process" of minority groups (Online/More Colour in the Media 2004). Archiving presents a key tool for protecting cultural heritage, and interactively publishing content online presents an opportunity to rouse engagement with minority cultures across geographic, community and generational boundaries. Online community broadcaster Radio Kultura, for example, addresses a diasporic Basque audience as well as a bicultural local audience of French and Basque listeners.

Greater use of on-demand and social media, already home to virtual communities that play an especially important role as "spaces for identity, expression and participation" for diasporic populations (Georgiou 2013: 84), could expand the parameters of community media to become "a cosmopolitan space of cultural netizens," geographically fragmented but symbolically connected (Nassanga/Manyozo/Lopes 2013: 259). On the site of one rural Irish community station, a remote listener commented to say: "Can't wait to go back home to Connemara. Listen to you guys every night. Helps me get to sleep. You're keeping me going until I can move back" (van Beek 2016:116).

Sobering Reality

In short, community media should be "well equipped to take on" the challenges of digital platforms: "they are grounded in an experimental ethos" in using technology and "cater for specific […] interests but also connect communities across boundaries and distances" (Hallett/Hintz 2010: 159). And yet, the publication, distribution and archiving of content online is a scattershot affair, often lacking an overarching digital strategy (Leindecker 2015: 14). Many smaller broadcasters are yet to advance beyond "simulcasting […] web and FM transmissions" which was already "increasingly common" a decade ago (Lewis 2008: 25). Others only embed some selection of audio content in playlists, blog posts or news items, with at most few and inconsistently applied metadata. Sometimes, more structured archives exist only for specific programs or initiatives; a fragmented practice which is exacerbated by having to rely on short-term, project-specific funding opportunities.

A review of community radio stations in Germany's umbrella association BFR revealed that only one in five offered ways "to access (posts with) past audio content by theme or topic" and "just under one in four allowed listeners to navigate to past audio content by day, week or month" (van Beek 2014). The rates were even lower among Spanish community media. Endeavors to highlight, structure and contextualize archival content in interactive or narrative ways that would ensure its discoverability in the long term (Leindecker 2015: 15) remained a remote prospect.

Online archiving efforts have often depended on the work of lone, passionate individuals, who might be increasingly challenged by ever more complex technologies. Switzerland's Radio LoRa has been uploading its full program since 2002 thanks to the pioneering work of Christoph Lindenmaier, whom his colleagues described as "a genius, [who] made everything himself" (van Beek 2016: 53). But its system has remained essentially unchanged since then, meaning you now need auxiliary software to listen to archived broadcasts, since they are still being uploaded as Real Media files.

Our study found relatively few examples of collaborations with comparably grassroots, activist communities of online developers, and hardly any recruitment efforts that targeted potential volunteers with a primary interest in web or tech rather than on-air radio. Spain's CUAC FM, where software engineers volunteered to develop a mobile app and an open-source system to automatically record and archive broadcast content, demonstrates the benefits of doing so. [1]

[1] See https://cuacfm.org/novas/2017/02/nova-version-da-app-android/ and http://radioco.org/en/about/.

The extent to which content is archived in-house varies too. While Slovenia's Radio Študent maintains an internal archive with 40 thousand objects, an interviewee at one radio station confessed that "we have a few cartons of stuff, but that's basically our archive". Current broadcasts now seem to be universally recorded and stored, but if this content is not labelled and organized its accessible preservation is still under threat.

Much historical material may have "scattered" and only survive "in a drawer, in the attic" of former volunteers or listeners (Brunow 2015: 9). On the bright side, the capacity of community media to cultivate active volunteer and sympathizer communities means this is an opportunity as much as it is a danger. At Radio Dreyeckland, former volunteers return to digitize the programs they themselves made. Radio Študent "crowdsourced" the station's historical record in an experiment it dubbed 'on-air ethnography', and even reconstructed its first ever broadcast.

What's Holding Them Back?

Essentially, it remains true that "the sector lacks the skills, resources and notably the regulatory support" to fully utilize the digital media environment (European Parliament 2007: 51). In addition to scarce funding opportunities, the main challenges community media face relate to copyright, volunteers, conflicting objectives, and data capacity and security.

When legal rights issues hinder the web archiving efforts of much larger institutions (Sierman/Teszelszky 2017), it is no surprise that community media wrestle with them. Specifically, copyright regulations that preclude or limit the online publication of musical content played a major role in discouraging most every station to some extent from uploading content—not just music programs, but mixed-content journalistic broadcasts as well. Only concerted, sustained advocacy can offer long-term relief. When Austrian community radio stations succeeded, after years of negotiations, in concluding a ground-breaking three-year collective agreement with collecting societies (Neuwirth 2014), CBA contributors uploaded over 500 files in a single day.

Community broadcasters rely on volunteers who are eager to learn and motivated by a sense of idealism. But this also means they can't necessarily be obliged to take on the additional tasks of uploading and categorizing their content, and stations have to rely on persuasion. High turnover and divergent levels of digital literacy of volunteers, many of whom might be from disadvantaged communities, affect the consistency of archiving and the quality of metadata. Centralizing the process is often unfeasible, not least with multilingual programming, so community media must continuously invest in training and guidance.

Contradictory use cases hamper the discoverability of archived content. Community radio websites, focused on helping regular listeners catch up with specific programs, tend to replicate on-air structures: hour-long units, fitted into archives by date and/or program that have frequently mushroomed into complex content trees which mix audio and non-audio content. But a new generation of (mobile) online-only listeners might not recognize program names or care about when something was broadcast. Consistent use of tags to identify subjects and genres as well as design shortcuts to highlight where audio content is available serve to mitigate this dilemma to some extent. But stations increasingly face a choice between maintaining intricate but cumbersome parallel navigation structures, as German

community broadcaster Radio Dreyeck-land did, and making a strategic decision to focus structures primarily on the online-only visitor, as Belfast's Northern Visions seemed to do when establishing a stand-alone archive site (van Beek 2014: 81–83).

The "digital archive needs active and constant care"; truly safeguarding long-term preservation involves not just multiple backups but regularly checking their integrity and migrating them whenever formats and carriers become obsolete (Pop 2015: 50). This is a daunting prospect for most community broadcasters. Stories about significant amounts of content being lost when servers failed or websites were overhauled or migrated were disturbingly frequent.

Lacking the resources to build online archiving structures, many broadcasters understandably rely on commercial third party services. Without their free accounts on Soundcloud, Mixcloud, iVoox and Vimeo, a vast span of community broadcast content would never find its way online. But delegating the online accessibility of their content makes broadcasters dependent on companies which can change or restrict access, features and pricing at will, or fail altogether and take entire archives down with them, while conceding those companies legal control and financial profit over their content.

If community broadcasters are to "maintain the relevance" of their media-political principles, they need to carve out autonomous, pluralist spaces in the digital media landscape the same way they did on the radio waves (Leindecker 2015: 13–14). That means doing it the hard way, building and utilizing non-commercial, open-access and open-source tools and infrastructures which they alone control, and can expand and customize at will. Doing so requires reaching out more to open source communities, recruiting primarily IT/web-focused staff or volunteers (as Radio Študent and CUAC FM did), partnering with local tech companies with similar values (as Germany's Radio Wüste Welle did), developing open source software that could also meet the needs of other community broadcasters (as Pi Radio did with metadata management tool "calcms"), and creating avenues for stations to pass on lessons learnt (as the CAPTCHA project aimed to do). Stronger national community media organizations would make the effort considerably more feasible. While networked efforts by German stations to build a "Freie Radio App" appear to have faltered, the CBA remains an excellent example of a joint initiative that, more than just creating a shared archive, provides even modestly sized stations with tools to publish program content on their own sites. In all, a formidable challenge indeed; but community radio was itself born of a struggle that achieved improbable success against daunting odds.

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PART 3

Policy, Regulations, and Government Intervention

CHAPTER 12

Media at the Margins: Policy and Practice in American, Canadian, and British Community Television

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Abstract

This comparative study addresses the policies and practices of community television in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada. In particular, I examine how community media organizations are transforming themselves to meet the demands of a digital world, and how these experiences are reflected in policy and regulation. Findings suggest that the policies governing community television do not correspond to what has been experienced by practitioners. Drawing from theories of the public sphere, the argument is made that policy does a disservice to community television by failing to acknowledge the importance of place, bodies, and practice. This is problematic, as it fails to distinguish community media from user-generated digital content.

Recent years have witnessed a tremendous degree of campaigning by community media organizations in Canada, the UK, and the United States. In Canada, January 2010 saw the Canadian Association of Community Television Users and Stations (CACTUS) launch a nation-wide campaign to "put community back in community TV," in anticipation of a

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review of community television by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC; Edwards, 2010). In the UK, the Community Media Association continues to lobby the BBC and the Office of Communications (OfCom) to recognize the value of community media. In the United States, 2009 represented a watershed moment, when Philadelphia witnessed the launch of its first community television station, ending a 27-year struggle for public access television in that city.

Community media are neglected aspects of our media landscape that represent the public's only opportunity to use the infrastructure of mainstream media to produce and disseminate their own content and voices (Howley, 2005; Rodriguez, 2001). With the advent of user-generated digital media, however, the relevance of *community television* is being questioned; it is accused of becoming an anachronism in today's contemporary mediascape (see Fuentes-Bautista, 2009; Timescape, 2009; Waldman, 2011). The anecdotes above illustrate an attempt to engage in this debate. Moreover, they join a conversation lamenting community television's position at the margins of our local, national, and global mediascape (Howley, 2005; Rennie, 2006). They suggest community television continues to be both a "living organism," and a site of contestation—an ongoing struggle over place, agency, representation, and identity (Rodriguez, 2001, p. 158). These areas of contestation find their fulcra in the four intersecting nodes of *policy, practice, publics*, and *place*, and it is within these spheres that this research is situated. This research seeks to address the experiences and challenges of community television in the United States, Canada, and the UK.[1] More specifically, this research asks the questions: How are these experiences reflected in regulation? And, how do these policies and practices compare across national boundaries, particularly when discussing digital media? Such questions take on new urgency as concern grows over the potential loss of diversity of voices brought on by corporate convergence (McChesney, 1999). This study is based on 10 in-depth interviews with community television practitioners, organizers, and advocates in Canada, the United States, and the UK. Given that the focus of this paper is on the intersection of practice and policy, these interviews were compared against a review of recent regulatory initiatives from the CRTC, FCC, and OfCom. These three countries, moreover, were not chosen randomly, but rather, because they are nations with advanced communications systems, and perhaps more important, because they share a regulatory commitment to serving that mercurial notion called "the public interest."[2]

This comparison reveals a bifurcation whereby the policies governing community television do not correspond to what has been experienced by practitioners and advocates. While the practitioners I interviewed emphasized experience, practice, and physical place as salient attributes of community television, policies tend to internalize the value of community television as residing exclusively in *content*, and not in the places or publics formed in the creation of this content. I do not seek to refute this position. Giving voice to the voiceless is crucial in a mediascape dominated by hegemonic capitalist interests (Howley, 2005; Rodriguez, 2001). Nevertheless, content does not represent the total value of community television or community media more broadly. In contrast, findings suggest that the strength of community

[1] I use "community television" to delineate the scope of this research. On occasion, "community media" is used to discuss the larger field or community media centers and organizations.

[2] The U.S. Telecommunications Act of 1996, the 1991 Canadian Broadcasting Act, and the UK Communications Act 2003 all reference broadcasting in the public interest.

television lies, in part, in its relationship to physical *place* (Howley, 2010, p. 9)—that is to say, in its ability to bring community members together in time and space for the purposes of education, deliberation, networking, community building, and of course, media production. Put another way, the benefits of community television reside not only in its content, but in its practices. While ignored by policymakers, this is not a new observation. King and Mele, for instance, noted in 1999 how a rhetorical devotion to community television's contributions to the deliberative ideation of the public sphere, "focus[es] too narrowly on the content of such programs and discount[s] critical possibilities inherent in the production of public access television," (1999, p. 607). What sets this study apart is the addition of a critique of policy, as well as its expansion from the microcosm of one organization to a comparison of practice and policy among nation-states.

Policy has long centered on community television's ability to foster freedom of expression and contribution to deliberation in our democracy. In doing so, it has created a discursive "community media public" based solely around content. Through this lens, community television has been called an "electronic public space" (Aufderheide, 1996) or an "electronic soap box" (Linder, 1999; United States, 1984a, p. 4667)—a vehicle for citizens to discuss, share, and deliberate matters most important to them. While praiseworthy, such a myopic reliance on content reduces community television purely to output. Policy rhetoric rests on the normative assumption that equates the value of community television with a disembodied, Habermasean public sphere (1974) at the expense of the corporeal, the experiential, and the practical. This is problematic, as it fails to distinguish community media from YouTube or any other user-generated digital platform. This perspective needs to be expanded to understand the totality of values and strengths engendered within these media practices, and I suggest that policy does a disservice to community television by failing to acknowledge the importance of place, bodies, and practice. This critique of regulatory obliqueness and the disembodied public sphere of community television policy is framed through the discussion of three themes. Drawing from Castells' (2000, pp. 18–20) and Giddens' (1991, p. 18) differentiation between "place" (territorially bounded localities) and "space" (dislocated and disembodied relationships), these themes are labeled: *place*, *space*, and *interface*. *Place* refers to the community, locality, and physical presence of community television organizations. *Space* refers to the relationships between community television and dominant institutions. Here, I discuss the difficulties in creating spaces and publics of attention and recognition. *Interface* refers to the changing nature of the relationship between community television and technology, particularly as organizations struggle with the adoption of digital media.

Community Television/Community Media

Scholarship on community media has been on the rise in recent years, with a number of conferences, journals, and manuscripts devoted to the topic (Jankowski, 2003). While positive, such a resurgence suggests there is still much to be learned. This could stem from the observation that community media is amorphous, as the practices are globally dispersed and locally situated, and also incorporate any combination of media and people (Rennie, 2006). Studies, for example, have focused on community radio, television, and newsletters in North America (Howley, 2005; King & Mele, 1999; Linder, 1999); community television and radio

in Australia (Rennie, 2006); Latino/a radio in the United States; community reporting in Nicaragua; video production among Columbian women (Rodriguez, 2001); and radio among Bolivian tin miners (Huesca, 1995). Such examples demonstrate that, while a central tenet of community media is its situatedness, it is not exclusive to any global milieu, or reliant on any one medium. Community media is what the community needs it to be. The most challenging aspect is definitional (Rennie, 2006, p. 22). Rodriguez, for instance, argues that we need to abandon the label "community media" (or "alternative media") and assume the moniker of "citizens' media," as it better embodies the qualities of collectivity, "contesting social codes," and empowerment (2001, p. 20). Adding to this difficulty is the observation that community media is not a stable, complete, or hermetic system. It is amorphous, mercurial, and more often than not, ephemeral (ibid.). Out of the myriad definitions posited (see Buckley et al., 2008, p. 206; Lewis & Booth, 1989, p. 9; Rennie, 2006, p. 4; Rodriguez, 2001), the most comprehensive comes from Howley, who defines community media as:

> Grassroots or locally oriented media access initiatives predicated on a profound sense of dissatisfaction with mainstream media form and content, dedicated to the principles of free expression and participatory democracy, and committed to enhancing community relations and promoting community solidarity. (2005, p. 2)

This highlights the fundamental characteristics of community media as suggested by Nossek: *participation*, *access*, and *self-management* (2003, p. 308). As this research suggests, *location* or *place* is yet another salient attribute. Howley, for instance, notes how reports of the obsolescence of place and community within the discourse of globalization have been greatly exaggerated (2010, p. 8). In contrast, he argues that "place still has enormous relevance to human experience," and that community media become the locus where the "relationship between place and identity" can be experienced (ibid., p. 9). All of this is to say that community media is intricately tied to the notion of place, and that this "sense of place" remains a seminal aspect of the human condition (ibid.).

What these disparate elements then point to is an understanding of community media as being less about content than about modes of production (King & Mele, 1999). This process-oriented approach has much in common with Couldry's (2004) call for a "media as practice" approach to communications research. Couldry seeks to "treat[] media as the open set of practices relating to, or oriented around, media," (ibid., p. 117). In doing so, this approach "decentre[s] media research from the study of media texts or production structures (important though these are) and . . . redirect[s] it onto the study of open-ended range of practices focused directly or indirectly on media," (ibid.). This notion of media practice is adaptable to a study of community media, as it lends credence to the argument that the physical locale of community media is often regarded as one of relationship building and empowerment, rather than simply content production (Higgins, 1999; Howley, 2005; Rodriguez, 2001). Indeed, it is an example of what "people [are] *doing* in relation to media across a whole range of situations and contexts" (Couldry, 2004, p. 119).

There is disagreement, however, as to the next phase for academic inquiry. Rennie argues that a policy approach is needed, so as to "get away from notions of community media as something resistant to government and the economy" (2006, p. 6). Conversely, Jankowski argues for the need to supplement policy analysis—something he sees as existing in abun-

dance—with theoretical and empirical model building (2003, p. 10). In agreement with Rennie, however, my research has also observed a paucity of critical scholarship on community media policy (see also Howley, 2010). Two further gaps appear in our knowledge of community media. First, scholars such as Rodriguez (2001), Howley (2005), and Huesca (1995) remind us power does not exist in binary—those with and those without. Rather, we need to move away from this reductionist notion and see it more along a spectrum. The authors intimate the need for a more nuanced hermeneutic of community media and power. Second, while we are confronted with a number of insightful case studies, and derived from them, a number of theoretical explanations championing the importance of community media as a democratic process, few studies have used these case studies to compare community media at the level of the nation-state. What I suggest is an alternative path scholars could follow to continue expanding our knowledge of community media—one that merges Rennie's (2006) assertion for policy critique, and Jankowski's (2003) argument for mid-level, empirical, and theoretical model-building. I accomplish this through presenting a critique of policy and putting forward an empirically-based argument centered around the concepts of place, practice, and publics.

Policies and Publics

Despite Canada, the United States, and the UK having distinctive media systems, *community television* generally follows the same framework. That is to say, a public access model, whereby community members are able to produce and broadcast their own programs using equipment and training provided by the station. The majority of community television stations in Canada and the United States are distributed through cable systems, while in the UK, where cable penetration is relatively low, organizations have either been able to secure a coveted terrestrial broadcast license ("Restricted Service License") or take advantage of Internet broadcasting (Timescape, 2009).

The United States is perhaps most infamous with respect to public access television—a country where free expression takes precedent, where community television stations are first-come-first-served, and where the popular film *Wayne's World* holds key representational space. While there has yet to be a census of public access stations, recent estimates place the number at around 3,000—making them rather ubiquitous entities among American communities (Goldfarb, 2008, p. 1). Traditionally, public access has been regulated at the municipal level, where the municipality grants a franchise to a cable operator in exchange for certain benefits—such as public, educational, and governmental ("PEG") access channels. Non-profit organizations, municipalities, or cable operators typically run these channels. Public channels stand for open public access, educational channels tend to air lectures and classes, and government channels air city council meetings and other government information—although these boundaries are often blurred (Linder, 1999, p. xxv). Surprisingly, the United States lacks a coherent community television policy. Rather, community television regulation is dispersed amongst a myriad of congressional legislation and FCC regulations, most of which generally address the distribution of cable systems.[3] Like much policy in the United States, community television has also been shaped by a number of Supreme Court cases (i.e., *Denver Area v. FCC*, 1996). These discrete rulings and regulations typically focus

[3] See United States, 1984b, 1992, 1996; FCC, 2006, 2007.

on elements such as franchise fees, rollout, and in the case of the 1992 Cable Act, content regulation and First Amendment implications (as was argued in *Denver Area v. FCC*). There has been little discussion of place, physicality, or publics. Rather, recent policy tends to follow the trajectory laid out in a congressional report on the 1984 Cable Act:

> A requirement of reasonable third-party access to cable systems will mean a wide diversity of information sources for the public—the fundamental goal of the First Amendment—without the need to regulate the content of programming provided over cable. . . . Public access channels are often the video equivalent of the speaker's soapbox or the electronic parallel to the printed leaflet. They provide groups and individuals who generally have not had access to the electronic media with the opportunity to become sources of information in the electronic marketplace of ideas. (United States, 1984a, p. 4667)

Note here the reliance on the tropes of the First Amendment, orality, and the marketplace of ideas—which connote content and dissemination, but focus little on modes or practices of production (King & Mele, 1999).

The more recent issue of statewide franchising has further pushed policy toward a disembodied space. Finding strong support in the lobbying efforts of telecommunication providers amongst state legislatures, this provision "allows new providers (i.e., phone companies such as AT&T and Verizon) to bypass municipal franchises and apply for a statewide franchise permit," (Goldfarb, 2008, p. 5). Distancing franchise authority from the municipality allows these companies to usurp local authority, avoid individual franchise fees, and leave many PEG organizations without sustainable funding. Despite vehement protest by PEG advocates, over 20 states have enacted such legislation, resulting in the reported closure of dozens stations, and the reduction of services at dozens more (Goldfarb, 2008, pp.5–8; Linder & Kenton, 2010, p. 12; Waldman, 2011, p. 300, quoting reports by American Community Media). Statewide franchising is thus a further example of the *lacuna* between the practices, policies, and places of community television.

Canadian community television policy is much more explicit than U.S. policy, having been enshrined as one of three components of the Canadian broadcasting system (in addition to private and public broadcasting) in the 1991 *Broadcasting Act* (Canada, 1991, §3.1.b.). This provides the CRTC latitude to regulate the service as it sees fit. Once the birthplace of community television (Howley, 2005, p. 52), Canada's community television greatly resembled its American counterpart (cable-based, privileging access and participation) until 1997, when deregulation permitted cable operators to eliminate public participation and consolidate stations (Timescape, 2009). To correct this imbalance, recent years have witnessed a plethora of regulatory interventions in community television.[4] For instance, in 2002 and again in 2010, the CRTC reversed many of these destructive allotments. In particular, the 2002 decision mandated for the first time, a quota for programming produced by members of the public (rather than cable employees) (CRTC, 2002, para. 55; CRTC, 2010, para. 10). This quota was set at 30% of weekly programming for community channels run by cable companies in 2002, and was increased to 50% in a subsequent 2010 decision to become effective in 2014 (CRTC, 2010, para. 10). Nevertheless, the focus remains on the creation and dissemination of content, rather than the provision of places for production and gathering. For instance, it was noted

[4] See CRTC, 2002, 2009, 2010.

in 2002 and reaffirmed in 2010 that the main objectives of community television are to "ensure the creation and exhibition of more locally produced, locally reflective community programming; and to foster a great diversity of voices and alternative choices by facilitating new entrants at the local level" (CRTC, 2010, p. xiii).

There are, of course, exceptions to this generalization. For instance, the 2010 *Community Television Policy* encourages licensees of community-based television to, "Facilitate citizen access to the production of programming, and, provide training to those within the community wishing to participate in the production of programming" (ibid.). Despite this, we continue to see a favoring of content over practices in Canadian community television regulation. That is to say, we see a focus on the disembodied voice of the participant, rather than any concern for the democratic value of the practice and place of community television.

While possessing a much weaker community television system than Canada and the United States, regulators and legislators in the UK have begun to acknowledge the participatory value of community media. This, for instance, is demonstrated by the inclusion of community broadcasting in the 2003 *Communications Act* (Timescape, 2009; UK, 2003, §262, 359). Nevertheless, the landscape of community television remains bleak. Many explanations have been given for the lack of local and community television, including the failure of cable to take hold, a lack of funding, and the failure of the licensing regime (OfCom, 2009, pp. 104, 128; Timescape, 2009). The future is thus uncertain for community television, with only four restricted service license (RSL) holders in operation as of 2009 (compared with 3,000+ community stations in the United States and 139 in Canada; CRTC, 2009; OfCom, 2009, p. 21; Timescape, 2009). Of these four stations, moreover, only Belfast's NvTv is predicated upon notions of public access (OfCom, 2009, p. 37; Timescape, 2009).[5] The challenges for all organizations remain securing the necessities of survival: favorable regulation and funding (Timescape, 2009). It has been suggested, therefore, that one should look to community radio for indices of potential regulation for television (OfCom, 2009). For instance, OfCom noted:

> In addition providing unique content, community radio stations deliver wide benefits to people in the areas in which they broadcast. This includes offering training and work experience opportunities, contributions to local education and providing a voice to those, such as older people or speakers of minority languages, who may find it harder to access the media. (2010, sec. 2.2)

While the democratic value of community radio in the UK is acknowledged, community television still remains nascent, if not stillborn. That said, a recent OfCom report noted community media (or "ultra-local media") has the potential to:

> Deliver media literacy in a range of forms, including content creation, critical appreciation, public service announcements, the skills to interrogate public data in order to make better-informed decisions about where—and how—to live, and the ability to hold local public bodies more effectively to account. (2009, pp. 127–128)

Unlike Canada and the United States, the challenge in the UK is how to operationalize this support. As was previously noted, infrastructure remains a barrier; hence we have witnessed a number of community television organizations transition or start-up online, to accommodate the "low overhead" costs of operating placelessly (Timescape, 2009). This dislocated form of

[5] An unlicensed community station (Channel 7) is also operating through cable in Immingham (Timescape, 2009; OfCom, 2009, p. 43)

community television, however, may not take full advantage of the embodied opportunities presented by community radio. For the moment, all three countries face challenges with respect to place and bodies in their respective policy and regulatory decisions. That places, practices, and embodied publics are not acknowledged does, indeed, suggest that community television is no different from any user-generated digital platform. This could then lead to further calls for defunding or increased barriers to access and infrastructure capital.

Publics and Practices

What these aforementioned policies do reflect is a Habermasean public sphere (Habermas, 1974). That is, one where voice, deliberation, and ideological space for discussion are privileged at the expense of place, practice, and bodies. In his formidable work, Habermas envisions the bourgeois public sphere as that which mediates the spheres of society and state (ibid., p. 50). That is to say, a group of citizens (i.e., bourgeois, white, male) coming together to discuss "objects connected to the activity of the state," (ibid., p. 49). Discussion is the operative word here, as for Habermas, "a portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body," (ibid.). In Kulynych's words, the Habermasean public sphere equates democracy with participation, and participation as "discursive participation; it is communication governed by rational, communicatively achieved argument and negotiation," (1997, p. 320). Physical presence in a "concrete locale" is unnecessary for such active participation in, and contribution to, the public sphere (ibid., p. 322). While Habermas notes that such discussions often took place in the salons or cafés of 18th- and 19th-century European capitals, many have critiqued Habermas for his failure to recognize the importance of place and bodies (Kohn, 2000; Kulynych, 1997; Warner, 1993). Warner argues that this conceptualization of the public sphere permitted self-abstraction of only the privileged elite, leaving minorities and the underprivileged embodied, but voiceless (1993, p. 240). While it is argued that user-generated media rectify such imbalance between the powerful and the powerless (Bruns, 2008), what separates community television from this cacophony is not only the addition of voices to the marketplace of ideas, but rather its practices, places, and publics (see Aufderheide, 1996, p. 127).

To be sure, there is nothing wrong with deliberation, only that its articulation as the *sine qua non* of democracy is incomplete (Kohn 2000; Schudson, 1997). Kohn, for one, argues that deliberative democracy invites participation only from the elite, and as such, abstracts minority voices (2000, p. 426). It is not only that discussion reigns supreme in the disembodied public sphere, but that the notion of place is often rendered irrelevant. Policy mimics such an approach, granting salience to content, but not practice. In contrast, community television is able to encourage equal participation, or as King and Mele observe, the "different *experiences of production* [are] both meaningful to the individual volunteers and important to the constitution of the public sphere" (1999, p. 621). This closely resembles Friedland's conceptualization of a "communicatively integrated community," where the interactions of place (community), participation, deliberation, and communication (media) are seen as necessary components of a functioning democracy (2001, p. 359).

Paralleling this debate, content—a disembodied voice in the airwaves—is an insufficient descriptor for community television. Without the recognition of practice and place, com-

munity television policy has created what Turner has called a "demotic" public. That is to say, "There is not necessary connection between, on the one hand, a broadening demographic in the pattern of access to media representation and, on the other hand, a democratic politics" (2010, p. 17). Without acknowledging a connection to place, community television is seen, through the lens of policy, as another contributor to an unending stream of voices, devoid of the empowerment capabilities highlighted by scholars (Higgins, 1999; King & Mele, 1999). Invoking another critic, policy has created what Fraser calls a "weak public"—deliberative, but unable to operationalize (1992, p. 134). Rather, in the bringing together of people in space and time, community television forms "strong publics"—"publics whose discourse encompasses both opinion formation and decision making," (ibid., p. 143). While such decision-making is localized at the community level, it nonetheless grants a certain degree of agency to community media organizations.

To recap, I have analyzed relevant community television regulation and legislation in the United States, Canada, and the UK, and found them wanting. More specifically, I argue that they fail to incorporate the salient aspects of place and the "experience of media production," favoring instead the end result—the product, the program, the content (King & Mele, 1999, p. 614). I argue that policy needs to conceive of community television in a more holistic fashion, taking into account the notions of publics, practices, and places. The following sections underscore this argument, using evidence from interviews with community television practitioners, advocates, and organizers.

Place

Of primary importance is the notion of place, and respondents advocated strongly for the situatedness of their community media practices. Situatedness here refers to both the physical infrastructure of the organization and the notion that public participation itself is a seminal characteristic. Public participation was called by one interviewee the "lifeblood" of community television, and the "cornerstone of the access system," suggesting the importance of this quality (personal communication, 11/9/10). The strongest reactions came from American respondents, whose public access television has traditionally been associated with notions of public participation, community reflection, and democratic practices (Linder, 1999). For respondents, community television is an arena in which a "community can speak to itself instead of being spoken to" (personal communication, 11/3/10). This is certainly warranted, given that many media outlets have gravitated away from "local accountability reporting" (Waldman, 2011). According to a recent congressional research report, community television is "used by 1.2 million volunteers and 250,000 community organizations," producing "20,000 hours of new programs per week"— statistics suggesting that these organizations are certainly in use (Goldfarb, 2008, p. 2). The notion of place, however, speaks to larger issues than just the dissemination of content. It speaks to enhancing diversity, facilitating conversation and discussion, empowering participants through media and digital literacy training, and fostering public participation. This last quality is especially salient among marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities, the LGBT community, youth, and the elderly. Representatives from the lobbying organization American Community Television (ACT) also noted the transformation from "public access television stations" to "community media centers." This is an effort to

remain relevant and provide resources such as training facilities, media literacy, and production classes. This also reflects a move from the seemingly pejorative notion of "public access television" to the more positive, "community media" (Ali, in press).

In addition to defining their practice as "community media," media literacy is a central tenet for practitioners, who maintain that their primary goal is the training of participants. ACT's executive director, Bunnie Riedel, also notes that such hands-on production and skills training can allow participants to develop the critical skills necessary to decode the onslaught of media texts presented to Americans on a daily basis (personal communication, 11/3/10). Nantz Rickard of DCTV noted that one of DCTV's most successful endeavors targets youth in the Washington, DC, area through a "Youth Training Institute." This "institute" includes a television program (YAP-TV), a "training aspect, of running people through how to use the equipment, how create stories with it" through a partnership with the Smithsonian Institute, and an art and media literacy program. They also hold an internship program and other "experiential" programs, so that "youth can come to us after school and participate regularly, learning not just how to use the media and the tools, but to be part of how the community interacts with us" (personal communication, 11/9/10). Such opportunity for diversity speaks to the potential of community media centers to physically bring people together, and it also represents evidence many advocates use to defend their practice against detractors who argue that community-participatory media should only exist in the virtual domains of YouTube (see Fuentes-Bautista, 2009; Linder & Kenton, 2010, p. 7).

Contrary to the case of the United States, the Canadian public has largely been ignored or even barred from participating in community television since the late 1990s. Jim Macgregor observed how Winnipeg community television has taken a circuitous path with respect to place and publics. Community television began in Winnipeg as something dedicated to public participation and access. During these early decades, Videon Cable-11 operated with few censoring guidelines, and Macgregor could recall only a handful of instances where a producer was cautioned or a disclaimer aired. This ethos of democratic video production began to wane in the mid-1990s, finding its apex during the 1997 Winnipeg flood. During this "flood of the century," Videon took on a new role in regards to place, one that saw it divorce itself from the participating public and embody the conventions of mainstream broadcasting. Management committed to covering the flood in its entirety, with over 180 volunteers, including anchors and reporters, working 24 hours a day. This transition to a new genre of community television saw the channel dedicate itself to "professional" community coverage. It soon became the template for all Videon programming. Reflecting an implicit binary, this is an interesting divergence from the American experience, where direct operation of community television stations by cable companies is generally taboo. Nonetheless, with the recent round of CRTC (2010) regulations requiring quotas for public participation, Shaw-TV (as it is now known) is working toward re-integrating the public into its operations. Macgregor is quick to add that this will not be a "regression to the 1970s," but a new model, one balancing community-initiated with company-initiated programming (personal communication, 11/21/10).

In contrast to the U.S. "public-participatory model," and the Canadian "hybrid model," the British case represents a rather dislocated alternative to notions of place. Since local television is relatively nonexistent, many organizations (i.e., Southwark-TV and MonTV) have migrated to the Internet for distribution (OfCom, 2009, p. 43). For Southwark-TV, the Internet reduces

overhead, allowing the organization to devote more resources to video production and training. Operating under the positioning statement, "Web, Event, TV" Southwark-TV, and its parent, the Community TV Trust, aim to incorporate media with local life by showcasing community initiatives and events, along with school and youth-produced projects. It is not, itself, a television station, but rather, a resource for community members who wish to produce their own local media (C. Haydon, personal communication, 11/3/10). Given its online presence, founder Chris Haydon was adamant that, while the organization itself does not operate as a hub, it tries to create hubs in schools, community centers, and the like, and it focuses its energies on creating "shared public spaces" and places for physical meetings (personal communication, 11/3/10). Haydon has a great fondness for the democratizing potential of the Internet, but he admits the situatedness of community media is the crucial factor:

> But the thing that I like most, actually, even pretty much above the wonder of the web as the great solution for delivering this stuff, is bringing people together physically. . . . Some will be 12-years old and some will be 50 and have no experience whatsoever. And each will be as proud, or as frightened, or as timid, or as rewarded to have feedback. To feel somebody understands. And this is somebody who is in effect a neighbour, who lives in their area. So that mix of media, that overlap of media and local life, the mix of media practice and putting on local events to bring that overlap into life. So that media sharing isn't a virtual experience, there are other important dimensions. At the end of the day, media is just something that happens between people. (personal communication, 11/3/10)

Southwark-TV thus represents a disembodied place for community television, one without a central locus, but that nevertheless speaks to the central tenets of community media in giving voice to the voiceless and place to the placeless. Such a telling should not suggest an idyllic situation whereby community television organizations are free to control their own destinies. Rather, these media institutions continue to be plagued by a constant lack of funding, regulatory invisibility, and public irrelevance (see Timescape, 2009). What these examples do illustrate is that, regardless of organizational, funding, or content models, community television remains firmly rooted in a notion of place (see Howley, 2010). The station, community media center, or impromptu screening room becomes the location from which actors are able to create a public of participants.

Space

The concept of space suggests the difficulties in forming publics that are not situated within this aforementioned locus of place. For instance, respondents noted the difficulties in forming alliances with regulators and policymakers, with cable operators, and even with the general public. This last aspect is most troubling to respondents. As a member of OfCom noted, "discoverability—people knowing that services exist, and, even if they know that it exists, understanding what the content is"—is a considerable challenge for community media practitioners in the UK (D. Radcliffe, personal communication, 12/14/10). Similarly, in Canada, the challenge lies in building public awareness:

> [The] vast majority of Canadians don't even know this stuff exists. There is a blackout in terms of public awareness that they have these rights and can go to a cable company and demand these resources and a cable company can't say no in terms of programming if they don't like it. (M. Lithgow, personal communication, 11/10/10)

As a result, "community television became increasingly irrelevant for most Canadians," (ibid.). John Rocco of ACT also observed how one of his largest challenges as a community media executive and national lobbyist is convincing the public of the value of community television (personal communication, 11/8/10).

In essence, the notion of "space" refers quite literally to carving out spaces of attention, recognition, visibility, and relationships in an over-saturated and over-stimulated mediascape. Space also refers to the ability to form a public or publics of supporters that are not immediately affiliated with the community media center at the grassroots level. Other difficulties in forming publics of supporters have occurred at the national policy level, where community media organizations struggle to create impact. While respondents from ACT noted success in forming relationships with regulators and members of Congress, they remain hard-pressed to battle against cable and telecommunication companies. Riedel argues that community television still lacks the regulatory mechanisms to contest poor treatment by cable companies. She contends that, rather than a comfortable rapport existing between community television, cable operators, and municipal governments, "cable operators are the foxes watching the hen house," forming beneficial relationships with municipal councilors and waiting to revoke community television's claim on channels. From her perspective, "It's this knee-jerk reaction towards marginalization. And I think the other big challenge is finally being able to have a seat at the table. My joke is that access is always the red-headed step sister" (personal communication, 11/3/10).

American lobbying groups have had slightly more success than their Canadian or British counterparts in bringing community television to the attention of regulators. Still, though, in Canada, indicators suggest that this declaration may need reevaluation, since CACTUS was influential in pressuring the CRTC to enact definitions, access quotas, and cable company financial transparency rules (CRTC, 2010). While largely successful in this campaign, however, some express doubt as to the visibility of community television lobbying in Canada. In an extensive report submitted to the CRTC, for instance, Timescape Productions observed that, unlike the United States, Canada lacks an umbrella organization to lobby on behalf of community television on a nationwide scale (2009, pp. 22, 151). This is not insignificant, as it speaks to the aforementioned notion of "discoverability"—the ability to form publics of attention and support that are so crucial in matters of policy and regulation.

When compared with the United States and Canada, advocates in the UK have had least success. Haydon, for instance, noted how his organization is invested in lobbying OfCom, but acknowledges the difficulty in getting anything accomplished at the federal policy level (personal communication, 11/3/10). Additionally, the Community Media Association—the official organization of community media practitioners—has been involved in lobbying the BBC and OfCom. While community radio was officially sanctioned in 2004 with the *Community Radio Order*, little has been achieved with respect to television. For instance, while the 2009 "memorandum of understanding" with the BBC can certainly be read as an effort to carve out spaces of recognition, particularly in acknowledging the importance of community television, it has had minimal regulatory impact (see Community Media Association and BBC, 2009). [6]

[6] The UK has announced the creation of a new local television license and service, although it is uncertain

This section addressed the challenges of forming supportive publics of citizens, regulators, cable operators, and politicians. This disembodied and abstracted public—one completely divorced from the sanctuary of the community media center—cannot be described as a "weak public" (Fraser, 1992). Rather, it is a hypothetical public, one vital to the survival of community media, but yet to be fully realized.

Interface

Indispensable to both place and space is the role technologies, and more specifically, digital media, play in mediating organizations, relationships, and campaigns. On the one hand, advents in user-generated digital media have allowed dissenters to argue community television is obsolete—a relic of the analog age—now that "anyone" can post video online. On the other hand, digital media has permitted organizations to expand their original purview and venture beyond the confines of cable television to reach broader audiences and engage in new forms of education (Fuentes-Bautista, 2009). Technology represents a dialectic position within community media discourse (see Ali, in press)—a tension certainly present in the statements of respondents. U.S. respondents remained hesitant to abandon television, while a Canadian respondent was mixed, and a British respondent was supportive. This last observation should not come as a surprise, as migration from television to Internet suggests "placelessness" (see Ali, in press)—a mode of dissemination no longer dependent upon infrastructure. This ethos resonates in the organizational structure of Community TV Trust, as it has abandoned reliance on television and embraced a purely online platform. For instance, Haydon observed:

> [The] Web, magically and mystically, is the great answer to how do you deliver your local media that you produce. You don't need to reach in your television, you just need to get online. That has become ever easier, even here in the U.K., Web is the answer to getting you started, it costs next to nothing, and anyone can get to it, you can get your neighbour or the man three streets away. (personal communication, 11/3/10)

For Haydon, television has become "almost meaningless," as practitioners can distribute their productions through online platforms. In contrast, Ian Morrison, founder of lobbying group Friends of Canadian Broadcasting, quoted Northrop Fry to describe his feelings toward online community television, asking, "where is here?" Morrison argues "the Internet works away from here":

> [The Internet] becomes distance free and is volume controlled so that while it can facilitate local communication, it also takes people's eyes and ears and attention away from local If there were to be a healthy community with democratic participation, by people who are informed and concerned about the things that are going on in their lives, community television would be a part of that. (personal communication, 11/2/10)

Morrison points to the first of two lines of defense against Internet migration. The first is in defense of television—a powerful tool for connecting locally-oriented people (Ali, in press; Fuentes-Bautista, 2009). The second is that of place and practice—a power inherent in the physical space occupied by community media organizations (King & Mele, 1999).[7] In the

whether any license holder will incorporate participatory media practices (see DCMS, 2011).

[7] See also Ali (in press) for an ethnographic study of how one American-based community television station

first instance, Rocco argues that, as long as commercial networks remain wedded to broadcast and cable distribution, then so should community television (personal communication, 11/8/10). Similarly, Rickard argues that YouTube is itself a mainstream presence, and that its narrowcasting ethos speaks to the individual, rather than the community:

> We must recognize that the platform for community media is a direct reflection of the value we place on civic engagement, community participation, and the ideals of a democratic system. These attributes of our communities are the cellular structure of our democratic organism, and are at least as important as the various commercial and economic limbs that underlie most content generated by and for the dominant Market Presence. (personal communication, 11/9/10)

Importantly, Rocco and Rickard do not eschew the necessity of digital media, but do question its omnipotence. Rickard's station, for instance, has just undergone extensive renovation to include digital and HD compatible equipment, and both respondents are interested in broadening where citizens can access community content.

The second line of argumentation stems from the Internet's potential to usurp the physical places currently inhabited by community media organizations. This is what Riedel suggested when arguing that internet-driven capabilities such as File Transfer Protocols, which would allow users to remotely upload content to a community media "server," are harmful as they abstract human interaction from the mode of production (personal communication, 11/3/10). Addressing this pressing issue, Rennie (2007) makes the important distinction between "amateur" and "community" media. While both give participants access to the means of cultural production, the difference lies in the role of the community media organization. As she writes, community media organizations "provide access to production and distribution (as do other user-generated new media) *but also allow for participation in the running of the organization and the development of technologies*" (ibid., p. 31, emphasis added). Community media promote community and publics of citizens through both product (content) and modes of production (practice). To many, the place(s) and relationships in which community media are produced are as important, if not more, than content.

Contrarily, Macgregor observed how digital media have expanded freedom of expression and choice, and suggested that community television must "rise to that technology to survive and adapt" (personal communication, 11/21/10). He points to the need to follow the trends set by youth and is unsure a traditionally television-centered model is the way the community media world is headed. He tempers his call for a dislocated and disembodied space, however, by noting that the community television model will not die, but rather, must expand to become more accessible. For Macgregor, community television cannot hold on to a romanticized past, but rather, must continue to adapt:

> I've seen an incredible evolution in terms of technology, in terms of how people receive information, in terms of how people spend their time in their day. They're not glued to their television anymore. . . . So, personally, I think the Internet has become the community channel, big time. But it's so big, so vast, that it has, in a lot of cases, excluded the little guy who just wants to do a show about speaking Yiddish or something It saddens me that that sort of change has taken place. And yet, it's also exciting. (personal communication 11/21/10)

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negotiates the concepts of place, "placelessness," television and digital media/user-generated content.

Conversations about digital media and Internet migration complicate the reification of "place." If user-generated content is everywhere, what becomes of community television? Many have rightly argued that this is not an "either/or" scenario. Instead, digital media should be seen as a complement to, rather than as competition with, existing practices (Fuentes-Bautista, 2009; see also Ali, in press). This is particularly true of what community media advocates tell policymakers. For instance, Alliance for Communications Democracy informed the FCC of the vast amount of online content offered by PEG groups, arguing that PEG centers are "uniquely positioned to help residents to extend content created through PEG facilities using social media and Web-based resources" (Linder & Kenton, 2010, p. 16).

This article has presented three cases for the implementation of digital media within community television practices: Southwark-TV represents a purely online model; Shaw-TV represents a hybrid model; and PEGs represent a television-centered model, although PEG leaders recognize the need to incorporate digital media. All three, however, demonstrate that these organizations realize they must go beyond television production to remain relevant to their communities (Ali, in press; Fuentes-Bautista, 2009).

Conclusion

In examining the tensions between policy, practice, place, and publics, I have discussed two intersecting visions for community television, both of which are necessary to secure its continuing survival. Not wrongly, a policy perspective focuses on the content of community television—its output— and its ability to contribute to the marketplace of ideas and deliberative democracy. I have critiqued this perspective for being too narrow, as it omits mention of places, infrastructure, and bodies. It fosters a Habermasean public sphere, one where deliberation and conversation are primary, and all else secondary. While this perspective serves to give community television *space* in the mediascape—i.e., channel capacity for community voices, (modest) funding, and recognition—what has been argued throughout this article is that it is equally important to give participants a *place* in the mediascape. That is to say, community television and community media *writ large* create publics both of deliberation and of *participation and practice*. This is accomplished through the primacy of the community media center, through educational classes for skills beyond those of television production (for instance, youth media literacy or basic computer skills), and through becoming a place where citizens can physically gather in space and time. This dynamic engenders the discussion of place, space, and interface. It is understating the problem, however, to believe community media organizations are fully in control of their own destinies—policy is critical in this regard, as is the formation of publics of attention, and visibility. The onus, moreover, does not reside exclusively with policymakers. In contrast, progress has been made to at least recognize the existence of community television by policymakers. Nevertheless, a more robust definition within regulation and legislation, through the inclusion of place, practice, and embodied publics, will aid in fostering a practice increasingly central to a communicative democracy (see Friedland, 2001; Howley, 2005; Rennie, 2006).

Part of the onus thus falls upon community media organizations, themselves, to continue disseminating their message and building the aforementioned publics of attention and recognition. Such a task lies at the heart of Radcliffe's comment that "discoverability" is a central

challenge for community media organizations. This concerns the notion of visibility—how to make the organization visible to the right people and recognizable to publics. Without this, the question must be asked: Does the mere fact that community television exists as an alternative to mainstream media and as a physical place signal a victory for the types of democratic practices described at the onset of this article? Indeed, as hyper-local, non-commercial entities, is the fact that they can, and do, carve a space and place for themselves in a world dominated by mainstream, commercial media, enough? Answering this question is not easy. I suggest, however, that practitioners may answer "yes." Not because they do not want to expand, but rather, because they "continue to fight for their lives" (Bolan, quoted in Delong, 2010, para. 1). They are aware that mere survival in a hostile environment is not enough. Visibility and the forming of supportive publics beyond the community media center may be a step toward securing a more robust contribution, both to their communities and to the larger project of democracy.

This research has its limitations. With only 10 respondents, I have only begun to discuss the experiences of community television in these countries. Additionally, participant observation and textual analysis should be employed to triangulate findings. Despite these caveats, this research has consequences for both the academic and community media reader. First, it demonstrates the tensions between policy and practice within the discourse and experience of community television. Second, it demonstrates the importance of physical place to community television and offers a strong rebuttal to those who argue that community television is obsolete in an era of digital platforms. Rather, community television's contribution in the mediascape is perhaps even more necessary given our schizophrenic relationship to place and community (see Castells, 2000; Howley, 2010). In an era dominated by commercial media and the distant voices of the national and supranational, community television often remains the lone outlet for community expression. More than giving voice to the voiceless, community media organizations give place to the placeless, through an emphasis on educational classes, media literacy, production, and the bringing together of citizens in time and space.

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CHAPTER 13

News by Any Other Name: Community Radio Journalism in India

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Abstract

Community radio journalism is a cultural resource that offers a voice to local communities and works to democratise media landscapes. Despite its indisputable value, community radio journalism in India faces a unique set of challenges: the foremost being that, officially, it does not exist. According to government policy, community radio stations are prohibited from broadcasting any news and current affairs content. The situation is further complicated by the presence of a development discourse underpinning the entire rationale for the sector. Instead of serving their listeners, community radio stations are beholden to a nebulous 'development' agenda. Under such circumstances, it is unsurprising that community radio journalism in India is relatively unexplored in the literature. This paper aims to address this gap by exploring how community radio practitioners in India source content and work around their restrictions in order to provide their listeners with relevant information and news.

Keywords

Community radio, India, news, journalism, development, social change

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Introduction

Community radio is considered to be a voice for the voiceless and a stronghold of alternative views. Similarly, community radio journalism also has a tradition of democratising the media and acting as a cultural resource to provide communities with a local voice (Forde, Meadows & Foxwell-Norton, 2002). In India however, community radio journalism faces a unique set of challenges: the foremost of which being that, officially, it does not exist. Government policy prevents community radio stations in India from broadcasting any news or current affairs coverage. Employing the concept of community radio as rhizome as a theoretical framework, this article explores the fluid and contingent nature of community radio news and journalism in an environment where it officially does not exist. Drawing on ethnographic research at two stations in South India, audience and broadcaster interviews highlight the resilient and contingent nature of community radio journalism in India.

Journalism and news in community radio

Community media have long been associated with alternative, grassroots forms of journalism. This section aims to establish a general definition of community radio journalism and a subsequent framework for analysis. There are numerous definitions of community radio journalism within the literature. In his seminal work, *Radical Media,* Downing (2000) suggests that the role of community media producers is to be in constant interaction with their audiences and to assist them in developing a critical worldview. Atton (2001: 112) takes a more specific stance, arguing that community media journalists should 'present news that is relevant to those communities' interests, in a manner that is meaningful to them and with their collaboration and support'. Forde (2015) suggests that there are four consistent traits of community media journalism that recur throughout the literature: firstly, they encourage civic participation and provide information to motivate citizenship; secondly, alternative journalism places emphasis on news that is immediately relevant to their audience; thirdly, alternative journalists fill gaps in mainstream news coverage; and finally, alternative journalism offers a critique of dominant media narratives and processes. These traits offer a broad working definition of community radio journalism from which to base this inquiry.

Building off this definition of community radio journalism, this research employs the rhizome as a frame of analysis. Alternative media as rhizome offers a useful theoretical approach to community radio news and journalism and is one of Bailey, Cammearts and Carpentier's (2007) four theoretical approaches to community media. While Carpentier et al do emphasise the importance of considering these approaches together, they concede that the fourth approach, community media as rhizome, should be granted special attention (Carpentier, Lie & Servaes, 2003; Santana & Carpentier, 2010). Based on Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) metaphor, community radio as rhizome refers to the fluid, contingent nature of the medium and the ways in which community radio connects various disparate elements of society to each other (Bailey et al., 2007). Deleuze and Guattari (1988) suggest a number of characteristics of a rhizome: connection, multiplicity, heterogeneity, no beginning or end, it is always between things, an intermediary. They see the philosophy of the state as arbolic: linear, hierarchical and static; in contrast, the rhizomatic is 'non-linear, anarchic and nomadic' (Carpentier, Lie

& Servaes, 2007). This connection and heterogeneity imply that any point of the network can connect to any other point, while multiplicity suggests that rhizomes operate outside of fixed sets of rules (Santana & Carpentier, 2010). Therein lies the importance of community media: through the 'catalysing role they can play by functioning as the crossroads where people from different types of movements and struggles meet and collaborate' (Carpentier et al., 2003: 62). This mediated interaction need not take place at the individual level and can involve groups, organisations, and even interpretive communities (Carpentier, 2015). Indeed, community media as rhizome also accounts for the linkages and interconnections between community media and civil society, as well as with the market and state (Carpentier & Doudaki, 2014). A clear example of community radio news as rhizome is offered by Van Vuuren (2001). In her research on community radio in Australia, she observed the range of community connections that contributed to the news broadcast on just one station:

> Weather reports are provided by local professional fishermen; a local taxi company gives traffic reports; a market report comes from the Brisbane-based wholesale fruit and vegetable market; and the station broadcasts a job search program with the assistance of employment agencies (Van Vuuren, 2001: 15).

This is illustrative of community radio's role as what Potapchuk and Crocker Jr (1999) term a 'bridge-building organisation', which they see as essential to maintaining civic capital and collective collaboration. Applying the metaphor of a rhizome to community radio journalism offers insight into the ways in which community radio journalism draws from and connects various disparate aspects of the community, as well as the necessarily fluid and contingent nature of community radio newsgathering. Thus, it provides a useful frame for explorations into community radio journalism in India, an environment where community connections and contingency are particularly important.

Community radio in India

Having established a broad view of the role and characteristics of community radio news and journalism, it is now essential to situate the community radio sector in India. Community radio has had to fight for its small space within India's megalithic media landscape. The space that community radio does occupy is tightly controlled by stifling legislation, specifically the Indian Telegraph Act (1885) alongside the India Wireless Telegraphy Act (1933), which make the possession of radio equipment without a licence illegal and effectively ensure that the exclusive rights to establishing, maintaining and operating radio and television broadcasting remain with the Central Government (Kumar, 2003; Pavarala & Malik, 2007).

Many scholars have noted the extensive legislative obstacles which have been placed in the way of Indian citizens obtaining their constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression (Gunaratne, 2000; Saeed, 2009; Sen, 2003; Thomas, 2011). A key breakthrough in the struggle for community radio, and indeed the media environment generally, in India was the Supreme Court's historic 1995 ruling that the 'airwaves are public property' and should be used for public benefit (Pavarala & Malik, 2007; Sen, 2003; Singhal & Rogers, 2001; UNESCO, 2011). It was not until after this ruling, in 1998, that the state broadcasters—All India Radio (AIR) and television station Doordarshan—were granted relative autonomy from the government, despite the recommendations of two separate committees: the Chanda Committee in 1966

and the Verghese Committee in 1978 (Singhal & Rogers, 2001). This landmark ruling proved to be of critical importance not only to the public broadcasters and communication rights more generally, but also for the community radio movement.

The first direct step towards community radio in India took place in September 1996. A group of media professionals and policy experts gathered in Bangalore to explore the relevance of community radio for India (SANCOM, 2015). The 'Bangalore Declaration on Radio' made a strong case for community radio, describing it as 'public service broadcasting in its most decentralised and its most democratic form' (Sen, 2003: 2199). Following this, the push for greater communicative and media freedoms gained momentum across the country. Then in 2000, a group of activists, academics and radio practitioners met and established the first systematic case for the creation of community radio as a third tier of broadcasting in India, separate to the government-run and commercial sectors (Pavarala, 2013). The declaration resulting from the meeting, which was supported by UNESCO, known as the 'Pastapur Initiative on Community Radio' after the area in which the meeting occurred, defined community radio as having 'three key aspects: non-profit making, community ownership and management, and community participation' (Sen, 2003: 2199).

In late 2002, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting finally released 'Community Radio Guidelines'. Far from being a victory for the community radio movement, the guidelines restricted licences to 'well-established' educational institutions and banned advertisements and news and current affairs programmes (SANCOM, 2015). Following this, India's first community radio station was established at Anna University in Chennai. Anna FM began broadcasting in February, 2004, to the area surrounding the university (Ghosh, 2011; Nirmala, 2015; Prabakar, 2009). Stations affiliated with educational institutions, often referred to as 'campus radio', have been subject to some scrutiny and criticism over the years. Thomas (2010: 221) bluntly states that campus radio has 'very little potential for becoming a tool for development'. Similarly, Prabhakar (2009) writes that activists are sceptical of the role of campus radio stations, in that expecting them to serve communities outside of their campus confuses the community radio mandate with that of public broadcasting. Despite the disappointment of such restrictive guidelines, the following years marked a renewed push for community radio with a number of stations exploring alternative methods of distribution including narrowcasting and cablecasting (SANCOM, 2015).

While community radio was treading water, another grassroots movement was taking root. India's Right to Information (RTI) movement was another important milestone in the lead-up to community radio. The movement was also of vital importance to the broader media environment. Thomas (2011), who has written extensively on the RTI movement in India, even suggests that the RTI movement played a role in revitalising participatory democracy in India. The RTI movement began in central Rajasthan in the late 1980s with a small group of social activists and local people who took an interest in livelihood issues including the failure of the government to enforce minimum wage regulations, and the availability of subsidised foods (Jenkins & Goetz, 1999). The critical tool of this movement was the *jan sunwai*, a type of public hearing in which local issues are discussed by members of the community. Thomas (2014) suggests that *jan sunwai* act as local public sphere based on local idiom, in contrast with Jürgen Habermas's bourgeois and exclusive interpretation of the public sphere, and that its strength lies within its deliberate inclusivity in which all local people have space to share

full accounts of their experience. The campaign for RTI laws incorporated the *jan sunwai* as well as other local information dissemination techniques such as street theatre to gain critical mass. In June 2005, the Right to Information passed and what started as agitation for basic livelihood-related entitlements became an important precedent for communication rights in India. Thomas (2008: 43) writes that the movement offers the 'best hopes for the rural poor to fulfil their right to development'. The success of the RTI movement can be attributed to a number of factors: firstly, it was an indigenous social movement that occurred in response to local needs; second, it employed familiar, colloquial tools, including *jan sunwai* and community theatre; and third, the movement gained significant momentum and was supported by a large group of people who understood the need for RTI and were willing to mobilise themselves and others in pursuit of this goal (Thomas, 2011). It is worth noting that, while the RTI movement attracted significant attention in the mainstream media, the push for community radio was largely ignored (Saeed, 2009).

Finally, in late 2006, a second phase of policy guidelines for community radio stations was released (UNESCO, 2011). Alongside educational institutions, NGOs and agricultural science centres or *Krishi Vigyan Kendra* (KVK) were granted the right to apply for licences. News was still not permitted but limited advertising, up to seven minutes per hour of broadcasting, was allowed (SANCOM, 2015). In October, 2008, Sangham Radio in Pastapur village launched to become the first community radio station licensed to an NGO, with their licence held by DDS, the Deccan Development Society (Ghosh, 2011; Pavarala & Malik, 2007).

More than ten years after the updated guidelines were released, community radio in India now finds itself at somewhat of a crossroads. As of May 2018, there were just 217 operational stations (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2018); a somewhat meagre number for a country with the population size of India. Malik (2016) writes that the movement seems to have plateaued:

> It is neither growing nor prospering. While there is recognition and acceptance of its potential in the upper echelons of administration, it looks as if there is a decline in buy-in from grassroots practitioners and communities in India.

The sector is facing a number of internal problems associated with sustainability and independence. In addition, the contemporary regulatory environment is still rigid and tightly controlled. Compared to the free-for-all of commercial broadcasting, community radio must adhere to the strictest rules around revenue-generating advertisements (Thomas, 2010). Alongside this, the restrictions on news content remain, and licences are only granted to educational institutions, agricultural groups, and well-established NGOs. It seems as though there is little room for community media journalism under these stifling conditions; indeed, such structures appear to more closely align with the aforementioned arbolic, hierarchical approach of the state. Where then does this leave community radio journalism in India? Is it, as the guidelines dictate, non-existent? Or does it, like the community radio sector itself, carve out a niche space to occupy?

Methodology

This article draws from a larger project involving ethnographic research conducted at two community radio stations in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The state has a long history with local broadcasting and was the site of early farm radio experiments in the 1960s (Page & Crawley, 2001). Later, Tamil Nadu was a hub of activism throughout the push to establish community radio in India and was the location of the first iteration of community radio in India, Anna FM in Chennai. Further, Tamil Nadu is home to the highest number of community radio stations in the country: as of May 2018, there were 31 operational stations (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2018). The site stations for this research were selected based on their locations and ownership models—both rural stations with NGOs as parent organisations. The aim was not generalisation or broad representation of the community radio sector, but rather tracing a complex social phenomenon. The diverse nature of community radio stations means that it is difficult to generalise across any two stations, even if they are in close physical proximity to one another, let alone on a national or international scale. As such, the purpose of the multi-sited nature of this research was simply to explore how different stations take different approaches, rather than making holistic generalisations or recommendations.

The primary methods of data collection were participant observation, interviews, and focus groups. Participant observation took place throughout the research and occurred in several stages. Initially, observation was centred on the station itself, with a period of time spent at each station, observing and recording the activities of staff, as well as any visitors to the station, and any other happenings. The second phase of participant observation draws on Couldry's (2006: 4) notion of 'decentred media studies': a form of media studies not necessarily focussed on traditional sites of media production and consumption. In a related, though more practice-driven article, Couldry (2004: 125) advocates for asking 'open questions about what people are doing and how they categorise what they are doing, avoiding the disciplinary or other preconceptions that would automatically read their actions'. Following this, the second phase of participant observation saw the research move outside of the stations to incorporate the work that takes place outside traditional sites of production. This stage of participant observation was highly dependent on developing relationships with the key informants and involved work shadowing and what Kusenbach refers to as 'go-alongs' (2003). A cross between interview and participant observation, go-alongs involve accompanying informants on their everyday outings in order to understand their experiences of their physical and social environments (Kusenbach, 2003). Asking questions, listening, and observing while informants move through these environments represents a more active, focussed, and outcome-oriented approach, rather than just 'hanging out with key informants—an ethnographic practice that is highly recommended in virtually all fieldwork manuals and textbooks' (Kusenbach, 2003: 463). Observations from these events, as well as time spent at the station and on go-alongs, were recorded in comprehensive field notes that included pure observations, as well as emerging prospective theories or areas for further research and analysis. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) suggest, periods of observation were selective and complemented by periods of reflection and recording, rather than attempting to capture absolutely everything.

Participant observation formed a major part of the data collection and also contributed to informing the topics to be discussed during interviews.

Interviews were semi-structured and in-depth with open-ended questions aimed at collecting descriptive qualitative data. The questions were general and aimed at generating discussion rather than imposing definitions or interpretations. The aim here, as Couldry (2004: 125) explains, was to ask 'open questions about what people are doing and how they categorise what they are doing, avoiding the disciplinary or other preconceptions that would automatically read their actions'. So as to understand the day-to-day operations and activities of the stations, interviews took place following a period of participant observation, go-alongs, and work shadowing. Ratan and Bailur (2007) note that ethnography, through immersion in everyday life, can help illustrate and clarify discrepancies between what has been observed and data that has been collected directly from the participants through surveys or interviews. In addition to collecting specific data, interviews were also used to clarify what had been observed, and subsequent interviews were occasionally used to question any discrepancies between what was done and what was said. Several approaches to interviewing were implemented in a specific order. First, towards the end of the period of participant observation, focus group discussions were conducted with groups of audience members. Following the completion of these, group interviews were conducted with the staff at the radio station, followed by one-on-one, in-depth interviews with the key informants at the stations. The use of these three methods—participant observation, interviews with staff, and focus group discussions with listeners—acted as a way of triangulating data by testing sources against one another (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

The data collected from both the interviews and participant observation was subsequently analysed using constructivist grounded theory. While grounded theory traditionally aligned with positivist and post-positivist research (Clarke, 2007; Spencer, Pryce & Walsh, 2014), it was adapted to constructivist inquiries by Kathy Charmaz (2014). She writes that, in contrast to Glaser and Strauss 'discovering' grounded theory, neither data nor theories are discovered, but constructed (Charmaz, 2014) Any resulting theories are interpretive portrayals, rather than exact representations of the studied world: 'We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices... Participants' implicit meanings, experiential views—and researchers' finished grounded theories—are constructions of reality' (Charmaz, 2014: 10). Interviews, fieldnotes, and documents were initially coded taking an open, line-by-line approach, before using axial coding to identify relationships between existing codes and synthesize the data in new ways (Charmaz, 2014). Finally, the data was re-coded based on thematic topics arising from the previous analysis of the initial coding phases. These thematic topics were placed in conversation with existing bodies of work and literature in order to build an understanding of community radio news and journalism in India.

Findings and discussion

The primary finding of this research is that, despite the ban, community radio news and journalism in India seems to be doing quite well. At both stations, discussions of news and journalism were common among both broadcasters and audience members. It is worth re-

emphasising here that the phrases 'news' and 'journalism' were deliberately avoided during interviews and discussions so as not to lead or bias the responses. The use of such terms emerged organically from the broadcasters and the audiences themselves. There are several key themes for discussion that emerge from the findings of this research. The first theme discusses the constructions of audience by broadcasters and the ways in which audiences themselves construct news. The second area of discussion involves how broadcasters navigate the restrictions on news, which primarily takes place through provisions of 'non-news' and the use of alternative news broadcasting formats. Finally, this paper attempts to understand why the government has taken such a stance on news within its community radio policy and the implications of such an approach.

Constructions of audience

A key finding of this research relates to constructions of audience, both in terms of how audiences are constructed by broadcasters and how audiences themselves construct news. McQuail (1994) suggests that self-constructed images of audience are a way for journalists to manage uncertainty. Conversely, Gans (1979) suggests that journalists consider themselves audience representatives and thus see the audience as similar to themselves. Meadows (2010) contrasts earlier relations between producers of news and their audiences, which he sees as more intimate and with fewer barriers, with modern journalism and mass media, where public opinion is formed, rather than reported on. These murky constructions and barriers between producers and audiences bring to mind Anderson's (2006) 'imagined communities', in which he suggests that communities are merely constructions created by their members based on shared attributes. Indeed, MacNamara (2013: 161) suggests that media audiences are 'doubly assumed and imagined—assumed and imagined to exist and assumed and imagined to listen'. If community media is to be truly grounded within their communities, the audience-producer barrier, so prominent in mainstream media, must be 'down' (Forde, 2015). Further, there must be clear conceptualisations of local audiences if the content is to be relevant as it is this relevant content that facilitates the strong community connections that break down these barriers (Forde, 2015). What was observed at both stations throughout the research were clear conceptualisations of audience based on ongoing interaction and social relationships that act as rhizomatic links between different groups. This is demonstrated in the following comment from a broadcaster:

> Earlier, we used to do agriculture-related programs, with whatever resources we had. But then we got feedback at one of the events we arranged. They asked us to give information about the seasonal crops, about what could be planted in which season, and how it can be maintained. So, we got messages from agricultural officers regarding the monsoon and suggestion for crops that are appropriate to be planted in monsoon. As per the listeners' requests, we started broadcasting this information in the radio. We started changing our program schedule as per the listeners choice.

These connections directly impacted upon the content that was produced: broadcasters demonstrated a strong understanding of who their audiences were, and this was reflected in what they broadcast. When viewed through a lens of traditional, Western news values such as timeliness, significance, proximity, conflict, human interest, novelty and prominence (Masterton, 1995), information about seasonal crops may seem out of place. Nonetheless, it

is locally significant information and, as Atton (2001) suggests, is an alternative construction of news appropriate for the alternative press.

There were similar findings in terms of the audiences' perceptions of the work of their local community radio stations. As far as the audience members who were interviewed were concerned, they were listening to news. It was timely, local news, specifically relevant to them. It was their news. One audience member was particularly adamant about the news broadcast on their local station, exclaiming, 'But there are lot of news broadcasted in the radio!'. The specific, local nature of the news content was also appreciated:

> They report if there is any incident in the locality and warns us to be careful. Even if we don't happen to cross that particular area, we can know if any accidents happen in the locality through radio. They instantly deliver news, and each programme gives us new information that is very helpful.

Such hyperlocal news fills a critical gap in media coverage, particularly in rural areas. The specific, local nature represents a key aspect of audience conceptualisations of news, alongside timeliness and direct relevance of the content to the audiences. This aligns with two of Forde's (2015) consistent traits of alternative journalism, discussed earlier, through its immediate local relevance and addressing a gap in mainstream news coverage. In an earlier work, Forde (2010) writes that news and current affairs coverage on community radio fills a critical gap in local news coverage that is overlooked by mainstream media outlets. She notes that 'this model of "journalism", or more accurately, news provision, sits more closely with newer forms of citizens' journalism and audience-driven journalism than the traditional formats of news production' (2010: 188). Returning to the Indian community radio sector, Pavarala, Stalin and Venniyoor also see the provision of local news and information as a key aspect of community radio programming, and thus the ban on news and current affairs represents 'a restriction on freedom of expression' (2011, p. 76).

The implications for freedom of expression hint at the broader impact of hyperlocal journalism on community radio audiences. Not only does hyperlocal journalism fill a critical gap in news coverage, but the close relationships and ongoing communication between community radio broadcasters and their audiences serve other purposes. A recurring theme throughout the focus groups of female listeners was the notion of empowerment and the community radio stations' facilitating roles. Participation in their local community radio stations, even at the level of simply being interviewed for a programme or volunteering to conduct listener surveys in their local village, had a profound effect on women. One female listener discussed the first time she was invited to take part in a programme:

> In the beginning, a negative attitude to talk and participate in the radio was there. But my in-laws came and saw the programme at the station. My husband too. The respect we get in the station and the exposure to what they do in the program changed their attitude. Now also in our home, they wish and send us to participate. In many homes they support them.

Participating in radio and news production was an empowering experience for many of the female listeners, who were able to exercise their right to communicate and be heard. The concept of voice is key here. As one female listener put it, 'We speak in many places and that's different. But in radio, people listen to what we speak.'

Hyperlocal journalism and the relationships between community radio broadcasters and their audiences clearly have broader implications beyond news coverage. As Malik (2012)

wrote in a piece for media watchdog *The Hoot*: 'Indeed, for those who have traditionally been unacknowledged and silenced, socially and culturally, the opportunity to have one's voice heard can be an imposing experience of self-worth'.

'Non-news'

As mentioned, the key finding of this research is that, from the perspective of broadcasters and audiences, community radio news and journalism is alive and well, and even prominent within the broadcasting schedules of the stations. At both stations, broadcasters discussed gathering and broadcasting community 'news' without hesitation. Similarly, audience members discussed tuning in to the stations specifically to hear local news. How can this be the case in such a strict regulatory environment? A lack of enforcement is not the case, with several stations recently receiving warnings about their content (Seshu, 2017). A potential reason for this somewhat lax attitude towards the news restrictions could be the provisions made for community radio stations to broadcast what the policy terms 'non-news'.

As discussed, the Government of India's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting specifically bans news, current affairs and anything remotely 'political'. Categorising community radio news and current affairs as inherently political is problematic: as Tacchi (2011: 118) argues, it is instead 'vernacular information sharing and discussion around local interests… this is not political, as seems to be assumed (that news = politics) in the Indian policy'. This hard-line stance was slightly softened in 2017 when the government allowed community radio stations to broadcast bulletins produced by All India Radio, the state broadcaster. The move was heavily critiqued by activists as it completely missed the point of their calls to allow community radio stations to broadcast original news (Seshu, 2017). The recommendations underpinning this policy identified several categories that are considered 'non-news':

> '(a) Information pertaining to sporting events excluding live coverage. However live commentaries of sporting events of local nature may be permissible; (b) Information pertaining to Traffic and Weather; (c) Information pertaining to and coverage of cultural events, festivals; (d) Topics pertaining to examinations, results, admissions, career counseling; (e) Availability of employment opportunities; (f) Public announcements pertaining to civic amenities like electricity, water supply, natural calamities, health alerts etc. as provided by the local administration; (g) Such other categories not permitted at present that may subsequently be specifically permitted by Ministry of Information and Broadcasting from time to time' (Bhawan & Marg, 2014: 10).

One could argue that most of these categories form a solid basis of the day-to-day content of community radio stations and, in a hyperlocal setting like community radio, could even be considered 'news'. Forde, Meadows and Foxwell (2002) argue that news, in the context of community radio, often refers to events of interest in the local area or public service announcements, categories which could potentially include all of the 'non-news' mentioned above. This could explain broadcaster attitudes towards news: what they consider 'news' could easily fall under a category of 'non-news'.

A further method of circumventing the restrictions was the avoidance of news bulletins in a traditional format. Neither station broadcast regular news bulletins, though both offered topical information including market prices, dam water levels, traffic, and weather at the same time each morning. Such an approach is by no means unique to India. A more extreme example took place during the 2005 coup in Nepal, which saw a complete ban on news broadcasting.

Community radio stations circumvented this ban by broadcasting educational programmes on topics such as the rights enshrined in the Nepali constitution, the processes for suspending these rights and the Geneva Convention, as well as employing local comedians to sing the news, methods that enabled them to continue broadcasting throughout the despot's 15-month rule (Girard, 2007). Alternative formats were also observed by Forde, Meadows and Foxwell (2002) who, in their study of Australian community radio, found that most community radio stations did not have dedicated news and current affairs programming but instead delivered local news and information throughout the content of various other programmes. This was indeed the approach observed at both stations, which would explain both the broadcasters' and the audiences' attitudes to news coverage. The news is there, it just may not take the form of a traditional, on-the-hour bulletin. Van Vuuren (2001: 78) suggests that community media function best when contributing to community development processes and, as such, the 'news imperative—with its emphasis on professionally produced "hard", "serious", political and controversial information' could be reduced. This concept of community development is of particular importance in the context of the community radio sector and is a significant influence on the value placed on news and journalism.

Development and news

Journalism has been widely employed as a tool of development. Manyozo (2012) observes that development journalism has been implemented as rural journalism in India, given the large percentage of the population in impoverished, rural areas. Similarly, community radio has also been primarily used as a tool for development, because, as Ashish Sen (2007) observes, community radio has demonstrated its ability to empower communities, particularly poor and rural communities. By this logic, and given the development goals of the government, one would assume that local journalism and community radio are a match made in heaven, from a development perspective at least.

So why then has the government taken such an approach to news? A potential reason is that community radio journalism potentially represents a source of narratives of dissent or resistance, particularly seeing as those rural, poor communities served by community radio stations are the same communities that struggle to access resources and assistance from a government so focussed on development. Mohan Dutta suggests that narratives of resistance that are often co-opted by discourses of nationalism and homeland security and portrayed as 'threats to security' (Dutta, 2014). This has been observed elsewhere in the community radio sector in India, where licence applications from 'troubled regions' have fallen victim to the Ministry of Home Affairs and its overzealous approach to national security. Pavarala (2013: 3) observes that the entire northeast as well as those areas affected by Naxalite insurgency are served by a minimal number of stations as compared to the rest of the country. Interestingly, Moitra, Kumar and Seth (2018: 126) observe that the groups who would benefit most from community media platforms are 'women, those in Naxal areas, and groups marginalized by caste or class'.

There are a several other reasons that represent significant challenges for the sector and may also impact upon how news is prioritised among stations. Given the restrictions on ownership models, limited to established NGOs, educational institutions and KVK, a major challenge is the 'NGOisation' of the sector. Stations are expected to conform to the

agenda of their NGO parent body who, in turn, are under pressure from donors to 'scale up' operations and demonstrate impact (Malik & Bandelli, 2012; Pavarala, 2015). Subsequently, news and current affairs coverage may not be a priority. A more systemic problem associated with this is the community radio sector's underlying, and potentially outdated, focus on development. Pavarala (2015) argues that there is now a need for the sector to move past its developmentalist agenda, which he sees as a legacy of postcolonial nation-building, and focus more on the development of communication rights. A comparative study of the community radio sectors in Nepal, Bangladesh and India revealed that while community radio stations in Nepal have a strong focus on local journalism in their content, community radio stations in Bangladesh and India tend to focus more on 'information provision and providing links to welfare/development services' (Arora, Ramakrishnan & Fernandez, 2015: 33). This raises further questions about the fundamental purpose of community radio. In this case, a development agenda overpowers the potential of community radio for journalism, activism, communication rights, and acting as an alternative public sphere. News and current affairs coverage could be considered unfortunate collateral damage.

An overarching development discourse could be observed throughout many aspects of the day-to-day operations of the community radio stations visited. An example of this was discussed in one of the audience focus group discussions:

> I very well knew about everything before. The information given on radio could be considered as additional qualification.
>
> I hear a lot of informative news from the radio but I cannot tell that I learnt anything new. They tell information that I already knew.
>
> But in present situation agriculture is not in its full glory. There is no rain and there is no conditions favourable for doing agriculture. So the information told in the community radio is not useful at all. Even though the programs broadcasted in community radio reaches people, it is neither useful nor impactful as there is no rain and no agriculture.

Here we can see a clear disconnect between the broadcasting priorities of the station and, by extension, its parent body, and the realities of their audience. The development agenda could be observed through the provision of information about increasing yield and treating pests, but the lack of local contextualisation meant that such information was irrelevant to the audience. Taking a different perspective and applying the traditional 'news values' (which are, according to Masterton's (1995) seminal article: timeliness, significance, proximity, conflict, human interest, novelty and prominence), a focus on development without appropriate local contextualisation strips community news of its news value.

Conclusion

Despite the restrictive environment of development imperatives, ownership structures and strict government legislation, it seems as though community radio news and journalism is alive and well. Though it may not necessarily take the form of a slick three-minute bulletin on the hour every hour, there is news and journalism in community radio in India, and it is seen as a key aspect of the day-to-day activities of stations. Close relationships and strong networks with audiences help community radio practitioners engage in hyperlocal journal-

ism from the margins that results in news that may not conform to mainstream, large-scale definitions, but nonetheless serves to let local voices be heard and contribute to the democratisation of the public sphere. The primary threat to community radio news and journalism does not necessarily come from overzealous restrictions on news, but rather an overarching development discourse that imposes programming imperatives and fails to account for the local broadcasting environment. As for next steps though, opening up the legislation to allow news broadcasting remains a priority for academics and activists. A key recommendation of UNESCO's National Consultation on Strengthening Community Radio in India, specifically called on the government to 'Relax content restrictions on community radio, and permit free collection and broadcast of local news and information over CRs.' Successive governments have failed to make community radio a priority in India, despite the valuable work being done in the sector. But at least there is some comfort in the fact that hyperlocal, community journalism has found a way, despite the odds.

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CHAPTER 14

‘In the Waiting Room’: Digitisation and Post-Neoliberalism in Buenos Aires’ Independent Music Sector

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Abstract

This chapter analyses the independent music sector in Buenos Aires in the wake of two major developments of the 1990s and early 2000s, digitisation and the national economic crisis of 2001, drawing primarily on fieldwork in 2011–13. The first section outlines the Buenos Aires music industry, focusing on independent labels and artists, and exploring the relative fortunes of the digital content and live music sectors. The second section takes as a case study a small label, ZZK Records, and the genre around which it coalesced, digital *cumbia*, examining the label’s changing relationship to digital technology and its economic strategies. Other strands of digital cumbia production are also considered. The final section explores the role of the state in the field of digitisation and culture. Alongside digitisation, Argentina saw a political transition to centre-left populist governments, and the two became increasingly entwined. The Kirchner governments (2003–15) saw new policies aimed at supporting the independent music sector and, more broadly, the emergence of a post-neoliberal paradigm for the cultural

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industries that sought to catalyse progressive alternatives to digital capitalism. An ethos of collectivism arose in response to the opportunities and challenges provided by digitisation and post-crisis economic realities. Many related developments came to an abrupt halt with the election of the centre-right candidate Mauricio Macri as president in late 2015.

Introduction

From the turn of the millennium, Buenos Aires emerged as a major centre of electronic dance music (EDM) in Latin America. As well as constituting an important regional hub for international EDM, it was also at the heart of the creation of new styles that reinvented traditional Latin American genres by incorporating digital technology and aesthetics. Argentinean laptop artist-producers mixed Latin American and Caribbean popular and folk musics with electronic genres like techno, dub, dubstep and dancehall to create new hybrid styles—first electro-tango (around 2000) and subsequently digital *cumbia* and digital folklore. Among the main driving forces that fostered the latter genres and propelled them to the global stage was the Buenos Aires label ZZK Records, internationally recognised as an important creative force in contemporary Latin American electronic music.

I was drawn to this area for a number of reasons. *Cumbia*, a genre of Colombian origin that spread across the Americas in the mid-twentieth century, had until recently been somewhat underrepresented in the academic literature, considering its significance in the region.[1] It had been an important feature of working-class musical life in Argentina for some fifty years, and while Argentinean sociologists had paid considerable attention to cumbia villera, with its intimate connection to the neoliberal 1990s and subsequent economic crisis, the music's more recent incorporation and transformation by middle-class laptop producers in Buenos Aires and the emergence of a middle-class cumbia scene had attracted minimal academic attention.[2] These developments seemed worthy of further study, since they pointed to a new phase in the history of this genre, one connected to wider changes in Argentina since the turn of the millennium. The country's decade of neoliberal capitalism, the 1990s, culminated in a catastrophic economic crisis in 2001, ushering in the centre-left Peronist governments of Néstor Kirchner (2003–7) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007–15). One consequence of the crisis and subsequent turn to nationalist and regionalist politics was increasing identification with Latin America on the part of a middle class that, in Buenos Aires at least, had long been famed for its Europhilia. This significant socio-political transformation was felt in the musical sphere. Rock had exercised a considerable hold over Argentinean audiences since the 1960s: Argentina was a pioneer in the development of rock en español in Latin America and is frequently described in middle-class circles as 'a rock country'. Yet while rock retained considerable popularity, national folkloric musics and internationally circulating Latin American genres such as cumbia were gaining increasing visibility among the middle and upper classes (Sánchez 2014). Digital *cumbia* and folklore thus spoke of wider social, political and cultural transformations, and with ZZK Records foregrounding the digital at the level

[1] The subsequent publication of several books (such as Vila and Semán 2011; Semán and Vila 2011; Fernández L'Hoeste and Vila 2013) altered this picture.

[2] There is an extensive literature on *cumbia villera*, in which the work of Pablo Semán and Pablo Vila has been particularly important. Irisarri 2011 is, however, the only study of digital *cumbia*.

of both musical aesthetics and institutional self-presentation, this label and its genres were potentially fertile terrain for studying the nexus between music, politics and new technologies.

For all the increasing legitimation of *cumbia*, however, ZZK's music was largely divorced from the mainstream *cumbia* or 'tropical music' scene in Buenos Aires, which was dominated by the 'popular' (that is to say working and lower-middle) classes. ZZK was tied more closely to the middle-class indie rock and alternative EDM scenes, illustrating that class divisions subsumed genre connections. During 2011 laptop *cumbia* became established in the commercial *cumbia* scene, due above all to the huge success of the boy band Los Wachiturros, which spawned many imitators and rivals, and a new subgenre—*música turra*. However, it was emblematic of Buenos Aires' class and geographical divides that these distinctive strands of digital *cumbia* barely intersected. This study thus focuses primarily on a niche of middle-class, independent musicians and labels rather than the *cumbia* mainstream, though it also considers *música turra*.[3]

Examining these actors provided insights into the fortunes of a sector of the music industry under digital conditions. The music industry suffered heavily in the aftermath of the 2001 crisis, and while it soon began to recover, it was then subject to many of the challenges experienced at global level with the explosion of internet access. Nevertheless, there were also important continuities: for example, the multinational major labels, long established in Argentina, continued to control over 80 per cent of the record market, and concerts by middle-aged rock stars from the global North filled stadiums. A focus on ZZK Records and related artists sheds light on the uncertain place for independent musicians and new technologies in this picture.

From the start, ZZK's outlook was global. It was co-founded by Grant C. Dull, a North American who had previously created What's Up Buenos Aires, an English-language internet portal for the Buenos Aires cultural scene, and it particularly caught the attention of expats, hip tourists and foreign journalists. Its early and enthusiastic adoption of social media and its aesthetic orientation towards fusions with internationally circulating forms of EDM resulted in prominent participation in the transnational networks of Global (or Tropical) Bass, the digital, club-oriented offspring of World Music (though over time its orientation shifted towards the parent genre). ZZK's artists toured regularly to Europe and the US, and collaborated with producers overseas, and the label signed a licensing deal with Los Angeles label Waxploitation in 2011. ZZK Records was thus a thoroughly, and at times frantically, transnational operation.

As ZZK's centre of attention shifted ever more towards Europe and North America, it became less rooted in the local music scene. In many respects, five years after its foundation ZZK could have been located in Bogotá, Brooklyn or Barcelona, and its location was arguably wherever Grant Dull's laptop happened to be. In order to explore wider issues surrounding music and digitisation that were more specific to Buenos Aires, I therefore broadened my research to encompass developments in cultural and digital policy at municipal, national and continental levels. The Ministry of Culture launched several new initiatives centred on digital transformations and the cultural industries, and seemed set on playing a larger and more supportive role in the independent music sector. Once again, transnationalism

[3] 'Independent' will be used here to refer to music other than *música tropical*, not released by a multinational major label.

was to the fore, and these shifting visions and policies must be understood in the context of the marked Latin American regionalism of the early twenty-first century. While many such initiatives were ultimately abortive, they signalled important shifts in the conceptualisation of the relationship between politics, culture and the digital, on the part of the Argentinean government and of the Latin American Left more generally.

The Buenos Aires music industry in the digital era

According to a report by the Observatorio de Industrias Creativas (OIC) in 2011, the Buenos Aires music industry represented a successful sector of the economy, with its total income having almost doubled between 2005 and 2009 ('La Industria de la Música' 2011). The principal reason for this success was live music, which grew by nearly 300 per cent in that period. These statistics contrasted, however, with a more uneven picture emanating from the city's independent music scenes. On 4 June 2012, the Club Cultural Matienzo hosted a debate on the topic: 'From underground to indie: industry and venues in the waiting room', which provided a snapshot of the independent music sector at the time. Participants complained of small audiences, a lack of venues and meagre earnings. The alleged cause of this difficult situation was new technologies: the internet was seen as a rival to live music, responsible for an excess of music and a dearth of audiences. One older musician quipped that if his generation wanted to hear music and meet girls, they used to go to gigs; now people stayed at home with YouTube and chat. The messages conveyed by the panellists were: work hard, lower your expectations and question whether you are good enough. It was hard to imagine that the audience went away with renewed hope.

A closer reading of the OIC report reveals two important findings that support the more negative mood seen at the debate. First, the growth of live music covered up a big drop in the sales of physical formats, yet the drop had not been offset by rising digital sales, which accounted for just 7 percent of total music sales in 2009, compared to a Latin American average of 15 per cent ('La Industria de la Música' 2011, 45–6). The report concluded that 'the digital market is not being consolidated in Argentina' (2011, 42). Furthermore, the limited digital sales were concentrated among overseas consumers and fans of Top Ten artists, meaning there was almost no local digital market for independent music.

Digital distribution initiatives by Argentine record and telecoms companies had been broadly unsuccessful. There had been several attempts to launch portals, from 2005 to 2007, but none had prospered and some had closed again. There were six portals active in 2010, but the number of users appeared to be low. The failure of Zap Música, launched in 2005, was emblematic: despite major investment from the cable company Fibertel, the portal achieved only derisory sales *(never exceeding $400 a month)*. The mobile music market was also slow to take off in Argentina and, at least initially, had a negligible effect on the independent music sphere, since mobile phone operators focused on selling a small range of current hits. iTunes launched in Argentina in 2011, but only 0.5 per cent of the population used it in 2013 ('Encuesta Nacional' 2013).

With the pay-per-download model showing few signs of promise, commercial attention shifted to streaming. Multinational services Grooveshark and Deezer launched in Argentina and 2012 saw the creation of the Buenos Aires-based Taringa! Música. Its parent company,

Taringa!, founded in 2005, was not only a highly successful social network but a prime source of links to free downloads of music, films and books and the first stop for music producers in search of pirated software, samples and plug-ins. Initially seen as a local equivalent of Megaupload, the Hong Kong-based file hosting service shut down by the FBI in 2012, it went through a tortuous legal process for several years from 2009. Its owners, the brothers Matías and Hernán Botbol and Alberto Nakayama, were committed for trial in 2012, charged with violating Argentina's intellectual property law by facilitating copyright infringement ('Confirman juicio oral' 2012). This was to be the first public trial in Argentina in which the responsibility of websites for the illegal actions of their end users would be debated, and Taringa! became a focal point for local debates about IP.

As part of efforts to legitimise its activities under the shadow of the impending trial, the company launched Taringa! Música, a legal streaming service. In 2012–13, it negotiated with multinational major labels, and trade and collecting societies, principally SADAIC (Argentinean Society of Authors and Music Composers) and CAPIF (Argentinean Chamber of Phonogram and Videogram Producers), and now described its aim as to become the Spotify of the Spanish-speaking world. The possibility that Taringa! Música might offer a radical alternative to the commercial digital distribution platforms of the global North receded as it backed off from a 'free culture'-esque stance under pressure to deal with major industry and legal institutions. By September 2013 Taringa!'s counter-cultural discourse had all but vanished: Hernán Botbol described a company that had attempted to respect IP norms and deal with complaints from rights holders while operating in an ill-defined legislative context, and had been unfairly treated by publishers. [4]

Late 2013 also saw a major blow for Taringa! Música—the arrival of Spotify in Argentina. While the Argentinean company had been embroiled in drawn-out negotiations, it had been outflanked by an international competitor and its moment had passed. Features of Taringa! Música that had been innovative when it was conceived were now commonplace on multinational services like Spotify and SoundCloud, and a combination of Argentinean fascination with foreign trends and the negative associations of the Taringa! brand put the local alternative at a disadvantage. Furthermore, Taringa!'s directors, observing the finances of multinational services, became less convinced by the idea of music streaming as an economic venture. With Taringa! Música just one part of a larger enterprise, and a problematic one at that, the directors shifted their attention to other areas, redesigning the portal as a source of information for news media. Taringa!'s attempts to improve its image had been largely successful—by agreeing to publishers' demands, it had ensured that the legal case against it was all but dropped ('Otro querellante' 2014)—but the sense that its music service might challenge multinational enterprises had passed. In 2013, only 3.8 per cent of the population used it to listen to or download music, compared to 27.5 per cent for the peer-to-peer service Ares and 14.4 per cent for YouTube ('Encuesta Nacional' 2013). With none of these services generating direct income for independent musicians, there was no immediate sign that digitised music would provide a financial lifeline to the independent music sector.

The second important finding of the OIC report was that 80 per cent of live Argentine music revenue came from stadium concerts. The local music industry thus depended heavily

[4] http://lic.cultura.gob.ar/foros-de-cultura-digital. No longer available.

on big-name acts, particularly international stars. Accounting for 90 per cent of the concert promotion market in 2012, the promotion and production companies T4F-Time for Fun, Fénix and Pop Art—rather than digital content providers—emerged as the primary actors of the music industry in the digital era ('El background' 2012). Many large concerts were sponsored by major brands and the early 2000s saw the rise of sponsored festivals such as Pepsi Music Festival (originally Quilmes Rock, founded in 2003) and Personal Fest (from 2004). The music industry boom thus exemplified the continuing concentration and corporatisation of the cultural industries, a process noted in the 1980s (Hesmondhalgh 2012) that has only intensified under digital conditions. In Argentina, as in the global North (Netto 2012), music was generating capital at an industry level above even that of the multinational major labels, with its value now lying primarily in its capacity to sell the products and services of the consumer electronics and telecoms industries.

The propitious local conditions for international rock stars were highlighted when Roger Waters sold 372,550 tickets for nine shows as part of his 'The Wall Live' tour, making the River Plate football stadium the second most important open-air venue in the world in 2012 from the perspective of ticket sales (Kantor 2013). Waters personally earned $15.7 million, illustrating how Buenos Aires' '2.0' music industry was primarily benefitting the same musicians who thrived under the '1.0' version, with profits concentrating at the top end of the live music industry. The digital era saw Buenos Aires experiencing a form of rock imperialism from the global North, boosted by the recession in Europe ('El background' 2012). Argentina's large rock fan base provided a receptive audience: 'The high demand for tickets makes Buenos Aires one of the most important markets on the planet', claimed Waters' agent (Kantor 2013).

This was a promising picture for transnational corporations and international stars, but less so for local independent musicians. Indeed, the OIC report noted 'impoverishment of the local, alternative scene' ('La Industria de la Música' 2011, 47) as fans' expenditure was drawn away from mid-level local artists in favour of international touring acts. Exacerbating the problem was a shortage of suitable small- and medium-sized venues, after a fire at the nightclub República Cromañón in 2004, which killed nearly 200 people, led the city government to close locales and tighten licensing practices. A decade after the tragedy, the city government continued to shut down small-scale cultural centres.[5] Independent musicians and promoters lamented the lack of performance spaces, the bureaucratic hurdles to creating new ones, the prevalence of shady practices in existing ones, and the struggles simply to break even (see also Totah 2014). One, DJ Relo, explained how he had founded Sub Klub netlabel as a response to the declining opportunities for live events; the internet provided an alternative outlet for his musical energies and an escape from the problems of the urban environment. Independent musicians thus found themselves in a double bind: declining sales of recordings raised the importance of live performance, yet the urban infrastructure and restrictive regulations conspired against it.

Independent labels were unsurprisingly downbeat in their outlook. Their problems were a decade old, to judge from an OIC report in 2004 that asked: 'How do small and medium independent labels survive, if even in an optimistic scenario the profits made from recording and releasing records are practically nil?' ('La industria del disco' 2004, 74). The first answer

[5] http://leymeca.com.ar. No longer available.

was that many labels had not survived. Those that had were increasingly distancing themselves from content creation, tending more towards licensing existing music. At a debate at the cultural industries trade fair MICA in 2013, one label owner proposed dropping the first word in the term 'record label', since labels rarely made records anymore. Another claimed that small labels were increasingly operating as a service industry, offering distribution to musicians for a fixed fee; some did not even have their own catalogue. He suggested that there was little investment in music at any level of the industry since it was simply no longer profitable to produce music in a studio.

If digital optimists have argued that the internet is democratising the cultural industries (see Hesmondhalgh 2012, 313–21), these independent label owners were more sceptical, pointing to their straitened circumstances and those of their musicians. One asked rhetorically: 'Who is going to protect us in this monstrous digital world, abandoned to the market as it is, perhaps more so than the record industry ever was?' Nicolás Falcoff, owner of the independent label Sura, claimed that there was 'a hyper concentration, a hyper monopolisation hiding behind the curtain of the democratisation of content on the internet'. Major corporations were profiting handsomely while 'those who are losing the battle are the content producers'. He described corporations as acting like parasites on cultural producers rather than investing revenues back into new production, resulting in the concentration of profits—a view echoed by academic reports on the global industry (for example Leurdijk and Nieuwenhuis 2012, 10). The evidence from Buenos Aires that revenue was not trickling back down to the independent music sector in a consistent way was echoed elsewhere: Solís (2010) reports a similar scenario in Santiago de Chile, while the Digital Music Report (2011, 22), describing 'the squeeze on the smaller players' around the world, provides a downbeat picture of losses and declining investment in artists on the part of labels in the UK and Mexico as well as Argentina.

The production of stasis in the Buenos Aires music economy

According to the Club Cultural Matienzo debate, the independent industry was 'in the waiting room'—a phrase that captures the sense of inertia and uncertainty in the sector at that time. One factor behind this stasis was the slow development of a digital music economy in Argentina. This in turn relates to the lack of credit card penetration and confidence in online transactions, in part a consequence of the central role of banks in the 2001 crisis and thus a limited culture of e-commerce. Moreover, not least thanks to Taringa!, there was a deeply rooted culture of free downloading, which was considered 'cool', according to Zap Música's former director: 'Buying in Zap Música was not cool. You were stupid if you bought it, because you could go to many sites and download it for free. So why pay?' The culture of internet use in Buenos Aires combined widespread access and high technological literacy with a disinterest in paying for digital content and pervasive 'free culture' practices. In 2012, the US-based International Intellectual Property Alliance (IIPA) painted a picture of high rates of piracy and low enforcement, and kept Argentina on its Priority Watch List (Argentina 2012). The IP activist Lila Pagola (2010, 40) wrote: 'We are copyleft avant la lettre, simply because if there were not a generalized practice of unauthorized copying and peer-to-peer sharing, the majority of us would not have access to cultural goods.'

While Argentineans' reluctance to buy digital content dampened optimism about the future of digital distribution, institutional forces must also be taken into account. The multinational major labels, the local collecting and trade societies SADAIC, CAPIF and AADI (the Argentinean Association of Performers) and the mainstream media formed a close and collusive bloc which had historically exerted a strong hold over the music industry. Many interlocutors traced the stasis in the digital music field to the attitudes and actions of these dominant players, which were widely regarded as having taken a conservative line with regard to emerging digital conditions: slow to react and fighting to defend their territory rather than adapting.

During the 1990s, the majors bought up large independent labels, as they did across Latin America (Ochoa and Yudice 2002; 'Valor y símbolo' 2010, 86). According to the OIC's 2004 report, the majors had 82.6 per cent of the national market, giving Argentina the second highest penetration of foreign capital in Latin America ('La industria del disco' 2004, 46). In 2010 the majors had 80 per cent of the record market and 90 per cent of the top-selling albums in Argentina ('Valor y símbolo' 2010). In the early 2000s, however, the majors streamlined their operations in Latin America (Laing 2009, 23). The 2004 report claimed that the major labels had suspended their research and development of new artists and were focusing on promoting a small number of long-established figures. The majors thus fostered a rigid and conservative star system, making opportunities for new entrants scarce. In Argentina, as elsewhere (Elavsky 2013, 105–6; Leurdijk and Nieuwenhuis 2012, 46), less famous national artists took the brunt of cutbacks as the majors reduced investment and focused on marketing global priority artists. In one analysis, a combination of the domination of the majors and the abandonment of policies in support of local industries during the neoliberal wave of the 1980s and 90s impeded the development of the Latin American music industry (Barrowclough and Kozul-Wright 2011, 21; Cunningham et al. 2011, 75). In the early 2000s, I would argue, the majors' simultaneous strength (in terms of market share) and weakness (in terms of the general decline of the recording industry) led them to take a cautious line, producing retrenchment rather than dynamic new developments. By 2012 the major record companies' Argentinean offices were increasingly diversifying into 'new business', negotiating with streaming services, concert producers and brands and transforming themselves into content and entertainment companies. Nevertheless, due to their earlier recalcitrance, they were still widely perceived as a conservative force.

Founded in 1936 and 1958 respectively, SADAIC and CAPIF, too, were commonly viewed as sources of inertia, resisting attempts to reshape intellectual property policies for the digital era and labouring over negotiations with digital initiatives such as Taringa! Música. SADAIC was commonly described as a conservative institution run by elderly men—'a white elephant' with 'a very analogue way of thinking', in the words of one senior industry figure. The same individual said of AADI: 'I talk about digital to them, and they make a very big effort, but they don't get it. They don't use it, so they don't get it.' A state cultural official described these institutions as 'the analogue sector', claiming that they made little effort to grasp how digitisation was reshaping the cultural sphere.

Relations between the major labels and the collecting and trade societies were tight: the majors dominated CAPIF (Lamacchia 2012, 142–4), while SADAIC's opaque and much criticised formula for dividing up royalty income was said to favour the multinationals. The majors also had privileged access to the mainstream media, which continued to be important

in Argentina (Becerra, Marino and Mastrini 2012, 18; 'La industria del disco' 2004, 29). Radio play was still key to music consumption ('Encuesta nacional' 2013) and industry success, and independent musicians claimed that payola was rife, making it hard for them to gain exposure. While the 2009 media law (Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual) was supposed to redress this balance by stipulating a quota for local independent music, the digital era had not yet seen a significant shake-up of the main players of the Argentinean recorded music industry, whose continuing collusive dominance left limited space for innovation.

If the institutional panorama was dominated by defensive, analogue-era organisations, institutional and political divisions also contributed to the production of stasis. The national and municipal cultural industries offices were run by opposing political parties and pursued divergent policies, while the major labels had limited connections with these offices and the independent sector. The majors operated to a significant degree as a separate sphere, their institutional line and much of their catalogue determined overseas. Such was the separation between the majors and the rest in neighbouring Brazil that Howard-Spink *(2006)* argued that there were effectively two recording industries. In sum, Buenos Aires sustained a fragmented and contested music sector, and as the fate of Zap Música and Taringa! Música confirmed, this was an unpropitious setting for aspirant digital music entrepreneurs.

ZZK Records and digital cumbias

ZZK Records, founded by Grant C. Dull, Diego Bulacio (aka Villa Diamante) and Guillermo Canale (aka DJ Nim), began life in 2006 as a weekly club night, coalesced into a label in 2008 and by 2011 had evolved into an integrated management and production company housing nine artists plus the three founder-DJs. Its parties brought together laptop artists interested in fusing Latin American musics with international genres like techno, dancehall and dub. It coined the term 'digital *cumbia*' for its signature sound, an EDM-tinged version of the Colombian genre adopted by Argentina; but a number of ZZK artists showed equal or greater affinity for Argentinean folkloric musics.

ZZK's artists had considerable interest in national and continental traditions, yet they and their audiences were primarily middle- to upper-middle-class cosmopolitans with a notable orientation towards the global North. The scene that coalesced around them amounted to a 'culture of circulation' (Baker 2015a; Lee and LiPuma 2002). Two of its foundational figures were a Dutch conceptual artist and musician, Dick Verdult aka Dick el Demasiado, and a North American DJ, Gavin Burnett aka Oro11. Dick el Demasiado's Festicumex (Festival of Experimental Cumbias) in 2003 was a prime catalyst, and Burnett, who spent an extended period in Buenos Aires in the early 2000s, further opened the ears of upper-middle-class tastemakers to fusions of *cumbia* with hip hop, dub and reggae. ZZK cofounder and manager Grant Dull had previously cofounded the website What's Up Buenos Aires (WUBA), aimed at connecting foreign audiences with the Buenos Aires cultural sphere. The scene was thus initiated by the circulation of foreign musicians through Buenos Aires, consolidated by a North American cultural entrepreneur and 'ignored by most locals but eagerly embraced by first-world expats living in Buenos Aires'.[6]

[6] http://latinbutcool.blogspot.co.uk/2008/03/enter-cumbia-phenomenon.html Invitation only.

I was originally attracted to study ZZK Records because of its international renown but also because it seemed to embody a cutting-edge, distinctively digital enterprise. Like many ethnographers of the digital, I faced fundamental challenges when I began fieldwork, such as where and what to study. ZZK artists played prestigious festivals and the label was covered by international media outlets, yet its impressive web presence contrasted with a local operation that consisted largely of Dull, his assistant Allie Silver, and their laptops. For much of my fieldwork ZZK did not have an office and work often took place in living rooms, bedrooms and cafés. Dull would spend much of his day networking digitally with the outside world—writing and answering emails and posting news, videos and music on social media. As a result, ZZK and its technologically savvy musicians became a key point of reference for the transnational Global Bass scene. Paradoxically, though, their local presence in Buenos Aires was far more modest.

Digital *cumbia* was more coherent on the internet than in the online world. Emerging from different points in Latin America in the early 2000s, its central nodes became Facebook or SoundCloud groups like 'The New Cumbia Makers' and blogs like 'Generation Bass', 'Nu *Cumbia* Experience' and 'Cassette Blog'.[7] If more traditional forms of *cumbia* were the soundtrack to countless large dances every weekend, digital *cumbia* was surprisingly elusive on the streets of Latin American cities and primarily inhabited online spaces.

ZZK was indeed a highly digital enterprise in 2011–12. It had a colourful website and its artists were assiduous users of social media.[8] They made mixtapes—consisting of their own unreleased tracks, their remixes of other artists' work and others' remixes of theirs—which the label distributed for free on its website.[9] As well as disseminating current information, Dull often filled quiet news days with retrospective posts—old videos of key performances from the past, for example—thereby constructing and reinforcing a sense of institutional history. Though remaining a niche label, ZZK created a transnational fan base via the internet and its artists communicated extensively with listeners and other producers, both locally and overseas. While Buenos Aires' musical culture has been notably transnational for centuries, its circulatory flows and international profile were much intensified by the internet.

At the same time, with industry developments moving fast, I was obliged to reconsider my initial premise about ZZK's distinctiveness. It might have been an accurate assessment earlier in ZZK's history: Dull had contacts and a knowledge of social media that helped bring ZZK's parties and then the label to international prominence in its first phase. But by 2012, to describe ZZK as a distinctively digital enterprise seemed increasingly meaningless. After the rapid international spread of a handful of dominant platforms, there was now little that distinguished ZZK's digital tools and strategy from those of myriad other independent labels, both locally and overseas. The intensification of circulation enabled by the web promoted certain kinds of standardisation on the web, which was further reinforced by the proliferation of homogenised, user-friendly internet tools; online presentations of self were thus increasingly similar.

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[7] https://www.facebook.com/groups/Cumbiamakers. Accessed 9 January 2022. www.generationbass.com; http://nucumbiaexperience.com. No longer available. www.cassetteblog.com. Accessed 9 January 2022.

[8] http://zzkrecords.com. Accessed 9 January 2022.

[9] http://zzkrecords.com/mixtapes. Accessed 9 January 2022.

What was striking about ZZK by 2012 was less its digital practices than the fact that its artists were starting to turn away from their original one-man-and-his-laptop formula and instead constitute ensembles, incorporate 'real' instruments and play down sampling. By this point, with digital technology now so commonplace in Buenos Aires, what was distinctive about ZZK was less a digital ethos than a post-digital one (Baker 2015b). The prefix 'post-' signifies modification, self-reflexivity and critique rather than rupture, since digital technology continued to be widely used. If there was a temporal aspect, it described a putative moment after digital saturation, a state of affairs evoked by Villa Diamante's 2009 mash-up album *Empacho digital* (Digital indigestion).

Most of ZZK's artists came from an EDM background and in ZZK's earlier phases, the digital had played an important role in mediating cumbia for the upper-middle class, who had historically viewed this genre as vulgar for its strong association with the 'popular' classes. Digital fusion enacted a class move, making this music not just acceptable but positively hip. However, as *cumbia* gained space among the middle classes, a process that accelerated with the appearance of middle-class 'traditional' *cumbia* orchestras from around 2009, several ZZK artists began to see their music-making as a personal journey into Latin American traditions, one that involved more sparing or self-critical use of new technologies and deeper engagement with old ones. Consequently, the laptop lost some ground to traditional instruments and a more conspicuously live aesthetic. Whereas in the peripheral Mexican city of Tijuana, the digital fusion musicians of the Nortec Collective aspired to modernity and cosmopolitanism (Madrid 2008), ZZK's artists were based in a capital city that had long been one of the most modern and cosmopolitan in Latin America. Their search was in the opposite direction: an inward turn, towards a different kind of connectedness, in this case to indigenous cultures and to nature. If, according to Alejandro Madrid, Nortec's 'savvy' musicians were driven largely by career and economic concerns and approached local culture through the prism of kitsch, ZZK's were more serious, even romantic, in their efforts to study Latin American traditions and merge them with urban cosmopolitanism, and this increasing engagement with such traditions entailed rethinking their relationship to digital technologies.

Initially, the computer had been central to ZZK's aesthetic; now, five years later, it was being literally and figuratively moved into the background whenever possible. Leo Martinelli started out working solo with a laptop, and then added two musicians (playing analogue synthesiser and acoustic drum) to form Tremor.[10] Chancha Vía Circuito started by sampling indigenous music on his computer; then he remixed a traditional song, 'Pintar el sol', sung by Miriam García and Alicia Solans, for his album *Rio Arriba*; finally he started taking folkloric music lessons with García.[11] The two musicians eventually performed together in public, singing duets—including 'Pintar el sol'—accompanied only by hand-held frame drums.[12] In 2011, El Remolón, also a solo laptop artist, added three musicians to form El Remolón y Su Conjunto, and he launched his albums *Boxeo Constitución* (2013) with a seven-piece ensemble and *Selva* (2014) with an acoustic set.[13] ZZK's newest and highest-profile signing, La Yegros,

[10] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRDbttlaZQw. No longer available.

[11] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CAzSMAqS10. Accessed 9 January 2022.

[12] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPO-MT6zkiI. Accessed 9 January 2022.

[13] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eY7SVqfS7q0. Accessed 9 January 2022.

performed with a full band; a laptop was tucked discreetly away at the back. The last three artists were now capable of performing without laptop and even without electricity.

For such artists, musical evolution or progression involved a kind of technological regression. Digital technology, rather than being the end point of a development from tradition to modernity, and from acoustic to analogue to digital, served as a starting point for a journey back to roots—from the modern to the traditional, the foreign to the local, the electronic to the acoustic—and from solo to interactive music-making. Villa Diamante's phrase 'digital indigestion' sums up a scene in which artists, while continuing to use digital technology, were developing increasingly critical perspectives towards it, ever more aware of its limitations as well as its advantages.

ZZK's post-digital shift had multiple causes. One was the emergence of a research ethos that bordered on amateur ethnomusicology or anthropology. Having begun by sampling folkloric music, several artists became more interested in their sources and saw learning to play or sing this music as a logical next step in their musical development, even travelling to other parts of the continent to hone their skills and collect music and instruments. They sought a more direct experience than sampling—playing the music themselves or working with musicians who did. This turn to sources was underpinned by the growing identification with Latin America on the part of Buenos Aires' traditionally Eurocentric middle class in the post-crisis period. Another reason for this shift related to copyright. After signing a management deal with Los Angeles-based Waxploitation in 2011, ZZK's releases had to comply with US copyright law, which meant all samples had to be cleared legally. The complexity and expense of this process meant that artists subsequently preferred to play or sing the music themselves, or expand into a band format. A third factor was the increasing economic importance of live performance (and thus of a sense of 'liveness') in an era of declining sales of recordings. A band format was considered more appealing to audiences and bookers, particularly in the crucial European summer festival market (see below). In sum, ZZK's 'early adopters' had developed a more complex relationship with the digital by 2012. A post-digital frame underlines this evolving vision and treats the enthusiastic embrace of the digital as a historical phase rather than an end point.

The economics of ZZK Records

ZZK's history was marked by a search for a viable business model. While it began as a weekly club night, by 2011–12 its live performances took place only sporadically. Its events rarely generated significant income and sometimes operated at a loss. After several years, ZZK's founders were no longer willing to invest the necessary time and energy in unprofitable live shows. Dull reported: 'How does a label survive month to month? It doesn't. That's the answer. We added up all the money we have coming up from local shows. It's a quarter of the money that we need to keep the label going in Argentina.'

From the start ZZK had an international orientation, organising tours in North America and Europe. These tours generated international publicity, but again they produced little in the way of profit, particularly as some artists had to take time off from day jobs. One early European tour earned the musicians around €400 each. Though there were occasional well-paid gigs and earnings rose as artists became more established, such musicians repeatedly

described overseas touring as more about promotion, contacts and personal interest than income. A commonplace assumption in the digital era is that musicians invest in recording in order to profit through touring; but touring may be characterised as much by investment as revenue generation, illustrating a process of constant deferral of economic rewards (Johnston 2012). The gains of touring are often immaterial, taking the form of cultural and symbolic rather than economic capital. ZZK's directors and investors were clearly frustrated by the disjuncture between prestige and financial returns.

Some of ZZK's albums received very positive reviews in the international press, with NPR proclaiming at the end of 2011 that 'Mati Zundel is about to become a household name among music lovers in the US'. Actual sales of his album *Amazónico Gravitante* were low, however. ZZK's album sales brought in a steady trickle of income, but not enough to provide a solid platform for the business, and even investment in overseas marketing by Waxploitation made little impact on this picture.

With ZZK struggling to generate significant revenue from live music and recordings, it looked increasingly to other sources. While commissions to remix other labels' or artists' work—such as *La Revancha en Cumbia*, an album of remixes of Gotan Project's hugely successful 2001 album La Revancha del Tango—brought in additional income, the key to survival was synchronisations (syncs).[14] Indeed, ZZK decided to license its catalogue to Waxploitation in the hope of capitalising on the latter's contacts and securing syncs with films, TV shows and advertising in the US. Syncs for a Mati Zundel track on an Aerolíneas Argentinas advertisement and for a Frikstailers track with K-Mart brought in five-figure sums in 2012–13, providing a crucial lifeline to both artists and label. Two Zundel tracks, 'Por el Pueblo' and 'El Alto de La Paz', were synced to the TV programme 'Homeland' in 2013, and La Yegros' song 'El Bendito' was synced to the video game 'EA Sports 2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil'.[15] Nevertheless, placing syncs at the centre of financial strategy was risky. 'It's like waving a wand', admitted Dull. 'You can't depend on it. It's a one in a million shot.' Zundel's first sync came about after a friend of Dull's picked up the track from Facebook while 'messing around' with the preview of a commercial that he was making.

Chancha Vía Circuito's experiences illustrated the rewards and challenges of looking for syncs. In 2012, he looked set to license a track to a major US TV show, which would have constituted his and ZZK's biggest financial coup to date. The deal fell through at the final hurdle, however, because the transnational media corporation behind the show insisted on the artist signing away DVD rights, and while both he and ZZK were willing to comply (believing that the fee and TV royalties justified the agreement), SADAIC refused to sign off the agreement, arguing that it was exploitative. A year after this major blow, however, Chancha secured a sync on the hit US TV show 'Breaking Bad'. The song soon had half a million hits on YouTube.

[14] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awR63tm-O5A&list=PL728126CAF0D66B92. Accessed 9 January 2022. Synchronisations (syncs) involve the licensing of music for addition to video media content.

[15] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHkzRyQi2dM.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yjow4fibUuA.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5AnuawYM9mg.
Accessed 9 January 2022.

Dull described the first Zundel sync as 'literally the salvation of our year', underlining just how fragile the company's finances were, despite its international reputation. Indeed, when I first contacted Dull, he replied:

> Ninety per cent of what you see ZZK doing I run from my humble apartment/HQ … Survival is as important to us as growth is right now. Ship constantly sinking. Then floating somehow … Don't let the fancy graphics and world tours fool you, we're in constant crisis and hustling like crazy to keep it going.

ZZK's predicament underlined the difficulty in converting intangible assets like prestige, which are relatively easy to acquire in the era of social media, into economic sustainability. Dull's day-to-day struggles made the challenges for independent labels abundantly clear. Thanks to digital technologies, starting a label was easy—but making it economically sustainable was a different matter. In our final interview, Dull began: 'Just write the chapter now—it starts with "We're broke, period".' Later on he recounted a conversation with Jeff Antebi at Waxploitation: 'We asked him yesterday, when does ZZK start to make money? The answer was, maybe never. And it's true. Labels are honestly … I don't know how they exist.'

As Ochoa and Botero (2009) observed in Colombia, they exist through a mix of economies of sacrifice, gift and exchange, alongside more standard industry models. Dull argued that the informality of Buenos Aires' economy meant that a considerable amount of work could be done through favours from friends, at discounted rates, or in exchange for a reciprocal service. ZZK was also cross-subsidised in various ways by its directors' portfolios of activities, and this seemed to be typical for small independent labels (see also Strachan 2007). Dull reported, 'I don't think any of the small or designer labels are making money. I think they do it because they love the music—first and foremost that's the reason I do it too—and they all have other jobs.' Dull continued to run WUBA and took on other marketing work; Villa Diamante had a successful DJ career; Nim ran a graphic design business.

Most musicians that I met cross-subsidised their art from other activities—a scenario typical of independent musicians in other countries (see Frith, Cloonan and Williamson 2009; Madrid 2008; Woodside Woods, Jiménez López and Urteaga 2012; Pereira de Sá and Oliveira Miranda 2012). Among ZZK and similar artists, some opted to cross-subsidise from other kinds of musical activity (and therefore live predominantly from music), while others preferred to work in a completely separate field (and thus keep their art 'pure'). DJing and music teaching were the most common choices. Frikstailers, Leo Martinelli and Axel Krygier wrote music for advertising and films, Gaby Kerpel (King Coya) for theatre (including De la Guarda and Fuerza Bruta), Daleduro for video games and Catnapp for gyms. El Remolón was a psychiatrist, while close ZZK collaborator Miss Bolivia has worked as a psychologist, yoga teacher and journalist.

Despite their limited income, many musicians displayed a non-profit brand of entrepreneurialism. An alternative or countercultural ethos was widespread in the city's independent music scenes, which drew on a historical anti-establishment vein in independent rock. This genre was strongly associated with resistance to the military dictatorship in the 1970s and 80s, and there remains today a nostalgic attachment to this 'golden age' of *rock nacional*. With the 2001 crisis, neoliberal capitalism was widely discredited and new social movements strengthened, consolidating a countercultural outlook among many young, middle-class

Argentineans. The independent popular music sector was thus traversed by the ideologies of post-neoliberal new social movements as well as independent rock, producing a cultural field in which corporations were often viewed askance, independence was valorised and anti-establishment or hippy subjectivities were commonplace.

ZZK Records was a case in point. Its two Argentinean directors were open about their dislike of the business aspect of running a label. Several of ZZK's musicians were uncomfortable with the label's partnership with Waxploitation, despite the latter's international prestige, because it obliged the label to become more business-like. ZZK Records generally styled itself as a collective, having emerged from a tightly-knit underground scene and a club night in which musical collaborations were encouraged. Villa Diamante described its defining characteristic as '*buena onda*' (good vibes), insisting that it prioritised collaboration and the collective good: 'The truth about the label is that … we never thought about it as a way to make money, but rather as a way to … join forces with artists who we thought were interesting … When you see the whole business structure of ZZK and compare it with a real business structure, it's not a business, it's something else, it's a cooperative'.

Villa Diamante and three partners opened the record shop Mercurio Disquería in 2012. His aims were twofold: to support the local independent music scene and not to lose money. Rather than supplement his meagre earnings from ZZK, he deliberately took on another unprofitable venture. He took a certain pride in recounting his counter-intuitive decision to open a record label when record labels were going out of business and a record shop when record shops were closing down. Meanwhile, digital musicians joined online groups like New Cumbia Makers and produced and uploaded their music for free, or created netlabels like Cabeza and SubKlub, or started online radio shows; more than generating profit, these activities required investment. Digital technologies allowed artists to inhabit the music scene in a variety of roles but also with a variety of relationships to the business of music. In the Buenos Aires independent scene, there was a vein of digital amateurism that saw individuals actively opting for non-monetised or non-profitable musical activities and accumulating cultural and symbolic (more than economic) capital in the form of internet likes, plays and free downloads. They were critical of entrepreneurialism when oriented towards business, yet engaged with it enthusiastically in small-scale enterprises with a non-profit ethos.

Disintermediation? ZZK in transnational context

Grant Dull described the birth of ZZK Records as almost an accidental move by three inexperienced friends. However, consolidating the enterprise had required them to engage with the established music industry in the global North and to learn to play by its rules. 'New technology, old structures' was his pithy summary and a corrective to a digital utopianism that fails to account fully for the maintenance of many elements of the 'old' music industry and the resources required to engage with them.

Economic opportunities for 'global' genres were still concentrated in the World Music industry and above all summer festivals, especially those in Europe, which were the growth area of the World Music market (Laing 2009, 28). Ambitious Latin American artists and labels like ZZK targeted this circuit, and securing enough dates to put on a European summer tour was a prime ambition and measure of success. The newer Global Bass scene thus appeared

to serve more as a gateway into the structures of the old industry than a replacement (Marshall 2010). If ZZK started out as a collective of independent laptop artists, a characteristic digital-era phenomenon, its biggest success was provided by La Yegros, a singer backed by two songwriters and a full band whose sound might be characterised as folkloric music given a contemporary flavour with digital beats and effects. La Yegros' breakthrough occurred when her single 'Viene de Mi' was heavily rotated on the French station Radio Nova, resulting in her signing to EMI France in 2013 and touring Europe with her band—hardly a distinctively 2.0 picture.[16] The following year, Dull pointed to her three-month, fifty-date summer festival tour as evidence that her career had taken off (Erbar 2014). However, other musicians from the digital *cumbia* scene noted drily that her success represented a backwards step: from the figure of the experimental electronic music artist to that of the old-fashioned World Music star.

There were also signs that ZZK's self-presentation had shifted somewhat. In the trailer for a documentary about 'Viene de Mi', the label's signature digital technology was nowhere to be seen, replaced by traditional drums and exotic-looking costumes.[17] At Womex in 2012, ZZK described itself as 'reviving Latin American folkloric traditions through an electronic pulse', a subtle reversal of emphasis for a collective whose roots lay primarily in EDM. Despite its initial digital focus, ZZK's biggest coup was via the artist who was furthest from its laptop-music roots and adhered most closely to the old World Music industry's aesthetic paradigms, and the label's updated self-framing suggests a recognition that the surest route to success lay in deferring to old structures rather than stressing new technology.

ZZK's experiences suggested that disintermediation—the marginalisation of middlemen, as musicians use the internet to take more control over their work—was less marked than is sometimes supposed (e.g. Cottrell 2010, 19). If some traditional middlemen were indeed declining in importance, others, such as bookers, promoters, agents and publicists, were rising; the field of intermediaries was thus being reconfigured rather than removed (Baym 2010). For example, a small label owner, Pablo Martín Fernández, explained that he had to go through an aggregator like Tunecore or CD Baby in order to place his music on Spotify or iTunes. Many independent musicians did not understand the process, so they turned to people like him to help them. He thus saw a proliferation of intermediaries, with three filters (Fernández, Tunecore, iTunes) between musicians and their audiences. Meanwhile, for many artists from the global South with international ambitions, industry rules had not changed substantially: while they availed themselves of the new digital tools for publicity and marketing, they also needed the services of agents in the global North in order to insert themselves into established commercial circuits—new technology *and* old structures.

Evidence from Argentina thus supported Rogers' (2013, 151) contention that disintermediation is a limited phenomenon since 'the process of breaking an artist on a wider stage remains largely filtered through many of the same channels as in the pre-internet era.' The challenge facing musicians was less producing or distributing music than promoting it and booking gigs. Dull argued: 'To give great shows, you need a great agent and you need a great management team.' ZZK worked with a complex network of intermediaries on three continents. To break into the US or European market it needed to have the ear of promoters and journalists; agents and publicists—traditional intermediaries who already had the attention of

[16] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtsjrvwqIr0. Accessed 9 January 2022.

[17] http://vimeo.com/68851466. Accessed 9 January 2022.

these key players and could provide privileged access to old industry networks—were therefore important. At its own cost, ZZK attended major international trade fairs like Womex and SXSW, looking to network and impress industry intermediaries such as European and North American promoters and bookers looking for acts. A key part of Waxploitation's investment in ZZK was temporarily to pay $3000 per month to a press agency in the US, illustrating the kind of real money moving around behind the digital free-for-all of social media.

While it is undeniable that musicians have greater opportunities to take control over their careers than in the past, they are also taking on more tasks (Leurdijk and Nieuwenhuis 2012, 63). In the music business, as in the wider 'creative economy', labour, costs, risks and pressures once assumed by institutions are now increasingly outsourced to individuals, dressed up as flexibility, independence and control. Among my interlocutors, younger musicians with few attachments or responsibilities often enjoyed this freedom, but those who were a little older were generally more ambivalent about their enforced conversion into self-managers. Digital tools added an additional layer of activities and responsibilities on top of the old machinery, a slew of new demands in terms of online presence and self-promotion. Two ZZK artists, Chancha Vía Circuito and Mati Zundel, ruminated about quitting the music profession in 2014, such was their distaste for the work of self- management. For all the talk about cutting out the middlemen, there was some nostalgia for them once they were gone.

In the face of such pressures, the Argentine state began to intervene and its actions suggested that changes in the nature of musical work in the digital era had the potential to alter the very conception of a musician. In 2013 the Ministry of Culture decreed that a cultural producer now also had to become a *gestor cultural* (cultural manager or promoter). One of the main aims of Recalculando, a state programme discussed below, was to teach musicians to *gestionarse* (manage themselves) and thereby convert them into *gestores*.[18] That the very word 'musician' was coming under pressure suggested that important changes were afoot, although their significance was ambiguous. In the global North, where musicians are increasingly expected to see themselves as small businesses—to acquire managerial skills and manifest self-promoting desires—such shifts are usually attributed to neoliberal 'creative economy' paradigms.[19] The *gestor cultural* discourse in Argentina might have evidenced the penetrative power of such globally circulating frameworks. Yet self-management also had a distinctive local history, one with a much more collective bent, which was being reanimated in the period of ascendance of the internet. Cooperative and self-organisation movements emerged in Argentina in the mid-1990s precisely as a critical response to neoliberal conditions and blossomed with the 2001 crisis provoked by neoliberal policies (Brand and Sekler 2009, 61–2). Self-management was thus associated locally with workers collectively occupying and taking over capitalist enterprises. Given the leftist valence of this idea in recent Argentinean history, the language of *gestores culturales* had a post-neoliberal flavour and the self-management in question was partly a matter of taking fuller advantage of increased opportunities provided by the state (described below).

[18] See, for example, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WyQG-UwgIVQ. Accessed 9 January 2022.

[19] This was one theme that emerged from the conference 'The small economies of the "new" music industry', University of Bristol, 25 March 2013.

Other digital cumbias

Although ZZK coined the term 'digital *cumbia*' for its particular brand of fusion, other currents of laptop cumbia emerged in Buenos Aires. The genre was thus internally diverse. Around the turn of the millennium, and well before the first ZZK party, DJ Taz, DJ Yankee and the legendary *cumbia villera* musician Pablo Lescano fused cumbia, EDM and dub in a project called Su Majestad La Cumbia, and while the group did not last long, DJ Taz attempted a comeback in 2012 alongside two young former disciples, Negro Dub and Che Cumbe, who had been organising large dances under the name of Colombia Fest. Their primary audience was a subset of the 'popular-class' public at the large weekend *bailantas* (dances) that are the mainstay of the tropical music industry, and their dub versions of Colombian *cumbia* appealed mainly in the Zona Norte (the peripheral northern zone of greater Buenos Aires) where Colombian music is particularly appreciated.

In 2011 an important new subgenre emerged from the commercial *cumbia* industry, epitomised by Los Wachiturros, a group with a highly digital aesthetic that mixed elements of *cumbia*, *reggaetón*, EDM and dancehall. A raft of similar *música turra* groups soon appeared, appealing mainly to younger listeners (above all teenagers) from the popular classes in the Zona Sur (southern zone). The musical elements of *música turra* were similar to those of ZZK, but the way they were used was quite different: whereas ZZK's artists often strove to experiment with and transform these features, *música turra* producers tended towards repetition of a limited palette of generic sounds, aiming to appeal to fans of mainstream *cumbia* and *reggaetón* rather than the alternative electronica and rock scenes to which ZZK was oriented.

Música turra's sound was new, but its economic model came from its predecessor, *cumbia villera*, which had emerged in the late 1990s (Magariños and Taran 2009).[20] In *música turra*, recorded music was distributed freely by any means available in order to drum up interest and the money was made at the gate of the large weekend *bailantas*. The most successful artists might perform short sets at numerous *bailantas* in a single night. Unlike ZZK, *música turra* derived significant income (fees and royalties) from live performance, the large fanbase for commercial *cumbia* and the centrality of *bailantas* in the leisure activities of the popular classes making this model financially viable.

The director of JR Producciones, a leading *música turra* production company, had a gold disc by one of his artists, Macho y El Rey, framed and mounted on the wall of his office in classic music-industry style—but this was really about appearances rather than sales, he admitted, since they gave most of their CDs away. Forms of distribution included TV, radio, informal CDs and increasingly the internet (via specialist *cumbia* websites). But *música turra* also embodied the innovations associated with Web 2.0. By uploading their music to YouTube and social media these entrepreneurs encouraged listeners to engage not only in consumption but also in collaborative and participatory practices. JR Producciones' music producer, KR Pro aka DJ Krass, uploaded not just completed tracks but also their constituent parts and broadcast their availability via Facebook, encouraging other producers and audience members to remix the tracks, thereby making the originals more widely known—which in turn translated into greater demand at *bailantas*. Moreover he urged other DJs to publish their

[20] It also echoes the model of digital urban music scenes in Brazil (Howard-Spink 2006; Pereira de Sá and Oliveira Miranda 2012).

remixed versions on the internet or CDs: as he told me, 'It doesn't matter what version, just that when a group plays a show, people know the song and sing it.'

The remix culture of *música turra* involved fans as well as producers. YouTube was awash with homemade remixes of Los Wachiturros' hit 'Tírate un Paso', set to videos of The Simpsons or the Mexican comic character El Chavo (with millions of views), and hundreds of home videos of teenagers dancing the song's choreography.[21] The rise of *música turra* (a term whose origins lie in the music's characteristic dance moves) coincided with the global success of South Korean K-Pop and particularly Psy's 'Gangnam Style', in which fans' imitation of choreographies played a key part in their engagement. Los Wachiturros' success had much to do with the opportunities to interact with their music—to share it, remix it, dance to it and post videos of dancing to it. *Música turra* was thus highly adapted to local digital conditions and while other, more formal and middle-class sectors of the Argentinean music industry were wrestling with pay-per-download and streaming, música turra focused on fans freely sharing music online rather than paying to own or access it. *Música turra* might therefore be regarded as a forward-looking sector of the Argentinean music industry.

Laptop *cumbia* also encompassed a third subgenre with an entirely different model: netlabels, which disdained not only the sale of digital music but also the open pursuit of commercial goals. Netlabels release digital-only albums for free, sometimes under a Creative Commons licence, constituting a 'nonprofit popular music sector' built on technological and legal changes (Galuszka 2012). Such was the growth of netlabels in the digital cumbia and broader Global Bass spheres that digital cumbia blogger John Newell (2013) was moved to remark ironically: 'I think for the first time ever there are now officially more internet record labels than there are artists and DJs. … It is an online epidemic.' Their owners often viewed the selling of music askance, unless the transaction took place directly between the artist and the buyer, and some struck defiantly anti-materialistic poses. Buenos Aires-based netlabel Cabeza began its self-presentation: 'In early 2008 Lucas Luisao and Martin "negromoreno" Moreno joined forces to shape one of the least profitable projects on earth.'[22] Another digital *cumbia* blogger, Cumbiónico (2012), writing about two Latin music netlabels, proclaimed: 'Showing oneself free to distribute music for free, as the Rebel Sounds + Latino Resiste people do, is a radical form of protest against the capitalist model of cultural production.' Buenos Aires artist Catnapp released an EP on Caballito netlabel called *No Money Whatever*. On the cover she holds a fistful of fake money displaying a cat's head, again foregrounding the decommoditisation of her music. A netlabel is thus often a labour of ideology and a statement about free circulation, one that requires investment rather than generating direct revenue. This non-materialistic trend appeared to be growing: Lucas Luisao of Cabeza reported that the 'competition' between netlabels had increased markedly since 2008. (There is of course an irony in a non-profit sector being concerned with competition.) He remarked, slightly wistfully, that the number of (free) downloads of his releases was declining substantially, now that there were more netlabels in the 'business'.

Buenos Aires netlabels like Cabeza and SubKlub released a wide variety of music by many artists, making aesthetic generalisations difficult; but their output was notably oriented to-

[21] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVLAllwh9Tk (official video). Accessed 9 January 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJHpUFYFgtw (Simpsons remix). No longer available.

[22] https://soundcloud.com/cabeza-netlabel. Accessed 9 January 2022.

wards genres such as dubstep and drum'n'bass, sometimes fused with Latin American musics. Perhaps linked to their aesthetic orientation towards rapidly evolving international subgenres of EDM, netlabels were pared-down operations that offered one important advantage: speedy turnaround. There was minimal risk of a cutting-edge sound being blunted or overtaken because of a drawn-out release schedule. Tracks could be released within weeks rather than the months or years associated with, say, ZZK. Netlabels were thus closely attuned to the rapid temporality of fast-evolving contemporary digital dance music genres.

One of the main ZZK developments of 2012 was the launch of its compilation *Future Sounds of Buenos Aires*, yet the very idea of selling a compilation album arguably looked more to the past. *Música turra* and netlabels may have provided more indicative visions of the future. By abandoning the sale of recorded music and (in the case of the former) focusing instead on fans' and musicians' participatory engagement with it, *música turra* and netlabels embodied two poles—one commercial, the other anti-commercial—of current thinking about the future of music, and of music as industry, in the age of the internet. At the time, though, three different economic and aesthetic strategies coexisted within laptop cumbia as a subgenre, illustrating the fluidity of the industry, of understandings of the digital and of aesthetic practices inflected by the digital.

Cultural industries, institutions and policies

Broadening out again from digital cumbia, significant developments were occurring in the wider institutional field in 2012–13, as the state's approach to the cultural industries evolved. It was in the realm of cultural policy that the most distinctive local developments relating to music and digitisation could be observed. While fresh debates and policy initiatives were in the air, transitions into practice were limited, and most new policy directions either failed or were curtailed by the change of government in 2015. Still, given their prominent discursive presence in the cultural sector during my fieldwork, and the importance granted to them by my interlocutors, they deserve attention.

In April 2013 the Argentinean Cultural Industries Fair (MICA) took place at Tecnópolis, the government's flagship science and technology park. Tecnópolis was an educational and cultural space hosting exhibitions designed to promote a history of local technological prowess and foster a cutting-edge, scientific national imaginary, as well as serving as a venue for artistic (and particularly musical) events. Much of MICA took place in a single, open-plan, hangar-like space, which brought contrasting ideological positions into close proximity. The event was organised by the Ministry of Culture's National Office of Cultural Industries (NOCI), and the state and its leftist politics were prominently on display: one entire wall of the hangar was lined with the stands of different government ministries, while talks typically circled around themes such as social inclusion, denunciations of the market and democratisation of cultural access. Nevertheless, MICA was a trade fair and the presence of many small- and medium-sized cultural enterprises eager to do business, alongside the Ministry of Culture's pronouncements about the value of culture to the Argentine economy, also gave the event something of a New Labour-esque flavour.

In particular, MICA provided a graphic illustration of the disputed territory of culture and intellectual property in Argentina. SADAIC, CAPIF and AADI had sponsored a Café de

la Música, hosting a series of talks defending their traditionalist vision of music and IP. A few yards away, the 'hackathon', a project devoted to developing free music hardware and software, was taking place. These ideologically conflicting programmes rubbed shoulders—almost literally—for four days. Elsewhere in the building, public talks included a debate on digital culture by a distinguished panel that articulated a critical vision of the current IP regime defended by SADAIC, CAPIF and AADI. The senator Liliana Felder launched the debate by contrasting two metaphorical locations for culture—the market and the plaza—and remarked, 'I think that everyone sat here wants culture in the plaza', revealing not only her own backing for the idea of a cultural commons but also her perception that this view was widely shared across MICA. With presentations elsewhere by Taringa! Música and prominent IP critic Beatriz Busaniche, attendees were offered a full range of views under the same roof.

Rodolfo Hamawi, the director of NOCI, organised a public meeting at MICA between Taringa! and its principal adversaries (SADAIC, CAPIF, AADI and the Argentinean Book Chamber), who met to sign a letter of intent ('Taringa' 2013). This event revealed a progressive branch of the state attempting to broker a compromise between a forward-looking digitally focused enterprise and backward-looking analogue-era institutions. The outcome was inconclusive, however, with two institutions failing to send senior representatives and public pronouncements still revealing discords.

Other institutional tensions were symbolised by the very location of the fair. Tecnópolis, a national government project, was originally planned to be built in the City of Buenos Aires but, facing stiff resistance from the city's right-wing mayor, Mauricio Macri, it was eventually constructed just outside the city limits. The federal and municipal governments were in the hands of opposing political parties, ensuring a low level of coordination between their public policies. National cultural programmes stemmed from the Ministry of Culture, whereas the municipal music office, Opción Música, was based in the Ministry of Economic Development; their respective ventures thus tended to have different ideological slants, specifically with regard to the balancing of social and economic objectives, and at times even came into competition. Opción Música, which pursued a neoliberal 'creative economy' line, attempted to reinvigorate the local music industry by introducing new models from the global North, but it faced resistance from the collecting and trade societies, disinterest from the major labels and tensions with leftist federal government institutions like NOCI. Opción Música's absence from MICA was telling.

MICA thus displayed a complex picture. There were ample signs of the conservative positions, institutional tensions and resulting stasis analysed earlier in the chapter, yet also a sense that new, more progressive cultural ideologies and policies were coalescing, ones attuned to the fair's surroundings, Tecnópolis, which exemplified a post-neoliberal national technological imaginary, revolving around the state and its concern with social inclusion. In the guise of NOCI, the state positioned itself at the centre in several ways: it hosted the event; it occupied the middle ground between Taringa! and the 'analogue' institutions, between copyleft and copyright, expressing both sympathy and criticism for both sides; and, more broadly, it argued that its involvement was crucial to the healthy development of the cultural industries. The state's role in the field of digitisation and culture thus merits further analysis.

State digital initiatives

If early digital culture initiatives came primarily from the commercial sector, the state increasingly sought to drive developments in the field. From 2003 the governments of Néstor and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner defined themselves in opposition to the previous neoliberal regime and prioritised social objectives. Recognising the potential of new technologies to advance its overarching social and political goals, the government became a leading actor in the field of digitisation. Flagship schemes such as Argentina Conectada (a national fibre optic cable network), Open Digital Television, the one-laptop-per-child programme Conectar Igualdad and Tecnópolis were all framed in terms of promoting national autonomy, sovereignty and identity. They were presented as motors of social and cultural inclusion more than economic development.

The Minister of Culture, Jorge Coscia, described new technologies as possessing 'enormous educative potential' and 'at the service of the democratisation of culture' (Coscia 2012, 17). For Hamawi, 'technology is placed at the service of inclusion and diversity' and flagship digital programmes were aimed primarily at reducing social and cultural divides (*Hamawi 2012, 8)*. Such discourses were underpinned by a vision of new technologies as tending to promote concentration of wealth and opportunities if left to the market. In the hands of the state, however, they might constitute technologies of social inclusion, widening participation and national unification. Above all, the digital was understood as political. *Página 12* journalist Washington Uranga argued that 'full citizenship is not possible today without thinking about the communicational and, within it, the digital', and hence 'the digital and the communicational is a space of political struggle'.[23]

There were, therefore, close connections between the state's digital strategy, political agenda, social mission and cultural vision. Widening access to both culture and new technologies was a central goal, because they formed two pillars of national sovereignty. Infrastructural programmes were intended to allow the state to distribute more widely cultural products that might fortify national integration and identity.

Increasingly, then, the digital and the cultural went hand in hand. Argentina Conectada was designed to foster not just better communications but also the creation of 'socially valuable' cultural content. Puntos de Cultura, inspired by the Brazilian programme of the same name, funded over four hundred 'culture points', which were provided with a computer (loaded with the government-designed free operating system Huayra) and digital video cameras. Igualdad Cultural (Cultural Equality), whose tag line was 'inclusion in diversity', brought together the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Federal Planning, Public Investment and Services—exemplifying how culture and the digital were bound together in the national political project. Igualdad Cultural 'conceives of access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and culture as a fundamental right of all the inhabitants of Argentina. This initiative aims, therefore, to foster the conditions to bring about equality of opportunity across the country with regard to the creation and enjoyment of cultural goods, and access to new forms of communication.'[24] Its goal was to use new technologies to open up cultural production, distribution and consumption to every corner of Argentina, for example by

[23] http://lic.cultura.gob.ar/foros-de-cultura-digital. No longer available.

[24] http://www.igualdadcultural.gob.ar. No longer available.

broadcasting live performances via Open Digital Television and a Federal Network of Digital Culture. One planned subproject entailed the creation of an Online Music Bank, a tool for disseminating music but also facilitating the fulfilment of the quota for national music on the radio stipulated by the 2009 media law.

Another Ministry of Culture digital initiative, Plataforma Argentina de Música (PAM), was launched at MICA in 2013. PAM was an online music platform aimed at promoting the Argentinean music industry to distributors, labels and festivals around the world. It focused not on selling digital content but rather operating as a digital catalogue for the national music industry. PAM was planned as a complement to the Online Music Bank, with the former aimed at the music industry and the latter at the media and consumers. It was a commercial initiative, but like most Ministry of Culture policies, it articulated a balance between economic and social objectives and had a marked nationalist slant. Hamawi described the project as intended to promote equality and 'to put together a broader, more democratic and inclusive map of Argentinean culture'.[25] Its vision was ambitious: to offer a public-sector alternative to YouTube and iTunes, with the bonus of fostering interaction between different industry actors.

The government's policies that linked digitisation, social inclusion and cultural access and production were noteworthy, but it should be underlined that most such projects were still progressive dreams more than concrete realities at the time of my fieldwork, and few made the transition. The Online Music Bank stalled because of a clash between widening cultural access and authors' rights. There were considerable problems around the licensing of digital content produced and circulated by the state. The government's digital TV initiative included a music branch, ACUA Música, but it appeared largely inactive. The digital TV project aimed to increase the diversity of cultural offerings, but it suffered from poor coordination between different bodies and lacked a clear sense of how content creation was going to be funded over the long term (Mastrini et al. 2013). PAM appears never to have fully taken off. It cannot be argued, then, that these music and digitisation projects had significant effects. Nevertheless, they have much to tell us about digital ideologies and desires within the orbit of the state at a particular historical juncture, one that was soon to be firmly relegated to the past.

The state's increasing activity in the cultural realm bore some fruit for independent musicians, though above all in the realm of live performance. Igualdad Cultural sent artists to perform well-paid concerts around the country, again in the name of social and cultural inclusion; Miss Bolivia, a close collaborator with ZZK, was one beneficiary. In 2013 the programme had around $1 million to distribute to 200 groups to provide ten concerts each. Another Ministry of Culture programme, Recalculando, was working with around twenty musical collectives around the country, focusing on boosting live music scenes and touring opportunities (see below). Tecnópolis provided well-paid performing opportunities for a number of DJs and bands from the middle-class *cumbia* scene.

In contrast, digital initiatives appeared poorly coordinated, sometimes even in contradiction and somewhat invisible in practice. Nevertheless, they might be understood as attempts by progressive (and often younger) voices within the state to promote change in a sector dominated by more conservative (and often older) institutions and individuals. Cultural officials and experts believed that progress would be slow and laborious in the face of the

[25] http://www.mica.gob.ar/1843/la-secretaria-de-cultura-de-la-nacion-lanzo-la-plataforma-argentina-de-musica-pam/. No longer available.

indifference or contrary interests of a static local private sector and multinational enterprises with considerably larger budgets. Furthermore, they considered both the announcement of ambitious public policies and their patchy implementation to be characteristically Argentinean. It would be a mistake, then, to regard limited progress as simply a sign of insignificance.

In this regard it is worth noting that some of the most dynamic figures in the sphere of music and digitisation moved towards increasing involvement with the state at this time. Fer Isella, who made his name as a music entrepreneur, directed the music section of MICA 2013 and led the launch of PAM, while Tatu Estela gave up his job as director of Taringa! Música in mid-2014 to take up the post of Coordinator of New Technologies at the Ministry of Culture. Such moves would support an argument—one explicitly articulated by Estela—that the public sector was more appealing than the private in Argentina at the time with regard to the intersection of music and new technologies. In neoliberal contexts in the global North, it is usually the state that is cast in the role of the slow-moving or heavy-handed player while the private sector is presumed to be fleet of foot; but in Argentina, with the private sector dominated by 'analogue' institutions, progressive initiatives in this period were concentrated within the state.

'Where are the cultural industries heading?'

Placing Argentina's independent music sector in political context generates a more nuanced understanding of the stasis presented earlier. The Kirchner governments came to see the significance of digital technology as lying primarily in the social and cultural realms; public policies relating to digitisation and culture thus increasingly prioritised social inclusion and cultural participation over economic development. The music industry panorama at this time may then be seen as underpinned by post-neoliberal politics and, in particular, by critical attitudes to digital capitalism.

NOCI's list of objectives began with 'democratising access to and the production of cultural goods and services, [and] promoting geographical and economic decentralisation'.[26] Its stance may be summed up by the phrase 'digital social justice' (Loreti and Lozano 2012), found in a book that it published in 2012, *En la ruta digital*. With a prologue by NOCI's director, Rodolfo Hamawi, and the opening chapter by the culture minister, Jorge Coscia, this book represented an important strand of the government's thinking on culture and digitisation at the time. Hamawi (2012) argued for the internet as a tool of public service rather than private enterprise, while Coscia wrote of 'designing an egalitarian and redistributive digital policy' (2012, 14). The market was portrayed as exclusionary and restrictive, and authors promoted the state as guarantor of social inclusion, democratisation of culture and access to knowledge.

Natalia Calcagno, a Ministry of Culture researcher, described the genesis of NOCI's recent line, and in particular its choice of the label 'cultural industries' rather than the more contemporary 'creative industries', in terms of a deliberate rejection of the latter's neoliberal orientation (treating culture primarily as an engine of economic growth). There are notable echoes of Brazil's public policies on digital culture, summarised by Horst (2011, 451) as committed to 'digital inclusion and resistance to the broader normative order of global capitalism'. While undoubtedly influenced by such post-neoliberal policy directions in the region,

[26] http://www.cultura.gob.ar/areas/industrias-culturales/. No longer available.

NOCI's vision was characterised primarily by a rejection of specific neoliberal examples, such as the UK's approach and its exportation to countries like Colombia. The stasis described earlier in the chapter may thus be seen as underpinned not just by institutional resistance and tensions but also by the scepticism of state cultural policymakers towards free-market conceptions of progress.

Within the Ministry of Culture, progressive voices attempted to formulate a vision of post-neoliberal cultural industries. The ministry's discourse on this topic exhibited the key transformative features of Latin American post-neoliberalism, identified by Macdonald and Ruckert *(2009, 7)* as a new agenda of social inclusion and, more specifically, 'governments' willingness to use state power to stimulate the economy and correct widespread market failures; to substantially deepen democracy by engaging citizens more directly; to use state institutions to reduce social inequalities through redistributive measures; and to renationalize some parts of the economy'. *En la ruta digital* may be seen as launching a debate on the shape of Argentina's cultural industries for the post-neoliberal as well as the digital era, and indeed positing digital technology as a powerful mediator of a post-neoliberal agenda.

'Where are the cultural industries heading?' asked a debate on the book at MICA 2013. Recent achievements were held up against strong critiques of the previous neoliberal regime. Calcagno, one of the book's architects, critiqued policy responses to digital challenges in the global North as restrictive and authoritarian and articulated scepticism towards beliefs in the balancing effect of the market. Martín Becerra, a politically influential media scholar, identified two policy phases since 2003: the first saw a bolstering of the traditional media and cultural industries in the wake of the 2001 crisis; the second, beginning around 2008, saw a deeper, more politicised questioning of the whole model (see also Becerra 2013). This second phase, in which the state was more active, saw the first articulations of a post-neoliberal reconfiguration of the cultural industries, a shift that might be summarised as moves to democratise access, balance the economic and the social and redistribute profits from corporations to creators. Certainly, statements of intent were more apparent than actual reconfigurations. For example, NOCI proposed that cultural creators be rewarded from an authors' fund, financed by a tax on the profits of ISPs and telecoms, to counteract the concentration of profits in the hands of large corporations (Hamawi 2012; Calcagno and D'Alessio 2012), but no such fund was actually created. Nevertheless, more concrete examples can be seen in state initiatives such as Igualdad Cultural, the 2009 media law (with its quota for Argentinean independent music on the radio) and the 2012 National Music Law, aimed primarily at stimulating the independent music sector. [27]

En la ruta digital revealed clearly the connection between digitisation, culture and politics, and represented a statement of intent by progressive figures within the orbit of the Ministry of Culture. Recognising the futility of a direct approach to politicians, they opted instead to promote public debate around these issues within more amenable spheres, such as universities and the creative sector, with the aim of building up a critical mass of opinion that would then oblige politicians to take notice. Becerra noted that the 2009 media law—a major legislative achievement of the second Kirchner government—grew from debates among a handful of progressive individuals in the 1980s and 90s. There was thus an important precedent for this

[27] http://www.musicosconvocados.com/marco.html. Accessed 9 January 2022.

approach and evidence that it could lead to substantial change over the long term. Becerra argued that debates in forums like MICA and *En la ruta digital* served to put key issues on the public agenda. Concrete results might be thin on the ground at first, he said, and issues might even fade from view for periods of time (something that did indeed come to pass); but opening such debates was an important first step, laying the groundwork for the implementation of new ideas in the future.

Collectivism

A commonplace local reading of Buenos Aires' music industry was that it was 'behind', as evidenced by the late arrival of services such as iTunes and streaming—the implication being that it differed from that of the global North in terms of its position on a developmental curve rather than following a different trajectory. A clue to a different reading, however, was provided to me by Nicolás Falcoff, MICA panellist and director of the independent label Sura.

> We're realizing that we're not going to get anywhere on our own, that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, that the way to work is to work collectively, that's what's coming now. I believe in work networks, in collective work, in solidarity economics, in networks of fair trade, in another way of making culture and another way of doing business … I'd tell anyone who wanted to do business to devote himself to something else, there are tons of businesses that are much more profitable than this one. The purging that took place as a result of this crisis meant that the pirates and the mercenaries really knew that there wasn't much for them here. Those of us who remain, the survivors, are organizing ourselves to see how, from an equitable starting point as far as possible, we may be able to create something a bit stronger and carry on doing what we like—which is music.

In Falcoff's vision, Buenos Aires' independent music scene, rather than presenting an inferior, belated copy of industry developments in the global North, displayed a search for alternatives to digital capitalism. His position was inspired more by social movements than capitalist entrepreneurialism, by a search for sustainability more than profit and growth. He described entrepreneurship among independent musicians in collective rather than individual terms, as 'the artist who is being empowered and saying "I want to do this, so I get together with another artist and another and we create a collective of artists to establish a work unit to put on [concert] series"; I see a lot of collective management and partnership among artists.'

State initiatives, too, were focused less on individualist entrepreneurialism than on collaboration. 'Collectives are the central actors of this new culture', stated Recalculando's promotional video.[28] This Ministry of Culture programme was working with twenty groups in mid-2013 and called them collectives, even though they were formed around record labels, because making records was only part of their activity. The term 'collective' thus signalled a shift in the nature of a record label, now conceived of as an association of artists from diverse fields engaged in a wide range of activities, with a different way of working—horizontal, collaborative, networked—and sustainability as its overriding aim. Recalculando promoted collective structures, arguing for strength in unity and a network as more than the sum of its parts. Its position was that such structures fostered a solidarity economy and eased the financial challenges that independent musicians faced under digital conditions.

[28] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WyQG-UwgIVQ. Accessed 9 January 2022.

Collectivism and cooperative thinking have a long history in Argentina, appearing at various points in the twentieth century. They blossomed in the late 1990s as increasing numbers of workers were marginalised under neoliberal conditions (Sitrin 2012; Zibechi 2012). The 2001 crisis saw an exponential rise of collectivism across Argentinean society, not least in the arts world (Giunta 2009, 54–64). Institutional weakness and economic hardship led artists to form collectives with a common vocabulary (horizontalism, self-management) and common traits (networked, economically autonomous, politically active and operating by consensus).

Just as this broad wave of collectivism was largely a bottom-up phenomenon, post-neoliberal reimaginings of the cultural industries were not confined to cultural officials and academics but also emerged from the independent music sphere. Falcoff presented his initiative as separate from Recalculando, as a private rather than government-sponsored programme, illustrating how collectivism circulated among independent musicians quite autonomously from government pronouncements. Indeed, many younger officials in Ministry of Culture music programmes such as Recalculando had started out in the independent music sphere. The transfer of ideas was thus just as much from the musical grassroots to politics as vice versa.

Collectivism was also a feature of the middle-class *cumbia* scene, not just in ZZK Records but also in large cumbia orchestras like La Delio Valdez, Sonora Marta la Reina, Orkesta Popular San Bomba and Cumbia Club La Maribel, which emerged from 2009. With one to two dozen players, they were not conceived as economic ventures, but rather stressed sociability over financial gain. Luciano Choque Ramos abandoned an earlier digital cumbia project, Imperio Diablo, to form Todopoderoso Popular Marcial in 2010, and he praised the symbolic impact of 'twenty people doing something together, the same thing, in real time—and it's pretty exciting what happens. You always see smaller groups or soloists or DJs or something quite individual, so seeing something more collective mobilises people'.[29] Such orchestras stood symbolically against both the digital and individualistic entrepreneurialism.

The collectivist ethos in the independent music sector thus evidenced the confluence of state and civil society ideologies and of post-neoliberal politics and subjectivities. It represented a vision of resistance among low- and mid-level actors to the intensifying corporatisation and concentration of the music industry. The currency of collectivism both within cultural institutions and among cultural producers, and its roots in local experiences after the 2001 crisis, suggested that it was more than just a passing fad or opportunistic slogan. Though it was to come under pressure as a result of future political changes, collectivism constituted a noteworthy response to digital conditions in Argentina.

Argentina in regional context

An important inspiration for Recalculando (and its predecessor, the Network of Independent Collectives or RECI) was Brazil's Fora do Eixo ('Off the Axis'), a national network of collectives that began working in 2005 to increase performing opportunities for independent musicians. The result was a national circuit, outside the structures of the mainstream music industry, to facilitate touring and reach new audiences. According to the Brazilian cultural official Jéferson Assumção (2013), Fora do Eixo (or FdE) brought a third player into the equation, alongside the state and the market: the community or collective.

[29] Interview with Luciano Choque Ramos, May 2012.

Assumção's adaptation of the state/market/civil society triad illustrates the extent to which collectivism was shaping social, cultural and political imaginaries in post-neoliberal Latin America, and the same was true in the technological sphere. Regional conceptions of the internet revolved to a considerable degree around his third term. As Garrido (2012, 94–5) noted, the internet was rarely treated as a commercial space by young people in Buenos Aires; its social and cultural aspects were paramount and ideas of networking and sharing were much more prominent than monetising. Similarly, Horst (2011) identified three key themes in the new media landscape in Brazil: digital inclusion, free culture and networked sociality. The last of these was utilised by FdE to try to strengthen independent music production across Brazil, generating publicity and audiences for live music and fostering the circulation of bands (Garland 2012, 510). The emergent collectivism in Brazilian and Argentinean independent music scenes was thus underpinned by particular local understandings of the internet.

FdE and Recalculando had fervent advocates, such as Assumção and British independent music network UnConvention.[30] It should be underlined, however, that the Brazilian network also generated a growing wave of polemics from grassroots and academic sectors (e.g., Garland 2012; Miseravel 2013). Nevertheless, such programmes were calibrated to the challenges and opportunities facing the independent music sphere in countries where the internet was conceived as functioning more effectively in fostering social networks than in selling digital content or services, and where governments placed more emphasis on digital inclusion than e-commerce.

A number of initiatives discussed in this chapter, like Recalculando, illustrate the growing links between the leftist state and the independent music sector, which had been left largely to the market during the neoliberal 1990s. The 2009 media law included a quota for Argentinean independent music on the radio, while the 2012 National Music Law gave concrete form to the sense that the independent music sector lacked economic viability and required state support, particularly in the wake of the Cromañón tragedy. NOCI's proposed authors' fund provided a further example of the state's recognition of the tendency towards the impoverishment of cultural producers in conditions of digital capitalism and its desire to intervene to alter this situation.

One might therefore identify several distinctive features of the independent music sector in Argentina and Brazil, the two largest Latin American countries to take a post-neoliberal turn in the early 2000s. One was collaboration between the state and the independent sector, based on a questioning of digital capitalism and its effects on smaller players. Both sides agreed that state intervention provided a necessary rebalancing of a rapidly concentrating field. Digitisation was seen as both a threat and an opportunity, with the market posing the former and the state guaranteeing the latter, and—in this vision—the opportunity was social and cultural more than economic. A second feature was collectivism. If the spread of digital technology fostered a 'do it yourself' independent ethos in the 1990s, the 2000s saw the rise of 'do it together'—also making extensive use of new technologies, but underpinned by a more collaborative ideology. A third was the particular characteristics of internet use, which focused on digital inclusion and networked sociality and thus supported the collectivist paradigm.

[30] https://www.unconventionhub.org/. Accessed 9 January 2022.

Viewing Argentina through the lens of Assumção's triad of state, collective and market, three conceptions of digital technology appeared to be at stake. For the state, digital technology was primarily a technology of social justice and cultural participation; for the collectivist paradigm, a technology of social aggregation and networking; and for the market, a technology of economic development and profit. These three conceptions were not mutually exclusive and many initiatives, both state and private, incorporated all three to different degrees; the issue was therefore one of emphasis. That said, *En la ruta digital* articulated a direct contest between the state and market visions of new technologies and it advanced a post-neoliberal line on the social potential of digitisation and its intimate connection to culture. In relation to the independent music sector, with commercial digital initiatives struggling, it was arguably in the first two realms that the most noteworthy developments were taking place in 2011–13, and the first two ideologies of the digital were in the ascendant. The state's digital initiatives and the collectivist movements, and their mutual interactions, showcased at events like MICA 2013, aspired to shape a post-neoliberal music industry, and their efforts, however abortive they turned out to be, constituted a distinctive contribution to global music industry debates.

Coda

The election of the centre-right candidate Mauricio Macri as president in late 2015, after twelve years of leftist governments, changed Argentina's political complexion overnight. It also provoked a wave of profound concern within the independent cultural sector. As mayor of Buenos Aires, Macri had been known to independent musicians mainly as the force behind the closure of many small venues and the imposer of restrictive legislation.

Two important shifts can be noted in the Macri period. One was the waging of a 'culture war' on the Kirchners' legacy.[31] This campaign focused not just on projects explicitly tied to the former presidents, such as the Kirchner Cultural Centre, but also on social and cultural programmes such as the school netbook initiative Conectar Igualdad.[32] The other shift was a return to neoliberal ideologies and more market-based policies, with effects immediately felt in the cultural field. For example, the progressive National Office of Cultural Industries (NOCI) was closed, to be replaced by a Department of Culture and Creativity, led by Enrique Avogadro, a former cultural official in Macri's right-wing city government. The department immediately abandoned NOCI's 'cultural industries' focus in favour of a 'creative economy' line, initiating a Network of Creative Cities.[33] Whereas the collective had emerged in the Kirchner years as an important cultural player, 2016 saw the installation of the entrepreneur at the heart of the government's imaginary.[34] The collectivist music programme Recalculando was disbanded, its *gestores culturales* replaced by Argentina Creativa's *emprendedores culturales* (cultural entrepreneurs). The Online Music Bank, which had changed focus and moved towards digitising old tango and folklore records, was also shut down. The day after the election, its

[31] http://lab.org.uk/argentina-culture-wars. Accessed 9 January 2022.

[32] http://aerom.com.ar/el-vergonzoso-titulo-de-clarin-para-justificar-el-fin-de-conectar-igualdad/. No longer available.

[33] http://redciudadescreativas.cultura.gob.ar. No longer available.

[34] https://www.rebelion.org/noticias/2016/4/210927.pdf. No longer available.

director, Tatu Estela, was refused access to his office in the Kirchner Cultural Centre; most of his team were fired and other cultural programmes were removed from the building.[35]

It should be recalled, however, that even a year before the election, many of the enterprises and initiatives considered in this chapter were struggling either to get off the ground or to continue operating. The 'active state' had formulated ambitious, progressive plans for digitisation and culture, focusing on connectivity, visibility and redistribution of revenue, yet it was having little impact on musicians or the circulation of music. Its digital music initiatives made no dent in the dominance of Facebook and YouTube, far and away the most visited websites in Argentina ('Encuesta nacional' 2013). Taringa! Música and PAM, local initiatives from the private and public sector respectively, had failed to challenge the hegemony of behemoths from the global North. Taringa! Música was going to be the Latin American Spotify, until Spotify got there first. PAM, meanwhile, appeared defunct. Not all the stunted growth or demise of such developments can therefore be laid at the door of Macri's government.

If we consider such programmes in terms of their effects, they appear insignificant. If we consider them, however, in terms of the thinking behind them, they tell us much about efforts from both public and private sectors to construct alternatives to dominant models of digital capitalism. They may have disappeared under pressure from global forces, multinational corporations and changing national political priorities, yet their fragility and evanescence makes it all the more important to document and analyse them.

From the perspective of independent musicians to whom I spoke in 2016, the panorama appeared unpromising, even worrying. If leftist governments had been able to do little to stem the concentration of rewards in the hands of an established elite of major concert promoters and performers, many of them foreign, a right-wing government that actively supported this process looked unlikely to emerge as a saviour. Even without the political change—a depressing development for many alternative-minded musicians—conditions were hardly favourable for large swathes of the Argentine music industry.

In a frank magazine interview over a year before the election, Grant Dull declared that 'the industry is shit … full of bad vibes and sharks' (Erbar 2014). He acknowledged publicly that the label usually lost money or at best broke even; that every year he considered giving up; and, more poignantly, that 'money and the suffering of wanting to make a business among friends is always going to damage friendship'. By 2014 most of ZZK's artists retained only a tenuous link to the label. Some had signed with other labels or released albums independently, leaving ZZK with leftovers: a digital release, a percentage of a back catalogue, or a booking or management fee. There had been a proliferation of micro-deals as each artist negotiated each aspect of their activity separately. As one told me, they had come to the realisation that the label was not going to make a living for any of them, so each one was now trying to make their own way without completely abandoning the ZZK brand.

This downbeat picture found echoes in reports from elsewhere in Latin America, such as Mexico City (Woodside Woods et al. 2012), where the flourishing of creative innovation was accompanied by 'the extensive exclusion of the majority and the condemnation of creatives to intermittency and precarity' (García Canclini and Urteaga 2012, 203). In Santiago de Chile, the majors retrenched; independent labels were scarce and run on a shoestring; there were

[35] Such shifts in the institutional landscape are illustrated by the disappearance of a number of the webpages that I used in drafting this chapter.

few small to medium venues; independent artists suffered from lack of audiences; and profit was almost entirely concentrated in mega-concerts by international artists (Solís 2010). One frustrated musician labelled Santiago's independent scene as 'in intensive care' (Solís 196)—worse than 'in the waiting room'.

Nevertheless, there were also some grounds for more optimistic assessments. The Digital Music Reports for 2012 to 2014 reported strong growth across the region and predicted a bright future for the digital music business in Latin America. The 2017 IFPI Global Music Report announced that Latin America was the region with the highest level of growth in revenue from recorded music for the seventh consecutive year, with a 12 per cent rise. Digital revenue grew by 31.2 per cent and streaming revenue by 57 per cent.[36] The previous year, Argentina had seen an increase of 34.8 per cent in revenue from recorded music, thanks to a 140 per cent rise in digital revenues, and streaming was making increasing inroads, representing 86.6 per cent of the digital market.[37]

Within the scene that I studied, ZZK Records' fortunes were waxing again by 2017, on the back of several productive crowdfunding campaigns and the international success of Nicola Cruz, who signed to the label in 2015. Grant Dull launched a new venture in Ecuador *(AYA Records)* and focused increasingly on making documentaries outside of Argentina *(ZZK Films)*. Back in Buenos Aires, success stories could be found among post-digital projects such as traditionalist middle-class *cumbia* orchestras (such as La Delio Valdez) and neo-World Music bands (such as La Yegros), rather than more experimental digital projects. A more upbeat picture could also be seen in *música turra*, which showed similarities with Brazilian digital music scenes like tecnobrega, baile funk and electronic forró. These scenes, with their enthusiastic adoption of new technologies, legitimisation of informal copying and distribution, and emphasis on live performance, have been held up as innovative responses to the crisis in the recording industry and possible models for the future (see 'The Paraense Tecnobrega' n.d.; Howard-Spink 2006; Comin 2011; Krauskopf n.d.; Pereira de Sá and Oliveira Miranda 2012). Vianna (2011, 247) argued that such vibrant and inventive new music economies, which were emerging on the edges of large Brazilian cities, might point the way forward for the mainstream music industry.

Still, there was continued uncertainty over which of these futures lay ahead, suggesting the continued aptness of the metaphor of the waiting room—although it might also be argued that the independent sector's struggles had been going on for so long in Buenos Aires that they were actually the destination. However, this metaphor serves, above all, to capture the sense of uncertainty within the sector at a particular historical juncture. In 2012 the independent music industry sensed change coming, but was pulled in several directions at once. The city government's Opción Música regarded the local music industry as needing to be brought up to date with developments in the global North; it thus focused on translating new business models from the outside world to Argentina. The Ministry of Culture and NOCI looked to other sources of inspiration, such as the egalitarian, redistributive cultural policies of Brazil. To generalise, the city government sought to stimulate digital entrepreneurialism while the national government spoke of digital social justice. In both cases, Argentina was seen as behind, and policies were designed to pull it forwards, though in different directions,

[36] http://www.ifpi.org/downloads/GMR2017.pdf. No longer available.

[37] http://www.revistapym.com.co/destacados/mercado-musica-streaming-2016. No longer available.

illustrating divergent orientations to two rival spheres of influence on Argentina—the global North and Latin America—and to the neoliberal and post-neoliberal ideologies that coexisted and competed in Buenos Aires' cultural sector. Complicating the picture further were the old 'analogue' institutions—particularly the collecting and trade societies—which, with their eye on the past, tended to resist both of the competing new models. It was unsurprising, then, that the independent music sector felt like it was stuck in the waiting room.

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CHAPTER 15

From Revolution to Reform: Recommendations for Spectrum Policy in Transitional Tunisia

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Abstract

Will the revolutionary changes of the "Arab Spring" result in more open and democratic media in the affected countries in the Middle East and North Africa? Using developments in Tunisia as a case study, the authors argue that democratically reformed media, Internet, and spectrum policies can lead to a more enabling and pluralistic environment that encourages new market entrants. Progress has been made, but ongoing challenges in structural and institutional reforms remain. The authors make a series of policy recommendations in the hope that Tunisia can be a model for its regional and global peers.

Introduction

In December 2010, Tunisian fruit vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire to protest the pervasive corrupt practices of his municipal government. His actions sparked widespread demonstrations in Tunisia that were magnified by both traditional news outlets and social media. These protests, in turn, triggered a wave of social unrest around the Middle East

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in what would come to be called the Arab Spring. In January 2011, after 24 years in power, Tunisian President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali became the first Arab leader to step down in response to the pressure against his rule. The following October, Tunisia held the first post-Arab Spring election, and the country is now in transition towards a more robust democracy through constitutional reform, a process that involves overhauling many of the policies and regulatory regimes over which Ben Ali once maintained a tight grip.

As a nation, Tunisia has long stood apart from others in the region, ranking first among North African countries in the 2010–2011 World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness index [1] and boasting a stronger economy, a better-educated population, and relatively low poverty levels compared to many of its neighbors. However, the Ben Ali government also kept a notoriously close watch over its citizens, maintaining tight control over the media environment and restricting freedom of expression. While Tunisia has long had uncharacteristically high levels of mobile and broadband penetration when compared to the rest of the Middle East and North Africa (a reflection, at least in part, on the strength of its economy and overall competitiveness), its citizens were not able to enjoy many of the corresponding benefits of ubiquitous communications or an open Internet. Up until the day he fled the country, Ben Ali exercised significant institutional and personal control over the Internet, broadcasting, and the telecommunications sector, resulting in pervasive censorship and an official regulatory structure that was largely superfluous, lacking both sophistication and clarity. Today, foreign investors and independent broadcasters continue to find it difficult to navigate the system successfully, and many of the old rules and processes have yet to be redressed. The interim government has recognized the need to increase access to traditional and web-based media and encourage freedom of expression, and thus made the reform of media and telecommunications structures a key piece of their platform. However, a truly enabling and pluralistic environment that encourages new market entrants has yet to emerge.

As Tunisia continues its transition to democracy, civil servants and other political actors are facing several competing priorities, of which regulatory reform to ensure the free flow of information and a more democratic media environment is just one. Free expression, access to information, and freedom of the media in Tunisia must be backed by regulatory institutions and policies that encourage and enable media pluralism, access for new players (private, public, and community) to enter the market, and independent regulatory systems and media outlets. Spectrum regulation, which determines the frequencies that are assigned to broadcasters and other wireless technologies, is critical to this process. Spectrum policy designed to enhance democracy can help Tunisia maintain its competitive edge through increased broadband Internet penetration, widespread sharing of information and exchange of ideas, technological innovation, and long-term economic growth. [2] Spectrum policy should therefore be a major priority in the restructuring of Tunisia's media environment, particularly because of its impact on wireless communications and Internet connectivity.

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[1] Klaus Schwab, ed., "The Global Competitiveness Report 2010–2011," report, World Economic Forum (2011), accessed Dec. 13, 2013, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GCR_Report_2011-12.pdf. Tunisia ranked 32nd overall on the index.

[2] Turgut Cankorel and Lara Aryani, "A Spectrum of Regulations: Mobile Telecom Regulation in the Middle East and North Africa," *Convergence* 5 (2009): 165–175.

The public commitment to overhauling government policies to enable a freer media environment creates a unique opportunity to explore different spectrum policies and leverage these regulatory reforms for democratic and developmental gains.[3] This process, especially if it adheres to principles of access and openness, could serve as an example for other countries in the region that are seeking to reform communications policies to similar ends.

This article will begin by discussing the media environment, broadcasting and telecommunications regulations, and spectrum allocation policies in Tunisia before the January 2011 revolution. After identifying areas of deficiency in the old system, the article will summarize the progress that has been made in the post-revolutionary period, and address ongoing challenges and potential opportunities. One of the key objectives will be to reform existing structures and institutions as a part of Tunisia's overall shift toward democracy and new attitudes toward media and access to communications.

Broadcasting and Telecommunications in Pre-Revolutionary Tunisia

Under former President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, the majority of institutions and key players in the Tunisian telecommunications and media sector were tied either directly or indirectly to the government, which had a hand in everything from the development of infrastructure to licensing and content regulation. Independent media groups, rather than enjoying autonomy and operating under a clear and transparent set of guidelines, were obliged to survive as best they could and find ways to coexist under the uncertainties of the Ben Ali regime.[4] As such, there was a disconnect in the Tunisian telecommunications and broadcasting landscape: Tunisia had some of the most robust infrastructure and highest rates of both mobile and Internet penetration in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region, but its government restricted individual freedom of expression and established a regulatory framework that gave the state enormous control—even in comparison to other MENA countries.

In terms of infrastructure development, Tunisia has long outpaced most of its neighbors, benefiting from a relatively stable economy, lower levels of poverty, and a citizenry more equipped to afford both the equipment and the associated operational costs of communications and broadcast networks.[5] As a result of this buildout, Tunisian citizens have near-universal access to mobile phone service and some of the lowest broadband prices in Africa. In 2008, Tunisia reported approximately nine million mobile subscribers out of a population of 10.2 million, and that number continued to rise until the number of mobile subscriptions surpassed the number of citizens about a year later.[6] Tunisia also reported 1.7 million Internet users

[3] Sana Ajmi, "Media Reform in Tunisia: A Long Way to Go?" *Tunisia Live*, Aug. 16, 2012, accessed Dec. 13, 2013, http://www.tunisia-live.net/recovery/media-reform-in-tunisia-a-long-way-to-go/.

[4] Joan Barata Mir, "The New Tunisian Legislative Framework: A Focus on Press and Audiovisual Media," white paper, Internews, Feb. 2012, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://www.internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/Internews_TunisiaMediaLaw_2012-02.pdf.

[5] The Davos Forum has ranked Tunisia first in Africa in terms of Networked Readiness every year since 2006. Ministry of Information and Telecommunications (Republic of Tunisia), "Classement de la Tunisie selon le Forum Economique Mundial de Davos Relatif Aux TIC durant la periode 2006-2012," report (2013), accessed Dec. 13, 2013, http://www.mincom.tn/fileadmin/PDF/Indicateurs_TIC/Positionnement_Tunisie_2006_2009/Positionnement-Tunisie-NRI_2006-2012-Fr.pdf.

[6] Open Net Initiative, "Internet Filtering in Tunisia," report, Aug. 7, 2009, accessed Dec. 13, 2013, https://opennet.net/sites/opennet.net/files/ONI_Tunisia_2009.pdf.

in 2008, and by March 2010, the number of Internet users had nearly doubled, reaching a reported 3.6 million. At roughly 33.9% of the population, the 2010 figure was significantly higher than the African average of 11.4% and well above the 31.7% mean for the Arabic Middle East at that time.[7] Yet despite these positive statistics, the regulatory framework in Tunisia remained stagnant in the pre-revolutionary period, which stifled independent broadcasting of radio and television. It also prevented regulators from responding to the demands created by the explosive growth of wired and wireless access.

Overview of Broadcasting and Telecommunications Regulation before the Revolution

Historically, the Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies has overseen the broadcasting and telecommunications industries at the cabinet level in Tunisia. The Ministry is broadly tasked with strategic planning to grow the domestic ICT sector and attract more international investment. The agencies under the Ministry's umbrella, including the National Broadcasting Corporation (Office National de la Télédiffusion, ONT), the National Telecommunications Commission (Instance Nationale des Télécommunications, INT), the National Frequencies Agency (Agence Nationale des Fréquences, ANF), the National Digital Certification Agency (Agence Nationale de Certification Electronique, ANCE), the Center of Telecom Studies and Research (Centre d'Etudes et de Recherche des Télécommunications, CERT), and the National Agency for Computer Security (Agence Nationale de la Sécurité Informatique, ANSI), have together been responsible for regulating broadcasting, telecommunications, and data and digital confidence. The role of Internet regulation fell originally to the Tunisian Internet Agency, a semi-private company with strong ties to the regime,

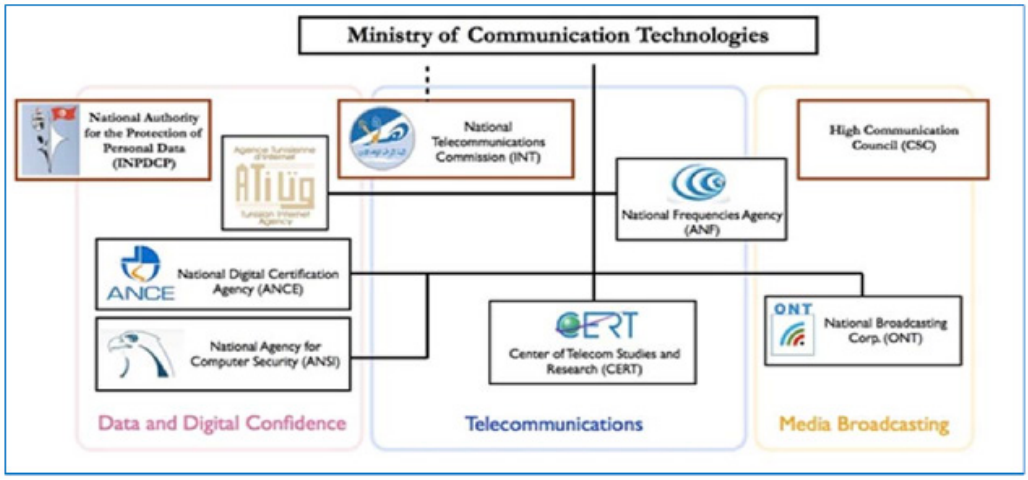


Figure 1: Regulatory agencies and authorities involved with the Ministry of Communication Technologies in regulation prior to the Tunisian revolution.

although later some of its authority was transferred to the National Telecommunications Commission. Figure 1 below illustrates the complexity of the regulatory system in Tunisia

[7] Data compiled from Internet World Stats, accessed Dec. 13, 2014, http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm#africa.

prior to the 2011 revolution, with nine different agencies and authorities overseen under the umbrella of the Ministry of Communication Technologies.

The public broadcasting landscape consisted of two television channels, Tunis 7 and Tunis 21 (now Wataniya 1 and Wataniya 2), and nine radio stations, four of which were national and five regional. The process for granting licenses to private media (including Hannibal-TV, Nessma-TV Mosaique-FM, Jawhra-FM, Shems-FM, and Express-FM) was largely opaque, which created a strong barrier to the development of the broadcasting sector. All licenses had to be authorized by the Minister of Information. Approval was further contingent upon a favorable advisory from an independent review board—the High Communications Council (Conseil Supérieur de la Communication, CSC), which was created by Decree No. 238 on January 30, 1989 and reorganized in 2008 by Law No. 2008-30 in preparation for a plan to liberalize the audiovisual sector. In reality, the review board was strongly tied to the regime and Ben Ali's advisers in the Presidential Palace, and most licenses were granted to government allies. Researchers at the Committee to Protect Journalists found that since the government started accepting applications in 2003, licenses had only been granted to friends and family of Ben Ali. For example, Cyrine Ben Ali, the President's daughter, owned Radio Shems FM, while Radio Zitouna for the Holy Koran belonged to Sakher El Matri, his son-in-law.[8]

Spectrum allocation was done through the National Frequencies Agency. The ANF allocated broadcasting bands to the ONT, the only entity with the right to own broadcasting transmitters. The ONT then distributed frequency bands to authorized radio and TV channels. As a result, private broadcasters in Tunisia had to first receive authorization from the government and then sign an agreement with the ONT to obtain a license to operate on a specific frequency.

The dynamics were similar in the telecommunications sector, where there was a largely state-controlled infrastructure and a vague regulatory framework. The largest provider of wired and mobile services in the country is Tunisie Telecom, which was established by the state in 1995. Although the government opened the mobile market to more competition in 2002, it did little to encourage real competition or create a climate conducive to foreign investment.[9] Consequently, although the government promoted access to mobile telephone and Internet services for its citizens, the regulatory framework did not reflect these policies.

There is perhaps no better example of the lack of structural institutions in pre-revolutionary Tunisia than the regulation of the Internet, which was made available throughout the country via terrestrial, satellite, and mobile data service providers but ultimately controlled by a single entity. In 1996, the government created the Tunisian Internet Agency *(the Agence Tunisienne d'Internet, ATI)* to serve as the central Internet authority, regulating the country's IP addressing and DNS services and operating the unique node for IP interconnection to the global Internet. When it reassigned all web services from the Institut Régional des Sciences Informatiques et des Télécommunications *(IRSIT, the research institute that was responsible for developing the Internet in Tunisia and connecting it to the wider world)* to the ATI, the government gave the ATI an unprecedented amount of responsibility and control over the network.

[8] Committee to Protect Journalists, "Attacks on the Press 2010: Tunisia," Feb. 15, 2011, accessed Dec. 13, 2013, http://www.cpj.org/2011/02/attacks-on-the-press-2010-tunisia.php.

[9] Moez Chakchouk, Presentation at the 3rd Arab Bloggers Meeting, Oct. 3–6, 2011, accessed Dec. 20, 2012, http://www.slideshare.net/mchakchouk/ati-ab1103102011-9547841

Consumer services were contracted out to Planet Tunisie ISP, the country's first commercial ISP, which was also owned by Cyrine Ben Ali. The government authorized additional ISPs in 1997 and the early 2000s, but they had to lease fixed-line access from Tunisie Telecom and international bandwidth from the ATI rather than controlling their own infrastructure and international connectivity. [10]

Under the Tunisia Telecommunications Code of 2001, the government established the National Telecommunications Commission (Instance Nationale des Telecommunications, INT) to serve as the lead regulatory agency in the telecommunications sector. Under the 2008 revisions of the Telecommunications Code, the INT was given an even broader mandate, ostensibly becoming an independent regulator of the telecommunications market with complete financial autonomy. The regulation of Internet services, which had previously been overseen by the Ministry of Information and Communications Technologies via the ATI, was also brought under the INT's purview in the restructuring. As a result, the INT took control of domain name regulation in 2009 while the ATI retained the technical role as registrar. In practice, of course, the Ministry of ICT had a heavy influence on INT decisions before the revolution, so the transfer of responsibilities from the ATI to the INT did little to actually alter the oversight process.

While the Internet regulation put in place in March 1997 (when only a few thousand Tunisians had connections) remained largely unchanged in the 14 years that followed, the ATI's censorship regime evolved a great deal, growing in both intensity and sophistication in response to network usage and expansion. As more Tunisians came online, the ATI spent an increasing amount of time and resources engaging in censorship on a massive scale. The Agency's policies were designed to shroud the work of the government, minimizing transparency and giving Ben Ali the ability to use the media for self-promotion and propaganda while silencing his critics. In the decade leading up the revolution, the ATI built both the technical infrastructure and the human resources capacity to implement keyword filtering, DNS and URL blocking, distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks on sites that criticized the political regime, profile and mail hacking of its citizens, and more. [11] In addition to filtering and monitoring, the government arrested cyber dissidents who made both online and offline statements denouncing Internet censorship, even detaining and torturing a number of web activists during the 2005 World Summit on the Information Society, which was hosted by Tunisia. [12]

Consequently, Tunisia—often portrayed as more modern and liberal than many of its neighbors in the MENA region—began to draw international attention due to its systematic censorship regime. In 2009, the Committee to Protect Journalists ranked Tunisia seventh

[10] Katherine Maher and Jillian C. York, "Origins of the Tunisian Internet," in *State Power 2.0: Authoritarian Entrenchment and Political Engagement Worldwide*, ed. Muzammil M. Hussain and Philip N. Howard (London: Ashgate, 2013), 19–32.

[11] Sami Ben Gharbia, "A First Glimpse at the Internet Filtering in Tunisia," Jillian C. York, trans., Global Voices Advocacy, Aug. 18, 2010, accessed Dec. 13, 2013, https://tunisistan.appspot.com/advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/2010/08/18/a-first-glimpse-on-the-internet-filtering- in-tunisia/.

[12] Ben Wagner, "'I Have Understood You': The Co-Evolution of Expression and Control on the Internet, Television and Mobile Phones during the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia," *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 1296; "Tunisia: Internet Repression Casts Pall on Web Summit," Human Rights Watch, Nov. 15, 2005, accessed Dec. 13, 2013, http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2005/11/14/tunisia-internet-repression-casts-pall-web-summit.

on its list of the "Ten Worst Countries To Be a Blogger," placing it in the same league as nations like Burma, Iran, Syria, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, and Turkmenistan.[13] The following year, Tunisia made it onto the Reporters Without Borders "Enemies of the Internet" list, for having "wagered on a[n] infrastructure development strategy while keeping a tight control over the Web's political and social content."[14]

Changes in the Air: Satellite Broadcasting, Pirate Radio, and Cyber-Dissent

The rise of satellite TV from the late 1990s onward began to shift the broadcasting landscape to a limited degree, as it enabled content producers to exploit the relative lack of regulation compared to traditional broadcasting media and take advantage of the technical challenges of blocking it. Satellite infrastructure would prove particularly problematic for the Ben Ali regime during the Tunisian revolution, when both Al Jazeera and France24 managed to circumvent state control and disseminate unrestricted information about the protests via satellite, a technology that the Tunisian government did not have the technical capacity to censor or block to the same degree as others.[15]

The technological flexibility brought about by the rise of the Internet created other additional avenues for free expression. In 2007, six radio stations, whose owners were waiting for government approval for broadcasting licenses, formed Tunisia's first Internet radio station, Radio 6. The goal of Radio 6 was to support freedom of expression and encourage access to the airwaves. "We waited a long time for licenses from the Tunisian authorities to broadcast our programming. Eventually we met and decided to unify our efforts to launch a radio station on the Internet, through which we support the freedom of expression," said Saleh Forti, then-Secretary General of the Tunisian Union of Free Radio Stations.[16] The station owners took advantage of the vague nature of Internet broadcasting regulation, which was minimal compared to the hurdles they faced in their unsuccessful attempts to obtain traditional broadcasting licenses and frequency allocations.[17]

In addition to these more subtle forms of resistance to the Ben Ali regime's control over information networks in Tunisia, direct cyber-dissent became increasingly popular—even in the face of the government's extensive and sophisticated censorship machinery and overt intimidation techniques. In the months leading up to the revolution, several key events revealed the growing cracks in the regime's authority and its increasingly frantic attempts to

[13] Committee to Protect Journalists, "10 Worst Countries to Be a Blogger," Apr. 30, 2009, accessed Dec. 13, 2013, http://cpj.org/reports/2009/04/10-worst-countries-to-be-a-blogger.php.

[14] Lucie Morillon and Jean-François Julliard, "Web 2.0 vs Control 2.0," Reporters Without Borders, Mar. 18, 2010, accessed Dec. 13, 2013, http://en.rsf.org/web-2-0-versus-control-2-0-18-03-2010,36697.

[15] Wagner, 1298 ("While modifying or even dismantling Internet capability was possible in a matter of hours, removing satellite dishes from houses across Tunisia was not an option that could be carried out easily or quickly.") For more on Al Jazeera's satellite broadcasting during the Arab Spring, see Lawrence Pintak, "The Al Jazeera Revolution," *Foreign Policy*, Feb. 8, 2011, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/02/the_al_jazeera_revolution#sthash.u5sTSOGo.dpbs.

[16] Jamel Arfaoui, "Tunisia Welcomes First Internet Radio Station," Magharebia, Dec. 17, 2007, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2007/12/17/feature-01.

[17] It is important to note that these web radio stations were hosted outside of Tunisia, because the independent Tunisian ISPs were afraid that their content might anger the Ben Ali government and did not want to be held liable for any offending content.

exert control, including the December 2010 release of a damaging collection of documents by Nawaat, a blogging platform for Tunisian dissidents, in partnership with WikiLeaks.[18] When protests against the regime in Sidi Bouzid and other cities began several days later, Ben Ali immediately ordered the ATI to maximize censorship across the country, blocking a number of sites wholesale and severely limiting access to others, including YouTube, Dailymotion, and various social networks that Tunisians had been using to share information about the demonstrations.[19] Government operators were also engaged in phishing, spoofing, and outright hacking techniques to infiltrate communications networks, obtain login credentials to social networks, and block some users' access. Independent ISPs began to throttle consumer bandwidth and cap large file transfers, possibly in an attempt to make it more difficult for users to share news and images of the protests within Tunisia and with the outside world. Users reported mobile data service outages in some of the protest locations, although it remains unclear whether these were deliberate or simply network load failures.[20]

Tension between the government and its critics reached new heights during the first week of January 2011, as groups like Anonymous, a loosely-defined coalition of web activists and hackers, announced their support for the fight against censorship.[21] On January 7, Tunisian authorities responded by arresting a great number of cyber-dissidents in the country, targeting three key groups: activists, journalists, and bloggers.[22] Ultimately, however, the government's attempt to silence its critics only further inflamed the uprising in the streets, with violent clashes erupting between protesters and police between January 8 and January 12. In a last ditch effort to win back the favor of the citizenry, Ben Ali made a televised address on January 13, announcing a number of concessions, including his plans to institute widespread reforms, remove restrictions on the Internet and free speech, and release all those who had been detained. He also revealed that he did not plan to seek reelection in 2014.[23] Within a few hours, the changes began to take effect—although the eleventh-hour overture would ultimately not be enough to save Ben Ali's presidency.

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[18] Layla Caledoniyya, "Wikileaks: The Tunisian Edition," Nawaat, Dec. 1, 2010, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://nawaat.org/portail/2010/12/01/wikileaks-the-tunisian-edition/. The collection of seventeen documents, which bloggers and reporters referred to as "Tunileaks," were released in December 2010 by Nawaat and Wikileaks. They included communications between the U.S. Embassy in Tunisia and the U.S. State Department from 2008 to 2010 that revealed an unflattering picture of the public's opinion of Ben Ali and other government ministers.

[19] Social network censorship began in 2007, continued with the shutdown of Facebook for ten days in August 2008, was intensified by the Presidential election of 2009, and culminated in 2010. See Riadh Ferjani, "All the Sides of Censorship: Online Media Accountability Practices in Pre-Revolutionary Tunisia," Working Paper No. 12/2011, MediaACT, June 2011, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://www.mediaact.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/WP4/MediaAcT_Working_Paper_Tunisia.pdf.

[20] Maher and York.

[21] Yasmine Ryan, "Tunisia's Bitter Cyberwar," Al Jazeera, Jan. 6, 2011, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/20111614145839362.html.

[22] Yasmine Ryan, "Tunisia Arrests Bloggers and Rapper," Al Jazeera, Jan. 7, 2011, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/01/20111718360234492.html.

[23] Ryan Rifai, "Timeline: Tunisia's Uprising," Al Jazeera, Jan. 23, 2011, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/spotlight/tunisia/2011/01/201114142223827361.html.

Progress in the Post-Revolutionary Period

President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali's departure from Tunisia on January 14, 2011 was a pivotal moment in the country's history. His resignation opened the door for Tunisia to hold its first real democratic elections. This landmark event led to a call for a general overhaul of media policies in Tunisia, including the creation of a robust legal framework for regulating the media and for issuing licenses for new types of media.[24] Although these regulatory agencies technically existed under the previous regime, the opaque and often informal nature of those relationships had rendered the system complex and largely ineffective, particularly in supporting the government's newly prioritized democratic goals of open access and fostering a free media environment. Just as political repression in Tunisia had been linked to strict control over telecommunications and broadcasting, promoting political freedom now requires the development of a transparent regulatory system that can adequately address these challenges.

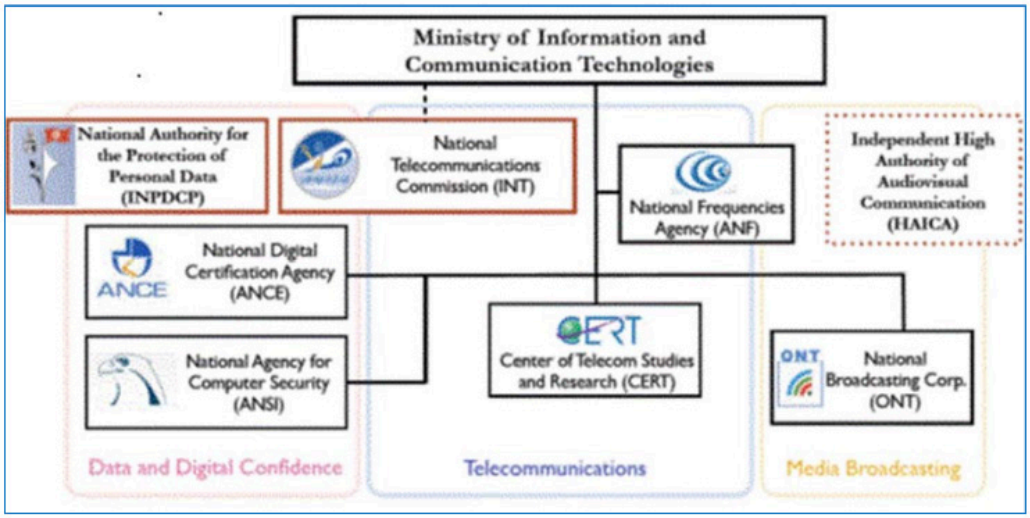


Figure 2: Regulatory agencies and authorities involved in regulation with the Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies after the Tunisian revolution.

The Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies continues to oversee most of the regulation in post-revolutionary Tunisia, although many of the pernicious practices associated with the Ministry of Information have been dismantled. The ATI, once a symbol of Ben Ali's authoritarian rule in Tunisia, has undergone dramatic changes in the name of openness and transparency, including revealing details about the censorship and surveillance it carried out during the previous regime and shifting its role towards the technical operation of Tunisia's infrastructure as an Internet Exchange Point (IXP).[25] The Agency, which previously authorized ISPs with the approval of the MoICT, no longer has any regulatory role and no authority or formal involvement in the system under the MoICT and the INT.

[24] "Reporters Without Borders in Tunisia: A New Freedom That Needs Protecting," Reporters Without Borders, Feb. 11, 2011, accessed Dec.14, 2013, http://en.rsf.org/tunisie-reporters-without-borders-in-10-02-2011,39519.html.

[25] Bryan Tan, "Censorship Authorities Will Still Have Work Post Revolution," *ZDNet*, Nov. 5, 2013, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://www.zdnet.com/sg/censorship-authorities-will-still-have-work-post-revolution-7000022460/.

Figure 2 above lays out the restructured regulatory system developed after the revolution, highlighting the shifts after 2011, including the removal of the ATI from the structure and the establishment of an independent authority that will be discussed in more detail below.

The latter, Decree Law No. 2011-116, outlines the creation of an Independent High Authority of Audiovisual Communication (HAICA), which will be responsible for broadcast licensing, content regulation, and public accountability.[26] Article 16 discusses the specific competencies of the agency, declaring that broadcast licensing will be regulated by HAICA in coordination with the authority on spectrum management. However, while the Decree defines the composition of the regulatory body, its powers, and its possible budgeting scheme, it is not "a substantive norm that regulates material aspects related to the provision of audiovisual media services, such as licensing, content, public service broadcasting, and so on…"[27] In essence, the Decree outlines the broad scope and structure of the agency but no specific processes. Thus, while it is an important first step—and still places Tunisia ahead of most MENA countries in liberalizing its spectrum and media regulations—it lacks the specificity to actually operationalize these new responsibilities. In particular, while it suggests possible funding, the Decree does not concretely define revenue streams, and while HAICA will likely play a role in supervising a Tunisian public broadcaster if it is established, the law itself does not include specific provisions about public service audiovisual media.[28] This lack of specificity continues to inhibit the development of a more robust and accessible licensing regulatory infrastructure, which in turn limits the flourishing of a free media environment.[29]

On April 30, 2012, INRIC released a comprehensive report that details the Committee's recommendations to the government and other major stakeholders in Tunisian public and private broadcasting and Internet services. The goal of the report was to help ensure that the Tunisian people have the right to objective, free, and pluralistic information through legislative reform. In its overview of the existing media environment in Tunisia, the report identifies significant challenges stemming from the fact that before the revolution, "Laws were either nonexistent, as in the case of the audiovisual sector, or draconian, like the press code of 1975."[30] Ultimately, the Committee argues that among necessary legislative reforms, Tunisia must establish independent regulatory bodies in the areas of broadcast, print, and electronic media "to try to bring some order and to address the highly complex problems that are posed."[31]

A number of INRIC's specific recommendations bear directly on spectrum management, broadcasting, and freedom of expression. First and foremost, the report urges the inclusion of "the principle of freedom of expression, press, information, and digital communication"

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[26] Mir, "The New Tunisian Legislative Framework: A Focus on Press and Audiovisual Media," 11.

[27] Ibid., 10.

[28] Ibid., 12–13. See also Sana Sbouai, "Média: La HAICA enfin mise en place," Nawaat, May 3, 2013, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://nawaat.org/portail/2013/05/03/media-la-haica-enfin-mise-en-place/.

[29] Yasmine Najjar, "Media Appointments Spark Controversy in Tunisia," Magharebia, Aug. 22, 2013, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2013/08/22/feature-01.

[30] National Authority for the Reform of Information and Communication (Republic of Tunisia), "INRIC Report: Executive Summary," report, Apr. 2012, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://www.inric.tn/fr/INRIC-Report-Eng-final.pdf.

[31] Ibid., 19.

in Tunisia's new constitution.[32] The Committee also recommends giving constitutional status to HAICA, thereby ensuring the institution's permanence and authority, and enshrining principles against filtering of websites and electronic journals or blogs "for any reason whatsoever."[33] On the public broadcasting side, the report outlines the creation of management and governance mechanisms for public radio and television organizations. With regard to private broadcasting, it emphasizes the need to preclude the state broadcasting agency, the ONT, from "all forms of political and economic interference." INRIC also calls for an independent body to analyze the national radio frequency spectrum on the FM band to determine which frequencies are available at the local, regional, and national levels. In order to give more autonomy to the regional media, the report calls for an assessment of the characteristics and needs of each region and its respective audience, and urges the reduction of broadcasting fees for new regional radio stations.[34] Finally, on the issue of the role of the ATI and the oversight of Internet services in Tunisia, the Committee notes the need to "define the relationship between the various stakeholders," including telecom operators and ISPs, and to review the tasks of the ATI (as an Internet Exchange Point) and other bodies that monitor and regulate the Internet.[35]

Ongoing Challenges in Tunisia

Instead of completely eliminating and replacing the legal institutions and structures that existed under the previous regime, government leaders and independent stakeholders in Tunisia have sought to modify and reshape these organizations to better adhere to democratic principles and values demanded by the populace. There is merit to the strategy of reforming existing structures instead of creating new ones, but it is also challenging, as it requires patient, diligent work to shift the systems, interests, and public perceptions that have existed for years. Many of these institutions continue to operate under the same people, rules, and regulations as under the previous regime. As Mir writes, "In institutional terms… Tunisia still does not have an administrative and judiciary structure ready to apply democratic laws and to perform according to non-authoritarian principles. The core of the executive power and public administration remains roughly the same."[36] The continuing political instability in Tunisia has only amplified this problem and poses a challenge to comprehensive regulatory reform.[37]

The INRIC report spells out a number of positive recommendations. However, INRIC's role as an outside entity, established after the revolution, proved to be both a strength and a weakness; while the Committee's independence gave it significant influence and power to confer legitimacy on the Tunisian reform process, it also provided it with little room to actively make the changes it recommended. In July 2012, after the completion of its review,

[32] Ibid., 21.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 24.

[35] Ibid., 26.

[36] Mir, "The New Tunisian Legislative Framework: A Focus on Press and Audiovisual Media," 14.

[37] "Tunisia Head-to-Head: What Next?" BBC News, Aug. 27, 2013, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-23790897.

Laabidi announced that INRIC would shut down, expressing some doubts about the future of the media environment in Tunisia.[38] The report itself echoes similar concerns that the government may not actually implement many of these reforms, particularly as it has not yet taken concrete steps to establish and fund HAICA, even though the law was passed in November 2011.[39] In that vein, while the state broadcaster is slowly adapting to the new, post-revolutionary culture in Tunisia (despite having previously served as a virtual propaganda arm of the government), it has not yet established itself as acting reliably in the public interest.[40]

Significant barriers to private entry into the broadcasting sector remain as well. The ONT retains exclusive rights to own broadcasting transmitters, and rents them to private broadcasters for an additional fee beyond the license for spectrum assignment by the ANF. In total, these agreements incur fees of about $60,000 USD (110,000 TND) for most of the new radio stations, such as OxygenFM, IFM, and KalimaFM. For many broadcasters, especially local and independent media groups, these costs are prohibitively expensive. Consequently, despite recent changes in the media environment, a number of broadcasters have been forced to continue to use the airwaves illegally. The proliferation of FM pirate radio stations operating illegally in post-revolutionary Tunisia, as well as the growth of online radio stations, is evidence of the need for greater access to the airwaves for new market entrants, and a tendering and licensing system that enables such access.[41] Pirate radio highlights the need for much more extensive reforms of the system that will create legal opportunities for a truly diverse range of broadcasters.

The final act of Ben Ali's presidency—lifting the Tunisian censorship regime—represented an important first step toward the creation of a free media environment in Tunisia. While this act has been celebrated by many and was reflected in Tunisia's removal from the Reporters Without Borders "Enemies of the Internet" list, it has not yet been accompanied by a corresponding effort to explicitly codify rights to freedom of expression and protection from censorship in the laws that govern wired and wireless access to the Internet. Moreover, while the government has discussed—and recommends in the INRIC report—recognizing Internet freedom as a global principle and enshrining the right to access information, it has only begun to take initial steps to enact these reforms. On September 4, 2012, the government announced the launch of a National Forum on Internet Governance, which Information and Communications Minister Mongi Marzoug declared to be the end of Internet censorship in Tunisia.[42] A few days later, Tunisia joined the Freedom Online Coalition[43]—"a global dialogue about the responsibilities of governments from around the world in pro-actively furthering

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[38] "Tunisia Media Authority Shuts Down, Citing Censorship," Al Arabiya News, July 4, 2012, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/07/04/224438.html.

[39] "Tunisia: NAICR Calls for Enshrining Audiovisual Regulation Authority in New Constitution," Tunique Afrique Presse, June 13, 2012, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://allafrica.com/stories/201206140458.html.

[40] Mir, "The New Tunisian Legislative Framework: A Focus on Press and Audiovisual Media," 13.

[41] Ghislain Fornier de Violet, "Radios: les pirates à l'assaut des ondes," Medinapart, Mar. 19, 2012, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://www.medinapart.com/2012/03/19/radios-les-pirates-a-lassaut-des-ondes/.

[42] "Tunisia: Internet and Communication Minister—'Internet Censorship No Longer Implemented in Tunisia'," Tunique Afrique Presse, Sept. 6, 2012, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://allafrica.com/stories/201209070049.html.

[43] Freedom Online Tunis, "Tunisia Joined the Freedom Online Coalition: Lessons Learned!" accessed Nov. 14, 2013, http://www.freedomonline.tn/Fr/tunisia-joined-the-freedom-online-coalition-lessons-learned_11_51.

freedom on the internet"—and hosted the Coalition's third meeting in Tunis in June 2013.[44] It remains to be seen how these developments will impact the legal and regulatory framework in practice in Tunisia in the long term.

In terms of infrastructure and access, growth has continued while citizens have largely enjoyed unfettered access to the global Internet since the revolution. In December 2011, the Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies reported 12.5 million mobile subscriptions, with a mobile penetration rate of 116.6%, and an estimated 4.6 million Internet users, with broadband Internet penetration at around 9%.[45] In large measure, these users have been able connect to the global network unencumbered, particularly via social networks, which were heavily regulated before the revolution. However, the Tunisian Internet Agency continued to face filtering demands for months following Ben Ali's departure. In May 2011, the Military Tribunal requested the filtering of five Facebook pages, with which the ATI originally complied.[46] But the rise in Internet traffic in the post-revolutionary period created a technical dilemma for the ATI: with the existing machinery, the agency would have to significantly throttle the speed of Internet traffic in order to block the pages. Shortly thereafter, a civil lawsuit requesting that the ATI block certain pornographic websites was also filed. There are ongoing legal inquiries into whether the ATI will have to comply with requests of this nature going forward, even as it has attempted to remain neutral as an Internet exchange point and to enable Internet freedom for its citizens.[47] Moreover, the quality of connectivity and access also varies greatly from region to region, largely because Tunisia lacks an adequate universal service policy and maintains an unclear regulatory framework regarding the quality of service obligations on existing ISPs as well as fixed and mobile operators.

Recommendations for Spectrum Regulation and Reform in Tunisia

The public commitment to online freedom in Tunisia and to the ideals of freedom of the media and freedom of expression in the post-revolutionary period has been encouraging. However, fostering a truly democratic media environment requires a much broader set of policy reforms beyond Internet regulation. In particular, spectrum policy can be a powerful tool for enabling access to information, freedom of expression, and freedom of the media, and as such can and must be a part of the conversation as Tunisia seeks to overhaul its communications policies to deliver on the demands of its recent revolution. Moreover, this post-revolutionary environment remains a unique opportunity to explore different regulatory mechanisms, which could serve as a model particularly to similarly-situated countries in

[44] Freedom Online Tunis, "About the Freedom Online Coalition," accessed Nov. 14, 2013, http://freedomonline.tn/Fr/about-the-freedom-online-coalition_11_50.

[45] Data compiled on Nov. 14, 2013 from MinCom (Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies, Republic of Tunisia), "Indicators," http://www.mincom.tn/index.php?id=361&L=2. The mobile penetration rate statistic is calculated as number of mobile subscriptions per 100 inhabitants. Internet broadband penetration is calculated as number of broadband internet subscriptions per 100 inhabitants.

[46] Tunisian Internet Agency, "List of Filtering Requests," accessed Aug. 23, 2012, http://filtrage.ati.tn/. One of the present authors, Moez Chakchouk, is the head of this agency.

[47] Jillian C. York, "Fighting Censorship on Principle," Al Jazeera, Feb. 23, 2012, accessed Dec.14, 2013, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/02/201222381652993947.html; "Tunisia's Highest Court Overturns Ruling on Filtering of Pornography Sites," Reporters Without Borders, Feb. 22, 2012, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://en.rsf.org/tunisia-internet-filtering-danger-of-03-02-2012,41805.html.

the region, but also more broadly. In this section we seek to explore potential opportunities for spectrum policy reform which would ensure a freer media environment, and would be part of a shift to better reflect Tunisia's recent commitments to Internet freedom in practice. While the policies discussed in this section are complementary and could be implemented together, they are discussed here to highlight the different policy tools and considerations that the Tunisian regulatory authorities have at their disposal.

There are traditionally three regulatory approaches to spectrum management. Historically, most telecommunications have been governed under the "command and control" method wherein airwaves were considered to be a public good.[48] Tunisia's telecommunications sector was largely managed under this structure until the late 2000s, when the government began to liberalize its policies and adopt a modified market-based "property rights" approach,[49] which treats spectrum as a resource that can be bought, sold, and often traded on the open market.[50] More recently, certain policymakers and academics have advocated for an open access "commons" approach, which in its most radical incarnation posits that the customary licensing regime is unnecessary as technology has advanced to such a degree that devices can share spectrum without interference.[51]

Interestingly, those that favor a commons-based approach and those that favor property rights largely utilize the same language—those who support the latter argue that open access would lead to a "tragedy of the commons," whereas proponents of the commons approach worry about the "tragedy of the anti-commons."[52] Both sides argue that their management style preserves democratic freedoms and free market ideals.[53] Many Western countries, including the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, have adopted a hybrid approach to regulation, maintaining aspects of command and control while heavily investing in market-based solutions and enabling open access experimentation.[54] Tunisia and other MENA countries undergoing radical shifts in governance structures are uniquely situated to benefit from the lessons provided by these countries. The creation of a regulatory framework that can evolve quickly in accordance with technological and social changes is critical for the continued democratic and commercial growth of the Tunisian nation. Flexibility is particularly important in this enterprise. Every year, the amount of spectrum required to transmit data packets decreases; according to wireless pioneer Martin Cooper, spectral efficiency doubles every 30 months.[55] Even so, given the explosive growth in mobile subscriptions and broadband Internet access in Tunisia over the past decade, a new approach will be

[48] Benoît Freyens, "A Policy Spectrum for Spectrum Economics," *Information Economics and Policy* 21 (2009): 128.

[49] Cankorel and Aryani.

[50] Ronald H. Coase, "The Federal Communications Commission," *Journal of Law and Economics* 2 (1959): 32.

[51] Kevin Werbach, "Supercommons: Toward a Unified Theory of Wireless Communications," *Texas Law Review* 82 (2004): 865–866.

[52] Kevin Werbach, "The Wasteland: Anticommons, White Spaces, and the Fallacy of Spectrum," *Arizona Law Review* 53 (2011): 217–218.

[53] Jeffrey L. Blevins and Sarah C. Barrow, "The Political Economy of Free Speech and Network Neutrality: A Critical Analysis," Journal of Media Law & Ethics 1 (2009): 27–48.

[54] Freyens, 128.

[55] Steve Song, "Spectrum for Development: The Impact and the Role of Wireless Technologies," white paper, Association for Progressive Communications (2011), accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://www.apc.org/en/system/files/OpenSpectrumIssuePaper_EN.pdf.

necessary if Tunisia's regulators have any hope of keeping pace with growth and innovation going forward, maintaining the country's competitive edge in the region, and realizing the opportunities created by the revolution.

There are a number of key ways that spectrum policy in Tunisia can be redesigned to enable democratic access, facilitate freedom of expression, and encourage economic growth. In this section we outline recommendations for Tunisian spectrum regulation. These recommendations are meant to balance the interests of commercial actors and the public interest, and enable policies for technological innovation. We emphasize the need for the Tunisian government to construct these regulations in a participatory and democratic manner, building a legacy of transparency and accountability that counters the memory of the previous regime. Specifically, we touch on broadcasting licenses, wireless access, and open spectrum use.

Broadcast Licensing

One of the key decisions facing the Tunisian government is how to structure the licensing regime for radio and TV broadcasting so that it fosters the democratic spirit of the transition while encouraging economic growth. This balance may be difficult because, as has been mentioned previously, the line between the former regime and the incumbent broadcasting and telecommunications operators in Tunisia is blurry at best; while Ben Ali and his family have been forced out of the country, many of the allies of the previous government have retained a great deal of power and influence today. Currently, anyone hoping to obtain a new license or to legally broadcast in a vibrant and free media environment in Tunisia will find themselves hindered by a convoluted and highly subjective regulatory process.

However, there are steps the government can take to eliminate these problems. In line with the goal of increased transparency, the first step should be to provide the public with information about how different bands are designated for different purposes, which frequencies have been assigned and whether they are currently in use, and how to delineate the process for licensing and allocation. As the INRIC report suggests, this process will likely require a survey of the available frequencies. Once that information has been compiled and the licensing procedures have been defined, the logical next step in the process of democratic reform will be to give the public the opportunity to offer input on the licensing process, and to make available the justification for subsequent decisions in order to establish a precedent for implementing the criteria. Any further restructuring should be as simple and transparent as possible, with clearly defined objective criteria for licensing.

We submit that there are three key elements for the Tunisian government to consider while designing the broadcast licensing regime: plurality, development, and democratic participation. These elements would help create a broadcasting ecosystem that is diverse and accessible to a wide range of actors, and which relies on public and private organizations that are both commercial and non-profit. While the focus has often been on national and regional broadcasting, we also argue for the importance of promoting and protecting community broadcasting in Tunisia. As such, there are several important matters to emphasize in policy development.

Create opportunities for different types of broadcast media outlets, including community broadcasting: The license fee structure should take into account both the needs and financial abilities of different categories of broadcasters. TV and radio operators who intend

to broadcast nationwide should be regulated separately from community radio stations and television channels, and the ONT should strive to balance the differences between the two in their approach to licensing. The authors of Broadcasting, Voice, and Accountability outline a number of key requirements when attempting to create an enabling environment for community broadcasting.[56] First, community broadcasting should be recognized by law as a distinct type of broadcasting.[57] "Community broadcasting" can be defined as independent broadcasting that is provided by and for the members of a community in a particular geographical location or that belongs to a particular community of interest. Its primary purpose is to deliver social benefit and not to operate for private commercial profit.[58] It should be owned by and accountable to the community that it seeks to serve and it should provide for participation by the community at all levels.[59]

The European Parliament has affirmed that community media constitute a "significant component of participatory democracy."[60] The study commissioned by the Parliament concluded that community media fulfill local informational needs; enable citizens to play an active role in community life; act as a catalyst of cultural and artistic initiatives, local public interest activities and civil society advocacy; and encourage the direct involvement of typically underrepresented groups such as ethnic minorities and young people.[61]

Community broadcasting should be supported and encouraged by spectrum regulators through specific and explicit licensing arrangements which guarantee fair and equitable access to radio spectrum for civil society and community-based organizations. The license terms and conditions for community broadcasters, while consistent with the overall objectives of broadcast regulation, should also be designed to ensure that community broadcasting service characteristics are preserved for the duration of the license period. Furthermore, to ensure independence, community broadcasting should be supported by public funding and the funding processes should be determined and administered by an independent public body that is objective, transparent, and accessible to the public at large.[62]

Allow licenses for low power FM broadcasting: As part of its support for community broadcasting, the spectrum regulator could also offer licenses for low power FM (LPFM) broadcasting, following the examples of other countries that have implemented systems to encourage the creation of local, community content. In 2000, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission created the Lower Power FM Radio Service, which authorizes non-commercial, educational broadcasters to operate on FM bands at an effective radio power of up to 100

[56] Steve Buckley, Kreszentia Duer, Toby Mendel, and Seán Ó Siochrú, *Broadcasting, Voice, and Accountability: A Public Interest Approach to Policy, Law, and Regulation* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

[57] Ibid., 156–160.

[58] A study commissioned by the European Parliament further defines community media as: "media that are non-profit and owned by or accountable to the community that they seek to serve. [They] are open to participation in program making and management by members of the community." European Parliament, "The State of Community Media in the European Union," report, Sept. 2007, accessed Dec. 13, 2013, http://www.cmfe.eu/docs/1166366638_The%20state%20of%20community%20media.pdf, iii.

[59] Kate Coyer and Arne Hintz, "Developing the 'Third Sector': Community Media Policies in Europe," in *Media Freedom and Pluralism: Media Policy Challenges in the Enlarged Europe*, ed. Beata Klimkiewicz (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), 275–298.

[60] European Parliament, 5.

[61] Ibid., 51–55.

[62] Buckley, Duer, Mendel, and Siochrú.

watts.[63] Applicants must pay filing and administrative fees, but if they are approved, the licenses themselves are provided free of charge. Their stations must meet certain environmental and equipment standards and agree to accept any interference on their channels from other licensed FM operators, relying on resources like the Low Power FM Channel Finder to identify available FM broadcast channels in their communities.[64]

Because of its extremely local nature (in the U.S. the standard range for an LPFM station is about 3.5 miles or 5.6 kilometers[65]), LPFM broadcasting is ideal for community broadcasters providing educational and cultural content, as well as transportation and public safety organizations. Allowing these broadcasters to share certain spectrum bands will help promote a free media environment and encourage local content targeted at a specific audience.

Wireless Communications

In addition to broadcasting, spectrum has the power to facilitate greater access to the Internet through the use of wireless technology. This mechanism for access is particularly important in some of the least-connected rural communities, which are isolated from coastal hubs by both physical distance and lack of virtual connectivity to information networks.[66] Recent studies have found that Tunisians in the interior provinces of the country are far less likely to use mobile phones, connect to social networks, or even have access to computers and the Internet than their peers in coastal areas. For example, a comparison of connectivity shows that while 85.8% of the population in the coastal Nabeul province are mobile subscribers, that figure is only 63.8% in the inland province of Kasserine. There are a total of 27 public Internet access points in all of Tunisia's inland provinces, compared to 232 in the coastal provinces.[67] The rural broadband gap points not only to economic inequality in Tunisia, but also to the comparative lack of infrastructure. This disparity in infrastructure is underscored by the fact that obtaining fixed-line access to high-speed Internet is comparatively easy in Tunisia's coastal cities, contributing to the already high rates of broadband penetration nationally. By contrast, the rural interior of the country will likely be opened up by the proliferation of wireless technologies, including mobile and fixed wireless Internet. Although wireless connectivity may only be a temporary measure as Tunisia develops the capacity to provide high quality fiber access to more and more areas of the country, it is a critical step that can help stem the growing divide between the interior and coastal areas of the country. Thus, Tunisian spectrum policy should be designed to specifically address the issue of universal access. To that end, we offer the following suggestions:

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[63] Federal Communications Commission (United States), "Low Power FM Broadcast Radio Stations," accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/low-power-fm-broadcast-radio-stations-lpfm.

[64] Federal Communications Commission (United States), "Low Power FM Channel Finder," accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/low-power-fm-lpfm-channel-finder.

[65] Federal Communications Commission (United States), "Low Power FM Broadcast Radio Stations."

[66] World Bank, "Poor Places, Thriving People: How the Middle East and North Africa Can Rise above Spatial Disparities," MENA Development Report (2010), accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMENA/Resources/OverviewENprintersversionspatialdisparities.pdf, 3–10.

[67] Zack Brisson and Kate Krontiris, "Tunisia: From Revolutions to Institutions," white paper, InfoDev and the World Bank (2012), accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://www.infodev.org/infodev-files/resource/InfodevDocuments_1141.pdf.

Exercise caution about spectrum auctions: Spectrum auctions have been utilized in many Western countries and are a hallmark of the "property rights" governance structure.[68] This approach may be extraordinarily tempting to developing nations because it can raise substantial sums of money for the government in a short time. These auctions should be considered with caution in Tunisia and only implemented with certain caveats. One of the biggest risks associated with the auction system is that large companies often have both the incentive and the financial resources to buy as much available spectrum as possible. In order to prevent incumbent providers from purchasing all of the prime spectrum at auction, any regulation regarding the practice of auctions should stipulate that certain bands can be sold only to smaller companies and non-profits, thereby ensuring that auctions are not simply an opportunity for incumbent providers to muscle out any competition.

In general, the auctions currently used to allocate spectrum licenses tend to favor operators with considerable market power, and this rarely leads to lower prices for the consumer.[69] Although these auctions have been successful by certain standards, they have also led to a highly concentrated market structure. The auction model encourages bidding from companies that intend to maximize profits from the spectrum they purchase rather than create competitive pressure that would lead to lower prices across the board for consumers. "Put another way, auction theory tells us that the type of auction mechanisms used to allocate spectrum, if they work well, will tend to maximize industry profits, and one expects industry profits to be higher with more concentration," write Milgrom, Levin, and Eilat.[70] A number of scholars, including Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom, have proposed alternative governance systems for managing "common pool" resources like spectrum. She outlines a number of principles that enable this type of management.[71]

Limit inactivity: It is also necessary to be wary of "spectrum squatting," a process that allows companies to buy up available spectrum as an anticompetitive measure and then leave it unused to create artificial scarcity. By limiting the amount of time that a company can maintain a license for fallow spectrum bands, the government can free up valuable spectrum for legitimate purposes. Similar measures have been adopted in Australia and elsewhere to positive effect.[72] In addition to encouraging a competitive market, these measures will prevent allies of the former regime from maintaining media control through exclusive spectrum licenses.

Permit license-exempt wireless use: To complement better policies governing the use of exclusively licensed spectrum, it is also critical that Tunisia allow and even encourage license-exempt wireless use. Examples from other nations show that it is often entrepreneurs operating on license- exempt spectrum and using widely available Wi-Fi equipment that provide the middle- and last-mile connectivity for communities without access to wireline

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[68] Eli Noam, "Spectrum Auctions: Yesterday's Heresy, Today's Orthodoxy, Tomorrow's Anachronism. Taking the Next Step to Open Spectrum Access," *Journal of Law and Economics* 41 (1998): 765–790.

[69] Paul Milgrom, Jonathan Levin, and Assaf Eilat, "The Case for Unlicensed Spectrum," SIEPR Discussion Paper No. 10-036, Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, Oct. 12, 2011, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://siepr.stanford.edu/?q=/system/files/shared/pubs/papers/pdf/10-036_Paper_Milgrom.pdf.

[70] Ibid., 12–13.

[71] Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[72] Martin Cave, "Anti-Competitive Behaviour in Spectrum Markets: Analysis and Response," *Telecommunications Policy* 34 (2010): 251–261.

infrastructure. In the United States, for example, wireless Internet service providers (WISPs) have been integral in providing access to rural pockets of the country, primarily in areas where cable and telecom companies have avoided building the infrastructure for wired Internet service. Currently, there are over 2,000 WISPs providing service to approximately two million Americans, many of whom live in areas that would not otherwise have high-speed Internet access—or any access at all.[73] The opportunity for similar deployments exists in Tunisia today, as there is growing demand in rural areas to harness the economic potential that corresponds with increased Internet access, as well as a burgeoning desire among the country's residents to participate in the expanding community of online activism and political debate.

The relative ease of establishing robust connectivity in rural Tunisia using wireless technology was demonstrated poignantly in the refugee camps on the border with Libya during the Libyan refugee crisis of 2011. The Tunisian Red Crescent and the International Committee of the Red Cross set up makeshift camps to accommodate the large numbers of Libyans flowing across the border to escape the violence in their country, and Telecoms Sans Frontiers *(TSF)*, a non-governmental organization, assisted by providing emergency telecommunications relief, offering satellite phones for people to call loved ones, and establishing a satellite Internet connection for emergency workers in the camps. Using Wi-Fi routers, TSF was able to distribute quality connectivity throughout the camps, in an area of the country where Internet connections are normally few and far between and Wi-Fi hotspots typically require a license to operate.[74] While these connections were established ad hoc during an emergency situation, they highlight a real opportunity to provide permanent wireless connectivity in some of Tunisia's least-connected regions using similar technology.

It is even possible to go a step further if the regulatory agency allows for different power requirements on wireless equipment depending on the region. Many countries set a universal power limit on all Wi-Fi devices to prevent harmful interference. While this approach may be necessary in densely populated urban areas where the 2.4 and 5 GHz bands operate near or at capacity, it is far less of a concern in rural areas. Regional power requirements that allow far more flexibility in sparsely populated areas would facilitate greater wireless connectivity without having to lay more fixed-line infrastructure in those areas.

Utilize a portion of the digital dividend for rural development: Along these lines, the digital switchover, which is scheduled to take place in the MENA region in 2015, could further increase the amount of spectrum available for development in rural areas. As television broadcasting shifts from analog to digital, it will free up valuable spectrum on the lower end of the frequency range (often referred to as "white space") that enables wireless signals to travel further and cover greater distances. Rather than simply repurposing this spectrum and auctioning it off, the Tunisian government has the opportunity to use the digital dividend in the interest of the public good and invest in the long term growth and development of cur-

[73] Matt Larsen, "America's Broadband Heroes: Fixed Wireless Broadband Providers, Delivering Broadband to Unserved and Underserved Americans," white paper, Wireless Internet Service Providers Association (2011), accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://www.wirelesscowboys.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/americas-broadband-heroes-fixed-wireless-2011.pdf.

[74] "TSF Being Deployed along the Tunisia-Libya Border for Refugees," Wireless Federation, Mar. 4, 2011, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://wirelessfederation.com/news/36830-tsf-being-deployed-along-the-tunisia-libya-border-for-refugees/.

rently underserved areas of the country.[75] These lower-frequency bands would be beneficial if opened to small wireless Internet service providers on a license-exempt basis, facilitating expansion of access on frequencies that have better propagation characteristics than those traditionally reserved for Wi-Fi devices.

Embrace the potential of open spectrum and experimentation: Even if spectrum is heavily regulated for both commercial and public interest purposes, it is also critical that some bands of spectrum are reserved for creative uses and experimentation that can enable technological innovation. Wi-Fi is one of the most commonly cited examples of a revolutionary technology that was developed on the so-called "junk" band under a commons regulatory approach. In the 1980s, the United States made that portion of the spectrum available to anyone who complied with established technical requirements, which include power limits, equipment standards, and certification that mitigate potential harmful interference.[76] By lowering barriers to access, the commons approach drove the development of spectrum-efficient radio technologies including Ultra Wideband *(UWB)*, software-defined radios, smart radios and antennas, cognitive radios, and mesh networks.[77]

There are inherent risks involved in this approach—some say it can potentially lead to overuse of spectrum and excessive interference.[78] However, opportunistic access models *(which allow devices to operate on bands for which usage is low or intermittent, such as those reserved by governments for emergency use)* can work by relying on databases that track the frequencies that are in use and other means to allow devices to utilize spectrum that would otherwise lay fallow. The technology will continue to improve with further experimentation and use, but it will need regulators to provide opportunities for it to flourish.[79] At the same time, further innovation can be encouraged and enabled by shortening the time period for exclusive spectrum licenses, which will allow the government to shift spectrum policy more easily to take advantage of innovation. A movement away from long-term ownership or control models for spectrum and toward more temporary and flexible authorizations can ultimately lead to more efficient use of spectrum and further development of technologies that can mitigate the risks associated with open spectrum and sharing.

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[75] The value of unlicensed spectrum, not only as a mechanism to encourage wireless innovation but also as an economically valuable resource unto itself, has been shown by a number of experts. In particular, Mark Cooper makes the case for unlicensed spectrum as a far more sustainable means for growth, arguing that "focusing on short term revenues that would be raised by auctioning licenses, while ignoring the immense value that unlicensed spectrum creates, which would increase revenues much more than auction yields, is a mistake… [F]ailing to make more high-quality spectrum available for unlicensed use would severely constrain the development of the unlicensed use model, which would retard the development of the entire wireless broadband sector, stifle innovation, drive up consumer costs for service, reduce long-term growth and slow job creation." Mark Cooper, "Efficiency Gains and Consumer Benefits of Unlicensed Access to the Public Airwaves: The Dramatic Success of Combining Market Principles and Shared Access," working paper, Jan. 2012, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://www.markcooperresearch.com/SharedSpectrumAnalysis.pdf, 5.

[76] Julius Genachowski, "Remarks on Preserving Internet Freedom and Openness," speech, Dec. 1, 2010, accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://www.fcc.gov/document/federal-communications-commission-chairman-julius-genachowski-remarks-preserving-internet-f.

[77] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "The Spectrum Dividend: Spectrum Management Issues," OECD Digital Economy Papers No. 125 (2007): 16.

[78] Philip J. Weiser and Dale N. Hatfield, "Policing the Spectrum Commons," *Fordham Law Review* 74 (2005): 664.

[79] Kevin Werbach, "Radio Revolution: The Coming of Age of Unlicensed Wireless," white paper, New America Foundation and Public Knowledge (2003), accessed Dec. 14, 2013, http://werbach.com/docs/RadioRevolution.pdf, 14.

Beyond Licensing and Allocation: Creation of an Independent Spectrum Regulator

While the above recommendations are important, licensing and allocation alone will not suffice. Tunisian regulatory authorities must develop a system for policing unauthorized use of spectrum—from detecting, locating, and mitigating the problems created by interference to regulating content abuse. In contrast to many of the closed agencies that existed prior to the revolution, the Tunisian government should always strive for transparency and accountability in the way these issues are handled going forward. To that end, in addition to a clearly-defined and easy-to-navigate regulatory process, the government should create a viable mechanism for receiving feedback and mediating complaints. It should also provide a searchable database or registrar of license holders, so that members of the public can easily ascertain who has the rights to which spectrum bands in any given area. If civil society groups or other dedicated organizations commit to lobbying on behalf of smaller spectrum users and the public interest, the regulatory entity must be willing to listen to their concerns and include such organizations in any consultative processes.

To achieve many of the goals laid out in this article, Tunisia needs a comprehensive spectrum regulator who can clarify the roles of the various organizations and create a system that operates efficaciously. A specific agency tasked with identifying strategic convergent approaches to spectrum issues will help in balancing both local and national broadcasting and telecommunications needs, and can broaden the focus from improving Internet access in coastal cities, where fixed-line infrastructure is relatively easy to build, to including the rural interior of the country. A single spectrum regulator could also advocate for prioritizing spectrum policy in Tunisia's ICT regulatory structure and ensuring that frequencies are allocated in a manner that promotes economic growth, democratic access, and innovation. However, as Tunisia has already learned, in order to promote a democratic and free media environment, it is critical that this regulator be independent from the government.

Conclusion

Tunisia's influential role in the political transformations of the Arab Spring does not have to be limited to the events of 2010 and 2011. Regional analysis suggests that Tunisia has the power to continue to lead its global peers as it completes the process of constitutional reform and establishes itself as a true democracy. The technologies that played such a critical role in the revolution will undoubtedly continue to be influential going forward, and new forms of media and online civic activities will likely continue to play an important role in shaping Tunisian political and social development. As such, it is necessary for Tunisia to preserve the most valuable achievement of the revolution—freedom of expression. With the participation of all stakeholders, Tunisia should move to carry out the necessary reforms in accordance with this principle and craft a neutral and fair regulatory framework that is favorable to economic development.

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CHAPTER 16

From Media Niche to Policy Spotlight: Mapping Community-Media Policy Change in Latin America

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Introduction

Some of the most inspiring media policy innovations in recent years have emerged in Latin America. Originally a region with a vibrant grass-roots media landscape but few possibilities for such media to operate legally, it has seen significant social and political change, leading to the radical transformation of the normative and legal frameworks that guide and enable media development. In several countries, non-profit community media have not only been legalized, but have been moved out of niche positions and elevated to a leading force in social communication. This paper traces these developments across several countries of the region.

Policy change has coincided with increased academic interest in non-mainstream alternative, community, radical, citizens', or civil society-based media practices (e.g., Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpentier, 2008; Coyer, Dowmunt, & Fountain, 2007; Downing, 2001, 2010; Howley, 2005; Rennie, 2006; Rodríguez, 2001; Rodríguez, Kidd, & Stein, 2009). This interest has been fuelled partly by the emergence of new media technologies that have allowed activists and grass-roots groups to create substantial media operations with a worldwide reach, partly by the continued spread of community uses of older technologies such as radio and video. Yet

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with the growth of the sector, policy questions have become more prominent. According to the World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC), "the lack of proper enabling legislation is the single principal barrier to [community media's] social impact" (AMARC, 2007, p. 5). Thus some community-media organizations (such as AMARC and the Community Media Forum Europe, or CMFE) and researchers (e.g., Hadl, 2010; Hintz, 2009; Milan, 2010; Reguero & Scifo, 2010) have increasingly been interested in the regulatory rules and norms that shape the media landscape: where they originate, how they are created, based on which values and interests, and how they shift.

In this article I will first introduce the contemporary dynamics of media policy at a global level and map several components that need to be considered if we want to understand the policy environment of a given media type or theme. I will then use this framework to investigate the policy environment of community media in Latin America, focusing on the countries of Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Venezuela, Brazil and Chile. In the limited frame of this article, these developments and environments can only be outlined as a brief and necessarily sketchy overview. What this article will highlight is, in particular, a way of approaching the analysis of media policy change and a starting-point for investigating the specific policy context of community media.

Mapping media policy

Policy analysis has traditionally focused on national legislation, the implementation of legal texts, institutional design, administrative processes, and the existence or non-existence of support measures that may condition legal rules. National laws, as we will see below, continue to be a crucial framework that enables, constrains, or obstructs media operations. However, they increasingly intersect with developments taking place at other levels than the national one, and they are subject to both normative and material influences by actors other than the nation-state. Geographically, both the local and the national have "become embedded within more expansive sets of interregional relations and networks of power" (Held & McGrew, 2003, p. 3). As for the actors involved, global policy debates such as the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) have experimented with new forms of multi-stakeholder processes that include non-state actors such as civil society and the business sector. As arenas where actors and interests clash in a "battle for justifications" and where "consensus mobilization" (Khagram, Riker, & Sikkink, 2002, p. 11) is a prime target, such forums offer specific leverage for new "players." Latentand invisible policymaking, such as standard-setting by technical communities and informal actor alliances, have opened further doors for non-state actors to shape policy (e.g., Braman, 2006; DeNardis, 2009). The vertical, centralized, and state-based modes of regulation have thus been complemented by collaborative horizontal arrangements, leading to "a complex ecology of interdependent structures" (Raboy, 2002, p. 6) with "a vast array of formal and informal mechanisms working across a multiplicity of sites" (p. 7).

These multi-actor dynamics, taking place at "different and sometimes overlapping levels—from the local to the supra-national and global" (Raboy & Padovani, 2010, p.16), highlight the nature of policymaking as a process of political negotiation. This puts the focus on the interactions between, and the interests of, those involved, and on the conditions and

environments of interaction. Prevalent societal norms and ideologies underlie and advance specific policy trends (Freedman, 2008); favourable institutional settings may create "policy windows," that is, temporary openings for policy change (Kingdon, 1984); and stable "policy monopolies" may be broken up when political constellations change and the balance of power shifts (Meyer, 2005).

Whether a policy window is opened and a policy monopoly is shaken depends, not least, on the relative strength of social forces such as civil-society groups and the private sector. For our focus on community media, a particularly relevant aspect is the position of existing commercial and public-service media, including the extent of their commercial (through media concentration) and political (through links with the political elite) dominance. Another key dimension is the strength of social movements that support policy change by both public pressure and interventions into policy deliberations. In particular, the creation of networks and collaborations across movements, both domestically and transnationally, has been identified as one of the key factors for gaining political influence (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Furthermore, individuals who occupy strategic positions in, for example, technology development or regulatory institutions may hold significant leverage in shaping policy development.

Finally, a focus on a region of the Global South, such as Latin America, may benefit from insights from postcolonial studies (e.g., de Toro & de Toro, 1999) that investigate how far Northern/Western concepts form the basis of social structures in non-Northern/Western societies and which continuities exist from colonial to current times. Policy analysis, with its focus on the governance of complex societies, faces the risk of setting the models prevalent in "advanced" societies as benchmarks for policy development in other parts of the world and thereby of assuming unidirectional policy change. Instead, it needs to illuminate differences and connections across societies and to question normative assumptions regarding the direction of development dynamics (Mihr, 2005).

The effort of mapping communication policy thus necessitates an enquiry into a broad range of dimensions: national laws and their implementation; regulatory regimes and institutional design; the technological, social, economic, and political context; interconnections between the local, regional, and global levels, including transnational influences; discursive, ideological, and normative frameworks; political constellations and government change; social movement formations; the strategic roles of civil-society organizations and individuals; and the interactions among diverse actors intervening in negotiations and norm-building processes. In the following sections, I will use these dimensions as a lens to look at community-media policy in Latin America.

Historical contexts of community-media policy

Over the past century, communication policy has passed through several phases (Ó Siochrú & Girard, with Mahan, 2002; van Cuilenburg & McQuail, 2003). Whereas during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, international co-operation and public-service values were prominent, albeit with a persistent dominance of state actors, the 1980s and 90s saw the "unobstructed rollout of a neo-liberal model of media development" (Calabrese, 2004, p. 324), characterized by market- and industry-dominated regulatory approaches. For community media, both periods provided substantial challenges. The earlier phase, with its focus on state-led initiatives and

international negotiation, left little space for citizen-based media models, while the later emphasis on business initiatives, commercialization, and the private sector has largely neglected media that are non-commercial and civil society–oriented. However, some openings for their support have emerged throughout those phases. For example, the MacBride Report, the main outcome of the international debate on a New World Information and Communication Order in the 1970s and 80s, recognized the role of local, alternative, participatory, and decentralized media (International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, 1980). At the World Summit on the Information Society of 2003 and 2005, community-media concerns were crushed by both authoritarian governments and business agendas, but side events, thematic WSIS-related conferences, and reports strongly emphasized the value of community media (Hintz, 2009).

Regional policy institutions have picked up the trail over the past decade. In 2001, the *African Charter on Broadcasting* recognized community media as a "third media sector" in a three-tier media landscape (UNESCO, 2001). Both the European Parliament (in 2008) and the Council of Europe (in 2009) adopted declarations in which they highlighted the important role of community media in advancing social cohesion, media pluralism, and intercultural dialogue, and in which they called for the legal recognition of community media in national media law, access to licences, and public financial support (Council of Europe, 2009; European Parliament, 2008). Likewise, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has acknowledged the centrality of community media for freedom of expression and access to information, calling upon states in the region to "legally recognize and reserve parts of the spectrum for this type of media, as well as to establish equitable conditions for the access to licences that recognize the difference of non-commercial media" (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2009, p. 392). Governments in several countries have started to put such calls into practice. The British regulator Ofcom, for example, has allocated licences to hundreds of community radio stations since 2004. The government of India plans to have legalized 4000 community radio stations by 2013 (AMARC, 2010).

The ideological, media-structural, and political context in Latin America

Various dimensions of the global political-ideological context of communication governance emerged in Latin America with particular force. For many decades the state was dominant in social and economic life, partly as socialist or social-democratic state, partly (and more often) in authoritarian forms and as military dictatorship. From the 1980s, the neo-liberal model was enforced more radically than elsewhere, promoted by international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization, as well as domestic elites. The telecommunications sector was privatized and media businesses became highly concentrated. However, following deep economic crises, as well as the (related) legitimacy crisis of the neo-liberal paradigm, left-wing governments were elected across the continent in the early 2000s. Their politics, rhetoric, and policies have differed, but they have largely stalled or reverted privatization processes and have put stronger emphasis on public services. Countries including Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador have recently carried out re-nationalization processes in the telecommunications sector, and new media laws have radically changed the environment for community media.

Community radio is immensely popular in Latin America due to its embeddedness in local society. Often it represents the only media outlet offering local news, programs on local issues, and programs in local languages. The cost of a radio set is low, collective use is possible, literacy is not essential, the use of radio waves requires only limited investment, and it is thus the most accessible media platform (e.g., Girard, 2003). A large number of grass-roots radio stations have existed all across the continent, and the beginnings of community radio as such are often traced to radio initiatives in Bolivia and Colombia earlier in the 20th century (Rodríguez, 2001). However, community radio has largely been excluded from access to frequency licences due to discriminatory laws and regulatory practices. In several countries, it remains explicitly forbidden; in other countries, allocation procedures, such as discretionary handing out of licences by the government to specific "friendly" operators and auctioning off of licences to the highest bidder, have practically prevented its legal existence. Where it is legally allowed to exist, laws are often highly restrictive regarding range and funding, radio stations are relegated to the border areas of the spectrum and are subject to conditions such as bans on carrying advertising or on political content. This situation has long been criticized by activists and scholars as a violation of freedom of expression and an abuse of state power to silence diverse voices (Gómez, Aguerre, & Eliades, 2009).

For decades, the private sector dominated ownership structures, with 85% of radio broadcasters under private ownership in 1993 and a strong role played by media corporations that also controlled other media businesses (López Arjona, 1993). Several large transnational enterprises, connected with each other both horizontally and vertically, have been struggling for television market shares, including Globo from Brazil, Televisa from Mexico, the Venezuelan Grupo Cisneros, and the Argentinean corporations Clarín and Telefe (Mihr, 2005). The telecommunications sector is even further concentrated, with Spanish telephony giant Telefónica and the Mexican América Móvil approaching a virtual duopoly in the regional market (Mastrini & Aguerre, 2009).

A significant aspect of the media situation in the region is the contrast between the wealth and international strength of multimedia conglomerates and rural areas that are largely cut off from media access—"an intermixing of the First and Third Worlds" (Callaos, 1999, p. 252). Newspapers, in particular, are typically concentrated in the larger cities and oriented toward urban elites. Proximity to elites and close connections between governments and press organizations are thus further characteristics of the media context. Across the region, the political environment of media is traditionally characterized by "cozy relations between large media business and governments" (Waisbord, 2010, p. 134; see also Fox & Waisbord, 2002).

The recent political changes have started to weaken these long-lasting ties. Moreover, governmental and administrative change has been carried by a wave of social movements and protests against the predominant social and economic order and has thereby reflected the strengthened role of civil-society groups and social movements. The Zapatista uprising in Mexico in 1994 provided a starting point for regional mobilizations as well as global struggles against neo-liberalism and, eventually, for the alter-globalization movement and its protests against summits of major international institutions. Indigenous uprisings followed in many countries, such as Ecuador, Bolivia, Guatemala, and Brazil. The economic breakdown in Argentina in 2001 led to an outbreak of massive protests that took down several successive governments and carried the slogan "*que se vayan todos*"—"they all must go." A year later in

Venezuela, President Chavez was ousted by a coup that was supported by the commercial media, but he was brought back into power by a popular movement that included community and alternative media. These moments in the recent history of the region, and many others, led to a reactivation of social movements as "the social and organizational fabric, seriously affected by adjustment policies and new mechanisms for repressing and criminalizing social protest, began to gradually recover" (León, Burch, & Tamayo, 2005, p. 25).

Meanwhile, regional linkages between movements emerged and broad networks were created, such as the international network Via Campesina and its regional grouping, the Latin American Coordination of Rural Organizations (CLOC). Common campaigns emerged, such as the Continental Campaign Against the Free Trade Area of the Americas and the Campaign Against Payment of the Foreign Debt. The intense convergence and co-ordination of movements has been highlighted, not least, by the World Social Forum, which originated in the region (León, Burch, & Tamayo, 2005, p. 29).

Communication infrastructure, media structures, and media messages have become vital concerns for these networks and campaigns. Larger movements such as Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) from Brazil have created their own media, including newspapers and radio stations. The right to create media has been a central piece of the communication agenda of social movements in the region, together with access to media and communication infrastructure, both "old" and "new," and the democratization of the media. This agenda has been framed by a call for communication rights that regards communication as a social right, rather than a commodity, and as an interactive process, furthering the active participation of the citizenry in social and political deliberations and developments. These concerns thus respond directly to some of the core deficiencies of the Latin American media systems (Girard, Camacho, Vannini, & Roemersma, 2010).

Snapshots of community-media laws and regulations in Latin America

Argentina is an appropriate starting point for a little policy tour around South America because it illustrates the dramatic changes between, as well as continuities running through, the "old" and the "new" regimes. The basis for media policy has been a law that was passed during the military dictatorship that favours private commercial media and excludes community media. It was amended and reformed during the neo-liberal decade of the 1990s, allowing further privatization, cross-ownership, foreign ownership, and a significant increase in the maximum number of licences that a company can hold, thereby supporting media concentration. Traditionally, media policy in Argentina thus combined authoritarian and neo-liberal concepts (Marino, 2009).

Following economic breakdown and social unrest, the new Kirchner government began moderate revisions of the regulatory framework in the mid-2000s and allowed non-profit organizations to be licencees, thus legalizing community broadcasting. However, the allocation process provided significant bureaucratic obstacles, and the regulatory agency remained weak and dependent on the executive. In 2009 a new legal environment was created with the adoption of Law 26.522 on Audio-Visual Communication Services, which "transformed Argentina in [sic] one of the best references of regulatory frameworks to curtail media concentration and promote and guarantee diversity and pluralism" (AMARC, 2010, p.

10). In particular, the law recognizes three sectors of broadcasting—state, commercial, and not-for-profit—and guarantees a 33% share of the radio frequency spectrum for each sector, making it the most radical framework in support of community media yet. In 2010 the law was temporarily suspended by the Federal Appeal Court of Mendoza, following strong opposition to the new law and a publicity campaign by the Clarín media group, the largest Argentine media corporation.

Historically, neighbouring Uruguay provided a good example of a dominant feature of the "old" policy regime across the region, that is, the arbitrariness of media licensing and the role of political–business alliances. Precise rules and criteria for granting, revoking, and renewing broadcasting permits did not exist until recently, licence periods were practically unlimited, supervision of the use or abuse of licences was absent, and typically the president handed out frequencies to political and business allies (Waisbord, 2010).

The election of the left-wing coalition Frente Amplio in 2005 represented a fundamental break with political traditions in the country, and the new government swiftly created two laws legalizing and regulating community media. The laws provide a clear definition of the sector, allocation criteria that are based on its social goals, and highly transparent and participatory allocation and renewal procedures. They also set principles for the administration of the radio-electric spectrum, stating that it "is a common heritage of humanity ... and, therefore, the equitable access to frequencies of the entire Uruguayan society is a general principle of its administration" (quoted in Lanza & López Goldaracena, 2009, p. 4). At least one third of the spectrum is to be allocated to community media. The state has also started to revoke licences that were used for fraud or otherwise violated the law.

Together with Argentina, Uruguay is seen as a model country for progressive policy change. Nevertheless, some legislation from the time of the military dictatorship continues to be in force and to provide wide discretion to the government in administering the radio-electric spectrum. As in Argentina (and most other cases reviewed here), the lack of independence of the regulator from the executive and the persistent power of the executive to hand out broadcast concessions, as well as the lack of a comprehensive response to existing media concentration, pose questions regarding the sustainability of the current changes.

Political change in Bolivia, with President Evo Morales taking office in 2005 and his Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) forming the government from 2006, proved to be an even greater landslide than in Uruguay. Community media were legalized by decree in 2004, 2005, and 2007, and the national telecommunications provider was re-nationalized. A new constitutional article on "social media" was introduced, calling for the state to support community media. The government moved beyond mere legalization by creating a national network of indigenous people's radio stations in response to the particular diversity of social and ethnic origins and languages in the country (Aguirre Alvis, Torrico Villanueva, & Poma Ulo, 2009).

As in Uruguay, the new laws and decrees in Bolivia display a thorough understanding of the characteristics of community media, with a few shortcomings, however. Community media are largely seen as local media and are limited in geographic scope; they are not allowed to carry advertising, and no specific percentage of the spectrum has been reserved for them. The new indigenous stations that are the result of government intervention and are dependent on government support are called "community media," which confuses the understanding of that term and concept. Furthermore, licence allocation is exercised by a mix

of several institutions, disturbing the transparency of the process, and overall the executive retains significant discretion in interpreting and applying the law (Aguirre Alvis, Torrico Villanueva, & Poma Ulo, 2009).

Venezuela provides a similar picture, unsurprisingly, due to close collaborations between the current Bolivian and Venezuelan governments. A new telecommunications law was adopted in 2000, just over a year after the new Chavez government had taken office. The law regularized spectrum allocation, after decades of arbitrary and political licence provision, and legalized community radio and television. Since then, the regulator has given out a large number of licences to community media. However, the complex allocation procedure provides numerous bureaucratic hurdles, community media are (as in Bolivia) restricted to a concept of local media, and while financial subsidies are available, they are widely seen as a double-edged sword, as they may jeopardize these media's independence (Urbina Serjant, 2009).

Regulatory inconsistencies persist, as the law and specific regulations are sometimes contradictory, and so do regulatory gaps—for example, regarding the renewal and termination of licences, for which few clear criteria and procedures exist. As a result, opportunities for discretion by the relevant institutions persist, as well as long procedures for allocating and renewing licences. The regulatory institutions remain heavily influenced by the government, and despite promising changes, Venezuelan media policy is still characterized by an "institutional weakness of the regulatory process" (Urbina Serjant, 2009, p. 8).

In all these countries, civil-society mobilizations have played an important role in creating policy change, and civil-society agendas could be transformed into policy through movement–government connections, either because of the existence of allies in power or because of individuals from the movements who took up government or regulatory positions. The Argentine media law was drafted by a communications professor and AMARC policy consultant, followed by extensive consultations with civil society and other sectors, and the final text was physically brought to parliament for adoption by a procession of 20,000 citizens, making it a "law of the people" (personal interview with Damian Loreti, Montréal, QC, February 11, 2011). The wording of the Uruguayan law was based on a draft submitted by civil-society groups, and besides its media-related content, it has opened institutional spaces for citizen participation in the administration of the spectrum. Its adoption was influenced by significant pressure from a broad civil-society coalition of media, labour, educational, and human rights organizations, and by the advocacy work of AMARC, with one AMARC expert becoming the head of the government's communications department (Waisbord, 2010). In Bolivia, AMARC participated temporarily in the process of allocating new licences to community media, and civil-society groups were involved in formulating the respective policies. Yet in that case, extended possibilities for participation only existed during a brief window after President Morales came to power and were later reduced or revoked.

Civil-society mobilizations and government change also occurred in Brazil, but not with the same outcome. Traditionally the country has had a fragmented, complex, and sometimes contradictory regulatory landscape, largely reflecting the traditionally close connections between the business sector and political elites. The federal constitution of 1988 highlights the social aspects of communication but does not recognize community media. Several of its articles (e.g., the rejection of monopolies and oligopolies) have not been transferred into laws and concrete regulations. There is no systematic supervision of whether stations com-

ply with legal and regulatory obligations, and sanctions are rarely applied: "The decision is always to renew, even with notorious violations by stations towards their legal obligations" (Moyses & Gindre, 2009, p. 19). Most new licence grants have to be processed first by the Department of Communications and then authorized by the National Congress. In theory, this may allow for parliamentary control and transparency; in practice, it leads to long delays and an overly complex process.

In Brazil, community media were legalized in 1998 and thus earlier than in the other examples. However, they face significant bureaucratic barriers in the application process, severe limitations in terms of transmission power and range, a lack of public funding, and restrictions to financing models such as advertising. As most community radio stations have to operate with few resources, sponsorship by political groups is common, and political dependency is a likely result. Meanwhile, thousands of community radio stations are broadcasting in Brazil without licences, making it one of the most vibrant grass-roots radio landscapes worldwide. However, and in contrast with the lack of supervision of commercial radio stations, unlicensed community radio stations are heavily repressed. According to some accounts, up to 10 radio stations are shut down every day, and up to several thousand per year (Moyses & Gindre, 2009).

The end of our tour brings us back to the southern end of Latin America, to Chile, where the links between the military dictatorship and neo-liberal policies can be traced even more clearly than where we started, in Argentina. The constitution, the General Telecommunications Law, and many regulations that are in existence today were adopted during the dictatorship. Radio frequency allocation follows strictly commercial principles: concessions are allocated by auction to the highest bidder and can be sold further, there is no limit to the number of frequencies that an owner can hold, most concessions are granted for 25 years, and renewal is comparably easy, all of which favours large media operations and, particularly, the incumbent stations. For TV, some anti-monopoly regulations are in place, but they have not prevented the Chilean media landscape from becoming highly concentrated. As elsewhere across the region, there are indications that this type of commercial allocation is intertwined with political favouritism (La Morada Women's Development Corporation, 2009).

Community radio is only allowed as so-called "minimum-coverage" radio and is limited to 1 watt of transmission power, which usually restricts coverage to the immediate surroundings of the station. Concessions for community radio are given for only three years, and public funding is not provided. Furthermore, given the significant bureaucratic and financial hurdles, the current "minimum-coverage" option is not a feasible opportunity for most non-profit community and social groups. A new law on community radio, which may alleviate some of these problems, is currently being debated.

Conclusion

In many countries of the region, the last decade has seen dramatic changes in media policy. Whereas previously communication regulation had been characterized by a mix of authoritarian political traditions and neo-liberal ideologies and was geared toward political and business elites, new legislation in several jurisdictions has helped to expand citizens' access to communication infrastructure and has provided clearer licence allocation procedures. A key piece

of policy change has been the legalization of community media and their integration into the national media mix as a legitimate and important sector within a three-tier media landscape.

However, community media are continuing to face serious obstacles. Little or no public funding is available, bureaucratic barriers often make the process of obtaining a legal licence a daunting exercise, and various restrictions on their operations persist, such as those regarding coverage and content. The weakness of regulatory agencies and their lack of independence from the state are visible across all the exemplary cases. While there have been promising new laws and regulations, structural change has not kept pace, and media authorities continue to depend on executive power. If (or rather, when) the current community media–friendly governments leave office, regulatory practices may be changed or revoked. From a community-media perspective, it seems desirable that the structural and institutional environment that frames policymaking be strengthened so that the current transformations become sustainable.

The snapshots of media laws and their implementation have highlighted the persistent role of national legislation and regulation in enabling or obstructing media operations. However, this brief overview has also shown that national policymaking has to be understood in the context of an international and multi-actor environment. Government constellations, intergovernmental co-operation, multinational norms and pressures, political traditions, ideological change, social mobilizations, and the strategic roles of civil-society organizations as well as individual experts, among many other factors, have framed policy change and created trajectories for understanding policy problems and needs. Further research on the scope and extent to which these various dimensions affect media policy change in Latin America and elsewhere may provide us with a clearer conception of how the legal and political frameworks within which media operate are constructed.

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CHAPTER 17

Community Radio Contradictions in Canada: Learning from Volunteers Impacted by Commercialising Policies and Practices

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Abstract

Community radio has been defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as promoting non-profit ownership of stations and volunteer participation. The increasing commercialisation of community radio in Canada, evident in changing station practices and regulatory policies, has resulted in the erosion of volunteer run governance and programming. This article draws on community media, anti-oppression, and third-sector studies literature to investigate the experiences of volunteers from two stations, CHRY in Toronto and Radio Centre-Ville in Montréal. Current Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) regulations define community radio 'by virtue

BY-NC-ND

of its place in the communities served.' This article concludes that reducing the engagement and empowerment of volunteers in community radio programming and governance limits the place of community radio in the community. The authors will also identify best practices that are needed to re-centre community radio within the community while ensuring a sustainable nonprofit community broadcasting sector.

Keywords

community radio, CHRY, Radio Centre-Ville, CRTC, volunteers, commercialisation, governance, policy

Introduction

Canada, described as the 'birthplace of community radio' (CRTC, 2008), is home to a long history of non-public, non-private radio practices and policies designed to provide community access to the airwaves. Today, Canadians have access to 182[1] licensed community radio stations, the majority of which are located in the provinces of Ontario and Québec where more than 60 percent of the country's population lives. The only local radio broadcasting from many of Canada's rural towns and isolated hamlets is either a community radio station or an Indigenous-run[2] radio station. Privately-owned commercial radio stations and media conglomerates overcrowd FM dials in urban areas (MCRP, 2017). Additionally, Canada's largest cities are often served by more than one community radio station. Despite the prolific development of community radio across Canada, the hyper-commercialisation of the FM dial, especially in major radio markets like Montréal and Toronto, is producing changing practices and policy shifts that threaten the sustainability of community access radio broadcasting by and for underrepresented communities.

Within the literature on community radio, defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as promoting non-profit ownership of stations and volunteer participation, there is a noticeable lacuna on the impact of policies and practices on community radio volunteers. The majority of scholarship published concerning community radio prior to the 2000s was descriptive, summarising a station's origins, programming practices, and/or funding structures (Rodríguez, 2001: 11). In the decades after, academics produced theoretical works that focused largely on community radio's contribution to democratising communication, participation and empowerment, social movements and political change, and countering the status quo (Ferron, 2012; Rauch, 2015; Rodríguez, 2001). Several studies observe that community radio engages community participation (Girard, 1992; Gumucio Dagron, 2001; Rodríguez, 2001; Sussman and Estes, 2005), however, only a handful examine the impact of volunteer engagement practices within community radio stations (Anderson, 2011; Fairchild, 2001; Khan, 2010). Gaps are evident in the theorisation of community radio, including an absence of works concerning content analysis, internal

[1] This number is the total of the following licence service types issued by the CRTC: Community (128), Community Type B (4), Community Type A (1), Community Developmental (2), and Campus (47). Retrieved on April 25, 2018, from: https://applications.crtc.gc.ca/radio-tv-cable/eng/broadcasting-services-List.

[2] The CRTC has licensed 53 Native B type stations, but hundreds of more Indigenous communities operate unlicensed local radio stations. See: https://applications.crtc.gc.ca/radio-tv-cable/eng/broadcasting-services-List?_ga=2.201279598.1362631076.1525613219-318507918.1484669306.

debates and contradictions, and the impact on audiences (Downing, 2003; Ferron, 2012; Hadl and Dongwon, 2008; Rauch, 2014). This article builds on current community media scholarship by drawing on anti-oppression and third-sector studies literature to investigate the experiences of volunteers from two stations, CHRY in Toronto and Radio Centre-Ville in Montréal. Both stations have decades of experience in community radio broadcasting, but recent changes to regulatory policies underpin ongoing internal conflicts over station practices that de-centre volunteer participation in governance and programming.

Based on comparative case study research on the sustainability of community radio in Canada, this article views the impact of commercialising Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) policies and community radio practices through documenting the experiences of the volunteers from community radio stations in major radio markets.[3] This methodology is informed by third sector studies frameworks offered by Fischer (2014: 458) that are useful for assessing the impact of governance practices, including investigating the distribution of power and decision-making processes, evident transparency in knowledge and information exchanges, inter-institutional dialogue, and greater accountability. Combining anti-oppression literature with third sector researchers who focus on transparency and accountability offers an opportunity to explore the conflictual realities of community radio stations, including 'core tensions' identified by Fairchild (2001: 7) among community radio stations in Canada and 'inter-community discord' described by Huesca (1995: 105) that required a response by community radio stations in Bolivia. The corruption of power and privilege is harmful to the sustainability of any community radio station (Hancock and Khan, 2004). This view of conflict helps illuminate the processes of exclusion experienced by some community radio volunteers.

Challenging oppression and inequality in the media is part of the mandate of community radio in Canada (NCRA, 1987). Where Dominelli (2003) documents the central role of anti-oppression literature in social work, scholars like Khan (2010) demonstrate the value of this understanding in evaluating the volunteer training practices facilitated by community radio stations in Canada. Drawing on anti-oppression literature to inform approaches borrowed from third sector studies allows this research to interrogate community radio policies and station practices in order to inform sustainable mechanisms for participation and accountability. This approach is necessary according to practitioner and scholar Coyer (2011), who examines the 'normative view' of community radio. Coyer draws on Williams (1985) who asserts, the word 'community' is always used positively. Because community radio 'is typically seen as a good thing' and 'it tends to aspire to some form of inclusiveness,' Coyer (2011: 170–1) suggests this orientation necessitates a more critical review of each station 'to identify who is "in" and who is "out;" who belongs and who does not'. Thus, using anti-oppression literature offers a lens for viewing the processes within community radio stations that may include or exclude volunteer members.

The above literature informs the questions guiding this research that investigate how community radio volunteers are experiencing changing station practices and CRTC policies. In addition, the impetus for this study is also informed by practitioner knowledge. The authors of this paper are not isolated academics that research community radio, but rather community

[3] Major radio markets identified by the CRTC include, Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver. See https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/publications/reports/BrAnalysis/radio2014/radio2014.htm.

radio practitioners with academic experiences who came together with other advocates to form the Community Media Advocacy Centre (CMAC).[4] Founded in 2015, CMAC is a not-for-profit organisation that supports the self-determination of Indigenous, racialised and disabled peoples in the media through research, relationship building, advocacy, and learning. CMAC was conceived of in part as a response to the very problematic this paper seeks to address—the marginalisation of diverse volunteers as a result of commercialising community radio station practices and policies. Where national associations representing community radio stations in Canada have advocated for changes in distribution models but have yet to recognise the impact of changing station practices,[5] CMAC's mandate and research agenda is interested in the future of community media. CMAC's practitioner experience also aided data collection, where CMAC members were able to access volunteers from CHRY and Radio Centre-Ville because they themselves are part of these communities. In addition to drawing on semi-structured interviews with five volunteers from CHRY and Radio Centre-Ville on changing community radio practices, other primary sources of data for this study include two interviews conducted with experts in non-profit and community radio governance and secondary sources consisting of CRTC regulations, station policies, press releases, media coverage and grey literature. This article analyses these data to investigate the challenges and opportunities for sustainable community radio in Canada with the goal of enriching not only current academic scholarship, but also the views of all advocates for community radio, including community radio volunteers, stations and their representative associations.

Community radio fissures in the state of Canada

In the decade before public policy in Canada distinguished between professional and community media (1974), Indigenous nations, social movements, refugees and immigrants took to the airwaves. Briefly, the first community-owned radio stations were established with experimental licences issued by the regulator in the 1970s. The government was responding to a decade of unlicensed radio broadcasting used as a tool of survival and resistance. Across northern Canada, Indigenous nations installed trail radio networks to link rural and isolated communities. In cities and towns across Québec, radio broadcasts organised by labour, feminists and community movements helped to amplify the Quiet Revolution (Gonzalez Castillo, 2014: 585–585). Similarly, in cities like Vancouver and Montréal, community media activists set up radio as a tool for organising low-income communities. At the time community radio practices were regulated through licence conditions. This history of community radio in

[4] See mission, mandate vision and values: www.CMACentre.ca.

[5] See Paragraph #23 of the ARC-Canada/NCRA/ARC-Québec joint submission for CRTC 2017-359-2:
In the Community Media Advocacy Centre's ("CMAC") submission in part one of this proceeding, they stated that "Community radio… has lost most of what made it distinct since changes were made to the Community Radio Policy in 2010. Stations, according to the policy changes, are no longer predominantly run by volunteers, rather now community radio is mandated to foster only some volunteer participation." To our knowledge, the changes in the c/c sector described by CMAC have not occurred, nor have we observed any evidence from our 149 licensed member stations that the changes arising from the 2010 Community Radio Policy have reduced the number of volunteers at c/c stations in any meaningful way. Our understanding is that the 2010 policy does not differ from the 2000 policy in term of the expectation that c/c stations will incorporate volunteers into their activities.
Retrieved from: https://services.crtc.gc.ca/pub/DocWebBroker/OpenDocument.aspx?DMID=3068770.

Canada precedes the development of specific policies and the issuing of hundreds of licences. Regulation in Canada began with the 1991 Broadcasting Act, which defines a broadcasting system that 'comprises public, private and community elements' (Section 3.1.b), and the CRTC's Policy Proposals for Community and Campus Radio (CRTC 1991-118) that developed the first policy issued in 1992 (CRTC 1992-38).

Previous to the development of policies, the CRTC issued several experimental licences with conditions to serve communities in 1974. Among these new non-professional stations run by community-members was the radio station at Laval University in Québec City established by students inspired by broader social revolutions in the province lead by the Front de Libération du Québec (Gonzalez Castillo, 2014). In Pond Inlet, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation set up a community-owned radio station in northern Ontario, founding the first licensed First Nation radio station in Canada. In Vancouver, community media activist's Co-op Radio started broadcasting to bring together low-income neighbours in the Lower Eastside area of the city (King, 2017a). These community-run stations provided representation in the broadcasting system by populations otherwise marginalised in media. Community radio continued to spread in urban areas among immigrant and refugee communities, including the creation of Radio Centre-Ville in 1974 to provide programming in multiple languages serving non-francophone communities in the St-Louis neighbourhood of downtown Montréal. Today, the multi-lingual licence of Radio Centre-Ville remains the only community radio station licensed to broadcast in multiple languages other than French and English.

By the 1980s, tens of community radio stations were operating across Canada and community broadcasters began forming regional and national associations. Diverse groups representing campus and community radio stations established the National Community Radio Association (NCRA) to represent their interests at the CRTC. The NCRA membership resolved in 1987 that 'community broadcasting serves the needs of socially, culturally, politically and economically disadvantaged groups in society' in response to mainstream media that 'reinforces social and economic inequities that oppress women and minority groups' (NCRA, 1987). Similarly the Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada (ARC-Canada) and the Association des radiodiffuseurs communautaires du Québec (ARC-Québec) were established to represent the needs of francophone and Québecois community broadcasters (King, 2017a). During this time, the CRTC established separate policies for Indigenous broadcasting (1990), community radio (1992), and ethnic broadcasting (1999). These licence classes promoted the development of linguistic and cultural solitudes on the FM dial by issuing separate English, French, Native and Ethnic licences, with the exception of Radio Centre-Ville's licence condition to provide multi-lingual programming.

Throughout the 1990s, these new CRTC policies underpinned changes in the community radio sector. The Ethnic Broadcasting Policy established a profitable, commercial ethnic radio sector and set out limits on the ethnic content aired by community radio stations (CRTC 1999-117). Ethnic producers and audiences previously served only by community radio stations, like Co-op Radio and Radio Centre-Ville mentioned above, found representation on a more commercialised radio dial. For example, new waves of immigrants and refugees to Canada from Arab and Muslim communities who did not find representation within community radio stations opened commercial stations (Marouf, 2015). During this period, new CRTC policies and changing community radio practices across Canada began to transform

the sector established to provide radio by and for diverse groups marginalised by private and public media.

In 1999, there were 49 community radio stations in operation across Canada (CRTC 1999-75) and in the decades that followed the number of stations on-air more than doubled. Many of the newly licensed stations served homogenous (white) rural communities across Canada, a reality that transformed the community radio sector by contributing to the under-representation of diverse groups among community radio staff and among the membership of the above-mentioned national community radio associations (Marouf, 2015). The 2000s would continue to see shifting practices and policies that marginalised diverse programmers and audiences within community radio stations. These changes were in part influenced by external pressures, like conservative organising that targeted the social and political agenda of community radio, successfully defunding and destabilising at least one campus-based community radio station in Waterloo.[6] However, internal practices concerning employment and governance practices contributed to the under-representation of women, ethnic and Indigenous peoples, and people living with disabilities among paid staff and boards of community radio stations (Bonin & King, 2017). Rather than prioritising equity in community radio stations, associations like the ARC-Québec invested in professional development among its members and sustaining paid staff (Light, 2013). Even at the NCRA, changing priorities produced a mission statement in 2003 that neglects to mention the 'under-represented voices' and 'disadvantage groups' that founded the association (NCRA, 2003). Such programming and staff changes within community radio stations also accompanied a decrease in community radio news staff and shows (King, 2017b).

During this period of growth and transformation within the sector, the CRTC initiated two reviews of the community radio policy in 1999 (CRTC 1999-30) and 2009 (CRTC 2009-418). During the 1999 review, the ARC-Canada and ARC-Québec called for the elimination of advertising limits and the NCRA opposed such changes as 'contrary to the mandate of community stations' (CRTC 1999-75). For the 2010 review, the NCRA, ARC-Canada, and ARC-Québec prepared a joint intervention. In addition to seeking 'flexibility' in advertising limits (CRTC 2010-499), the associations also advocated for changes to the definition of community access in radio governance and broadcasting. Where the former policy states community radio 'provides for membership, management, operation and programming primarily by members of the community at large' (emphasis added, CRTC 2000-13), the changes put forward by the associations during the last review defined stations through 'community ownership' and programming that is only 'in-part' produced by volunteers (CRTC 2010-499). Other changes in the new policy supported by the associations reduced spoken word programming from the 25% requirement for 'community-oriented' public affair and news shows (CRTC 2000-13) to a minimum of 15% spoken word content (CRTC 2010-499). Notably, the spoken word category is generically defined in the revised policy as 'local' and therefore can now account for any words spoken into the microphone regardless of the type of program or

[6] Building on the successful defunding of CKMS in Waterloo, the Ontario Progressive Conservative Campus Association held a series of workshops across university campuses in 2009 on how to dominate campus discourse through defunding campus based community radio stations. See: https://rabble.ca/babble/canadian-politics/conservative-party-strategy- take-over-student-unions-exposed.

content.[7] Such changes have led to a reduction in locally-produced public affairs and news programming aired on community radio in Canada since the 2010 review (King, 2017b). In his dissenting opinion concerning the last community radio policy review led by the CRTC,[8] Commissioner Marc Patrone noted changing station practices and predicted 'that community radio may gradually become something more akin to a commercial venture.' Since that time, community radio practices that for decades provided underrepresented communities access to broadcasting have increasingly prioritised airing professionally produced programming that is attractive to advertisers (Light, 2013).[9]

In Canada, the origin of community radio practices may be rooted in the resistance to anglo-colonisation by diverse groups of Indigenous nations, Québecois social movements, refugees, and immigrants; however, changes in CRTC policies and commercialising community radio practices depart from this social and political history. Today, community radio in rural and isolated areas of Canada is often the only local radio, broadcasting to a geographical community defined by colonialism and the uneven development of communication infrastructure. Diverse communities who helped found community radio are underrepresented in governance and programming at some community radio stations. However, it is in Canada's cities where conservative organising, economic pressures and policy changes are fermenting fissures in community radio. Contradictions created by for-profit, commercial programming and governance practices within some of the country's oldest community radio stations have de-centred the needs and interests of station volunteers. This research provides the following case studies that document community radio volunteer experiences to investigate how the community is experiencing commercialising community radio station practices and policies.

Case study of CHRY

On 30 April 2015, as the many diverse volunteers of CHRY gathered for their semi-annual volunteer general meeting (VGM), they had no idea that by the end of the meeting they would no longer be part of the station they held dear to their hearts. After the procedural components of the meeting—reports from staff of each department, plans for the annual fundraising campaign, and the financial report—the program coordinator announced that as of midnight 30 April every program at CHRY would effectively be cancelled. Though CHRY staff branded this as a non-renewal of programming agreements (CHRY, 2015), volunteers were told that they will not be returning to their shows on CHRY. The following day CHRY rebranded as VIBE 105, launching a new website, and a series of mainstream professional DJs[10] to fill programming time, along with pre-recorded music content. Volunteers who

[7] Whereas previously spoken word content comprised news and public affairs type programming, now Public Service Announcements (PSAs), station IDs and music introductions can also be counted towards the required 15% spoken word content.

[8] The changes approved by the CRTC were made by a regulatory body that never included the appointment of a commissioner with a background in community broadcasting (Light, 2013, Footnote 4).

[9] Some stations have even joined forces with the Canadian military to sustain their stations. For example, 105.9 Seaside FM (a self-described community based, easy listening radio station serving the Halifax Region of Nova Scotia), changed programming practices by signing a contract with the military to provide paid-military staff as on-air hosts. Press release retrieved from: https://nslegislature.ca/legislative-business/hansard- debates/assembly-61-session-4/house_12dec06#HPage5104.

[10] Though these DJs are not paid to program on VIBE 105, the majority of them are professional DJs who earn

attended the meeting received a handout explaining the changes at the station and its justifications. Upon later investigation by volunteers and concerned community members, it was concluded that though this move was deceitful and against the interests of community members and volunteers who built the station, it was perfectly legal and within the context of CHRY's bylaws (Romandel, 2015). [11]

CHRY has a long history in the Jane and Finch/Driftwood and York University communities in North Toronto, serving underrepresented Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Canadian, African and other marginalised communities in Toronto. 'Radio York' was founded as a closed-circuit radio station for York University students in 1968. In 1987, CRTC decision 87-240 allowed Radio York, under the call letters CHRY, to operate an FM licensed community radio station at 50 watts on the 105.5 dial. Since then, CHRY had flourished into a diverse medley of voices on the right of the FM dial, hosting the only station in Toronto to feature Caribbean, African, Asian and other cultures—notably the only station in the diverse city of Toronto to celebrate Caribbean accents as central to the audio aesthetic of the station (Armstrong, 2010). The centrality of Black Toronto to CHRY (and vice versa) has been noted by Charles Fairchild's seminal work on community radio in North America:

> CHRY's specificity has a lot to do with the local community, beyond which its signal is quite weak. CHRY is most closely associated with Jane-Finch...a large part of CHRY's success is the explicit focus on this one specific community, providing an obvious service for an obvious need (Fairchild, 1993, p. 181).

Furthermore, the CRTC licensing decision predicated its decision on CHRY being 'the only station in its service area that devotes considerable amounts of its music programming to black music and folk music from different parts of the world' (CRTC 1987).

Additionally, the 1994 renewal for CHRY's licence was based on a community approach to programming and the diversity of spoken word programming, as well as the use and importance of volunteers, emphasising that 'community access is one of the most important aspects of CHRY' (Mastrocola, 2016: 5). The CHRY grid prior to 1 May 2015 was a mix of music and spoken word (including news and public affairs) programming that spanned the diverse Canadian-Caribbean community, as well as Pan-African, West African, Tamil, Filipino, Jewish, Indie, Indo-Caribbean, literary, Franco-Caribbean, Hip-hop, Jazz and Gospel genres. [12] The DJs who programmed the music shows were not professionals who earned a living from DJing, but rather passionate community members who volunteered to share their love of music with the wider community.

The rebranding of CHRY to VIBE 105 had deep implications for community access and the space open to volunteers to program on the station. The handout given to volunteers at

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a living from DJing. Being on the air at VIBE 105 benefits their professional prospects through free advertising of their skills and services as professional Toronto DJs. For example DJ Ritz lists on his website (http://www.djritzent.com) a calendar of paid gigs he does every week, such as a show on commercial radio station Z103 and gigs at different clubs each night of the week. Marxman the DJ programs the Soca Chutney show on VIBE 105 and also owns a DJing business (Image Events) catering to Caribbean weddings (https://twitter.com/MarxmanTheDJ).

[11] Staff at CHRY also consulted with the National Campus and Community Radio Association's Regulatory Affairs Committee to ensure its legality (https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwDPd9fabTPHbWRuZnZkWU8yZjA/view).

[12] See the old CHRY programming grid at http://www.chry.fm/pdf/chry_program_grid_final.pdf. To this day, VIBE 105 had not released a programming grid.

the 30 April meeting stated that the rebranding is a switch to commercial practices the will be 'guided using several commercially viable practices ... and offered under a more streamlined and professional guidance of the management group.' Additionally, in a press release from the new VIBE 105, management called the programming and the campus/community radio sector in Canada mediocre, a comment that raised concern and criticism from CBC's Metro Morning host Matt Galloway, who is an alumnus of CHRY.[13] VIBE 105 management also said in the press release that they are 'making professionalism a requirement' (VIBE, 2015). Prioritising professionalism within community radio is a dramatic shift from the sector's purpose and history (CRTC, 1974; UNESCO, 2001).

This change towards a more professional sound and commercialised management approach began in 2012 when the current General Manager of VIBE 105 became Program Coordinator of CHRY. During this time, CHRY stopped live broadcasting the annual Driftwood Multicultural Festival—a celebration of diversity and community in the Driftwood/Jane and Finch neighbourhood—that CHRY was a part of since 1999 (Gopaul, 2018). The move away from community engagement was also evident in modifications to CHRY's tagline around 2013, from 'Your Community Radio Station' to 'Your Leading Source for Diversity.' The removal of 'community' from the description of the station provided for heated discussions at a Volunteer General Meeting in 2014, raising concern about the changing character of the station away from its historical community roots to a commercialised commodification of multiculturalism.[14] Regarding such changes, long-time CHRY volunteer Luca Capone observed:

> So I would say, to compare it to my earlier year as CHRY, where the staff was always very accepting, always excited about news ideas, thoughts and programming ideas that volunteers were presenting, that show hosts were presenting. But when there was a management change, especially when [a named individual] was volunteer coordinator and then became programming coordinator, there was a change towards a commercial view, focused on making us sound not original anymore, making us sound like something else, something that was maybe less concerned about quality programming, original programming, exciting risk taking programming, whether it is was spoken word or music. And towards something that would bring in advertising dollars—so there was a complete lack of respect (Capone, 2017)

CHRY's priorities had shifted over time and according to management, the new practices introduced on 30 April 2015 were meant to meet 'the expectation of current day broadcasting and media consumption' (CHRY, 2015). Rather than CHRY continuing as an alternative to mainstream Toronto media, VIBE 105 would be able to adapt to the 'changed and fast-paced media environment where opportunities on the FM dial must match the pliability of other media options' (VIBE, 2015). The move to VIBE 105, built on the dramatic elimination of community and volunteer participation in the station, was a turn towards prioritising the advancement of CHRY/VIBE within the wider commercialised Toronto FM market rather than providing a refuge or alternative from it, and appealing to mass audiences, rather than engaging marginalised or under-represented communities.

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[13] Matt Galloway tweeted on 1 May 2015: 'Spent a long time at #chry. Nothing we did was mediocre despite meagre resources. Shame to see this happen.' https://twitter.com/mattgallowaycbc/status/594301786330046464

[14] Notes from participant observation by the author at CHRY's 30 April 2014 Volunteer General Meeting, held at Steadman Lecture Hall D, York University.

After volunteer programmers were kicked out of CHRY they immediately started organising, having recognised what they lost and seeing this as a larger trend in Toronto.[15] Their initial meeting on 12 May 2015, garnered support from a large number of former volunteers, staff and board members from the over 25-year history of CHRY on the FM dial, and also community members who were concerned with what had happened. It was through this process that volunteers and community members learned what was written in the by-laws, and the lack of power they held within the governance structure of the station. As part of its governance structure, CHRY hosted a semi-annual Volunteer General Meeting (VGM), such as the one where volunteers were dismissed on 30 April 2015. However, this VGM was not the Corporation Act of Ontario mandated Annual General Meeting (AGM), though this distinction was never raised or explained to community volunteers who produced the majority of programming at the station. The CHRY by-laws (2012) state that only students at York University were voting members of the corporation and had legal powers to demand accountability and change. Though concerned York students did attend the initial organising meeting on 12 May, some of whom were also volunteers at the station, not enough interest was garnered from them to take legal action as the only legal members of the corporation. Without action from York students, non-student volunteers (i.e. community volunteers) were not able to influence accountable and transparent governance at CHRY.

The CHRY board of directors never, in a lapse of accountability and governance literacy, ensured that volunteer programmers from the community were part of the governing structure of the station itself. The idea that 'A community organization board considers itself based in and representative of a community' is among best practices identified in the literature (Bobo, Kendall & Max, 2001: 182). It is also worth noting, the relevant legal statutes do not require non-profit organisations, like CHRY and other community radio stations, to be representative of the community.[16] In fact, the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act (S.C. 2009, c. 23), states: 'Unless the by-laws otherwise provide, a director of a corporation is not required to be a member of the corporation' (see Membership 126-2). A former CHRY board member[17] Paula Davis, explained her experiences on the CHRY board:

> What the board sees is ad revenue, what the board doesn't see is: what is the value volunteers are bringing, what is the value of the programming that we are doing? It is this intangible thing that is driving the organization but we never talk about it, there's never a conversation. And this is the problem, the board doesn't deal with vision, the board doesn't actually defend [community] radio as a medium, it defends this entity that is the station and it has no way of reconciling the sacrifice of volunteers, the value of volunteers (Davis, 2016).

Volunteers that were kicked out of CHRY continued to search for forums to express their grievances outside of the legal avenues closed to them[18] by organising community meetings

[15] In 2011 the CRTC revoked the licence for CKLN, a community radio station that had operated out of Ryerson University as the 'voice of the underground' since 1983. The revocation came after four years of internal struggles over governance, finances, and the mandate of the community radio station.

[16] Also see COCo's Health House Tool: https://coco-net.org/healthy-house-nonprofit/

[17] All members of the CHRY board of directors are volunteers elected from programmers, community members, and York University staff. CHRY staff are non-voting members of the board (CHRY By-laws, 2012).

[18] Some took their complaints to the CRTC, filing complaints with the body about the changes at CHRY. But all received the same response: 'Although the CRTC regulates and supervises the Canadian broadcast system under the Broadcasting Act (the Act), the broadcasters themselves are responsible for the choice, content,

at York University and the Jane and Finch Community Centre,[19] participating in conferences such as the conference hosted by the Media Action Research Group (MARG),[20] and taking to the airwaves with sympathising stations and shows such as CKUT, CJMP and GroundWire Community Radio News. A handful of volunteers took their shows and energy to the newly AM licensed community radio station CJRU operating out of Ryerson University where they continue to advocate for accountability from VIBE/CHRY.[21] At the aforementioned MARG conference, volunteers kicked out of CHRY and their supporters summarised the arbitrary transition from CHRY to VIBE 105 as taking the community out of their community radio station to promote a commercialised agenda and sell CHRY, a community built space, as VIBE 105 or a more sustainable 'brand' for attracting audiences on Toronto's FM dial. The lack of transparency by staff at CHRY, combined with an absence of governance literacy within volunteer engagement practices at the station, were seen as the main reasons community volunteers were easily disenfranchised from decision-making that approved cancelling all CHRY programming and rebranding as VIBE 105.[22] A similar trend of commercialising community radio practices was seen only one year later disrupting volunteer access at Radio Centre-Ville in Montréal.

Case Study of Radio Centre-Ville

For more than forty years, Radio Centre-Ville has served the needs and interests of Montréal's diverse linguistic communities. On air since 1974, the station is Québec and Canada's oldest multilingual community radio broadcaster with licence conditions to broadcast in French, English, Spanish, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Portuguese and Greek. Among the community members who founded the station and continue to program on-air are immigrants and political refugees, some from Argentina, Chile, Mexico, and Haiti, who shaped the 'critical leftist' positioning of the station's programming (Gonzalez Castillo, 2014). Community radio in Québec is uniquely supported with operational funds provided by a program under the provincial government's Ministry of Culture and Communication (Light, 2013). There is a direct link between public policies that support development of community radio and the sector's roots in Québec's nationalist movement (Gonzalez Castillo, 2014). Eduardo Gon-

and scheduling of the programming they provide. The Act does not give the CRTC the right to edit or censor programming.' (email sent to Elleni Zeleke from CRTC DONOTRESPOND/NEPASREPONDRE crtcdonotrespond@crtc.gc.ca, June 16, 2015).

[19] Public meetings were held on 12 May, 27 May, 10 June, 6 July and 16 September by an ad-hoc group of kicked out volunteers, past staff and board members, and concerned community members under the banner "SaveCHRY" (https://www.change.org/p/chry-radio-inc-save-chry-immediately-set-aside-the-april-30-2015-dismissal-of-programmers-reinstate-all-shows-and-volunteer-programmers-as-of-april-29th-2015-call-a-general-members-meeting-agm-within-the-required-mandate-to-address-these-concerns).

[20] http://www.mediaactionresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/MARC-schedule-1.pdf.

[21] On 24 and 25 March 2018, the NCRA held a Station Manager Summit hosted by VIBE 105 at York University. Randy Reid, former Program Coordinator of CHRY and current General Manager of VIBE 105 presented a session entitled 'VIBE105 Transition—From CHRY to VIBE105.' Volunteer programmers kicked out of CHRY in 2015 and who are current volunteers at CJRU (Ryerson University) wrote a letter to the NCRA objecting to Reid's presentation without representation from volunteers who were dismissed in the process he was describing (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdGV3HkBwqGZFv3RQCJ- 1z71-5_Ynvqs1ufl7WBbE4hp-PBoFA/viewform campus-and-community-broadcast/).

[22] The ad-hoc group SaveCHRY presented a workshop entitled "Take Back Our Space: Mapping Community Media in Toronto" on 13 May 2016 at the MARG conference.

zalez Castillo observes 'where francophone community radio was seen as an instrument for reinforcing nationalist pride' the multicultural and political agenda of Radio Centre-Ville's programming makes the station a historical anomaly in the development of community radio in Québec (2014: 589).

Individuals from diverse community and ethnic groups in the St-Louis neighbourhood came together in the early 1970s to form a not-for-profit organisation and apply for a FM radio licence. After years of organising and early broadcasts conducted from the studios of Radio McGill (CKUT 90.3 FM), Radio Centre-Ville was granted a licence by CRTC decision 74-388 to broadcast in five languages in 1974. On 30 January 1978, the membership of Radio Centre-Ville passed a Declaration of Principles that ensures the station provides 'priority access to the airwaves' for low-income and disadvantaged individuals or groups and airs independent radio programming that promotes active citizenship and the 'equitable distribution of airtime' (Radio Centre-Ville, n.d.). Initially sustaining financial instability and infrastructure challenges (including limited studio space and transmitter failure due to a storm), Radio Centre-Ville moved into a new building in 1982. Over the years, Radio Centre-Ville has won awards for promoting citizenship and multicultural exchange and set many precedents on the radio dial, including launching programs by and for feminists, LGBTQ people, prisoners, children and refugees (Radio Centre-Ville, n.d.).

Governance of the station, including compliance with the CRTC, is facilitated by a mix of paid staff and volunteers elected to the board of directors by the station's registered membership during the Annual General Meeting.[23] Radio Centre-Ville's programming is coordinated by a committee made-up of representatives from the different linguistic teams of volunteer producers. In recent years, the station has suffered from financial instability that resulted in a growing deficit. The press coverage of Radio Centre-Ville's financial troubles highlighted the station's efforts to launch a cafe (in the same building as the radio station) to cultivate new revenue sources (Faguy, 2017). Yet, the financial crisis worsened and heightened governance problems at Radio Centre-Ville. Discord between the board and the linguistic teams developed in part due to decisions taken to privatise some station practices, effectively running the station as a private business through heavy handed bureaucratic practices (Gonzalez Castillo, 2014). For some producers, these changes 'ran contrary to the principles the radio station had defended throughout its history' (Gonzalez Castillo, 2014). The issue of commercialising practices came before the membership on 4 December 2016, in a general assembly. On that day, Radio Centre-Ville's membership took decisions, electing a board and passing one resolution prohibiting the selling of airtime, that has yet to be implemented by the station's board and staff (GroundWire, 2017). Dozens of volunteers have since been kicked off air or had their shows moved to accommodate programmers who purchase airtime.

Barred programmer Frantz Andre shared his experiences of recent changes at the station. Andre described his last show at Radio Centre-Ville: 'one night we came in and the doors were locked and we were told we cannot have our program.' He noted the lack of community access to the airwaves and decision-making is not what he expected from a community radio station. He added:

[23] According to the Not-for-profit Corporations Act of Canada (S.C. 2009, c. 23) and Companies Act of Québec (C-38), the organization's membership elects a board of directors to be the legal representatives of the non-profit radio station.

> Radio Centre-Ville is a station that has been around for more than 40 years and our program has been on air for 30 years. This is a democracy in Montréal and most of the volunteers at Radio Centre-Ville are people who suffered dictatorships in their countries. So they are coming here, knowing that there is a democracy and freedom of speech, with Radio Centre-Ville giving that opportunity. And suddenly not having that freedom of speech because some people have decided that they are only going to act in their own interests. That is not acceptable (GroundWire, 2017).

Andre and other displaced volunteer programmers organized a press conference on 1 February 2017, in response to the 'tyranny at Radio Centre-Ville.' In a public statement, the volunteers behind the press conference identified the 'height of the crisis' as the general assembly following the December meeting and vote held on 22 January. They reported the January meeting 'was marked with irregularities and in which several dozens of unknown persons arrived and acted like legitimate members' (Radio Centre-Ville en lutte, 2017). During the press conference, concerned programmers condemned the anti-democratic practices forcing the commercialisation of the station's programming and management practices. Mikhail Kapellas, a member of Radio Centre-Ville since the 1970s addressed the press conference. Kapellas quoted from the website of the ARC-Québec and pointed to the mandate of community radio 'to reinforce the participation of citizens in public affairs.' Kapellas concluded, 'when you start selling whole hours of programming, then you destroy the nature of community radio. Because you do not allow dozens of citizens and volunteers to participate in the radio station' (GroundWire, 2017). Some of the station members who participated in the press conference also reported that they had contacted the CRTC for assistance and were told that the regulator cannot be involved in the internal matters of the radio station (GroundWire, 2017).

Because of the CRTC's in-action, on 13 March 2017, the board members elected at the 4 December general assembly filed a complaint at the Superior Court of Québec, seeking the annulment of the 22 January general meeting and the right to appeal the station board's decision to introduce programming changes under which 'airtime was illegally sold' (Moreno vs Lalanne Zéphyr, 2017). Elected by the membership to the board at the December meeting, Aristofanis Soulikias, believes the station's new governance practices and programming changes have departed from the mandate of community radio. Soulikias observed:

> Community radio, like all real community organizations, are formed from the bottom to the top. It is not a top bottom, top down system. Here we have a situation where all kinds of changes are taking place. Shows are being sold for money to private entities that come, take over a radio show that has been rooted in the radio landscape of Montréal community for decades with security guards. This is imposed physically. We are talking about, you know, security guards blocking the way of volunteers trying to enter the studio. People were trying to do their show and not even being informed that their show is no longer. So definitely that is really far from anything that I can call community radio (Soulikias, 2017).

Long-time programmers like Kapellas agree that there is a democratic deficit at Radio Centre-Ville. For Kapellas the conflict at Radio Centre-Ville is contributing to a larger crisis in media, stating that:

> If you lose the community radios, then you will have the alternate facts, fake news, and *radio-poubelle* [trash talk radio in Québec]. So that is the question, do we want a society that has more participation of citizens or not? A community radio station can contribute to citizen engagement (GroundWire, 2017).

Since the launch of the complaint at the Superior Court of Québec, the board elected in December has won the release of documents, including membership lists, general assembly attendance records and board meeting minutes (Moreno vs Lalanne Zéphyr, 2017).

For programmers displaced from Radio Centre-Ville, a committee of former station volunteers is organising to reinstate democratic governance and community access to airwaves.[24] For now Soulikias is still on-air presenting the only program on the FM dial that reports on Montréal news and cultural information in Greek. According to Soulikias:

> Radio Centre-Ville was an island or an oasis in a commercial radio landscape. There are a few other Greek-language shows, heavily commercialised and dependent on the church [funds]. We were independent and that one island has now been taken over in large chunks, transforming Radio Centre-Ville into a commercial radio (Soulikias, 2017).

Other programmers agree that the paid content now on air at Radio Centre-Ville sounds commercial. Former volunteers like Andre also believe many of the new programs are transforming the critical political perspective of Radio Centre-Ville. Andre compares his banned program that was critical of the occupation by the United Nations (supported by Canada) in Haiti to the mainstream coverage now on air at Radio Centre-Ville that promotes the status quo (Andre, 2017). Today, according to volunteers kicked off air like Andre, volunteers still on-air like Soulikias, and longtime volunteers like Kapellas, Radio Centre-Ville is, for the first time, airing paid content that does not match the station's critical leftist origins or community radio's mandate. Forty-two years after the station's founding by and for community members, Radio Centre-Ville's governance and programming is being redefined by for-profit, commercial and status quo practices that are no different than commercial radio practices.

Conclusion

On 29 March 2017, CKUT Radio 90.3 FM (Radio Centre-Ville's partner community radio station) in Montréal made a public statement concerning the financial crisis impacting the community radio sector. The statement (CKUT, 2017), released online and read aloud at a public demonstration held outside of Radio Centre-Ville, points to austerity measures that have produced drastic cuts in public funding, privatisation, and threaten the sustainability of community radio. CKUT warns that from Toronto to Montréal, 'community radio stations are ever more susceptible to becoming commercial and violate their mandates to provide community-oriented programming' (CKUT, 2017). These changes are not just affecting Radio Centre-Ville and CHRY, CKUT also points to stations like CIBL (Montréal's oldest francophone community radio station) that cancelled all of its on-air shows in September 2016 to change programming formats and thereby attract more advertisers.[25] A similar trend can also be seen more recently at CIUT in Toronto, where a longtime Indigenous programmer

[24] This includes organising a 'Gathering to Denounce the commercialization of Radio Centre-Ville' on 29 March 2017, and a fund raiser to support the legal case called 'Célébrons ensemble la résistance! Pour une Radio libre' 30 July 2017.

[25] In December 2017, the former station director who instituted commercial radio practices at CIBL resigned. In January 2018, the board of directors of CIBL fired all staff and closed the station due to an ongoing financial crisis. The board, with the support of community members and former staff, are now working to relaunch the station in May 2018: http://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/montreal-community-radio-station-cibl-fm-lays-off-all-its-employees.

was suspended from the station after criticising on-air the mainstream media's coverage of the death of Colten Boushie, a young Indigenous man in Saskatchewan, and the acquittal of his killer, Gerald Stanley (Kao, 2018). Such practices silence dissenting voices within a sector founded to amplify radio made by and for diverse communities marginalised and underrepresented in public and private media.

The above case studies of CHRY and Radio Centre-Ville explore contemporary contradictions in community radio practices by investigating changing regulatory policies and station practices. This research begins to address gaps in existing scholarship, such as Daniela Mastrocola's (2016) research paper about the transition of CHRY. While Mastrocola identifies insufficient resources (despite station surpluses) as the cause of the drastic changes at CHRY, the paper gravely overlooks the policy context in Canada and did not consider the impact of the commercialisation of community radio from the perspective of volunteers who are directly impacted by these changes. Guided by community radio, anti-oppression and third-sector studies literature, this study prioritises the views of volunteers as necessary to evaluate the impact of the commercialisation of community radio. These case studies help to illuminate the role of paid staff and governing boards in instrumentalising policy gaps to impose change. Additionally, this research is placed within a broader historical context that views the development of commercialising community radio practices and policies over time. Finally, this research has also identified the need for future studies to consider the professionalisation and commercialisation of community radio within the broader context of the neoliberalisation of media.

This comparative view of commercialising governance and engagement practices within two community radio stations in major markets in Canada seeks not only to document the discord experienced by community radio volunteers, but also learn from these challenges and inform community radio policies and station practices that provide sustainable mechanisms for community participation and accountable governance. Where the corruption of power and privilege is harmful to the sustainability of any community radio station (Hancock & Khan, 2004), this research recognises that opportunities are not always evident for volunteers participating in community radio stations. Kira Page from the Montreal-based Centre for Community Organizations (COCo), points to limitations in the legal frameworks in Canada for not-for-profit organisations experiencing conflict. Kira observes:

> There isn't really a mechanism for enforcing [bylaws] outside of the power that we have between ourselves within organisations. So the enforcement mechanism that is given is really the membership at the annual general meetings. There is no ombudsperson. You can't call 911 on a board of director's meeting gone badly wrong... Nonprofits are meant to be self-managed. And so when we have problem with each other, we have to fix them with each other. And that can be extremely challenging, but it can also be way more rewarding for the end for the organisation to find new and creative ways to solve conflict within itself (Page, 2017).

Page's insights reveal that in the absence of appropriate mechanisms that empower community members within non-profit community radio stations, it is necessary to build on experiences of volunteers displaced from CHRY and Radio-Centre-Ville and develop best practices concerning governance and engagement practices.

According to Kristiana Clemens, co-founder and vice-president of the Community Media Advocacy Centre, improving governance practices within community radio stations is

necessary given changing practices across Canada (CMAC, 2018). Clemens (2017) believes volunteers should be aware of policies and procedures, because 'community radio stations are comprised of the people within them and in order to accomplish their goals, those individuals need to find ways to work together and the way that happens is through documentation for governance, policy, and procedures'. Based on over two decades of experience working in community radio stations across Canada, Clemens concludes:

1. Where nonprofit community radio stations are sustained by community dollars and volunteer labour, procedural and fiscal transparency should be established by posting bylaws, policies, and financial statements (on the station website and within the station) for review by station members and the community at large;
2. Community radio stations need to encourage and publicise volunteer participation in board meetings and require member consultation on major governance changes, rather than relying solely on the annual general meeting;
3. Stations should create a policy committee that is representative of non-management staff and volunteers to ensure that all stakeholder voices can be heard in the policy development process;
4. And to ensure more accountable governance structures, community radio stations should implement anti-oppression orientations for new volunteers as well as directors of the board and staff. (Clemens, 2017)

Similarly, the COCo has developed non-profit organisational assessment tools [26] and anti-oppression audits to help organisations, like community radio stations, 'identify priority areas and work towards fostering a culture where people are willing to change' (Page, 2017). Tools and best practices are needed because the current CRTC policy mandates community radio to distinguish itself 'by virtue of its place in the communities served' (CRTC 2010-499). However, the experiences of CHRY and Radio Centre-Ville volunteers reveal that commercialising community radio policies and practices is reducing the engagement and empowerment of volunteers in community radio programming and governance. Given the community radio volunteer experiences of governance deficiencies and changing station practices documented through this comparative case study analysis, better practices are needed to re-centre community radio within the community and to sustain non-profit broadcasting practices in Canada.

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[26] See, for example, COCo's Healthy House tool, https://coco-net.org/healthy-house-nonprofit/.

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PART 4

Production and Distribution

CHAPTER 18

Podcasting About Yourself and Challenging Norms: An Investigation of Independent Women Podcasters in Denmark

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Abstract

This article investigates why and how women use independent podcasting and social media platforms to challenge norms afflicting their own personal lives. Extending previous studies of independent podcasting as a tool of empowerment, this article analyses semi-structured interviews with the hosts of two podcasts: the mental health and personal journals podcast *A Seat at The Table* and the parenting podcast *Our Different Family* [*Vores Anderledes Familie*]. The podcasts are norm-challenging but, at the same time, illustrative of a gendered podcasting sphere in which women primarily podcast about what has traditionally been considered female domains, such as mental health, personal journals, and parenting. The study finds that podcasting's lack of visuals and unrestricted, conversational format allow for creating and distributing in-depth realisations about personal norm-challenging issues. Simultaneously, it finds that the participatory affordances of social media platforms are essential for receiving feedback, content ideas, and emotional support from like-minded listeners when the podcasters challenge oppressive norms.

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Keywords

independent podcasters, women's voices, podcast production, oral-aural media, listener communities, social media

Introduction

Independent podcasting provides a channel for all kinds of voices to express themselves about personal subject matters. In contrast to institutional radio and podcasts, independent podcasters represent themselves and do not undergo any kind of editorial gatekeeping (Adler Berg, 2021a; Markman, 2012; Millette, 2011). This freedom allows for breaking down traditional boundaries regarding what can be said and done in the media. While also engaging specific subcultures through their frequent online interactions with listeners, independent podcasters share characteristics with bloggers, YouTubers, and other types of user-generated content producers (Markman, 2012). Their participatory characteristics lead to offering and receiving support on diverse issues such as disabilities and illnesses (Collins, 2018; Meserko, 2014; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt & Buchholtz, 2018), ethnic minorities (Vrikki & Malik, 2019), Blackness (Florini, 2017; Fox et al., 2020), and queer identities (Copeland, 2018; Fox, 2008; Zehelein, 2019).

A fast-growing research area within podcast studies focuses on independent podcasting's capabilities for women. As recording technologies have become more affordable and accessible in recent years, women see opportunities to podcast while doing household work (Wang, 2021). The freedom and intimacy of the medium provide women with narrative power (Greer, 2017) and allow podcasters to challenge norms of gender and sexuality (Adler Berg, 2021b; Copeland, 2018) and discrimination, social stigma, and prejudices against women (Jorgensen, 2021; Zehelein, 2019). Because of its ability to challenge norms—suppressive and uncomfortable as they are for those who cannot inhabit them (Ahmed, 2014)—independent podcasting constitutes a relevant feminist research object.

Yet, these previous studies (Copeland, 2018; Greer, 2017; Jorgensen, 2021; Wang, 2021; Zehelein, 2019) all present textual and auditory analyses. Research on independent podcasting's possibilities for women requires further quantitative documentation and qualitative investigations from the podcasters' points of view, and I intend to address the research gap with this article by combining a preliminary quantitative analysis with semi- structured interviews with podcasters. Furthermore, I specifically explore independent women podcasters in Denmark, which is a relevant and complex country-case, for two reasons. First, in comparison with the growing body of academic research on independent podcasts in larger geolinguistic regions such as the US and UK (e.g., Llinares et al., 2018; Spinelli & Dann, 2019), we know very little about independent podcasting in smaller regions. Denmark, with its 5.7 million citizens, provides an opportunity to study this phenomenon. Second, the number of women and men in Denmark listening to podcasts is equal (DR, 2022). Yet, as the preliminary quantitative analysis shows, more men than women are podcasting, and very different topics are discussed and disseminated in podcasts, depending on the podcaster's gender. Men tend to podcast about sports, comedy, film, television, and business; women tend to podcast about mental health, personal journals, and parenting. Quantitatively, independent women

podcasters engage in what has traditionally been considered female domains (henceforth, traditional female domains), even though they, at a qualitative level, counter institutional media representations and challenge gendered norms (Adler Berg, 2021b; Copeland, 2018; Fox, 2008; Greer, 2017; Jorgensen, 2021; Wang, 2021; Zehelein, 2019).

Hence, this article investigates the relations between engaging in traditional female topics and challenging norms. I ask the following question: Why and how do women use independent podcasting and social media platforms to talk about mental health, personal journals, and parenting while at the same time challenging norms? I consider two sub-themes: 1) the possibilities of independent podcasting for women, including challenging how to speak and what to speak about, and 2) the possibilities of online communities, including receiving emotional and creative support.

To answer these questions, I examine two podcast cases which are both norm-challenging and engaging in traditional female topics: the mental health and personal journals podcast *A Seat at The Table* and the parenting podcast Our Different Family [*Vores Anderledes Familie*].

Before embarking on methods and analysis, I present key conceptions of independent podcasting as an oral-aural medium and its potentials and limitations for women, in order to provide a theoretical framework for understanding the podcast cases.

Independent podcasting as an oral-aural multisocial medium

We are all affected and formed by the experience of hearing a person's voice dominating, talking over, interrupting, or criticising another person's voice. Consequently, while much has been written about the space privileged bodies take up in visual media and the effects of these physical bodies, we must also consider which voices take up space in the media, what they say, and how they say it. Voice in this regard should be thought of with a dual understanding, conceptualised as what to speak—speech as linguistic production of meaning, or the semantic level—and how to speak—speech as vocal expressions, or the performative level, which includes tone, identity, and emotional register (Lawaetz, 2014).

The voice as the central means of communication in podcasting is inherently intimate, affective, and powerful. It is indeed expressive (Arnheim, 1936/2008), as it reveals basic emotions of fear, passion, happiness, anger, and sadness, which makes the listener realise that the stories the voices tell are actual lived experiences (McHugh, 2012). Podcasting as an oral-aural medium with no visuals to rely upon gives podcasters a space for expressing themselves without worrying about their appearances. Furthermore, the lack of visuals creates empathy as listeners use their imagination to "see" the events unfold (Rodero, 2012). Thus, podcasts, like radio and music, are effective tools of resilience and mobilisation. As radio scholar Kate Lacey (2013: 8) has pointed out, the act of listening to voices involves "*both* the realm of sensory, embodied experience and the political realm of debate and deliberation [emphasis original]".

Then what differentiates independent podcasting from institutional podcasting or radio? While large-scale institutionalised formats must reach mass audiences in order to maintain funding and broadcast permission, the lack of editorial gatekeeping in independent podcasting provides people with the freedom to talk about what they want, for as long as they want, how they want, and to whom they want. This authenticity of what is being said and how it is being said has become an aspirational ideal for independent podcasters (e.g., Adler Berg,

2021b; Collins, 2018; Jorgensen, 2021; Meserko, 2014, 2015; Mottram, 2016; Sullivan, 2018) and enables further empathy and identification with the persons talking and being described in the podcasts (e.g., Collins, 2018; Copeland, 2018; Greer, 2017). Independent podcasters reach out "to the world of the similarly minded" (Zehelein, 2019: 145), and they often engage in deeply personal (even private) stories about their own life or the lives of their guests (Adler Berg, 2021a; Collins, 2018; Jorgensen, 2021).

This, in turn, affects listeners, who then deeply engage with the podcasters and their content (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021). Interacting, sharing, and discussing podcasts online are significant motivations for listening to independent podcasts (e.g., Fox et al., 2020; McClung & Johnson, 2010; Perks & Turner, 2018) and consequently, independent podcasters have more online interactions with their listeners than traditional media content producers (Berry, 2016; Löwgren & Reimer, 2013; Markman, 2012; Markman & Sawyer, 2014). In this sense, independent podcasting is not solely a radiogenic medium characterised by parasocial relations between podcasters and listeners, but indeed is also a multisocial cross-media ecosystem (Swiatek, 2018). Through social media platforms, listeners communicate and collaborate about shared interests and challenge norms and societal structures.

In sum, the accessibility, freedom, and authenticity of independent podcasting and its multisocial dimensions are, as Kim Fox, David O. Dowling, and Kyle Miller (2020: 302) find, "well suited to the project of community building".

Potentials and limitations for independent women podcasters

Traditional Western radio journalism teaches reporters and hosts to speak without emotion, using the lower range of the voice (Mottram, 2016). Because male (or naturally low-pitched) voices are still associated with authority and credibility, and female (or naturally high-pitched) voices are associated with the domestic sphere (Mottram, 2016), at least in Western countries, women in radio have historically defied their physiology and developed deeper, neutral voices (Mills, 2004). In a Danish context, the Danish Broadcasting Cooperation has, as shown by voice researcher Anna Lawaetz (2014), trained women radio presenters to speak with a narrow frequency and to use certain intonation patterns, while men have been given greater freedom to raise and lower their voices. In another study, Lawaetz (2019) analysed the voices of three high-profile Danish politicians and concluded that their voice pitches dropped concurrently with increasing their political power. And this tendency applies to women in general, as women's voice pitch on average has dropped by 23 hertz over five decades (Pemberton et al., 1998).

Independent podcasting, characterised by its lack of editorial gatekeeping, becomes a space for rebelling against prevailing linguistic and vocal norms. It permits women to talk about women to other women (Adler Berg, 2021b; Greer, 2017) and to "hear how women really talk and think" (Wang, 2021: 64). Podcast scholar Stacey Copeland (2018: 214) has pointed out that "podcasting and digital soundwork offer a new platform for female voice, including those not traditionally 'warm' or 'low' enough for radio", which resonates with Christine Mottram's (2016: 66) conclusion: "Finding vocal authority in podcasts is not about achieving the traditional Western aesthetic of the low, deep voice, but about sounding like a 'real' person: individually authentic". This way, independent podcasters can change the ideal for

women's voices. If more listeners are exposed to high voices, then they have the possibility of achieving the same status as low voices.

For contextualising and conceptualising independent women podcasters, we see that at least three categories of voices in radio and podcasting exist: 1) the male voice, which uses a wide set of vocal opportunities, 2) the institutional female voice, which has a narrower set of vocal opportunities at its disposal, and 3) the non-institutional (or independent), unrestricted female voice.

Having already discussed the potentials of independent podcasting for women, certain limitations should also be considered. First, limitations concern the increasingly powerful platforms—for example, Apple and Spotify—which independent podcasters must use in order to be found and listened to. A voice not listened to is not recognised as legitimate, according to Kate Lacey (2013: 166): "Without a listener, speech is nothing but noise in the ether". But platforms have the power to censor or remove podcast episodes, including norm-challenging podcasts which may be considered controversial or inappropriate. Today's platforms, more commonly, complicate the ability to remain visible to existing listeners and be discovered by new listeners (e.g., Berry, 2016; Sullivan, 2018; Swiatek, 2018) and thus hinder community building. As Wang (2021: 66) argues, the commercialisation of podcasting, in which "more professional programs" are increasingly favoured by platforms, will further marginalise women's unpaid podcast production work. Discoverability issues may force independent podcasters to spend more time on optimising their content for the infrastructures of platforms and less time on creating their podcasts (Morris, 2021: 18).

Second, limitations may concern listeners' and podcasters' expectations of what makes a "good" or "successful" podcast, for example, the opinion that personal subject matters need to be revealed (Collins, 2018), or, as the preliminary quantitative analysis outlined below indicates, that certain topics are suitable for either women and men to podcast about. Normative imperatives for women podcasters also include traditional discourses around women's voices. A pervasive critique in the media of the popular Danish independent true crime podcast Dark Country (Aurvig & Bugbee, 2018–present) seems illustrative. Despite their many listeners—or because of their mainstream breakthrough—the hosts were publicly criticised for being incompetent, ignorant, and immature, not solely because of their professions as journalists and not detectives, but also because of their high-pitched voices, informal conversational tone, lisps, and vocal fry (the use of the lowest tone of voice characterised by its creaky, breathy sound), which were perceived as inappropriate for discussing murder cases (Nielsen, 2019).

Consequently, as these political, economic, and sociocultural structures are impinging upon their possibilities for expressing themselves and building communities, independent women podcasters may become increasingly institutionalised and suppressed.

Setting the Danish terrain: Preliminary quantitative analysis

In May–June 2020, I sampled 552 independent Danish podcasts and coded these by their formats and topics (for sampling and coding procedure, see Adler Berg, 2021a). One year later, in June 2021, I made use of this previous mapping (Adler Berg, 2021a) to investigate the genders of the podcasters, which I determined by listening to the podcasts and considering

the gender pronouns the podcasters used about themselves on their social media accounts. I then divided the genders of the podcasters by the most widespread topics of the podcasts.

Questionnaire surveys conducted almost a decade ago revealed that 90 per cent of English-speaking independent podcasters worldwide, but mostly located in North America, were men producing content for a male audience (Markman, 2012; Markman & Sawyer, 2014). The Danish independent podcasting sphere is, in comparison, considerably more gender-balanced. Still, while women's and men's podcast consumption is equal (DR, 2022), more men than women are producing independent podcasts. The preliminary quantitative analysis revealed that 33 per cent of independent podcasts are produced and hosted by women (20% by one woman, 13% by more than one), 57 per cent by men (27% by one man, 30% by more than one), and the remaining 10 per cent by men and women together. The fact that only 10 per cent of the independent podcasts are hosted jointly by both genders may indicate difficulties in finding common interests to podcast about: While men podcast about external topics such as sports, film, television, and business, women are urged to podcast about themselves and their personal inner lives. As much as 37 per cent of all women podcasters podcast about mental health and personal journals, and the second most widespread topic for women, at 11 per cent, is parenting (see Adler Berg, 2021a).

Consequently, while women bloggers, YouTubers, Instagrammers, and independent podcasters have the ability to counter institutional media representations, women still engage in traditional female domains pervaded with emotionality (Ahmed, 2014). A likely explanation might be that they are formed by societal norms to talk about these topics. Reproducing traditional media's preoccupation with traditional female and traditional male topics makes them no different from, for example, broadcast television, in which programmes about family, relationships, and well-being are hosted by women and sports programmes are hosted by men (Andreassen, 2015).

Case studies: A Seat at The Table and Our Different Family

I selected two podcast cases to investigate why and how women use independent podcasting and their online communities when striving to challenge norms. Two cases seem appropriate for elucidating several aspects of the quantitative findings while still retaining sufficient space in this one article for case studies. The first case selected is *A Seat at The Table* (*ASATT*), made by Ingrid Baraka and Naima Yasin who, based on their own and guests' lived experiences, discuss issues in relation to "being Black women in Denmark" (Baraka & Yasin, 2017a–present); thus, its topic is coded as "mental health and personal journals". The topic of the second podcast case, *Our Different Family* (*ODF*), is coded as "parenting". *ODF* is made by Sophie Nielsen, who interviews guests about trying to thrive as a parent in LGBTQ+ family constellations, families struggling with diagnoses, disabilities, illnesses, and so on.

The two podcast cases are purposive (Neergaard, 2010) for five reasons: 1) they are representative of the topics that women podcast about; 2) they have high cultural impact (in terms of social media followers' numbers, *ASATT* and *ODF* have 8,020 and 6,553 followers on Instagram, respectively) (Baraka & Yasin, 2017b–present; Nielsen, 2020b–present); 3) one podcast is led by two women and the other by one woman (to investigate the importance of podcasting as an individual or collaborative practice); 4) the podcasters were unknown to

the Danish public before starting their podcasts (to reflect on the theoretical description of independent podcasting as a democratic medium with no editorial gatekeeping); and 5) they explicitly and publicly communicate that they are norm-challenging. Echoing *ASATT*'s title, the podcast's description along with several episode intros state that the podcast intends to offer "more people a seat at the table" (Baraka & Yasin, 2017a), thus giving voice to people that Baraka and Yasin find are not represented in institutional media. Likewise, *ODF*'s description and several of its episode intros announce that the podcast scrutinises what it means to be "different from most families" (Nielsen, 2020a–present). Both podcasts speak *from* and *to* minority positions, regardless of their high numbers of listeners and followers.

Figure 1 Podcast Cover Art



Comments: The image on the left depicts the cover art for A Seat at the Table; the image and illustration on the right depicts the cover art for Our Different Family [Vores Anderledes Familie].

Source: Baraka & Yasin, 2017a–present; Nielsen, 2020a–present

Previous studies have conducted auditory and textual analyses of independent women podcasts (Copeland, 2018; Greer, 2017; Wang, 2021; Zehelein, 2019). Yet, for the purpose of understanding motivations, experiences, decisions, and emotions, semi-structured interviews are useful (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Thus, I invited the podcasters via e-mail, and semi-structured interviews were carried out 12 April (Baraka and Yasin) and 13 April (Nielsen) 2021 (via Zoom due to the Covid-19 pandemic). The recorded interviews lasted for 47 minutes and 65 minutes, respectively, and were based on the following questions: Why do you podcast? Which possibilities does independence offer you? Why do you podcast about the topics that you podcast about? How and why do you form online relationships with listeners? After transcribing the recorded interviews, I inductively categorised and, finally, analysed them, informed by a close listening to approximately ten episodes of each podcast (Baraka & Yasin, 2017a–present; Nielsen, 2020a–present). All interview quotes were translated from Danish to English by me.

In the following analysis, I discuss the possibilities (and the limitations) of independent podcasting in relation to why Nielsen, Baraka, and Yasin—as is the case for most independent women podcasters—podcast about mental health, personal journals, and parenting. In the second part of the section, I turn towards how they experience the significance of social media activity in relation to their podcasting practice. The analysis is structured according to the research sub-themes (the possibilities of independent podcasting, including challeng-

ing how to speak and what to speak, and the possibilities of online communities, including receiving emotional and creative support).

The possibilities of independent podcasting: Realising and reflecting about yourself through podcasting

The *ASATT* project was initially planned to be a magazine, but rather accidently transformed into a podcast. To generate ideas for the magazine without having to make detailed notes, Baraka and Yasin (along with two former podcast members) recorded a conversation amongst themselves, with little interest in sharing it with others. But as they listened to the recording afterwards, they saw the potential of making it public. *ASATT*'s origin story indicates that conversations constitute the foundation of the podcast. Four women decided to record their conversation which then became the first episode of the podcast, as Baraka explained: "*ASATT* and the podcast medium have grown symbiotically together, and I think this is our strength: that we have become native to the podcast".

Yasin and Baraka appreciate podcasting's audio-only format because, Yasin argued, audio-visual media distract audiences' attention: "Wearing a scarf, a face mask or whatever means that what you say is not listened to". Though they post pictures and videos of themselves and podcast guests on social media, podcasting liberates them from being judged by or worrying about their appearances while podcasting. Likewise, Nielsen finds podcasting more adequate for "creating dialogue" in a "natural way" than blogging or YouTubing, which she initially also considered relevant for her project. Nielsen aims to facilitate an unmediated, informal conversation in her podcast:

> I decided to podcast because I wanted to hear other people's stories. But it should be like if I had invited the guest home for a cup of coffee. The conversation has to be without limitations, letting itself unfold [between me and my] guest.

Independent podcasting's oral-aural vernacular and (fairly) unedited and unscripted nature allows for addressing a wide variety of topics and to let personal, humorous, serious stories, and laughs, affections, cries, frustrations, and anger succeed one another. This conveys a sense of intimacy and authenticity as well as trust (Jorgensen, 2021) for podcast guests and listeners. In fact, surveys of podcast listeners show that revealing personal and intimate stories strengthens the parasocial relations to podcasters (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021). For the podcasters, the conversational format provides comfort when telling their deeply emotional and personal stories and allows for new realisations and insights to emerge. As Spinelli and Dann (2019) have noticed, engaging in deep and open-ended conversations and interviews is a key motivation for podcasting. Academic and podcaster Siobhán McHugh (2007) has argued that the purpose of interviewing is to gain new perspectives and have one's awareness changed by participating. Similarly, to conversate and interview is, essentially, why Baraka, Yasin, and Nielsen podcast. In fact, Yasin explained that what makes her continue are the conversations with her fellow podcaster and podcast guests. Conversating through independent podcasting provides new perspectives on their own experiences and thoughts about challenging norms and enables the podcasters to share these insights with their listeners.

In short, Baraka, Yasin, and Nielsen seek to challenge norms by revealing their own and guests' lived experiences with navigating and confronting social norms and discussing these norm-challenging issues in a nuanced, intimate, and open-ended way. Independent podcasting as a conversational, unrestricted, and freely available medium is essential for creating new insights and realisations for themselves, guests, and listeners.

Challenging how to speak: Embracing various vocal expressions and wordings

As much as Nielsen, Baraka, and Yasin find it meaningful to conversate and interview, podcasting in most cases implies becoming familiar with listening to and editing one's own speech and interviews. Nielsen "hated it to begin with" because the interviews never turned out the way she had planned: "They become something else which may be even better than what you had in mind. But I think instinctively we women are enormously self-critical, always finding faults and flaws". For Nielsen, listening to her own voice through the act of podcasting prompts self-consciousness as well as reflections about being a woman, though, as previously mentioned, unpredictability might also be the purpose of interviewing (McHugh, 2007).

Similarly, Baraka, who has been editing the *ASATT* podcast for several years, still finds it "cringe cringe", because she thinks she sounds "very high-pitched and giggling", and Yasin, laughingly, said that she wishes she had been "media trained". Why is this so? Baraka reflected:

> Maybe we have learned that we should lower our pitch to sound calm, credible. But you can't control your voice if you have not been trained to. And why should you? I think [our voices] make our podcast easily recognisable, accessible, and intimate to listen to.

Thus, for Baraka and Yasin, "becoming native to the podcast" implies that they are no longer afraid of how they speak (i.e., their vocal expressions). They acknowledge the congenital aspects of their voices, thereby approving that vocal authority in independent podcasts is about sounding "real" and "authentic" (Copeland, 2018; Mottram, 2016). They are not trained to, nor do they intend to, lower their voices to conform to prevailing ideals of power. Challenging vocal norms is not the intention with their vocal expressions, but rather a side-product which they, eventually, must come to accept and even appreciate.

Apart from sounding high-pitched, Baraka and Yasin, in the interview as well as in several podcast episodes, verbalised that they use many English words and proverbs, and that Baraka speaks with a Jutlandic dialect (as she grew up in a minor Jutland city). Listening to the podcast reveals words from African languages and an extensive use of intellectual terminology (e.g., socialisation, racialisation, Eurocentrism, and intersectionality) combined with proverbs associated with the use of African American popular culture (e.g., they end several episodes by stating "May your fro grow and your skin glow"). The podcasters thus stage themselves as carrying and identifying with these sociocultural values: to be an English speaker, to grow up in Jutland (in which, at least during Baraka's childhood, speaking English as well as being Black was rare), to have African origins, to be intellectual, and to be inspired by and associated with African American culture.

The combination of these various vocal aspects is seldom heard in institutional media and thus nuances preexisting ideas of what it means to be a Black woman in Denmark. On the one hand, Baraka and Yasin's uniqueness may explain *ASATT*'s popularity within their listener community and, perhaps, the resulting media attention, which, then, is capable of

inspiring and influencing institutional radio and podcast production. On the other hand, comparable to the previously mentioned critiques of the *Dark Country* podcasters' voices, Baraka and Yasin are continuously confronted with how they speak. According to Yasin, people outside the *ASATT* community are repeatedly "stunned by the simple fact" that they speak Danish and find the combination of English wordings, Jutlandic dialect, intellectual terminology, and African American proverbs confusing and disproportionately concerning. Baraka clarified: "There is a complexity about how we sound. People struggle to understand that these different things can actually exist in a Black woman".

Challenging what to speak: Creating spaces for norm-challenging personal issues

ASATT and *ODF* represent the most widespread and traditional topics for women to podcast about—mental health and personal journals, and parenting, respectively—yet, their specific focuses within these broad topics are highly niche and non-traditional. Nielsen specified:

> [ODF is concerned with] how to live in a family which is not only about lunch boxes and children who can't sleep… It is about putting misunderstandings, prejudices, and barriers down, and getting some knowledge out there by talking openly about things… [because] everybody has their own ideas which are subject to prejudices.

To establish this openness, Nielsen decided that the first two episodes of *ODF* should be conversations between her and her husband, in which they disclosed their own family story and reflected on personal challenges with being parents for a child with autism spectrum disorder.

Yasin explained the motivation for starting the *ASATT* project:

> [We wanted to provide a space for listeners] who looked like us, were the same age, and talked about the same stuff we talked about with our friends. Also, we wanted to relieve some of the pressure from our Black friends, so that our White friends who want to understand [these issues] can listen to our conversations.

Baraka further explained the space their podcast provides:

> [*ASATT* is] a safe space in which we can tenderly hold each other accountable for our values and our thoughts. So, we must have some kind of experience and knowledge about what we are talking about. We must be willing to investigate and admit if we are wrong, and willing to reveal the processes and the journey we are going through.

Fox, Dowling, and Miller (2020: 300) argue that Black podcasters create "a nuanced sense of African-American trends, cultures, and lifestyles, which are now accessible to non-Black audiences". The same is true for ASATT, which non-Black listeners are welcome to listen to, but which, as Baraka emphasised, remains focused on identity from a perspective that is "not centred on whiteness". It is created for a specific community of Black listeners, by Black podcasters.

The process of crafting one's own space for personal norm-challenging issues is closely related to how Baraka and Yasin described the possibilities of independence. For Baraka, independence implies that they can "say something out loud to each other in a room where you are understood and where no one asks, 'Is it really true what you are saying?', or 'Are you not exaggerating?'" Yasin elaborated, "[Independence entails that] we are not interrupted and questioned as to whether our conversations are valid". With the aim of preserving their

independence, Baraka and Yasin have rejected several commercial opportunities. Notably, in 2019, they stopped collaborating with an established digital media outlet because, Baraka maintained, "we insist on talking about certain topics on our own terms". Building their own podcast and Instagram platforms enables them to discuss what they find important. With ASATT's increased popularity, they have been invited to participate in radio and television interviews, yet they rarely agree to do so. Yasin explained: "We don't want to discuss the N-word or whether racism exists or not. We simply don't agree with these premises, and we can make those demands on our own platforms which can be just as important as P1 [Danish Broadcasting Cooperation's talk radio station]". Thus, as academic and podcaster Dario Llinares has argued (2018), independent podcasters' freedom and control over production processes brings along a sense of status, impact, and power to compete with institutional media.

The possibilities of online listener communities

Independent podcasting as a cross-media ecosystem becomes apparent when considering how *ASATT* and *ODF* use Instagram, which the podcasters describe as the social media platform with the most followers and interactions with listeners. Consistent with what Fox, Dowling, and Miller (2020) note, reactions are solely supportive, most likely because independent podcast communities exist as "closed" groups which are difficult to search for and harass. If negative reactions occur, Yasin argued, they are intended to "make us aware of our blind spots, or the listeners just want to let out some frustrations aimed at the establishment".

Baraka and Yasin alternate between episodes with guest interviews and those consisting of conversations between themselves. Except for one monologue episode and the previously mentioned conversations between Nielsen and her husband, Nielsen is dependent on finding guests who are willing to tell their stories in the podcast. In addition, she performs all the podcast production and social media tasks alone as well. The workload of podcasting alone led to her putting the podcast on hold. On the other hand, considering that women are significantly less inclined to podcast together (the preliminary quantitative analysis shows that 13% of women podcast together in comparison to 30% of men), the flexibility of podcasting alone might appeal to women who must find the time in between the various tasks involved in running a household. Either way, as Wang (2021) suggests, production requirements of independent podcasting itself can be incompatible with family obligations, and therefore, Wang stresses, women's unpaid labour of motherhood, running a household, and childcare is the significant difference between female and male podcasters. For Nielsen, her podcast project contradicts with the labour of childcare to such a degree that—though it is not completely "mommy blogging" (Wang, 2021: 63)—it has become, at least temporarily, an Instagram "mommy blog".

In the following two sections, I discuss how Nielsen uses Instagram as not only an enhancement of, but also a replacement for, independent podcasting, and how Baraka and Yasin use the affordances of social media (primarily Instagram) to deeply engage with listeners.

Instagram as an emotional tool

When Nielsen started *ODF* in March 2020, she decided to change her personal Instagram account to a public and professional account instead of creating a new Instagram account

for the podcast. She uses it to share and interact about podcast-related content: "People value when [Instagram content] is personal, when they can follow our everyday life as a family". Motivated by followers' engagement, Baraka, who is mainly responsible for *ASATT*'s social media content, has decided not to schedule social media content in advance, "so that it does not become this factory-like Instagram with planned, generic content". The podcasters seek to make their Instagram content authentic and personal in order to create a close relationship with their listeners and followers. This "need" is enlarged by the fact that they are podcasting about norm-challenging aspects of their own or guests' mental health, personal journals, and family life, which demands a tremendous amount of emotional support. Podcast guests may provide weekly emotional support, but social media followers enable daily and immediate emotional support to deal with the loneliness of challenging prejudices and normative understandings of issues closely related to their own personal life (see also Adler Berg, 2021b).

This motivates the podcasters to spend considerable amounts of time on personal interactions with like-minded followers: comments, stories, and Q&As, but mostly direct messages (DMs). Listening to their podcasts, it is evident that they often encourage listeners to send them DMs. Additionally, posting on Instagram always prompts personal interactions, which in turn convey a deeper level of obligation and commitment. Yasin explained:

> We can't […] post something without having conversations with people. We put a lot into answering people's questions, and in addition to the ten followers we [have time to] answer, we continue to answer… 90 per cent of the DMs are extensive messages from listeners turning their inside out. So, we give them the respect they deserve.

As noted elsewhere (Adler Berg, 2021b), personal interactions may become a double-edged sword. Nielsen devotes two hours every day on Instagram in relation to her podcast because of her growing audience:

> [The more followers,] the more time it takes because people are so nice, and they comment and write messages every single day. I love that people dare to share their personal stories with me. I don't want to disappoint anyone. I want to be able to respond to all messages, but at some point, it becomes impossible […] Some days I just want to delete the account, and other days I can't do without this community and all the acquaintances that have come out of it. I felt lonely until I found out how many others are in similar family constellations.

While her podcast is on hold, Nielsen uses Instagram to continue the conversations she usually has with podcast guests: "In the podcast, we talk into the microphones. The same thing now happens on Instagram. Talking about the difficulties as well as what needs to be celebrated in my life makes people share their stories too". By breaking social media's apparent glamorous façade, Nielsen has found a community which makes her feel less alone in her daily quest of challenging norms. The process is self-perpetuating: Her followers become generous and share their own struggles with navigating norms—and this makes her share even more of her own life.

Co-creating content with community members

Baraka and Yasin frequently consider how their followers interact with new episodes, and they use this information to mould and reevaluate their content. Baraka elaborated:

> More or less unconsciously, we use it to redirect our podcast […] If topics only resonate with White listeners, then we think about why, because we really want to target Black women. It makes us evaluate whether we meet our goals and the function we have for ourselves.

Even though listeners are not editors in the traditional sense, they perform some degree of editorial gatekeeping through social media interactions. Instead of trying to reach a broader audience by platform-optimising their content (Morris, 2021), the podcasters exploit Instagram data along with the stories, comments, and, especially, DMs to identify, address, and engage specific listeners.

Furthermore, DMs regularly provide the podcasters with ideas for new episodes, guests, perspectives, and issues to discuss. As much as independent podcasts are "closed" for outsiders of the community, they can be "open" participatory spaces for insiders of the community, according to Nielsen:

> I constantly get messages from people who write that they know someone who would like to share their story [in the podcast]. Someone asked if I had considered inviting a solo mom, and I thought, yes, it makes so much sense, though I had not thought about it myself. You can feel that people believe in the project. They don't just listen to the podcast […] they come up with ideas. They can see that the podcast is so open that it allows for influence, and this gives rise to ideas for what they would like to hear about.

Yasin and Baraka likewise receive DMs from listeners who suggest podcast guests and issues for future episodes. If a listener suggests an issue relating to an upcoming episode that has already been recorded, Baraka and Yasin may use this issue for their weekly talk (17:00–18:00 every Sunday, following the release of a new podcast episode) on the voice-based social audio platform Clubhouse. Baraka provided an example of this:

> A listener wrote to us: "I am looking forward to listening to your episode [about sustainable capitalism] because how can I perform within capitalistic structures as an anti-capitalist and anti-racist?" And so, we used this dilemma for our following Clubhouse-talk.

Other times, to save time and thought, Baraka and Yasin ask Clubhouse participants to jointly discuss a listener's question that they have received beforehand in an Instagram DM. While the affordances of Instagram allow for daily interactions between podcasters and listeners, Clubhouse provides an opportunity for podcasters and listeners to get to know one another better, as Yasin explained: "We benefit from listening to people's thoughts and hopefully they also feel that they get closer to us". Baraka and Yasin do not plan any agenda before their Clubhouse talk, and this, according to Baraka, "creates a free space for listeners to give their own take on the issues we discuss. And, like podcasting, there is no video on. You can sit on the toilet while still having a deep thought". Thus, for Yasin and Baraka, social audio apps—Clubhouse, Spotify's Locker Room, Twitter Spaces, and others—provide opportunities for deeper engagement with their listeners and followers.

Conclusions

This article has addressed the possibilities of independent podcasting for women by asking the following question: Why and how do women use independent podcasting and their social media platforms to talk about mental health, personal journals, and parenting while at

the same time challenging norms? To answer this, semi-structured interviews were carried out with the hosts of two norm-challenging independent podcasts: the mental health and personal journals podcast *A Seat At The Table* and the parenting podcast *Our Different Family*. The analysis shows that the podcasters use independent podcasting to talk about their own personal, norm-challenging issues (i.e., their mental health, personal journals, and parenting) for two reasons. First, the lack of visuals provides the freedom to speak without worrying about appearances, which is significant when podcasting about personal norm-challenging issues. Second, the conversational, unrestricted medium of independent podcasting allows for creating, receiving, and distributing nuanced, in-depth insights and realisations about challenging the norms that afflict their own lives. They use podcasting to create their own spaces for issues which they find important but unrepresented by institutional media. Independence allows them to be radical in approaching and challenging the norms. This is the reason why they are reluctant to collaborate with or participate in institutional media outlets, which could eventually provide them with mainstream exposure. Their aim is not to reach a broad audience or be acknowledged by "outsiders", but to benefit their like-minded core-listeners. Who listens is much more essential to the podcasters than how many. Furthermore, by combining various wordings and acknowledging congenital aspects of their voices, they challenge gendered vocal norms in a way that is seldom possible through institutional media outlets. Finding one's voice (as understood through its dual conceptualisation) by means of independent podcasting affords the process of constructing their own identities.

While the podcast medium provides a platform from which to create and distribute unrestricted content, the affordances of social media platforms allow the podcasters to engage deeply with like-minded listeners. They use Instagram—and, in *ASATT*'s case, additionally the social audio platform Clubhouse—to build a tight participatory space and extend the sharing of experiences and strategies to navigate and challenge oppressive structures and prejudices. Interactions with listeners on social media platforms provide the podcasters with feedback, content ideas, and, last but not least, emotional support, which is essential for the podcasters to feel less alone in their norm-challenging quest. Instead of optimising their podcast content for distribution platforms to reach a broader audience and new listeners, they intensify their use of social media platforms and create presence, immediacy, and engagement among already existing listeners.

Independent podcasting constitutes an important feminist research area, as it allows marginalised voices and communities to take up their space by speaking about what they want, the way they want, and to whom they want. The stories that independent podcasters tell are made public through the podcast technology which proves suitable for raising awareness, broadening understandings, and even mobilising publics around certain issues—such as changing normative understandings of what women should say and how they should say it. The preliminary quantitative analysis presented in this article shows a gendered podcasting sphere in which women tend to podcast about traditional female domains such as mental health, personal journals, and parenting. Yet, the qualitative analysis reveals that the two podcasts within these traditional female topical categories are not necessarily reproducing norms, but are rather norm-challenging, in that independent women podcasters—as discussed elsewhere (Adler Berg, 2021b)—speak about their own lived experiences as women *in order to* challenge gendered norms. Through independent podcasting, they can build their own

"feminist world" (Ahmed, 2017) and speak freely about the profound emotional labour that comes with being a woman.

Future (quantitative) research should investigate what women and men podcast about in other countries and further explore women's reasons for podcasting about certain topics—including how independent content creators are affected by women's increasing visibility in traditional media. The quantitative data here lacks diversity, since only cisgender identities are present in the sample. Combined, the gendered topics and the lack of diversity in the sample suggest that independent podcasting is influenced by homogeneity and cultural conservatism. If the sample included larger or several geolinguistic areas, more genders would probably have been present, which would have allowed for investigating how and why a broad range of genders uses independent podcasting. Furthermore, as gender constitutes the only variable in the quantitative mapping, to code the age, race, or physique of a speaking voice would provide new insights and significantly differentiate the understanding and uses of the medium. Finally, this article has briefly touched upon how women experience their own recorded voices, and this question should be further explored in comparison with how men experience their own voices.

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CHAPTER 19

The Business of DIY: Characteristics, Motives and Ideologies of Microindependent Record Labels

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Abstract

This paper examines micro-independent record companies, mostly set up by musicians according to the Do It Yourself (DIY) principle. They serve as distribution channels for counter-mainstream, often local, music. This paper discusses the characteristics of micro-(DIY) independents in the Netherlands and their rationale and motives in the context of persisting uncertainties in the music market. Earlier research (Hesmondhalgh 1998b, 1999, Strachan 2003, 2007) on micro-independents in the UK demonstrates their typical moral or political motivations, aiming to counter the hegemony of the capitalist mainstream music industry. The analysis is based on business information and open (qualitative) interviews with 14 companies in Netherlands. The paper shows that DIY-independents want to contribute to broadening the supply of contemporary music. By releasing indie genres and engaging in the associated social discourse, they differentiate themselves from the commercial majors. Commercial or financial success is not considered important and they adhere to collectivist ideologies. However, they do not aim to resist the dominance of the major music industry.

BY-NC-ND

Keywords

DIY, micro-independents, music production, sociology of music

Introduction: Do-It-Yourself

The global market for recorded music is largely dominated by three major record labels. These majors' (Sony Music, Universal Music and Warner Music) market share is about 70 percent of the entire global music market (Leurdijk and Nieuwenhuis 2012). One common criticism of these global companies, is that they typically operate in the mainstream market consistent with a commercial, capitalist corporate ideology, with little attention paid to the creativity of the artist (Negus 1995, Hesmondhalgh 1999, Frith 2000, Strachan 2007). In addition to these majors, there are numerous small record labels, from larger independents to very small micro-independents.

This paper examines such micro-independents, often set up by artists following the Do It Yourself (DIY) principle, to serve as a distribution channel to issue their own counter-mainstream ("indie") music and that of other local bands and artists (McKay 1998, Moore 2004, Strachan 2007). By appropriating DIY and indie as emic concepts, micro-independents actively position themselves within broader classification processes in the music industry. Our research looks at the characteristics and business structure of micro-DIY independents in the Netherlands and their rationale and motives in the context of the current uncertainty of the music market. Previous research by Hesmondhalgh (1998b, 1999) on independents and Strachan (2003, 2007) on micro-independents in the United Kingdom shows that they are typically grounded in moral or political motives, aiming to counter the hegemony of the mainstream music industry. The question is whether such motivations also play a role in the Netherlands. Exploring the Dutch case will add to our understanding of micro-independent music companies, expecting that a smaller musical culture in a somewhat peripheral country as the Netherlands may offer a very different context than the sizeable and globally dominant British cultural industries.

Technological developments in recent years have opened many doors for DIY artists. They can be described as musicians who want control over the production, promotion and distribution processes of their music. Typically, these processes are kept separated from major professional record companies and the professional networks surrounding them. Such DIY-artists are characterized by the in-house production of their music. Recording is mostly done at home, in "home" or "bedroom" studio's (Hesmondhalgh 1997, Hibbett 2005), using relatively cheap, often digital recorders. Distribution and sometimes sales take place within very small business structures, with a minimum input of finance and human resources. Such companies are called micro-independents.

Usually, DIY musicians aim at forms of alternative expression, by idiosyncratic and autonomous production and distribution of their artistic products (Moore 2004, Choi 2009). Moore calls this the DIY-ethic, in which artists, musicians and participants attach great importance to the fact that music should be judged on creativity and authenticity. The DIY ethic opposes the mainstream music industry, with its emphasis on large production budgets, rich sounds, professional instruments and thoughtful "performing skills" of the artists (Moore

2004, Hibbett 2005, Choi 2009). In this context, the term mainstream refers to the mass or large scale production of popular music (Thornton 1995, Hibbett 2005).

For DIY musicians, the internet is an important medium for the distribution and promotion of their music, as it appears to offer substantial creative freedom and autonomy (Hibbett 2005, Choi 2009, Kruse 2010). Arguably, new technologies such as the internet can be used by musicians to secure creative control over their productions (Karasas 2002). Not only have they transformed traditional processes of music production and distribution, they have also contributed to the increase in the supply and consumption of different types of (popular) music (Leyshon et al. 2005, Handke 2010, Oliver 2010). Musicians today can promote and distribute their home-produced music virtually free of charge, as user-created content, separated from professional spheres to wider regional, national or international audiences (Kruse 2010, Oliver 2010). The digital home recorder is considered a crucial link, as it allows relatively cheap professional-quality productions. Furthermore, Kruse (2010: 633) suggests that digital recorders have made important contributions to the rise of the indie pop and rock music in the 1980s, as well as the recognition of lo-fi productions, classifying such music as authentic (Hibbett 2005: 56). Alternative DIY approaches to music production, promotion and distribution, are therefore considered to have eroded traditional power structures within the music industry (Hesmondhalgh 1999, Strachan 2007, Kruse 2010). Our study aims to not only shed more light on the practices of (Dutch) micro-independents, but will also contribute to the academic debate about theoretical notions of augmented possibilities for counter-mainstream music in the internet era.

Theories on DIY Independents

Most research on DIY music production and micro-independents is based on British or American cases. Strachan (2007) describes DIY micro-independents as very small record companies, established mostly by one person or a small group of friends. They release music albums on a small scale (sometimes only one or two a year) under a private label.

Small-Scale, Collectivism and Networks

The characteristic small scale of all aspects of their business operations sets these micro-independents apart from mainstream music companies. British studies show that micro-independents are generally run by only one or two individuals, who take on all organizational tasks (Ibid.). Albums are usually released by simple agreements between the label and the artists, often based on mutual trust (Banks et al. 2000, Crossley 2009). Micro-independents in the UK are typically run from home (Strachan 2003). Characteristic of these record companies is that they often work with local artists. Bands or artists are often personal acquaintances, but many labels also issue releases by their owners or employees. DIY micro-independents rely heavily on working in cooperative networks with other small cultural organizations, such as venues, distributors, record stores, recording studios, bookers and agents. In his work on local music, Crossley (2009) similarly points at strong network ties between musicians, fanzines and distributors. These networks are characterized by mutual communications, support, exchanges and recommendations. Becker (1982) and Crane (1987) suggest that such social networks create close relationships between artists and their audiences and can thus

can serve as independent distribution channels for cultural expressions. Crane (1987) claims that artists who participate in such networks also often support each other. A social network links them to other artists, stimulating aesthetic or artistic innovation. Networks can generate new artistic ideas and act as a source of information about works and activities of connected artists. British micro-independents are frequently affiliated with international DIY networks in which other small record companies participate (Hesmondhalgh 1999, Strachan 2007).

Collectivism distinguishes DIY independents from profit-oriented record labels on the hegemonic mainstream market (Hesmondhalgh 1999, Strachan 2007, Crossley 2009). They embrace an aesthetic of openness and accessibility, in which musical interests prevail over profit motives or commercial success (Strachan 2007: 252). Collectivism is based on creating or expanding a support network, in which the participating labels see each other not as competitors, but support each other where necessary. In that way micro-independents attempt to gain access to the production and distribution processes of popular music. Crossley (2009) shows how such networks of independent music production generate an autonomous dynamism and structure. This dynamism may challenge the dominance of major record labels and the resource distribution and conventions of the music industry (2009: 30). Network connections between musicians, DIY micro-independents, their audiences and other participants can confirm collective participation, autonomy, creative freedom and close social or artistic relationships. This discourse of autonomy and independence is diametrically opposed to that of the dominant and commercially oriented majors (Hibbett 2005).

Symbolic Resistance and Art/Commerce Discourses

Professionals in the mainstream music industry are often criticized for their disinterest in the quality of music (Williams 1981, Hibbett 2005, Strachan 2007). Genres unknown or less popular, are deemed unsuitable for major record labels. As a result, majors nowadays hardly release music of unknown talent (Carvalho 2008). Major labels show no interest in musicians in small niche markets, selling at most 20,000 copies (Weissman 2003). The music industry is characterized by the super star phenomenon (Rosen 1981, Hamlen 1991) which leads to huge income differences between successful and unsuccessful musicians (Cox, Felton and Chung 1995). The practice of many independents can be regarded as an expression of symbolic resistance against the capitalist discourse within the mainstream music industry. The motives of musicians to be signed by a DIY independent often find their origin in aversion against the corrupt and capitalist system of the mainstream music industry. They define their own practices by differentiating them from the commercial mainstream (Hesmondhalgh 1999, Hibbett 2005). The conscious choice for small scale is the answer of DIY independents to the commercial operations of major record companies (Rosen 1997, Strachan 2007: 248)

In Strachan's (2007: 247) opinion, the differentiation from larger mainstream record companies is central to the micro-independents legitimation (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 104). Views or conventions about aesthetics and music as an art form are regarded very important by the employees of micro-independents. Additionally, they may be considered as justification for their behavior, contrasting it to the commercial, profit-oriented record companies in the mainstream music market. Both Rosen (1997) and Strachan (2007) stress that micro-independents oppose commercial gain or other profit goals. According to them employees are aware of the low monetary gains of their ventures. For them, the creative artist

or the attention to access and the development of the artistry of musicians is central. Rosen calls this the "access aesthetic" (Rosen 1997: 3).

The contrasting ideologies about the access to and value of music as a cultural product, are referred to as art/commerce binaries (Strachan 2007). This dichotomy is central to the debate among musicians, fans and critics on how rock music's value should be assessed (Weinstein and Weinstein 1999). Those critical of the commercial production of mainstream music, often talk in terms of manufactured pop music. Manufactured here refers to artists who are "created" or "invented" by the commercial industry. Such "fabricated" acts therefore, lack any artistic value, according to the supporters of the art principle (Weinstein and Weinstein, 1999). It is believed that the priority of commercial music production is making profits, rather than artistic innovation or creativity (Hibbett 2005, Saha 2011). However, Frith (1983) indicates that commercial rock musicians in reality are no different than other entertainers. They may likewise be blamed of being in the music business for the money. This is opposed to the innovation-oriented and music-based anti-commercial DIY ethic.

Similarly, Strachan's research shows that employees of DIY independents believe that artistic creativity suffers in commercial, large scale, profit-oriented mainstream music businesses (2007). The typical small scale production of micro-independent record companies, following Hesmondhalgh (1998b), O'Connor (2008), Rosen (1997) and Strachan (2007), can be characterized as a distinctive feature of pure art products (Bourdieu 1984). In keeping with his field theory, this way of producing ensures a high degree of autonomy. Oppositely he places mass cultural production, aimed at making commercial cultural products. Bourdieu (1996) perceives popular music as commercial culture, produced and distributed to provide financial (or economic) capital. Hibbett (2005), Hesmondhalgh (2006) and Strachan (2007) however, stress that alternative, independent music production may be conceived as examples of small scale restricted cultural production. Negus (1995) also nuances this contradiction by showing that for virtually all players on the market it is difficult to draw boundaries between making "creative" or "commercial" decisions, regarding the industrial production process of popular music. He argues that creativity and commerce are always very closely related.

DIY Motives, Genres and Classifications

The motivations of DIY micro-independents to engage in music production may often be considered political or moral (Rosen 1997, Hesmondhalgh 1998b, Strachan 2007). Political and moral motivations can be seen as a way of resisting the dominant, capitalist-oriented discourse, used by the major record companies. For this reason, some independents try to transform or to democratize the system (Hesmondhalgh 1998b). They aim to promote counter-hegemonic or non-mainstream genres (Hesmondhalgh 1999, Strachan 2003, 2007). These genres are also known as "indie" genres, including punk, post-punk, indie pop, space rock, psychedelic rock, post rock, krautrock, lo-fi and many electronics genres (Strachan 2003, Hibbett 2005). A genre can be considered as a class or type of art (DiMaggio 1987). Wright (1975) believes that genres can be regarded as artistic works characterized by certain shared conventions and contents.

As indicated by Hitters and Van de Kamp (2010), the use of different types of genres by recording companies can be considered a form of classification. By releasing indie genres and engaging in the associated social discourse, independents differentiate themselves from the

commercial majors and labels. The distinction is reinforced by the fact that the latter companies hardly deal with the release of non-commercial an unprofitable music. By responding to genres outside the mainstream supply, small record companies create opportunities to enter into competition with the majors and to contribute to the diversity of contemporary music (Peterson and Berger 1975, Dowd and Roy 2010). Especially the interactive internet may play an important role, by the mostly free dissemination and promotion of music (Oliver 2010).

The previously discussed symbolic resistance, as well as alternative and collectivist business operations, can be interpreted as characteristic DIY practices to counter the commercial music industry. DIY micro independents thus oppose the power dominance of the majors. Strachan (2007) suggests that by releasing indie genres, British micro-independents try to influence music consumption. Nevertheless, despite their small-scale limited production, micro-independents often aim to be part of the public debate on musical taste. Hibbett (2005) ironically calls them the "scholars and conservators of good music" (p. 60).

Symbolic Rewards

Artists (such as musicians engaged in micro-independents) who distribute their own work themselves or through small networks, must have self-supporting abilities (Becker, 1982). Crane (1987) explains how autonomous artists know that they will never get rich by selling their art, because in the end the sales are just not enough. Therefore, in addition to their artistic work, they have normal day jobs, mostly art related.

It is considered an advantage that the autonomous self-supported artist is free to do whatever he or she wishes with the art created. Assuming an independent reward-system (Crane 1976), these artists retain control over the symbolic and financial rewards. Symbolic rewards refer to the benefits of respect or prestige and recognition of beauty or authenticity of the art product within the restricted field of art (Bourdieu 1996). Authenticity here, is considered a social construct, attaching cultural status to restricted field cultural products by setting them apart from large scale mass products (Peterson 1997).

Hesmondhalgh (2006) underscores that symbolic rewards, typical for small scale restricted cultural production, also characterize independent music production. Also Strachan (2007) suggests that the practices of DIY independents shows the relation between production on a small scale and acquiring symbolic capital. Here, personal recognition and satisfaction are generally considered as rewards or success. Bourdieu (1996), however, also sees a link between autonomous art production on a small scale and a disinterest to the economic value of art or cultural products. He emphasizes that participants in small, autonomous art fields adhere to the art-for-art's-sake principle. Bourdieu (1996) assumes that participants in autonomous art fields are rich in cultural capital, but lack economic capital, and moreover, deem that to be unimportant.

DIY artists managing a micro-independent are often fans or enthusiasts with a passion for music. Strachan (2007) maintains that their main motivation is to personally (and financially) invest in artists or bands. Commercial or financial success is regarded as unimportant. A key motivation is to be involved in the recording and release process, as it is considered "being worthwhile in itself " (2007: 255). Among micro-independents, success equals satisfaction or a certain degree of personal recognition within the network sphere. An example of recognition is positive coverage in the music press. Also airplay on a radio station, which may

then serve as promotion for the release of an album, is considered as a form of recognition (Strachan 2003).

Research Methods

In this research we map the characteristics and business structure of micro-DIY independents in the Netherlands and their rationale and motives in the light of the persistent uncertainty of the music market. As research method, we have chosen the open or qualitative (semi-structured) interview, with a focus on social behaviors, beliefs, attitudes and experiences of the respondent (Boeije 2005). Besides mapping the characteristics of these small organizations, the aim was to understand the motives and beliefs of their owners and managers. Furthermore, this research also intends to chart working practices and attitudes towards majors and the mainstream music market. It is therefore of great importance that during the interview the respondent gets ample opportunity to put forward his or her opinions and points of view (Hijmans and Wester 2006). The more elaborately the respondent can talk about a particular theme, the clearer and more complete the potential result becomes for the interviewer to interpret. This can be considered a dialogue with an informal character or a conversation with a purpose (Hijmans and Wester 2006).

Substantive and theoretical considerations, derived from preliminary or previous findings informed the selection of these micro-independents (Hijmans and Wester 2006). We thus applied theoretical or purposive sampling, assuming a consciously reflected choice of respondents. The selection of Dutch micro-independents was based on characteristics (size, music genre, release numbers etc.) derived from findings of other researchers, most prominently the work of Strachan (2003, 2007). For this research fifteen employees from a total of fourteen micro-independents were interviewed. A topic list was used in the interviews, based on the literature review, thus giving the qualitative semi-structured interview a solid foundation in theory (Braun and Clarke 2006). The interviews took place between April 22nd and May 31st of 2011. The interviews were transcribed into documents with an average size of 16 pages. The contents of these documents was subsequently arranged by themes through a process of systematic thematic coding and content analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Dutch DIY Micro-Independents: Characteristics and Ideologies

The examined micro-independents in the Netherlands are small organizations, in most cases established by one or two people. During the interviews it was found that these record labels often started to release the musical productions of the founders or those of friends. The largest part (10) of the examined Dutch micro-independents is still managed by one or two staff members. A small number (4) consists of a group of three or four friends. All have indicated during the interviews that their work is driven from a love or passion for music. Most of the Dutch micro-independents are also run from home. In addition to their work for the label, most staff members also have another, often artistic, job. In Table 1 an overview of the examined micro-independents is given. It is described which employees were interviewed and what their functions are at the record label. Furthermore, the tables provide the number

of employees in the examined micro-independents, as well as the founding year and place, the genres released and the average number of releases per year.

Label name:	**Employee(s) interviewed and function(s):**	**Total # of employees**	**Founded in:**	**Genres:**	**Avg. # releases (annually)**
Subroutine Records	Koen and Nick, owners and managers	2	Groningen, 2005	Indie pop, singer-songwriter	5
Betoontoon	Lasse, co-owner	3	Rotterdam, 2008	Experimental and electronic computer-controlled music	2
Laterax Recordings	Jorg, label owner	2	Rotterdam, 2001	Electro, indie pop, singer-songwriter	4
Snowstar Records	Cedric, owner and management	2 and 1 intern	Utrecht, 2003	Folk, indie pop and singer-songwriter	4
Dying Girraffe Recordings	Ingmar, owner and distributor	1	Rotterdam, 2001	Indie pop, singer-songwriter	4
Knife Slits Water	Maarten, co-owner	2	Amsterdam, 2006	Experimental, krautrock, (Neo) psychedelic	4
Eat Concrete	Teun, owner	1	Den Bosch, 2006	Electro (mostly), indie pop, shoegaze, psychedelic rock	4
Freebird Records	Marcel, co-owner	2	Leiden, 1998	Garage, stoner rock	2
Narro Minded	Gabry, co-owner	4	The Hague, 2000	Electro, noise, post rock	6
Beep, Beep, Back Up the Truck!	Nicolai, co-owner and management	2 and 1 intern	Utrecht, 2008	Indie pop, post rock, singer-songwriter	4
Stardumb Records	Stefan, owner	1	Rotterdam, 2000	Indie pop, punk	5
WOT NXT	Marcel, co-owner	4	Leiden, 1996	Indie pop, punk, singer-songwriter (mostly)	3
Bunker Records	Guy, owner	1	The Hague, 1992	Dark techno, electro, electro funk	12
Sally Forth Records	Minco, co-owner	3	Amsterdam 2007	Hardcore, indie pop, noise	4

Table 1: Overview of the 14 Dutch micro-independents, the employees interviewed and their functions, total number of employees, year and place of foundation, genres released and the average number of releases per year.

Small Scale: Production, Indie Genres and Classification

Dutch micro-independents produce on a small scale. In most cases they release about four productions a year. These productions are issued in editions of 150 to 500 pieces. As shown

in Table 1 independents exclusively release indie genres. These can be considered as non-commercial, counter-hegemonic music styles (Hesmondhalgh 1999, Strachan 2007) beyond the mainstream supply by the major record companies. By categorizing their genres within the indie discourse, these labels consciously present their music as distinctive within the realm of popular music (Hibbett 2005). Furthermore, the table also shows that the examined micro-independents are not limited to releasing one specific genre, while indie as a genre is not limited to these micro-independents. Gabry of Narro Minded describes why:

> The funny thing is that our audience, the people who feel challenged with what we're doing, mostly listen to all these different styles of music. It's not that we serve complete different markets. They're just people who love adventurous music. And that's just how we also see ourselves. It's not odd at all; there are just people out there with broad tastes and there's just a lot of music around. That's what I think. They're just music lovers, I guess. (Gabry, Narro Minded).

Nonetheless, with their focus on indie genres, it can be assumed that the micro-independents want to distinguish themselves from the majors (Hitters and Van de Kamp 2010). The interviewed staff members expect major record companies to mainly deal with the release of commercial and uniform mainstream music, in order to maximize financial gains. It is remarkable that most interviewees find the profit motive of the majors understandable. Generally they recognize that the majors have to produce commercially profitable music in order to keep their heads afloat. In so doing, they consider mainstream culture as a completely different industry or entertainment world. They accept that other conventions apply in this industry, that relationships between record companies and artists are not the same and that



Picture 1: A typical bedroom studio. Picture taken by Robin den Drijver. Reproduced with permission.

music is approached or assessed differently by majors. Clearly, they classify themselves as different from the major industry.

Distribution, Promotion and Business Models

Dutch micro-independents are usually actively involved in the distribution and promotion of their releases, in which they often also invest financially. Most see promotion as a very important part of the launch of a release, because they feel that the music should be heard by as many as possible. Also artwork and design of the album is often part of the label's job. It is common to initially seek a break even. That means that the label first needs to recoup the investments. Potential profits can be equally divided between label and band, the so-called 50/50 deals (Strachan 2003). Despite the fact that a number of Dutch micro-independents have outsourced distribution to specialized companies, most of them prefer self-established independent channels for distribution. However, at least one company also had a distribution deal with major Sony, a practice quite common among independents in general (WIN 2016)

Remarkably, most micro-independents do not financially support the recording of an album. Thus, they distinguish themselves from the majors, who on the contrary invest substantially in the professional recording process. DIY artists usually provide a readymade album, which they themselves have recorded at home in what Hesmondhalgh (1997) calls bedroom studios, separate from the intervention of the professional (major) studio sphere (see pictures 1 and 2). According to Hesmondhalgh (1998a) this is an important characteristic of DIY musicians. Artistic freedom and the possibility for bands or artists to work autonomously, is considered important by all micro-independents. Koen of Subroutine Records comments:

> Anyway, it's important to realize that the musician's freedom has been a core principle to us from the first moment we've established. Our bands possess complete creative freedom and the rights of their music will stay theirs forever. In our opinion, this also applies to other cases like the album design. (Koen, Subroutine Records)

Similar to the British labels, these companies almost never work with official contracts. Agreements between the label and bands are often only verbally discussed and more than one release per artist is never expected. The increasingly common 360 degree deals among majors, whereby income from performances and merchandising are shared with the label (Carvalho 2008), in order to reap maximum returns from a release, are unthinkable among micro-independents. The bands arrange their own performances and obviously, their revenues remain their own. Similarly, Dutch micro-independent labels are not concerned with income from band merchandising.

The internet is widely used as a promotional tool for spreading free (or paid) mp3's, streams or albums. Compatible to Pfahl's (2001) findings, the primary objectives are enhancing awareness for certain bands or musics. Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram are widely used. In addition, the free distribution of music files is used to reach out to larger audiences within niche markets. Most Dutch micro-independents also work with internet services like You-Tube, SoundCloud, Spotify and iTunes, in order to generate additional revenue, but as yet returns are minimal. Inevitably, as such services are owned by global media conglomerates, these worldwide distribution networks also tie the micro-independents to the wider mainstream music industry.



Picture 2: A box of DIY CD's, manufactured in Poland, by Dutch band Transtec on Laterax Records. This CD was issued in an edition of 500. Picture taken by Robin den Drijver. Reproduced with permission.

Local and International Networks and Collectivism

The interviews demonstrate that the record companies engage in partnerships with both domestic and foreign labels in various ways. These network relationships often have the purpose to distribute each other's releases. In this way micro-independents support each other in distribution and sales. Such alternative distribution structures were also visible among post-punk and indie genres investigated in the 1990s by Hesmondhalgh (1997, 1999).

In general Dutch micro-independents are embedded in local as well as international DIY networks. Characteristic of these organizations is that they assume cooperation with other small companies without aiming at commercial or financial gains. Maarten of the Knife Slits Water label explains:

> Together with other small European record labels, we participate in some kind of network. With these labels we exchange a lot of releases, like a trade market. It's like: 'I send you ten of our records and you send me ten of yours'. That's why we have this small shop and a mail order of all these European labels, but also some American. We just support each other in the distribution of our releases. After some time, you get quite a few contacts in Sweden or Germany. It's really like a network, a little scene. (Maarten, Knife Slits Water)

There are also forms of cooperation between micro-independents and local and independent record stores. In addition, staff members maintain close contacts with fanzines, distributors, bloggers and journalists. Other network connections were contacts with music venues, pro-

grammers and recording studios. Similar networks were also found among the independent scenes studied by Kruse (2010), Hesmondhalgh (1997) and Crossley (2009). Characteristic of such network relationships is that they are based on mutual support, trust, advice and exchange. Collectivism then, may be considered an important ideological characteristic of micro-independents, both in the UK and USA as well as in the Netherlands (Strachan 2007). This collectivism places the importance of music above commercial or business interests. Nevertheless, as is the case with internet distribution, such networks are in many ways connected to the proliferated music industry as a whole. Venues, recording studios, festivals, agents, promotion companies and bookers, together with the micro-independents, need to connect to the wider music industry, in order for them to reach audiences and to get their music heard. In that way, micro-independents are as much tied to, and part of the mainstream music industry from which they often vehemently distantiate themselves.

Political Motives

Dutch micro-independents show much less oppositional political dynamics than their British counterparts (Savage, 1991, Hesmondhalgh, 1999, Strachan 2003, 2007). They do not aim to challenge the majors (Savage, 1991). Nor do they want to democratize or transform the music market (Hesmondhalgh 1999, Strachan 2003, 2007). One reason for this is that they understand that they have little financial possibilities and thus can only release music on a very small scale. Subsequently, competition with the majors is regarded as unrealistic or even naive. In addition, label staff realizes that the music they release, only appeals to a small niche audience. Lasse of the Rotterdam Betontoon label argues: "It's not my mission to overthrow the majors. That would be absurd to think, because with our type of music you simply can't overthrow any major record company. Fans of Lady Gaga are definitely not going to listen to the music of Alien Drones" (Lasse, Betontoon). In addition, Dutch micro-independents release their productions often only on vinyl and cassettes, thus limiting themselves to a small niche market from the start. After all, such sound carriers only appeal to a very small and specific group of music enthusiasts.

Dutch micro-independents then, consciously operate on small-scale restricted niche markets, similar to Bourdieu's field of restricted cultural production (1996). In a way, this may be considered political as well. As Hibbett explains: "As an elite sect within a larger field, indie rock requires its own codes, i.e. cultural capital, and therefore can be used to generate and sustain myths of social or intellectual superiority" (2005: 57). Similarly, limited financial resources and an appeal to small audiences are regarded as typical for artists, organizations and participants in such autonomous art fields. Characteristic of cultural producers within autonomous art fields is that often they are rich in cultural capital, but lack economic capital (Bourdieu 1996).

Moral Motives

Although there are no overt oppositional political motives among Dutch micro-independents, most labels do aim to enhance the diversity in the supply of music, since this music would otherwise not be heard. Like their British and American colleagues, they show moral motives. The drive or even obligation to promote "other music", can be interpreted as a motive to



Picture 3. Statement from Laterax Recordings, illustrating how internet distribution provides opportunities for reaching niche markets, that majors would ignore. Image is reproduced with kind permission of Laterax Recordings.

counter the power dominance of the majors. In addition, such a motive can also be considered as symbolic resistance (Strachan 2007). Despite their small-scale production orientation, they do aim to influence the taste dominance of the mainstream music industry. It is therefore a combination of aesthetic and moral motives, aimed against the dominance of the majors in the public sphere (Ibid.). Jorg of the Laterax label makes the following comment:

> Someone working for a major label simply just wants to find a band, or let's just say, make a band. And from then on everything is under control and ready to make as much money as possible. But we think the other way around. Our releases are meant to be very cool, authentic music. From that moment we try our best to find an audience, because we think our music should be heard by everyone. Our goal is to release music that's really worth listening and where you should listen to with full attention, so that listening to that music becomes an experience itself. (Jorg, Laterax Recordings, see picture 3).

The examined micro-independents find it important to support the bands and artists as much as possible, in order to allow these musicians to grow artistically. Dutch label staff gives their bands the time and space to focus on artistic or creative development. Dutch micro-independents regularly organize label-related events, offering their bands opportunity to perform (see picture 4). These may be considered as local promotional fora, as pointed out by Hesmondhalgh (1998a).

Taste Preferences, Autonomy and Symbolic Rewards

The examined record companies only release music if the staff fully support the band's or artist's work. They explain they have to be fully dedicated, in order to promote a band, otherwise the collaboration has no chance of success. Staff will only invest time and effort in music that is very close to their personal preferences. In short, these micro-independents only

release music they fully support, which refers to the autonomous nature of these record labels and the autonomous behaviour of their staff or owners. We can also observe a Bourdieusian link between restricted autonomous small-scale music production and a disinterest in the economic value of that cultural product (Bourdieu 1996). Almost all interviewees indicated that making money was never a consideration for starting their micro-independent.



Picture 4: A label related event by Subroutine records. Image is reproduced with kind permission of Subroutine Records.

As virtually all music is readily available through free downloads, the market for recorded music is generally perceived as very insecure (De Meyer and Trappeniers 2007). Owners and staff of micro-independents acknowledge that releasing indie-genres will not generate big returns. For this reason, personal fulfillment is mostly regarded as success (see picture 5). On the other hand, they don't want to lose money doing this, as they are also very committed to their company's continued existence. Also, Dutch micro-independents get symbolic rewards by way of recognition for their artists or releases (Crane 1976, Bourdieu 1996). For them it is particularly rewarding when their artists or bands get positive reviews and that the public responds positively to these artists, as Cedric of the Snowstar label explains:

> To me it's more important that reviewers consider the Lost Bear record as an amazing album, than that they write that I released an amazing record. I'd rather stay behind the scenes, but I do feel very related to a band that is positively reviewed because we've released that particular record together. So when a band receives good reviews I'm just as happy as the band is, for the simple reason that Snowstar was responsible for releasing that record. (Cedric, Snowstar Records)



Picture 5: Snowstar Records compilation CD, a promotional tool, illustrating motives of personal passion and broadening the diversity of music. Image is reproduced with kind permission of Snowstar Records.

Conclusion and Discussion

Dutch DIY micro-independents have many common characteristics, which makes them clearly stand out from the major record companies that operate on the mainstream market. The research shows that micro-independents primarily release music in order contribute to broadening the provision of contemporary music. Their releases can be specified as indie-genres, or non-mainstream music styles. Releasing precisely these indie genres may be conceived as a way of classifying, of distinguishing themselves from the major record companies or the mainstream music market (DiMaggio 1987). Commercial or financial success is not considered important by micro-independents, however most of our respondents do want to break even in order to keep their companies going.

With their releases, most micro-independents have the aesthetic objective to enrich the everyday supply of music. This may be interpreted as a moral motive to oppose the dominance of the majors, a form of symbolic resistance (Strachan 2007). The drive to influence the music industry's mainstream taste is to be conceived as an interplay of aesthetic and moral motives. In that way, the examined Dutch micro-independents share many properties with similar small DIY labels in the United Kingdom and the United States. There are many similarities between the business operations, the structure and working practice of these organizations. Furthermore, the motives to start up or take part in a record label are in many ways similar. The examined independents are all embedded in both local and international network structures, often genre-specific. Also, they value forms of collectivism and profit sharing, which again distinguishes them from the majors.

However, the interviews showed that for the Dutch, political motives are less important than for their counterparts in the United Kingdom. Overt political oppositional motives were virtually not found. Dutch DIY-independents do not have a mission to combat the dominant hegemonic system of the major music industry or to democratize the music market. A key difference is that British DIY-independents more often explicitly aim to compete with, or even overthrow the majors. The size and global dominance of the British cultural industries, in contrast to the Dutch, can play a part in this. Also Hesmondhalgh (1999) described the strong aesthetic and political fervor of British indies in the punk and post-punk era, which has its roots in the—perhaps more strongly politicized—British society. This may have to do with the fact that the United Kingdom has profounder political and social divisions than the Netherlands (Russell 2010). In the British situation there may be a stronger urge to compete against dominant cultural, political and economic elites. Both Strachan (2007) as Hesmondhalgh (1997) register the mission among staff of British micro-independents to compete with the major recording industry. Dissatisfied with the capitalist and corrupt mainstream industry, they have the determination to transform and democratize the music market. A salient difference with our research results is that such goals are completely absent among the Dutch DIY-independents. On the other hand, it is not clear to what extent the political motivations are still present today among staff of British micro-independents. Both Hesmondhalgh's (1997, 1999) and Strachan's (2003, 2007) research findings are somewhat dated, making it difficult to predict whether such political motivations have decreased or maybe increased.

In terms of market shares, independents slowly but gradually gain ground in the market for recorded music, even up to 38% according to the Worldwide Independent Network (Statista 2016, WIN 2016). In the contemporary music marketplace they are well positioned to capitalize on their lean organizations, their network structures and their digital as well as non-digital distribution networks. Such an observation suggests direct competition between majors and independents. Micro-independents, however, appear to operate not so much on that shared marketplace, but on a parallel market. This parallel market logic is underscored by both the usage of distinctive non-mainstream genre classifications as well as their denial of the economy (Bourdieu 1996) as displayed by the respondents in our research. Their primary motivation is the love of music and their contribution to the diversity of taste. Rewards are mainly symbolic, voiced in terms of pride and recognition. Nevertheless, as Hesmondhalgh (2006) rightly points out we cannot fully explain alternative independent music production as a Bourdieusian subfield of restricted small-scale production. As we have shown in this contribution, micro independents are inextricably bound to the field of mass cultural production. Only due to the overall growth of musical supply, technological innovations, audiences and the access to music, have micro-independents been able to establish themselves as a viable subset of the recording industry.

Theoretically, we have contributed to a deeper understanding of practices of cultural production in a non-dominant music industry as the Netherlands. Previous research into independents is virtually all from the United Kingdom or the United States. Because these studies are done from an Anglo-Saxon perspective, there is little comparison with DIY cultures in other countries. Subsequently, the establishment of micro-independents in other countries may well be grounded in different motives. Despite the fact that there seem to be many similarities between Dutch and British micro-independents and their staff, we hope to

have shown for instance the absence of political motives among Dutch micro-independents. Moreover, we can expect the dominance of Anglo-Saxon music in the global music market to influence the position of local DIY-micro-independents in most countries. Future research may shed light on those uncharted territories. Furthermore, we may expect that differences in different countries might vary consistent with the size and influence of creative or cultural industries, its relation to politics and cultural policy, local art worlds as well as linguistic, socio-economic and cultural-economic factors.

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CHAPTER 20

Intervention for Inclusivity: Gender Politics and Indie Game Development

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Abstract

In this paper, we investigate the interplay between independence as a rhetoric, principles of feminist interventionist work, and different models for creating a more inclusive industry. Through clashing understandings of the needs of aspiring game developers, indie culture can serve to reify dominant narratives of the mainstream industry, including discourses that hinder female participation therein. However, there are successful models in which we can observe other, more inclusive, modes of welcoming previously marginalized and excluded groups, which can be taken up in other contexts for diversifying local indie game development.

Author Keywords

Inclusivity, indie game design, women in games, gender, community, feminist research

Introduction

Digital games[1] culture is no longer the exclusive domain of young males. The demographic landscape of this culture is radically changing, particularly in terms of age and gender.

[1] We use the term digital games to refer to any and all digital games played online or offline, on a gaming con-

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In 2011, the Entertainment Software Association reported that 38% of gamers in Canada were female, and almost 40% of those surveyed who were 55 years or older had played a game at least once in the previous four weeks. This reported diversification of the player base is not, however, mirrored in the games industry. A recent collective analysis of salary data from 2001–2011 reports that men still constitute 90% of the total games workforce, and have consistently outnumbered women in all fields over the last decade except in business operations and marketing (Shirinian, 2012). This unvaried developer base of digital games goes hand-in-hand with a relative lack of innovation and diversity in game representation, mechanics, and interfaces, leading to a market of largely homogenous games based on sequels and adaptations aimed at a population of heterosexual males aged 18 to 35, the de facto market of "hardcore" gamers (Fron, Fullerton, Morie & Pearce, 2007). If the industry hopes to keep their newly acquired market satisfied, and to attract potential players to digital games culture, diversifying the workforce will be crucial going forward. This recommendation to appeal to broader audiences is not intended to suggest that developers who are othered, or who represent difference, innately know or understand what these new and potential gamers want to play, but rather that including diverse perspectives in the design process may assist in disrupting this hegemony and homogeneity.

As Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter (2009) argue, "the game console has been very much part of the apparatus of 'becoming man,' and not of 'becoming woman'" (p. 18), and the context of their production plays a central role in this relationship. Because technological and computing expertise in general continues to be largely associated with the constitution of hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 2009; Corneliussen, 2012; Wajcman, 1991), it is unsurprising that there is a shortage of women working in the digital games industry. Strategic efforts to increase the number of women in the industry include creating women-only working spaces or special interest groups, awarding scholarships to female applicants to alleviate the cost of attending game design schools, and making visible the accomplishments of successful women in industry through celebration and promotion. These strategies are instrumental in making the industry appear more attractive to prospective students and supporting those already in the field, but offer little help or support for women who are just beginning a career in game design (e.g. new grads, women pursuing a second career or part-time job in games) or hobbyists. Addressing the needs of this under-served group is mainly carried out through the creation of locally organized, small-scale ventures that focus on training first-time game developers.

This paper reports on one such program: The Difference Engine Initiative (DEI). As a program that received a considerable amount of promotion and funding, the DEI is important for what it can tell us about perspectives on, strategies for, and (re)actions toward the organization and mobilization of community resources for social justice projects, especially since Toronto-based indie game developers are fiercely passionate about promoting and protecting the city's image as a model community for others in Canada and abroad to aspire to (Hawkins, 2012; Munroe, 2012). Indeed, investment in and attention to the question of inclusivity demonstrates a commitment by the indie community to address the exclusionary aspects of digital games culture that its corporate counterparts have yet to make. This declaration is consistent with how the indie community, broadly positioned as an alternative to

sole, computer, or handheld gaming device.

mainstream digital games culture and characterized by an anti-corporate sentiment, promotes itself as appropriate stomping grounds for grassroots social justice movements. Finding, creating, and enabling means of support for activist work is crucial for sustainability, and en masse, the Toronto indie community firmly plants itself in the corner of women who want to make a name in games. As the first community-directed initiative in Toronto dedicated to generating knowledge to improve the experience of female game developers, we explore the interplay between undertaking messy, complex, and contentious feminist intervention work and maintaining status as a 'model' indie games community.

DEI was a Toronto-based workshop intended to support the entry of women into the indie game community. We became involved in this initiative as invited participant-observers [2] and documented the results of the workshops (also known as incubators) using ethnographic methods such as semi-structured interviews, researcher observations, surveys, and participant journals, which were contextualized by our immersion in this community through our attendance of local presentations, showcases, networking events, and meetings of the Toronto indie game collective, the Hand Eye Society (HES). We consider the numerous community discourses around and within DEI to understand how inclusivity was envisioned, sought, and sometimes obstructed. Through a feminist analysis of how the program was conceptualized and subsequently delivered, we explore the paradox of focusing on inclusion and gender politics in the context of a set of practices that emphasize discourses of independence and meritocracy. We argue that given this underlying ideological emphasis, the indie game scene in Toronto also struggles with its aim to produce diverse and inclusive work, and it is no more egalitarian or compatible than the mainstream industry in supporting social justice projects.

Indie as Resistance

In comparison to mainstream gaming, which reflects, reinforces and (re)produces the dominant understandings of what counts as legitimate participation in video game culture (Jenson & de Castell, 2010), coming to a determination of what constitutes 'indie gaming' is a slippery task. The exploration of this shifting terrain (i.e. what is or is not indie) directly impacts questions related to inclusion, and we encourage readers to see Lipkin and Ruffino's contributions in this edition, which discusses indie games culture more broadly. For our purposes, the indie identity that we report on here is a particular, local subject-position that was discursively constructed through and by conversations with and between participants, organizers, and other Toronto-based indie community members.

A reoccurring theme that underscored many of our conversations with developers and players was the given understanding that 'indie' not only refers to an employment or career alternative to working in large gaming studios, but also implies a particular political position; one that is held in opposition to what mainstream games culture represents, sanctions, promotes, and protects. As a "hegemony of play" (cf. Fron, Fullerton, Morie & Pearce, 2007), mainstream games, in their content and production, communicate dominant values, and some indie games make use of the same modes to convey alternative or oppositional perspectives.

[2] The authors took on the role of what the organizers called 'embedded academics' and fully participated in the incubators alongside the other women, including developing and showcasing a playable game in DEI1. Stephanie was the embedded academic in DEI1 and Alison in DEI2.

For example, some indie games make very purposeful artistic decisions that are not popular or common practice in mainstream game design, such as: an amateur[3] kitschy style that evokes a homemade aesthetic, "regressive" 8-bit styles that are re-appropriated as a nostalgic celebration of early games culture, and even illustrating characters whose bodies challenge hegemonic expectations of how men and women should be represented (see Parker, this edition, for a discussion on indie game art). These examples can be understood not only as a choice to ignore mainstream art norms, but also as very intentional decisions to respond to and subvert dominant practices in game art and design, making these choices political statements that represent and offer a viable alternative to participating in mainstream practices.

The use of subversive design tactics are part of a discourse that constructs and positions indie game developers as resisting the dominant global hyper-capitalist structure of the video games design industry (Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter, 2009). Within this discourse, mainstream game publishers are portrayed as heartless, faceless corporations who are interested in profits, not people. This argument was typically qualified by referencing examples of gaming culture's normalized-yet-offensive practices that sanction sexism, racism, homophobia, and other prejudices for the sake of catering to the "hardcore gamer" and maintaining the hegemony of play (Fron, Fullerton, Morie & Pearce, 2007). This discursively constructs the Toronto indie gaming scene, including indie games, players of these games, and developers, as a productive counter-culture—a viable, alternative space where practices of contestation or resistance are encouraged and indeed a part of 'being indie'. Despite this insistence on difference through a disavowal of the mainstream, the Toronto scene is just as homogenous, characterized as "primarily populated by white dudes" (Goodyear, 2011). This lack of diversity is a major concern for several leading members of the Hand Eye Society (HES), a not-for-profit collective of projects and people working in Toronto's indie game community: "there are so many underrepresented groups—it's time to deal with that and to change that" (Woo, 2011). As part of a broader diversity initiative,[4] HES created DEI in recognition of, and as a way to begin to address, issues of gender inequality in their community.

Indie Intervention for Inclusivity

The primary purpose of DEI was to help Toronto-area women create their first digital game. The 12 participants were selected based on their responses to a competitive application process that received interest from 65 women.[5] The DEI was run twice in 2011; the first

[3] This statement does not imply that indie games are or should be considered amateur productions, or that indie game developers are amateurs in terms of their skills and/or professionalism in comparison to professionals who work in larger studios. Rather, the point here is that this art style is used as a response to the overemphasis on art realism and 3D modelling tools as representative of "better" (i.e. more expensive) games.

[4] DEI was part of TIFF Nexus, a provincially funded initiative to explore a range of emerging trends in interaction design (one of which was diversifying the field and industry by bringing in and working with marginalized groups) and foster connections between academics, industry members and enthusiasts. Additional information about the TIFF Nexus project can be accessed at http://tiffnexus.net. Please see to Harvey & Fisher (forthcoming) for further discussion of DEI participants' activities within the TIFF Nexus network.

[5] The women selected to participate in DEI were middle class, born in North America, between the ages of 20–30, of Caucasian or east-Asian descent, and had completed some form of post-secondary education. Most participants were either involved in a new media or technology-related career (e.g. freelance illustrator, graphic designer, film production, network administrator, professional blogger, etc.); however, none were working in the games industry prior to their involvement in DEI.

incubator (DEI1) in August–September, which was led by two members of HES, and the second incubator (DEI2) in November–December, which was organized and coordinated by two females who were participants in DEI1. In both incubators, the participants met once a week for three hours. These meetings were opportunities for participants to show their weekly progress, troubleshoot technical issues, provide and receive feedback, and discuss other topics related to game development. Actual game development labour (including conceptualization, concept art gathering, programming, drawing, and animating) was completed outside of these meetings. Local female mentors and role models with industry experience were invited to some of these meetings to share their perspectives and experiences on working in a male-dominated space. At the end of their incubation, participants had an additional two to three weeks to finalize their games, which were then débuted to the general public at well-promoted showcases.

Conceptualized by the HES organizers as a first step towards addressing gender inequality, DEI was intended to be an interventionist space that would make a positive difference in the lives of the participants (who were considered to be marginalized), as well as the community:

> "We will take a handful of participants with little to no game-making experience, but who are passionate about games and are interested in learning what goes into making them—these are people with ideas and the desire to make them a reality, for whom the opportunity to get into game development has either been absent or unwelcoming...It's important to note that this Initiative is not the perfect solution to all the problems of gender disparity in this industry, nor is it intended to be. We are hoping to generate some data and theories as to why there aren't more women in game development, and are hoping to learn how to make future endeavors more effective at encouraging and satisfying a more diverse group of people in this industry."
>
> Metanet (2011)

This statement demonstrates a much-needed political commitment from industry leaders to actively seek out and/or create these opportunities and openings; not only providing the means for the experience, but also co-constructing knowledge that can be shared and mobilized going forward.

Undertaking interventionist work to break down barriers is imperative to opening up a culture to the disenfranchised, but can also be potentially problematic when the existing and largely *invisible* power relations and structures that organize these relations are not explicitly recognized in the planning, implementation, or analysis of these interventions. Even the best-intentioned programs, practices, and people operate within the racist, heterosexist, patriarchal, and capitalist hegemonic orders they seek to topple. Concerns over the distribution of power within these initiatives and how this distribution impacts on the relations between those involved need to be critically considered (Frisby, Maguire & Reid, 2009; Krumer-Nevo, 2009). This requires organizers to (re)think through their assumptions and presumptions about what they are doing and the capabilities of those involved, and deliberately disrupt the practices that have worked to exclude women in the first place, because "the point of productive equity work is not to reproduce the situation, but change it." (Jenson & de Castell, 2011, p. 156). Speaking directly to these concerns, critical feminist researcher Patti Lather (1991) proposes that interventionist work must be guided by theoretical and methodological frameworks that are grounded in dialogue, reciprocity, and reflexivity in an

attempt to circumvent what she identifies as the central danger to praxis-oriented empirical work: the imposition and reification of dominant, hegemonic values.

Interventionist initiatives that are not conceptualized as mutually-educative experiences for both participants and organizers risk importing, uncritically, taken-for-granted notions and educational practices that work to restrict or limit the ways in which learners experience agency and authority in the process of knowledge construction. Programs based on educational givens assist in concealing the forms of power that naturalize inequality and mutual-exclusion between 'instructors' and 'learners' and can thus unintentionally perpetuate the issues that the program is meant to address. Indeed, some of the participants (those in the first incubator—DEI1) described aspects of the program that they felt were counterproductive to creating conditions of possibility for working towards inclusivity. There was a disconcerting disconnect between the stated goals of the program and how participants' felt upon their exit, which we argue is reflective of the organizers' reluctance to stray from 'business as usual' practices of the indie community and risk engaging in practices where the outcome was unpredictable. In the following sections, we identify and analyze moments before, during, and after DEI1, where opportunities to implement participant-driven changes were passed over in favour of staying faithful to established practices, and in effect, maintaining the status quo.

The Aspiring Female Game Developer and Her Barriers to Entry

Programs designed to educate, intervene, or assist disenfranchised populations are anchored by a representative subject who embodies particular characteristics that the program is meant to address (McDermott, 1993). More often than not, these subject-positions are constructed by program organizers and informed by personal experiences, reported trends and findings (such as media reports and scholarly articles), and sometimes stereotypes. For instance, due to the protocols of academic institutions (e.g. applications for funding and ethics approval), researchers are sometimes required to construct particular subject-positions before they actually make contact with study participants.[6] Although this practice can be viewed as problematic, in that it is an example of the powerless being labelled by a more powerful group (Freire, 2000), it is reasonable to temporarily construct a starting point subject-position, so long as agency to modify this construction is not limited to organizers and it is not used as a blanket representation for all participants beyond this starting point.

In the case of the DEI, the "aspiring female game developer" subject-position, and perceptions about the barriers that prevent her from entering the field, was constructed through the language employed in various documents, including the call for participation, the program FAQ, blog posts, and early media interviews publicizing the initiative. A discursive analysis of this initial subject-position can provide valuable insight into the underlying conceptual framework through which the HES organizers understand females' experiences and relationships within game development culture, locally and broadly. Within texts about the DEI, the aspiring female game developer was constructed as someone mystified about the game development process in general, intimidated by programming, and lacking access to tools, visible role models, or experienced people to help solve design or development problems. This construction—the

[6] An exception here is when researchers employ a participatory action research (PAR) methodology and framework, where participants are (typically) involved in the research process from the initial stages.

helpless, unknowledgeable female—is highly stereotypical and largely reflective of (working to reinforce) the hegemonic framework and guiding patriarchal discourse of digital games culture at large, which is founded on a binary and mutually exclusive understanding of gender where males are naturally proficient with technology and women are not.

This discourse extends past the sphere of digital games culture. It is the normalized ways in which people conceptualize their everyday interactions with technology (Connell, 2009; Cornelissen, 2012; Wajcman, 2007), and it is plausible that some women choose not to engage with game development because of these very reasons. However, many of the women interested in DEI *did not* identify with the organizers image of first-time female game developers. For instance, at the first pre-incubator information session for DEI, attended by over 40 women, a significant number of potential participants spoke about their enthusiasm to learn programming languages, named female game developers that they held in high esteem, suggested software and resources that they had previously tinkered with, and, overall, provided a great deal of evidence that directly challenged the imagined subject-position put forth by the HES organizers.

Participant contestation to this subject-position continued into DEI1, where the first discussion revolved around how participants enjoyed access to the very things that organizers assumed they lacked: experienced friends and colleagues (support), knowledge of game development software (tools), and females working in game-related careers who we admired and were inspired by (role models). Moreover, everyone had very clear ideas and goals about what they wanted to accomplish—for their game, but also within the larger diversity project—and what they needed to make that happen. Despite this, as the weeks went on and it became increasingly evident that the participants were neither helpless nor unknowledgable about game development, narratives about aspiring female game developers were not modified to better reflect the identities and experiences of the participants in DEI1. From a feminist intervention perspective, forgoing this opportunity to tell a very different story about female game developers is inconsistent with the goal of promoting alternative knowledges to disrupt business as usual, yet entirely consistent with maintaining existing power structures.

A closer look at the language used to describe the program can be illuminating here. Incubators, for example, are meant to create or provide the optimal conditions for a specimen to not just survive, but grow and thrive. Significantly, an expert who possesses knowledge of how to keep the specimens alive determines these perfect circumstances. Those who are subject to incubation are very much dependent on these experts, who are in full control of the incubator environment. While this description is appropriate for the operation of actual incubators (such as those used in medical contexts to assist in the care of premature offspring), this model of expert-administered care and nurturing is problematic in a social justice equity project because it positions learners as dependents and implies that they do not possess an understanding of their own ideal, optimal conditions to thrive in the environment. Adopting a stance that views knowledge as dynamic and power as fluid between everyone involved would means that *everyone's* knowledge and understanding of this issue is, and can only ever be, partial and limited. This challenges the conceptual organization of DEI1 that positions the HES organizers as the experts. Even though it did not reflect the situations of the participants, insistence on the subject-position and incubator model enabled HES organizers to maintain exclusive authority to validate what 'counts' in this culture, such as legitimate barriers to entry.

Significantly, some of the reasons DEI1 participants articulated about why they had not yet developed a game were due to barriers that were not explicitly recognized by organizers as such. Although participants pointed to time—both inopportune and a general lack of it—as the main reason, their hesitancy to create a game was also partially due to the sexism, misogyny and marginalization that they had experienced in Toronto and elsewhere as visible females engaging in public game related activities (playing games, attending conventions or socials). During a DEI1 session, one participant described how she felt awkward attending HES socials, as though she was intruding on a private invitation-only affair. She shared how the noticeable lack of other women at these events made her feel unwelcome, which prompted other participants to share similar experiences, such as how they felt that they required to bring a male escort to these events to legitimize their presence, but not their participation—in these spaces, women are immediately read as the (non-gaming) girlfriend of a male attendee instead of a person who is also interested in game design and culture.

Even though the saturation of men in the Toronto indie games community was a rationale for the creation of the DEI, organizers did not consider participants' experiences as a barrier to entry into the community. As the president of a small indie development team, and a co-founder of HES, the female organizer of DEI1 [7] offered embodied-evidence or proof that gender is not a significant enough marker of difference to prohibit entry and subsequent success in this industry. During sessions and in public interviews, she (re)articulated her view that people "only need to motivate themselves to learn and seize the opportunity" if they want to make digital games (Goodyear, 2011). Although she shared her experiences of sexism in the industry (e.g. clients only wanting to talk to her male team members and not her), she was unwilling to concur with the participants' view that harassment and general misogyny were a significant barrier to career success. Rather, she advised participants to develop a thick skin and to not take it personally. However the "it's not personal, it's business" discourse works to exclude women in two ways: (1) It effectively naturalizes the organizing patriarchal values of the culture and industry that make it difficult for women to be and feel successful, and (2) it also keeps the business world a male-domain by characterizing female responses to inequitable situations (taking it personally) as irrational, which has a long standing association with femininity, and is not valued.

The organizers' strategy to play-down the motivational power and significance of emotions/emotionality in the game development process reflects a zero-tolerance stance on what are perceived to be feminine expressions, and reinforces gaming spaces as domains for enacting traditional masculinities. Here, emotionality is viewed as potentially detrimental to achieving industry success, needing to be kept under control. From this perspective, success depends on the woman's ability to take on, or at least perform, masculine traits that are valued in a

[7] We focus on the actions of the female organizer in this paper because she played a more active leadership role in DEI1 than the male organizer, who acted as her mentor. Although they referred to each other as co-organizers, in practice the female organizer did the work of facilitating the sessions and communicating with participants and journalists. Having the female organizer lead and represent DEI1 was a strategic move to hedge the (anticipated) criticism of a male presence within a designated female-only space. The implications of this male gaze/surveillance of the DEI1 participants and the female organizer were not lost on researchers, participants and the journalists and community members who followed the activities of DEI (cf. Creighton, 2011).

business context (stoicism, toughness). Instead of recognizing how sexism is operationalized to exclude females and strategizing how to make it more inclusive, it is individuals, not the system, that are labelled as the problem and the ones that need to change. In this deficit model, accomplishment in the game development industry is premised exclusively on a meritocracy—anyone can make a name in games if they just try hard enough. In this way, systemic inequalities and oppressions are disavowed and responsibility for overcoming challenges is delegated entirely to the individual, regardless of whether they have the necessary privilege.

Participants of DEI1 felt a loss of authority in that the organizers' experiences, sentiments, and knowledge were valued over their own, which were met with critiques of female sensitivity and emotionality, as articulated by the female organizer at the Game Developers Conference:

> "The DEI was designed as a creative space where people could challenge themselves, develop their abilities and learn alongside one another in a warm, encouraging environment. But instead, [the incubator] was viewed as a support group underscored and necessitated by the reaction to an unequal social world, and where learning was secondary to the formation of bonds and relationships."
>
> Alexander (2012)

Closing down opportunities to gain an understanding grounded in other experiences about the lack of female game developers in Toronto not only goes against previously-stated intentions, but is also another example of structural inequity between organizers and participants, as well as highlights how women's experiences continue to be trivialized and their voices silenced. The absence of a dialogic or reciprocal working relationship made participants feel that they were being wrangled into subordinate positions in relation to the organizers—the inferior "aspiring female game developer" who allows emotions to get in the way of making games.

Modelling the Indie Way of Doing Things

In praxis, making a difference requires that the knowledge, culture, and conditions of those on the outside should be privileged over dominant cultural values. Those who commit to improving the lives and conditions of the excluded are critical cultural workers, and they should be the ones to struggle with the hegemonic values that are present in society and within themselves (Friere, 1970). DEI was promoted as an intervention to tackle issues of inequality and it is therefore unsurprising that participants expected that equality would be the framework guiding their incubator experience, both in terms of how they interacted with organizers to make games, as well as how they would work to create social change, as partners.

Organizers of DEI1 presented themselves as equals by creating games alongside participants; however this did little to erase the clear hierarchical relation between them. DEI1 was conceptualized as a traditional model for teaching and learning, where novices learn from experts and the "exchange" of knowledge and ideas works as a unidirectional transmission.[8] As previously mentioned, employing a top-down model in a community education initiative implies that experts fully understand the issue at hand and know how to fix it. Indeed, before they had met participants to ask what they needed, the organizers had already outlined a full curriculum for the program based on what they believed participants needed to become

[8] To be clear, our criticism of this model is focused on how it (again) relegates participants into a subordinate position, not the pedagogy per se.

empowered. When the solution to perceived needs is an administered response, learners are viewed as consumers of a predefined pedagogy, effectively "rendered passive, positioned as the recipients of predefined knowledge and services rather than as agents involved in interpreting their needs and shaping their life conditions" (Fraser, 1989, p. 174; McDermott, 1993). The implementation of such a model demonstrates that contrary to the motivation of DEI and the intentions of the organizers, in practice, these incubators served to re-entrench an authoritarian environment that limited the agency of the participants through the persistent interpellation of a fixed and limited subject-position.

The adherence to a predefined model was a source of tension between organizers and the participants of DEI1. We would like to note that the DEI1 program is a carbon copy of the Artsy Games Incubator (AGI), an HES program encouraging artists to extend their practice to games development. Significantly, the AGI did not have a social justice agenda, nor was it a female- only space. Yet organizers did not modify the AGI program for use in DEI1—everything, from curriculum to delivery, remained untouched and was imported wholesale. This one size fits all approach to teaching game design—no matter who the participants are—ironically demonstrates an insensitivity to individual differences, as well as HES organizers' commitment to not disrupt established practices. When participants suggested alternative ways of doing things, these ideas were rejected because they challenged "how things are done." For instance, participants wanted to use Twitter to communicate with each other in lieu of email or the DEI blog hosted on the HES page, both which were found to be unsuitable for their needs. The participants' knowledge and frequent use of Twitter made it an ideal tool to facilitate a peer-mentoring educational environment, where they could make requests for help and also provide assistance to each other quickly and easily. Twitter was, however, a technology used by participants, but not the organizers. Organizers did not stop participants from using Twitter as the primary mode of communication, but they also did not encourage it, nor did they make an effort to use it themselves. If participants wanted help from organizers, they would have to approach them through the channels that the organizers themselves were comfortable with.

We argue that this tension around the use of Twitter is less about the tool itself, and more about what it represents and enables: direct peer-to-peer support and assistance disrupts the hierarchical structure that the incubator operated on. Organizers were not uncomfortable with learning a new tool, but with how it modified the way things were done. Indeed, in their pre-DEI written description of "support," for example, the contributions of local mentors and HES organizers are mentioned, but not peer-to-peer help networks: "we will be bringing in local mentors as well as providing lots of advice, tips, answers to questions, and support for the game makers" (Metanet, 2011).

A more significant example relates to the unveiling of the DEI1 games. To promote female visibility at the event, participants requested that they be able to stand on stage with the organizers and introduce the games personally. Independent game development was a potential full-time career option for some of the women and it was very important to them that they be known and recognized as individuals, and not lumped together and introduced en masse, or as indistinguishable from each other. This request was rejected on two grounds—(1) organizers insisted that the game should, and would, "speak for itself" and for you, and (2) the majority of the game-playing public does not know or care about the person behind the game

anyways. The use of two normative (and contradicting) discourses as a rationale to reject this modest request to increase female visibility (an issue they knew and experienced first hand at HES events) was troubling for participants, as it seemed counterproductive to the objective of doing things differently. This oddity was later bolstered when participants learned that the (mostly male) participants of the AGI were allowed to talk about their games at their social, and that the guest speaker of the night would be showcasing her work-in-progress game to the audience. When confronted about this double-standard at the DEI1 post-mortem, the organizers admitted that their decision was made out of concern for participants' reception within the community, as the high level of publicity and media attention on DEI was apparently producing a negative backlash from some male indie game developers as preferential treatment. The organizers wanted to simultaneously "protect" participants as well as appease community members who were upset at the special attention and perceived hand outs that these women were receiving. Such a response to the expressed desires of the participants is exemplar of both the paternalism of the top-down incubator model, as well as the contradicting discourses that circulated within the incubator, as protectionist measures do not align with the organizer's injunction to develop a thick skin.

These examples of tension are representative of the ways in which unequal power dynamics produced a schism between participants and organizers even though everyone involved was ostensibly working towards the same goal. Participants were expected to follow through with the program, but not make any changes to it or question the status quo of how things get done in this community of practice. As the weeks went on, participants became bolder in pursuing what they knew they needed and decided as a group to create their own conditions for empowerment, including making radical changes to the organization of DEI2 (which two DEI1 participants facilitated), and forming the basis for a community group focused on addressing the many barriers to entry and multiple potential types of aspiring female game developers, as discussed in more detail below.

DEI1 could be characterized as an expert-centered learning experience that sought to groom these female game developers for entry within the community in a way that was undisruptive to the existing power structures. It is important to note, however, that these tensions and conflicts had a productive outcome of creating conditions for group cohesion, which then led to the restructuring of the second incubator. In response to the authoritarian environment of DEI1, the facilitators of DEI2 took a collaborative approach in the conceptualization and execution of the second iteration, leading to a more democratic forum where organizers did not make assumptions of participants' capabilities, needs, or preferences. For example, instead of limiting participants to using object-oriented game development tools, DEI2 organizers offered a range of tools for all skill-levels for participants to consult, with the prerogative to also use tools that were not on the list or beyond the expertise of the organizers. While DEI1 participants only used two tools (Stencyl and Game Maker), DEI2 participants each used a different tool, ranging from Adventure Game Studio to Flash to Unity, and were much more experimental in terms of content and mode (see for example *The Immoral Ms. Conduct*, a game about young women's' experiences in prison played on YouTube, cf. Poplar, 2012). DEI2 participants were also fully involved in the planning of their showcase, which did not feature a guest speaker and focused completely on the participants and their accomplishments during the incubator.

Understanding the underlying causes for the friction in the first sessions enabled the leaders of DEI2 to foster a participant-centered environment that was inclusive, open to feedback, and subject to participant-driven change. Unsurprisingly, the DEI2 participants reported a greater level of satisfaction with their experiences. Significantly, the topic of gender-based discrimination and exclusion was one that emerged less frequently in DEI2, and we suggest that this may be because inclusion was intentionally built into the structure of this incubator as opposed to simply providing motivation.

Challenging Indie Ideology

These divergent methods of organizing DEI1 and DEI2 demonstrate how the use of particular dominant discourses can serve to maintain an exclusionary field of practice, whether it is in mainstream games culture or the indie games scene. In our conversations and observations, what was most pervasive and disconcerting was the sentiment that we are past the point where gender matters because we have achieved equality, and our success is solely premised on a meritocracy wherein individuals have the unhindered freedom to do and be all that they want. This perspective was articulated by one of the two organizers during her presentation "Why I Hate Women in Games Initiatives" at the 2012 Game Developers Conference on her DEI1 experience. When considering this disavowal of women-focused projects like the DEI, we can understand her hesitation to support the participants in ways they wanted as partly a product of her own personal experience taking up the female game developer subject-position; nobody helped her, she always felt like she needed to have a thick skin to deal with this environment, and she (as well as the very few other women in the industry) found success. However, this "if I can do it, you can do it too" attitude is problematic because it elides the important differences between her experience as a woman in indie game design and others who have faced other forms of intersectional oppression. The organizer's use of personal experience as evidence that women can succeed "without handouts" reproduces given ideological systems and does not allow us to see difference as constituted relationally (Scott, 1991). What is missing is recognition of other intersections with gaming culture (including, but not limited to, race, class, sex, age, orientation, and ability) that can constrain, as well as enable, what is considered to be legitimate access to and participation within gaming culture. Within the discourse of meritocracy—which is prevalent in the post-feminist, neoliberal sensibility that emphasizes the empowerment available through choice without addressing how political and cultural influences limit our choices—present-day women are autonomous agents that face none of the previous power imbalances (Gill, 2007). Here, women have recourse to free choice, and to succeed, the strategy is typically to become more like a man. This is in no way an inclusive strategy, as it charges those who wish to participate with fitting into a mould rather than questioning such a mould in the first place.

In this way, the indie culture that purports to be in opposition to the practices of the mainstream games industry mirrors some of the keys ways of excluding women from participation. The DEI was meant to introduce difference into Toronto's homogeneous indie game scene, and yet when difference was enacted or suggested, it was bypassed by HES organizers in favour of maintaining a construction of first-time female game developers that created minimal disruption to the status quo both within the incubator and in the com-

munity. Difference abounded in DEI: between participants, between participants and the 'aspiring developer' construction, between participants' and organizers' ideas of what was needed to feel empowered, and more than can be listed in this short paper. We do not doubt the sincerity of the organizers' intentions to diversify their community; however, we think it is important to recognize that the "add women and stir" approach we observed in DEI1 is not interventionist work that can make significant gains for women in the long run.

In many ways, the rhetoric of meritocracy reflects and indeed reifies the post-feminist and neoliberal context of digital games culture at large, where the increase of women players arguably diversifies the player population but the underlying framework continues to cast female participation as innately subordinate or inferior to their male counterparts (Harvey, 2011; Jenson, Fisher & de Castell, 2011). The numbers indicating broader participation in games culture are by no means an adequate signifier of cultural change.

New Girl in Town

Reluctance to deviate from sanctioned, normalized practices—whether it be the theories and methods we use, or the roles we play—can snuff out opportunities to experiment with different or new praxes that might improve the lives of those on the margins (Freire, 2000; Jenson & de Castell, 2011). Dominant ideas are not adequate to reverse the reproduction of the forms of exclusion that characterized the culture. A more appropriate starting point is critical dialogue and a profound respect for the disadvantaged and their knowledge. As adult women who were all too familiar with experiences and practices that cast them as always already inferior in the larger games community, it was disheartening to re-experience it in an initiative that was meant to introduce difference and change. We cannot ignore, however, the ways in which DEI laid the groundwork for more sustained and inclusive models of participation, and provided opportunities for women in Toronto to get into indie game development.

Despite the challenges, DEI had an extremely positive impact on the community, both in making women's game design and activist work visible. Furthermore, it directly shaped the revamp of the second incubator, and addressed how the community could accommodate demand for women-only workshops and spaces (i.e. how to serve the other women who attended the preliminary information session or applied to participate). Reflecting on their experiences in DEI1, participants and allies were more eager than ever to work towards fostering a more inclusive indie game development community in Toronto. This prompted several participants from both incubators to create a central group for women who did not necessarily have ties to other groups within the HES collective, and/or found independent representation intimidating. The work is currently being carried out by Dames Making Games Toronto (DMG), which acts as a welcoming committee to women new to the local game development community, and provides ongoing support to women who already work in the industry. As a work-in-progress feminist intervention space, DMG is committed to supporting women game developers and their allies through hosting casual socials, presentations and networking opportunities, training workshops and jams, and providing online support and outreach (for more about DMG, visit http://dmg.to and see Westecott, this edition).

The differences between the one-off, top-down incubator and the creation of a self-organized hub for female-identified developers can be understood in the important distinction

between emphasizing the individual woman who wants to break into a community of practice with established norms and the creation of a community that strives to be safe, welcoming, and inclusive of many different types of experiences. In the former, shaping participants into the indie identity as an already-constituted subject-position is prioritized, while in the latter, building a community with a shared goal of pushing back against exclusionary norms to foster the kind of environment that allows for many different identities to take up game design is the desired outcome.

DMG supports the growth of an emergent community by addressing needs that were not being met by the existing infrastructures around indie game design, and indeed challenges the solo auteur vision of the indie designer in general by emphasizing the important role of colleagues, collaborators and support groups for those seeking to engage in independent game design (Guevara-Villalobos, 2011). Independence refers not to the emancipated individualism celebrated in the rhetoric of neoliberalism but to self-supported and self-motivated labour that is often lonely, incredibly challenging, and rarely lucrative. Community can provide instrumental resources, as well as provide the support that was so denigrated within DEI1 when the organizers dismissed the importance of sharing experiences of sexism and exclusion as important to the production process, further advising participants to combat feelings of exclusion and inferiority by turning a blind eye towards elements and practices of a sexist culture.

While one can potentially seek out and receive assurance elsewhere, marginalized groups often face a different set of challenges in hegemonic spaces that are not often understood by those in privileged positions. Building a community committed to exploring and addressing these issues is vitally important to addressing barriers. For some, strong, supportive relationships can be as fundamental to the game development process as a computer, and while DEI participants took advantage of the networking opportunities and developed relationships with others in the larger Toronto indie scene, it did not replace the security and reassurance provided by the cohort of others in a similar position.

Conclusion

Being indie in no way translates to being inclusive. Rather, a great deal of the values and meanings associated with going indie actually reify the structural inequalities of the mainstream industry through the valuation of a supposed meritocracy that not only denies persistent systemic exclusion but celebrates in its own way the precarious labour conditions of digital games production. The process of becoming an indie developer in DEI1 was not a disruption, but an expansion, where those in power maintained their roles and status while the foundation upon which they stood grew through the expansion of the number of indie game developers, small studio start-ups, and transmedia engagements with game mechanics *within* the current frameworks and practices of production. Inducting more women into this 'model community' without questioning the dominant narratives of the system that excluded them was the identified solution, but participants pushed back, turning their efforts towards community-building activities that circumvented the legitimization of particular practices, objects, language, knowledges and subject-positions related to 'being indie'. By embracing rather than resisting the dynamism and variation of needs within, the members of DMG are

instrumental in rewriting what being indie in Toronto might look like and committed to actively creating opportunities and openings for difference to be engineered.

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CHAPTER 21

From Art House to Your House: The Distribution of Quality Cinema on Home Video

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Résumé

Cet article defend l'idée que certains distributeurs de vidéo maison ont joué un rôle important pour donner forme au déplacement historique du « cinéma de qualité » des salles de cinéma au contexte domestique. II examine plus particulierement la compagnie Kino International, Facets Multimedia et Zeitgeist Film pour comprendre de façon plus compléte comment se créent et circulent les notions de valeur et de qualité dans le domaine de la vidéo maison. Alors que Kino International offre une sélection éclectique de films étrangers et de classiques du cinéma muet et que Facets Multimedia se spécialise dans la production internationale, le documentaire et les film pour enfants, Zeitgeist se concentre plutôt sur le documentaire et les films d'une poignée d'auteurs choisis. En dépit des différences apparentes, chaque compagnie élargie, raffine et complexifie Jes critères constitutifs de la vidéo maison de qualité en se fondant et en redéployant les notions d'exclusivité, d'exotisme, d'intellectualisme et d'activisme social. En défendant cette idée et en faisant aussi allusion à de nouveaux services comme le site de distribution par transit de données Mubi, cet article fait valoir l'idée que la "distribution" est un moment déterminant où la valeur économique et culturelle du produit se façonnent.

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If we take it that "film" is a particular technology for the capture and presentation of moving images, and that "cinema" more broadly describes the social arrangements through which moving images are produced, circulated, and consumed,[1] then over the last several decades cinema has not "died" but rather proliferated and transformed.[2] Specifically, celluloid-rendered images and theatrical viewing practices have been ostensibly displaced by waves of different video technologies and the domestic consumption of media in general. In this transfer from one techno-social arrangement to another, the features that constitute "quality cinema" and "film art" have been contested and rearranged, although not upended entirely. As Charles Acland has indicated, media technologies do not simply disappear when new ones appear, nor do all the practices by which these technologies are used.[3] His point suggests the continual need to investigate the creation, exchange, and use of cinematic wealth and value in the face of technological change; in this case, to understand how distinction operates in the realm of home video.

Home video distributors have played a critical role in shaping the historical shift of "quality cinema" from theatrical to domestic contexts. As James Kendrick and Barbara Klinger have discussed, the most prominent among them is The Criterion Collection, which has created a canon of cinema based on exclusivity and eclecticism.[4] In addition to their highly selective catalogue, Criterion has also distinguished itself by providing rich "bonus" materials, such as commentaries by film artists and scholars as well as supplemental essays; further, the company typically promises to release only the best digital transfers of their movies. Yet, it is important to note that Criterion has not been the only player in this arena and the senses of "quality" they have cultivated comprise only one part of the larger distribution of attitudes toward home video.[5] This essay examines Kino International, Facets Multimedia, Zeitgeist Films, and Mubi (formerly The Auteurs), a streaming media website,[6] in order to more fully understand the creation and dispersal of notions of value and "quality" in the home video arena. Whereas Kino International provides an eclectic mix of foreign films and silent film

[1] This differentiation derives from Christian Metz, *Langage et Cinema, Nouvelle edition augmentee d'une postface* (Paris: Editions Albatros, 19TT), 7. I am particularly inspired by David James's use of this formulation in *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 5–6.

[2] Anne Friedberg, "The End of Cinema: Multimedia and Technological Change," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 438–452.

[3] Charles R. Acland, "Introduction: Residual Media," in *Residual Media*, ed. Charles R. Acland (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xv.

[4] James Kendrick, "What is the Criterion?: The Criterion Collection as an Archive of Film as Culture," *Journal of Film and Video* 53.2–3 (Summer/Fall 2001): 125. In her assertion that the Criterion Collection was influential in connoting a "high art" quality to certain DVD releases, Klinger has written that Criterion helped create "the perception that the digital era in theatrical cinema has finally found its aesthetic equivalent on the domestic front in DVD." Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 61.

[5] Where Kendrick focuses on Criterion's peculiar selectivity as a means by which archival practices and values have been transferred and democratized to some degree, Klinger focuses on the production of "collectability" as a quality of DVD cinema that is subsequently taken up by domestic media consumers. She highlights how the transfer of cinephilia into domestic movie consumption has been paired with technophilia. Ibid., 56 and 75.

[6] The Auteurs changed its name to Mubi on 13 May 2010. Anne Thompson, "The Auteurs is Now Mubi," Indiewire.com, 13 May 2010, http://blogs.indiewire.com/thompsononhollywood/2010/05/13/the_auteurs_is_now_mubi (accessed 14 July 2010).

classics, and Facets specializes in international, documentary, and children's films, Zeitgeist focuses on documentaries and a handful of select auteurs. Despite these apparent differences, however, all expand, refine, and complicate "quality" home video by drawing upon and redeploying qualities of exclusivity, exoticism, intellectualism, and social activism.

Additionally, these companies have used these techniques to contend with changes in the technological and cultural conditions pertaining to them. Some of these companies were able to distinguish themselves from the chaos that characterized the early days of home video distribution. In this way, what seems marginal and even elite served an important economic function. Further, despite the slipperiness of each company's identity, the relative stability of each firm's mission assisted them in creating and maintaining additional business endeavors, including theatrical distribution and exhibition. Perhaps most importantly, these companies were instrumental in converting highly refined notions of cinematic quality from one industrial/cultural arrangement to another, from theatrical to domestic distribution and exhibition.[7] This supposedly stable situation is itself characterized by turmoil and change, as seen presently by the growth of rent-by mail, video-on-demand (VOD), and internet streaming distribution systems. Thus each company faces new challenges and challengers, such as the Mubi website, that they are meeting according to their own logics, which are themselves extensions of their past actions.

In examining the operational logics of these companies, I wish to indicate the importance of distribution by extending the implications of the term. In the majority of media industry studies, "distribution" primarily refers to that sector of the industry that orchestrates and accomplishes the movement of commodities from producers to consumers. Indeed, in its industrially dominant form, it is the bottleneck through which the mass of productions must pass in order to reach their potentially vast audiences.[8] In critical political economic theory, however, "distribution" can refer to the general dispersal of wealth in a society.[9] These two meanings of distribution—the process by which specific commodities circulate as well as the social allocation of wealth—are best understood when set in relation with one another. In this sense, distribution is a determinant moment when the economic *and* cultural value of a commodity is produced. Conceptualizing distribution in this way is particularly important for understanding cultural commodities, as their value is so closely tied to the formation of ideas, beliefs, and social identities. Thus, assessing how such commodities accrue cultural value requires analysis of the ways in which the forms of their exchange bear upon their relative value in general.

Early Distinctions

Joshua Greenberg has argued that early video distributors "invented" home video, as companies like Magnetic Video were the first to conceive of using magnetic tape to play Hol-

[7] A similar argument regarding The Criterion Collection is made by Klinger, 60.

[8] This fact led Nicholas Garnham to identify distribution as the most important element to understanding the political economy of the media industries. Nicholas Garnham, *Capitalism and Communication: Global Culture and the Economics of Information*, ed. Fred Inglis (London: SAGE Publications, 1990), 161–162.

[9] As Marx wrote, "in production the members of society appropriate (create, shape) the products of nature in accord with human needs; distribution determines the proportion in which the individual shares in the product." Karl Marx, *The Grundisse* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 88–89.

lywood films.[10] Analogously, Facets and Kino invented the idea of art cinema for domestic consumption; founded after these companies, Zeitgeist followed suit and navigated both the traditional and home theater markets. In large part, they accomplished this by distinguishing themselves from a range of alternatives. Frederick Wasser and Greenberg have described how, in its beginnings, home video distribution was neglected by the Hollywood studios, thus allowing a number of independent companies to enter the emerging field.[11] Many early independent distributors gained their foothold by releasing "side-stream" content, including workout tapes and children's programming.[12] Simultaneous with these numerous startups that specialized in non-Hollywood material, there was also a confusing number of mergers and acquisitions, and a proliferation of sub-labels within labels.[13] Although the Hollywood studios did open their own in-house video divisions by the beginning of the 1980s, their efforts were varied and tentative. They largely served as defensive responses to the prolific number of independent video distributors and music distributors who entered the video market.[14] Only in some cases did Hollywood studios work in-house to get their content via magnetic tape to retailers, thereby allowing for a space for independent video distribution, and even sub-distributors, or "middle middle men."[15] Thus video differed from theatrical distribution structurally, and fairly quickly in its growth it adopted a model based on the music business, where studios worked through wholesalers to bring their product to retailers.[16] These early years, from about 1977 to 1982, represent a moment of turmoil, change, and growth.

Eventually, however, the Hollywood studios gained control of the market.[17] Through the 1980s, they increasingly tried to homogenize the video market with a two-tiered pricing scheme aimed to promote the newest releases.[18] Their consolidation was augmented through the late 1990s through the general application of revenue-sharing practices on the part of corporate video chains and independent stores that used Rentrak as their distributor. These services allowed stores to guarantee that new releases would be available on "opening" weekends. As these endeavors prioritized "new releases" and "hit films," the home video rental market was rendered increasingly Hollywood-centric.

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[10] Joshua Greenberg, *From Betamax to Blockbuster: Video Stores and the Invention of Movies on Video* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 7, 52–56.

[11] Frederick Wasser, Veni, Vidi, Video: *The Hollywood Empire and the VCR* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 10, 95; Greenberg. 2–3, 56–59. Wasser has profiled the development and fates of some of the more interesting independent video distributors, including Media Home Entertainment and Vestron. Wasser, l 06–107.

[12] For example, the Nostalgia Merchant released public domain classic films, while Goodtimes Home Video released the *Sweatin' to the Oldies* series of workout tapes. This historically followed the success of *Jane Fonda's Workout* in 1982. See Wasser, 125.

[13] The fan website *Critical Condition*, built and operated by Fred Adelman, provides a well researched visual documentation of a vast number of these companies, as well as brief narratives about their beginnings and eventual fates. Notably, Lionsgate Home Entertainment holds the rights to a large number of titles originally distributed by the independents. "Critical Condition: Obscure & Bizarre Films on Video & DVD," Critical Condition http://www.critcononline.com (accessed 11 July 11 2010).

[14] Greenberg. 56–57. Wasser, 96, has an excellent chart of the "stages" in which the studios entered video distribution.

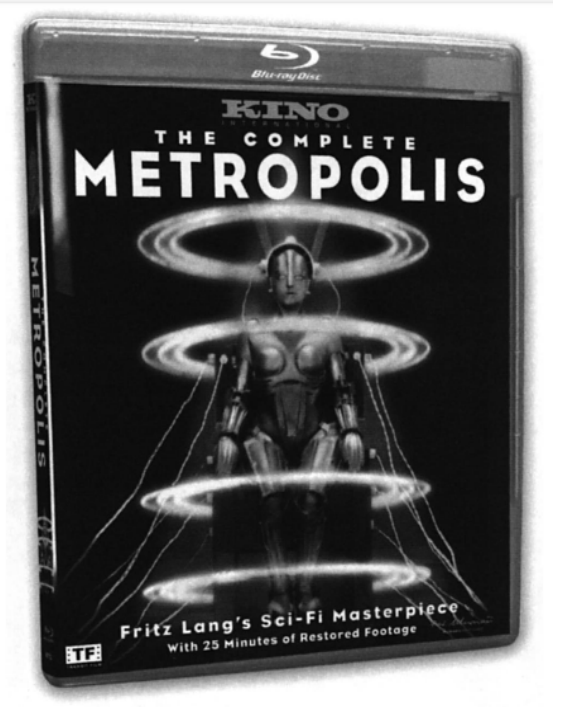
[15] Ibid., 95.

[16] Ibid., 143–152; Greenberg, 56.

[17] Wasser, 183–184; McDonald, 123.

[18] Wasser, 131–135.

It is amidst and in contradistinction to these conditions that Kino International and Facets Multimedia defined themselves, gaining economic viability and cultural prestige, and even economic viability through cultural prestige. They offered comparatively "better" titles than Hollywood releases, meaning more selective, less tied to Hollywood release schedules, and displaying an affection for the "classic" and the "artful." In this business approach, Kino and Facets also distinguished themselves from the bulk of other independent distributors at the time, who more often than not catered in public domain titles, horror films, or cheap action films, a fact that rendered the very phrase "direct-to-video" a signifier of second-rate content that still lingers today.[19] Just as they distributed movies, they distributed an idea about movies, and about what counts as quality cinema and quality home media.



Kino recently released a "complete" version of Metropolis in theaters and on home video, blurring the lines between "art house" and your house. (Photo credit: Kino International)

Founded in New York in 1976, Kino distributed silent and "classic" American films to the art house theaters of the time. They released respected foreign films as well, as they were licensed to release Janus Collection titles in theaters. Donald Krim bought the fledgling company in 1977. After earning a law degree, Krim worked in the "non-theatrical" department of United Artists, which handled film rentals to college campuses and similar non-traditional venues.[20] This provided experience in getting films to audiences, in marketing

[19] This was not and is not universally true, as seen for instance with the "Original Video (OV)" and "V-cinema" industries in Japan. Mark Schilling. *Contemporary Japanese Film* (New York: Weatherhill, 1999), 29.

[20] Eugene Hernandez, "Positioned for the Digital Future, Lorber and Krim Still Favor the Big Screen," *Indiewire.com*, 9 December 2009, http://www.indiewire.com/artic/e/positioned_for_the_digita/Juture_krim_lorber_stil/Javor_the_big_screen (accessed 11 July 2010).

non-conventional theatrical releases, and in understanding the audiences who had a taste for such fare. Kino's focus was cinema that was thought to be "classic" rather than old, films that had earned prestige previously through awards or critical acknowledgment, such as films by Charlie Chaplin and Alfred Hitchcock. By the time Kino started its home video distribution division in 1987, they were already associated with quality cinema, "quality" here meaning American films from the past that remained historically important or aesthetically impressive, and foreign films both classic and new.

Facets Multimedia had similarly humble but distinguished beginnings. The company was founded in 1975 by Milos Stehlik and Nicole Dreiske as a film exhibition center in Chicago, which focused on international and American art cinema, non-Hollywood children's films, and experimental live performance.[21] By the early 1980s, however, the operation expanded to include an adjacent video rental store that specialized in "art house" fare as well as the distribution of art cinema titles on video. Stehlik set Facets, like Kino, apart within the field of media distribution at the time by treating movies on video as, in his terms, "cinema." Also like Kino, Facets began in the days before the VCR became a viable option for media consumption, and so worked within a frame of reference for "quality" cinema that derived from the celluloid and theater based context. Both companies thus upheld the notion that cinema is made for artistic rather than simply commercial or entertainment purposes, and displaced this notion from celluloid and the art house theater onto magnetic tape and the VCR. Their vision was to provide for the art house in your house.

Although newer and smaller than these other two companies, Zeitgeist Films has operated in an analogous manner and carved a comparable cultural space for itself. The company was formed in 1988 in New York, when, according to a producer there, the art house market remained viable, even if it was small and facing serious challenges. Unlike Kino and Facets, Zeitgeist still thinks of itself primarily as a theatrical release company, with home video being a necessary but adjacent element of their operations. One producer at Zeitgeist acknowledges the company's mission and stature by saying it does "boutique on a budget." They typically only release about six movies in theaters each year. Nevertheless, as they eventually distribute all their theatrical releases on home video, as well as a handful of titles for which they do not handle theatrical release, they remain an important name in the specialty video market.

Qualities of Quality and Techniques of Taste

Cultural distinction does not guarantee success. The owners and operators of Kino, Facets, and Zeitgeist had experience in the art house theatrical market. Their intervention was in attempting to bring this conception to a new technol ogy and into a new social pattern of use. In order to succeed, there needed to be a coordination among these distributors with a larger public, a set of retailers and customers who were amenable to conceiving of home video in similar terms. This suggests an alignment among social fields in which cultural goods accrue particular values; Pierre Bourdieu's work on social fields, taste, and cultural stratification is instructive on this point. "Taste," he famously wrote, "is a practical mastery of *distributions*

[21] Milos Stehlik quoted in Jason Guerassio, "Facets Multi Media," *Independent Film and Video Monthly* 26.6 (July/August 2003): 25.

which make it possible to sense or intuit what is likely (or unlikely) to befall... an individual occupying a given position in social space" (emphasis added).[22]

He elaborated how such taste values, or "dispositions," operate in the world of cultural production and circulation, and two elements of this seem particularly germane in the context of specialty home video distribution. First, he differentiates between "large-scale" and "restricted" production.[23] Where large-scale production "submits to the laws of competition for the conquest of the largest possible market, the field of restricted production tends to develop its own criteria for the evaluation of its products."[24] Second, this process of production and of the production of value resonates with a larger social sphere. For both the commercial and art minded cultural producer, he writes, the "ultimate and often indefinable principle behind his [sic] choices finds itself continually strengthened and confirmed by his perception of the selective choices of authors and by the representations authors, critics, the public and other publishers have of his function within the division of intellectual labor."[25] The specialty distributors discussed here have behaved analogously to the publishers of "classic" literature described by Bourdieu, by having actively fostered exclusivity, cosmopolitanism, intellectualism, and social activism. These characteristics resonate with elite and academic conceptions of film-as-art. Although these qualities of "quality" often overlap, they are identifiable in specific, concrete techniques undertaken by these distributors. Further, they used their accrued cultural capital to move from one technology to another and from one social use of media to another. In this respect, they have not just coordinated with a social formation, but altered it.

What Bourdieu calls "restricted production" aligns most readily with the quality of *exclusivity.*[26] The Criterion Collection has developed this strategy quite remarkably, as they only have around 500 film titles under their banner, but it is practiced by Kino International and Facets as well. Kino distributes a broad range of titles, including silent classics (the films of Buster Keaton), American independent cinema (*Daughters of the Dust*, Julie Dash, 1994), and "The Best of World Cinema" (*Himalaya*, Eric Valli, 2000). This breadth could appear to convey a sense of inclusiveness rather than exclusivity. Facets would also appear to be anything but restrictive at first glance, as they handle the distribution of over 70,000 titles. However, in both cases, the companies reveal rather strict parameters on what they release, namely movies that are outside the contemporary mainstream and that have pretensions of refinement. Although circumscribed by economic necessity, each company selects and promotes a rarified cinema.

In the case of Kino, this exclusivity is in part derived from their strong relationship with film archives and preservationist institutions. Specifically, Kino has been able to "branch out," in the words of one company employee, into American independent and contemporary world cinema because they have such a solid base in silent film classics from across the

[22] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 466.

[23] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 115.

[24] Ibid., 115.

[25] Ibid., 134.

[26] Exclusivity is not unique to "high quality" cultural production in the contemporary period. Low-brow video distributors, such as Something Weird Video, regularly make similar claims to exclusivity. Jeffrey Sconce has discussed the use of high-brow strategies by low brow cultural producers in ""Trashing' the Academy: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style," *Screen* 36.4 (Winter 1995): 371–393.

world. Although they lost access to the Janus Collection films to the Criterion Collection, Kino behaves similarly to Criterion by relying upon a stable base of classics that can be sold and resold on a regular basis, such as *Battleship Potemkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925) or the box-set *The Movies Begin*, which features a vast number of films representing all manner of early cinema. In the latter case, as well as with such collections as *Edison: The Invention of the Movies*, Kino's ongoing good relations with the Motion Picture Collection at George Eastman House is vital. The company has worked with this archive and others, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in order to obtain high-quality prints of films that have been previously consecrated. As Kino has successfully promoted these titles in the home video market, representing their interests and those of their institutional affiliates, these institutions then help Kino with subsequent projects, creating a virtuous circle of status and quality.

Another way that these companies maintain a sense of exclusivity is through their access to international cinema at film festivals and the distribution markets that occur there; moreover, this process conflates the sense of exclusivity with that of *cosmopolitanism*. Kino International regularly sends representatives to the festivals at Rotterdam, Toronto, Cannes, and Sundance, and Zeitgeist like wise sends scouts to these festivals and others that cater in international art cinema, such as Berlin. Certainly, this is not a surprising practice on their part, as the markets at international film festivals have served as crucial links between the production and consumption of world cinema for many years. The point is that by entering these markets and engaging in these social arenas, these companies position themselves in competition with larger distributors, such as the specialty divisions of the major Hollywood studios, which often focus on theatrical distribution. Even more importantly, participation in these festival markets aligns these video distributors with a stratum of cinema culture where select films gain early approval and cultural consecration. This puts Kino and Zeitgeist in a privileged position to internalize and subsequently disseminate the values regarding cinema fostered at these festivals.

Facets combines exclusivity with cosmopolitanism in a different manner. It should be noted that Facets does not in fact distribute the 70,000 titles they have access to; the majority of these titles are actually distributed by other companies, including Kino and Zeitgeist among others, and Facets serves as the wholesaler that brings these commodities to market. In terms of the titles they distribute themselves, Stehlik says that Facets takes a "curatorial" approach, seeking out and filling holes in the home video landscape. In practice, this can mean a single film title that is not available, but more often it means films produced in certain areas of the world that are under-represented in the North American market. Stehlik opposes this to what he calls the "clearinghouse" models adopted by Amazon and Netflix. As of today, he has said, "Facets Video hosts three exclusive video lines: Accent Cinema, a world cinema label that has particular strengths in Europe; Cinemateca, a Spanish world cinema label that features films from Spain and Latin America; the Facets Video label, a world cinema label that has particular strengths in Middle Europe, the Middle East, and American independents." Stehlik has said that they acquire "between twelve to eighteen films annually for exclusive release on the Facets label; [and] another twenty for exclusive distribution, and four to five thousand new titles every year for nonexclusive distribution." Whereas Kino offers "The Best in World Cinema," (although they demonstrate a particular strength in Russian cinema), and whereas Criterion provides a highly restrictive selection of "A-list" foreign films, Facets

has carved a niche within niche home video by distributing films from areas that are more under-represented than other more recognized national cinemas. Stehlik has publicly emphasized Facets's exclusivity, stating, "it is very difficult [for Facets] to distribute independent features that aim at a broad, middle-brow audience and which emulate Hollywood films or television. There are other distributors that are perfectly capable of moving these films into the marketplace."[27]

Whether dealing with their own titles or those that they wholesale for other distributors, Facets has been instrumental in distributing exclusive, cosmopolitan, and generally *intellectual* notions of cinema through their catalogue. Indeed, one can find that the ingenious organization of many specialty video stores actually conforms to categories instituted in the Facets catalogue, which generally follows accepted typologies of national cinemas and auteurs. For many years a print publication, the catalogue is now only online; they issued their last paper catalogue in 2007. Although the catalogue is accessed differently as a result, the logics about "cinematic quality" initiated in the print catalogue have maintained in the transfer to the digital format. As opposed to mainstream distributors and wholesalers such as Ingram Entertainment Inc., Video Products Distributors, Inc. (VPD), or Rentrak, which uphold a "new release" mentality that is reflected in the volume of New Release shelf-space in corporate chain stores, Facets's catalogue is quite particular in its categorization. As just one example, within the "European Cinema" division of the online catalogue, one finds a plethora of subdivisions, organized either by recognized directors, such as Tony Gatlif or Agnes Varda, or by country, such as Irish cinema or Norwegian Cinema.[28] This highly refined partitioning of cinema accords with the impulse toward taxonomization found in scholarly approaches toward film and other visual arts. Further, it helps to inform retailers and, eventually, video store browsers who must navigate (perhaps with the assistance of a clerk) these categories in order to find a specific title.

Somewhat similarly, Zeitgeist upholds a film-as-art notion of home video through their work with a small but specific selection of renowned world cinema auteurs. Two of the most notable are Atom Egoyan, particularly his early features, and Guy Maddin, with whom Zeitgeist apparently has an exclusive relationship due to longstanding positive interactions. This auteurism is quite personal in some cases. Because Zeitgeist simply does not have much money to devote to the production of extra features, they rely on the filmmakers themselves for "bonus" material. On the one hand, this renders their relationship with select directors intimate, but on the other hand, and as a consequence, the intellectual and creative singularity of these directors is reinforced by their involvement in the DVD production and marketing processes.

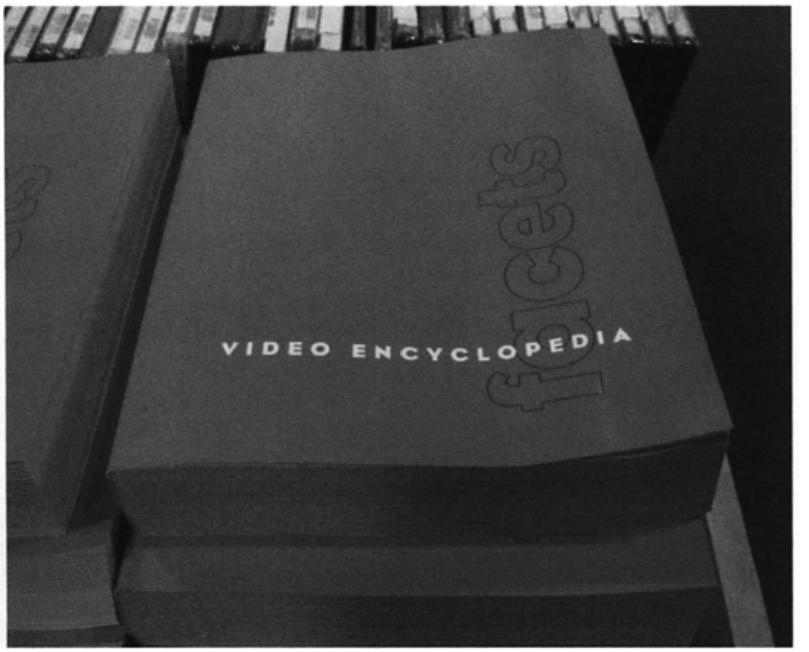
James Kendrick argues that The Criterion Collection constitutes a video archive of "important" films, and is able to consecrate its selected released as important films,[29] thus prompting consumers to evaluate the merits of *The Seventh Seal* (Ingmar Bergman, 1957) in relation to *Armageddon* (Michael Bay, 1998) and the *Beastie Boys Video Anthology* (various, 2000). What is the criterion, indeed? Alternatively, Kino, Facets, and Zeitgeist leave little question as to why

[27] Quoted in Guerassio, 27.

[28] "Browse All Genres," Facetsmovies.com, http://www.facetsmovies.com/user/movieBrowseByType.php(accessed 17 June 2010).

[29] Kendrick, 125.

their films hold value, particularly intellectual value. Kino does not constitute an archive, but rather provides access, for a price, to existing film archives and their ongoing efforts at film preservation and restoration. Facets is not precisely an archive either, except perhaps at their rental location in Chicago, but rather is a disseminator of conceptual categories by which to organize the otherwise unruly mass of non-Hollywood cinema. And although Derek Jarman may not command the same recognition as, say, Akira Kurosawa, Zeitgeist's adherence to an auteurist approach to their titles demonstrates a general faith in film-as-art (hence the need for a film artist) and a pseudo-academic impulse to categorize films according to a preconceived



The Facets Video Encyclopedia not only provides capsule reviews of innumerable films, it also functions as a catalogue for these titles, listing their price. The Encyclopedia is organized mainly by nation and director.

shared sensibility. Most blatantly, perhaps, Zeitgeist reveals an intellectualist approach to home video through their release of documentaries about contemporary philosophers and social theorists, including their films *Derrida* (Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman, 2002) and *Zizek!* (Astra Taylor, 2005).

The intellectualism disseminated by these companies is also internal to them as a general working philosophy and institutional objective. Many if not most of the producers and other employees at Kino and Zeitgeist have degrees in Film and/or Media Studies, and in personal interviews these subjects will cite this educational history as important to their current work. Milos Stehlik of Facets proclaims overtly that media education should be a mandatory element of pub lic education and should begin quite early in children's curricula. The emphasis on children's media at Facets, a genre that the company has promoted almost since its beginnings through the Chicago International Children's Film Festival, testifies to the company's sense of media as *enrichment* rather than entertainment. Indeed, in 1996 they released the *Facets*

Non-Violent, Non-Sexist Children's Video Guide.[30] This title presents a category of opposition more than of affiliation.[31] They also offer film appreciation classes at their Cinematheque on a regular basis, including such courses as "Cinema and Surveillance" and "Odd Couples: The Buddy Comedies of Billy Wilder." Facets's position is seen even more clearly in their status as a "non-profit, 501*(C)*3 organization, and a leading national media arts organization... [and their] mission is to preserve, present, distribute, and educate about film."[32] Their status as a cultural, educational institution has been recognized by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Illinois Arts Council, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Chicago Community Trust, and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, all of whom support Facets with funding. The website for the National Film Registry provides a link to Facets below the question, "How do I obtain DVDs or videos of National Film Registry titles?"[33]

The intellectual pedigree embodied within these companies coordinates with and flows outward through their sales to educational institutions. As Stehlik recalls, the video transition of the 1980s devastated the market for 16mm film rentals, which teachers at both high school and university levels used regularly. Consequently, he states, many educators relied on Facets's video releases; apparently, they recognized and affirmed the sense of intellectual value Facets saw in these movies. In the case of Kino, it is their strength in silent cinema that makes them particularly valuable to universities with film history courses. One Kino employee states that the company's silent film packages, for instance, are "tailor made for college classes"; one thinks immediately not only of the Edison shorts or *The Movies Begin*, but also about Kino's releases of such film history standards as *Intolerance* (D.W. Griffith, 1916), *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927), or *The Thief of Bagdad* (Raoul Walsh, 1924).

This academic affinity suggests the creation and sustaining of a virtuous "circle of belief,"[34] if not an outright homology, among different social fields. Specifically, the value of cinematic art developed in cinematheques coordinates with that cultivated in academic settings, film festivals, and among cinephilic video storeowners. Kino, Facets, and Zeitgeist harmonized with these social fields and helped to deliver the sense of cinema developed there into the video store, into the home, and even back into the classroom. The social function of these companies in fact constitutes a soical activism. Facets's protectionist approach toward children's media has already been noted. Zeitgeist, alternatively, demonstrates a vaguely left-leaning but vehemently anti-corporate, anti-big-media agenda through their release of select documentary films, a disposition that accords with their own position vis a vis the mass media. Titles such as *The Corporation* (Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbott, and Joel Bakan, 2003), *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media* (Mark Achbar and Peter Wintonick, 1992), *A Place Called Chiapas* (Nettie Wild, 1998), and *Trouble the Water* (Tia Lessin and Carl Deal, 2008) all attest to Zeitgeist's strategic commercialization of activist media production.

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[30] Virginia Boyle, ed., *Facets Non-Violent Non-Sexist Children's Video Guide* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1996).

[31] This implicitly evokes Bourdieu's assertion that, "in matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation." Bourdieu, Distinction, 56.

[32] "About Us," Facets.org, http://www.facets.org/pages/aboutus.php (accessed 17 June 2010).

[33] "National Film Preservation Board: National Film Registry," http://www.loc.gov/film/filmnfr.html (accessed 17 June 2010).

[34] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 77–78.

Even more than externalizing and projecting a particular political agenda, these companies demonstrate activism within the social field of independent media that they inhabit and sustain. In addition to the formal education that many employees at these companies attained, a large number of them have also circulated within a larger "indie" media sphere where cinephilia itself was a functioning ideology. During or after getting their college degrees, a number of these employees worked at independent video stores. As with many current and former video store workers, they remark upon the social interactions occurring at the video store as important elements of this position, making it more than just a job but closer to a vocation. One producer "admitted" to being a film buff, "guilty as charged."[35] Another distribution employee asserted that working at an independent specialty video store was vital to engendering a sense of cinematic breadth and eclecticism as *collective* values. "People who worked [there]," he stated, "felt very passionately about films and that was the place to be to be around people who felt similarly."[36] The strength of this harmonization is demonstrated particularly well by the fact that the primary sales representative for one of the companies was once the buyer at one of the largest and most respected independent video stores in the country. Here, a perfect reversal of roles reflects the interchangeability of the attitudes shared by each position.

This shared sensibility of media quality-for the sake of quality-regularly guides the choices and activities of these companies, making it a *de facto* mission and operating logic. It can be formalized, as in the case of Facets's status as a non-profit arts organization. "You have to build your own infrastructure," says Stehlik, "if you want to do something in mainstream culture."[37] More often, how ever, this sense of activism is informal and internalized. Given the financial constraints put upon both Kino and Zeitgeist, they cannot afford conventional market research or intense promotion of their product. Instead, they must gamble on the possibility that their clients and customers share their taste. At Kino, this can mean trying to repeat the success of one of their "hits," such as with their continuing line of avant-garde films from the pre-WWII period. Zeitgeist similarly has to do a bit of guesswork in predicting what will work for the company, but this guesswork is offset by past successes as well as the cultural capital that gets embodied by the individual employees and institutionalized through their decisions and actions. Although generally distributing documentaries, select auteur films, and independent art cinema, it is often chance and a producer's taste that guides the selection of film titles at Zeitgeist. In the words of one pro ducer there, who formerly worked at Criterion, one simply has to "believe" in the movies that they choose; they must feel a passion for them, or else the uphill battle against the economic limitations of niche cinema would be overwhelming. As Zeitgeist has no formal market research tools, they claim to generally "know" their market, basing their assumptions on past successes. Here, the "circle of belief" functions as a taste-based business model. Their faith in art cinema goes hand in hand with a faith that this is a disposition that they share with their customers. They trust that they will have customers because they are the kind of people who would be their customers.

[35] Anonymous specialty video distribution worker, interview with Jacob Mendel. 10 April 2009.

[36] Ibid. 25 August 2009.

[37] Milos Stehlik, interview with Peter Alilunas. 25 June 2009.

The Future: Where Art...Art?

Kino, Facets, and Zeitgeist thus contended with the challenges of the changing home video landscape over the last twenty-five years. Each has managed to succeed in creating an identity for themselves, which in turn helped them create bridges from art house theaters to domestic media consumption and then from VHS to DVD. But media distribution is undergoing yet another transformation. In a recent *Los Angeles Times* article, the head of Home Entertainment at Sony Pictures acknowledged that DVD sales were declining rapidly, that Redbox was causing industry confusion, that Blu-ray was likely never to have the same impact as DVD, and that digital downloading showed "nice growth."[38] Six years after Chris Anderson discussed the development of the "long tail," by which digital and semi-digital distribution systems facilitated the proliferation and economic feasibility of niche media, there has indeed been a proliferation of new means for the dissemination and consumption of moving images.[39] This has caused as much experimentation as was seen in the early days of home video, as the Hollywood studios and other major content providers assess new techno logical possibilities, such as internet streaming and VOD, and economic models, such as subscription-based access to content. On the one hand, not all of these transformations are positive for the majors. As one Home Entertainment execu tive for a major Hollywood studio stated, "from my perspective, the deals that the Hollywood studios have cut with Netflix on their streaming model I think are some of the single worst business decisions that the studios have ever made in the industry of home entertainment," due to the fact that it keeps people from going out and spending money on new releases.[40] On the other hand, given their established position within the media business as well as their economic power, it does seem inevitable that the major players in media distribution, including the Hollywood studios, Ingram, and VPD, will continue to navigate and shape the way content flows across screens, from Hulu to streaming Netflix, to Pay Per View, to YouTube.

But what does this mean for the eclectic boutique art-cinema distributors like those discussed above? Content-wise, these companies have been part of the "long tail" before such a thing was identified. Facets, in fact, instituted a "long tail" model for bringing their product to market in the days before digital technology, as they have provided a rent-by-mail system through their rental location since 1983. In this way, they served a more geographically dispersed clientele than simply the renters in Chicago, getting art cinema on VHS and DVD to customers without a specialty video store in their vicinity. But these companies are confronting new technological changes as well. Like the Criterion Collection, all three are now making ventures into the Blu-ray DVD market, despite the additional costs and somewhat marginal benefits of this technological change. In this, they are betting on the fact that their established brand identities, which signify cinematic quality, will coordinate with a new industry standard that promises technological quality. And like previous ventures, they release Blu-ray editions based on their DVD track record; Kino is offering films by Buster Keaton (*The General*, 1936,

[38] Ben Fritz, "Sony Pictures' David Bishop: In the Thick of Home Entertainment's Evolution," Los Angeles Times, 18 February 2010, http://articles.latimes.com/2010/feb/18/business/la-fi-ct-facetime18-2010feb1B (accessed 2 May 2010).

[39] Chris Anderson, "The Long Tail," *Wired*, October 2004, http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.10/tail.html (accessed 2 May 2010).

[40] Personal interview with anonymous Hollywood executive, 18 March 2010.

and *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, 1928) and Wong Kar-Wai (*Fallen Angels*, 1995), while Facets is offering a more limited number of titles, taking a "wait and see" approach to new media technologies.

But the real elephant in the room of home video distribution is VOD and internet streaming, and all three of these companies are cautious, even hesitant, in their approaches toward these delivery systems. One possible model for new media art cinema can be seen in the website called Mubi, which was originally called "The Auteurs" in an interesting gesture toward quality. On this website, one can stream any number of both classic art house films as well as more contemporary prestige pictures. The company was formed in 2007 with funding from Goldman Sachs, and it was conceived as an online outlet for "under distributed films." More importantly, the goal was to overcome time-space barriers for people who like art cinema, so that one could watch "*In the Mood For Love* in a cafe in Tokyo on your laptop," for instance.[41] Although the original intent of Mubi was to make such movies available for free, the vast majority of their offerings cost around $3. Unlike other distribution models, including some online firms, Mubi does not ask for any minimum from the rights holders in payment for the service of putting the movie online, and they split the revenue fifty-fifty with the rights holder of any film that gets streamed. Notably, Mubi partnered early on with The Criterion Collection, allowing them to distribute a selection of Criterion films. Criterion even allows the website to stream six of their films for free each month. Kino International has also partnered with Mubi, so one can stream a number of their films as well. These partnerships aim to expand the technological bounds of quality cinema by drawing upon existing cultural wealth, and this could simultaneously consecrate the Mubi website itself as a new site for the production of cultural wealth.

In terms of a practical cultural logic, Mubi exists in the realm of the long tail, but in a significantly different way than something like Netflix. In their own terms, Mubi takes a "strategic approach" by being very selective about titles and only offering a restricted number. Accordingly, Mubi, like Criterion or Zeitgeist, aims to create a sense of value out of exclusivity. This endeavor is tricky on the internet, of course. One worker at Mubi even admits that, in use, the website serves as a tool of discovery rather than a tool of viewing for most visitors; people go there to pre-shop for their DVDs. But, through the social networking and chat forum features on the Mubi website, they also allow for interactions around media that are not immediately reduced to commercial transactions. In this way, the website distributes both movies as well as a discourse around them; given their infrastructure, Mubi may indeed indicate how notions of restricted, exclusive, and prestigious forms of media wealth could circulate more widely. If we are to believe the techno-utopian hype, art cinema—from the art house to your house—will soon be everywhere and nowhere in particular.

Thus we find another instance of the transfer and transformation of quality cinema from one techno-social formation to another, and with it another moment of danger for the cultural industries. Mubi, like Facets, Kino, and Zeitgeist before them, demonstrates how, in the realm of cultural production, the distribution of wealth necessarily intertwines with distribution as a process of exchange and commodity circulation. Although in classical Marxist critical political economy the circulation of capital has as its objective the realization of surplus value, the apparent generation of money from money, "circulation" in the cultural

[41] "About," *Mubi.com*, http://mubi.com/about (accessed 12 August 2010).

realm necessarily involves *ideas* of value, values about value. And these values are not stationary either; the circulation of cultural commodities does not merely put into motion money and objects, but also competencies, tastes, and practices of use. These all must circulate as well. For their part, Kino, Facets, and Zeitgeist all distributed quality as a quality and helped cinephiles feel at home at home.

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CHAPTER 22

SoundCloud and Bandcamp as Alternative Music Platforms

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Abstract

We examine two "producer-oriented" audio distribution platforms, SoundCloud and Bandcamp, which have been important repositories for the hopes of musicians, commentators, and audiences that digital technologies and cultural platforms might promote democratization of the cultural industries, and we compare their achievements and limitations in this respect. We show that the emancipatory elements enshrined in SoundCloud's bottom-up abundance are compromised by two elements that underpin the platform: the problematic "culture of connectivity" of the social media systems to which it must remain integrally linked and the systems of intellectual property that the firm has been increasingly compelled to enforce. By contrast, it seems that Bandcamp has been relatively stable in financial terms while being at odds with some key aspects of "platformization," and we explore the possibility that some of the platform's apparent success may derive from how its key features makes it attractive to indie musicians and fans drawn to an independent ethos. Nevertheless, we argue that even while in some respects Bandcamp acts more effectively as a cultural alternative than does SoundCloud, Bandcamp is also congruent economically and discursively with how platforms capitalize on the activity of self-managing, self-auditing, specialist, worker-users.

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Keywords

music streaming, music platforms, alternative music, electronic dance music, cultural platforms, skeuomorphism, multisided markets, digitalisation of music

Context and Approach

In this article, we examine two music platforms that over the past decade have been important repositories for the hopes of musicians, commentators, and audiences that digital technologies might achieve democratization of the cultural industries: SoundCloud and Bandcamp.

The significance of these platforms can only be established by placing them in the context of the broader development of platforms in the world of recorded music. Recorded music was the first major cultural industry to be transformed by online platforms. The practices and working lives of many musicians, not just established names, have been fundamentally altered by the rise of music streaming and social media (Baym, 2018; Haynes & Marshall, 2018). The use of music streaming services by consumers has grown rapidly in recent years, and all serious analysts now see them as central to the economics of the recorded music industry over the coming years. A small group of specialist music streaming services has become dominant, notably Apple Music, Spotify, and in the vast Chinese market, those offered by Tencent. The attraction of such services is the instant availability for consumers of huge catalogs of professionally produced music, either for free, with adverts interrupting the music, or for a monthly subscription fee, which as well as avoiding adverts, allows offline consumption of tracks saved to devices such as laptops and mobile phones. The services provide access to many thousands of playlists, based on artists, genres, and moods, some produced by algorithm and some by professional editors (they also allow for the creation and sharing of playlists by users). These platforms are the formalized inheritors of the well-funded but "extra-legal" (Nordstrom, 2007) peer-to-peer "pirate" services that sprung up in the first Internet boom of the late 1990s and early 2000s; most famously Napster, eventually closed down as a result of legal action by the "major" music business corporations (Sinnreich, 2014). Some such services or platforms persist but most digital consumption of music worldwide now takes place via the "mainstream" streaming services, in negotiated partnership with rights owners (mainly the majors).

However, there is another set of streaming services or audio distribution platforms which serve a somewhat different purpose, allowing free and easy uploading and labeling of digital files containing music, and seeking to provide a means by which musicians can find audiences without necessarily working alongside major and independent recording and publishing companies. They might therefore be characterized as "producer-oriented" platforms, as opposed to the "consumer-oriented" mainstream platforms. We use the term "producer-oriented" to refer to the fact that, compared with streaming services such as Spotify, they are designed in such a way as to encourage producers of music to upload content though they are also accessed widely by people interested in music who are not musicians, and have no ambition to act as producers. [1]

[1] It is easy for amateur and semi-professional musicians to use YouTube to upload their music. YouTube, because of its extraordinary multiplicity, does not fit easily into our categories of "consumer-oriented" and "producer-oriented" music streaming services.

The first major example of a "legal" producer-oriented web-based service that served as a means to connect musicians and other music producers with music audiences was Myspace, though it was also widely used for social networking among non-musicians. Myspace, established in 2003, rapidly declined in popularity and use as a social network after 2008, displaced largely by Facebook. Although Facebook continues to be widely used by musicians to share music and information, SoundCloud, launched from Berlin in 2008, and Bandcamp, launched in California also in 2008, have been much more significant as channels for musicians to reach audiences in the new musical ecosystem. Arguably, these sites represent the main way in which the hopes of digital optimists regarding new relations of musical production and consumption are embedded in the rapidly emerging "platformized" cultural world.

We begin by analyzing SoundCloud's efforts to create a "bottom up" platform devoted to sharing and connecting through music. We show how certain aspects of the service's interface appeal to electronic dance music and hip-hop musicians and their audiences because, whether consciously or not, they reflect commonplace practices and values in those genres. We also show that the sense of a demotic and interactive abundance that underpins the service is doubly compromised: first, because of the problematic "culture of connectivity" and data-mining that underpin social media and other platforms with social-media features, and second, because it must manage conflicts of interest between its users and rightsholders. SoundCloud, we explain, has failed to find stable ways of monetizing the rich mix of musics that make the site so attractive to its users. Seeking to respond to this failure, it has been forced to accept terms and conditions from the established mainstream music industries that seriously damage its claims to be distinct from, and alternative to, the mainstream consumer-oriented streaming platforms, particularly regarding the enforcement of intellectual property.

Bandcamp provides a revealing comparison. While it is not completely clear how well or badly Bandcamp performs in economic terms (see below), there have been no reports of financial difficulties. This seeming success may partly be explained by the facts that it operates with a small number of staff and does not need to make licensing agreements with key rightsholders to encourage use. Another possible factor, we suggest, is that its (partial) resistance to "platform" characteristics makes it attractive to musicians drawn to an "alternative" or independent ethos. Bandcamp, in other words, may be a successful alternative platform partly because, in significant respects, it is less like a platform than other key music services. Nevertheless, in some interesting ways, it is also congruent economically and discursively with how platforms capitalize on the activity of self-managing, self-auditing, specialist, worker-users.

To make the above arguments, we analyze the distinctive technological, political-economic, and business forms of these two platforms. Like other analysts of cultural platforms, we seek to draw upon insights from software studies, political economy of culture, and business studies (cf. Nieborg & Poell, 2018). However, our approach to the issue of the platformization of cultural production is distinctive. First, although we scrutinize the degree to which these platforms are influenced by understandings and practices associated with Big Tech, our focus on "alternative" sites such as SoundCloud and Bandcamp means extending the political-economic and socio-technical analysis of cultural platforms beyond those of the GAFAM oligopoly that dominates so much public and academic commentary on platforms and

platformization.[2] Second, we analyze how audio distribution platforms such as SoundCloud are associated with the "alternative" and "independent" cultures that have been so important to popular music over many decades. "Alternative" is a term widely used to refer to forms of culture, and forms of cultural production, that stand outside, or in opposition to, some kind of "mainstream," especially those associated with business corporations or the state (*Downing, 2000*), and that therefore in some way differ from, or challenge, conventional norms. In some cases, this involves nonprofit and cooperative forms of governance, in some it involves petty capitalism (*Mutibwa, 2015*). The notion of the musical "alternative" is strongly tied to "independent" or noncorporate and nonstate cultural institutions, especially record labels, distributors, and shops, and with a special focus on achieving greater degrees of collective autonomy and control for groupings of musicians, audiences, and others (*see Hesmondhalgh & Meier, 2015; Kruse, 2003*). Focusing on alterity and independence therefore requires attention to aesthetic, textual, and cultural values and practices, as well as to political economy, business practices, and software affordances. To assist with this analytical task, we also draw upon interviews conducted with musicians from various genres.

Such a focus on alterity and independence also demands consideration of the musical genre formations that are essential to understanding the meanings of music in modern societies (Brackett, 2016; Lena, 2012). We show how and why "producer-oriented" audio distribution platforms become associated with particular musical genres—Bandcamp with certain kinds of "indie" music, and SoundCloud with electronic dance music and certain subgenres of hip hop. This in turn allows us to place analysis of such platforms in the context of longer histories of efforts to create genre-based alternative business models for the production and circulation of culture in the name of democratization (Hesmondhalgh, 1998), thus deepening the historical field, and avoiding an emergent tendency in research and scholarship to see the onset of platforms as a totally new beginning for the cultural industries.

SoundCloud

The original aim of SoundCloud was to provide, in the words of its founders, "something that would enable artists to share and connect through music" (Ljung, 2017). It grew quickly in 2010 and 2011 to become the main way in which amateur and semi-professional musicians share music with potential audiences. SoundCloud is available and used across much of the world (Allington, Dueck, & Jordanous, 2015) and has a "highly shareable, highly social" (Mulligan, 2017) user interface, which easily links to mainstream social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. It incorporates many of the hallmark features of social media platforms, allowing for the following of other users, the reposting of tracks posted by other users (akin to Twitter retweets or Facebook sharing of posts), and the liking of tracks. As with social media, metrics are clearly and visibly displayed (e.g., number of followers, plays, likes, reposts), fostering user interaction, but often involving competitiveness and hierarchies of

[2] The widely used acronym GAFAM refers to five large tech corporations with massive global reach: Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft. Three of these firms (Google, Apple, and Amazon) own and operate popular consumer-oriented (as opposed to producer-oriented—see above) music platforms. Other popular and well-funded services such as Spotify and Deezer are not run by these major tech corporations, and so are "independent" in this (limited) respect, but they are likely to be vulnerable to takeover by the bigger companies.

users. Registered users of SoundCloud can upload audio content up to a limit of 2 hours for free, more if they pay subscription fees, and unlimited for "premium" subscribers.

For professional musicians, SoundCloud provides a sense of "a direct connection with fans unlike standard streaming services" (Mulligan, 2017). For emerging musicians aspiring to greater success, it offers "a global platform for reaching fans with no intermediary" (Mulligan, 2017). Like YouTube, SoundCloud engages millions of users who have no ambition to achieve professional success as content creators. But also like YouTube, the appeal of SoundCloud has been stimulated by stories of the platform's role in enabling ordinary users to achieve success and fame.[3] Still, the platform's ability to pave the way for success is often misunderstood, misrepresented, and mythologized. Perhaps the most widely cited case of a rise to musical fame via SoundCloud (e.g., Sisario, 2014) is the New Zealand artist Lorde, unknown when she posted her track "Royals" in October 2012, and an international superstar just a year later. Similar stories later surrounded the emergence of Billie Eilish as a global star (Duboff, 2019). As with stories about YouTube celebrity and Myspace stardom, the truth is often more complex. In fact, as Haynes and Marshall (2018, p. 1979) point out, Lorde had signed with Universal, the world's largest record label, 3 years before "self-releasing" "Royals" (see also Bertoni, 2013). What is more, even on producer-oriented cultural platforms, only a small number of users post their own music—around just 3% to 4% of consumers post music and/ or video to SoundCloud or YouTube according to one source (Mulligan, 2017). Nevertheless, as a result of its mix of amateur, professional, and semi-professional content, SoundCloud has an extraordinarily large and diverse catalog of music and other sound files, over 170 million tracks by 2017 (Lovejoy, 2017), far more than the roughly 40 million tracks available on Spotify (Nicolaou, 2018). In the words of one enthusiast, "it's music interaction and discovery distilled to its purest form, home to just as many famous artists as ones that will be soon" (Horn, 2014).

SoundCloud includes music, speech, and sound across many different genres, but it is particularly well known for electronic dance music (EDM), and hip hop (Allington et al., 2015; Caramanica, 2017). Some key values associated with EDM, and to a certain extent hip hop, are incorporated into SoundCloud's design and interface.[4] In particular, SoundCloud enshrines a sense of vernacular abundance which appeals to musicians and fans drawn to those genres. Core audiences of EDM and hip hop (including amateur and semi-professional musicians) have historically placed great value on the genres' ability to produce and sustain an ever-changing abundance of grassroots creativity. In the case of EDM, this has led to a relative emphasis on anonymity, manifested in the frequent use of multiple aliases by producers, and the downplaying of performers' visual images (Hesmondhalgh, 1998). The abundance

[3] Some commentators and users see much stronger parallels between SoundCloud and the video-sharing site Vimeo, than between SoundCloud and YouTube, on the basis that Vimeo does not carry adverts, allows for better audiovisual quality, and arguably contributes to a stronger sense of community among creators and users. When SoundCloud reorganized in 2017 in the wake of new investment, its new CEO and other senior executives came from Vimeo. The aim appeared to be to focus on monetizing the attachment of creators to the site, as Vimeo successfully had. See Kirn (2017).

[4] Some commentators have used the term "SoundCloud rap" to describe hip hop disseminated on SoundCloud and characterized by "lo-fi" and "distorted DIY production" (Scheinberg, 2017). At the time of writing, such tracks are by far the most popular form of music on SoundCloud. In this article, we focus more on electronic dance music (EDM), partly for reasons of space, and partly because some of the research on which this article is based was focused on that genre (Rauh, 2018).

has partly been made possible by use of low-cost digital technologies, including "bedroom" production on laptops, often based on sampling, remixing, mashups, and so on (see Rauh,

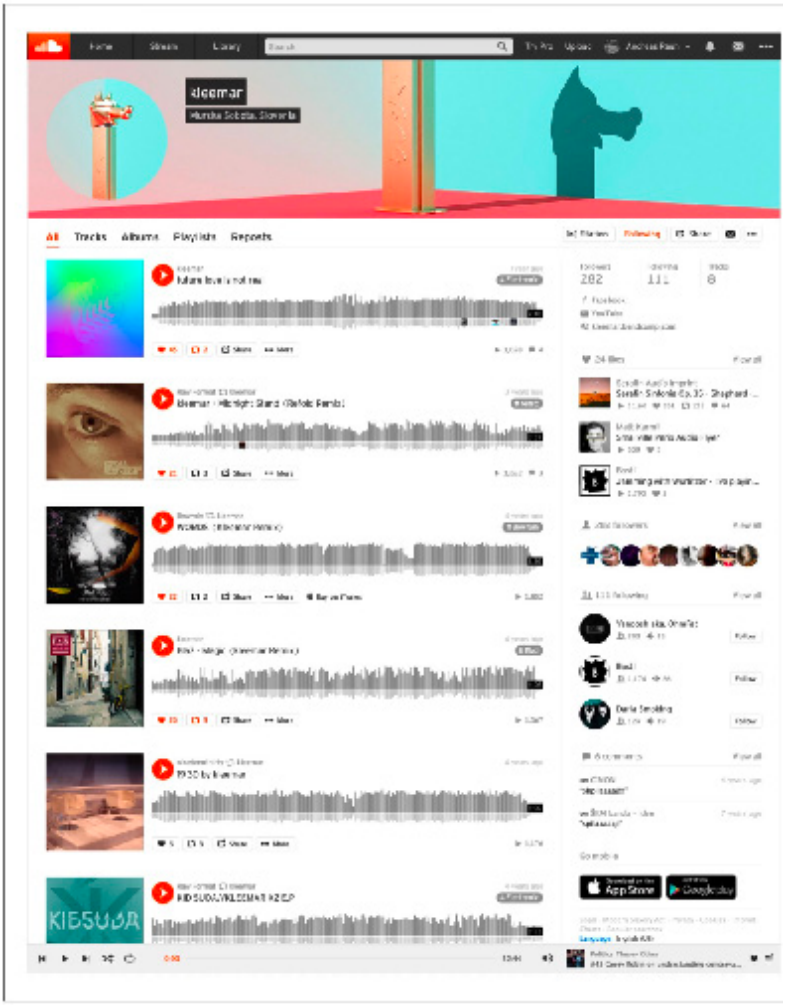


Figure 1. Detail from a profile page from SoundCloud, showing the lack of emphasis given to performer identity. (Screenshot of https://soundcloud.com/kleemar, accessed 24 April 2019, used with permission.)

2018).[5] Compared with other genres, such as jazz, rock, and indie, there is comparatively less focus on stable canons of revered historical figures, and great value is placed on the dynamism and ephemerality of the music and associated forms of sociality (Straw, 1991).

The de-emphasizing of performer identity is apparent in SoundCloud's design, in particular the visual prominence of music represented as a waveform (see Figure 1), but also in the way that amateur and semi-professional musicians are, at least in terms of presentation, given nominally equal billing with established and emerging professionals. As Figure 1 shows, musicians' profiles coexist in the same digital space. The waveform draws from practices in digital music (re)production, and in SoundCloud reflects conventions adopted by EDM and

[5] EDM and hip hop of course have star systems based on celebrity musicians and DJs, but this feature of the cultural industries is in constant tension with the high value placed on anonymity (Hesmondhalgh, 1998).

hip-hop communities. In those genre worlds, DJs have long relied on visual references to cue and mix tracks, latterly as waveforms displayed on the screens of digital turntables and laptops. Using audio software (digital audio workstations [DAWs] and virtual studio technology [VSTs]), music producers create tracks by manipulating loops and other audio content displayed as waveforms in the screens of computers. Moreover, the waveform symbolizes an engagement with computer-based music technologies, and such symbolism in itself is attractive to the technology-oriented users who are often drawn to EDM and hip-hop—musicians in these genres are "deeply invested in technology" (Farrugia & Swiss, 2005, p. 30) and dance music cultures were early adopters of online platforms for music distribution (Allington et al., 2015; Mjos, 2013). These musicians are largely enthusiastic, and at times utopian about new technologies, though critical dystopian views are also apparent.

Importantly, the waveform in SoundCloud is also a primary focus of social interaction because the platform allows registered users to post comments directly on it. These comments are timestamped, and are often used to convey information about sections in a track (or DJ mix) that have important meanings in EDM culture, such as *the drop* (when the bass line and kick drum (re-)enter the mix following an anticipatory build) (see Figure 2) or *the hook* in hip hop. In this way, SoundCloud embodies into its design distinctive forms of genre-specific interactivity, by allowing users to post comments on particular moments in tracks uploaded by amateur and professional musicians. Listeners can also interact with each other through the comments posted along the waveform. For amateurs and beginners, this interaction is often a valuable source of feedback (whether encouraging or discouraging; Rauh, 2018), and



Figure 2. Detail from a profile page from SoundCloud, showing the waveform and timestamped comments. (Screenshot of https://soundcloud.com/tahira/raca-tahira-rework, accessed 10th December 2018).

for professional musicians and their fans, it can enable a greater sense of "mediated intimacy" (Baym, 2018) and community, in ways not dissimilar to threads of discussion on a musician's Twitter feed.

In these various ways, SoundCloud involves a much greater sense of vernacular interactivity and reciprocity than the mainstream consumer-oriented platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music, and there are strong echoes of the hectic and tumultuous diversity of the peer-to-peer sites that have long been popular among EDM, hip hop, and other audiences, but that have become increasingly marginal as digital music has become integrated in consumer-oriented platforms.

However, SoundCloud's demotic, interactive, and apparently democratic abundance is compromised. Even as it seeks to convey an aura of peer-to-peer multiplicity, underpinning the platform's interactivity is social media's problematic "culture of connectivity," involving "a continuous pressure—both from peers and from technologies—to expand through competition and gain power through strategic alliances" (van Dijck, 2013, p. 21). That culture of connectivity also includes monitoring users' behavior and gathering data about music consumption, potentially available to third parties via Application Programming Interfaces (APIs); and, like other platforms based on "user-generated content," their business model depends on what can be characterized as the "free" or unpaid labor of users.[6] SoundCloud's rhetoric of sharing and connecting through music remains embedded in the political economy and culture of digital networks under capitalism, and various contradictions result from it.

This is clear when considering SoundCloud's history, and the platform's struggles to build a business model based on UGC and social media interaction. As is typical for a tech company seeking to establish itself as the main provider of a certain kind of service, SoundCloud has sustained considerable losses in the hope of achieving very large profits later, once it has established itself as the dominant platform within its particular market by matching high numbers of providers (and their content) with high numbers of users (and data about consumption practices; see below for more discussion of this multisided aspect of platforms). But the platform has proven unable to monetize the vast amounts of freely given content, which is largely obscure and/or unauthorized, thus leaving it at a disadvantage in a market dominated by consumer-oriented platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music. SoundCloud's capacity to earn revenue from the sales of targeted advertising is also limited because the platform does not have demographic (meta)data information associated with individual user behavior (Allington et al., 2015).

The problems facing SoundCloud demonstrate the continuing difficulties that capitalist businesses face in generating revenue from music-related online activity, even as they transform the ways in which music is distributed and consumed (Hesmondhalgh & Meier, 2018). By 2014, SoundCloud had "raised more than $100 million in venture financing from blue-chip investors" (Sisario, 2014) claiming 175 million regular users and valued itself at as much as US$700 million, as firms such as Twitter and Spotify showed interest in purchasing the company. In spite of its rather dubious claims to attract such high numbers of users, however, SoundCloud's revenues were "miniscule" up to 2014, and were derived almost entirely from "the fees it charges some of its most active providers" for storage space and data analysis (Sisario, 2014). For this reason, in 2014, SoundCloud began to sign deals with major music publishers, distributors, and artists so that they could attract advertising, and in 2016 began to offer a consumer-oriented subscription service along the lines of those run by

[6] There is no space to discuss the concept of "free" or unpaid labor here. See Hesmondhalgh (2015), for discussion of problems concerning the concept, including its relations to ideas of exploitation.

Spotify, Apple, and Tidal, entitling subscribers to advert-free music as well as offline access. It also sought and obtained further investment from its backers, but by 2017 SoundCloud was in serious trouble, making considerable losses, and attracting only 100,000 new consumer subscriptions. It laid off hundreds of workers in 2017, closing its San Francisco and London offices and, under a new Chief Executive, abandoned its efforts to compete with the major subscription platforms, and refocused towards catering to content producers, on the basis of selling "tools" (mainly data on user behavior and extra storage) to musicians for between US$70 and US$100 per year (Nicolaou, 2018). SoundCloud then seemed to recover, raising yet more investment in anticipation of a bid from a bigger rival such as Spotify (Nicolaou, 2018). Yet there is still skepticism from music industry commentators about its efforts to "reposition itself as a creator- first community" (Deahl & Patel, 2018). SoundCloud's future remains uncertain (Sanchez, 2018).

As a result of these developments, while SoundCloud maintains a reputation as a place where musicians—perhaps especially hip-hop musicians (Caramanica, 2017)—can go from obscurity to success and fame, thereby presenting itself as a "bottom up" challenge to the music industry, it has not been able to bypass the systems of intellectual property that underpin the music industries, and this has come to constrain its appeal to independent musicians. This is evident in SoundCloud's changing policies on "takedown" notices. For years, the company did little to police copyright infringements, claiming that as a platform it was protected by the US Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998, notably the "safe harbour" principle which determines that online intermediaries (whether "platforms" or Internet service providers) cannot be held responsible for user-generated content that infringes copyright.[7] However, as SoundCloud struck deals with major recorded-music companies (Universal, Warner, and Sony), it was compelled to take a far stricter stance with regard to unauthorized use of copyrighted material. It increased the number of takedown notices it issued and increased deletion of profiles of recurring offenders. To make matters worse, its content ID algorithm often seems to be inaccurate, leading to unjustified takedowns. While users can appeal, the process is opaque, increasing levels of anxiety and uncertainty among musicians (Rauh, 2018). This scenario places some users at great risk of having their profiles deleted, as is evident in the case of DJs who upload mixes and sets featuring unauthorized third-party content. Many DJs have migrated to other producer-oriented platforms (Rauh, 2018), such as Mixcloud, partly because the latter service is not so enthusiastic in enforcing takedown notices (O'Hear, 2018).

SoundCloud, then, faces a major problem: its most valuable asset is uploaded content made by those the company refers to as *core creators*, yet it must reinforce stricter copyright enforcement policies, because of its lack of power vis-a-vis the major record companies. In this respect, it is in a much more vulnerable position than YouTube, which, backed by its mighty Alphabet parent company, can approach infringement issues from a more powerful position. Having said all this, in SoundCloud's favor is the need of the recorded-music companies for a variety of online outlets for licensed music, so that outside China and India the mainstream consumer-oriented streaming services do not form into an oligopoly, or even a duopoly run by, say, Apple and Spotify, as is highly feasible. Moreover, the music industries as a whole rely on a constant influx of new talent and cultural products, and SoundCloud offers

[7] A similar principle was incorporated into European law in the form of Article 14 of the E-Commerce Directive of 2000.

a relatively inexpensive environment where musicians can experiment musically (which in EDM and hip hop rely on sampling and remixing) and build up followers and fans. Yet, current copyright enforcement policies on SoundCloud work against the common view among many EDM and hip-hop musicians of "fair use"; that is, as long as the authorship of sampled material is acknowledged and no negative impacts are incurred to the original artist (loss of revenue or reputation damage), there is a valid case for using copyrighted material without authorization. A different view prevails in the mainstream music industries, one with which SoundCloud is now forced to comply.

SoundCloud, then, is a remarkable cultural phenomenon, but its struggles suggest limits to hopes that a producer-oriented platform of this kind might be the basis of any significant democratization of musical production and consumption. Bandcamp provides an interesting comparison, precisely because its relative success seems to be based on ways in which it foregoes features of "platforms," at least in some understandings of that term.

Bandcamp

Bandcamp is a music sales website founded in 2008 by Ethan Diamond and Shawn Grunberger, developers with a successful track record in Silicon Valley (their webmail service Oddpost was bought by Yahoo! in 2004 for a reported US$30 million). While it launched in the same period as Facebook and Twitter, and comparable music-oriented platforms such as SoundCloud and Spotify, it has not grown at the rate of these former peers, and nor has it changed so substantially. It has also not taken the leap into market flotation enacted by these other larger platforms (SoundCloud being an exception at present, though not for the want of trying). Bandcamp received venture capital funding in 2010, from Brad Garlinghouse and True Ventures, but such financing does not seem to have substantially impinged on a stable business model that has been "profitable since 2012" (Bandcamp, n.d.-a). Although it has of late made some concessions to the rise of streaming (purchased releases can now be streamed through the Bandcamp mobile app), it is distinct from other major music platforms in that it primarily offers artists a digital storefront for sales of digital files, physical releases, and merchandise.

It is this distinctiveness we examine here, in the context of platformization. Bandcamp does define itself, in corporate filings to the State of California, as a "music platform" (Bandcamp, 2013), but in its more public-facing discourse, as well as through its interface and its business model, it operates in ways that seem deliberately counter to the approach of dominant music streaming services. This makes it an intriguing case of a potentially "alternative" music platform.

Economically speaking, Bandcamp is at odds with a key aspect of "platformization," namely, that it "brings about a shift from single- and two-sided markets to complex multi-sided markets" (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 428). Whether Bandcamp is one-sided or two-sided is a difficult question—economists generally agree that "sidedness" is a matter of "degrees" rather than an either/or distinction (see Filistrucchi, 2010, pp. 4–5)—but what is more pertinent is that its status as a "transaction platform" (as opposed to a "non-transaction platform") means that, across however many sides, Bandcamp is operating within one *single market system*: that of digital and physical music commodities.[8] It does not meaningfully engage in the "stacking"

[8] The key distinction here concerns the "neutrality" of the price structure; that is, the irrelevance of whether it

of markets so commonly associated with platforms. (The fact that Bandcamp offers musicians and consumers distinct "products" is not relevant here.[9])

Going by the quite specific technical definitions offered in some strands of "platform studies" (Bogost & Montfort, 2009), Bandcamp would fail to constitute a platform on the basis that it is neither programmable nor modular. Most notably, its API offerings are minimal, allowing users to access their own sales data and merchandise orders, but offering no real opportunities to work "with" the data (e.g., by connecting audience metrics to other datasets). Gillespie (2017) argues that it is "too late" to base the definition of "platform" on these technological criteria (i.e., the public understanding of the term has moved on), but it is notable that in its use of this basic, "level 1" API (Andreessen, 2007), Bandcamp strongly resembles older iterations of content distribution sites. And going by Gillespie's rather more socio-cultural definition, Bandcamp still lacks some degree of "platform-ness"; its recommendations system seems to be entirely editorial rather than algorithmic, and the site lacks the "culture of connectivity" that van Dijck (2013) notes is a hallmark of social media. It also has no advertising of any sort, and while this does not directly relate to its status as a platform—there are plenty of online platforms that operate without ads (see Scholz, 2016)—it does put Bandcamp in sharp contrast to the dominant online music (and media) streaming services, and also to the contemporary Internet as a whole.

In economic, technological, and socio-cultural terms, then, Bandcamp perhaps offers something akin to a "quasi-platform"; a static, Web 2.0-esque distribution service whose functionality has been rapidly outflanked by its former cohorts. And yet, as it enters its second decade, Bandcamp must be considered a relative success among a field littered with might-have-beens—if not quite a tech "unicorn," then at least a very sturdy workhorse (at the time of writing, Bandcamp mediates music sales totalling around US$7 million per month, 10%–15% of which goes directly to the site). Why has Bandcamp not gone the way of, say, Myspace, a music-focused site whose decline has been attributed to the lack of an expansive API (Helmond, 2015, p. 7)—essentially, a failure to "platformize"?

The answer is partly that Bandcamp offers capacities that hold specific value to the indie music practitioners who form its core user-base, and that these capacities relate directly to its "quasi-platform" status. A significant consequence of the lack of connectivity mentioned above is that artist pages are discrete entities—lacking, for instance, the autoplay function of SoundCloud that takes listeners from one artist to the next when a track is over. Releases on Bandcamp seem more fully "situated" than on streaming services, allowing for the creation of the "excess of symbolic meaning" that Barry Shank (1994) has argued is a key characteristic of local music scenes, such as the one he studied in Austin, Texas, in the 1980s (p. 122). One interviewed practitioner suggested that "it feels like when you go on a Bandcamp page, you can concentrate on what it is more. If it's a release, an album or EP or whatever, it feels more

is the buyer or seller who pays the platform. This is sometimes referred to as "pass through," since one side of the market is able to pass through its interaction costs to the other side (Filistrucchi, Geradin, van Damme, & Affeldt, 2014, p. 299). Rochet and Tirole draw on the example that "for a given level of VAT, it does not matter who, of the merchant and the consumer, is charged for it" (p. 648). Bandcamp's per-transaction fee is this kind of "neutral" exchange, and is quite distinct from a platform having to set a price structure that works for, say, advertisers, rightsholders, and consumers who do not directly transact with one another.

[9] To use Filistrucchi et al.'s (2014) example, a rental agency dealing with landlords and tenants operates in a single market, despite the fact that the products offered to each side are different: "a landlord trying to rent a flat would not usually be interested in visiting flats that are up for rental" (p. 303).

conceptually there, in the closest way possible I think to a physical release." One band observed that SoundCloud was for "viral streaming of individual tracks," whereas "with Bandcamp it's more like you make your own little space on the Internet"; another argued that "if Bandcamp is the full thing, the twelve-inch [album], then SoundCloud is the seven-inch [single]."[10] There are links to rock discourses of value here—the album as the nourishing meal, the single as calorific snack (Keightley, 2001, 2004)—but also to indie-specific values of materiality (physical productivity as the valorized "doing" in "do it yourself"), and insularity (the "do-it-yourself" [DIY] scene as something to be shielded and protected; see earlier citations, and Jones, 2018). It makes sense, then, that practitioners value how Bandcamp allows users their "own little space," rather than chasing the ephemeral (and quite uncontrollable) popularity of virality.

This emphasis on space also intersects with a specific notion of time. Because Bandcamp pages are relatively standalone, there is less fear that releases here will be cast adrift amid an unceasing flow of content. This offers an alternative to the hurried chronology of the "News Feed"—what Kaun and Stiernstedt (2014) call "Facebook time"—and this sense of relative permanence also extends to the overall site design. Bandcamp has a relatively stable and limited set of features, unlike Facebook's reactive approach in which rugs are frequently pulled from beneath users' feet as various components of the platform are redesigned, repurposed, or removed entirely (Bratton, 2015, p. 194). Here, there are notable connections with indie and punk practitioners' historical emphasis on "documentation" as a key aspect of their work (Azerrad, 2001, p. 132); the phrase "making a record" neatly carries this connotation of cultural output as archival work (or "record-keeping"). Bandcamp is a place where recordings feel like they will stick around, contributing to a historical lineage of self-made cultural artifacts—very different from the ephemerality and newness enshrined in SoundCloud, a focus on innovation congruent with some core values of EDM and hip hop.

Nieborg and Poell (2018) argue that platformization has brought about the "contingent" cultural commodity, defined as "malleable, modular in design, and informed by datafied user feedback, open to constant revision and recirculation" (p. 2). Popular music is certainly not immune to these processes—prominent examples include the iterative "albums" of Kanye West and Frank Ocean (Greene, 2016), or the rise of highly data-driven Spotify playlists both algorithmic and editorial (see Bonini & Gandini, this issue). But there are numerous reasons why the kind of "contingency" observed in the news and video game industries might be less readily adopted in music, including popular music's particularly strong emphasis on "authentic" expression (Frith, 1987/2007, p. 136). That larger issue of authenticity is beyond the scope of this article, but at the genre-specific level at least, it is clear that a malleable cultural commodity is ideologically incongruent with indie's emphasis on materiality, permanence, and insularity, and that Bandcamp provides these qualities to a substantially greater extent.

Bandcamp's limited utilization of data may be to some extent a matter of resources (i.e., their small staff may make certain kinds of data work infeasible), but it is at least partly a deliberate choice to offer a non-platformized aesthetic; Bandcamp advisor Andrew Dubber (2013) has used the phrase "behavioural skeuomorphism" to characterize the platform's conscious efforts to make the platform's interface look and feel like an old-fashioned, record-shop experience for consumers. Bandcamp's skeuomorphism also extends to a specific approach to metrics.

[10] The interview material utilized here is drawn from ethnographic research focused on the do-it-yourself (DIY) indie-punk scene in Leeds, conducted during 2015–2018 (see Jones, 2018).

While a few now-conventional metrics of a kind associated with social media platforms are available to Bandcamp page owners (plays, sales, and "buzz," with additional location details available to paying "Pro" subscribers), there is no public metric that is directly equivalent to "likes" or "followers." Perhaps the most important measurement on the site—the number of people who have purchased a release—is not given publicly in numerical form, but is instead represented pictorially, in the form of a collection of avatars of "fans" who have supported the artist (see Figure 3).

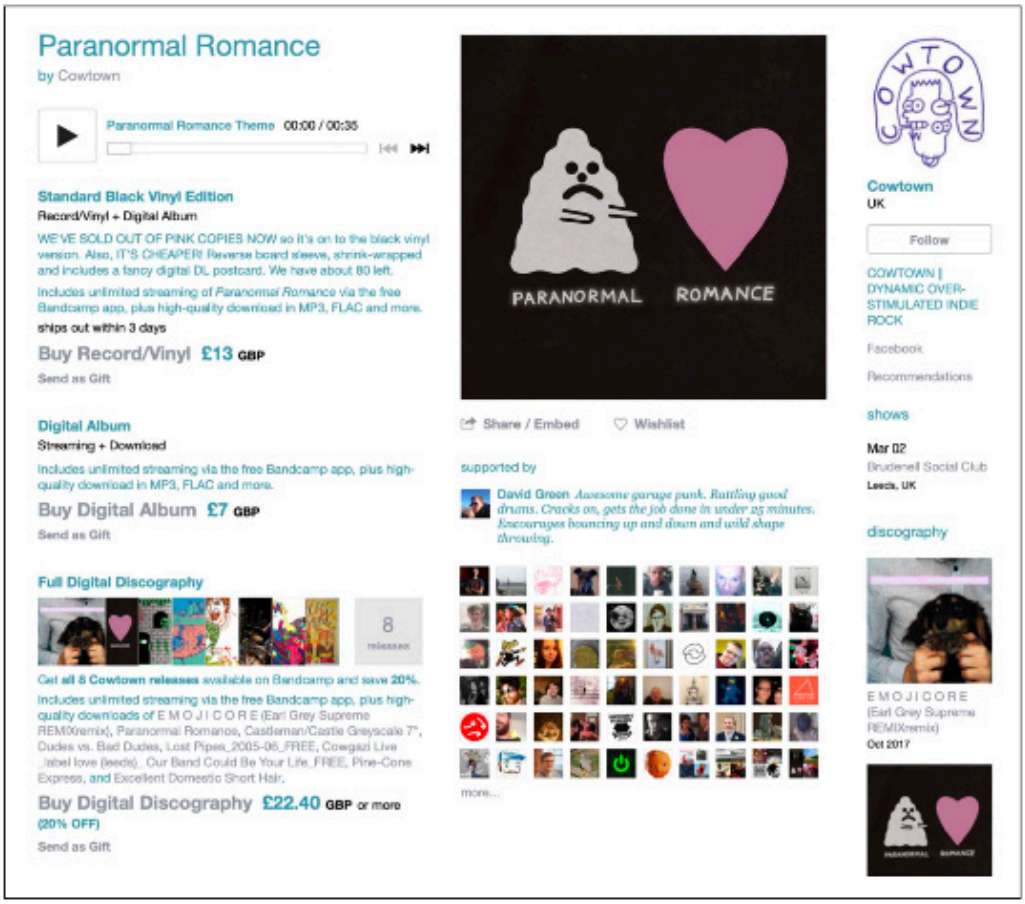


Figure 3. Detail from an Artist page on Bandcamp, showing a crowd of "fans," and any qualitative feedback left by them, beneath the album art. (Screenshot of http://cowtown.bandcamp.com, accessed 17th December 2018.)

Again, this approach is consistent with the ethical and aesthetic sensibilities of the indie musicians who populate the platform. These practitioners report finding conventional metrics at best "vaguely interesting" or "irrelevant," and at worst a source of anxiety and unwelcome comparison with other, bigger acts. The irrelevance of metrics here relates to the specific structure of small indie scenes (highly focused on the local), and also a not-for-profit ethos, which combine here to mean that the numbers are simply not that valuable (Jones, 2018). There is a strong desire to "translate" metrics back (*a la* Bolin & Andersson Schwarz, 2015),

to see their audience not as the instrumentalized connective "edges" of a social network, but as individuals with which to form communicative bonds. On Facebook Pages this means "clicking through" past their total number of likes to find meaningful relations to the local, material practice that still constitutes the primary "site" of their scene: "that's quite nice to be like, hey, I remember I saw that person last night, they've now come and found us [. . .] I like getting new Likes because you can relate it to those moments." Bandcamp's pictorial representation of fans—the opposite of the "faceless" numbers on mainstream platforms—makes it easier to locate meaning, creating a crowd scene out of individually discernible users, and thereby emphasizing the direct, intimate connection that indie musicians tend to valorize (Nguyen, 2012). This is not to say that feelings of competitiveness and status-seeking are eradicated—it isn't hard to approximately "add up" the number of avatars on display—but there is a clear affinity between Bandcamp and indie music here.

Bandcamp has, like SoundCloud, made some effort to bring the recorded music industry on-board, but this has been aimed primarily at larger indie labels, and therefore does not interfere with core platform dynamics in the same way as SoundCloud's contentious implementation of "content ID." The Bandcamp "Labels" tool, for example, which allows for an overview of multiple artist accounts, is utilized by large indies such as Merge and Sub Pop but is also organizationally beneficial for smaller scale "bedroom" labels. The platform's most recent "expansions," if they can be labeled as such, have included opening a bricks-and- mortar record store in Oakland, California, and collaborating with a record manufacturer to offer a "vinyl pressing service" to artists. These developments may hint toward aspirations of vertical integration, but the "old-school" focus on vinyl and record shops also emphasizes their positioning as music intermediaries rather than technologists, and this operates in tandem with their discursive emphasis on what we might call a "music ecology"—of which they declare the "streaming giants" to be the enemy (Bandcamp, 2018). Bandcamp argues that, "[s]ince we only make money when artists make a lot more money, our interests remain aligned with those of the community we serve" (Bandcamp, n.d.-a).

Such an approach perhaps points to the limited scope of current perspectives on platforms from economics. The starting assumption of the two-sided market theory is that platforms connect actors from different markets who have no interest in each others' welfare (Rochet & Tirole, 2006, p. 646). Newspapers connect audiences and advertisers but, to use Filistrucchi's (2010) neat example, "it would surprise the news agent if you also asked, in addition to the price of the newspaper, the price of an advertising slot in the newspaper" (p. 4). In this framing, the cross-side network effects generated by platforms are a kind of accidental fallout of individuals acting out of self-interest. Bandcamp's business model is less about generating sufficient critical mass to generate such "accidental" effects, and more about making the case for a moral economy in which consumers *deliberately* treat musicians' livelihoods as their own concern.

There are some significant ways, then, in which Bandcamp might justifiably be understood as an "alternative" to the platformization of culture—although, as we will now show, the relationship is somewhat more complex. And the platform's discourse emphasizes this alterity by, for example, positioning their relative reticence to utilize data as an ideological stance, rather than a matter of insufficient resources, as in this introductory section on a Bandcamp "Help" page concerning download pricing:

> Please take what we're about to tell you with a grain of salt. Part of what makes Bandcamp *Bandcamp* is that you, not some corporate behemoth, set your own pricing. And that's really as it should be, since the most effective price just isn't the same for every artist, and you know your fans better than anyone. That said, we have the advantage of a metric crap-ton of data, and that data tells us a few things: [. . .]. (Bandcamp, n.d.-b)

The informal and self-aware tone taken here by Bandcamp (e.g., the semi-ironic description of the platform as a "corporate behemoth") seemingly anticipates some degree of skepticism from their "alternative"-minded artists, and seeks to negotiate between practitioners' localized, qualitative understanding ("you know your fans") and the kinds of analysis in which platforms specialize (built on "a metric crap-ton of data"). Arguably, this "in-between" position reflects an ideological compromise of the platform that does not seek to be a platform. But, at the same time, this kind of hands-off liberalism is a fundamental platform logic, which reflects that fact that platforms have nothing invested in any single sellers' success or failure. In these ambivalent negotiations with and presentations of data, then, Bandcamp remains compatible with a kind of anti-managerial autonomy valued by indie practitioners.

While this compatibility is partially a consequence of Bandcamp's specific status as an alternative, advert-free quasi-platform, it also demonstrates a quite striking congruity between indie music ethics and platform logics. The aforementioned emphasis on autonomy is one crucial overlap—platforms, unlike labels, won't change your image, or force you back into the studio to record a more commercial track—but there is further affinity in platforms' and indie practitioners' shared interest in bypassing traditional cultural gatekeepers, and in encouraging participation from amateurs (the "anyone can do it" ethos of punk, which on platforms is sometimes considered in terms of the "prosumer"). Where once indie and DIY had a fairly stable and unambiguous antagonist, then, in the shape of major record labels (and their stranglehold on access to TV, radio, and the music press), the newly dominant platforms are regarded far more ambivalently.

This ambivalence means that tensions between platforms and indie (and its sense of itself as valuably alternative) are likely to be subtle, often arising in the form of potentially pernicious elisions between the two sets of ideologies at play. For instance, to return to the Bandcamp "Help" page quoted above, what is being sought is not a rejection of datafication in general, but the "most effective price." Similarly, the reason they give for encouraging "pay what you want" is not premised on this being a more egalitarian approach but on the data-supported assertion that people will, on average, end up paying more. The specific ethical frameworks of indie here are not adhered to for their own sake, but because they work as a specific form of granularity to be instrumentalized for the maximum return. In this context, Bandcamp's assertion that "you know best" is perhaps the very essence of what is unique to platform economics: the autonomous activity of a legion of self-managing, self-auditing, specialist, workers, mediated by a host platform that capitalizes upon the effect this individualized labor has in perpetuating and accelerating an internal, multisided market.

As this section has outlined, one key concern of indie musicians in the platform age is that their distinctive sense of alterity might be rendered *indistinct* amidst a torrent of content from newly platform-enabled creators. Bandcamp mitigates this concern particularly well, by anachronistically ensuring that musical content and its context constitute its "raw material" (Srnicek, 2017, pp. 54–58), and not data. Nonetheless even this indie-minded quasi-platform

puts forward, economically and discursively, an amended conception of the musical alternative, as slippery concepts such as autonomy, participation, and self-sufficiency—having arguably always existed on a normative knife-edge—are put to work in new, complex ways. Yet here too there is continuity, for the industry surrounding indie has always been involved in negotiations and compromises with the major-led industry "mainstream" that acts rhetorically and discursively as an ideological pole to be resisted.

Conclusion

Mainstream consumer-oriented streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music are undoubtedly the principal means by which the challenge to the recorded music industry once afforded by digital technologies has been contained. The status of music as property, threatened by the early "pirate" sites' enabling of radical sharing, has now been restored and in recent years the revenues of the global recorded music industry have substantially recovered—though not to the levels achieved at the turn of the century. Revenues now increasingly derive from advertising and subscriptions, rather than the sales of ownable individual items such as "singles" or "albums" that once sustained the late twentieth-century industry. Within this new system, producer-oriented sites such as Bandcamp and SoundCloud represent the residues of the hopes for a democratization of cultural production and consumption that were so widely heard in the first decade of the twenty-first century. In many respects, these producer-oriented platforms have become the principal site for "alternative" music, in the way that independent, alternative record companies and record shops once were (Kruse, 2003). Against excessively pessimistic accounts, we have indicated how some aspects of the sites represent positive values and emancipatory aspirations. However, we have also shown how, like older forms of alternative cultural production and distribution, these services are compromised and problematic, in ways that demonstrate contradictions in the political economy and culture of digital media. We showed, for example, the ways in which SoundCloud offers accessible self-publishing and music abundance, but struggles to be sustainable. Meanwhile, Bandcamp seeks to act as an "alternative" platform but finds relative stability partly via (often unacknowledged) congruences between platform ideologies on the one hand and values of its indie and DIY admirers on the other.

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CHAPTER 23

Indie or Mainstream? Tensions and Nuances between the Alternative and the Mainstream in Indie Games

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Abstract

The commercial emergence of "indie games" since 2008 represents a fundamental challenge for contemporary game studies. As we still do not have a clear definition of the indie game, its popularity and commercial success have made the conceptualization of this type of game even more complex. Far from being a pure videogame model, completely separated from the mainstream sphere, indie games often involve hybridizations and ambiguities between the alternative and the mainstream. Thus this article aims to problematize the neat conceptualizations of indie games as an opposing "genre" to mainstream games by exploring the many tensions and nuances between the alternative and mainstream dimensions that can be identified within indie game production, culture and design. The first part of the article focuses on the production and distribution issues, as well as on the cultural construction and artistic legitimation of indie games. The article then posits a design-centered analytical approach to indie games inspired by Kellner (1995) and based on "procedural rhetorics" (Bogost, 2006; Flanagan and Nissenbaum, 2014). This approach is used to look at commercially successful

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indie games, which we consider to be an especially suitable object of study for exploring and understanding contemporary culture through the frictions between hegemonic culture and counter-culture, progressivism and conservatism, capitalism and anti-capitalism, as well as the way we conceive these notions.

Keywords

indie game, design, culture, ideology, mainstream

Resumen

¿Indie o mainstream? Tensiones y matices entre lo alternativo y lo mainstream *en los* indie games

La emergencia de los *indie games* como producto comercial desde el año 2008 supone un reto fundamental para los estudios contemporáneos del videojuego. Cuando todavía carecemos de una clara definición del *indie game*, su popularidad y comercialidad hacen que la conceptualización de este tipo de videojuego resulte más compleja si cabe. Lejos de constituir un modelo de videojuego «puro», completamente separado de la esfera *mainstream*, los *indie games* a menudo presentan hibridaciones y ambigüedades entre lo alternativo y lo *mainstream.* En este sentido, este artículo pretende problematizar la conceptualización nítida de los *indie games* como un género opuesto a los videojuegos *mainstream*, a través de una exploración de las múltiples tensiones y matices entre lo alternativo y lo *mainstream* que pueden ser identificadas en los procesos de producción, la cultura y el diseño de los videojuegos *indie*. La primera parte del artículo se centra en aspectos de producción y distribución, así como en la construcción cultural y la legitimación artística del *indie game*. A continuación, se desarrolla un análisis del diseño de *indie games* inspirado en Kellner (1995) y basado en la retórica procedural (Bogost, 2006; Flanagan y Nissenbaum, 2014). Este análisis se aplica a *indie games* con éxito comercial, considerándolos un objeto de estudio particularmente interesante para explorar y entender la cultura contemporánea a través de las fricciones entre cultura hegemónica y contracultura, progresismo y conservadurismo, capitalismo y anticapitalismo, y el modo en que estas nociones son concebidas.

Palabras clave

indie game, diseño, cultura, ideología, mainstream

Introduction

The origins of independently produced videogames or "indie games" go back (at least) to the 80s, with young fans powering the British videogame industry by creating videogames in their bedrooms (Donovan, 2010, p. 111–138). But indie games have never been as popular as they are now since 2008, after the international success of games like *Braid* (J. Blow, 2008), *Castle Crashers* (The Behemoth, 2008) and *World of Goo* (2D Boy, 2008). These videogames and many other indie games that followed in their wake (eg Limbo [Playdead, 2010], Minecraft [Mojang, 2011], Journey [Thatgamecompany, 2012], etc.) achieved great sales

success and critical acclaim. Online distribution platforms of large companies such as Steam (Valve Corporation) have now on their virtual shelves a specific space for the indie "genre".

As we still do not yet have a clear definition of the indie game, its popularity and commercial success have made the conceptualization of this type of game even more complex.

In this context, this article has two objectives. Firstly, it aims to problematize any neat conceptual distinction between "indie games" and "mainstream games", exploring the many tensions and nuances between the two categories that can be identified within indie game culture.

A reference from film studies that is particularly close to this approach is Indiewood, USA: "where Hollywood meets independent cinema", by Geoff King (2009), which is an exploration of the "area in which Hollywood and the independent sector merge or overlap" (2009, p. 1). As King explains, with an argument that is also worth applying to "indiewood games": "films produced and distributed in this domain have attracted a mixture of praise and controversy. From one perspective, they offer an attractive blend of creativity and commerce, a source of some of the more innovative and interesting work produced in close proximity to the commercial mainstream. From another, this is an area of duplicity and compromise, in which the 'true' heritage of the independent sector is sold out, betrayed and/or co-opted into an offshoot of Hollywood" (2009, p. 1).

As a complementary objective, this article proposes an analysis of the design characteristics of popular indie games that have had remarkable sales success in recent years, based on the premise that they are an especially suitable object of study for exploring the ideological debates and disputes characteristic of our time, the tensions between mainstream culture and alternative culture, and between conservatism and progressivism (Kellner, 1995; Cassar, 2013).

The next two sections deal with the production and distribution issues, as well as with the cultural construction and artistic legitimation of indie games. The last section focuses on the aforementioned analytical contribution, oriented towards indie game design.

Indie or mainstream?
Tensions and nuances in the production/distribution dimension

The rules of the Independent Games Festival (the largest annual gathering of the indie game sector, inspired by the Sundance Film Festival) state that videogames that want to be presented at this festival need to meet two conditions: (a) to have been produced by an independent developer, and (b) to have been created with an "indie spirit" (DeJong, 2013, p. 16).

Neither of these conditions are easy to objectify, as we shall see, but they do show that the indie game phenomenon is multifaceted in nature involving production and distribution processes as well as a cultural dimension and a certain design approach, regarding the so-called "indie spirit".

As for the first aspect, the indie game is partly defined by differentiating it from the hegemonic production and distribution dynamics of the videogame industry. Mainstream commercial videogames are published by major "publishers", eg Electronic Arts or Activision/Blizzard, which are usually associated with a capitalist ethos: the pursuit of economic benefits over artistic or cultural purposes (Lipkin, 2013, p. 9). Commercial videogames are also often developed by large teams with budgets that can reach hundreds of millions of dollars.

Discourses on indie games connect with traits that are quite the opposite of the above: "independent games are (said to be) usually made without the help of a publisher, have a limited budget (...), but are also groundbreaking and beyond what is proposed by the mainstream industry (...)" (Ruffino, 2013, p. 111).

The new online distribution channels play a crucial role here: they provide opportunities to access a wide audience and market games without having a publisher, either through direct ways (eg the author's personal webpage) or through the online distribution platforms of companies such as Microsoft (Xbox Live), Sony (PlayStation Network) and Valve Corporation (Steam).

This "bypassing" of the physical sales outlets makes it possible for low- budget videogames, which are intended to have low market prices, to be profitable for their creators, or at least allow them to cover their investment.

Other features that are usually associated with indie games are the use of low-cost technological tools (Flash, Java, open source software, etc.), and the use of social networks for crowdfunding through platforms like Kickstarter or Indiegogo (Lipkin, 2013, p. 12, 20).

However, some authors have questioned the "indieness" of the production and distribution forms of the most representative games of the indie phenomenon in recent years (Martin and Deuze, 2009; DeJong, 2013).

To begin with, De Jong states that "most of the games that people nowadays think of as indie (…), like *Super Meat Boy*, *Flower* and *Braid* (…), were distributed via platforms that are owned by major publishers; they only gained such commercial success because they were successfully marketed and branded as indie games on these platforms" (DeJong, 2013, p. 16).

Moreover, a supposed "indie game" like *Journey* (Thatgamecompany, 2012) was developed by a fairly large team of 14 people and published by Sony Computer Entertainment, with a budget of "multiple millions of dollars" (according to its creative director, Jenova Chen, [1] which puts in question its "indie" condition.

Martin and Deuze (2009) argue that the concept of "independence" is extremely complex to analyze in the contemporary videogame, and that the relationships between the indie and the mainstream, rather than corresponding to a polarized confrontation, present many gray areas, including negotiations and agreements between developers and publishers with very specific factors in each project, and even symbiotic relationships based on common interests.

In this sense, these authors stress the importance of the intellectual property in the power relationships established between creators and publishers (Martin and Deuze, 2009, p. 282). They also highlight the growing interest of big companies in publishing "indie" games, and even establishing their own publishing brand of indie style titles, for example the case of Capcom's *Clover* (2009, p. 284–285), as well as the appearance of small publishers that specialize in publishing indie projects, such as Nicalis.

[1] Visit: <https://www.vg247.com/2013/03/13/journey-cost-multiple-millions-of-dollars-no- royalties-for-a-year/>.

Artistic legitimation and ideological tensions in the cultural construction of indie games

Beyond a series of tangible features related to production and distribution processes and economic aspects, the indie game phenomenon is also (and perhaps above all) a cultural construction.

A central issue in this respect is the construction of the cultural identity of the indie game authors (Martin and Deuze, 2009, p. 280). In fact, the "politique des auteurs" of the French/European cinema, which once was a fundamental hallmark of independent films compared to Hollywood cinema, now resonates with the indie game phenomenon. One manifestation of this is the emphasis placed on the author's name in the paratexts and display screens of indie games—for example, the message "made by Notch" at the beginning of *Minecraft* (Mojang, 2011).

Parker (2013, p. 45–47) points out that before the strong artistic legitimacy that many indie games authors now enjoy, a number of preconditions needed to appear in the cultural ecosystem of videogames. The first thing that was necessary was the emergence of a series of "prestigious works" in the mainstream area by authors who were exalted by critics and the public as "artists"; eg cult videogames like Ico (Team Ico, 2001) and Shadow of the Colossus (Team Ico, 2005) by Fumito Ueda. The progressive incorporation of game studies in the academic world was also slowly preparing the ground for the emergence/growth of the indie game phenomenon, with its authors strongly aligned with artistic and aesthetic aspirations, as well as, in many cases, with the idea of videogame creation as a political/ideological act.

Martin and Deuze (2009, p. 278–279) also point out that technological factors, such as the new digital distribution channels and the rise of videogames for mobile devices, were also relevant preconditions for facilitating the emergence of individual authorship, as well as new opportunities for small development teams.

In the favorable context defined by these preconditions, the discourses of the indie games creators and other cultural agents (critics, the media, academia, fans, festivals such as The Indie Games Festival and Indie Cade) have gradually formed a certain sociocultural profile of the indie games author, which has now spread throughout the collective imagination.

This profile is marked from the outset by the aspiration of "creative freedom". The indie authors postulate the creation of videogames as an act of personal expression, where the author should feel emotionally and ideologically very much implicated in the project. Naturally, this contrasts with the vision of the mainstream game as a commercial product orientated towards "superficial" entertainment, as well as with the idea of the working conditions of the large companies in the industry constraining the freedom and creativity of their workers (Lipkin, 2013, p. 11, 14; Westecott, 2013, p. 79–83; DeJong, 2012, p. 20).

This is closely linked to indie authors (and the fans of indie games) having a strong hostility towards the mainstream videogame (DeJong, 2012, p. 22; Ruffino, 2013, p. 110–111; Parker, 2013, p. 54). A paradigmatic example of this is the following statement by Tommy Refenes, coauthor of Super Meat Boy, in the documentary Indie Game: The Movie (Swirsky and Pajot, 2012).

> "... I'm not going to go work at Electronic Arts or Epic. That sounds horrible, that sounds like Hell to me. So if it comes out and people don't like it, and people hate it, and it has a Metacritic score of

> like 20, and everyone thinks it's awful... It doesn't really make a difference (...) We tried to make it as fun and as accessible as possible. [However,] if people want to buy *Modern Warfare* or *Halo: Reach* that's fine, because I think those games are shit. If that's what people want, then they don't want my games, because I don't make shit games."

This rejection of mainstream video games is deeply connected with a certain ethic and/or style in the way the creation of video games is understood and carried out by indie game authors. They usually appeal to "do-it-yourself" creative philosophies (Lipkin, 2013, p. 11, 15; Westecott, 2013, p. 80–84, Parker, 2013, p. 46), the idea of "small but good" (Indie Game Magazine, in Lipkin, 2013, p. 14), and the defense of low cost technological tools, combined with an ideal of democratizing access to videogame development (Anthropy, 2012; Westecott, 2013, p. 81).

Behind all this lies a significant ideological component: anti-establishment attitudes, associated with anti-capitalism, criticisms of neoliberalism, the desire to shed light on society's "blind spots" (eg, socially weak groups, stereotyped or under-represented in the mass media and in the videogame market), etc.

Moreover, note that statements such as those made by Tommy Refenes, cited above, are also linked to a certain sense of cultural/artistic superiority of the authors and fans of indie games with respect to mainstream videogames. These discourses often allude to the indie creators and the games themselves being more "authentic", having a higher aesthetic and experiential value beyond videogames as mere entertainment. In this sense, the issues addressed in indie games and the way they are treated are often suggested to be more "mature" or "transcendent" than in the common videogame: indie games often deal with universal and existential themes, such as love or death, focusing on them abstractly and/or with dense symbolisms throughout the game (Martin and Deuze, 2009, p. 289; Parker, 2013, p. 48).

At the same time, a significant element in the "strategy" of artistic legitimacy of the indie game is a certain cultural appropriation of experimentalism with the "game design". The personal expression of the author through game mechanics and other elements of the game design is regarded as the "essence" of the art of creating videogames (cfr.: "procedural rhetoric", Bogost, 2006), which is opposed to videogame blockbusters, in the sense that their design often relies heavily on cinematic narrative. This leads to the idea that the mainstream or blockbuster videogame has less artistic "purity" than indie games (Parker, 2013, p. 54–55; Martin and Deuze, 2009, p. 280–281). In any case, it is interesting to note how, from a contextual limitation (having major film narratives in videogames implies a considerable increase in the budget), there emerges a legitimizing discourse on the cultural level, which enhances the artistic status of the indie game and its authors (Simon, 2013).

In the end, all of this connects with the social hierarchies of taste (Bourdieu, 1988): indie games are, in a way, a new cultural area through which some videogame fans can obtain a culturally "distinguished" position, separating themselves from the tastes of the majority.

Regarding the cultural vehicles for spreading indie game culture and the construction of the cultural identity of the authors, we need to highlight "The Rise of the Videogame Zinesters", the theory/manifesto by Anna Anthropy (2012)—a cult book among indie game fans that, explicitly or implicitly, deals with many of the arguments legitimizing the indie game reviewed here.

Lipkin (2013, p. 20) underlines the activism of many indie game authors in social networks; for example, the fact that all members of the Mojang team (*Minecraft*) have an active Twitter account, or the popular personal blog of Edmund McMillen, creator of *Super Meat Boy* (2008).

In connection with this, the important role of indie game fan communities, such as Indiegames.com, Indie Statik and TIG Source, for the construction and cultural legitimation of indie games and their creators should not be forgotten. These communities show a remarkable collaborative spirit, with young people who aspire to one day become indie authors becoming involved in peer-to-peer teaching dynamics (Martin and Deuze, 2009, p. 290; DeJong, 2012, p. 19). Furthermore, these communities are often proactively involved in the development of certain indie projects from the beginning (collaborating in tests, providing reviews and recommendations for authors, etc.), and even sometimes contributing to the financing of these projects through crowdfunding.

Meanwhile, Parker *(2013, p. 50–55)* stresses the role of the specialized press and game scholars for understanding the rise of indie games and their cultural legitimacy in recent years. As an example, he refers to a short article by the scholar Ian Bogost on the indie game *Passage* (Jason Rohrer, 2011), a small videogame without a budget and with very limited graphics. In his blog, Bogost exalted *Passage* as a fundamental example of the expressive possibilities of videogames (focused on the game design, the "procedural rhetoric"), as well as to "talk" about important issues (love, death, loss) and provoking deep thoughts and emotions in the user. Later, other specialized academics and journalists would continue this laudatory discourse. Currently, *Passage* is a cult indie game and Jason Rohrer, who was an amateur when he made the game, has become a professional videogame creator with notable prestige in the indie community.

Finally, it is interesting to conclude this section with a reflection on *Indie Game: The Movie*, the documentary that premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and which narrates the personal experience of several indie authors (mainly Jonathan Blow-*Braid*, Edmund McMillen and Tommy Refenes-*Super Meat Boy*, and Phil Fish-*Fez*). The documentary presents these young videogame creators to a large extent as romantic heroes, lone, talented creators facing a giant industry, who sacrifice their personal lives to pursue a childhood/adolescent dream and an artistic ideal. For its narrative quality and "hook", this documentary has been instrumental in mobilizing affects toward the indie game as a cultural phenomenon and to its heroes, those young videogame creators.

However, there are certain complexities and ideological frictions behind this "heroic" portrayal of indie games creators. Indeed, in a context in which contemporary capitalism has become associated with the ideal of the neoliberal subject, it is certainly complicated to attribute a counter-cultural label to "indie" creators who actually fit the profile of the lone entrepreneur (Ruffino, 2013, p. 116–119).

According to Nikolas Rose *(1998, 1999)*, the concept of the neoliberal subject is based on the idea of autonomous individualism: a subject who is responsible for themselves to find work and which corresponds to the ideal of becoming an "entrepreneur" of themselves. Thus the neoliberal subject is associated with values such as meritocracy, constant appeals to talent and hard work, and the ability to adapt to an increasingly unstable job environment, which requires workers to be constantly updating and reinventing themselves and have a highly competitive attitude. All this, implicitly refers to the figure of a "hero" with great adaptive

capacity and autonomy, whose very existence would call into question the necessity for the welfare state and the public administration's strong involvement in the employment and social fields.

It is not difficult to identify many of the key features of the neoliberal subject in the discursive construction of the indie games authors in Indie Game: The Movie and in other texts. In this sense, it is inevitable that we ask ourselves whether the "heroes" of the indie game phenomenon really are counter-cultural heroes, or rather a complex and to a great extent contradictory mixture between it and the neoliberal subject, namely the entrepreneurial hero.

Indie or mainstream? A game design analysis

The implicit tensions, ambiguities and contradictions between the alternative and the mainstream in indie games that we identified in the previous sections; both in production/distribution and in the cultural dimension, must also occur at the design level.

In this sense, Sudmann *(2012)* stated that, contrary to what the indie games author's and fan's hostility towards the mainstream seems to imply, there is not a radical denial or rejection of the forms and design traits of mainstream videogames in indie games (see also: DeJong, 2012, p. 18, 22).

Moreover, the growing consolidation and popularization of a certain "indie style" in the last few years has brought about the phenomenon known as co- optation: the emulation of indie game design style in videogames that have not been developed under real indie production and distribution conditions. For example, Lipkin *(2013, p. 16)* cites the case of *DeathSpank* (Hothead, 2010), a videogame by the renowned author Ron Gilbert and promoted by the big publisher Electronic Arts, which the critics, including Indie Games Magazine, adopted as "indie" (see also Martin and Deuze, 2009, p. 290).

In the reverse sense, Lipkin (2013, p. 18) points out that "with the increasing technical and graphic improvements of games that are being independently developed and produced, such as *Legends of Grimrock* or *Amnesia: the Dark Descent*, it is becoming harder to evaluate a game's 'indieness' by its appearance".

In fact, sometimes authors deliberately mix indie elements with mainstream elements as a design strategy to make the game more appealing to a wider audience. In this regard, the following statements (which seem to reveal a certain degree of guilty feelings) by Edmund McMillen in the magazine Eurogamer (6-29-2012) are significant:

> "*Super Meat Boy* is the closest thing to selling out that I've ever done, but it's not. But it is safe. It's very, very safe, and I knew it was safe going in, and I was playing it safe because I was risking so much (…) I don't want to risk my whole f***ing career and my future on something that is uncertain (…) I'm not comfortable risking [programming and good friend] Tommy [Refenes'], my future and my wife and everybody else."

In any case, as researchers, instead of "worrying" about the high ideological complexity of the indie game phenomenon and its apparent contradictions and ambiguities, we can take advantage of it, as we suggested at the beginning, by adopting the indie game as a very suitable object of study to explore the ideological debates and disputes which are characteristic

of our time, the tensions between mainstream culture and alternative culture, and between conservatism and progressivism.

Along this line, we propose an analysis of the design characteristics of popular indie games in recent years, including their sales and critical success. Indie games that are particularly likely to reflect the tensions between the alternative and the mainstream will be focused on in this article.

The analysis is based on D. Kellner's "double hermeneutics" (1995), which is an analytical approach to media culture texts that, instead of looking for a unique and hypercoherent discourse or "message", focuses on exploring latent ideological tensions between conservatism and progressivism, such as the reinforcement of certain stereotypes and the transgression of others, formal conventions vs. formal innovations, etc. These latent ideological tensions, which the analyst of media culture works must unravel, can be addressed either within a particular, individual text or across a coherent set of several texts (see also Cassar, 2013).

On the formal level, the analysis is informed by game design theory and procedural rhetorics and the theory of game design as an expressive medium (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004; Adams, 2010; Bogost, 2006; Frasca, 2009; Flanagan and Nissenbaum, 2014).

As a way of presenting the results of the analysis, we define five indie-mainstream tensions that characterize the design of the popular indie game in recent years.

Expressive singularity + popular genres

Many popular indie games are characterized by a dense symbolism of the game design in the representation of characters, worlds and underlying themes, in line with procedural rhetoric theory (Bogost, 2006; Frasca, 2009).

A paradigmatic case in this respect is *Braid* (J. Blow, 2008). As the game goes on, the story of Tim progressively unfolds: he lost his love because of a mistake that is never clearly explained in the game, and now he lives obsessed with the past, tied down by regret. The most interesting point is that in *Braid* the "core mechanic" (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004, p. 316; see also Sicart, 2008) is deeply linked to these background questions: it is a mechanic of backwards time, a "rewind" at the touch of a finger. Thus, from a metaphorical perspective, the ludic experience of the player becomes interwoven with Tim's mental and emotional state: the experience of living obsessed with the past, not being able to stop thinking about what you would do if you could go back in time…, which the player must do to solve all the puzzles in the game.

As in *Braid*, an interest in exploring the representation and "simulation" of psychological states through the gameplay design can also be found in other indie games, such as *Amnesia: the Dark Descent* (Frictional Games, 2010) and *The Binding of Isaac* (McMillen and Himsl, 2011):

Amnesia: the Dark Descent, which was inspired by H. P. Lovecraft's stories, portrays the thin line between sanity and madness. The player/character must continuously deal with the dilemma of keeping hidden from monsters by remaining in the shadows but then progressively lose his sanity, or moving through the lit up areas but then be more exposed to monsters. Beyond a simple tactical dilemma that brings more interest to the gameplay, this constant tension between sanity and madness cyclically evokes an essential theme in Lovecraft's literature and it does so in a way that is only possible for the video-ludic medium.

Regarding *The Binding of Isaac*, the vast basement where Isaac goes to try to run away from his evil mother was designed according to the "rogue-like" formula: a random articulation of "dungeons" that generates a new basement for every game. However, in this case the rogue-like system is neither a simple "retro" reference nor just a way to enhance "replayability" (Bogost *et al*., 2005, p. 63–64): this chaotic form of the gameworld symbolically connects with the theme of madness in the game's narrative, since Isaac is actually a kid suffering from parental maltreatment, victim of an unbalanced mother.

In the end, one of the main characteristics of mainstream indie games is the expressive singularity and coherence of the game design in relation to essential aspects of the content, such as the main character's psychology, their relationship with the represented world and certain underlying themes.

Nevertheless, this artistic ambition, closely related to the notion of procedural rhetoric (Bogost, 2006) is usually accompanied by a "mainstream" wrapping: on the macro-structural level, many indie games rely openly on popular commercial genres and gameplay models: for example, the platform genre (*Super Meat Boy [Team Meat, 2010], Cave Story+* [Studio Pixel, 2011], *Braid*), the first-person shooter (*Amnesia: the Dark Descent*), or the "hack-and- slash" combined with roleplaying game elements (*Bastion* [Supergiant Games, 2011]), etc.

Thus, probably one of the keys to the success of "mainstream-indie" games relies on their combination of a very expressive ludic design regarding specific aspects with a global playability framework ("wrapping") with popular tinges based on well-known commercial genres.

Essentialism or casual gaming?

Indie games such as *Super Meat Boy, Fez* (Polytron, 2012), *Limbo* (Playdead, 2010) and *Journey* (Thatgamecompany, 2012) could be associated, in one way or another, to the approach of minimalist game design (Nealen *et al*., 2011).

Thus, one of the pleasures behind the gameplay experiences in *Super Meat Boy* and *Journey* is just learning to "tame" the avatar, mastering the control of his particular ways of moving: *Meat Boy's* jumps with long suspensions and strange acrobatics and the fascinating "dance" through semi-flight over the dunes by the avatar of Journey, seeking impulse points around the ruins.

Besides, *Fez* sets out a slow-paced and contemplative exploration experience, through many island-worlds that hide countless little treasures, hieroglyphs and secret passages, and where meticulous observation and patience (including going back to a certain place at a different time in order to check if something has changed) become fundamental actions in order to understand the game and be able to progress. In the words of the author himself, Phil Fish, *Fez* is a videogame where the player must learn to appreciate the significance of "stop and smell the flowers" (NowGamer, 6-21-2011).

In a similar fashion, Limbo's puzzles usually reward the player's sensitivity: a detailed observation, paying attention to a little noise caused by something that fell down behind them, carefully measuring every step in order to get as close as you can to a winged insect without scaring it… Attention to little details, delicacy, patience.

Undoubtedly, the search for essentialism and simplicity in many *(but not all)* indie games contrasts with the big audiovisual spectacles of blockbuster videogames. Nevertheless, again in this respect we can find an alternative + mainstream "circle squaring": essentiality and

simplicity allow them, at the same time, to get closer to the "casual gaming" formula, which is a model of commercial success in recent years (Juul, 2010; Martin and Deuze, 2009, p. 284). Significant evidence in this respect is the fact that *Braid* obtained the "Casual Game of the Year" award from the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences in 2009.

Innovation + conventions and commercial trends

Indie games such as *Braid* and *Fez* base their proposal on very particular and innovative game mechanics: the backwards time mechanic with several variations in Blow's game, and the 2D-3D shifting mechanic in *Fez.*

Moreover, the originality and innovation of many indie games frequently come from the omission or transgression of design canons of mainstream videogames.

At first sight, in indie games such as *Journey, Limbo* and *Minecraft* (Mojang, 2011) there is no point system and "economic" management elements such as HUDs (head-up displays) are non-existent, scarce or very subtle. Moreover, in games such as *Minecraft* and *Journey* there is not even a clear objective for the player/character.

Although in Edmund McMillen's games there are usually point systems and clear objectives, other typical aspects of mainstream videogames become subverted, such as the "reward system" (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004, p. 345–350): what in a blockbuster would usually be a scene where the player/character gets a reward after having completed a level, in McMillen's games that scene has an ironic or anticlimactic tone. In *Super Meat Boy* it's a compilation of all the player's failures in that given level (it shows dozens of Meat Boys crashing against walls, falling into the void, etc., through a visual fusion that invites the player to laugh at their own clumsiness), and in *The Binding of Isaac* it's a short video showing relatives and friends humiliating poor Isaac.

Nevertheless, popular indie games also tend to incorporate classic principles of game design and trends of commercial successes.

Without going any further, in *Journey* there is a subtle "leveling up" system related to the avatar's evolution: by collecting magical clothing it is possible to make the avatar's cape longer, which allows him to perform longer lasting jumps and flights. (However, this is neither necessary nor relevant at all to going forward in the game).

Other prototypic traits of commercial videogames are also present in many indie games, as we have seen previously: for instance, basic elements of platform and puzzle genres, and certain elements of "casual gaming".

Nostalgia and criticism of industry's successes

Nostalgia for the 8- and 16-bit eras of gaming stands out as a particularly relevant trait of indie game design style, according to several researchers (Martin and Deuze, 2009, p. 291; DeJong, 2012, p. 18; Lipkin, 2013, p. 10, 15–18).

In this vein, *Super Meat Boy i*s better understood if it is connected with Super Mario Bros (Nintendo, 1985) (McMillen made the platforms to be "enemies" instead of "allies"), *The Binding of Isaac* can't be fully appreciated without remembering *The Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo, 1986) (it is actually a deconstruction of type-dungeons of *Zelda*, submitted to random permutations), and *Cave Story+* and *Fez* can't be fully analyzed without relating them to the

labyrinthine exploration and the "backtracking" of *Metroid* (Nintendo, 1986) and *Castlevania* (Konami, 1997).

It is evident that authors such as Edmund McMillen, Phil Fish and Daisuke Amaya ("Pixel") are "fans" of the old classics of Nintendo, Konami, etc., to which they pay tribute in their games. Nevertheless, this nostalgic component is closely interwoven with a strong criticism of the contemporary videogames industry and current big-budget mainstream videogames, as we saw before.

Anti-capitalist fun or cultural distinction?

Indie games may have design traits in tune with consumer society values and capitalism, such as progression understood in quantifiable terms, accumulation of resources, challenges related to great conquests of territory, etc. (eg, *Super Meat Boy, Bastion, Cave Story+).*

However, a lot of design traits with an anti-capitalist orientation can also be found among them: many indie games don't allow the "race" to achieve higher and higher levels of the player/character *(Super Meat Boy, Limbo, Fez*), prevent the player from collecting objects *(Journey)*, promote the management of scarce resources *(Amnesia: the Dark Descent, FTL* [Subset Games, 2012], and so forth.

Moreover, in some of them all references to the notions of "victory" and "defeat" are eliminated. In certain cases "victory" isn't even possible *(Minecraft)* and in others the concepts of "failure" and "defeat" become diluted: in Journey and Fez it is practically impossible for the player to "fail" and, in any case, it is not penalized.

In line with this, Jenova Chen has been openly critical of what he calls an excessive leaning towards "task-solving culture" in videogame design (Gamasutra, 5-18-2012): that is, understanding fun as something inherent to efficient problem solving. Therefore, he decided not to give a clear objective to the player in *Journey*, or even intermediate goals or a point system. In this sense, more than either a competitive game or a problem-solving game, *Journey* brings just an aesthetic experience to the player.

In addition, some indie games seem to have a certain "the weak against the system" poetic. Thus, in *Amnesia: the Dark Descent* (Frictional Games, 2010) the design of the player/character follows a principle of lack of empowerment: Daniel, the main character, comes up against illusory and supernatural monsters but there are no weapons in the castle where the story takes place, so when they appear the only thing he can do is run away. In this vein, avatars such as Meat Boy and the kid of *Limbo* die at just one touch, they are extremely fragile. These characters do not have a "health bar", which usually allow the strikes to be "cushioned", thus for them every hit, every mistake, becomes a lethal strike, a lethal mistake.

Moreover, in games like *Super Meat Boy, Limbo, Fez* and *Amnesia* there is no possibility of evolution regarding the character's action abilities: the avatar begins with only the abilities of walking, running and jumping *(not much more)* and these remain their only ones for the whole game.

All of these aspects together point to a sort of gameplay design that we could call "counter-fun" or "anti-capitalist fun", an entertainment proposal characterized by depriving the videogame of common videogame design elements potentially linked to capitalist values, consumerism, or to the maximization of efficiency and benefits, as well as by counteracting the fantasies of power common in mainstream videogames.

Nevertheless, from a very different point of view, the notion of "counter-fun" could recall the theory of taste as a cultural distinction by P. Bourdieu. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Bourdieu suggests that one of the distinction strategies of "high culture" consumers is to show a certain capability of appreciating "pleasure deprived from pleasure" in cultural works and experiences (1988, p. 501), something supposedly suitable only for refined tastes.

> "…In the negation of inferior, coarse, venal, servile—in a word natural—pleasure (…) there lies a claim to superiority on the part of those who are able to content themselves with sublimated, refined, selfless, disinterested, distinguished pleasures forever out of reach of the uninitiated" (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 501)

That is, the "counter-fun" of indie games probably has also a certain element of cultural seduction, as it entails a sort of invitation to feel part of a "high culture" community.

Final considerations

Through this study we have seen that the cultural dynamic behind indie games doesn't follow a monolithic logic of opposition or dissociation from the mainstream videogame, but a much more complex relationship, sometimes including strategic articulations of the alternative and the commercial.

In fact, popular indie games and "mainstream-indie" games are nowadays an indispensable reference for the industry in terms of how innovation, artistic status and commercial success can be integrated. Moreover, as G. King pointed out (regarding "indiewood" cinema), culturally they represent a very controversial area, "an area of duplicity and compromise, in which the 'true' heritage of the independent sector is sold out, betrayed and/or co-opted into an offshoot of Hollywood [the videogame industry]" (2009, p. 1).

As for the original contribution of this paper, we have proposed a design- centered analytical approach to indie games, inspired by Kellner (1995) and Cassar (2013) and mixed with "procedural rhetorics" (Bogost, 2006; Flanagan and Nissenbaum, 2014), whereby indie games (indie game design) can be understood as a cultural phenomenon that reflects ideological tensions of our time, frictions between hegemonic culture and counter-culture, progressivism and conservatism, capitalism and anti-capitalism, and the way we conceive these notions.

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CHAPTER 24

Making Media Together: Experiences of Aboriginal Participation within Co-Creative Remote Media Production Teams

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Abstract

This article outlines the findings of a research project that examined how participation can be understood, and subsequently improved, within collaborative, co-creative media practices. As a case study, the research project looked at Pintubi Anmatjere Warlpiri Media and Communications (PAW Media), a remote Indigenous media organisation (RIMO) based in Yuendumu in Australia's Northern Territory. By means of 13 in-depth interviews, grounded in participant observation, the project examined how Aboriginal participation was motivated, enabled and limited from the perspectives of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal collaborators. The study revealed practices of Aboriginal participation at PAW Media that were highly valued by participants; nonetheless, limits to participation were noted and two conflicting views regarding improved practice expressed. Non-Aboriginal facilitators supported a transition towards greater Aboriginal autonomy over production, involving a handover of tasks and responsibility to their local Aboriginal counterparts; however, most Aboriginal media pro-

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ducers indicated that their participation was currently better served within a refined version of the existing co-creative structure.

Keywords

Aboriginal producers, co-creative, cross-cultural, Indigenous media, participation, production, remote, teams, Warlpiri, Yuendumu

Introduction

It is another hot summer afternoon in the remote Central Australian community of Yuendumu, 300 kilometres north-west of Alice Springs. Inside one of the studios at the local Indigenous media organisation, a few young men sit together making props for an upcoming film project. They discuss the footy, laugh about YouTube clips they have seen and share ideas for the film's storyline. Their conversation drifts between English and the local language, Warlpiri. Two of the media workers are Aboriginal, from the local community, and the other is a 'whitefella' facilitator. In neighbouring rooms, other small, cross-cultural teams work together to produce local video, radio and music projects. The organisation for which they work is called Pintubi Anmatjere Warlpiri Media and Communications, or PAW Media. It is one of eight remote Indigenous media organisations (RIMOs) in Australia.

The production model at PAW Media can be described as an example of 'co-creative media', involving collaborative relationships between professional producer/facilitators and community media workers to produce storytelling projects (Rennie, 2013: 21). Co-creative media practices can be found in various forms across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, arts, disability and educational sectors in Australia (Woodrow et al., 2015: 150–1). Co-creative media gives people from marginalised and disadvantaged groups the opportunity to participate in media and storytelling production through collaboration with a facilitator. This key collaborative relationship between participant and facilitator, and the way participation is motivated, conceptualised, enabled and limited within it, is the focus of the research project discussed in this article.

As a case study through which to explore co-creative media, my research examines lived experiences of participation within cross-cultural, collaborative media production teams working at PAW Media. By focusing on a case study within the context of remote Indigenous media production, the research offers insights into a model of co-creative media that has been operating in various forms for more than 30 years. By means of 13 in-depth interviews with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal collaborators, grounded in participant observation, the study describes the current practices of participation at PAW Media. It also uncovers how an ideal form of participation in media is conceptualised, and documents recommendations to help reach that ideal. Through this process, I propose a framework for evaluating participation in co-creative media practices that can be applied both within and outside the remote Indigenous media sector.

To date, academic research into co-creative media has focused on theorising, mapping and describing the concept, and its position within the broader field of participatory media, storytelling and research (Spurgeon et al., 2009; Woodrow et al., 2015). Literature on co-creative media offers the key insight that participation in participatory media is often something that

is actively facilitated, rather than an organic occurrence in response to a new technology (Rennie, 2013: 23). However—perhaps because it is a relatively new area of study—the literature is limited in its accounts of how participation is facilitated, experienced and limited, and the power dynamics at play within the central participant-facilitator relationship. For people in marginalised communities, including remote Aboriginal communities, the ability to participate in media can be empowering (IRCA, 2010: 6–7). Without first understanding how participation is conceptualised and experienced by those performing it, though, we are limited in our capacity to evaluate and improve co-creative media as a participatory practice.

Theoretical framework

Participation

Most scholarship positions participation within the context of Western democratic ideals (Arnstein, 1969; Carpentier, 2011; Pretty, 1995; White, 1996). Here, types of participation are assessed within two binaries. High participation features acts of maximal control, with individuals and communities being able to significantly influence the socio-political structures in which they exist, and thus hold those in power to account. Meanwhile, low participation features activities with negligible power redistribution. Participation is here differentiated from concepts such as interaction or access (Carpentier, 2012). With the community media sector increasingly needing to demonstrate its social impact, this maximalist view of participation is a valuable concept to incorporate within evaluative and analytical frameworks (Dreher, 2017: 14).

A notable and commonly cited academic model for evaluating participation is Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation, details of which were first published in 1969. Eight categories are proposed, ranked as rungs on a ladder, ascending from least to most reflective of empowering participation (Arnstein, 1969: 217). Ascending from the bottom, the categories are: manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power and citizen control (1969: 217). Only the top three categories of citizen control, delegated power and partnership are described as being reflective of citizen power, while the remaining categories are classed as tokenism or non-participation (1969: 217).

There are some limitations to Arnstein's ladder and similar participation evaluation frameworks. They do not allow for the dynamic, non-linear and evolving nature of participation (Potter, 2014: 44). The models fail to shed light on who participates, and the activities in which they participate (Cornwall, 2008: 275–6), or to consider the right not to participate (Potter, 2014: 44). Further, the Western democratic ideals underpinning the models may exclude other ways in which participation can be valued in alternate cultural and political contexts.

In attempting to find a way of thinking about participation that is useful within the non-Western setting of my research, I will try two approaches. First, in keeping with key literature on critical participation, I recognise participation as synonymous with power; however, given the non-Western setting of this research, it is possible—even likely—that Aboriginal study participants perceive participation in different terms than those valued in the models. Therefore, though I reference Arnstein's ladder in my research findings, I will also preference an evaluative approach that considers participation more subjectively. How

it is understood and valued should be dependent on the perceptions and lived experiences of participants, as shaped by their political and cultural contexts. This approach to participation reflects Couldry's (2010) theorising on the notion of voice. Couldry points to the necessity of understanding voice in terms of how it is valued by subjects whose voices are, or are not, reflected in social, cultural and political institutions. In my research, only by first finding out how PAW Media's production staff experience and perceive Aboriginal participation have I been able to make context-specific recommendations to support that participation.

Participatory and co-creative media

The term 'participatory media' describes bottom-up, inclusive, process-driven approaches to media production, and represents an alternative to top-down, outcome-driven orthodox media structures (Spurgeon et al., 2009: 276). Participatory media allow people who would otherwise only be media consumers to also be media producers (Rennie, 2013: 23). Huesca (2008: 191) lists three components of participatory media production: (1) access to communication resources; (2) participation in key aspects of production; and (3) collective ownership and policy-making.

However, literature on participatory media often fails to critique the organisational and social structures enabling, shaping and potentially restricting participation (Spurgeon et al., 2009: 276). Participatory media frameworks can be too technologically determinist, assuming that practices spring up organically when new media technologies arrive (2009: 276). In reality, participation is often the result of planned and intentional processes involving professional facilitators and organisations (2009: 276).

Challenging the assumption that participation in media is always an organic, participant-led process, the term 'co-creative media' is used to describe a type of participatory media (Rennie, 2013: 23). The co-creative model assumes that many people interested in being involved with participatory media projects are unable or unwilling to take part in every aspect of production. Here, facilitators can fill in these gaps, allowing participants to participate in the capacity of their choosing (Spurgeon et al., 2009: 280). In this sense, a co-creative approach is a way of configuring participation in relation to the technical and industrial process of media production.

Ideally, co-creative media projects allow for the 'best of both worlds'. They bring people with unique perspectives and non-mainstream stories together with professional media producers and facilitators. However, the reality of negotiating the constantly evolving roles and power dynamics at play between the two parties can be complex. According to Rennie (2013: 24), drawing attention to the role of professional facilitators within participatory media should not undermine the authenticity of participation; rather, the co-creative model acknowledges that facilitated relationships often exist within the production process, and could have positive and/or negative effects on participation.

Background: PAW Media and its cross-cultural, co-creative workforce

PAW Media is a RIMO based in Yuendumu in Australia's Northern Territory. The organisation, formerly known as Warlpiri Media Association (WMA), emerged in the early 1980s. It has

since grown to service 14 remote communities with radio and other media, and has a footprint stretching more than 450,000 square kilometres (PAW Media and Communications, 2016b).

One catalyst for the early development of WMA was the arrival of United States-born anthropologist Eric Michaels in the 1980s (Hinkson, 2002: 202). He came to Yuendumu after hearing local people had started using video cameras, a novel instance of remote Indigenous media production in Australia (Hinkson, 2002: 202). Michaels worked alongside local video producers such as Kumanjayi Japanangka Granites and Francis Jupurrurla Kelly to develop a 'Warlpiri approach to video' (PAW Media and Communications, 2016a: para. 2). Since Michaels' departure from Yuendumu in the late 1980s, a succession of non-Aboriginal managers have been employed (PAW Media and Communications, 2016a). From the late 1990s, non-Aboriginal employees have also worked in full-time video and radio facilitation and production roles (PAW Media and Communications, 2016a). Local media workers outnumber their non-Aboriginal counterparts, but tend to work casually or part-time. It is typical for local staff to be away for extended periods, but return to PAW Media weeks, months or even years later. At the time of my research, there were four non-Aboriginal producers and about 15 to 20 local Av producers working across radio, video, animation and music platforms.

Not all media produced by the organisation is a result of co-creative practice. Some projects—especially in the music department—are entirely locally organised and created; however, the majority of work produced at PAW Media is the product of some level of cross-cultural collaboration.

Method

Participants

As mentioned above, I conducted interviews with 13 participants working in radio, video, music and/or animation production at PAW Media. Nine of the participants were Aboriginal, employed as local community media workers. Four of the participants were non-Aboriginal, employed as producers, trainers, facilitators and coordinators. The average (mean) age was 42 years for Aboriginal participants and 44 years for other participants. Aboriginal participants had been employed at PAW Media for an average of 4.6 years, while their non-Aboriginal counterparts had been employed there for an average of 2.5 years. First languages spoken by Aboriginal participants included Warlpiri, Anmatjere, Arrente and English. The first language of all non-Aboriginal participants was English.

Researcher role

Prior to conducting this research, I worked for PAW Media as a radio producer for almost three years between 2012 and 2014. During that period, I collaborated with local Aboriginal broadcasters to produce live and pre-recorded radio for the 14 communities on PAW Media's footprint. This job was my first experience working in a remote Aboriginal community, which was an immense privilege; however, I found it difficult to fully understand and justify my role, as a non-Aboriginal person, in facilitating Aboriginal media production. On a personal level, this research project represented an opportunity to better understand my facilitator

role in relation to enabling and limiting Aboriginal participation. On a broader level, I hope this research can be developed into a useful resource for other facilitators and organisations supporting Aboriginal participation in remote community workplaces.

As a former employee, I consider myself as more an insider researcher than an outsider researcher (Gair, 2012: 137). This study benefited from advantages generally granted to insider researchers, including easier access to organisational gatekeepers; a pre-established rapport with participants; and an existing understanding of local context (Unluer, 2012). However, the study may have been disadvantaged if my established familiarity had censored the information participants chose to share, so as not to upset our existing relationships. I endeavoured to minimise this risk in the interviews by asking broad, non-leading questions. In data analysis, I remained alert to the possibility of participant self-censorship, and where I believed that it may have been a factor, I disclosed this doubt in the findings. In data collection and analysis, I acknowledge my reflexivity as a researcher.

Data collection

Research was conducted during two field trips. The first was to a Remote Indigenous Media Festival, hosted by PAW Media in the Warlpiri community of Lajamanu for one week in October 2015. The second field trip was a week-long visit to PAW Media's base in Yuendumu in April 2016.

Given that this was an exploratory study into Aboriginal participation, I selected an ethnographic approach as a way to base my findings in the perceptions of those experiencing and facilitating participation. Data was collected primarily through confidential, semi-structured, individual in-depth interviews. Participant observation was used as a secondary research tool. Data was collected via audio recording (with prior consent) and note-taking.

Considering that research conducted in remote Aboriginal communities is tainted by a history of exploitation and miscommunication, I prioritised ethical approaches to gaining free, prior informed consent from participants. As Meadows (2009: 124) recommends, I invested time into knowing, being known and gaining authorisation in the community I was researching. Also, following Laverick and Brown's advice (cited in Liamputtong, 2010: 5), I adopted an approach of patience, courtesy, adaptability and willingness to learn.

Data analysis

In a qualitative data analysis process, recordings of the 13 interviews were assigned numerical codes, transcribed and read repeatedly, along with participant observation notes. Recurring themes were identified and categorised.

Given the limited scope of this study, focus on recurrent themes was prioritised over exploration of each individual participant's view. Categories were included only if addressed by multiple participants, or if featuring an opinion contradicting a view held by multiple participants. This was an attempt to account for outlier perspectives while also allowing for discussion of the major issues emerging from the study.

Results

This study presents its results in five sections: (1) motivations for participation; (2) co-creative distribution of labour; (3) facilitator-participant power dynamics; (4) perceptions of ideal participation; and (5) recommendations to improve participation. In communicating these results, I prioritise use of participant quotes. This is an attempt to allow participants to speak for themselves, and to provide insights into the way participants perceive the issues explored. Participant observations are only noted where they contradict, or add an additional perspective to, what was found in participant interviews.

Henceforth, I adopt the Warlpiri words *Kardiya* (non-Aboriginal) and *Yapa* (Aboriginal) to refer to participants. This reflects how participants refer to themselves and their cross-cultural colleagues within the interview excerpts displayed. To respect anonymity, participants are referred to as *Kardiya* participants 1 to 4 and *Yapa* participants 1 to 9. I elected not to allocate fake names, as this may cause confusion within such a small organisation and community.

Motivations for participation

Yapa participants revealed three key motivations to work at PAW Media. The first, and most commonly cited, was a sense that their work provided an important community service. *Yapa* participants spoke with pride about serving local audiences. *Yapa* participant 1 stated:

> I love going to work every morning, love doing things for our community … If we don't go to work, nothing gets done, we need to turn up for work every day.

Yapa participant 2 added:

> I like mostly talking on the radio and talking to my people. Yeah, the good thing I like is when people call us for a request. I know then that the community is listening … Providing a service for our people. It's really good.

A second motivator for *Yapa* media producers was enjoyment of the work atmosphere. *Yapa* participant 3 said:

> People are happy, you come to work, your workmates greet you in the morning with 'Good morning, it's a beautiful day.' Sometimes I come just to hang around with the other workers.

Yapa participant 4 had noticed the work atmosphere at PAW Media from a young age, stating:

> Ever since I was at school, I've seen a lot of people having fun here. I thought I might work for media because it's fun there.

A final factor motivating work participation for *Yapa* staff was enjoyment from the media production process. *Yapa* participant 5 said:

> I like listening to music, using the computer, looking at old stuff, doing video shots, working the panels on the [radio] desk. You get to do recording and editing. I'm really interested in it.

For *Kardiya* staff facilitating the participatory media process, there were two common motivating factors. The first was the opportunity to learn about, and work within, a different culture. The second was the chance to support and empower local staff. *Kardiya* participant 1 summed this up:

> Learning about the culture that we're working in is fantastic. Seeing engagement from *Yapa* is terrific. They're the two best things about it.

Co-creative distribution of labour

All study participants were asked to describe their own jobs as well as those of their cross-cultural, co-creative colleagues. PAW Media workers described a clear demarcation of tasks and responsibilities along cultural lines.

Both *Yapa* and *Kardiya* participants described the *Yapa* work as fitting into five key areas: (1) everyday media production (broadcasting/editing/recording); (2) generating or approving key creative ideas; (3) community liaison to organise media projects and ensure cultural protocols were met; (4) Aboriginal language-based tasks; and (5) providing cultural advice to *Kardiya* collaborators.

The *Kardiya* position within co-creative teams was attributed with more varied roles. These included: (1) technical media expertise; (2) training and helping *Yapa* staff; (3) coordinating large-scale projects such as feature documentaries; (4) day-to-day paperwork and administration; (5) tasks requiring written English literacy; (6) liaison with government and other organisations; (7) writing and acquitting grants; (8) delegating and coordinating work for *Yapa* staff; (9) filling in for *Yapa* staff when they were away; (10) tasks that *Yapa* staff did not want to do.

Despite the division of labour, *Yapa* participants were all quick to emphasise the cohesiveness of the production groups. *Yapa* participant 5 said:

> The job brings us together. Different colours, *Yapa*, *Kardiya*, Chinese. It's good to share dreamings, songlines.

Cross-cultural power dynamics

To explore power dynamics within collaborative teams, study participants were asked about generating ideas, addressing creative disagreements and their overall views on power-sharing.

Generating ideas

In this study, all participants spoke of an idea-generation process that prioritised *Yapa* input. Yapa staff all said they felt supported to pursue their creative ideas and interests. *Yapa* participant 2 stated:

> They [*Kardiya* staff] encourage us to make what we want to make. They're not giving us a piece of paper saying do this, do it this way … they're telling us to do it our way. And they help us with it.

Kardiya staff described their roles in terms of supporting *Yapa* ideas, while also making some creative contributions themselves. *Kardiya* participant 3 explained:

> Primarily it's trying to facilitate their [*Yapa*] ideas to make them a reality. So whatever their ideas are, are primary. And if there's something I see that can add to that, I'll put my two cents in.

With respect to their own ideas, *Kardiya* staff all said they would be prepared to concede if there was disagreement from *Yapa* colleagues. *Kardiya* participant 4 stated:

> I would explain my idea and why I thought it was good for the production but, ultimately, I would have to concede if I thought he didn't like my idea. Because it's a Yapa production and he's the *Yapa* worker, and if he has a problem with one of my ideas, I have to let it go.

Overall, study participants described *Yapa* collaborators as having more power than *Kardiya* collaborators in terms of generating and approving ideas. However, I noticed limits to this power. Although it was not mentioned in the interviews, I observed *Kardiya* staff also determining which ideas were supported. *Yapa* ideas that *Kardiya* staff did not like, did not have time for or felt did not fit within externally funded project guidelines were sometimes subtly sidelined. To some extent, for an idea to come into fruition, *Kardiya* and *Yapa* staff both had to support it.

Addressing creative disagreements

In dealing with creative differences, study participants all indicated that because PAW Media was an Indigenous media organisation, the *Yapa* preferences should be prioritised.

Yapa participants said they felt comfortable speaking up if they disagreed with a collaborator's decision or approach. *Yapa* participant 2 stated:

> I'd try to work with them, let them know that I don't like it.

I observed, though, that *Yapa* collaborators generally only felt compelled to speak up when they observed a breach relating to cultural protocol. More general creative differences of opinion usually were voiced only upon consultation. *Kardiya* participant 4 observed reluctance by *Yapa* collaborators to initiate conflict, explaining:

> I wish [*Yapa*] people would be more up-front and say no to things. I think [*Yapa*] people often find it hard to say no, so they just say yes and then stop turning up.

Generally speaking, *Yapa* participants had the upper hand with creative disagreements within cross-cultural teams; however, this power was strengthened when active consultation processes were in place, rather than when it was assumed that Yapa collaborators would speak up if they had a problem.

Power structures

Overall, *Yapa* staff described a balanced power dynamic featuring mutual respect and appreciation. *Yapa* participant 4 stated:

> A new *Kardiya* comes in with a blank mind. *Yapa* have worked in the community for most of their life so when *Yapa* are explaining to *Kardiya*, it's like giving the knowledge. And the *Kardiya* is giving the knowledge about what they've done before. So they're like equal in power.

From the *Kardiya* perspective, participants also referred to a mutual dependence within the production process. *Yapa* participant 4 stated:

> I think it's genuine collaboration. Many of our projects wouldn't be made without *Kardiya* producers, but also couldn't be made without the input of *Yapa* workers and the *Yapa* who contribute to the stories.

Overall, participants expressed a view that power was shared equally between *Yapa* and *Kardiya* collaborators; however, these equal power dynamics should not be considered fixed,

but rather as shifting over time, depending on the individual relationships, personalities, production frameworks and circumstances involved.

Perceptions of ideal participation

In order to understand whether and how improvements could be made in relation to Aboriginal participation, study participants were asked about their ambitions for ideal participation in the workplace. Here, *Yapa* and *Kardiya* perspectives differed significantly.

Kardiya staff shared a view that ideal Aboriginal participation was synonymous with *Yapa* workers taking control of all aspects of production, leaving *Kardiya* roles redundant. *Kardiya* participant 3 stated:

> I personally feel that if someone's coming here from a *Kardiya* world, or is Kardiya, their job should be to make their job irrelevant. So basically, by the time you leave, someone [*Yapa*] should be able to do your [*Kardiya*] job.

Kardiya participants voiced a level of disappointment that an autonomous Aboriginal model had not eventuated. *Kardiya* participant 4 stated:

> You always hope in these [*Kardiya*] roles that you're leaving a legacy, and when you go, [*Yapa*] people will continue to work as they have with you. I've really given the [*Yapa*] fellas I work with every opportunity to learn enough to be able to do these productions without me, but that said, when I went away there were several months where I wasn't there and nothing happened.

Kardiya participant 1 expressed a resigned view that an autonomous Indigenous model would be ideal, but was not currently feasible:

> Look, ideally it would be entirely *Yapa* [working at PAW Media] of course. But the reality is that *Kardiya* have the skills from the outside world that *Yapa* want … It's a necessary partnership, it's maybe not the ideal thing, but we just need to find ways to make it work best.

In relation to the nine *Yapa* study participants, only two expressed a desire to move towards a model of Aboriginal autonomy in the workplace. *Yapa* participant 1 stated:

> Well that's a dream of mine. That's what us *Yapa* mob got to do, work towards that, for Yapa to run the organisation how we want it run.

Yapa participant 2 shared this view, stating:

> It'd be good if it was all Aboriginals working, it'd be really good because we can show people of other communities, and towns around, that there's an Aboriginal organisation that's just run by Aboriginal people, no other workers.

The majority of *Yapa* participants, however, expressed a desire not to work towards an Aboriginal-only model at PAW Media, instead preferring to retain the co-creative teams. *Yapa* participant 5 stated:

> I prefer to keep going as it was before, *Kardiya* and *Yapa* working together.

A few reasons were given for this preference. *Yapa* participants said they wanted to continue learning new skills from *Kardiya* staff, and that they also generally enjoyed the cross-cultural company. *Yapa* participant 7 stated:

> It's important that we need *Kardiya* coming into the community, and they become like our family in the organisation. It's important we have *Kardiya* coming in to share their ideas and experience.

Participants also stated that by having *Kardiya* staff consistently in the office, *Yapa* staff members could be absent from work in order to participate in other cultural commitments. *Yapa* participant 4 said:

> Yeah, at least it's good to always have someone [*Kardiya*] to take over. For us *Yapa*, there's always something coming up, like cultural reasons and sorry business. Like ceremonies. We don't have a date, it just happens. We can't be here all the time at the desk.

Finally, a couple of *Yapa* participants also mentioned that without *Kardiya* staff as gatekeepers, local family disputes or obligations might interfere with appropriate allocation of work resources. In summary, although an Indigenous-only model was advocated by *Kardiya* facilitators, this lacked support from most *Yapa* participants. Instead, from a *Yapa* perspective, there was a strong, although not unanimous, desire to continue working within the current cross-cultural co-creative model.

Recommendations for improved participation

Yapa and *Kardiya* participants were asked about current barriers to Aboriginal participation, and how these could be improved within the current co-creative structure. The suggestions from all interviewees related to improving the facilitation skills and approaches of *Kardiya* staff, so they could best support local participation. *Yapa* participant 8 explained:

> We have no problem with *Kardiya* coming and working, just make sure they respect the community and can work with the community.

Language training

A key barrier to collaboration was the fact that *Kardiya* facilitators lacked local language skills. Most *Kardiya* staff only knew a handful of phrases in Warlpiri, and cross-cultural communication at PAW Media was carried out primarily in English. While most *Yapa* staff had good verbal English language skills, some said they still struggled to comprehend everything *Kardiya* staff said. *Yapa* participant 7 explained:

> The tricky things are the [English] words that are unexpected and that I can't understand. I go back to them and I try to understand, but sometimes I just can't understand.

Moreover, *Kardiya* staff recognised that limited local language comprehension restricted their cultural knowledge. *Kardiya* participant 3 stated:

> We have just got to learn language. It automatically gives us massive insights into the people we're working with. Because language is the key to how people think, operate and understand the world … I feel like it really should be part of our work, every week, with *Yapa* staff training us.

Cultural inductions

A second barrier to *Kardiya* staff facilitating participation was a lack of local cultural knowledge, particularly upon commencement of employment. *Yapa* participant 4 explained:

> Some *Kardiyas*, they don't understand *Yapa* way, *Yapa* law. Some *Kardiyas*, they're new, and they just come and they don't know what's going on. It's really different for them.

Kardiya staff all lamented not receiving more than a very brief cultural induction, and advised that this needed to be changed. *Kardiya* participant 4 said:

> I found it quite challenging not really having any training … not with the cross-cultural context.

Kardiya participant 3 added:

> I think it's essential that a more thorough cultural induction be implemented as part of our start of employment.

Multiple recommendations were made about what should be included in induction training. These were: (1) being taken out on country with an elder to learn about cultural protocols and local kinship systems; (2) spending time in other Yuendumu community organisations; (3) being given relevant literature to read; (4) being mentored by more experienced facilitators; and (5) being given clearer job descriptions.

Yapa participants also suggested that new *Kardiya* staff be encouraged to meet as many people in the community as possible upon arrival. *Yapa* participant 1 stated:

> The idea is to get to know the community, and respect the community, mingle with people, just talk. Share ideas. Tell us about yourself. What you do and what in the past you have done. That makes it easy for community to relate to you.

Project-selection guidelines

Many of PAW Media's projects involved funding or commissions from external agencies. At times, pressures such as deadlines and expectations of high production values created barriers for Aboriginal participation. Given that *Yapa* collaborators could often be absent from work due to competing commitments, *Kardiya* staff said they sometimes felt compelled to work alone to meet funder deadlines and expectations. *Kardiya* participant 3 explained:

> A lot of it is the pressure of delivery. Things actually need to get finished. If there are no *Yapa* around, *Kardiya* have just got to do it, regardless of what's going on.

Moreover, in order to meet deadlines, initial grant applications were sometimes rushed through without proper consultation or involvement of *Yapa* staff. This sometimes left *Kardiya* facilitators stuck finishing projects in which *Yapa* staff members were never interested. *Kardiya* participant 4 suggested:

> Maybe there should be rules—like no project should be conceived by a *Kardiya* staff member without significant *Yapa* involvement, or no funding should be sought for a project unless it is being driven by a *Yapa* staff member.

Advanced facilitation training

Kardiya staff interviewed in this study all had strong technical media skills and previous experience engaging with Indigenous cultures. However, none had received much formal facilitation or community development training. A few staff said it had taken them time to learn to step back in their collaborations to create space for local input. Both *Yapa* and

Kardiya study participants identified a tendency for *Kardiya* staff to rush or take over projects. *Kardiya* participant 4 said:

> I've seen other *Kardiya* facilitators take over and pretty much make productions themselves, then just tack a *Yapa* name on as director, which I think is really wrong.

Kardiya participant 3 added:

> We [*Kardiya*] like to control things, because there's risk involved; otherwise it could all go pear-shaped.

Yapa study participants also noticed over-zealous tendencies in some *Kardiya* staff. *Yapa* participant 6 said:

> They [*Kardiya*] are not always patient, but we need that patience to be there, to show cultural respect.

Staff retention

An overall barrier to Aboriginal participation at PAW Media was the high turnover of *Kardiya* staff. *Yapa* staff spoke of the strain of regularly saying goodbye to *Kardiya* colleagues and friends, then having to invest time in 'breaking in' replacements. *Yapa* participant 4 stated:

> Every year it's hard. I see friends going away. And then another one comes and it takes them time to get into it. I've seen that happening for 15 years, new people coming in. And I feel sad for the ones who left.

Kardiya staff also recognised that they became more effective in their roles over time. *Kardiya* participant 4 said:

> I feel I was a lot better at my job after being there for three years than just being there a couple of months … It takes a long time to understand how things work.

A couple of *Kardiya* staff named burnout as a contributing factor. *Kardiya* participant 3 said:

> Sometimes *Kardiya* staff get a bit of martyr syndrome. They feel like they need to burn themselves out. I've seen that happen, people being hospitalised because they just feel like they need to go to the 'enth degree.

Yapa staff said their *Kardiya* collaborators usually left because they missed friends and family. *Yapa* participant 7 explained:

> They probably get sad being here away from their mob. I think they need more time to spend with family, then they can come back here if they want.

Thus, while staff retention can be difficult to ensure, investigating options for extended leave and professional development could be worthwhile.

Discussion

This study explored Aboriginal participation within co-creative, cross-cultural production teams at PAW Media by examining the motivations, labour distribution, power dynamics, ideals and barriers related to that participation, as described by study participants. Overall, the cross-cultural working relationships found within the teams can be described as *reciprocal partnerships*. *Yapa* and *Kardiya* media workers had different roles and responsibilities, but

power and creative control were shared relatively equally. Both parties expressed mutual respect and appreciation.

It is important to note from the outset that this finding of reciprocal partnerships relied heavily on the individual approaches of the team members involved, rather than the structural set-up of the organisation. Considering the cross-cultural division of labour found at PAW Media, alongside the wider (largely non-Aboriginal) political and economic structures within which RIMOs exist, it would be unsurprising to find lower levels of Aboriginal participation exercised within similarly structured teams comprising different individuals. Structural limitations were recognised by *Yapa* and *Kardiya* staff, and their recommendations to protect and improve participation will be discussed shortly; however, the existence of reciprocal partnerships will first be addressed.

Earlier, I identified two possible ways to evaluate participation. The first was to refer to popular academic models grounded in Western democratic norms, such as Arnstein's (1969) ladder. The second was to evaluate participation by considering its value as dependent on the world-views of participants. Participation through reciprocal partnerships is considered differently depending on which evaluation method is used.

With regard to Arnstein's (1969) ladder, partnership represents the third best of eight types of participation (1969: 217). Partnership is ranked only below delegated power and citizen control (1969: 217). In other words, partnership is a good form of participation, but it would be better if *Yapa* participants had more autonomy within the relationship. Through a mainstream lens, this is a clear and helpful analysis: we know where we are in relation to other types of participation, and what better forms or participation would look like.

Using the second, more context-specific, evaluation approach, attending to participants' own world-views, Aboriginal participation at PAW Media can also be seen as valued. In Warlpiri communities such as Yuendumu, obligation-based roles and responsibilities to land, law, ceremony and family are of central importance (Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu, Holmes and Box, 2008). Within this context, *Yapa* media workers valued their participation as a means of providing a community product to local audiences. They were proud to be supporting local language, stories, knowledge, music and culture. Here, participation was less about exercising individual power, and more about performing a role within the larger community. Reciprocal partnerships with *Kardiya* staff were perceived as a generally effective, enjoyable means to achieve this valued participation. So far, therefore, there is little to suggest anything except a positive, valued form of Aboriginal participation within the co-creative structure at PAW Media. To position this within a contextual evaluative framework, I will shortly discuss how these lived experiences compare with participants' perceptions of ideal participation, but first a few points should be made.

As an aside to the previous paragraph, I do not wish to suggest that communities such as Yuendumu represent a static, insulated form of a traditional Aboriginal culture from which to evaluate participation. In Yuendumu—like anywhere—culture is evolving and being shaped by various factors. Western influences exist alongside—sometimes in competition with—Warlpiri norms. Nonetheless, the Warlpiri cultural context remains important for understanding participation in this study.

The finding of valued participation at PAW Media is noteworthy partly because of the low socio-economic status of remote Aboriginal communities such as Yuendumu. Remote

community members are less likely to participate in employment or education than other Australians, while issues like domestic violence also negatively impact participation in community life (AIHW, 2015). This suggests valued Aboriginal participation at PAW Media was not just an incidental occurrence as part of wider trend in Yuendumu, but rather a specific and meaningful phenomenon.

The experiences of valued Aboriginal participation at PAW Media documented in this study depended to a significant extent on reciprocal partnerships within a co-creative production model involving *Kardiya* collaborators. Examination of the distribution of labour within teams revealed a reliance on, or preference for, *Kardiya* staff to carry out key tasks. This idea fits theorising of co-creative media as a process enabling participation by allowing facilitators to 'bridge participation gaps' (Spurgeon et al., 2009: 276). This is not to say that valued Aboriginal participation could not also be possible under alternative production models, just that the experiences documented in this study were enabled by co-creative practice.

So far, my discussion has looked at conceptually evaluating Aboriginal participation in its current form at PAW Media. I now turn to considerations of how best to improve participatory practice within the context of the case study. Here, the notion of ideal participation, as perceived by participants, becomes important for creating a benchmark against which to compare current practice.

Despite finding value in the current state of Aboriginal participation at PAW Media, many study participants saw room for improvement. However, significantly, there was a lack of consensus on what an ideal model of participation looked like, and thus what they should be working towards. *Kardiya* staff and a couple of *Yapa* staff supported a future shift towards a more autonomous model of Aboriginal participation at PAW Media. They imagined media production where labour and responsibility were in Aboriginal hands, without non-Aboriginal influence. Yet most *Yapa* study participants rejected this option, instead preferring to retain the collaborative, cross-cultural teams in which they worked within the co-creative model—albeit, importantly, with some improvements.

Having *Kardiya* facilitators working towards an independent Aboriginal model of participation, without the support of the majority of *Yapa* staff, is likely to be problematic. If facilitators are trying to hand over jobs and responsibility to unwilling *Yapa* staff, this may actually lead to disengagement and a weakening of Aboriginal participation. Further, *Kardiya* staff may feel frustrated about their failure to realise their ideal model of participation, and question their role in being there at all.

The support from *Kardiya* staff for a more autonomous Aboriginal participation model was hardly surprising. Coming from non-Aboriginal Australian communities, they were likely to share the Western democratic ideals that promote participant autonomy as an ideal form of participation. In keeping with logic advocated in Arnstein's (1969) ladder, *Kardiya* staff felt this would strengthen Aboriginal participation because *Yapa* media workers would no longer have to share power or creative influence with non-Aboriginal parties. Nonetheless, given that the desire to move towards an autonomous model was challenged by many Aboriginal participants, it would be beneficial for *Kardiya* staff to factor this into informing their facilitation approaches.

Most *Yapa* participants perceived their participation as being better served under a cross-cultural, co-creative production model, and found benefits in employing Kardiya collaborators.

Yapa staff members were not forced to be involved in every aspect of the production process, but could have more freedom to choose how and when to participate. By sharing labour with *Kardiya* staff, they felt better able take time off from work to participate in other family and cultural commitments, knowing day-to-day media operations would continue without them. Overall, as a trade-off for sharing power with *Kardiya* collaborators, *Yapa* workers had more flexibility in choosing the nature of their participation. In addition, Yapa staff generally enjoyed the personal relationships formed through cross-cultural collaboration, as well as valuing the skills, technical expertise and resource management to which they had access through employing outside professionals.

I note that the finding of *Yapa* staff preferring a co-creative model may have been influenced by the fact that I, the researcher, was a former *Kardiya* facilitator. *Yapa* participants may not have wanted to cause offence by voicing a preference for *Kardiya* staff to leave. However, I believe this risk was minimal, as I approached the topic in broad terms during interviews, in reference to the distant future, and because participants gave reasoned answers justifying their positions.

Despite overall satisfaction with the state of affairs at PAW Media, study participants recognised that the current dependence on *Kardiya* staff did limit, or had the potential to limit, Aboriginal participation. If a *Kardiya* staff member was ineffective in their position, this could lead to disengagement from *Yapa* collaborators, and to a situation where a *Kardiya* staff member was left to create Aboriginal media products with very little Aboriginal input. Even for *Kardiya* staff who were suited to their facilitation roles, limited local language skills and cultural knowledge restricted their capacity to facilitate Aboriginal participation—especially upon recent commencement of employment. Thus, in supporting the current dominant *Yapa* view of ideal Aboriginal participation within a co-creative framework, recommendations made by study participants should be considered. These recommendations relate to improving *Kardiya* skills and approaches in terms of: (1) local language; (2) cultural knowledge; (3) project planning; (4) facilitation; and (5) employment longevity.

In prioritising the views of *Yapa* participants, this study proposes a process for improving Aboriginal participation by refining the current co-creative structure. However, the opinions of two *Yapa* participants who supported a shift towards a more autonomous Aboriginal model of participation should not be disregarded. Just because this model was not desired by most *Yapa* study participants at PAW Media does not mean this will not change in the future, when the topic should be reconsidered. It is possible that the default opinion to continue with a co-creative model was in part due to convenience and familiarity with the status quo—a situation from which participants may eventually wish to move away.

Furthermore, by proposing a refined co-creative production model at PAW Media, I do not deny the troubling structural cross-cultural dependency that will continue to perpetuate. The question with which remote Indigenous organisations such as PAW Media have to grapple is whether the benefits of working within a cross-cultural, co-creative structure outweigh the downsides of an ongoing dependency. An alternative structure is surely possible, but would fundamentally change the current model, which is able to capitalise on non-local facilitation, technical expertise and connections with Australia's wider media industry.

Given that, at the time of this study, the model of production collectively preferred by *Yapa* workers at PAW Media was one of cross-cultural collaboration, this should be respected

and supported. The co-creative workforce dynamics should be transparent, monitored and strategically supported to support maximum Aboriginal participation within this model.

Limitations

The research outlined in this article should be read as attempting to build a conceptual frame for examining the cross-cultural, collaborative relationships within a co-creative production model, and using that as a basis for addressing questions of participation, power and collaboration. The qualitative findings presented must be understood in the context of a short and small-scale research project, and are therefore not generalisable or transferable. However, the conceptual framework and method used in this study are transferable. Via their transfer, findings from this study could be tested and refined as part of a larger effort to understand, evaluate and improve participation in co-creative media practices, both within and outside the remote Indigenous media sector.

Conclusion

This article outlines findings from the first qualitative research to explore the lived experiences of Aboriginal participation in cross-cultural, co-creative production teams working in a RIMO. As a case study, it looked at PAW Media, a RIMO based in the remote Northern Territory community of Yuendumu. Through 13 in-depth interviews, grounded in participant observation, the study revealed valued experiences of Aboriginal participation at PAW Media. This participation was facilitated through a co-creative production model with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal collaborators sharing power relatively equally, working in reciprocal partnership.

The significance of this study can be found in both its policy recommendations and its theoretical contributions. In terms of practical benefit, this research demonstrates how participation in co-creative media can be understood, evaluated and subsequently improved. The research examined how *Yapa* producers at PAW Media conceptualised an ideal form of Aboriginal participation, and documented recommendations to help achieve this ideal. The overarching vision for local Aboriginal participation expressed by *Yapa* study participants was one that broadly retained, yet modified, the current co-creative production model. Particular recommendations were made to improve the language skills, cultural knowledge, facilitation abilities and project development approaches of *Kardiya* collaborators.

In reaching this understanding of what an ideal model of Aboriginal participation looked like, as perceived by most *Yapa* participants, it was interesting to note that it conflicted with ideals held by *Kardiya* collaborators. Here, *Kardiya* producers envisioned ideal participation in Aboriginal media production as being an Aboriginal-only affair, existing separately from non-Aboriginal influence. In finding that this ideal was rejected by most (although not all) *Yapa* participants, there is an opportunity for *Kardiya* producers to reconsider their roles in facilitating Aboriginal participation. This does not mean that ideas for alternative models should be disregarded, but that an active process of regular dialogue regarding goals and directions for Aboriginal participation should be engaged in.

In contribution to theoretical debates, this research illustrates an alternative approach to exploring participation by considering it a concept and practice best evaluated by positioning it within the context of participants' world-views. This approach was adopted alongside more traditional academic models for evaluating participation, which are highly valuable in reminding us that participation is linked to power. Used in isolation, traditional models, with their tendency to champion Western democratic ideals, can be problematic in terms of accounting for participation in the largely non-Western context of a remote Aboriginal community. Here, ideas relating to obligation and community service must be considered as contributing to participant perceptions of what constitutes valued participation. This research found mainstream understandings of participation, which idealised maximal participant control, were strongly reflected in the views of *Kardiya* study participants, but emerged less in the views of their *Yapa* counterparts. Instead, the alternative theoretical description of co-creativity was more reflective of *Yapa* thinking on ideal participation in the PAW Media workplace.

Opportunities exist for future studies to advance understandings of participation and co-creative production in community and Indigenous media. In relation to PAW Media, it would be beneficial to further investigate the recommendations presented in this study to develop a practical training program and/or resource. At a broader level, future research could examine participation within other Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations using co-creative media practices. Ideally, these studies could be of a broader scope, considering the organisational and structural factors at play. These studies could look at how participation is affected by internal and external stakeholders such as managers, board members, funding bodies and government policy-makers.

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CHAPTER 25

Participatory Film Production as Media Practice

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Abstract

This article uses a practice theory perspective to study new media creation through the case of participatory film production. Although a growing body of practice-related literature addresses user-generated content or online creative communities, the engagement of collectives in the development of complex long-term creative projects like movies or transmedia has received less attention. Sometimes these are commercial projects generating communities for profit, sometimes actual cocreative or community- generated projects; either way, practice theory proves useful for observing and identifying expectations, motivations for engagement, intrinsic rules, tacit normativity, and routinization as well as innovation, compromise, and negotiation between the creative agents involved, particularly in a project's early stages. This article presents an overview of practice theories connected to media production and discusses them in relation to actual cases of participatory filmmaking.

Keywords

participation, practice theories, media production, participatory filmmaking

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Introduction

There's Something About Practices . . .

Practice has become a common keyword in the academic study of culture and media. This recourse to practices happens for different reasons, but it mainly addresses "what people do to media" or, particularly relevant in this article, "what people are making together in relation to media." This perspective forces attention away from texts or structures onto what people are actually doing, or at least what they say they do (Couldry, 2011).

A sort of practice approach has thus come to the fore in digital media research. Although rarely elaborated (I will treat the theorization of practices below), the notion of practice is often at the core of current definitions of media and culture. To name just a few examples, Gitelman (2007), discussing the newness of new media, defines the communicational dimension of media as a cultural practice. Jenkins adopted this definition to refer to media as cultural systems—"layers within an ever more complicated information and entertainment stratum" that are thus differentiated from technological delivery systems (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 13–14). Subsequently, Jenkins (2010) applied the expression "clusters of practices" to creative communities in DIY media production, indicating the significant role the notion of practice acquires in debates on media literacy, expertise, social learning, and shared knowledge, where it contributes to understandings ranging from "affinity spaces" (Gee, 2007) to, more explicitly, "communities of practice" (Wenger, 1998). Furthermore, Dena (2010) labeled her approach to transmedia design and production "transmedia practice," drawing on Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2001) semiotic notion of domains of practice, which distinguishes between four different domains of meaning-making in multimodal texts: discourse, design, production, and distribution. Finally, Carpentier's (2011) study of media and participation emphasizes the importance of practices and communities when discussing the role of organizations (and their alternatives) in media production. To summarize this practice approach, I refer to Hills' definition of culture as a

> series of spatially and temporally bounded, but still everyday, practices through which self-identity is generated against 'mainstream' or 'parental' others. Culture in this definition amounts to routinized ways of doing things and ways of thinking about the world that work to define a specific, substantial community against other groups. (Hills, 2005, p. 15)

As I will show, this last quote is already introducing certain key features of practice theory.

. . . and About Participation

A practice approach to the study of media and culture, as introduced above, seems particularly useful in a context of expansive cultural productivity at all levels. One of the most popularized expressions referring to this environment is "participatory culture" (Jenkins, 2003), defined in terms of "low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations . . . informal mentorship members [who] believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another" (Jenkins, 2010, p. 238). However, Jenkins' position has generated controversy about the actual scope of participatory culture, its interdependences with established media power structures (Deuze,

2008), and his own conceptualization of participation (Fuchs, 2011a, 2011b). As Deuze states, not all participation is the same, nor is it equally distributed across user groups or media forms:

> [M]uch of this participatory culture is heavily regulated, constrained or embedded within company processes and practices that strive to "harness" rather than "unleash" participation Thus, the role participation plays in the media industries' move online can be seen as an expression of the convergence of production and consumption cultures as well as in the corporate appropriation of the technology. (Deuze, 2008, p. 31)

An example of this observation is the extensive use of the term "crowd" as an all-purpose tag to refer to any kind of collective engagement in processes of media production. As I will demonstrate, popular "crowd" terms in media, like crowdsourcing and crowdfunding, do not encompass the diversity of creative practices involved in participatory media production and often, in fact, do not count as participatory at all (see Literat, 2012; Roig, Sánchez-Navarro, & Leibovitz, 2012). Controversies aside, in this article the notion of participatory culture is relevant for highlighting participation as the key feature of contemporary cultural production.

This article is organized as follows: Having already outlined some preliminary considerations regarding practice and participatory culture, I will introduce my specific area of study, that is, participatory creative projects. I will then proceed to focus on the theorization of practice, and particularly on the elements that are most relevant to research on media production. Subsequently, I will illustrate the application of this practice perspective in two specific cases of community-based filmmaking projects: *A Swarm of Angels* (UK) and *Star Wreck/Iron Sky* (Finland). Finally, I will offer some concluding remarks on the potential and challenges of participatory media production through the lens of a practice theory perspective.

Participatory Creative Projects

A growing body of practice-related literature addresses user-generated content and online creative communities, but engagement in participatory media projects has received little attention. Their emphasis on human activity and creative communities—or collectives—underlines the potential of a practice approach to the study of participatory forms of media production. As the case analysis section will show, complex social interrelations emerge around collective involvement in these long-term, demanding cultural enterprises. Thus it is easy observe how individuals develop strong affective ties to projects they feel personally related to, either as socially engaged citizens (as in some participatory documentaries) or as media enthusiasts (as in some fan-related movies or crowdsourced films). Some noteworthy examples from the former category are *The Age of Stupid* (2009), *Collapsus* (2010), *Prison Valley* (2010), *Highrise* (still in development) or *Life in a Day* (2010); the latter includes, to name only a few, *Star Wars Uncut* (2010) and its "sequel" *The Empire Strikes Back Uncut* (2012), *The Cosmonaut* (2012), *Iron Sky* (2012), and *Lost Zombies* (2012). Technologies and platforms for media creation, collaboration, and distribution are of course instrumental in this expression of participatory culture, as are the social and cultural values assigned to digital creativity, particularly when it relates to film and television production. Many calls for participation therefore take the form of an invitation to be part of something unique that has traditionally taken place "behind closed doors," leading to overambitious statements that entice participants to "make history," to

become "coproducers" or "codirectors," or to feel personally—if vicariously—connected to celebrities (e.g., Kevin Spacey, Paul Verhoeven, Ridley Scott, or Lars von Trier).

Beyond rhetoric, delimiting the notion of participatory creation is no easy task, not least because of the inherent complexity of "participation" itself. Creative practices like filmmaking are necessarily complex, expensive cultural endeavors dependent on the collaboration of different creative agents. In this context, it is entirely unsurprising that not all "calls to participation" are genuine (many are actually not). Taking elements from Jenkins' cultural approach, but also from participatory democratic theory (Carpentier, 2011; Pateman, 1970) and participatory art (Bishop, 2004; Literat, 2012), I define participatory creation as opening some decision-making processes to a loose collective of participants who gain recognition as practitioners through their engagement in a creative practice.

Many implications derive directly and indirectly from this broad definition; they are summarized below in Tables 1 and 2. Concerning a project's initial stages, it is key to note that a participatory project can be either the task of a creative core team (what Literat calls the "alpha artist") or the self-organizational effort of a community. Therefore, participatory projects are not at odds with specific expressions of leadership and creative vision from a core team. Moreover, enrollment should be unrestrictive and practitioners mostly self-selected through a personal compromise of engagement.[1] This also implies that a call for specific expertise is neither a requirement for nor an obstacle to considering a project participatory, although most participatory projects are open to a broad range of enthusiasts with different backgrounds and talents.[2] It is also crucial to note that participatory projects tend to appear connected to broader social and cultural phenomena, like social activism, free culture movements, games, or fandom. Meanwhile, one must not overlook the fact that participatory discourses have also been co- opted by brands and media companies. All these social, cultural, and economic connections shape the "constitutive rules" of the practices of participatory creation of media products.

As for development, participatory projects tend to offer clearly defined goals and milestones across their different phases. Their most important feature may be their inextricable connection to decision making, that is, their distribution of creative control, which in turn implies the existence of spaces for negotiation and debate. From this key starting point, different degrees of participation become identifiable on a spectrum from minimization to maximization of participation (Carpentier, 2011). It follows that a participatory endeavor implies transparency and mutual recognition among participants (Deuze, 2008), and that to ensure such relations a participatory project should promote communication not only between the creative core and the rest of participants but among all practitioners. Thus participatory projects tend to foster specific creative communities based on collaboration, leading to mutual support networks (following Jenkins, 2010, p. 233). Transparency also means that participatory creative projects tend to release tools and resources as means of instrumental productivity (Wirman, 2009)—in other words, these projects open their own

[1] "Gated membership," in which enrollment in a participatory process is tied to a (usually monetary) contribution, has been a contentious issue.

[2] According to this specification, Blender movie projects, which aim to produce films experimenting with the possibilities of the open-source creative tool Blender, are not considered participatory filmmaking, as they select only a small number of participants from among the most skilled members of the Blender community and proceed under tight creative control.

procedures to help others acquire know-how and use it in other projects. By incorporating the aforementioned elements, participatory projects tend to develop strategies for ensuring the continuity of the practice over time, beyond the scope of a particular initiative.

Certain additional features frequently connected to the notion of participatory projects can indeed constitute a valuable contribution but should approached with some caution for purposes of analysis. First, asking people to contribute to a project (in terms of labor or money, even if rewards or tokens are given in exchange) is an insufficient condition of participation. Thus crowdsourced or crowdfunded projects are not necessarily participatory (Roig, Sánchez-Navarro, & Leibovitz, 2012), although some crowdfunded projects that transcend a mere reward-for-money system can foster a meaningful creative relationship between supporters and the creative core, which could be analyzed in terms of the elements mentioned above. On the other hand, releasing a creative project under an open license allowing appropriation and remixing is also insufficient, unless it is an integral part of a participatory project. In view of the previous statements, it must also be said—contrary to some widespread discourses, and despite the importance of engagement—that just making people feel part of the project is not a sufficient condition in itself; nor is engaging people in a multimodal experience, as in a transmedia project (which is not to deny the potential of the combination of transmedia and the participatory).

Furthermore, cocreation, understood as an agreement between a promoter entity and a collective of engaged users to contribute specifically to significant parts of a creative project, shares many features with participatory projects, mainly decision making, transparency, and mutual recognition (Banks & Potts, 2010; Deuze, 2008). However, cocreative projects may involve restricted membership and also require certain tangible user-driven outcomes, which have further implications for the meaningfulness of contribution, ownership, and rights. These projects can thus differ considerably from strictly participatory projects. Finally, all these strategies for opening creative processes should—at least ideally—result in different kinds of cultural products and at the same time have a social impact, encouraging further initiatives to explore alternatives and advances in cultural production.

The following tables summarize my position regarding participatory projects. Table 1 assembles the key contributory focal points for analysis of participatory projects, which influence the set of conditions depicted in Table 2. This second table establishes a distinction between "necessary conditions" for considering a creative project strictly participatory; "ideal conditions," which are not necessary but are seen as desirable; and "related conditions," which embody some popular notions that can be identified in some participatory projects but also can lead to misconceptions, as they do not constitute a sufficient condition in themselves.

Table 1. Contributory Focal Points in Participatory Projects.

Contributory focal points	Project goals, outcomes, and milestones
	Leadership and power relations
	Promoters and backers
	Degrees of expertise required
	Means of distribution
	Broader social, economic, and cultural connections
	Construction of affective engagement with the project

Source: Author.

Table 2. Conditions of Participatory Creative Projects.

Necessary Conditions	**Ideal Conditions**	**Related Conditions**
Unrestricted membership	Creative communities	Crowdfunding (money)
Self-selection of participants	Mutual support networks among participants	Crowdsourcing (labor, tasks)
Distribution of control (decision-making processes)	Creative contribution to significant parts	Open licensing and remix
Spaces of negotiation	Explicit collaboration conditions with project promoters	Sense of belonging
Transparency	Ownership	Multimodal experience
Mutual recognition	Differentiated cultural products	
	Instrumental productivity	
	Embedded forms of re- appropriation	
	Continuity over time	

Source: Author.

These tables offer valuable insight into the main features of participatory creative projects. However, such a project must not be taken as an "either/or" logical proposition. There is a gray area where projects that could in essence count as participatory become identifiable despite the near absence of some necessary conditions. I will show this to be the case in *Iron Sky*, where distribution of creative control was arguable, at the very least.

Now that I have introduced this article's main concepts—the practice approach and participatory projects—I will present an overview of theories of practice that will serve to analyze participatory phenomena.

Practice in Theory

Practice is indeed a very abstract, ambiguous term. Despite its wide use, or maybe because of that, it tends to be taken for granted, leading to conceptual misunderstandings. First, it is important to recall two different common meanings applied to the word practice: the actual execution of a plan or method (i.e., as opposed to theory) and the "customary or expected procedure or way of doing something" (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010), which is usually applied to describe specific fields of professional activity (what we call professional practice or praxis). Taking this second meaning further, practices emerge as the more elemental components of the social. On this basis, this article adopts a preliminary, simplified consideration of practices as sets of interconnected and routinized everyday activities carried out by human agents. This section will treat the notion of practice and the ways its theorization contributes to better understanding of participatory projects.

Approaching culture and society as practices is nothing new. This intellectual interest is traceable to essential 20th-century philosophers and sociologists, from Durkheim (1915), Heidegger (1962), and Wittgenstein (1968) to Bourdieu (1977), Foucault (1979), Giddens (1979), De Certeau (1984), and Turner (1995). Their important contributions have helped to shape a more specific theoretical and methodological corpus on social practices. These theorizations of practice are identifiable in different branches of social theory, from cognitivism to Marxism and functionalism, which all locate everyday practices at the very center of sociality.

Postill (2011) adopts the term practice theory to refer to the work of a "second wave" of practice theorists in social science, particularly Schatzki (1996), whom Wittgenstein's conceptualization of practice influenced deeply. Indeed, Schatzki has been influential in the shaping of a culturalist approach to practices, evident in the work of contemporary authors in the fields of consumption (Moisander, Könkkölä, & Laine, 2012; Warde, 2005), social theory (Reckwitz, 2002; Swidler, 2001), philosophy of science (Knorr-Cetina, 2001), or media studies (Ardevol et al., 2011; Couldry, 2011). This article uses this interdisciplinary body of work on practices as a theoretical and methodological tool in the study of contemporary cultural production. To this end, I will use practice theory as a conventional denomination, while acknowledging that there is no unique approach to the theorization of practices.

Drawing from Schatzki's conceptualization of social practices (1996), Reckwitz offers a concise definition of practice as a

> [R]outinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, "things" and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. A practice—a

> way of cooking, of consuming, of working, of investigating, of taking care of oneself or of others, etc.—forms so to speak a "block" whose existence necessarily depends on the existence and specific inter-connectedness of these elements, and which cannot be reduced to any one of these single elements. (Reckwitz, 2002, pp. 249–250)

More specifically, Schatzki refers to an organized set of bodily and mental activities that form an inextricable assemblage—constituted by understandings of what has to be done and what has to be said, the rules or instructions that regulate them, and the teleo-affective structures that orient them—that is an emotional component of satisfaction and desire (Schatzki 1996, p. 89). More simply, three identifiable main components lie behind all practices, if to different extents: understandings related to the practice, explicit rules (or procedures) of the practice, and finally, affectivity (motivations, emotions, goals, beliefs, moods, engagement) linked to the practice (Schatzki, 1996, p. 89; see also Reckwitz, 2002, p. 250; Warde, 2005, p. 134).

Schatzki distinguished two main types of practices: dispersed practices and integrative practices. Dispersed practices—simple practices scattered across social life—are characterized as sets of doings and sayings oriented mainly to social understandings. Such practices include explaining, describing, asking, examining, greeting, obeying or supposing. Schatzki insists that dispersion does not mean isolation; thus a dispersed practice can help constitute another, for example, asking in relation to replying. On the other hand, integrative practices constitute particular domains of social life. Some examples are agricultural, culinary, educational, or filmmaking practices. Schatzki does not regard integrative practices as mere collections of dispersed practices, since the latter are often transformed upon becoming part of an integrative practice. For instance, the dispersed practices of asking and replying are overtly transformed when they become part of educational practices. Moreover, an integrative practice can become part of, or be tightly linked to, another integrative practice (like filmmaking and play in relation to machinima, which can be broadly defined as the production of linear audiovisual content from a computer-generated virtual environment, such as a videogame or a virtual world).

Integrative practices are useful in identifying both differences and connections between different meanings of the term practice. Thus, the more abstract notion of practice as opposed to theory is commonly used to embody the whole set of capabilities that make up the appropriate way to carry out a specific professional activity (i.e., praxis), as is obvious in highly regulated fields like law, psychology or medicine but equally applicable to any kind of complex practices, like those belonging to the field of cultural production. Therefore, any complex practice can be seen as a domain of social life—a set of interconnected practices subject to explicit rules and regulations, as well as implicit rules that shape what is considered the "right" way to do things in specific contexts. This "right way" defines normativity, hierarchies among participants, and expectations, and once a practice is established it tends to be tacitly accepted as natural. This article will show how the observation of emerging practices is crucial in participatory projects' early stages, when participants are negotiating meanings related to hierarchies, internal organization, relationship with other cultural domains (i.e., free culture movement, fandom), leaderships, and affective ties.

Consequently, practices are neither strictly established nor stable. Instead they are socially and culturally constructed, and governed by rules both explicit and implicit. Moreover, a complex practice that is deeply interrelated with other domains of social life, as also stated

in Bourdieu's theory of fields,[3] is at the same time constituted by other practices ranged on a continuum from elemental dispersed practices, like asking questions or interpreting data, to more specific integrative practices like design, postproduction, financing, or marketing. Finally, a practice approach holds practitioners to be those who are "enacting" the practice. This means acknowledging all the agents involved as participants, that is, professionals and users alike.

Practices and the Everyday

Most theoretical approaches emphasize the routine, ordinary dimension of practices. In an accurate summary of the more orthodox conceptualization of practices, Christensen and Ropke (2011) offer the following criteria for identification:

- Bodily-mental activities (individual and social interactions) are routinized and repetitive.
- Activities incorporate components such as understanding, know-how, states of emotion, motivational knowledge, and usually also objects, which are all interconnected.
- Interconnected activities and components are perceived as meaningful entities in a given society or culture. (Christensen & Ropke, 2011, p. 238)

This emphasis on routine explains why debates on media practices tend to focus on mainstream media consumption and sometimes overlook transformative practices related to media, like remixing or cocreation. Bearing in mind that social practices are everyday and usually routine, researchers need to consider how people engage in creative practices, that is, how they deal with a complex object that is not, at least at first, routine. Knorr-Cetina (2001) adopts a practice approach to explain interaction with non-routinized objects through what she calls object-oriented or creative practices. For Knorr-Cetina, this situation entails a complex unfolding object in a brand-new situation, be it a scientific object of study, a technological device, a body/mind technique to be mastered, a cultural object like a video game, or a media project. This interaction generates new practices to overcome the challenge. Knorr-Cetina is not suggesting that routinization and repetition leave the picture—both are essential to this process of domestication. But these kinds of practices also hold plenty of room for creativity, improvisation, self-improvement, frustration, pleasure, and affective engagement. Overall it seems that in these creative practices, the practitioner is trying to achieve the psychological balance between competence and challenge that Csikszentmihalyi (1996) calls *flow*, a state typically used to exemplify our engagement (and disengagement) with games.

Organization of Practices

Practices are internally organized through three main components: understandings, procedures, and affectivity. This third component justifies interest in practices from consumption

[3] Bourdieu defines fields as specialist domains of practice with their own logic that are constituted by a unique combination of species of capital; for example, financial capital, symbolic capital (prestige, renown) or social capital ('connections'). . . . [In a field] . . . differently positioned practitioners compete and cooperate over the same prizes and rewards: money, pleasure, recognition and so on. . . [Furthermore, some fields have] . . . tangible effect on other fields." (Bourdieu in Postill, 2011, pp. 7–8, 16)

studies (Warde, 2005). A practice analysis should thus consider motivations for engagement, affective relations and beliefs associated with the practice and expected rewards.

Practices are also interconnected, necessitating interrogation of the external organization of practices and power relations. Swidler (2001) argues that some practices anchor, control, or organize others, pointing to a possible hierarchy among practices. For Swidler, the power of these anchoring practices lies in their bond to constitutive rules, that is, implicit rules that stay in the background yet are essential to define what the practice is about and thus produce normativity. Although determining the extent to which some practices can control others via implicit rules is highly problematic, certain anchoring practices and constitutive rules are identifiable and empirically observable, particularly in early stages of the practice and in moments of conflict and change. In such moments, participants' different motivations and expectations can collide, leading to conflict but also to negotiation to try to restore a shared vision of what the practice means for its participants.

Reproduction and Innovation

Notably, though practices have been regarded merely as "repeated ritual confirmations that something is indeed what it is" (Swidler, 2001, p. 89), they llend themselves to both reproduction and innovation. As Warde (2005) graphically describes, a set of established understandings, procedures and objectives exists in a practice at all times, acting as formal and informal codification that governs and conducts the practice, often without much reflection or conscious awareness on the part of participants. It constitutes the basis for reproduction of the practice, accounting for its considerable inertia through time. But at the same time,

> performances in the same practice are not always the same. . . . Conventions will usually be to some degree contested, with some practitioners typically still attached to prior codes of conduct, while others, perhaps of a new generation, seek to replace current orthodoxies with new prescriptions. . . . Practices also contain the seeds of constant change. They are dynamic by virtue of their own internal logic of operation, as people in myriad situations adapt, improvise and experiment. (Warde, 2005, pp. 140–141)

Like Knorr-Cetina's notion of object-oriented practices, Warde's work acknowledges that practices, though everyday and inertial, are not necessarily routine, homogeneous, repetitive, or stable through time.

Practice Theories in Practice: The Case of Community-Based Participatory Film Production

This section will outline some results of research on participatory forms of film production using practice theory as a theoretical-methodological tool. The research examined practices taking place in participatory environments where a community is fostered or forms informally around the development of a film project. Of particular interested were how the interrelation between different roles like "producers" and "audiences" changed, and how processes and their outcomes could configure an alternative to traditional production models. We selected two groundbreaking case-examples of participatory filmmaking: the British open-source film

project *A Swarm of Angels*, and the trajectory of the Finnish collective Energia Productions, promoters of the fan film parody *Star Wreck* and the science fiction comedy feature *Iron Sky*.

To gain thorough insight into the cases, the research devoted special attention to the early stages. Then, practice is less routine and normative, or undergoing change, which facilitates observation of the external organization of practices and their implicit rules. Thus each case was approached as an organizational form, that is, part community but also alternative organization (Carpentier, 2011, p. 221–222). All its public manifestations, from websites to blogs, press, specialized forums, social media and offline events, were observed. Official sources, which represent the perspective of the creative core, and unofficial sources received equal attention. Once this framework was established, the focus turned to the organization of practices in participation spaces: structure of discussion threads, processes of decision making and meritocracy, emergence of recognized members, statistics on actual participation, identification of different domains (community organization, project development, content production, and promotion), and contributions to the creative community. From there, it became possible to outline a set of practices and identify the key features of its production model.

After briefly presenting both cases, the next section will discuss them in the light of practice theory and contrast the results with the wider proposal of conditions for participatory creative projects.

A Swarm of Angels (UK)

A Swarm of Angels (*ASoA*) is a film project promoted by digital entrepreneur Matt Hanson. Set up in 2006, it aimed to build a community for the collaborative development of an open-source science-fiction movie from scratch. Collective action to redefine filmmaking production processes was therefore considered as important as the final product. After two years of intense activity, in 2009 *ASoA* went into hiatus—though it was not officially canceled—after working on two screenplays, designing different visual concepts, and experimenting with participation strategies, like releasing a teaser or fostering a user-generated documentary on the community. Registered members of the community called themselves Angels, and a playful appropriation of the Christian angelic hierarchy and imagery was extensively used to identify the community. The conceptualization of *ASoA* was clearly the work of a single man, but it was conceived as a cultural experiment reliant on community decision-making to shape the project's processes and outcomes. Thus, though not in a "pure" form, *ASoA* can be considered a community-driven project. Table 3 summarizes key areas of interest in *ASoA* by identifying contributory focal points:

Table 3. Contributory Focal Points in ASoA.

A SWARM OF ANGELS	
Project goals	Community-developed, open-source fiction feature with Creative Commons license (by-nc-sa) scheduled for an online release

A SWARM OF ANGELS	
Leadership and power relations	Clearly identifiable leadership, open creative core, meritocracy, rewards chosen by community
Promoters and backers	Community drivenness, gated community, renowned supporters
Degrees of expertise required	No prerequisites, specialized calls
Means of distribution	Internet, Creative Commons license (embedded in project goals), day and date event
Broader social, economic, and cultural connections	Free culture, open-source movement, remix culture, independent filmmaking, entrepreneurship

Source: Author.

Energia Productions/Iron Sky (Finland)

Energia Productions is the company name adopted in 2006 by the Finnish team behind the popular fan film *Star Wreck: In the Pirkinning* (2005), considered the first feature film freely distributed on the Internet. The team's collective interest in its work sparked the collaborative strategy behind its first commercial film project, *Iron Sky*, a science-fiction comedy based on an original screenplay and coproduced by different production companies from Finland, Germany, and Australia. An initial level of participation grew via the Iron Sky website, which featured calls for viral promotion, screening demands, and collective financing, as well as merchandise, premium content, remixing contests, and so on. Furthermore, community participation moved quickly from the *Star Wreck* forums to a new social moviemaking platform, Wreckamovie.com, developed for *Iron Sky* but open to any project. Thus, Wreckamovie users are invited to contribute to tasks in any projects available in the platform, or start their own. Significantly, the main reason behind that move was to avoid possible legal issues with community contributions, as the platform's end-user agreement clearly states. After almost seven years of development, *Iron Sky*'s worldwide theatrical release took place in 2012, and a crowdfunded sequel is in the works. Tables 4 and 5 summarize contributory factors for both *Star Wreck: In the Pirkinning* and *Iron Sky*:

Table 4. Contributory Focal Points for the Star Wreck Project.

STAR WRECK: IN THE PIRKINNING	
Project goals	Fiction feature developed by closed amateur team with strong support of a community
Leadership and power relations	Clearly identifiable leadership and creative core
Promoters and backers	Independently developed in-house, self-financed by core team
Degrees of expertise required	No prerequisites; calls for promotion and subtitling
Means of distribution	Free streaming and download [4]; due to increased demand, two different DVD editions with additional content and some TV screenings

[4]Download currently available only through http://archive.org/details/StarWreckInThePirkining

STAR WRECK: IN THE PIRKINNING	
Broader social, economic, and cultural connections	Fandom, science fiction, Creative Commons, popular cinema, spoof cinema, DIY film saga

Source: Author.

Table 5. Contributory Focal Points for Iron Sky Project.

IRON SKY	
Project goals	Commercial fiction feature developed by professional team with strong support of a community through collaborative platform
Leadership and power relations	Clearly identifiable leadership and creative core
Promoters and backers	Private investors, crowdfunding
Degrees of expertise required	No prerequisites, calls for specific suggestions and tasks
Means of distribution	Traditional window system (theater, DVD/BR, television), added value items (game, collectors' edition)
Broader social, economic, and cultural connections	Fandom, science fiction, independent cinema, popular cinema

Source: Author.

Case Analysis

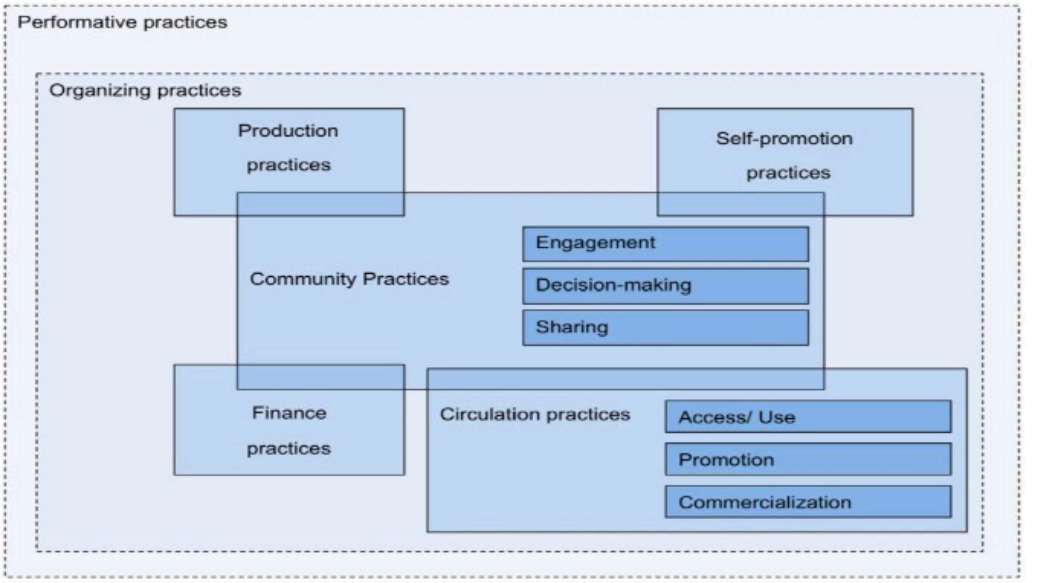
The two cases have an identical starting point: a creative core launched a film project in which fostering a community played an essential part. However, there are some significant differences, one of them quite defining: *A Swarm of Angels* was born as a participatory experiment where a growing community was expected to shape all the aspects of the project, although under close supervision.[5] On the other hand, the team at Energia Productions harnessed the commitment of an active community of interest that had formed around their previous amateur creative efforts, the *Star Wreck* parody saga and particularly its 2005 installment, the Internet cult phenomenon *Star Wreck: In the Pirkinning*, in order to engage its members in the team's forthcoming, more ambitious project. *Iron Sky* involved plenty of playful offers for participants—even if they had very little real impact on the final outcome, which was tightly defined by its creative core of professionalized producers.

Figure 1 offers a visual introduction to the set of dispersed and integrative practices observed through analysis, which I will refer to below: A practice analysis of both cases revealed a set of integrative practices, that is, specialized domains aimed at the instrumental development of the creative project. These practices were easily identified according to the understandings and procedures necessary to carry them out: production organization, design, screenwriting, promotional content, technology, distribution, music, and so on. However, the different degrees of connection to a creative community strengthened affectivity issues related to motivations, goals, or community engagement. The more the community was in control of a practice, the more transformative options took place, owing to changes in dispersed

[5] Hanson himself referred to *A Swarm of Angels* as a "gated community."

practices coming from community interrelations. Hence, even though similar integrative practices were observed in both cases, ASoA featured identifiable spaces for negotiation and, in some cases, innovation.

Figure 1: Sets of Practices in Participatory Filmmaking Projects.



Source: Author.

(b) *Financing practices* involving the financial support for the project and present from the very beginning in debates and community resolutions.

Some examples revolve around subscription models (the option *ASoA* adopted), merchandising, crowdfunding strategies (broadly defined as collective micro-financing, extensively used for *Iron Sky*), sponsorship, deals with broadcasting companies, and the like. Some of the practices were closely connected to constitutive rules and tended to be frequent objects of controversy, as they wound up tension between the commercial and alternative/experimental sides of the projects. In *ASoA*, the commitment to a subscription model signaled an initial attempt to protect the project from external investment (public or private), which would have been considered a compromise or sell-out at odds with the open-source nature of the endeavor (instead, open-source and free culture acted as constitutive rules). In *Iron Sky*, however, this compromise was much vaguer, opening a wider range of financial options that made *Iron Sky* a hybrid, presented as an independent commercial feature with an alternative creative process. In this case, two main funding strategies stood out: the "Ward Bonds" initiative (2008), a merchandising campaign carefully crafted around the World War II propaganda aesthetics of the movie; and a crowdfunding campaign across different platforms, the self-defining "Race for 300,000 €," which ultimately did not come close to its ambitious goal.

(c) *Circulation practices* concerned with decisions and actions regarding access, licensing, distribution, promotion, or commercialization of content.

Circulation practices are indeed closely related to financing (as in the case of pre-sells to broadcasters or DVD/BR licensing) and both types of practice connect equally closely to the constitutive rules that account for the legitimacy of the project as a form of community/alternative-media organization. However, here they are assigned to a separate category because of particularities in terms of copyright, distribution strategies, and participants' engagement in diffusion. Again, the two cases differed substantially: *ASoA* was open source in nature, whereas the creative core behind *Iron Sky* adopted a strategy of revealing a lot from the production process as a part of the commitment to keep circulation practices as open as possible, combining traditional theatrical release with on-demand screenings run through the *Iron Sky* website.

(d) *Self-promotion practices*, a particularly important set of practices around the promotion of the organizational form itself, as distinct from promotion of the film proper.

These practices exist because of the need to engage participants over time. By emphasizing the qualities and values of the organization or "brand," such as its "authenticity," "innovation," "relevance," and "radical departure" from traditional production, the practices legitimize its activity and pave the way for continuity, not ruling out professionalization. Crucially, the process is, in the end, as much or even more important than the actual feature film. In both cases, but particularly in *Star Wreck*/*Iron Sky*, self-promotion practices acquired an important performative and playful dimension.

(e) *Community practices* focused in different ways on the participants as a collective. Tightly bound to all other kinds of practice, community practices fall into several subcategories identified through the analysis:

- *Informal engagement* to keep the community active and engaged, upholding the mutual compromise essential to any community. Key to transparency, these practices tend to be encouraged by the creative core. Some typical examples are disclosure of information on the progress and milestones of the project.
- *Collective agency and decision making* to foster contribution to decision-making processes and thus proximity to production practices. Again, project promoters are essential to keeping it rolling and are, as previous sections mentioned, key for creative recognition.
- *Knowledge and expertise exchange* focused on social capital inside the community. A direct consequence of the emergence of affinity spaces, these practices are usually created and maintained by members without need of the core team's active participation. They concern different interests in adjacent fields like technology, filmmaking, music, and so on, which brings participants closer to learning communities, communities of practice, and communities of interest.

Besides this set of integrative practices, the research identified two transverse practices that would account as dispersed practices. They can easily go unnoticed, particularly as a project becomes more mature, but they shape and influence the rest of the practices from the very beginning:

(f) Organizing practices, self-reflexive or "meta-" practices oriented to general organization and the establishment of explicit rules, hierarchies, meritocracy, and discussion of expected

rewards, which become an intense source of normativity. It was possible to delve into these organizing practices because the cases were observed from their earlier stages. In consolidated communities, these practices may seem invisible and "naturalized" because they are constituted at the very beginning and only contested at moments of conflict and change. These practices reveal what the participatory condition of a media project really is, and whether the organization is oriented to maximalist or minimalist forms of participation (Carpentier, 2011, p. 215). Debates over every relevant aspect were an intrinsic feature of the ASoA project. Thus the community thoroughly discussed all processes, from the open-source nature of ASoA to rewards for participation, promotional activities, technology, financing, or voting. Another example of negotiation and innovation in the ASoA community was the experiment of developing two independent screenplays at once, the first managed by the creative core and the second one more community-managed. Contrary to initial expectations, the community-based, open-ended screenplay forum ended up much more active and fruitful (Roig, 2008).

(g) *Performative practices*. Most participatory projects include a framework for performative expression and possess a playful dimension that opens the practices to practitioners who need not have the specific technical skills required in professionalized environments. Participants are invited to play at being filmmakers, and also to play with the aura of filmmaking and its processes and imaginaries. The dynamics of these playful practices represent playing with the rules as much as playing by the rules, thus clearing the way to the transformative and innovative. As stated previously, in the case of ASoA, project leader Matt Hanson played extensively with the metaphor of the angelic hierarchy in organizing an open participatory process, and the most relevant call for participation asked the Angels to record videos about their engagement in the project, with minimum technical requirements. For its part, Iron Sky took advantage of its parodic condition as a movie made in Finland about Nazis coming from the Moon to invade Earth in 2018. Fruitfully exploiting the imaginary of World War II propaganda, the project issued hilarious calls to action, attracting participants to remix teasers, demand to see Iron Sky in different countries, fund the movie, or buy merchandising. In the Wreckamovie platform, collaboration is structured in tasks open to anyone regardless of filmmaking skill (many of them, actually not much more than playful brainstorming exercises).

I now return to Figure 1 and connect it to Table 2. This linking of the case analyses of practices with the theoretical approach to participatory projects reveals the importance of transverse dispersed practices—in these cases, organizing and performative practices—in shaping the necessary, ideal, and related conditions for participation. Because these sets of practices embody constitutive rules and act as anchoring practices, it is essential, in order to get an insight of the phenomenon to analyze the early stages of a project and, additionally, critical moments of conflict and change in its course (Roig, San Cornelio, Ardèvol, & Sánchez-Navarro, in press). An important, final point is that actual expressions of integrative practices like production, diffusion, or financing, which are anchored in transverse practices, are tangible evidence of a global practice-based approach to media production; meanwhile, community practices say much about ideal conditions of participation and collaboration.

Conclusions

If anything is really "new" in the changing notion of new media, it is the newly emerging media practices. These practices point to a cultural environment that blurs the traditional divide between producers and consumers. Within it, appropriation, re-elaboration, and play abound; cultural experiences are increasingly socialized; participation and co-creation discourses are embedded even in mainstream productions; and engagement is a fundamental element of any creative endeavor. However, that is not to say that these practices necessarily lead to a new participatory production environment. As shown throughout this article, thorough analysis of practices reveals numerous contradictions: in many participatory experiences, participants have no real decision-making power and are treated as privileged target audiences; meanwhile, many allegedly open projects operate under tight creative control. Yet these operations also offer abundant potential for transformation, challenging traditional assumptions about what people are doing with and to media. As stated above, practices account for innovation and reproduction: New forms of performing a practice can conflict with established ones, fostering a negotiation process with the potential to change the meaning of the practice. Moreover, implicit rules in the background help define what a practice means for the practitioners. These constitutive rules typically only come to the fore in early stages of the practice and at moments of conflict and change.

Throughout, this article has tried to interrogate the idea of the participatory as a sort of empty container expression equivalent to notions like "engagement," "contribution," "experience," or "personalization," which admittedly can assume significant roles under certain conditions. Spaces for negotiation and debate, decision making, transparency processes, and mutual recognition become essential to the consideration of a creative project as participatory. In this sense, practice theory allows researchers greater specificity in investigating the kinds of things individuals are doing in relation to media production, and in relation to each other as practitioners. It does so by accounting for three main components: basic understandings of what the practice is about, procedures (i.e., rules and instructions) that regulate it, and especially the affective elements linked to the practice. Asking what media practices people are involved in allows the focus to move from reception issues—or even mere use, as would be the case for traditional media objects and processes—onto participants, production, and performance.

At the same time, participatory projects expand the reach of practice theory beyond the comfort zone of the everyday. Creative challenges—in which participants, motivated by their own interest in becoming part of a groundbreaking event, put their skills to the test in a long-term process—thus also merit attention. As has been suggested through this article, the act of contributing to an appealing process can be much more important than its final outcome, as it provides opportunities for pleasure, performance, and social peer interaction around a cultural endeavor seen as innovative, socially relevant, and unique. Participatory media projects based on social causes or in fiction owe their strength to the suggestive power of the cinematic imaginary.

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PART 5

Labor, Funding, and Promotion

CHAPTER 26

Indie Cinema and the Short Film Assemblage

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Abstract

Dewi pulang (Dewi goes home), the 2016 short film by Candra Aditya, offers a means to redefine the meaning of independence for contemporary Indonesian screen production. In the years of Reformasi following the end of the New Order, to be independent was to be in solidarity with the reform movement, and to express a diy sensibility that did not rely on big production companies or the state. In recent years, the meaning of independence has been complicated by a changing cultural economy of film, including the accommodation of many previously independent filmmakers into the mainstream. Rather than seeing independence embodied in the film or filmmaker, this essay considers the history of short film and the foundational role of *komunitas* (communities) as the location for independent media practice. Independence is theorized as a characteristic of the assemblage of organizations, events, and infrastructures that facilitate the production, circulation, and consumption of short film.

Keywords

short film, assemblage, Indonesia, *Dewi pulang,* independent cinema

Looking over developments in the Indonesian screen industries since Reformasi, it is hard to identify who or what is independent these days, given that many previously 'independent' filmmakers now work with large production companies and no longer see the state as a target of opprobrium. During the Reformasi years (1998–2005), it was easier to identify independent filmmakers and their films due to their deliberate self-identification,

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their political stance, and their adopted modes of production (Sasono 2020). Independence was used to assert autonomy of the creator free from dictates of state and big business, while creating work true to the creator's intent and vision. Now, however, independence is normalized, turned into a marketing label or a 'genre' akin to art cinema, often accompanied by an orientation towards international film festivals. Arguably, the meaning of independence has become more blurred and complicated (Ortner 2012).

To reassess the meaning of independence in Indonesian screen production, this essay takes as its entry point Candra Aditya's 2016 short film *Dewi pulang* (Dewi goes home). At first glance *Dewi pulang* exemplifies the blurred meaning of independence in Indonesian screen production: while sponsored by the government's Pusat Pengembangan Perfilman (Film Development Centre) and not especially politically radical, it is a rich cultural text and bears many hallmarks of typical indie cinema that deals with quotidian subject matter.[1] The filmmaker Candra Aditya, who wrote and directed *Dewi pulang*, continues to work 'freelance', sporadically writing stories and scripts, drawing on a pool of similarly freelance talent to make films as and when he can. Taking government sponsorship is not unusual for someone in his position, but it did not mean acquiescence to government demands: he fought to retain scenes of Dewi smoking, despite objections from the government sponsor. Although seemingly minor, it speaks to the ways in which short filmmakers assert their independence by pushing boundaries and challenging norms.[2]

Taking *Dewi pulang* as an example of an independent film requires looking beyond the text and the formalities of its funding, to consider also the 'life' of the film as it is conceived, made, distributed, exhibited, and consumed. Following Harvey (2007:263), we see that the short film 'appears to engage in four topographic spheres of activity: modes of production, object, text, and trace'. She highlights the ways in which the life of a short film does not end with the production of the film (object) but extends to the way the film comes to be (production) and the traces it leaves as it circulates as a cultural object and its reception as text. Harvey's expanded definition of the short film decentres the film-object and highlights the assemblage of networks, agents, and organizations that animate an individual title. By following Harvey, this essay reveals a longer history of short film in Indonesia, which developed an alternative mode of production, distribution, exhibition, and appreciation since the 1970s that subsequently shaped the indie film movement associated with Reformasi and that has continued to provide a model of independence for filmmakers. Central to this short film assemblage are the Indonesian groupings called *komunitas*, which operate as the nodes in the rhizomatic networks of short film (Engchuan 2020).[3] By taking this contextual approach, *Dewi pulang* becomes a means to consider the ways in which independence can productively be theorized in the Indonesian context with implications for the study and understanding of independence for screen production around the world.

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[1] Funded by the Pusat Pengembangan Perfilman, an agency of Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan (Ministry of Education and Culture). https://pusbangfilm.kemdikbud.go.id/ (accessed 12-12-2020).

[2] *Prenjak / In the year of monkey* (Wregas Bhanuteja, 2016) for example, despite containing an uncensored explicit scene, was screened to government officials including the president and went on to win both the national Citra Award for Best Short film and the Leica Cine Discovery Prize for Short Film at Cannes Film Festival in 2016.

[3] See also Engchuan's contribution to this issue.

Independence is usually defined 'negatively'—that is, independent of something (Lent 2012)—and taken to mean the commercial, mainstream screen industries with their big companies, hierarchical decision-making, capital-intensive production, and mass-market appeal (Ortner 2012). Although derived from a North American experience in the 1990s by filmmakers operating outside the large Hollywood studios, the term was readily adopted by new film movements in Southeast Asia in the late 1990s and early 2000s in line with the political reform movements provoked by the Asian financial crisis of 1997–1998 and the development of digital technologies that democratized access to the means of production (Khoo 2007; Lent 2012). This became the main understanding and context of independence across the region.

In these definitions of independence, the feature-length fiction film is privileged as the exemplary mode, as it is easy to identify its 'other': big production companies and their producers, mainstream content, and stars, with marketing aimed for release in multiplex cinema chains. Other forms of content, such as short film and documentaries, are left outside the discussion. Partly this is explained by an imagined hierarchy that privileges the feature film over these other formats. Even for practitioners, the short film is often regarded as a 'training space' or showreel 'for aspiring filmmakers, [and] a momentary stopping point on the path to feature-length fulfilment' (Holohan 2009). As a result, discussions of the short film usually focus on formal properties, most notably length, and how this gives the form its distinctive characteristics. Gatot Prakosa (2008:27), for example, says that the short film 'has a language far different to fiction feature films, due to its shorter play time'.[4] Although some short-form productions, such as the music video, the advertisement, video art, and increasingly the short-form social media video, have their own cultural (and economic) significance, the feature film remains the sine qua non of the screen industries.

The focus on form by scholars such as Prakosa and Holohan decontextualizes short film out of what Singapore scholar Sophie Harvey (2007:263) calls 'moving image culture'. Harvey draws on Juan Foo's essay 'Mini Cinema: A nation's cinema starts with shorts' (2002), which 'calls for a re(frame)ing of Singapore's moving image culture that recognizes the relevance and importance of short film production' (Harvey 2007:264). The point is not to rewrite film history in a way that simply places the short film as an imagined origin; rather, as Adrian Pasaribu (2013) argues in the Indonesian case, it is to challenge the predominant '*bioskop-sentris*' (cinema-centric) model of cinema that privileges and foregrounds the feature film. By *bioskop-sentris*, Pasaribu means that the prevailing understanding of 'film' is of a feature-length work, comprised of a progression of notable titles and concerned with box-office figures as the measurement of success and cultural significance. In this model, the film industry is centralized around large production companies, television stations, and major exhibitors which operate rigid, large-scale, capital-intensive businesses mostly centralized in Jakarta.

By contrast, Pasaribu says that the short film belongs to a different kind of '*budaya sinema*' (cinematic culture) that is community-based, bottom up, youth-driven, regional, and geographically dispersed. Moreover, short films move in and through the rhizomatic networks of spaces and organizations of this *budaya sinema* in ways that attest to its 'nomadic' and 'polymorphous' qualities (Harvey 2007). Together these characteristics constitute a set of

[4] 'memiliki Bahasa yang jauh berbeda dengan film cerita panjang, mengingat masa putarnya yang singkat'.

principles and organizational features that not only mark it as distinct from the feature film industry but also substantiate its independence. Shorts are less premised on the need to make money to cover investment costs and therefore provide the space for experimentation, voice, and autonomy unavailable in large media productions. Interactions and relationships may continue with the commercial media industries, but an alternative economy of short film organized around its independent principles persists.

Short Film Assemblage

What is significant about *Dewi pulang*, and other shorts like it, is not its length or whether Candra Aditya wants to make a feature film (he does) but, rather, how it reveals the infrastructure of communities, events, and platforms across the archipelago that support and sustain short film. Candra Aditya had worked in these networks for several years before conceptualizing *Dewi pulang* and securing funding. Once completed, the film then moved through a network of festivals, including Purbalingga in 2017, and communities such as Boemboe Forum, which organized Gemar Film Pendek #3 (at Kineforum, Jakarta in January 2018) and Sinema Rabu in South Jakarta (March 2018), before being hosted on Viddsee, a Singapore-based video streaming platform. Together these can be conceived of as nodes within the assemblage of short film.

Central to the short film assemblage in Indonesia is the locally emergent formation called the *komunitas* (community). *Komunitas* are social formations of likeminded individuals who come together for discussion and collaboration; to build events and create publications and other resources; and to nurture new talent and voices. *Komunitas* are often deeply local but develop relations with others across the country in rhizomatic networks. *Komunitas* are amorphous and malleable, appearing and disappearing, at times territorializing into events, festivals, and annual gatherings. *Komunitas* form an alternative economy of film production, distribution, and appreciation that maintains its identity as 'independent' by operating outside of commercial networks and industrialized forms of cultural production.

Prominent *komunitas* organizers Lulu Ratna (2007) and Tintin Wulia (2019 [2005]) note the plethora of *komunitas* which emerged in the late 1990s in the tumult and opportunity of the Asian financial crisis and the end of the New Order regime. Such networks supported feature filmmakers in the early years of Reformasi who readily adopted the indie or independent label to describe their intent, politics, and practice contra the state and commercial production companies. As feature films have returned to mainstream pop culture (Barker 2019), many Reformasi-generation indie filmmakers have been incorporated into the production processes of the largescale production houses. They maintain whatever creative autonomy they can. But the meaning of independent has become more complicated and contested.

Indeed, the origins of the independent-film movement in Indonesia are not to be found in the moment of Reformasi but rather in the work of short film activists who engineered short film as a nomadic movement in the 1970s (Prakosa 2005; Pasaribu 2013). Gatot Prakosa, one of the movement's notable figures and a short film historian, describes the short film scene of the 1970s and 1980s as '*sinema ngamen*' (busking cinema) because of the way filmmakers went from place to place, looking for places to screen and audiences to engage (Prakosa 2008:6). At one of the first events, Festival Film Mini (Mini-Film Festival), held in

1973 in Jakarta, several filmmakers formed Sinema 8, a group dedicated to 8 mm filmmaking to challenge established cinema conventions (Jayasrana 2015). Many of these works were experimental and underground and included work from Gotot Prakosa, Hadi Poernomo, and Henri Darmawan. They congregated at the city-government-operated Dewan Kesenian Jakarta (dkj), which was located at the Taman Ismail Marzuki (tim), and used it as a centre for gathering and exhibition (Prakosa 2008:4).

Their work also contrasted with official short films produced by the Ministry of Information and other state agencies to promote the developmentalist agenda called 'Gelora Pembangunan' (Spirit of Development) of the New Order regime (Jayasrana 2015). Official films were screened to villages using a mobile apparatus that was operated by ministry officials, usually before a feature film presentation. Other 'shorts' were screened on tvri, the country's only television station, also operated by the Ministry of Information. Festival Film Indonesia (ffi) began to acknowledge the short film in its categories of awards, though its focus remained on propaganda and official film. But otherwise, film activists were able to evade state control since the regime focused on feature films and the mainstream distribution channels of broadcast television and cinemas. It allowed filmmakers to experiment in form and content, since they were less worried about mainstream appeal, state censorship, or large budgets.

The art school Institut Kesenian Jakarta (ikj) became an important site for the creation, appreciation, and discussion of short film in the 1980s and especially into the 1990s. Required to make two 16 mm films to graduate (Prakosa 2008:7), film students not only completed a practical task but created opportunities for experimentation and dialogue. Noted critic of the regime and iconic filmmaker Garin Nugroho emerged from ikj in this period, graduating with his short film *Gerbong 1, 2, 3* (Wagon 1, 2, 3, 1984), followed by important documentary work including *Air dan Romi* (Water and Romi, 1991), before moving into feature film in the 1990s with his debut *Cinta dalam sepotong roti* (Love in a slice of bread, 1991). In this period, 'short filmmaking was still limited to the "exclusive" circle of film students in the Jakarta Art Institute (ikj)' located in the national capital (Ratna 2007:304).

Others graduating from IKJ in the early 1990s shared a similar trajectory, but as Prakosa (2008:7) notes, they were beginning to interact much more with overseas festivals. For her graduating project, Nan Achnas made *Hanya satu hari* (Only one day, 1988), which went on to win the Grand Prize at The Young Cinema Film Festival in Tokyo. Riri Riza completed *Sonata kampung bata* (Sonata of the brick village, 1991), which screened at Oberhausen Film Festival, before he worked as the production designer on Nugroho's *Bulan tertusuk ilalang* (*... And the moon dances*, 1995). Together with ikj classmate Mira Lesmana and music video director Rizal Mantovani they conceptualized, shot, and released the omnibus film *Kuldesak* (Cul-de-sac, 1998), which began a revival of feature film production (Barker 2019). Starting in shorts became a noted path for other directors, including Harry Suharyadi,[5] Hanung

[5] Graduated IKJ with *Happy ending* (1996), which screened at Busan International Film Festival. His debut feature, *Pachinko and everybody's happy* (2000), was made in Japan.

Bramantyo,[6] Ifa Isfansyah,[7] Yosep Anggi Noen,[8] and Edwin.[9] While their identities and practices shifted towards the feature film, this did not mean that they became totally disconnected from short film, however, as many continued to move back and forth or contribute to shorts communities through mentorship, for example.

By the late 1990s, however, outside ikj, new forms of 'informal networking' were beginning to emerge with the disintegration of the New Order and its systems of control. *Komunitas* formed in the new civil society spaces and drew on the energy of reform to facilitate the production, promotion, and discussion of short film (Ratna 2007:304). One of the earliest short-film-focused *komunitas* was Konfiden (*Komunitas* Film Independen), which organized the Indonesian Independent Film-Video Festival (ffvii) from 1999 to 2002. At the first ffvii, Konfiden published a manifesto in which 'independence' was defined for the first time in Indonesia, drawing on a 1998 article in Filmmaker magazine by Jim Moran and Holly Willis. It details how independence is operationalized in the sectors of technology, industry, aesthetics, economy, and politics (see Figure 1). Although adopted from the American film



Figure 1. Independence as defined in the Konfiden programme book in 1999.

Translation: Independents as a strong opposition movement against the dominant media practices in some sectors. In technology, independents operate in the world of the amateur (home video, 16 mm, 8 mm) against the professionals (35 mm, 70 mm). In industry, independents operate individually or in free groups that oppose production, distribution, and exhibition organized on a mass scale. In aesthetics, independents support originality, performance, and avant-garde in opposition to the conventional, the generic, and the residual. In economics, independents operate for a love of cinema rather than a love of money. In politics, independents operate in and explore the culture of the marginalized and the oppressed against the centre, the dominant, and the mainstream.

Image Source: Jayasrana 2015.

[6] Made *Topeng kekasih* (Lovers' mask, 2001) about inter-generational trauma of the 1960s' purge of leftists that founded the New Order regime. Bramantyo went on to direct early independent features including Brownies (2004), *Catatan akhir sekolah* (Final year notes, 2005), and the mainstream hit Get married (2007).

[7] Made shorts, including Be quiet exam is in progress! (2006) and *Half teaspoon / Setengah sendok teh* (2008) before his first feature *Garuda di dadaku* (The eagle in my chest, 2009).

[8] Made several shorts, including *Ketemu bapak* (Met father, 2002) and *A lady caddy who never saw a hole in one* (2013), before his features *Solo solitude / Istirahatlah kata-kata* (2016) and *The science of fictions / Hiruk-pikuk si Al-Kisah* (2019).

[9] Made *A very slow breakfast* (2002), an experimental mediation on time and desire while at IKJ. He continued making shorts, including *Kara, anak sebatang pohon / Kara, the daughter of a tree* (2005), which screened at Cannes Film Festival. Edwin moved into feature production with *Babi buta yang ingin terbang / Blind pig who wants to fly* (2008), *Kebun binatang / Postcards from the zoo* (2012), and the recent mainstream films, high-school drama *Posesif* (Possessive, 2017) and book-adaptation *Aruna & lidahnya* (Aruna & her palate, 2018).

lexicon, Indonesians did not have an equivalent to 'Hollywood' (Murti 2009 [2007]), so to be independent meant being in solidarity with the reform movement, expressing a diy sensibility, and distancing oneself from commercial production companies and the state. Here the meaning of independence is localized and vernacularized, as it was in many places around the world, including Southeast Asia (Lent 2012).

Short films and their *komunitas* continued to proliferate as others around the archipelago began to take up media production to create community, tell stories, and express ideas. Of these, Minikino, established in Denpasar in 2002, and Jakarta-based Boemboe Forum, established in 2003, were two of the most prominent, organizing screenings, workshops, talks, exhibitions, and networkeing opportunities with others domestically and internationally. Shorts featured at the independently operated Jakarta International Film Festival (jiffest), first held in 1999, and in dedicated festivals such as Purbalingga, which was established in 2006.[10] The official Festival Film Indonesia (ffi) was relaunched in 2004 with a short film category, won that year by *Djedjak darah: Surat teruntuk Adinda* (Blood print: A letter to the beloved), directed by M. Aprisiyanto from Yogyakarta, marking an aesthetic break with the ffi winners under the New Order.

These networks have expanded beyond Indonesia with the creation of regional networks and communities, fostering the exchange of ideas, talent, and capital. International film festivals in Busan, Singapore, and Europe have nurtured many Indonesian filmmakers through shorts programmes and by hosting workshops and training. Viddsee, a Singapore-based film-sharing platform, began in 2013 to share and promote Southeast Asian shorts alongside other video sites, such as YouTube. SeaShorts Festival, established in Malaysia in 2017, promotes shorts production and regional networking. Both bring into dialogue filmmakers and others in the region and are part of the expanding transnational assemblage of short film.

Traces of the short film continue to shape commercial media production from online content such as web series to omnibus feature-length projects. Social media company line, for example, sponsored an Adaapadengan Cinta? (What's up with Love?) teaser in 2014 that was watched by over seven million people and lead to the feature *Ada apa dengan Cinta 2*? (Riri Riza, 2016). Celebrated features director Joko Anwar has used the shorts form as paid promotion and, in one case, as a teaser to secure feature funding.[11] Others have followed the *Kuldesak* example and made omnibus features, including *Berbagi suami* (Love for share, Nia Dinata, 2006), *Parts of the heart* (Paul Agusta, 2012), and *Belkibolang* (Agung Sentausa, Ifa Isfansyah, Tumpal Christian Tampubolon, Rico Marpaung, Anggun Priambodo, Azhar Lubis, Rico Surya Pratama, Edwin, and Sidi Saleh, 2010). As with the new format of the 'microfilm' in China (Gilardi et al. 2020), we see how the short form is also integral to the new media industries of Indonesia.

[10] http://clcpurbalingga.id/tentang-kami.html (accessed 14-8-2020).

[11] Joko Anwar made a short film for Nokia and an advertisement for Toyota called *Jalinan aja* (Just drive, 2017) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePmDVWD51do (accessed 14-8- 2020). He then made *Jenny* (2016) as a pitch for *Pengabdi Setan / Satan's Slaves* (2017). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CLoJJn4kGg (accessed 14-8-2020).

Conclusion

Dewi pulang offers a means to understand the economy of short film that operates in parallel with, but not necessarily in opposition to, commercial short formats (such as advertising) on the one hand, and the mainstream feature film industry on the other. From this emerges a newly theorized meaning of independence that is premised on the kinds of infrastructures, organizations, and modes of production that emerge from this dispersed, nomadic, and polymorphous moving-image culture. Indonesia offers a unique vantage point with its *komunitas* that have energized and sustained this economy of shorts. *Dewi pulang* stands as an emblematic film that speaks to the larger film culture in Indonesia, to the skills of the filmmaker, and to the new definition of independent film culture.

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CHAPTER 27

Independent Canadian Music in the Streaming Age: The Sound from Above (Critical Political Economy) and Below (Ethnography of Musician)

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Abstract

This article illustrates the precarious position of Canadian independent musicians in the streaming era. In the first section, we articulate the sound of the Canadian music industry from above, providing a macro-level political economy, looking at multinational conglomerates, streaming technology, financialization, consolidation, and inequality. In sections two and three, we listen to the sound from below using ethnographic methods, relaying the experiences of independent musicians within an increasingly precarious industry. Based on feedback from the musicians we interviewed, we conclude by providing a series of recommendations and ideas to foster a more equitable, community-based music culture.

BY-NC-ND

Keywords

Independent music, music in Canada, music industries, music scenes, political economy of music, streaming music

Introduction

"I thought it was this viable career choice. That with enough effort, you could make it work," laments Lee Klippenstein of Slates and Screaming Targets when reflecting on a decade-plus career as a musician. "I certainly don't think that's the case now." Many independent musicians, in Canada and elsewhere, find themselves in a similar position, increasingly unable to support themselves making and performing music. Unless something "emerges to challenge the status quo" that has made a working career as a musician so unsustainable, John K Samson of the Weakerthans and Propagandhi expects only "further consolidation and a narrowing of who can live as a musician."

This article illustrates the precarious position of independent musicians in the streaming era.[1] Though its focus is Canada, it joins a number of articles (Mühlbach and Arora; Nickell; Towse) that position a nation's music industries and its independent musicians within the globalized streaming music era. What this article adds to the conversation is a dual methodological approach, using a combination of critical political economy and ethnography. In the first section, we articulate the sound of the Canadian music industries from above, providing a macro-level political economy, with attention paid to multinational conglomerates, streaming technology, financialization, platforms, consolidation, and inequality. We are influenced by Hesmondhalgh's call for "more systematic historical comparisons . . . beyond an excessive focus on new players . . . to the cultural-industry and political-economic contexts in which those organisations are embedded" ("Is Music" 19). With a broad, statistical overview, we aim

[1] "Independent" is a fluid and imperfect category but we use it throughout this article due to its currency as a term describing creative autonomy, a low-to-middle income status, and/or music making that operates at some distance from the major record industry. However, there are many downsides to the term independent, such as its relation to taste and distinction, its occasional meaning as formal experimentation, its lack of precision (see Dryhurst for a discussion of why the term "interdependent" captures the ambiguity of much music-making), and its history of being privileged by scholars in contrast to mainstream music released on major labels (see Mall). Furthermore, the term independent has become increasingly imperfect as many independent artists and labels maintain limited partnerships with major labels and the variety of income streams that artists engage with today complicates the independent-major binary. Our use of the term is also based on our interviews, in which musicians discussed their conflicted independence: not charting on major hit charts but may have (or had) moderate radio airplay (likely on public, campus, or satellite radio); relying on government grants for support; maintaining a tenuous relationship with labels and intermediaries; and who are laborers not only in making music but in other adjacent areas like promotion, social media management, tour booking, and so forth. We considered a number of alternative terms (non-superstar musicians, low-to-middle income musicians, working musicians, community-based musicians, and musicians struggling to achieve a living wage), but found all of them imprecise as well. See Hesmondhalgh ("Indie") and Bennett and Strange for further discussion of the term independent. Similarly, "music industry" is a slippery term and we aim to be specific about the many music industries (including recording, publishing, radio, live, licensing, and streaming), while still maintaining a broad perspective on what constitutes musician labor within a consolidating industry/set of industries. Furthermore, many musi- cians themselves, including our interview subjects, often imagine themselves in some sort of relationship with "the music industry." See Hesmondhalgh ("Flexibility"), Toynbee, Frith, Williamson and Cloonan, and Sterne for further discussion.

to map systemic inequalities and demonstrate the existential hardships faced by independent musicians in Canada.

In sections two and three, we listen to the sound from below using ethnographic methods, relaying the experiences of independent musicians within an increasingly precarious industry. Our study uses interviews with seventeen artists from Edmonton, Alberta, and Winnipeg, Manitoba. We are influenced by Cohen's call for "an ethnographic approach to the study of popular music, used alongside other methods [that] would emphasise that popular music is something created, used and interpreted by different individuals and groups . . . a human activity involving social relationships, identities and collective practices" (127). Cohen warns against "a reliance upon theoretical models abstracted from empirical data, and upon statistical, textual and journalistic sources," which need "to be balanced by a more ethnographic approach" (123). By incorporating theory, data, and journalistic sources, along with interviews of independent Canadian musicians, we aim to provide an account of the dire situation of our musical culture that is being accelerated by corporate consolidation, financialization, and platformization. Based on feedback from the musicians we interviewed, we conclude by providing a series of recommendations and ideas to foster a more equitable, community-based music culture.

The Political Economy of Canadian Music

When it comes to studying national music industries on the periphery of the American-led global music industries, an attention to global macroeconomic concerns is key. Many of the world's national and regional music industries are increasingly affected by a tight oligopoly of transnational (mostly American) music, technology, and financial companies. Media consolidation is not a new concern, but its intensification through financialization, streaming technology, and platformization is tightening the grip of power held by the biggest companies. The political economy of music is heavily shaped by only two or three massive conglomerates in each subsector, shaping the opportunities for musicians of all stripes. In recording and publishing, the "Big Three" of Universal Music Group, Sony Music Group, and Warner Music Group dominate the industry. Reports range from the Big Three controlling at least 70% of the global recording and publishing market in 2019 (Stasen), to as high as 86% of the North American market in 2016 (Christman). The exploitation at the heart of record label contracts is well documented (Stahl, *Unfree*; Arditi). In the live concert and ticketing business—often a musician's leading revenue source—LiveNation (which owns Ticketmaster) and Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG) form a duopoly, controlling the rights to perform at the largest venues and festivals, while dictating onerous terms to musicians. American terrestrial radio stations have been consolidated into homogenous, centralized networks by iHeartMedia, Entercom, and Cumulus, reinforcing the power of American superstars in global markets. The satellite radio market, once a promise of expanded diversity and opportunity, is now dominated by the merged entity SiriusXM. Internet radio was another format with potential for range and innovation; its biggest success, Pandora, was recently acquired by Liberty Media, a conglomerate that also owns SiriusXM, has investment stakes in LiveNation and iHeartMedia, and whose Chairman, John Malone, openly stated that "the goal would be to get to full consolidation" (qtd. in Szalai and Vlessing). Into these highly consolidated music

industries, streaming music arrived on a promise of expanded access and opportunity; the reality has been quite different.

Streaming in the Music Industries

The shift to digital music has reconfigured the music industries in myriad ways. Scholars often chart these changes by conceptualizing a new relationship to music: moving from consumer electronics to "networked mobile personalization" (Hesmondhalgh and Meier), based on the "digital music commodity" (Morris), mediated through overlapping networks and "technological assemblages" (Leyshon), which craft a "branded musical experience" (Morris and Powers) for "users" that are provided a service rather than consumers who are sold a product (Anderson). An adjacent historical paradigm is provided by Towse, who outlines the way digital service providers (DSPs), or platforms (such as Spotify, Apple, and Amazon), have altered the established method by which songwriters and recording artists are paid. Rather than discrete sales, a DSP uses platform pricing for subscriptions and ad-based services, which has depressed the royalty rates paid to musicians, now "too low to fully sustain a full-time career as a recording artist for the majority" (Towse 14).

As the largest growth market in the music industries in recent years, streaming platforms have been subject to a growing body of scholarship. Marshall provides an early analysis of the ongoing controversy over artist royalties, focusing on Spotify's meager payouts to musicians and its "pro-rata" revenue sharing model, in which pay to musicians is allocated according to total number of streams across the platform, rather than a user's subscription payment being divvied up among the musicians they listened to individually. Spotify's payment model favors big labels with many clients and extensive catalogs, while disadvantaging independent musicians and labels without the comparative scale. Hesmondhalgh further discusses the potential advantages of a user-centric model, rather than pro-rata, while also challenging simplistic criticisms of streaming music services, such as the reliance on dubious "per-stream" rates and the lack of systemic analysis ("Is Music"). Vonderau adds to this holistic understanding of streaming, arguing that Spotify is not just a music service, but operates at the intersection of advertising, technology, music, and finance. The importance of debt financing and brokerage to Spotify's rise, as Vonderau delineates, is essential to understanding the political economy of music; lurking in the shadows behind this technological transition to streaming music is the power of speculation.

Financializing and Platformizing the Music Industries

Financialization—the accelerated growth and power of the financial sector and its extractive logic—has had a dramatic but oft-unacknowledged impact on the consolidation of the global music industries in the last two decades. Private equity firms are a case in point; these investment funds buy companies using debt that is raised against the assets of the target company itself, referred to as "leverage." The investment fund then *pays itself* to restructure and financially engineer the company to "maximize efficiency," then seeks to sell the streamlined property at a profit. Warner Music Group, for example, was acquired by Bain Capital, Thomas H. Lee Partners, and Providence Equity Partners in 2004, which resulted in mass layoffs, including staff and musicians, as well as the reduced operational capacity of many of the historic labels

within Warner Music Group. In 2007, Terra Firma used debt-financing to acquire venerable British music company EMI and proceeded to lay off the existing management and nearly half of its workforce. Unable to restore revenues, Terra Firma forfeited control of EMI to its creditors; EMI's publishing arm ended up in Sony Music Group, while its recording arm was sold to Universal Music Group. The result of this instance of predatory financial extraction was a reduction from the "Big Four" record labels to the "Big Three."

Radio has been another target for financialization. In 2008, Bain and THL acquired Clear Channel, the largest US operator of radio stations. The layoffs were immediate, with many rounds of layoffs in the subsequent years. Smaller stations were sold off, the focus was shifted to only the most profitable stations, and local programming was replaced with syndicated programming. Saddled with $20 billion of debt by its private equity owners, the renamed iHeartMedia filed for bankruptcy in 2018 in order to restructure its debt. The second largest radio operator in the country, Cumulus, experienced a similar decade of private equity, consolidation, debt, streamlining, and homogenization. The private equity experiences of Warner Music Group, EMI, iHeartMedia, and Cumulus—four of the largest conglomerates in the music industries—demonstrate that the story of private equity is not just the rapid looting of profit in its successes, but also the debt-saddled wreckages it leaves in its failures.

In addition to private equity, other financial firms are circling the music industries. Institutional investors, such as Blackrock and Vanguard, have assembled dominant investment stakes in all major media companies, using this "common ownership" to reduce operational capacity, limit competition, and raise prices (deWaard). Investment groups, such as Hipgnosis Songs Fund, Round Hill Music, Concord, Shamrock, Primary Wave, and Lyric Capital Group, are acquiring recording and publishing rights in an effort to turn catalogs of songs into speculative assets. Hipgnosis, for example, owns an investment stake in more than 57,000 songs (over a thousand of which are #1 songs), is valued at over 2 billion dollars, and recently received a billion dollar investment from private equity company Blackstone to continue its mission of "establish[ing] songs as an uncorrelated asset class with attractive risk adjustment returns" (Ingham). Canadian musicians such as the Weeknd, Justin Bieber, Carly Rae Jepsen, and Neil Young have had their publishing rights financialized in this manner. In conjunction with this external financial pressure, the Big Three labels have enacted internal strategies of financialization, such as monopolistically leveraging their back-catalogs in order to gain equity stakes in streaming music companies, such as Spotify, Rdio, and Soundcloud. Finding great success in this investment-based strategy that requires no sharing of royalties with its artists, the Big Three labels now operate their own venture capital funds, as do all major media companies.

As the financial sector consolidates and extracts capital from established media sectors and copyright licenses, Big Tech companies create the platforms that are reshaping the working practices of today's creative workers. This "platformization of cultural production" has sharpened "expectations of digital visibility in cultural work" and led to a distribution of revenue that is "notoriously uneven and subject to very strong 'winner-take-all' effects," with massive uncertainty surrounding the ability for small-and-medium businesses or artists to "generate sustained long-term revenue" (Nieborg 25, 30–31). There is a long history of exploitation and precariousness in the cultural and creative industries, of course, one that predates the financialized and platformized streaming media era (Hesmondhalgh, "User-generated"; Hes-

mondhalgh and Baker). Workers in all creative sectors have been faced with an increasing reliance on entrepreneurialism and tasks adjacent to the making of art, music, and cultural products, while cultural policy has been limited in its capacity to respond to unsustainable working conditions (McRobbie). The music industries have numerous examples of uneven power dynamics between the record industry and recording artists (Stahl, "Primitive"). And though more musicians can release music today, evading previous gatekeepers to digitally distribute their own work to streaming services for a fee, not requiring a record label, their ability to actually make a living wage doing so are severely curtailed. There is a distinct lack of transparency when it comes to how musicians are being remunerated, making historical comparisons difficult (Hesmondhalgh, "Is Music"), but it is becoming clear that the result of this financialization, consolidation, and platformization in the music industries has been escalating inequality: a boon for corporations and superstar musicians, but devastating for average musicians.

A recent Citigroup report found that the U.S. music industry generated $43 billion USD in 2017, but artists received only 12% (Sanchez). Within that meager 12%, there is stunning inequality among artists and it's worsening: the top 1% of artists accounted for 77% of all recorded music income in 2014 (Mulligan). By 2020, the top 1% accounted for 90% of streams and the top 10% of artists accounted for 99.4% (Smith). Another analysis showed the 10 top-selling tracks command 82% more of the market and are played almost twice as much on Top 40 radio than they were a decade ago (Thompson). The top 1% of live performers earned 26% of worldwide concert revenue in 1980, but that market share had climbed to 60% in 2017, taking in more revenue than the bottom 99% combined (Krueger 85). The top 5% of artists also increased their share of the pie, from 62% to 85%, meaning the market share for the remaining 95%—the vast, vast majority of working musicians—has decreased from 38% of the market in 1982 to just 15% in 2017 (85). Meanwhile, the average American musician made only $21,300 from their craft in 2018 and 61% report music income is not sufficient to meet their living expenses (Krueger and Zhen). In Canada, the average musician only makes $17,900/year, less than half of the average Canadian worker's income, and well below the poverty line (Hill, "A Statistical"). It is more winner-take-all in the music industries than ever before and the vast majority of creators are struggling to earn a living.

The Canadian Music Industries in the Streaming Age

The Canadian record industry has ties to the much larger American record industry through a domestic-international or subsidiary-parent company relationship. Canadian subsidiaries have typically developed national artists for a domestic market to determine the potential for international distribution. Beginning in the late 1960s, the existence of Canadian subsidiaries of major multinational labels "mirrors an international pattern; these firms have set up national branches and manufacturing plants in many countries" (Straw 102). As one example, the wider political economy surrounding Capitol Records' first Canadian record pressing plant, which opened in 1976, indicates an industrial logic that was largely American in structure (Fauteux et al.). Many Canadian independent record labels that have released albums by Canadian artists have developed distribution deals with major labels. For instance, the Toronto-based Arts & Crafts Records, home to notable indie acts like Broken Social Scene and Feist, had EMI Music Canada as its distributor until 2013 when EMI was merged into

Universal Music Canada. Furthermore, the label's co-founder Jeffrey Remedios is now the CEO of Universal Music Canada. While there is an increasing focus on digital music and streaming services today, lessening the importance of producing, distributing, and retailing material cultural products like records, Canada is still part of a global context in which large, often American, record or tech companies retain significant influence.

Transnational financialization and consolidation means the livelihoods of Canadian musicians are subject to the structural constraints established by Fortune 500 CEOs, Silicon Valley programmers, and hedge fund managers. The consolidation of the Canadian media sector only exacerbates the situation. The Canadian Media Concentration Research Project notes that vertical integration within the country "is very high by historical standards and almost four times current levels in the United States," as the top five media companies (Bell, Rogers, Telus, Shaw, and Quebecor) accounted for 71.1% of the $80 billion CAD network media economy in 2016 (Winseck). Vertical integration has real impacts; the control of the Canadian radio sector by the ten biggest radio groups grew from 50% in 1997 to 82% by 2018, leading to homogenized playlists and limited exposure for new musicians (Canada, *Minutes*). The 2006 policy for commercial radio noted that the sector was financially sound, in part due to the fact that the 1998 policy increased the limits on the number of stations a licensee could own in a single market (CRTC). Alongside this increased consolidation is the fact that commercial radio and other major music industries in Canada have been "slow to embrace genres outside of Rock and Country" (Sutherland 230). For this reason, many independent artists and musicians who perform music not typically heard on more mainstream channels have sought out Canada's public and campus radio sectors for airplay.

Radio in Canada has historical and ideological connections to ideas about national identity and community (however ambiguous) and these ideas shape the mandate of a national public institution like the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). Section 3 (1)(b) of Canada's Broadcasting Act (1991) claims that the broadcasting system provides a "public service essential to the maintenance and enhancement of national identity and cultural sovereignty." The CBC has a mandate to reflect the regional and cultural diversity of Canada; to contribute to shared national consciousness; and, to develop Canadian talent (Canada, "Organization"). Thus, the CBC makes efforts to showcase music from across Canada's regions and it is mandated to program at least fifty percent Canadian content. In addition to the CBC, all Canadian music radio must program a certain percentage of Canadian musical selections across the broadcast week in the form of Canadian content regulations. Commercial stations are to have at least 35 percent Canadian music selections across the broadcast week. Campus stations are also usually licensed at or above 35 percent. Most significantly, campus stations are licensed to reflect their local communities and to complement commercial and public radio programming. This means that music programming often prioritizes local artists and music from a wide variety of styles and genres (Fauteux; MacLennan; Mastrocola). Established in 1971, the aim of these content regulations was to boost the Canadian music industries (see Muia), but they have not been updated or applied to internet consumption, like streaming music services, and are therefore less relevant to the financialized, consolidated, and platformized global music industries.

Responding to this worsening media climate, the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage studied remuneration models for Canadian artists and creative industries in 2019.

The resulting report (Canada, "Shifting") focused on the industry term "value gap," "a disparity between the value of creative content enjoyed by consumers and the revenues that are received by artists and creative industries" (6), which it linked to "a severe decline in the ability of artists to earn a middle-class income" (7), in large part due to "wealth [having been] diverted from creators into the pockets of massive digital entities" (23). A report generated by Music Canada agreed, arguing that the creative labor of Canadian musicians "subsidize[s] major online platforms and telecommunications conglomerates through Canadian copyright exceptions that prevent performers and record labels from being properly compensated" ("Closing" 10). The total cost it estimates to have been lost to the Canadian music industry since 1997 is over $19 billion ("Closing" 18).

While pointing to the extractive and consolidated nature of tech platforms and telecoms is certainly justified, Music Canada fails to mention the effects of the concentration of the Canadian recording industry, perhaps because it is a trade group funded by the Canadian subsidiaries of the Big 3 record labels: Sony Music Entertainment Canada, Universal Music

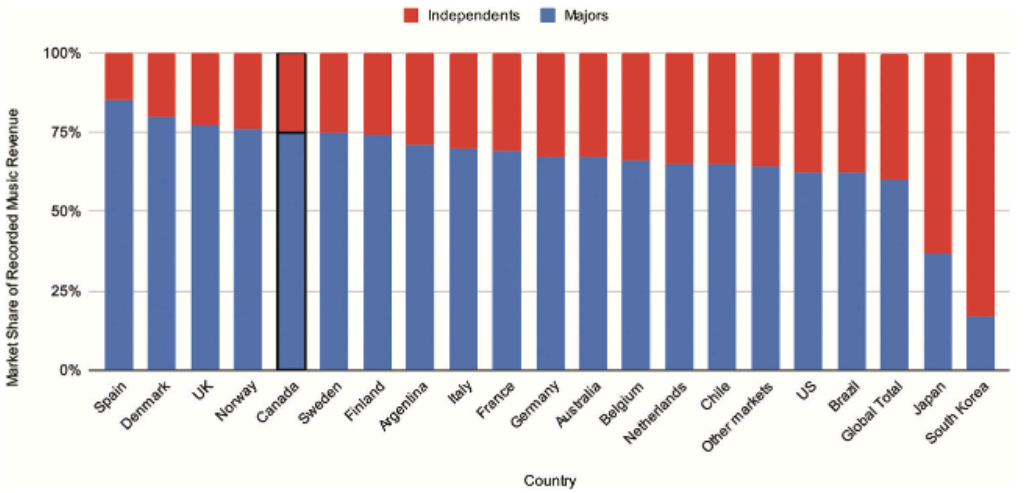


Figure 1. Market Share of Major and Independent Record Labels Globally, 2018.
Data: WINTEL Worldwide Independent Market Report 2018. Full data available at CULTCAP.ORG/DATA.

Canada, and Warner Music Canada. According to the WINTEL Worldwide Independent Market Report in 2018, Canada has one of the highest rates of major label market share in the world, at 75%, as indicated in Figure 1. Only Spain, Denmark, and the UK had a higher rate. Correspondingly, Canada has one of the lowest rates of independent record label market share at 25%. Even the United States has higher (38%). The global average is 40%, while more equitable countries like Japan (63%) and South Korea (83%) should be the goal. It is no wonder that Music Canada's solution to the "value gap" is punitive copyright legislation; the Big 3 record labels would continue to profit handsomely within their oligopoly.

Within this consolidated Canadian industry, there are many inequalities. Three of the biggest global streaming superstars are Canadian—Drake, the Weeknd, and Justin Bieber—and they have dominated in the streaming era: from 2005 to 2017, they had the top 8 most

streamed songs of Canadian musicians, 31 of the top 50, and 72 of the top 150 (Bliss). Each of the three has continued to rack up global hits and chart records since that time and their success has positive effects for the Canadian music industries, facilitating jobs and international attention. However, their success also casts a long shadow; most recent statistics on Canadian music are artificially inflated by these three megastars, clouding our picture of the health of the industry. Sales and streaming figures that subtracted these three artists would present an even more alarming reality for the average musician. What might appear as a profitable, vibrant industry from baseline numbers is in fact dominated by three musicians, all three of whom are signed to US-based Universal Music Group. Figure 2 depicts a representative sample of chart entries of Canadian musicians on the Top 100 Singles Charts in Canada during two time periods: 1990–1999 and 2009–2018. The 1990s, the height of both the CD

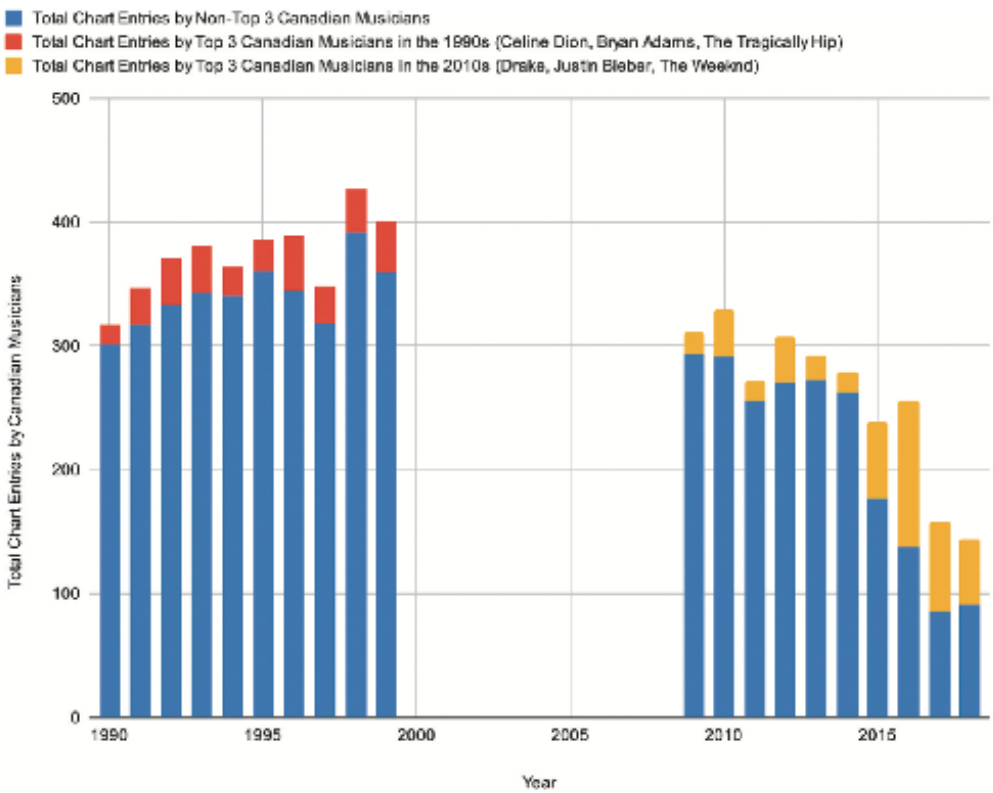


Figure 2. Canadian songs on top 100 singles charts in Canada: 1990–1999 & 2009–2018.
Data: RPM Magazine (1990–1999); no data (2000–2008); Billboard Canadian Hot 100 (2009–2018).
Full data available at CULTCAP.ORG/DATA.

boom and Canadian content regulations, witnessed a wider variety of Canadian musicians making popular music that reached a substantive Canadian audience, at least as measured by charts. There were 306 distinct Canadian musicians who made the top 100, 3,730 total chart entries, 1,154 unique songs, and the top 3 musicians controlled only 5–10% market share of the chart. The streaming era, by contrast, has been notably less diverse for Canadian music: only 246 distinct Canadian musicians (including many cover songs and one-hit wonders from song competition television series), 2,588 total chart entries, 764 unique songs, and a

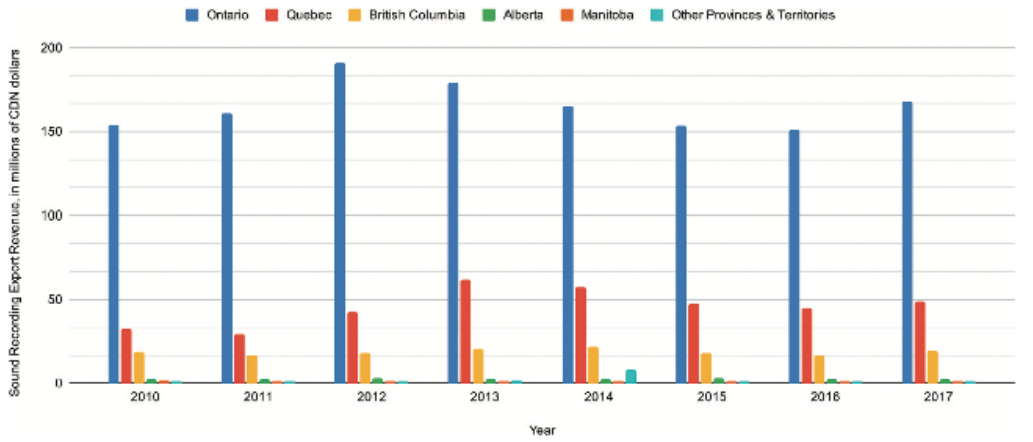


Figure 3. International Exports of Canadian Sound Recording Industry, 2010–2017.

Data: Statistics Canada. Table 12-10-0116-01 International and inter-provincial trade of culture and sport products, by domain and sub-domain, provinces and territories (x 1,000,000). Full data available at CULTCAP.ORG/DATA.

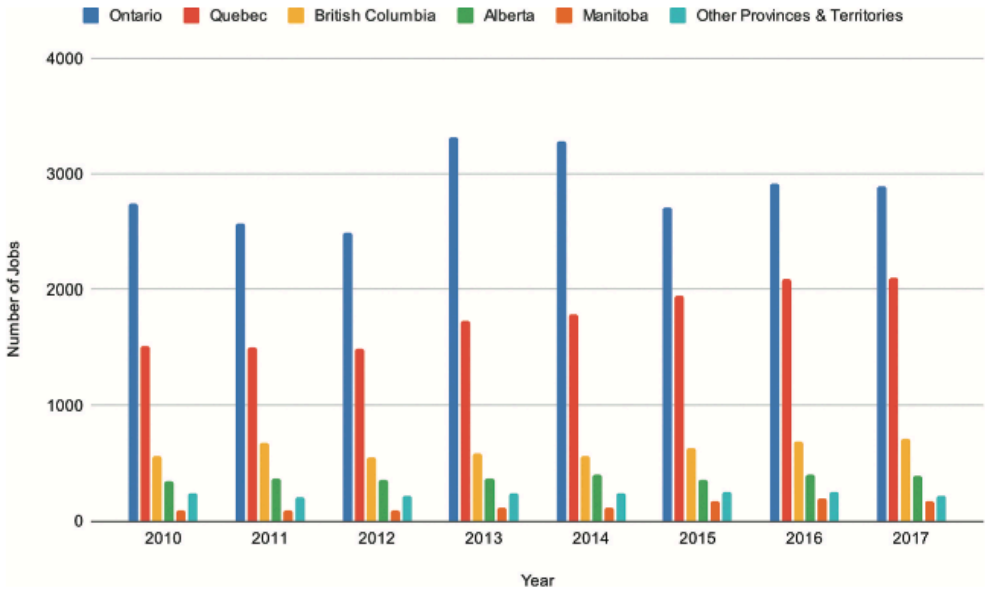


Figure 4. Jobs in Canadian Sound Recording Industry, 2010–2017.

Data: Statistics Canada. Table 36-10-0452-01 Culture and sport indicators by domain and sub-domain, by province and territory, product perspective (x 1,000). Full data available at CULTCAP.ORG/DATA.

dramatic trend line down in all categories, except the increasing market share of Drake, Justin Beiber, and the Weeknd, which reached as high as 46% in 2016 and 2017.

Regional inequalities are widening as well. Ontario, particularly the cultural hub of Toronto, has a disproportionate significance within the Canadian music industries, with nearly half of music sector jobs nationwide, over 60% of Canadian music publishing and recording export revenue, and 58% of the Canadian total GDP generated by this music sector as of 2017 ("In-

dustry Profile-Music"). Figures 3 and 4 demonstrate this inordinate power of Ontario within the Canadian recorded music industry, with a limited sector in Quebec, and the remaining provinces and territories struggling to maintain jobs and exports of recordings. Government grants help mitigate this imbalance, as discussed by musicians below. But in the case of grants awarded by the Foundation Assisting Canadian Talent on Recordings (FACTOR) from 2013 to 2020, as seen in Figure 5, more than half of total money went to Ontario musicians, despite the province having less than 40% of the population. Correspondingly, other

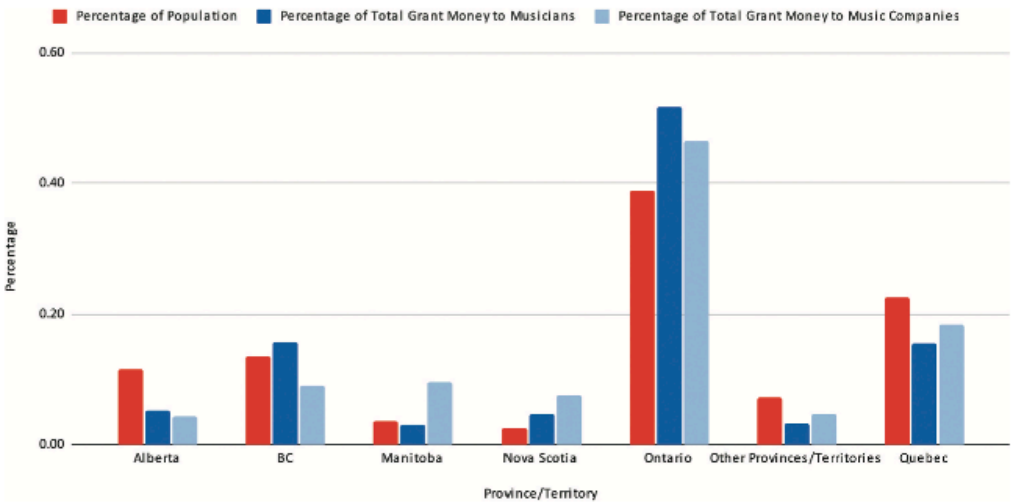


Figure 5. FACTOR Grants Awarded to Musicians and Music Companies Based on Province/Territory Compared to Population, 2013–2020.

Data: FACTOR (2020); Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0009-01 (2020). Full data available at CULTCAP. ORG/DATA.

provinces and territories receive a disproportionately lower amount of funding compared to their population. To make matters worse, conservative governments at both the federal and provincial level continue to slash funding to arts and culture programs when possible: in Ontario, funding for the Ontario Music Fund was reduced from $15 million to $7 million by the province's Progressive Conservative 2019 budget ("Ontario government"); in Alberta, the United Conservative Party enacted a 5 per cent budget reduction to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts ("Arts and Creative"); and in Manitoba, the Progressive Conservative Party proposed $8 million in cut to community groups, including the Winnipeg Arts Council (Kavanagh).

Issues of diversity and inclusion are another concern when considering worsening inequality within the streaming age of music. Amidst this corporate consolidation, listener data are showing a reduction in the diversity of music across vectors of gender, class, and ethnicity. A report on Spotify's most-streamed artists in 2018 indicates that all of the top artists are men (Byager). A deeper analysis of 600 Billboard Hot 100 songs from 2012 to 2017 found an average of 16.8% female performers, 12.3% female songwriters, and only 2.1% female producers (Smith et al.). A UK study found only 12% of musicians in 2019 were from a working-class background, down from 20% in previous years; women and people of color were further disadvantaged (Carey et al.). In Canada, female artists make 82 cents of total income for every dollar of male artists, with Indigenous artists making only 68 cents on the dollar (Hill,

"Demographic"). With this overview of the political economy of Canadian music, it is clear that independent musicians face undue hardship in pursuing their career. The next step is turning to the musicians themselves, listening to their perspectives and values, in order to advocate on their behalf.

Amplifying Artist Perspectives in the Streaming Music Era

To get a sense of how artists in Canada have been navigating their careers within the context of the political economy of music in Canada, we interviewed nine musicians in Edmonton, Alberta, and eight in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Some of these artists continue to live and work in Edmonton and Winnipeg while others have moved to larger cities in order to develop their careers. Interviews ranged from thirty to ninety minutes and took place in person between December 2019 and March 2020, although some were conducted via phone or video chat for artists who were located elsewhere. The interviews followed a fixed set of questions, but with exploratory contextual prompts to continue in areas that seemed of particular interest to the project and the interviewee themselves. Possible themes were identified prior to interviews, then iteratively updated as we listened to and reflected on the stories and answers shared by the musicians. The career paths of these artists are unique but what unites them is some distance from the major record industry. These are artists without major label representation and without regular commercial radio airplay. Some expressed an aspiration to eventually find commercial success while others have maintained a do-it-yourself and independent ethos throughout their careers.

These cities were chosen for practical reasons (one member of our research team lives in Edmonton and one in Winnipeg) but also to call attention to cities that are infrequently the focus of writing on music in Canada. Studies of music making in Canada predominantly focus on larger cities with more venues, music-related businesses, and radio stations, such as Toronto, Ontario or Montreal, Quebec. While both Edmonton and Winnipeg are mid-sized cities (the population of the former is 981,280 as of 2017 and the latter is 749,534) with a number of music venues and recording studios, they do not maintain the music infrastructure and support of Canada's larger urban centers. Both cities are also isolated in terms of their proximity to other large cities, although Edmonton is relatively close (about a three-hour drive) to Calgary, Alberta's other major municipality. In Winnipeg in particular, this has led to a certain pride in the local scene, as it is difficult to travel elsewhere for shows. These interviews highlighted three aspects of the artist experience that are relevant to analyzing the political economy of music in Canada: the core and peripheries of "the industry," touring and geography, and grants and funding.

The Core and Peripheries of "The Industry"

Because our interview subjects either live or have lived in the mid-sized cities of Winnipeg and Edmonton, there is often a career trajectory that involves moving to a larger city where more music infrastructure is located. Some interviewees mentioned the ability to find more work opportunities in bigger cities and that there is a better chance of having a gatekeeper, like a SiriusXM programmer, present at a live performance in Toronto. Both Colleen Brown and Cayley Thomas are singers, songwriters, and instrumentalists who moved to Toronto

from Edmonton. Brown commented on the increased prominence of the business side of music in Toronto and explained that "it just felt like almost every time I watched an artist build up in Edmonton, there would be some kind of wall where it just wouldn't build past a certain point." Natanielle Felicitas, a freelance cellist, expressed a similar sentiment in the Winnipeg context but with some frustration about this trajectory: "I know everyone sort of concentrates themselves in Toronto and a lot of Winnipeggers are told to go there if they want to have the next level up. It would be nice to see Winnipeg have . . . more industry, more middlemen." For other artists, however, a city like Winnipeg represents more opportunities for producing and performing music. The late Kelly Fraser, a beloved Inuk pop singer and Juno Award nominee, detailed a music journey through bringing back the "Inuit drum" which was "lost years ago from missionaries telling us to ban it." Fraser added, "I learned how to play in Inuit Studies in Ottawa's Nunavut Sivuniksavut for two years. I was able to bring it back to my community . . . [and] collectively we brought that drum back." She later found that it was hard on her mental health to be back in her community in Nunavut "because I didn't have a lot of support and I wasn't saving money. So I moved away to Winnipeg to try to make it, though it's very hard." Canadian musicians often wrestle with the dilemma to stay in their community or relocate to a larger city with more industry opportunities.

The process of becoming acquainted with different levels or tiers of the music business can be tricky. For many musicians, there is a need to be strategic with respect to deciding when to establish partnerships with labels or other industry intermediaries like a publicist or a booking agent, and how much of their own money to spend. Most interview subjects commented on the fact that they have worked with a manager or a publicist but that these partnerships were temporary and timed to align with a major funding opportunity (such as a grant application) or an album release. This process of negotiating budgets and partnerships to align with key benchmarks of one's career seems to be a strategy that defines the experience of independent musicians in Canada. One indie solo artist from Edmonton mentioned that her publicist was the most expensive line on her marketing budget but that little return had come from this expense. Marti Sarbit, vocalist and songwriter of Imaginary Cities and Lanakai, explained that a manager was essential for putting together large grant applications. This perceived requirement to participate in "the industry" in a specific way can be a significant obstacle for many. Fraser indicated that forms of institutional racism can be a barrier for participating with labels, an issue she connected to a longer history of colonialism in Canada: "I don't know if labels that are mostly run by white people or people who live in the West with Western ideologies and values, I don't think they'd be able to see what I'm trying to do, trying to teach." She did try to work with a label for her album *Sedna* but the label requested that she sing only in her language; she wanted to sing half in English and half in Inuktitut because that is how she teaches. She decided not to work with the label given their efforts to control her practice.

Touring and Canadian Geography

A study on the music ecosystem in Alberta noted that 73% of artist income comes from performances and touring ("West Anthem"). Studies out of the US corroborate this finding; the *Future of Music* found that much artist revenue has to be sustained by aggressive touring ("Artist Revenue Streams") and *The Creative Independent* indicated that most musicians in the

US are not able to earn a living wage through music-related work, with most income coming from performing/touring at 61% (Köerner and Kladzyk). Touring is not an option that is accessible to everyone. The increasing emphasis on live music within a musician's workload raises issues for those in Canada, given a vast geographic area and low population. Musicians living and working in the northern territories have an especially difficult time touring, facing exceptionally long distances and expensive travel options. Although streaming services help reach audiences beyond borders, it forces musicians to rely on live shows and touring to generate an income, as opposed to selling albums (Weaver). Some artists noted the increasing importance of festivals and showcases, in which one can spend a few days in one area and perform and network with the hopes of building a team to help advance their career. Some felt that it is difficult if not pointless to tour across Canada, finding it to be more effective to fly to a different region and visit a number of towns or cities in that particular area.

In most cases, artists emphasized the necessity of touring, although the financial return of this endeavor varied across responses. Klippenstein said that for his Edmonton-based bands, it is usually "a 50/50 split between show sales and records and merch sales. . . almost always strictly vinyl for us." He added that live shows and merch sales have "been, really, the only thing to sustain us." Fraser noted that an increase in popularity had meant having to tour and more regularly. Before, she avoided planning tours but instead, "specifically allowed [herself] to be available to Indigenous people who want me to play at their events on their reserves in Nunavut" and did "a lot of workshops and motivational speaking." Winnipeg-based Samson said that most of his income comes from live revenue but when he plays with a full band he makes "what the band makes and it's not very much."

The logistics of organizing tours and live performances is often a fundamental aspect of a Canadian musician's career and thus a number of musicians discussed working with booking agents. This has had both positive and negative outcomes. Klippenstein said that an agent has resulted in slightly higher guarantees than if he had booked shows himself but that the end result is often ending up on bills with mismatched bands and "poorly attended shows." One's relationship and experience with venues is another aspect of the booking process that many noted as significant, particularly when planning and organizing shows themselves. Transparency and communication from the venue is crucial. As Big Dave McLean, a celebrated Winnipeg blues guitarist, songwriter, and Member of the Order of Canada, said, "If I'm going to Sault Ste. Marie, well it's going to take me a while to get there and I sure hope there's a gig for me when I get there. In the past I have shown up to, 'Oh gee, I'm sorry I forgot that I booked this guy too.'" Sarbit added that some venues "will send you this beautiful contract ahead of time and give you all the information you need. Love those venues."

One of the most striking takeaways from the artist perspective on touring in Canada is that geographic and financial obstacles can determine the logistics, and thus often the sound, of the performance. Thomas indicated that her recordings are quite layered, and she has thought, "Oh, why did I have to include a vibraphone!? . . . How to pair that down because that's a big thing. I guess, to create a product that you can recreate with as little resources as necessary." Similarly, Felicitas said that "It's cheaper for just one person to fly there and tour Eastern Canada with the Eastern string players as opposed to bringing me along." Further, genre plays a role in determining one's ability to tour and perform in smaller cities or towns. Josh Sahunta, an Edmonton-based R&B and pop singer-songwriter, explained that because

he fits within the "genre of easy listening" he can get a wide variety of bookings because his music "is not really something that would be off-putting in any setting." Based on the fact that some artists expressed that it can be difficult to reproduce the sound of the record in a live context given the additional costs it necessitates, it can be said that the sound of the music one hears in a live music context is shaped by financial and logistic realities and these obstacles are more prominent for new and independent artists. Certain genres and styles of music that lend themselves to solo artists or smaller outfits seem to travel more efficiently.

Government Grants and Funding

One opportunity for artists in Canada is a robust funding framework for musical activities including recording, promotion, and touring. Shapiro explains that Canada "has one of the most extensive systems of any country for funding of the arts and is viewed as a model case by other nations" (90). The Liberal government's Budget 2021 included $70 million over three years to Canadian Heritage for the Canada Music Fund (CMF), including $50 million in 2021–22 to help the live music sector with difficulties faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The CMF funds major Canadian granting organizations FACTOR (for the English market) and Musicaction (for the French market). Sahunta has taken advantage of this system and describes grants as "invaluable" and has used them for tours, showcases, and recording. By no means is this a perfect funding framework, but a number of musicians emphasized the reliability of grants as a significant source of financial backing. One Juno Award winning folk singer-songwriter from Alberta said that "the most funding that I get is from grants. I would say that about 50% of them are Indigenous-based grants. And that's the money that goes towards my travel and towards creating new albums."

Grants range from those provided by local organizations such as municipalities, radio stations, and banks, to organizations at the provincial and federal levels. Typically, the more local the grant, the easier it is to acquire, at least in mid-sized cities like Edmonton and Winnipeg. Klippenstein said that three of the most expensive albums recorded over his career "were funded by a radio station that had no radio shows that played any sort of music similar to [his bands]." This was called the "10k20 program," which involved twenty bands receiving $10,000 and was a "fairly straight forward grant to write." The larger grants offered by FACTOR are said to be more difficult to acquire and they often require assistance (such as a manager) as well as money to be put forth by the artist themselves. FACTOR was founded in 1982 by three of Canada's largest broadcast chains in partnership with the Canadian Independent Record Production Association and the Canadian Music Publishers Association. Over the years, it has expanded its funding opportunities but has worked to manage a balance between "providing opportunities to those artists and companies in need of support, but also to those with potential to reach some level of commercial success" (Sutherland 223, 226). About half of our interview subjects had applied to FACTOR for funding while others preferred smaller, low-stakes, regional or local grants. FACTOR's smaller grants, like the Emerging Artists Program, introduced in 2007–08, still require a certain level of industry experience, such as demonstrating a certain threshold of sales and radio airplay (Sutherland 227). Across our interviews, the importance of grants was routinely emphasized, and artists have used a variety of funding sources to help sustain their careers and livelihoods.

Some grants do come with significant barriers, particularly the larger ones that support a range of activities across an extended period of time. Thomas described the FACTOR Juried Sound Recording (JSR) grant as "the Cadillac . . . of the FACTOR programs." She said, "while a very generous grant, it requires you to put a bit of your own money in." Klippenstein expressed some frustration with the need to account for statistics and keep accurate records for the purpose of putting larger grant applications together. With a delightfully Canadian example, he noted that it can be hard to keep track of record sales on the road: "I don't know how many records we sold, because the book fell in a snowbank or whatever." Fraser described the grant writing process against dire circumstances under which her bandmates were low on money and starving. Some of her bandmates "went days without eating." A grant was approved by the territory (Nunavut) and she said, "one of the things that they told me was, 'next time you write your proposal, make sure you're grammatically correct.' And, it's like, right now, that's not my biggest priority."

In a larger arts-funding context, there has been a noted turn to instrumentalized benchmarks for acquiring and justifying grants. Another example of a major industry grant in Canada is the Radio Starmaker Fund, one developed by private broadcasting trade association the Canadian Association of Broadcasters. As Shapiro notes, this fund reflects a move to support "stars" as opposed to Canadian culture or content and the fact that "new talent would have to sell between 2500 and 10,000 units in Canada to qualify" meant that a significant number of artists were ineligible (94). Beyond Canada, Behr has described how a focus on a "free-market economy" has shaped state funding of the arts in a number of national contexts, where money spent on "the arts came to be spoken of in relation to the returns it generated: profits, tax revenues and jobs" (279). A common sentiment expressed by interviewees was that grants tend to privilege "the people who are more strategic and less artistically driven" (as said by one anonymous interviewee). Others bemoaned the fact that Facebook "likes" and YouTube "views" become part of the criteria for a successful application. Greg MacPherson, Winnipeg singer-songwriter and co-owner of indie record label Disintegration Records, raised questions about what sort of music might get funded if we circumvented ideas about instrumental return. He said, "I would love to see all that support going into . . . some weird electronic music from The Pas [a small town just over 600 km northwest of Winnipeg] or something that's very different and unique."

There is a relationship, then, between a sort of homogenization of music finding success through grants and within the higher echelon of the music and record business in Canada. Samson said, "I do feel like the homogenization of the industry is basically leading to artists, musicians, being mostly people like me . . . middle-class people with support, people who've kind of won various lotteries." These points echo Sutherland's claim that FACTOR has had "well-developed procedures for responding to ongoing changes in its target sector" but this has not been matched in its effort to address matters of diversity through the 2000s (despite this being an emerging government priority not specific to the music industry) (229). Many other participants questioned whether a polished grant proposal is strongly correlated with interesting music.

Community-led Values and Opportunities

Throughout our interviews with musicians there was a pronounced focus on the value of community between artists and local institutions. Music scenes offer a means by which to consider music's relationship to the local, a relationship that informs "notions of collective identity and community" (Bennett 3) and they are shaped by institutional spaces that bring people together through listening to music and participating in the production and circulation of music (Fauteux 130). Scenes can be shaped by genre conventions and expectations as well. In O'Connor's writing on punk, "scene" means "the active creation of infrastructure to support punk bands and other forms of creative activity" (226). For cities like Edmonton and Winnipeg, a sense of community can bind individuals and institutions within a music scene, where campus stations, record stores, venues, and so forth, support and sustain music-making. However, as interviewees from these cities pointed out, there can be limitations for career-minded artists who wish to move beyond the local scene and establish themselves beyond its borders.

Music communities and scenes are interwoven in the ways that each are understood as integral to music in geographic and social spaces. The idea of community is fluid and can be fraught. It is easy to romanticize "community" against the notion of a major music industry monolith. It might be a vehicle of exclusion by which certain artists or industry intermediaries are welcome to participate at the expense of others (exclusionary practices that might be oriented around taste, class, race, gender, and so forth). Alternatively, an idea of community might conjure ideas of participatory and collaborative music making or cultural production (Mayes 19). Despite myriad meanings, it is necessary to emphasize the fact that community is a term that helps musicians make sense of their everyday lived realities and experiences as artists and, throughout our interviews, a number of key characteristics can be said to define or describe community-led values in the context of music-making. Within a larger framework of music scene studies and community-based music-making practices, our interviews with independent musicians in Canada point to three themes for which we might focus attention and energy in our thinking about how we might restructure or reimagine the music industries in the streaming media era. These include: Sustainability for musicians (livelihood), sustainable infrastructure, and transparency and community.

Sustainability for Musicians

A "sustainable music career," of course, is defined differently by individual musicians. For some, the ability to play music and to tour without losing money is the goal. For others, the aim is to make a living wage off of playing and recording music. As one artist claimed, the desire to "put art in the world that I think is meaningful" often means having to make money to survive and to sustain one's self. Another defined a sustainable career as "paying rent, paying my bills, having a decent standard of living . . . being able to afford to take care of my child."

There are a number of obstacles to achieving a sustainable career. Many interviewees stressed the toll that music-making and the increased pressure to carry out a wide variety of tasks and jobs related to their career can have on their mental health, a hazardous situation explored by Gross and Musgrave. Sarbit explained, "All I wanted to do is make music. I didn't necessarily want to run a business at the same time and take care of the people in it." There is

a tension between spending time writing music and the need to be on social media "talking about it," as Felicitas said, echoing a dynamic that Baym isolates. Sahunta indicated that a larger "obsessiveness" with social media "is pretty toxic to mental health" and can involve a "constant comparison cycle." Fraser emphasized the mental health struggles that come with being an artist, "because you don't run on a paycheck . . . if you can work nine to five but still get no money. You can go do a show and still not make money." Commenting on the common narrative of the need to tour to earn income in today's music industries, Samson said that heavy touring ruined a lot of personal relationships.

The standards and structures set by the music business can be difficult to conform to and they often work against one's artistic sensibility. Arlo Maverick, an Edmonton-based hip hop MC, commented on the increased pressure to release singles more regularly but that he sees himself as an album artist: "I want to take time to create a body of work." He added that there have been rapid, significant changes in the nature of an artist's creative practice and labor over the last decade or so: "all of a sudden it's like, 'Okay, if you want to be on our site, you need to pay us money'" (see; Burton). At the same time that artists are coming to rely on corporate social media platforms for marketing themselves, the companies behind these platforms are increasing the barriers between fans and artists. Jared Salte of alternative-pop band the Royal Foundry said that both Facebook and Instagram have changed their algorithm and that there is now a financial cost required for fans to see the news or updates that the band is sharing.

The entrepreneurial nature of a musician's creative labor reflects the variety of income streams that any one artist might require in order to maintain, or work toward, a sustainable career. Royalties from radio, money from sync and licensing deals, adjacent income (such as working a second job), and streaming music royalties are some of the most frequently cited income streams according to interviewees. Some artists said that airplay on the CBC's radio services provided reliable royalty cheques. A number of artists said that their royalties from being played by the satellite radio service SiriusXM were amongst their highest sources of income. When the American services XM Radio and Sirius Satellite Radio were licensed in Canada (both have since merged to form SiriusXM) a number of Canadian channels were required, including CBC music channels, like Radio 3. Sound Exchange, which deals in royalties from streaming radio like SiriusXM, was said to pay more than most other royalties. Fraser explained that one large check from Sound Exchange and performance rights was notably significant, which helped to "pay bills, build credit, buy a new car . . . pay for my own recordings" and to "even pay [her] sister's bills and help [her] family out more." Brown has been participating in songwriting circles "to build up a library of songs that could potentially work for placements or song licensing." Far from a dying medium, radio is in fact the lifeblood of many independent musicians' careers.

A less reliable source of income has been per-stream payments from streaming music services like Spotify. There is a paradox between the dominance of these services and the pressure artists feel to have their music featured on playlists and the accompanying payouts that artists receive. As Salte says, "Over the past five years, we've seen our streams go up but our [streaming] income go down quite a bit." Others have been slightly more successful, such as Sarbit who, after being featured on a playlist and generating nearly a million plays of one song, received around $4,000 (still a very small number considering the high number of streams). Shane Matthewson from noise rock band KEN mode said that "as far as new fans

discovering us, it's through Spotify playlists" and noted that one of their songs was on a Spotify metal workout playlist "and that's our top streamed track." While income from streaming is predominately negligible, some have found ways to profit off of the opportunities that a playlist feature or listener data affords.

Sustainable Music Infrastructure

Infrastructure, which includes institutions and resources that are essential for music-making (venues, cultural intermediaries, and local media), is a key component of a music scene and the broader environment that enables a musician to remain in a city or town. There is the issue of sustaining venues themselves and ensuring that there are places for artists to perform, but also ensuring that live music venues and festivals are accessible and inclusive spaces. Spencer Heykants from Edmonton rock band Counterfeit Jeans explained, "It's good to see that a lot [of venues] are adopting inclusive space policies. So people who sometimes wouldn't feel comfortable going out to see a show now feel that they're welcomed." Issues of accessibility, inclusivity, and equity shape not only the audiences' experience of a performance but also the artist experience. Samson highlighted the example of inequality with artist payouts. He recalled an instance when he and partner Christine Fellows "both played the Winnipeg Folk Festival two years apart with exactly the same band and she got paid a third of what I got paid."

While venues may be the most obvious place where musicians and audiences come together, a range of spaces and places like studios, radio stations, print weeklies, and record stores combine to support local music-making in important ways. Many interviewees noted that campus radio stations have been helpful as a "pipeline to get your music across the country especially because touring can be prohibitively expensive, given the size of this country" (as said by Jed Gauthier of Counterfeit Jeans). Sahunta traced the success of one of his albums to campus radio: "It started charting on campus radio across Canada, there were a couple of stations in the UK that picked it up. and then I started getting offered some really cool gigs out of that." Campus radio remains an important local media outlet for independent artists, particularly as the trend in commercial media has been to delocalize. A notable benefit of the campus sector is that artists can submit music to stations directly, as opposed to having to pay for an aggregator to distribute music via a streaming service like Spotify. Edmonton is served by the University of Alberta's CJSR-FM and Winnipeg has CKUT-FM at the University of Winnipeg and CJUM-FM at the University of Manitoba, but artists typically submit music to stations across the sector, hoping for national airplay. Local media and journalists are strong advocates for local musicians, but this is a resource that has nearly disappeared from music cities in Canada and beyond. Other components that artists indicated were missing or lacking within the broader framework of sustainable music infrastructure were "more community organizations . . . like a resource centre" to help figure out things like contracts (Sarbit); and "mental health aid for artists is like massively needed" because music is "such a personal endeavor that if things don't go well, it can get dark" (Sarbit). Fraser was frank about her struggles with mental health and trauma, and mentioned the support provided by the Unison Benevolent Fund. Tragically, she died by suicide shortly after talking to us.

Transparency and Community

A lack of transparency across various components of the music industries was a recurrent issue expressed by interviewees. A veil of uncertainty permeates an artist's relationship with people and things that are essential to their careers, including, but not limited to, labels, contracts, grants, and playlists. Klippenstein mentioned that one label was "reluctant to even tell us what the records had sold" and that there was very little sense of what money was coming in from streaming music services. Brown cited the importance of transparency when dealing with contracts but that it is expensive to hire an entertainment lawyer. She noted specifics like ensuring that artists know what Sound Exchange is and how it works and that there are "differences between performance royalties here in Canada versus the performance royalties in the US." Brown added that "for the next album that I'm putting out, I made the decision to hold on to my masters. it's a huge income stream if you do get your songs played on the radio or satellite radio." In another compelling example, Samson has used his platform to inform audience members at live shows about how much he has been paid that night: "I feel like it's important to do because if we want justice and diversity, there needs to be transparency about who's making the money, because it's usually not the artists."

Another recurring theme among our interviews was the privileging of community and care over commercialism. Rather than profit-seeking and entrepreneurialism, a community of care has been central to the livelihoods of artists and to the notion of sustainable music infrastructure. Artists often advocated for a community of care, built upon mentorship, resource sharing, and community networks. Arlo Maverick is an advocate for mentorship and he offers grant writing support to others: "I've sat on juries before, I've written grants before, I've written grants for the artists. And with that information, I don't look at it from the standpoint of, 'Okay, this is mine, I don't want anyone to have it,' I look at it from the standpoint of, 'Okay, who needs to know about this?'" Fraser also emphasized the importance of teaching and educating within a community. "I teach [children and others] how to write a song and people are seeing the value in me trying to build a bridge for other Inuit artists," she said, "because I don't want them to suffer like I did." A notion of community also came through in certain comments about productive relationships with respect to the task of booking shows and tours. One artist explained that after touring for over five years, "I feel at home in so many places and Canada feels like a neighbourhood to me and it's really lovely and I am so cared for by so many different places and it is so loving." Samson has found that outside ideas about community defined only by music itself, he has found comfort in a music community that was also a "political music community" which means feeling as though he is a part of "a real community that's not based on competition."

Conclusion: Recommendations for Canadian Music Industries

"Water running along a pavement will readily seep into every crack," Ed Yong writes about the failure to contain the COVID-19 virus; "so, too, did the unchecked coronavirus seep into every fault line in the modern world." Though the plight of musicians may not rank among the most immediate concerns of the pandemic, the diversity of our musical culture could well be another victim of the virus. COVID-19 led to an overnight collapse in the live

concert market, the livelihood for many performing artists. But as this article has sought to demonstrate, Canada's music industries were already riven with fault lines, through which many of its most promising musicians were falling through the cracks. The task before us is to rebuild in a more sustainable fashion.

In response to this rebuilding effort, our research project—driven by a methodology employing both "top-down" political economy and "bottom-up" ethnography—aims to offer recommendations from both perspectives as well. In a separate article, we document our efforts advocating for musicians in government copyright consultations and the need for antitrust and anti-monopoly action, as well as public streaming infrastructure (Selman et al., forthcoming). In the following, we draw from suggestions our interviewees made, synthesized with our own thoughts on the political economy of Canadian music, to offer three main recommendations, which balance a need for near-term reforms and long-term transformations. We advocate for the implementation of policies, structures, and practices that,

1. prioritize a broad and diverse class of working musicians, not just superstars;
2. use government support to achieve sustainability for both an artist's livelihood as well as for music infrastructure that is not monopolistic; and
3. shift emphasis away from market-oriented, profit-based, commercial conceptions of Canadian music and toward a community-based, care-informed model.

Musicians have different needs and aspirations; becoming too reliant on one aspect of the music industries or on one income source can be detrimental to supporting the careers of varied artists. It is with this point in mind that our recommendations hope to rethink and revitalize the ways that artists are supported in Canada.

Supporting a Diverse, Working Class of Musicians

"If music becomes something that people just do as a hobby," Gauthier laments, referring to the difficulties of a working musician, "you're going to lose a whole bunch of voices in music because you're just going to have the people who can afford to pursue music careers." As non-Canadian multinational companies dominate the industry, government support through grant money is of vital significance, a key point that was raised by all of our interviewees. Thus, we strongly encourage increased funding at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels. The metrics for which artists qualify for grants should be continually restructured so as to allow for a wider diversity of artists to receive support, with less focus on discriminatory markers such as "proper grammar." Struggling artists should be supported by means-tested grants and mental health support should be a priority. Provincial music organizations, like Alberta Music and Manitoba Music, were, for the most part, described as helpful resources that are, as described by Felicitas, "really good at connecting the dots, especially across Canada." Given some of these barriers and the larger instrumental turn in arts funding, some musicians shared ideas about how to reform the granting process. Salte pointed to an Alberta Foundation for the Arts grant that covers living expenses "for while you're working on something" as a "great, forward-thinking" grant because "that's a very real need for an artist." Others indicated that application systems could be more user-friendly and that, in some cases, juries could be more

diverse. The grant-writing process itself could be subsidized, as its current process favors the educated and well-connected. Furthermore, positive working relationships between federal and local organizations can be a productive way to decentralize the music business in Canada and strengthen musical and cultural activities in localities across the country. Bolder yet, this patchwork of government funding initiatives could be replaced with a universal basic income (UBI) for working musicians who can demonstrate some minimal level of productivity and fandom. As Wright envisions, a UBI would create "a massive transfer of resources to the arts, enabling people to opt for a life centered around creative activity rather than market-generated income . . . creat[ing] a potential alliance of poets and peasants" (74). Imagine the vitality and diversity of Canadian music if independent musicians were not saddled with constantly hustling in a winner-takes-all corporate contest.

Cultivating an Equitable Music Infrastructure

Nurturing a healthy music culture requires more than just ensuring musicians are being paid. There are a number of opportunities for rebalancing equity within Canada's complex music infrastructure. Taking inspiration from the campus-community radio sector in Canada, which is nonprofit and regulated so as to program Canadian, local, and varied music, we imagine productive scenarios in which certain live music venues might operate as nonprofit organizations and be committed to the showcasing of diverse and independent music. These venues could be connected to campus-community stations and serve as a reliable venue for radio programmers and station volunteers to organize shows for local and touring bands that reflect the station's music programming. Just as commercial radio stations with more than $1,250,000 in annual revenue make financial contributions to Canadian Content Development (including FACTOR, Musicaction, and the Community Radio Fund of Canada), profitable and high capacity live music venues and sports and entertainment complexes could help to finance smaller, nonprofit music venues (particularly if a large entertainment complex receives public funding to be built, such as the Rogers Place arena in Edmonton). With more funding, campus-community stations could expand their partnerships with local and student-produced media to cover local and diverse music. Given the dominance of music listening on Spotify and Apple Music in Canada, and the increasing importance of playlist inclusion, we need regulations that mandate a wider variety of Canadian artists on playlists for the major streaming companies operating in Canada. There is a long history of cultural policy in Canada that serves to promote and protect Canadian culture, particularly against American cultural exports (Skinner and Gasher; Armstrong), such as the aforementioned Canadian content regulations, and there is much debate as to how this can play out in digital and streaming media. The Liberal Party's proposed Bill C-10, for instance, seeks to promote Canadian content in digital and streaming media but it has been met with opposition and concerns about user rights and net neutrality (McKelvey). Nevertheless, algorithmic bias toward certain, mostly corporate content already exists; now is the time to consider how to effectively implement local, regional, and diversity mandates.

Moving beyond a Profit-based Conception of the Music Industries

Considering the onslaught from transnational media conglomerates and financialization, the diversity and vitality of Canadian music will not only require continued government support for arts and culture, but bold action, such as financial reform, cultural protectionism, and antitrust enforcement. Reform that would truly help independent Canadian musicians would strike at the corporate power held all across the cultural industries: record labels, publishing, touring, radio, tech platforms, and financial firms. As a rash of new research indicates, antitrust reform and tax increases are increasingly necessary to tame the power of monopoly in the new gilded age (see Dayen; Teachout). The commercial culture facilitated within this transnational corporate atmosphere is stifling Canadian music and our interviews pointed to this plight. MacPherson said that "we need to try to take a step back from the notion that commercial viability is the best way to achieve our collective goals"; instead, we should focus on ways to "create a culture of creativity, of imagination, of celebration, of our uniqueness and less about competing on the market to get some sort of weird market share that's already flawed and broken." One anonymous artist feared a dystopic future if the current incentives of the streaming-based music economy continue: "it's not sustainable. we're going to end up with no art to stream." As tech platforms become more entrenched in our daily and cultural lives, their designation as a utility becomes more appropriate. A public, nonprofit approach to streaming should be considered, one that privileges community, care, and sustaining working musicians over non-Canadian corporate profit. Capital City Records at the Edmonton Public Library is one example of a digital public space that could be used as a model. The library provides local artists with an honorarium to make their music available for anyone with a library card, with artists retaining rights to their content which can still be shared and sold anywhere else. This example highlights ways that listeners, artists, and cities can be connected through noncommercial, public spaces. Moreover, such a space is able to make use of the internet and digital technology in a way that partially circumvents unfair power dynamics and concentration in the media industries. With more local public libraries joining this initiative, a national network of local, library-based streaming music services presents an exciting alternative.

COVID-19 is an unmitigated disaster for Canada's music culture. The songs that will never be recorded and the live concerts that will never be staged are a dramatic loss for our nation's heritage. But as it has been in many sectors, the pandemic is also an opportunity to rethink what is most essential and how our structures do or do not support those essential workers and values. New space has opened to consider alternatives to ossified, unequal industries. To Yong's metaphor of the pandemic being like water that has seeped into every crack of the modern world, we can add Leonard Cohen's: "There is a crack, a crack in everything/That's how the light gets in.

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CHAPTER 28

Crowdfunding for Independent Print Media: E-Commerce, Marketing, and Business Development

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Abstract

Crowdfunding, as an alternative method to fundraising, triggers increased awareness in society, while it is also an effective marketing tool for campaign runners. The production and release of independent print media poses significant hurdles in terms of financing. Including the community in raising funds through crowdfunding seems like a good possible alternative. This paper examines which types of crowdfunding the independent print media use, and why, and also focuses on the possible types of crowdfunding that are the best fit for organizations. The study applies a case example approach on a total of thirty independent print publications that have relied on crowdfunding. We found that independent print media focus on reward-based crowdfunding for the launch of publications, the method being not used solely for fundraising, but also specifically for community building. Practitioners benefit from the insights by being enabled to draft campaigns that are better-suited to the specific needs of the independent media target group, and to secure financing for the start of the operations. The approach of this study is of special value, as the research and empirical insights into the independent media sector are limited.

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Keywords

crowdfunding (CF), marketing, media, independent media, E-commerce, business development

Introduction

Analogue, as well as digital, media act as infomediaries between the producers and the recipients of information [1,2]. In the last decades, a shift from analogue to digital media usage can be observed [3-6] With the emergence of social media at the advent of the Web 2.0, the roles of the producer and the consumer became fluent [7-9]. One of the consequences, triggered by filter bubbles, is the rise of fake news leading to social tensions [10,11]. Therefore, media companies have a social responsibility when distributing information, and influencing local, regional, and international communities [12-14].

Hence, the independence of the media, especially political independence, is important in order to preserve the unbiased coverage of events in all fields of life [15,16]. Being, and staying, independent is especially grounded in the stable financing of operations, without pressure from lower financial resources [17,18]]. Therefore, the different forms of fundraising for media deserve special attention and have been the object of ongoing scientific research over the last years [19-24]. In particular, operating publications independently from established publishing houses is a challenge because of the lack of visibility, marketing options, and resources [25,26].

Crowdfunding has gained traction, visibility, and acceptance as an alternative means of financing for startups, as well as for small- and medium-sized companies [27-29]. Apart from the gathering of monetary funds, marketing effects can also be observed [30-32]. Therefore, crowdfunding is becoming a popular alternative to traditional financing options, such as bank loans or investors [33-35]. Running a crowdfunding campaign better preserves the independence of the company or the project than applying other alternatives [16,36,37]. The campaign runner is accountable to many supporters, who each make a small contribution, in contrast to the single bank or investor that provides a larger sum of money [38].

Although the research on fundraising for media [39,40], as well as crowdfunding research [35,41], is ongoing and quite extensive, there has been little research about their intersection, or about how crowdfunding can be used for financing media [42]. Especially lacking is research into the ways that the independent media are using crowdfunding to finance their operations and stay autonomous in the long run. As a first object of research, independent print media representing the classical media and that is produced on a project basis seems of interest [43,44]. Moreover, the increasing costs of paper and printing, the decreasing willingness of advertisers to place ads in print publications, as well as the lack of financial support received by bigger media organizations that the independent publisher does not receive, makes independent print media using CF platforms to finance their projects a reasonable scope for research [45,46]. Therefore, we investigate which types of crowdfunding are used by the independent print media, and which crowdfunding types best suit their purposes. Furthermore, the various benefits gained from crowdfunding for independent print media are also analyzed. Answering the research question will provide more information on pos-

sible fundraising strategies for the independent print media, that has gained in importance, especially in the cultural field, over the last couple of years [47-50].

Our paper extends previous knowledge based on communication theory and focuses on new technologies (e.g., platforms) that are very popular as communication tools. We also draw on the network society theory. According to Castells [51,52], a network society is one in which social structures consist of networks based on communication technologies, and that has an infrastructure of social and media networks that shape its organizational forms at all levels: individual, group, and societal [53]. Crowdfunding has become a proper instrument [54], and a new internet-based method for raising the financial resources needed for relevant projects [55].

The theoretical part of this paper discusses the crowdfunding field, but also the independent print media, and the various financing options for media. In the empirical section, thirty case examples of independent media running crowdfunding campaigns have been observed and analyzed, and the common characteristics and patterns in using this fundraising method were identified. By relying on a case example approach, this study serves as an example of how this empirical method can be used to observe niche phenomena inductively and qualitatively. From a practical perspective, the research findings benefit all stakeholders involved in crowdfunding, as outlined in the conclusion.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 of the paper approaches the theoretical background of crowdfunding, the independent print media, as well as fundraising for media. Thereafter, Section 3 provides an overview of the methodology used, while Section 4 highlights the research findings and discussions in relation to recent scientific contributions. Finally, the conclusion in Section 5 answers the research question and gives theoretical and managerial implications. Furthermore, limitations and further research questions of the study are discussed.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Crowdfunding

If many people are contributing to projects, different constellations are possible. People can work independently as freelancers, as part of a project team under supervision, or as members of different organizations [56,57]. An organization outsourcing the key processes of the internal value chain to an external crowd is pursuing a crowdsourcing approach [32,58-60]. The external supporters can act free of charge or be paid by the organization [61]. The reasons for crowdsourcing vary but can include the fact that it is more cost-efficient and flexible, and that engaging external stakeholders can help with finding out-of-the-box solutions [62]. Crowdsourcing can be applied to a variety of different scenarios, from idea generation and problem-solving, to joint pattern analysis and distributed logistics [63,64]. Crowdsourcing has been a rising trend in different industries over the last decade [65].

Crowdsourcing can also be applied to meet the financial needs of an organization [32,60]. This specific usage is called "crowdfunding", and it is being used by organizations, as well as individuals, to fund projects, companies, hobbies, and charity causes [58,66,67]. Observed from another perspective, crowdfunding is already applied by banks when they distribute

the savings from the depositors to the borrowers needing money, claiming an interest for the service [68]. The rise of crowdfunding in the age of digitization is driven by platforms that act as infomediaries and directly connect the supporter and the campaign runner [29,69-71].

The term, "crowdfunding", is inspired by concepts, such as crowdsourcing [59], but represents a distinct category of fundraising and is facilitated by an increasing number of websites dedicated to this endeavor [72]. Crowdfunding usually involves three stakeholders: the project initiators who are looking for funding for their project; the backers who are willing to support a specific project; and the crowdfunding platforms that act as intermediaries [69,73]. Project initiators and backers are often private persons but can also be NGOs or startups [69]. Backers, in their role as platform users, can be influenced by social networks [74-76], and their motivation for involvement can also vary [77]. It is also important to underline that their behavior can be influenced by the decisions of other backers [78]. Unlike traditional financial intermediaries, crowdfunding platforms do not lend and pool money on their own behalf. They focus on bringing together project initiators and backers and funders by providing information about the projects [73].

Crowdfunding platforms differ in several dimensions. Therefore, it is not surprising that there are various types of crowdfunding. A classification relevant for the present study is that of Haas et al. [79]. They draw a distinction between three major types of crowdfunding: hedonism, altruism and for-profit. Hedonism describes a type of crowdfunding where backers contribute money for innovative and creative projects and products. These platforms usually set minimum amounts and pledges and aim to create "a hedonistic value" ([73], p. 14) that is achieved through the support of such projects. Crowdfunding platforms of this type are Kickstarter or Indiegogo. In terms of charitable projects, the predominant form of support for the altruism-type of crowdfunding is donations. Backers support projects of this type for purely altruistic reasons. Typical platforms are Crowdrise and Kiva. A crowdfunding type with a profit-oriented promise focuses on financing startups, but also on granting consumer credits. In return, the backers are offered monetary benefits [77]. Representative platforms are FundedByMe or Prosper [73].

Four different categories of crowdfunding can be identified: lending-based, donation-based, reward-based, and equity-based [80-84]. While lending-based crowdfunding aims at the crowd providing monetary funds in exchange for interest (much like a bank), donation-based crowdfunding works like one-to-one offline donations. The donator gives money and expects nothing in return [71,85,86]. As lending-based crowdfunding is quite like banks remitting loans, banks have identified this category of crowdfunding as a way of acquiring new customers [69,87-89]. Reward-based crowdfunding is often used as a preselling/pre-ordering method for inventions and new products [90]. For providing funding for a project, supporters receive material or immaterial benefits in return (e.g., the finished product, a meeting with the management, etc.) [91-93]. The goal of equity-based crowdfunding is the long-term relationship between the supporter and the campaign runner [94-100]. Therefore, equity-based crowdfunding is also seen as a combination of holding shares in a stock-listed company and being an entrepreneur: The supporter has direct contact with the management and participates in the future profits of the company [100-102]. Ideally, the supporter becomes an ambassador for the vision of the company or project [103,104]. Crowdfunding has, besides the monetary benefits, a strong marketing effect for the campaign running party

[31,32]. In all the crowdfunding categories, the supporters risk the loss of the investment if the campaign runner's project or business fails after a successfully conducted crowdfunding campaign [105-108].

Among those who can choose the type of crowdfunding best-fitted to the need, besides the supporters and the campaign runners, additional stakeholders must be considered within the ecosystem [92,109]. External agencies support the success of the campaign with know-how and human resources [110-112]. Banks and external investors have an interest in knowing about the campaign, as well as the possible consequences, and more exposure means more parties being involved in critical decisions [97,98,113]. Media, suppliers, and customers should be informed about the campaign and can, by chance, be converted as supporters [114,115]. Employees, besides contributing to the campaign, can serve as important multiplicators of the campaign [116]. Every crowdfunding category offers different values for the involved stakeholders. With that in mind, it seems logical that each different industry, and even each different company, might choose a different crowdfunding approach [30,31,117].

2.2 Independent Media

Politically independent media outlets are seen as an integral part of a healthy society as they serve as the watchdogs of the powerful minority by promoting independent journalism. They declare their independence from state-owned or corporate organizations by providing the news and information that people need to create their own opinions and to have a say in how their cities, regions, or countries are run [25,118,119]. Because of their importance to social and economic development, they are especially crucial in societies where press freedom and, therefore, active independent journalism, is lacking. On their website, the Media Development Investment Fund [118] states that 85% of the world—which means almost 7 billion people—live in countries without a free press, unable to trust the news they read, hear, or see. Many of these countries are exposed to media capture that occurs when the news media promotes the commercial or political interests of the state and/or nonstate interest groups governing the media industry, instead of holding those influential groups accountable [120-122].

Despite the political aspect of independent media in different media systems, the term, as such, gets increasingly difficult to define as new digital opportunities via the Internet emerge that promote independent journalism [25,119]. Other forms of media outlets, beyond public and private media, have adopted the term "independence" in different ways, as they also use the term to illustrate their distance from the mainstream conventions and the prevailing powers of the media industry itself [119,123]. In this case, the term "independent media" is used for specific, often industrial, media formations, e.g., independent television, independent music, or independent newspapers. Here, the abbreviation, "indie", is commonly used in this context to indicate that a particular type of company, publication, press, or studio, is independent media [25,124,125].

These independent organizations, mostly grassroots organizations, are referred to as alternative, nonprofit, noncorporate, radical, and subversive, and "doing things differently" is at the center of their operations [25,119]. Important to mention here is that these specific coherences, with their institutional and aesthetic traditions [126-128], are strongly rooted in Western popular culture and liberal democracies, and so the relevancy for its meaning cannot be transferred to every political system and culture across the globe [25,119].

Compared to larger mainstream organizations, where job security and roles are, for the most part, ensured, members of the independent print media enjoy autonomy, choice, and individual independence as workers. This translates to creative freedom, which is often expressed in the media's aesthetics and taste codes, which in turn can be converted into cultural capital that leads to symbolic value for the consumers [25,46]. Working for freedom often merges into working for free, as independent media lack the institutional support mechanisms of large media organizations [25,36]. However, the distance from the institutional and corporate constraints of the legacy media can be leveraged towards empowering powerful audiences and communities [129-132] and allowing stories to be funded that would otherwise not be covered. Therefore, for the independent media, the proximity to, and the identification with, a specific crowd to create meaningful products that are, at the same time, contributing to a certain (sub)culture, can be greatly leveraged to pursue a purpose [36,46].

Thomas [133] considers independent magazines to be those that are published without the financial support of a large cooperation or institution, in which the makers control the publication and distribution. This also gives the "maverick" editor or publisher the freedom to continuously explore different fields and discover new ways of doing things without commercial direction [77,133]. Independent publications are made by people that are often producers, designers, retailers, and promoters at the same time, and who put their passion and talent into publishing content outside of the mainstream. Indies inspire readers on a small-scale and inform them about the noncommercial niche activities off the radar. An exclusive material object, such as print, becomes a matter of desire, of physical gratification for the producer and the reader and, at the same time, becomes a symbol against the dematerialization of the new technological age [113].

Scholars use the term "alternative" to describe the kind of media that does not belong to the mainstream. This category of media is also defined as "citizen media" and "activist" media. Atton [134] underlines that alternative media should be rooted in the cultural patterns of an independent media outlet and should display at least some of the following attributes: the use of modern, evolving technology; horizontal communication patterns, the so-called "horizontal linkages" ([134], p. 27); a strong aesthetic form; innovative, alternative, and independent distribution methods; and de-professionalized organizational norms and roles [134-136].

"Independent media", which combines all these terms and refers to the "autonomous ownership model", also expresses the possibility of self-rule over the existing content ([135,136], p. 5). Independent media are not necessarily independent in the strict sense of the term. "Independent", rather, means being "separated from commercial and corporate interests" ([137], p. 338). Rauch [138] portrays the relationship between alternative and mainstream media as "interdependent, antagonistic, fluid and contingent" (p. 758) and, furthermore, emphasizes that alternative media can only be illustrated and understood in relation to mainstream media.

There are some important differences between independent media and mainstream media [136,139]. Independent media involve reciprocal communication, and there is the possibility of participation in the creation of content. Mainstream media, on the other hand, tend to be constrained by bureaucracy and financial obligations, which is not the case with independent media. However, significant differences also reside in terms of critical content and social motivation [138]. The power of independent media could lie in its agenda-setting by highlighting topics that are not covered by the corporate media [140].

Independent media must have a certain audience. Furthermore, independent media need to find the right kind of audience, an audience that is attached to the industrial, aesthetic, ethical, and sociopolitical ideas of that media, as Bennett [141] points out. As a result, independent media are often associated with certain subcultures. Independent media become much stronger when there are opportunities to communicate. When the less powerful and politically marginalized have access to the media, it has a significant impact on the diversity of information available [135,136]. When a society is more democratic, those who have less power can also speak out in different media, especially the so-called "alternative" media [122,142].

Many of the indie magazines choose print as their main medium [133]. One reason for this could be the indies' (nonconvergent) response to the "convergence culture", "the flow of content across multiple media platforms", as introduced by Jenkins [143], and another could be in the incentive of material culture and the construction of a community of desire [133]. Moreover, indies have also identified specific elements, such as the quality and tactility of the paper, or print-specific graphic design that cannot be reproduced by a digital screen. Nevertheless, especially for independent brands that proactively choose to not receive any financial support from a larger entity, print (compared to digital) is an expensive medium to choose.

2.3 Fundraising for Media

Pinterits [144] identifies that emerging multichannel retailers that mainly use E-commerce (online) channels to make sales generally generate revenue directly or indirectly, as well as in transaction-dependent and transaction-independent ways. Direct revenue generation is when the consumer of a product or service pays the producer for it directly. Indirect revenue generation describes models in which it is not the consumer that is charged for a product or service other than the primary operations of the business, but a third party, such as a sponsor or advertiser. The difference between transaction-dependent and transaction-independent revenue is connected to whether a payment is related to a specific transaction or is, rather, based on another factor, such as a monthly fee [144,145].

Because of rapid technological advancement, business models for new media that provide the potential for a public sphere in which people can participate in well-informed nonhierarchical debates are in constant transformation [146]. This also has effects on the interactions between the users and the activities on the Internet. Individuals actively take part in the production of media and express themselves through blogging, websites, by uploading photos and videos, and other user-generated content [147]. The ability of media producers that are designers, artists, software engineers, and journalists to develop new projects [148-150] is their biggest resource and is based on their human capacity and a digital platform or application [151-153].

When looking closer to free journalistic projects, such as magazines, newspapers, books, or other publications, crowdfunding (explained in more detail in the next section) is a common way to collect enough funding to pursue a purpose. The increase in the usage of crowdfunding in journalism is mostly based on the digital developments in which labor and the production processes are more distributed across different parties on digital platforms. Rather than being the main way to finance a project, crowdfunding mainly represents an additional revenue source to the traditional funding models of journalists and publishers, such as direct sales, subscription, and/or ad placement [37,121,122,154]. Popular platforms,

such as Kickstarter or Indiegogo, that do also accept projects from other branches, are much more used to launching campaigns for journalism-related projects. Aitamurto [37] claims that "the power of crowdfunding as a revenue model comes from the quantity of relatively small donations, ranging from $5 to $20." Here, money is raised for different types of journalistic productions, e.g., single stories, continuous coverage, or new publications. The crowdfunding platforms allow online communities to come together around a shared project and can create "new social interactions that motivate the crowd to participate in the funding of a projects, offering feeling of connectedness to a community with similar interests and ideals' for crowdfunders" [2,69]. Next to collecting the money, crowdfunding creates additional value in several ways, namely, by sensing the potential interest among the audience, branding in the form of brand attention, finding knowledge for the story in the form of contributions, and building an audience [37].

3. Research Methodology

On the basis of the outlined literature review, the research question of this paper is apparent: If independent print media make the decision to use crowdfunding as an alternative financing method, which type of crowdfunding is selected? Furthermore, whether the choice taken is in the best interest of the intentions of the publication should be evaluated and discussed. As an added focus of the study, the different benefits arising from crowdfunding should be exploited for independent print projects. To assess the research question at hand, in a field where information is scarce, a qualitative approach is recommended to generate a first in-depth insight [155]. Qualitative expert interviews provide details about singular cases [156,157]. As this study is aiming to give a general overview of the subject matter, case examples are the preferable empirical method of usage [158,159]. In contrast to case studies, case examples provide objective information about a multiplicity of cases without the researcher being directly involved or highlighting a single phenomenon in detail [155,160].

Considering the multiple options of CF platforms that can be used to launch CF campaigns, as well as the lack of literature about independent print media in this matter, it was helpful to conduct our own desk research. Identifying cases led to an overview of the discovered campaigns and identification of the coherences among them. The research follows a deductive approach, as preexisting data is gathered to investigate coherences and patterns. As a support tool, Microsoft Excel has been used. A total of thirty independent print media crowdfunding projects were analyzed, as this quantity was considered expressive enough to identify relevant patterns and recurrent findings. To draw conclusions on the development of a specific print magazine, the focus was set on discovering outlets that have accomplished growth up until now.

Different steps of gathering and mining data were used during this study. Firstly, two of the most used international reward-based crowdfunding platforms with creative and commercial focus—Kickstarter and Indiegogo—were identified as appropriate for discovering relevant campaigns. The available filter options of the platforms were used to identify relevant campaigns. Other crowdfunding platforms were discovered by searching directly for existing independent print magazines via Google, supposing that the outlet used crowdfunding to fund the project. Performing a keyword-based search on Google based on "independent magazines

crowdfunding" brought up 707,000 results and helped to identify relevant articles and blogs. In these cases, independent magazines commented on the meaningfulness of crowdfunding for their project launch causes, indicating that they used this method to finance their projects. Kicktray. Available online: https://kicktraq.com/ (accessed on 10 May 2021), a web-based analytics tool that simplifies the tracking of Kickstarter campaigns, was also used to discover relevant crowdfunding campaigns. Most of the relevant information has been obtained from the project overview on the landing page of the respective campaigns. The starting and ending date were identified by updates or the comment rubric of the individual campaign pages. Other important data has been gathered on the website of the magazine (e.g., potential spinoff projects, web shop, or the current issue published).

To illustrate coherent outcomes on the "funding goals" and "funding volumes" of the campaigns, EUR (€) was considered as currency. Therefore, the OANDA currency converter was used to convert the foreign currency of some campaigns into EUR (€). The currency rate of the last day of the month in which the respective campaign finished was used to convert the currency in order to compare the campaigns at hand on an equal basis.

4. Results and Discussions

As described in the methodology, the data of the applied secondary research are summarized in Table 1, which is separated into two segments to describe the relevant research findings. As seen in Table 1, we have analyzed thirty independent magazine outlets, mainly from Western countries. The second column (from left to right) displays the names of the respective magazines so that the data within the following columns can be attributed to the outlets. The third column shows the respective CF platform that was used to launch the campaign of the media outlets. Kickstarter was the most used platform for launching and funding their projects, being preferred by nineteen out of the thirty outlets. Among the other platforms, we mention Startnext (5), Indiegogo (3), Crowdfunder (1), Ulule (1), and Pozible (1). The campaigns were launched beginning in 2016, while the implementation took an average of one month to accomplish. The purposes of the CF campaigns were predominantly aimed at publishing and printing the first print issue of the respective media outlets (Column 6).

Table 1. Observed Independent Print Media Crowdfunding Campaigns.

#	Outlet	CF Platform	Launch	Duration	Location	Purpose
1	Ethos Magazine	Indiegogo	16 October	1 month	UK	P + P1I
2	Film Stories Magazine	Kickstarter	18 October	1 month	UK	P + P1I
3	The American Bystander	Kickstarter	15 October	1 month	USA	P + P1I
4	The Handstand Press	Kickstarter	21 March	1 month	Ireland	P + P1I
5	Azeema Magazine	Crowdfunder	17 October	1 month	UK	P + P1I
6	Almost30 Magazine	Startnext	18 June	1 month	Germany	P + P1I
7	Gusher Magazine	pozible	N/A	N/A	Australia	P + P1I
8	LOLA Magazine	Startnext	20 November	1 month	Germany	P8I + CS
9	Kater Demos	Startnext	15 August	1 month	Germany	P + P1I
10	Puss Puss Magazine	Kickstarter	14 March	1 month	UK	P + P1I

#	Outlet	CF Platform	Launch	Duration	Location	Purpose
11	Atlas Magazine	Kickstarter	14 October	1 month	UK	P + P1I
12	Intern Magazine	Kickstarter	13 July	1 month	UK	P + P1I
13	Anxy Magazine	Kickstarter	16 September	1 month	USA	P + P1I
14	Failed States	Kickstarter	17 August	1 month	UK	P + P1I
15	Die Epilog Magazine	Startnext	13 May	1 month	Germany	P + P1I
16	20 s Magazine	Kickstarter	19 September	1 month	Germany	P + P1I
17	Rosegarden Magazine	Indiegogo	15 April	1 month	Germany	P + P1I
18	Exberliner Magazine	Startnext	20 May	1 month	Germany	CS
19	Cherry Bombe Magazine	Kickstarter	13 April	1 month	USA	P + P1I
20	Pylot Magazine	Kickstarter	14 March	1 month	UK	P + P1I
21	Caddie Magazine	Indiegogo	16 October	1 month	Australia	P + P1I
22	Gonzai Magazine	Ulule	12 November	1 month	France	P + P1I
23	Temple Magazine	Kickstarter	18 September	1 month	France	P + P1I
24	Unica Magazine	Kickstarter	18 December	1 month	USA	P + P1I
25	Driftwood Magazine	Kickstarter	17 November	2 months	UK	P + P1I
26	Mold Magazine	Kickstarter	17 March	1 month	USA	P + P1I
27	TIMEisNOW Magazine	Kickstarter	19 November	1 month	Germany	P + P1I
28	Ladybeard Magazine	Kickstarter	13 April	2 weeks	UK	P + P1I
29	MC1R Magazine	Kickstarter	16 August	1 month	Germany	P + P5I
30	The Black Explorer	Kickstarter	20 July	1 month	UK	P + P1I

Notes: P + P11: publishing + print 1st issue; P + P5I: publishing + print 5th issue; CS: Corona support; P8I: Print 8th Issue. Source: authors own development based on the crowdfunding platforms.

As Table 2 depicts, the thirty campaigns have gathered about 8276 supporters/backers, meaning an average of 276/campaign. While most campaigns were successful, some of them did not reach the expected funding goals, ranging from 22.77% in the case of Puss Puss magazine, to 213.45% for Ladybeard. Most of the campaigns exceeded the initial goal by only a few percentages. On average, the crowdfunding campaigns were successful, collecting a total of €379,027 (108.58%). The average amount that was the aim of the campaign launchers was €11,636. The average founding volume that was eventually reached by the CF campaigns was €12,634. Column 6 shows the actual (newest) issue of the print magazine. On average, the outlets have launched 16 issues since their CF campaign. In the last column, spin-off projects that were developed besides the print magazine are shown. The column demonstrates that most of the spin-off projects are either agency or studio projects, but other media arms *(podcasts, workshops)* were also created. Every campaign that was looked at in the table has been categorized under reward-based crowdfunding campaigns.

Table 2. Performance of Observed Independent Print Media Crowdfunding Campaigns.

#	Outlet	No. of backers	Funding goal in €	Funding volume in €	% FFG	Current Issue	Spin-Off Project
1	Ethos Magazine	117	23,600	8899	37.71	14	Word Scape Agency
2	Film Stories Magazine	504	11,245	21,963	195.31	24	Podcast
3	The American Bystander	853	23,591	39,447	167.21	18	N/A
4	The Handstand Press	144	6500	6720	103.38	1	N/A
5	Azeema Magazine	30	1000	1014	101.40	3	Azeema Consulting Agency
6	Almost30 Magazine	266	12,000	14,221	118.51	3	N/A
7	Gusher Magazine	108	2905	3259	112.19	4	N/A
8	LOLA Magazine	133	3000	3531	117.70	8	Podcast + Creative Agency Lola & the bean
9	Kater Demos	425	7500	9211	122.81	5	Podcast Miaudio
10	Puss Puss Magazine	155	23,540	5360	22.77	12	Puss Puss Creative Agency
11	Atlas Magazine	146	7260	5023	69.19	25	N/A
12	Intern Magazine	347	8335	6443	77.30	4	Online courses, agency services
13	Anxy Magazine	813	55,448	64,523	116.37	4	N/A
14	Failed States	75	1122	1882	167.74	4	N/A
15	Die Epilog Magazine	154	2500	2707	108.28	9	Club & workshops
16	20 s Magazine	142	5139	5584	108.66	2	N/A
17	Rosegarden Magazine	144	3000	3225	107.50	4	N/A
18	Exberliner Magazine	470	30,000	29,647	98.82	203	tip Berlin media
19	Cherry Bombe Magazine	784	32,098	32,857	142.25	16	Podcast, Conference
20	Pylot Magazine	115	4859	5593	115.11	10	N/A
21	Caddie Magazine	78	10,000	9820	98.20	9	Production Studio
22	Gonzai Magazine	453	8500	9858	115.98	37	Music Label
23	Temple Magazine	49	3000	3011	100.37	9	N/A

#	Outlet	No. of backers	Funding goal in €	Funding volume in €	% FFG	Current Issue	Spin-Off Project
24	Unica Magazine	162	6555	8542	130.31	1	Supply unica. Available online: https://supplyunica.com/ (accessed on 5 June 2021)
25	Driftwood Magazine	164	2274	4167	183.25	4	N/A
26	Mold Magazine	701	31,189	34,087	109.29	5	N/A
27	TIMEisNOW Magazine	172	5700	7390	129.65	1	agency NOKTE
28	Ladybeard Magazine	181	2372	5063	213.45	1	N/A
29	MC1R Magazine	301	16,000	17,511	109.44	6	N/A
30	The Black Explorer	90	7848	8469	107.91	2	N/A
	Total	8276	349,080	379,027	108.58	448	—
	Average	276	11,636	12,634€	108.58	16	—

Notes: % FFG: percentage of fulfillment of initial funding goal; N/A: not available. Source: the author's own development based on the crowdfunding platforms.

The observed cases reflect the spectrum of media diversity, as also discussed by Thomas [133]. A cultural and sports focus can be witnessed when monitoring the content perspective of independent print media, which is in line with the findings of De Voldere and Zeqo [161]. The publications highlight their independence and freedom [25,45,46,119,141]. While the distribution of launched crowdfunding campaigns for independent print media in the last years stayed the same, the study at hand confirms the dominance of Kickstarter in the reward-based crowdfunding sector, as outlined by Hrenyk and Grant [162]. A strong linkage between projects in the Western hemisphere and Kickstarter could be observed as well. Reward-based crowdfunding offers shorter funding and commitment periods than equity-based crowdfunding but, then again, offers the supporters more in return than donation-based campaigns [33,83,84]. From an organizational perspective, the research confirms the findings of Karppinen and Moe [119] and highlights the fact that most independent media organizations are organized in a lean and grassroots manner.

Out of the funding behavior of the independent print media analyzed, a mixture of methods can be observed. This can also be related to one of the main goals of independent organizations: to stay independent. Taking the framework of Meier and Stormers [163] into consideration, the aspect of selling the publications is complemented by the crowdfunding approaches, which primarily finance the printed media products. This also ties into the discussion about the usage of crowdfunding for preordering products [30,164]. Media publishers using crowdfunding are, therefore, able to estimate the demand before producing the final products. Another method of funding, placing advertisements in the publications, is lacking acceptance in the independent print media space, which underlines the findings of Eldridge

[165], as well as Lovett et al. [166]. This can have two main reasons: the magazines want to preserve their independence, and the circulation is not high enough to attract advertisers.

The observed publications use crowdfunding not solely for raising monetary funds, but also for generating feedback and new ideas, as well as for triggering a marketing effect in terms of awareness and reach generation [31,32,104]. Moreover, the observed organizations tend to build up communities by applying crowdfunding techniques, which serve them as a starting point when launching new follow-up campaigns [167,168]. The use of external agencies to assist during crowdfunding campaigns, as outlined by Behl et al. [111] and Du et al. [112], could not be observed in the sample. A possible reason could be that the lean teams prefer to manage the campaign in-house, not spending funds on third-party support, which might not benefit the campaign to a large extent. Banks and investors, as important long-term partners for running media operations, can be presented market proof and traction by successful crowdfunding campaigns [97,98,169,170]. Independent print media use crowdfunding campaigns to present a benefit to supporting artists, journalists, and their affiliates from the marketing effect, but also offers them exposure in exchange for their work and commitment [171,172].

Conclusions

The main research aim of this study, empirically based on the examination of case examples, was to focus on the type of crowdfunding that is used by the independent print media. Furthermore, the best-fitting crowdfunding types, as well as other benefits stemming from the crowdfunding engagement, were analyzed. Observing the gathered and discussed data, the conclusion can be drawn that every crowdfunding campaign used for independent print media offered rewards (presale of magazines, merchandise, advertisement spots, etc.). As the goal of the crowdfunding campaigns of the independent print media are printed magazines, and the independent media organizations often rely heavily on a nonprofit approach, the reward-based crowdfunding approach seems better-suited than other monetary-driven campaigns.

Independent print media aimed at producing regular publications, especially, were using crowdfunding the most. Data about the current issues of the media being advertised on the respective websites signals the success of the method, which subsequently strengthens the regular production of the magazines. The mentioned publications are using the network effects of the community to drive awareness and monetary support for their future published issues. It seems remarkable that independent print media mostly use crowdfunding for the launch of the media as well as the first issue. It might be the case that the organization, thereafter, is able to identify other ways to raise the necessary funds for future publications. Some media seem to use crowdfunding as a community and loyalty tool to keep in touch with customers, and benefit from their network as well as the feedback.

Observing the platform usage of campaign runners, Kickstarter is the dominant platform for independent print media, according to the study. The reasons can vary, from the historic growth, the success stories of campaigns on the platform, and the support for innovative and creative projects with far international reach. On the other hand, independent media often refer to the local culture in their content and choose local platforms for their crowdfunding to be able to reach a local audience.

The average duration of only one month for the crowdfunding campaigns indicates that the print products are already finished in digital desk publishing but need to be reproduced. This is also indicated in several of the campaigns and signals the effort that the teams put into the projects, relying heavily on intrinsic motivations. A total of 90% of the funding goals (27 out of 30 projects) were reached, which indicates the willingness of the supporters to back independent media. Therefore, the loyal and emotionally committed community can be used for future community-building approaches. Besides benefitting from the community building and the marketing effects, the campaign runners can also gain advantages from the feedback of the supporters, as well as from the image gained by a crowdfunding campaign. A crowdfunding campaign, although it involves a lot of hard work within an organization, can pay off in the long term.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends previous knowledge in the field of general communication theory, as platform-driven crowdfunding might be considered a new technology that is also used as a communication tool. We also add value to the network society theory, as crowdfunding can be regarded as a network instrument, and/or a strategy, aimed at helping investors and/or different organizations, via specific platforms, gather the relevant funds, not only to begin their businesses, but also to grow. Crowdfunding platforms have the potential to bring together interested investors, who are striving to diversify their investment portfolios, with entrepreneurs eager to innovate and implement new business ideas, but who lack funds. Our research serves as an extension of the case example approach to the industry of independent media organizations running crowdfunding campaigns. It also shows another application for the mentioned research method, while the research done shows the acceptance, as well as the joint power, of crowdfunding projects, looking at an average of 276 people funding the projects.

From a managerial perspective, the paper serves, first and foremost, independent media organizations running, or thinking about running, a crowdfunding campaign. It provides hints about the preparation, the setup, the execution, as well as about the control of the campaign, while also arguing that crowdfunding campaigns seem like a viable option for raising funds. Furthermore, the study gives insights for closely related stakeholders, such as the crowdfunding platforms, the supporters, as well as the banks and investors, as to how they can more easily connect to each other, develop new businesses, and more efficiently allocate resources for mutual benefit. Additionally, external crowdfunding agencies benefit from the case example approach. It is also interesting to see that some media organizations could successfully spin off projects from their crowdfunded publications and use these for cross-financing.

The study is limited in various aspects, which could provide the subjects for future studies as well. Independence, in the meaning of freedom of press, is mainly a topic of interest in the Western hemisphere and the research was focused on publications from Western societies. Other societies, for example, Japan and India, present suitable ground for the crowdfunding of independent media publications. It should be noted that only successful and efficient crowdfunding projects have been observed and analyzed in the study. To successfully run crowdfunding platforms, managers must consider specific conditions: a keep-it-all approach for independent print media seems to be highly target-oriented, thus allowing for proper financing opportunities. The editing or print products can be more easily adjusted, especially if the research, protoype, or the development of new products are subject to financing.

Furthermore, the study is limited to thirty case examples that are all set in the print media area. The COVID-19 pandemic could have had an influence on the crowdfunding efforts in this space. Besides these fields of future research, upcoming studies could focus on the quantitative studies on independent print media. Qualitative expert interviews could enable more insights for a better understanding of the phenomenon at hand. Future studies could also investigate the characteristics of investors when relying on crowdfunding, as well as taking into consideration crowdfunding initiatives in other industries.

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CHAPTER 29

‘Let’s Keep Music Special. F—Spotify’: On-Demand Streaming and the Controversy over Artist Royalties

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Abstract

On-demand streaming music services have expanded significantly in recent years. Services such as Spotify and Deezer are widely expected to become the dominant means of mass music consumption in the future and have been significant factors in helping recording industries in some countries arrest their long-term decline. The emergence of such services (especially the largest of them, Spotify) has caused controversy, however, with both major stars and smaller independent artists publicly criticising the low levels of royalty payments such services have thus far generated. This paper provides an overview of the controversy, concentrating on the criticisms of Spotify from independent labels and musicians. In such a rapidly moving sector, it is unwise to offer any definitive predictions and thus the purpose of this paper is to outline as clearly as possible the parameters of the current debate. To achieve this, it considers the business models associated with streaming music and their place within the contemporary recorded music ecosystem, most notably in relation to piracy and declin-

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ing record purchases. It concludes with a consideration of streaming services in relation to the broader power dynamics of the recording industry suggesting that while services like Spotify may cause problems for independent musicians they rely upon a logic of scaling that correlates with the existing practices of the major record labels.

Introduction

One thing that the history of popular music tells us is that the introduction of significant new technologies is rarely uncontroversial. New inventions, such as the microphone (Frith 1986) or the sampler (Theberge 2004) get challenged and ridiculed by parties whose interests may be threatened by new social practices of music-making and music-consuming. A recent example of this kind of conflict is the controversy over the amount of payment being given to artists for allowing their music to be made available on streaming services such as Deezer and, especially, Spotify. It is a controversy that periodically appears in the mainstream media, such as Radiohead singer Thom Yorke's proclamation that Spotify is the 'last gasp of the old industry… the last desperate fart of a dying corpse' (Dredge 2013) or Taylor Swift's decision to remove all of her back catalogue from the service upon the release of her 2014 album, 1989 (Dickey 2014).

The controversy is not merely a few superstars grumbling, however, as the majority of concerns have actually been raised by independent artists several rungs down the music industry ladder. While such discontent could perhaps be assumed to be merely an economic spat about how the pie should be divided, it actually reflects more deep-seated uncertainties regarding the changing nature of the music commodity and its impact upon the perceived value of music, as well as more long-standing issues regarding the dominant power relations within the music industry. This latter point is notable because it contradicts a common perception that the disintermediating nature of the internet should be a boon to musicians beyond the major label system (for example, Baym 2011; Wikstrom 2009), with the emergence of 'long tail' economics (Anderson 2007) enabling unsigned artists to sell their music to a wide audience. However, the seemingly inexorable shift to streaming services has the potential to be a way through which old industry structures reassert themselves. Yorke is thus correct to associate Spotify with the 'old industry' but perhaps premature when describing it as a 'dying corpse'.

An introduction to streaming services

Before outlining details of the controversy, it is important to differentiate streaming music services. Often generically referred to as 'music in the cloud' (Morris 2011), streaming services can be split into three types. The first is streaming radio (sometimes referred to as webcasting). This can simply be an online version of existing radio services, or online-only radio stations that specialise in particular genres or localities, but the more distinctive form is personalised, in that the service selects songs to play for each individual listener based on previous listening preferences. This kind of streaming radio service thus provides a more bespoke experience than broadcast radio but, in comparison to other kinds of streaming service, the important characteristic is that it is non-interactive: the listener does not choose what songs will play. The most established streaming radio service is Pandora, which announced in April 2013

that it had 200 million registered users in the United States, 70 million of which were 'active' each month (Peoples 2013).[1] The majority of Pandora's income comes from advertising but it also has 2.5 million subscribers paying a monthly fee to avoid ads and listening limits. Another prominent player in this field is iHeartRadio, a mixture of traditional radio services and Pandora-like tailored recommendations, created by terrestrial radio provider Clear Channel,[2] and boasting 50 million users (Solsman 2014).

The second kind of streaming music service are locker services, such as iTunes match and Amazon's Cloudplayer. In these services, users can listen to 'their' music directly from the internet, either songs that they upload directly to the service's servers or that are automatically 'matched' (to, for example, a user's Amazon CD purchases). Locker services thus offer mobile access to a listener's entire MP3 collection. However, they are a relatively small part of the cloud-based music landscape and, in all likelihood, a temporary phenomenon, designed to ease consumer experience until the 'purer' forms of cloud-based services are adopted more widely.

The third kind of streaming music services are 'on-demand'. Such services are similar to streaming radio services, such as Pandora, with one crucial difference: the listener chooses what music is played. They are thus interactive rather than non-interactive. As such, they provide a listening experience similar to locker services, except that choice is not limited to an individual's collection: instead the listener can choose from a vast catalogue of music (upwards of 30 million songs on some services). Spotify has established itself as the most famous of these services but there are other significant providers. The most important of them is Deezer, the second largest on-demand service with 16 million active users and 6 million subscribers (Peoples 2014). It has garnered fewer headlines than Spotify because it has strategically avoided entering the mainstream US market but is the most global service, available in 180 countries. Other services include Rhapsody (until the emergence of Spotify, the largest subscription service in the United States, with 2 million subscribers), US-based Rdio and WiMP, based in Norway.[3]

On-demand services often include radio functions so there is some overlap between services but the most important distinction is the one between non-interactive and interactive services. Within the music industry, it is widely accepted that on-demand services are heralding a significant reconfiguration of recorded music consumption, from being based on ownership of music to being based on access, renting rather than buying records. This acceptance reflects the manner in which streaming music has begun to enter the mainstream in recent years. This can be seen in the global expansion and accelerating growth in user/subscriber figures among the aforementioned services but, probably more significantly, in the way in which the major internet companies are now becoming involved in the on-demand streaming market. For example, Amazon offers a limited streaming service as a benefit to subscribers of its Amazon Prime service, while Google actually provides two streaming subscription services: Google Play Music All Access and YouTube's Music Key service.[4] On top

[1] Pandora was available only in the United States until December 2012, when it launched in Australia and New Zealand and where it now has 2 million listeners.

[2] Clear Channel has subsequently changed its name to iHeartMedia.

[3] WiMP has subsequently been purchased and rebranded as Tidal.

[4] Although often not recognised as such, YouTube is actually the largest music streaming service, and is the de

of this, Apple, a long-time rejecter of streaming music, purchased Beats Music (primarily a headphone manufacturer but with a small on-demand streaming music service) in May 2014 and launched its own on-demand streaming service in June 2015.

The backlash against Spotify

The broader issues discussed in this paper, concerning the changing nature of the musical commodity and the economic reward for recorded music, are applicable to all of the on-demand streaming services. This paper will focus on Spotify, however, given that it is the most prominent of such services and the one which has been the centre of public debate about the levels of remuneration received by artists for streaming. The service was launched from its native Sweden in 2008 and it currently offers a catalogue of 'over 30 million tracks' in 58 countries (Spotify 2014). In January 2015, Spotify announced that the service had achieved 60 million active users and 15 million paying subscribers (Spotify 2015). Its growth in subscriber numbers has been impressive: according to public announcements, it took almost 2 years to get its first 500,000 subscribers but then added 2 million in approximately a year, a further 3.5 million in the following 18 months, 4 million more in the next 14 months and 5 million more in just 7 months. It is growing exponentially and is the poster boy of the new, optimistic, digital record industry—the one that has stopped bleating about piracy and is doing something new and funky. Yet despite, or perhaps because of, its success, Spotify has also received a large amount of criticism, most notably from artists about the levels of remuneration they receive from the service.

The public discussion of Spotify payments first began in 2009, when it was widely reported that Lady Gaga had received a payment of just $167 for her song 'Poker Face', which had been streamed over a million times (for example, Smith 2009).[5] The statistic was misleading[6] but the mud stuck—it is easy to find recent stories repeating the bogus fact (for example, Marsden 2012)—and the idea that Spotify did not adequately reward artists gained public credence. It was around the time that Spotify launched in the United States in 2011 that the controversy surrounding payments became more consistent as a number of smaller US record labels withdrew their catalogues from the service. Seemingly, the first to do so (though not the first to announce it) was Projekt Records, a Brooklyn-based gothic rock label, formed in 1983, which withdrew its catalogue from all on-demand streaming services in July. Label founder Sam Rosenthal stated that these services 'are not a viable way forward for the music industry' and was vocal in his criticism of Spotify:

> In the world I want to live in, I envision artists fairly compensated for their creations… Spotify is NOT a service that does this. Projekt will not be part of this unprincipled concept. For a stream on Spotify… on average $0.0013 is paid to Projekt's Digital Distributor. 5000 plays generates around $6.50. In comparison, 5000 track downloads at iTunes generates $3487. … To earn the U.S. monthly

facto source of music listening for significant numbers of young internet users. It has approximately 140 million weekly music video users (Mulligan 2014a).

[5] For the original Swedish news story, see Andersson (2009).

[6] The amount related to songwriter's publishing royalty only (not the income from the recording itself, which conventionally is about nine times higher), after collecting society deductions, for a song that was co-written, covered only a short period of time just after Spotify had launched and related to streams in Sweden only (see Barnett 2010).

> minimum wage—$1160—892,307 plays a month are needed at Spotify. This is not a viable number for artists. (Rosenthal 2011)

The next label to pull its catalogue out of Spotify, and the first to be publicly reported, was Century Media, a metal label based in Dortmund and California. In August, they announced the withdrawal of its repertoire, along with its associated labels, 'to protect the interests of its artists'. While praising Spotify as 'a great tool to discover new music', Century countered that:

> Physical sales are dropping drastically in all countries where Spotify is active.… Since the artists need to sell their music to continue their creativity, Spotify is a problem for them. This is about survival, nothing less and it is time that fans and consumers realize that for artists it is essential to sell music to keep their heads above water.

Century concluded that:

> Spotify in its present shape and form isn't the way forward …. Ultimately, in some cases, it will completely kill a lot of smaller bands that are already struggling to make ends meet. (Century Media 2011)

More label withdrawals followed. Curiously, metal labels, especially LA-based metal labels, seemed the most keen to remove their catalogues from Spotify. In September 2011, Napalm Records withdrew their repertoire, stating that 'the income generated through streaming is so insignificant that neither we, as a record company, nor our artists are able to further support this method of distribution. We… object to price models that endanger our existence and that of our bands' (see Metal Underground 2011). Also withdrawing in September 2011 were Prosthetic Records and Metal Blade, while Sumerian Records withdrew most of its catalogue in November. Beyond the LA metal scene, a more widely publicised story emerged in November when ST Holdings, a UK digital distributor for independent electronic and dance labels, withdrew from on-demand streaming services the catalogues for 234 of the 238 labels it distributed. In announcing their withdrawal, the company highlighted that, in the third quarter of 2011, their digital revenues dropped for the first time in their history (by 14%) and that iTunes income in particular was badly affected, falling by 24%. During the same period, on-demand streaming services accounted for 82% of 'plays' of their music, but just 2.6% of revenues, with Spotify returning £2500 for 750,000 streams. This low rate led the company to voice concern that the value of music was being undermined, stating that 'music loses its specialness by its exploitation as a low value/free commodity. Quoting one of our labels, "Let's keep the music special, **fuck Spotify**"' (in Resnikoff 2011).

The royalties debate and the changing nature of the musical commodity

It is important to keep these examples in context. The withdrawal of a handful of small independent labels is not going to cause too much of a dent in a catalogue of 30 million tracks.[7] It is also worth noting that some of these companies (such as Century) have subsequently returned their catalogues to Spotify. However, the controversy about the amount of money paid to artists by streaming services has continued, especially among some smaller independents and DIY artists.[8] Broadly speaking, the complaints can be characterised in two ways.

[7] Unless you're a fan of Californian metal or UK dance, in which case it really sucks.

[8] Perhaps most active is David Lowery, member of alternative rock bands Camper Van Beethoven and Cracker who has also worked as a financial analyst and derivatives trader. Lowery runs the blog 'The Trichordist' (sub-

First, musicians argue that on-demand streaming services undermine sales of digital files and physical media and, therefore, they are not a financial model that can sustain their musical careers. Underpinning this, however, is a broader aesthetic and moral argument about what music should be worth, with the micro-pay- ments generated by each stream being seen as devaluing music itself.

I will return to these issues shortly but, first, I want to outline the two ways in which Spotify has responded to such criticisms. The first is to argue that, for many artists, the amount that they receive from Spotify reflects their contract with their record label and not the amount that Spotify pays out (e.g., in Rosenthal 2011).[9] There is some truth to this and it is important to recognise that the question 'how much does Spotify pay artists?' is somewhat misleading given that Spotify does not 'pay artists' any more than a physical record store 'pays artists'. Instead, Spotify pays labels, or distributors handling labels and, as such, what proportion of that money is returned to artists is a matter of individual (though often standardised—see Stahl 2013, 165–170) contracts. It is necessary to be cautious, therefore, of information circulated online about the amount a particular artist received from streaming. However, there is obfuscation in Spotify's response also.[10] Not all of the artists raising concerns have record label contracts, with many instead using digital distributors that charge a flat rate commission which makes it possible to ascertain what Spotify actually paid out. A large number of these independent artists have made significant efforts to provide reliable data on streaming rates (for example, the cellist Zoe Keating and the aforementioned David Lowery, who maintains a 'streaming price bible' on his Trichordist blog). Furthermore, the fact that independent labels, and not just individual artists, have been complaining about the revenue received from on-demand streaming suggests that the low level of income received by artists is not just a matter of exploitative contracts.

Aside from claiming contractual confidentiality, Spotify's main public response to the issue of royalties has been to provide some really big figures—the global amount that it has returned to rights holders. In 2012, Spotify founder, Daniel Ek, stated in an interview that 'the whole debate about artists payments is slightly misconstrued. We have paid out over half a billion dollars to rights holders now, and that's doubled in the last nine months. That's a significant amount of money' (in Dredge 2012).[11] The word 'misconstrued' is quite deliberate because the argument being made is that artists and the media are wrong to treat on-demand streaming services as comparable to sales. Spotify has repeatedly argued that it 'does not sell streams, but access to music. … [It] is not a unit based business and it does not make sense to look at revenues from Spotify from a per stream or other music unit-based point of view. Instead, one must look at the overall revenues that Spotify is generating' (in Houghton 2011).

titled 'artists for an ethical and sustainable internet'), where he provides analytical and provocative posts on a range of music industry issues.

[9] Recently, Spotify has begun to subtly deflect pressure from itself onto the record labels, both by making streaming data directly available to artists (via its 'Spotify Artists' service) and through implicit public comments about the distribution of revenue.

[10] It should also be noted that Spotify's contracts with the major labels are subject to non-disclosure agreements which make it impossible to ascertain how much, and in what ways, specific labels are remunerated. It is commonly accepted that the major labels received lump sum payments for making their catalogues available on the service and that this income is not shared with artists.

[11] In Ek's public response to Taylor Swift, he announced that Spotify has paid $2bn to rights holders (Ek 2014).

Thus, the really really big or the really really small numbers get to the heart of those different ways of understanding streaming services.

To be clear, this is not merely an argument that it is impossible to equate a certain number of streams with one purchase. Rather, it is an argument that the nature of what is being sold is qualitatively different than in the past and, therefore, artists need to reconsider how they are rewarded—not merely how much they are paid but the basis on which they are paid: in the 'old' model of music-buying/owning, consumers paid (and artists therefore received) a one-off payment; in the new model of music-renting, consumers continually pay for access to music. The theory is that continual small payments will compensate (and more) for the withdrawal of the one-off payment. That is why Spotify argues that 'people need to transition from unit-based thinking to consumption-based thinking' (in King 2012).

The economics of streaming music

While Spotify's position reflects a broader cultural shift toward 'renting' music, its argument that musicians should move away from 'unit-based thinking' is seemingly undermined by the fact that musicians are paid on the basis of how many times their songs are streamed by the service. In fact, Spotify royalty statements list each stream and its associated rate (though Spotify refers to calculating per-stream rates as 'reverse engineering'). Understanding Spotify's position that it is wrong to focus on individual streams requires an understanding of the broader economic logic of streaming, which depends upon the totality of streaming rather than the aggregation of individual streams.

Before explaining Spotify's payment system, it is important to recognise that Spotify does not seem to be 'cheating' by paying a lower royalty rate than other digital suppliers. At SXSW in 2012, Spotify's chief content officer, Ken Parks, reported that the company pays out 'in the neighbourhood of 65–70% of revenue to rights holders' (in Peoples 2012a) and it has repeatedly affirmed that it pays 'nearing 70%' or 'approximately 70%'. The 70% figure is important because it is what Apple returns to rights holders for iTunes downloads and it broadly matches historically conventional allocation in the record industry.[12] So while not confirmed precisely, Spotify is at least paying rights holders a broadly conventional rate for the right to use music. It distributes money by dividing its total revenue by the number of streams played on the service. However, the amount of revenue Spotify generates relies mainly upon the number of subscribers it has (plus a little extra from advertising), whereas the number of times music can be streamed is effectively limitless. Thus, when this amount paid is compared to the overall number of songs streamed, the numbers look embarrassingly small—the broad average from the information posted online is about $0.004 per stream (0.4 or 0.5 cents per stream, although streams get different rates of return according to a variety of factors, most notably whether it is played by a subscriber or someone using the free service). Given the tiny figures quoted from musicians on per-stream basis, or the '30,000 streams only earned me $120' stories, it is understandable that musicians might be concerned about the amount of money they are receiving. How can Spotify suggest that streaming is a viable option for artists?

[12] The bulk of that 65%–70% is paid to the rights holder of the sound recording, with 10.5% (of total revenue) paid to owner of publishing rights for mechanical royalties and performance rights.

Spotify's answer to the question is scale. Given the company pays a fixed proportion of revenue back to rights holders then, as Spotify's overall revenue increases so, too, does the amount of money returned to rights holders (70% of a billion dollars is more than 70% of 10 million dollars). This means that scale is key to the viability of Spotify and similar services: the more free users it can convert into paying subscribers the greater the level of return to artists and labels, not because more people are playing their music but because there is a bigger pie to share out and the effective per-stream rate thus increases. This can actually be seen in the royalties data that has been shared online: whereas the average rate per stream was initially in the region of $0.002 to $0.003 per stream (as can be seen in Sam Rosenthal's statement quoted earlier), today it is $0.004 to $0.005. Ek announced in November 2014 that '500 thousand listens on Spotify would pay out between three and four thousand dollars' which is an effective per-stream rate of $0.006 to $0.008 (Ek 2014). The logic of the Spotify model has thus shown signs of working, though it remains to be seen whether services can scale sufficiently to provide a viable means of income for musicians. According to Spotify's artist-in-residence, D.A. Wallach, that particular tipping point is achievable, stating that 'if we can get to the scale of Netflix—which has 20 million subscribers—we estimate we'd be paying out to artists what iTunes is paying out on a year to year basis' (King 2012). [13]

Artists are thus being told that they are wrong to treat streams like sales and that they should adopt a patient, long run view. Yet while large labels with cash reserves can potentially ride out the storm, artists who need money to live on now argue that streaming is undermining their current income by cutting into their digital sales. Both Century Media and ST Holdings made explicit reference to the fact that income from digital sales had fallen dramatically since the emergence of on-demand streaming. Spotify's position, perhaps unsurprisingly, is that streaming does not have a detrimental effect on digital sales. For example, Katie Schlosser, a director of label relations at Spotify, has stated that they have been able to provide labels with 'data that's proving and demonstrating the fact that streaming revenue is additional to actual unit download consumption or physical music sales' (Resnikoff 2013). Perhaps more surprisingly, the argument has been supported by the major record labels. For example, at an IFPI event in London in 2012, then president of Universal Music Group's global digital business, Rob Wells, described the argument that on-demand streaming 'cannibalises' sales as 'absolutely bogus' (Peoples 2012b).

The year 2012 was a good year to claim that streaming does not undermine sales, as overall revenue for the recording industry increased for the first time this century, if only by 0.2% (IFPI 2013). There were also individual instances where streaming and selling seem to have complemented each other well. For example, one of the biggest albums of 2012—Mumford and Sons' *Babel*—became the most streamed album on Spotify in its first week of release ('around eight million listens') while simultaneously recording the highest first week sales for a US

[13] In 'Spotify explained' (2013), the company used 40 million subscribers as their basis for explaining the potential of the service for musicians. Two important provisos need to be made about this argument, however. The first is that it assumes subscription prices remain constant, but there are many commentators who think that, for streaming to really break though into the mainstream, lower price points will have to be introduced (for example, Mulligan 2014d). Second, it assumes that new subscribers are converted from existing free tier users. Spotify has thus far remained consistent in converting 25% of users into subscribers. If, however, the number of free users increases at a faster rate than the number of subscribers, then revenue compared to number of streams could conceivably go down rather than up.

album that year (600,000 units) (Peoples 2012b). Furthermore, there are specific territories where streaming has played a significant role in the local recording industry returning to growth after more than a decade of decline. For example, in Norway (where streaming accounted for 65.3% of recorded music revenues in 2013) the industry grew by 7.2% in 2012 and 10.6% in 2013 (IFPI Norge 2014) while in Sweden (where streaming contributed 71.2% of recorded music revenues in 2013) the recording industry has seen 3 years of consecutive growth (IFPI Sverige 2014).

Given their distinctive characteristics (small markets with high broadband penetration and the home of two of the major streaming services), it is unclear whether these Scandinavian examples are reliable indicators of future trends in much bigger music markets. Most notably, neither country had well-established paid download services prior to streaming services emerging (Mulligan 2014b). This makes them very different from the United States and the United Kingdom, where download services were contributing between 40% and 50% of recorded music income by the early 2010s. And, revenues from download sales declined in the United States for the first time in 2013 (Pham 2014) and the United Kingdom in 2014 (Titcomb 2015). Critics of streaming services were quick to attribute the blame to Spotify (for example, Titcomb's headline was 'UK music downloads in decline for first time as Spotify eats into iTunes sales'), though Ek (2014) contends that to do so is to confuse correlation with causation. Instead, he points to Canada, where download sales were falling before streaming services emerged. It should also be noted that growth in download sales had been flattening out considerably since 2008 (which Mulligan (2014c) attributes to increased spending on apps).

In the long run, it seems reasonable to assume that the changing nature of the musical commodity means that streaming will replace downloading but it is difficult to make predictions about the speed and the nature of the transition as current data is ambiguous. Nonetheless, 'while industry executives initially refused to attribute the early signs of weakness in digital sales to the rise in streaming, in the second half of 2013 many conceded that ad-supported and paid subscription services did seem to be cannibalizing digital sales' (Christman 2014).

Spotify and the mainstream industry

Despite concerns that streaming music could be undermining digital sales, the major record labels (Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment and Warner Music Group) have been very supportive of both Spotify and on-demand streaming more broadly. Many of the bigger independent labels, such as Beggars Group and XL, have also been supportive of the service. The majors' support of Spotify is in stark contrast to the early years of the twenty-first century, during which they were hostile to the emergence of digital music and ultimately had to be bullied by Apple into committing themselves to the digital marketplace (Knopper 2009, 170–177). What has changed in the meantime to effect such differing responses? [14]

Understanding the change in attitude requires understanding the changing contours of piracy in the last 15 years or so. In the early twenty-first century, the record industry's

[14] It should not be assumed that the major labels' reaction to Spotify was uniformly positive. In particular, there was resistance to the idea that access to music should be free and, before launching in the United States, Spotify implemented some limits on the amount of music that could be listened to by non-subscribers. These limits have since been removed, however.

overwhelming concern was that digital files generated massive amounts of piracy which undermined legitimate sales. Initial responses to these developments involved searching for ways in which music could be 'locked' through Digital Rights Management systems and aggressive litigation campaigns, against both companies involved in piracy (such as Napster) and individual downloaders (Marshall 2012). Around 2005, however, the record industry changed its approach to online music consumption. While still publicly criticising piracy and campaigning for improved copyright enforcement, the record industry apparently accepted that it would have to adapt to consumer behaviour. The challenge for the labels was finding a way to incorporate the behaviour of a generation which had grown up with music being free and accessible. This has been Spotify's key selling-point: it has consistently presented itself as offering a platform which 'monetises' existing consumer behaviour. In its response to the withdrawal of the Century and Mute catalogues, Spotify stated that the service:

> was launched out of a desire to develop a better, more convenient and legal alternative to music piracy. Spotify now monetises an audience the large majority of whom were downloading illegally (and therefore not making any money for the industry) before Spotify was available. (in Bruno 2011)

The connection between Spotify and piracy is less than coincidental: Spotify founder Daniel Ek was formerly CEO of uTorrent, the most popular client for bittorrent sharing and the Spotify software itself depends on the peer-to-peer technologies that facilitate widespread file-sharing (when a user requests a song, encrypted data is transferred from other users' computers) (Greeley 2011). Despite this heritage, however, a major selling point of on-demand streaming services is that they are generating income for rights holders out of consumer behaviour that had previously generated none. [15]

However, surely the main reason for the major labels' support of Spotify and similar services is that the 'consumption-based' logic of streaming services actually fits the logic of the pre-digital record industry quite well. The success of the major labels has always depended upon 'consumption-based' rather than 'unit-based' profits; their strategy was to release lots of records in the knowledge that only a small number of them would be successful but that the rewards from a small number of hits would outweigh the losses of the remaining releases. Thus, from the major label's perspective, so long as some records made a profit, it did not matter which records sold a lot and which did not. It mattered to the careers of specific individuals (the artist, say, or the A&R executive that signed them), but not to the label overall, whose success depended upon overall levels of music consumption.

The correlation between the 'consumption-based logic' of the major labels and streaming services can be seen in the way that royalty payments are calculated, which is inherently beneficial to those with large catalogues. Spotify's payments are based on a 'market share' system. Simplifying slightly, the basic logic of the system is that an artist is paid a percentage of Spotify's overall revenue determined by the percentage of overall streams that the artist

[15] There is not space in this paper to evaluate the claim that streaming monetises 'pirate' behaviour. There are certainly examples of countries, most notably Spain, in which rates of piracy have reduced as adoption of streaming has increased. There is also some consumer survey data which also suggests a connection between increasing streaming services and declining rates of piracy (for example, NPD Group 2012). Ek's aforementioned caution about confusing correlation with causation should be noted, however, given that other factors, such as the dramatic rise in web takedown notices and the growth of YouTube, will have played a part in declining piracy rates.

accounted for in a particular month (Spotify 2013).[16] There is thus no connection between an individual listener's payment and their listening preferences. This is beneficial to artists and labels who receive a high number of streams because it means that they receive a high proportion of income regardless of how many paying users actually streamed their music. For example, if a listener pays £10 but listens to only one obscure Finnish rapper for the entire month, the rapper will still only receive a very small proportion of the listener's money as the majority of it will be distributed to those artists at the top of the Spotify charts. Independent and less popular artists would benefit from an alternative system of payment that directly distributed an individual's subscription to only those artists to which the individual had actually listened.

Conclusion

The specific complaints about royalty rates raised by independent musicians and labels reflect, after a period of uncertainty, some significant structural recalibrating of the recording industry. Rather than internet technologies providing liberation from old industry dynamics, what we may be seeing is a consolidation of long-established power structures (as predicted by Bukart and McCourt (2004) though not via the precise mechanisms they suggested; see also Rogers 2013). Furthermore, the introduction of streaming may be making the ground outside of the mainstream even more uncertain given that independent artists and labels do not have the luxury of extensive back catalogues and are much less insulated against declining sales. If streaming is 'cannibalising' sales, therefore, it will be disproportionately impacting upon smaller players. Artists signed to bigger labels can be insulated against the changing rhythms of payment for recorded music—if, say, it takes 5 years of streaming income for an album to recoup its costs rather than 2 years of sales income, those with larger catalogues/financial reserves will be able to weather the storm. However, even if streaming services can scale sufficiently to offset the global decline in incomes from record sales, Spotify's current payment system seems skewed towards the major labels.

Thus, despite the seemingly radical shift from ownership to access-based models, the business model of on-demand streaming is one with which the major labels are familiar and which suits their existing strategies. It is unsurprising that they have been supportive of the new services. Indeed, this support has gone beyond the realm of public statement as the major labels are actually shareholders in Spotify: financial filings reported in 2009 state that the major labels have a 16.5% in Spotify, with Merlin, an aggregator for the biggest independent labels, owning a further 1% (Arrington 2009; Jerrang 2009).[17] Furthermore, in late 2012, Access Industries, owners of Warner Music Group, invested $130 million dollars in Deezer for an undisclosed stake. This, again, is a repeat of earlier industry structures, in which each

[16] The actual equation offered by Spotify is 'Spotify's monthly revenue x (artist's Spotify streams/total Spotify streams) x approximately 70% to rights-holders'.

[17] According to Arrington, Sony owns 5.8%, Universal 4.8%, Warners, 3.8%, EMI 1.9% and Merlin 1%. Presumably, Universal assumed EMI's share when it completed its takeover in 2012. There is dispute over how much the labels actually paid for their stakes: Jerrang contends that it was just €8,800 (implying they received shares in exchange for licensing their catalogues) while Arrington disputes this, claiming inside sources state that the labels paid the same rate as other external investors and thus Jerrang's figure is missing three zeros. It is impossible to verify these figures, but it is commonly accepted that the major labels and Merlin do have a stake in Spotify.

of the majors owned their own CD distribution companies (Negus 1999, 55–60). Needless to say, the fact that the labels have a stake in Spotify has merely added to the suspicion and distrust towards the company and its royalty system. The lack of transparency in the entire system has been something that Spotify has tried to address (through its Spotify Artists portal), but they remain limited in information they can release and streaming royalty statements remain incomprehensible to even the most seasoned analysts.

From this perspective, the concerns raised by artists and independent labels about royalty payments from Spotify seem very similar to arguments made about the record industry in the past and, rather than being a 'disruptive technology' (Barr 2013), Spotify and other streaming music services may actually (or also) be quite conservative technologies. There are historical precedents here. In *Pop Song Piracy*, Barry Kernfeld argues that the history of copyright infringement in the music industry follows a repetitive pattern: new technologies or social practices emerge which undermine music rights holders' established forms of profit-making, who respond by yelling 'piracy!'. The public recognises genuinely transformative new practices from blatant copying, however, and, in such cases, rights-holders end up having to adapt to the new practices yet, in doing so, find ways of incorporating them into their existing profit-making practices (2011, 2–4).

Though the story is not complete, it is relatively easy to fit the story of digital music into such a narrative, with on-demand streaming services being the chapter in which the powerful corporations begin to incorporate the disruptive practices and reassert dominance. The recorded music landscape in the streaming era is beginning to bear many similarities to that of the CD era: financial success depends upon scale and catalogue, the major labels have a stake in music distribution networks, and the vast majority of artists do not make any money.

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CHAPTER 30

DIY or Die? A Typology of DIY Careers in the Portuguese Independent Music Scenes

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Abstract

This article addresses the DIY career building strategies in the Portuguese independent music scenes. Is it anchored on the reading of DIY careers as a pattern of promoting employability, in a context marked by major transformations in the music industries and the precarization of professional trajectories. Drawing from interviews with 71 individuals involved in the production and mediation of Portuguese independent music, we seek to understand how these actors build their DIY careers considering their different positions within the music scenes, the strategies used to negotiate their careers, and the way DIY is present. For this, we conduct a typological reading of these careers to identify different career profiles. Based on a mixed-methods approach, we identify five distinct career profiles: 'catch-all musicians', 'non-stop musicians', 'mediator musicians', 'author musicians', and 'mediators'. In their differences, these trajectories are marked by DIY ethos and praxis, from their beginnings to the present day.

Keywords

DIY, music careers, trajectories, career profiles, independent music scenes, Portugal

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DIY careers as a way of promoting employability

Over the last decades, the music industries have undergone major transformations. The proliferation of (illegal) downloading and streaming services has led to a decline in recorded music sales and contributed to the growing importance of live music (David, 2010, Haynes and Marshall, 2018; Marshall, 2015; Wilkström, 2009). It has become the main source of income for musicians and a plethora of music industries professionals. On the other hand, a series of technological innovations, the arrival of social media and the emergence of a platform economy (YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram) (Fox, 2004), have contributed to more widespread access to the means of production, distribution, and promotion of music and have created direct communication channels between musicians and their audiences (Baym, 2012; Carradini, 2016; Choi, 2016; Haynes and Marshall, 2018; Hracs, 2012; McLeod, 2005). Musicians can now easily promote their music, attracting new fans on a global scale. At the same time, these platforms offer musicians opportunities for monetization. In short, these innovations have enabled a transfer of power to the creative agents, who now have a wider margin of action at all moments of the production and distribution process and are less dependent on studios, producers, publishers, or promoters.

Although they do not provide a total democratization of cultural-creative production and distribution processes [1], these transformations have implications for musicians' working practices (Hughes *et al*., 2016). They can now take control and responsibility for a broader range of activities and tasks in the music field. To the creative dimension of writing, composing, and playing, these actors add many other activities—that of producers, editors, promoters, agents, DJs, among others. Having a music career is much more than knowing how to sing or play an instrument. It requires skills related to management (e.g. planning and strategy definition, dealing with copyright, royalties and other legal issues, stock management) and to the production of content for social media (e.g. marketing and self-promotion) (Oliveira, 2020, 2023).

The most recent analyses of these implications for musicians' ways of working are anchored on the DIY or entrepreneurial approach to music careers which has been present in research on different musical genres, in different geographical and sociocultural contexts (Bennett, 2018; Bennett and Guerra, 2019; Coulson, 2012; Gavanas & Reitsamer, 2016; Guerra, 2018; Haenfler, 2018; Kuchar, 2020; Oliveira, 2020, 2023; Reitsamer & Prokop, 2018; Scott, 2012; Tarassi, 2018; Threadgold 2018).

When it was first used in the early of the 20th century, DIY referred to the practices of creating or repairing something without recourse to an experienced craftsman/professional. Over the following decades its meaning gradually evolved to encompass a wide range of cultural and creative practices (Bennett and Guerra, 2019). From the mid-1970s, DIY gained greater prominence with the emergence of punk. By taking control of the means of production and distribution of music, several punk bands created their production platforms and, by organizing themselves into a network (Crossley, 2015), boosted the emergence of alternative distribution circuits to those that dominated the music industries. From a way

[1] Several studies (Haynes and Marshall, 2018; Kjus, 2016; Morris and Powers, 2015) show that, rather than promoting profound changes in power relations in the music industries, these transformations have been adapted to already existing practices and paradigms.

of music production symbolically and ideologically distinct from the commercial circuits, during the 1980s and 1990s, the DIY ethos remained strongly linked to the punk aesthetic. But it extended to other musical genres, other spheres of alternative cultural production, and to other socio-cultural domains. Today it is synonymous with a broader ethos of lifestyle policies, with repercussions on people's projects and professional choices, on a global scale (Bennett and Guerra, 2019).

The notion of a DIY career implies understanding it as a form of professional trajectory or a pattern of promoting employability (Guerra, 2010, 2016; Oliveira, 2020, 2023) that allows individuals to respond to the current context, guided by neoliberal configurations and by the precarization of the world of work—this obviously includes artistic and cultural work (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; McRobbie, 2016; Standing, 2011; Threadgold, 2018). In this scenario of redefining the meaning of DIY, we are now witnessing the growth of the levels of professionalization that characterize much of the contemporary DIY cultural production sphere (Bennett 2018; Haenfler, 2018; Tarassi 2018). It does not mean the DIY career concept has lost its connection to an ethos of independence and resistance. To this ethos is added the recognition of the need to achieve a sustainable lifestyle (Bennett, 2018). To discuss DIY careers is to recognize their pragmatic dimension, which justifies the existence of intersections between spheres that used to be opposed: independent and commercial, art and economy, work and leisure, ideology and pragmatism (Oliveira, 2020). It seems more appropriate to assume that DIY and contemporary independent music practices and careers coexist with mainstream ones in a continuum and a vast dynamic of intersection, generating different degrees and forms of independence.

Based on this understanding, this article aims to analyze the construction of DIY careers in the independent music scenes in Portugal[2], considering: (1) the different positions within the independent music scenes that social actors occupy, focusing on gender, education, and social class; (2) the strategies they use to negotiate a music career and their perspectives on music; and (3) the way DIY is present in their trajectories. For this purpose, and for the first time, we conduct a typological reading of these careers to identify different career profiles.

The article is structured as follows: in the first section, we make a brief historical background of independent music in Portugal and a description of Lisbon and Porto scenes. We explain the centrality of both cities and draw a portrait of their music scenes, considering aspects such as gender, education, and the socioeconomic background of their protagonists. We also describe the main strategies they use to manage their careers. Next, we present an account of our methodological approach. In the third section, we present the typology and discuss the features of the five career profiles. Finally, we provide the main conclusions.

Background

Portuguese independent music: What are we talking about?

Talking about independent music in Portugal means referring to a specific social space within the pop rock universe, established during the 1960s and 1970s thanks to the growing capacity

[2] This DIY concept is present not only in the theoretical framework that underpins this research but also in the interviewees' discourses.

of action of a diversified set of agents and structures: recording studios, labels, newspapers and music magazines, radio shows, venues, artists, and bands (Guerra, 2016). This process was marked by two crucial moments in recent Portuguese history: the democratic revolution of 25 April 1974, which ended 48 years of dictatorship, and Portugal's accession to the then-called European Economic Community in 1986. Both opened Portuguese society to external lifestyles and cultural references. This allowed the consolidation of the pop rock industry. Although on a smaller scale and with some delay in time, we witnessed similar processes to those happening in the US and the UK.

In the 2000s and 2010s, with the transformations that the music industries have experienced, with the widening of its audiences and its relative commercial success, the subfield of independent/alternative music has become a key player, recognised and, in a way, reified (Guerra, 2016), namely by gatekeepers, such as music journalists/critics and promoters. Although this sub-field claims and defines itself by opposition to the objectives and ways of working of the mainstream music industries, there are approximation movements between independent artists and bands and mainstream actors, especially multinational labels, and distributors.[3] These movements translate into contracts with major labels, which allow musicians greater or lesser freedom, depending on the type of contracts.

So, the Portuguese context meets Hesmondhalgh and Meier's (2015) argument when the authors state that indie, or independent, encompasses a diverse range of approaches to music production and promotion. This spectrum ranges from more traditionally organized independent artists and bands that resemble the majors in their way of working to DIY approaches to self-financing and self-releasing music. The analysis of Lisbon and Porto music scenes relies on this understanding of independent as a space of intersections and constant negotiations between a DIY way of doing and organizational logic common to the more mainstream spheres of the music industries.

Lisbon and Porto independent music scenes

Lisbon and Porto are the country's main cities. They are where we find the key institutions, facilities, players, and opportunities on the political, economic, social, and cultural levels. Therefore, they have always played a crucial role for the careers in the Portuguese independent music scenes. In this sense, most of our interviewees live in Lisbon (44%) or Porto (34%); the rest are based in cities close to these two urban hubs.

The importance of living in Lisbon or Porto meets the desire of 'being where the action is' (Markusen, 2006: 1929). This is related to the social and symbolic capital of both cities. As in other cultural and creative activities, the importance of the two cities comes from the fact that they host a set of venues, events, networks, relational dynamics, and key players—especially those with roles in mediation—that positively influence the building of a music career. In his analysis of Montreal, Stahl (2004) already evidenced something similar, highlighting the importance of soft and hard infrastructures[4] in sustaining the city's music scene. For these

[3] Today, the main labels in the Portuguese music field are the multinationals Universal and Sony and the Portuguese label Valentim de Carvalho, founded in 1824.

[4] Hard infrastructures include the built environment, cultural centres, meeting and socializing venues, live performance halls, studios, labels, promoters, and the music press. Soft infrastructures involve associative structures, social relations, and networks, interactions between the various members of the music scenes, which provide the flow of ideas and information.

reasons, whether in our sample or more generally in the cultural and creative sector, migration flows between smaller cities with less cultural offer and the cities of Lisbon and Porto are common. This is even more striking in the case of Lisbon. The city occupies a crucial role due to the promotional and reputation-building opportunities. Those who live and work outside Lisbon go there regularly to network.

This importance of the territorial, sociocultural, and economic contexts that structure the music scenes has been highlighted by several authors. Hracs et al. (2011) show how musicians consider the economic and social dynamics of city-regions when making their location choices. Taking the small town of Denton, in Texas, Krims (2014) also shows how urban musicians choose their location based on employment opportunities and considering the types of music consumption cities offer. Namely, the author emphasizes the relevance of the spatial and socio-cultural contexts in which musicians learn to compose and play music. These are preconditions for the development of vibrant and sustainable urban music communities. Therefore, we can say that the case of Portugal is similar to other Western countries.

In line with other music scenes and geographical contexts (Abreu et al., 2017; Berkers and Schaap, 2018; Buscatto, 2018; Gavanas and Reitsamer, 2016; Guerra, 2016; Guerra and Oliveira, 2019; Leonard, 2017; O'Sullivan, 2018; Reddington, 2012; Strong, 2011), male hegemony is a defining feature of Portuguese independent music scenes. In our sample 79% of interviewees identify themselves as men and only 21% of interviewees identify themselves as women. As other research has shown (Richards, 2016; Smith et al., 2019, Vecco et al., 2019), this makes it more difficult for women to build and maintain music careers. The women we interviewed mention aspects such as exclusion from music scenes networks; gender stereotypes of supposed female characteristics, their interests, skills, and roles assigned to them by society [5]; horizontal and vertical segregation, which relegates women to less favourable employment conditions, income, power, and recognition; difficulties in balancing professional and family life; and objectification and sexual harassment. These difficulties tend to accumulate over time, becoming a kind of 'cumulative disadvantage' (Acker, 2009 in Buscatto, 2018) that women seek to overcome to negotiate their music careers.

Despite these difficulties, in the wake of feminist-queer movements, #MeToo or the building of support networks in the music field [6], our research denotes a greater problematization of gender inequalities and the prevailing heteronormative constructions of gender and sexuality. This happens especially among the younger generations and is shown in the reduction of differences between men and women when composing lineups. Formed in Lisbon, in 2014, the collective and promoter Maternidade [7] is an example, to which we can add DAMAS, a music venue, in Lisbon. They have in common the intention of fighting the marginalization of women in concert lineups, as well as the paternalism that they consider to be institutionalized. This phenomenon also manifests itself in some musical projects, such

[5] In Portuguese society, there is a strong influence of the Roman Catholic matrix that assigns women the roles of mother, girlfriend, and wife. While men are invited to assert themselves and lead in the public space, women's domain of leadership is the private space, the home, the children, the domestic sphere.

[6] An example is shesaid.so, a global independent community of women and gender minorities in the music industries, which already has several Portuguese members. More details at https://www.shesaid.so/.

[7] More details at https://www.facebook.com/maternidade2014.

as Vaiapraia and Filipe Sambado [8]. It translates into the themes addressed in the lyrics and how the artists present themselves, questioning gender stereotypes.

In line with the results of other research on musicians' ways of working and their entrepreneurial attitude (Coulson, 2012; Scott, 2012), the protagonists of Portuguese independent music scenes have a high level of education. 69% of our interviewees have completed higher education and 20% have attended university. However, few have formal higher education in music, and this is mainly in music production and sound engineering. This does not mean a total rejection of music education: among the interviewees, 38% had taken singing and instrumental lessons; 24% had attended a music conservatory, while others had rock and jazz lessons. Nevertheless, in most cases, these lessons were a means of acquiring basic knowledge for a further DIY self-taught evolution.

As many authors (Bennett, 2018; Friedman et al., 2016; Threadgold, 2018) have shown about the importance of socioeconomic background in the creation of conditions for building DIY careers in music and others creative and cultural industries, the Portuguese independent music scenes are not an exception. Most interviewees belonged to the middle classes associated with liberal professions (66%) in artistic, intellectual, and scientific areas. We can say that this is a group of actors who are strongly qualified in educational, professional, and social terms, which contrasts with most of the Portuguese population, but is close to the reality of other artistic and creative groups in Portugal and other countries.

Although this privileged socioeconomic position, precariousness and insecurity mark the careers in Lisbon and Porto independent music scenes. This is a common feature of other creative workers (Bennett, 2018; Guerra, 2016, 2020; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; McRobbie, 2016). They must combine various strategies and sources of income. Meeting other research on music careers (Coulson, 2012; Gavanas and Reitsamer, 2016; Guerra, 2016; Reitsamer and Prokop, 2018; Scott, 2012; Tarassi, 2018), one of the main sets of strategies that our interviewees adopt takes on a logic of multiplication and can take different forms. One possibility is the development of different roles and activities in the music scenes, a multi-tasking exercise that Tarassi (2018) also identified when studying Milan's independent music scene. This is a characteristic feature of independent music production and an aspect Becker (1982) already pointed to in his analysis of the art worlds. The ability to perform different roles and activities makes artists attractive to a variety of employers and contributes to the acquisition of symbolic and cultural capital, reinforcing the positioning these actors have in the music field. A second possibility is to combine music with another profession, which may or may not be related to the artistic and cultural field. Several works in artistic and creative sectors, and more specifically in the music field (Coulson, 2012; Gavanas and Reitsamer, 2016; Guerra, 2016; Reitsamer and Prokop, 2018; Scott, 2012; Tarassi, 2018), have shown that this is an essential strategy to ensure the viability of careers in these areas. For most of our interviewees (62%), this situation arises as a necessity because the income they get from music is not enough. To teach, to be involved in several musical projects simultaneously, as well as to play, compose and write for others are other ways in which this logic of multi-tasking is translated.

[8] Further details at https://www.facebook.com/Vaiapraia and https://www.facebook.com/ofilipesambado.

A second set of strategies is strongly associated with a professional perspective of music. Musical activity is understood as any other profession. Networking, planning and defining goals, and a work methodology is a crucial strategy for a music career. This also includes the use of copyrights, as well as applications for funding. Especially networking refers to music's relational and collective dimension (Becker, 1982; Crossley, 2015). Relational networks are the main way of access job opportunities and build a reputation. Thus, they are used strategically. But they are also a way of being integrated into a community. As Coulson argues, 'networks in the music world also involve friendship, co-operation, support, musical collaboration and learning opportunities' (Coulson, 2012: 258). In the case of Lisbon and Porto scenes, our interviewees state that teamwork—do-it-together (DIT)—is a requirement for building music careers.

A third set of strategies follows a logic of continuity. Our interviewees strive to play live many times and to remain continuously active. This means always being at some point in the process of creating and distributing music, whether composing, recording, producing, editing, or playing. Regularly editing albums, singles, or video clips is also a common practice.

A fourth set of strategies is based on a logic of reduction. This can mean reducing the size of musical projects, that is, instead of having a band with several members, having a band with two or three elements, or having a solo project. But it also means saving, seeking to reduce the costs of musical activity, and adapting it to the resources available. DIY practices assume a crucial place here and in playing different roles in the spectrum of music creation and promotion.

In line with the privileged positioning of most of these actors in the Portuguese social structure, the use of family support is also a common strategy in the Portuguese independent music scenes. It is through this diversified set of strategies that the interviewees manage their careers.

Methodology

The data were collected between 2016 and 2018. To provide different points of view on the object of study and achieve a more comprehensive and robust perspective, we used a mixed-methods approach (Crossley and Edwards, 2016). We conducted 71 semi-structured interviews with individuals involved in the production and mediation of Portuguese independent music scenes: musicians, promoters, record label heads, producers, music venue programmers, managers, and journalists. We used snowball sampling, seeking to ensure that our sample was representative of the Portuguese field, namely in terms of gender. The concern to include social actors at different stages of their careers also guided sample design. We started with a set of key informants and key players in the Portuguese independent music scenes, who facilitated the entry into the field and allowed the identification of other members of the music scenes. Then, we also asked each new interviewee to suggest other people to interview.

The interviews were carried out in settings chosen by the interviewees, such as rehearsal rooms, recording studios, bars, music venues and public places. All interviews were audio-recorded and fully transcribed. We conducted our data analysis by building key categories based on the interview scripts. The interviews were subjected to a thematic content analysis using *NVivo*, which also served as a starting point for the construction of the typology. For

this construction, we used multiple correspondence analysis (MCA), a technique that allows knowing the topological configuration of the social space under analysis, facilitating the definition of profiles of individuals characterized by a set of variables that represent the most frequent type- relationships. We complemented the MCA with cluster analysis, a clustering method that allows the operationalization of the groups/profiles identified through the MCA. Throughout the article we will use excerpts from the interviews as a way of illustrating the ideas discussed. To ensure their privacy, interviewees have been anonymized.

A typology of Portuguese DIY independent music careers

To better understand the construction of DIY music careers, we conducted a typological reading of them to identify different career profiles. To define the career profiles, we considered two analytical dimensions that the MCA revealed to be the most relevant. The first involves the strategies adopted by social actors to ensure the sustainability and economic viability of their careers, including strategies such as networking, the capacity for reinvention, regularly publishing albums and other artistic materials, or using copyrights. The second one focuses on the combination of music-related activities with others in non-musical/artistic fields to earn a living. Based on these dimensions, we were able to identify five ideal-typical career profiles in the independent music scenes: 'catch-all musicians', 'non-stop musicians', 'mediator musicians', 'author musicians', and 'mediators'. They are fluid ideal types. Overlaps or transitions between different career profiles are common during these actors' trajectories. These movements are a consequence of the precariousness and uncertainty that characterise the careers of these actors. They are also the result of external factors, such as the fragile economic situation of the country and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Catch-all musicians

'Catch-all musicians' comprises 27% of our interviewees. This career profile includes musicians who mostly combine their music careers with other music-related activities, such as writing and playing for others and working as producers and composers for cinema, television and advertising. It is also common to find musicians who combine music with another profession outside the musical/artistic field. Although the interviewees perceive music in a professional way, their own music-making is not their primary source of income. It is also in this career profile that applications for funding are more frequent, which is a crucial task in the context of the non-artistic activities developed by musicians. Therefore, the careers of these musicians require a great capacity for adaptation and enormous versatility. This is the reason why we have designated this career profile as the 'catch-all musicians'. This capacity for adaptation and multiplication of projects and roles is their main strategy to deal with the instability and uncertainty of a music career. This occurs in a markedly DIY way. The skills and expertise needed to perform the various roles are acquired in a self-taught way, in a logic of sharing and collaboration with others. It is also a career profile deeply marked by DIT, because it is anchored in relational networks. The following excerpt illustrates the need to combine several activities, play with different bands, and work hard. In these words, are also evident the difficulties that this multi-tasking entails:

> I live from the music field, not only making music and not only making the music I want. I make music for advertising, for films. I also have work in producing events, and in the studio. I must keep splitting up, which brings very good things. For example, being able to do anything. Then there's a downside: you can never dedicate yourself 100% to anything. And it's very hard to stop doing one of them because it's the combination of them all that allows you to continue living.
>
> Male, 40 years old, BA, musician, producer, promoter and record label head, Barreiro.

This career profile has the most significant gender difference: 94.7% of the individuals in this sample are male. This group is also where we find the oldest interviewees, that is, over 50 years old. Therefore, it is also in this profile that we find the interviewees with the longest career: 89.5% of the interviewees have 16 or more years of activity. This finding reinforces an idea that other studies (Abreu et al., 2017; Bennett, 2013; Haenfler, 2018) have already demonstrated: the participation and involvement in music scenes and subcultural movements is not a reality that remains confined to youth. It continues over time, even though the forms of involvement may change. At the same time, it leads us to consider that this versatility and capacity for adaptation is essential for maintaining and consolidating a music career over time.

Non-stop musicians

This career profile includes 10% of interviewees. Finding a balance between music-making and other professional activities is also a reality, but the connection between the day job and the artistic sphere is more evident in this career profile. The defining feature is the maintenance of continuous musical activity. This means ensuring that the cycle of creation-performance-dissemination is never interrupted, requiring regular releases of albums, EPs, singles and videos. To ensure this, the musicians must plan the whole creative process and define objectives and a work methodology. These musicians are also able to reinvent themselves as musicians and artists. One way to achieve this is to develop various musical projects in parallel. This not only enables musicians to express their creativity in different musical styles but also increases the possibilities of playing live and their sources of income. In this way, and as the excerpt below illustrates, one of the main strategies used by these musicians is to ensure as extensive a concert circuit as possible for their different musical projects.

> We must be always doing something, trying to give many concerts. We mustn't stand still. Nowadays, music gives us money through concerts, royalties, and almost nothing else. The goal is to keep playing, to do new things so we can play more often.
>
> Female, 31 years old, attended higher education, musician, dance teacher and actress, Porto.

This implies the development of solid relational networks with other actors of the music field. Networking not only leads to job opportunities but is also essential in the processes of reputation building and the achievement of a more favourable positioning in the field. In this career profile, music takes on a professional character, requiring planning, dedication to work, perseverance, and the capacity to multiply roles in the music scene. It is in this and the previous category that a highly professional perception of music-making prevails, and DIY practices take on a more professional dimension. This brings us back to the works of Thornton (1995), when she introduces the notion of 'subcultural capital', and Haenfler (2018) who shows how DIY practices and subcultural experiences are transformed into viable career

paths by encouraging the development of skills useful in the labour market, such as management, organisational and marketing skills, but also DIY skills, of resistance, achievement, freedom, and collective action.

Mediator musicians

This is the career profile that brings together the highest percentage of interviewees (31%). Unlike the previous career profiles, for 'mediator musicians', the combination of music-making with other professions outside the music field is not very common. However, the need to play several roles is also a reality. As well as being musicians, these actors work as promoters, record label heads, managers, or music venue curators—that is, professions that allow for creativity, but focused on 'mediation' activities. DIY ethos and practices are very present. First, because the performance of these roles arises, in most cases, as a necessity, due to the lack of channels for promoting their musical work. At the same time, the learning of the necessary skills for the performance of these activities takes place in a self-taught way. In contrast to the other career profiles, the development of several musical projects is not an option. The focus is on the multiplication of roles. The musicians in this career profile tend to be younger and, therefore, recourse to family support is more common for these actors than for the other categories. Another differentiating element is the fact that most members understand music as being only one of the channels and possible languages to share their vision of the world. As the following excerpt clearly demonstrates, we find in these actors a willingness to experiment artistic languages besides music:

> I can't imagine doing this my whole life. I want to realize if I want to continue making music or if it's just a means. I think for me, it's just a means. It could be writing or making films, or theatre. I like the boost it gives me. Many things I'm learning by making music and programming will serve me in the future. But I don't see myself making music for the rest of my life. But maybe I'll do something else related to music, programming, and agency work.
>
> Female, 18 years old, attending higher education, musician, promoter, and record label head, Lisbon.

We also find a skeptical perspective regarding living solely as musicians. They consider that being a full-time musician, especially in the independent music scenes, is virtually impossible. So, in the future they imagine themselves combining music with other artistic activities, such as illustration or writing, as well as playing other roles in the independent music scenes, more linked to mediation and not so much to creation. Involvement in the music field tends to be seen as a form of experimentation and learning. And rather than something continuous and linear, it seems to be made of back-and-forth movements. It is also important to mention that it is in this career profile that we find a higher presence of women (32%), as well as greater awareness and problematization of gender differences in the music field and other artistic areas (Buscatto, 2018; Reddington, 2012).

Author musicians

The fourth career profile, which we have designated as 'author musicians', is the smallest (7%). The small size of this group is a significant and quite expressive result of the difficulties involved in building and maintaining careers in independent music scenes. This is the only career profile whose members live exclusively from the music they create for themselves.

They do not need to create music for other people or be involved in mediating activities. This implies a diversified set of strategies. First, recognizing that networking and the acquisition of social capital are crucial (Becker, 1982; Guerra, 2016; Reitsamer and Prokop, 2018), these interviewees focus intensively on networking and establish relationships in the music field. However, like the 'mediator musicians', the reduction of the size of musical projects (solo projects or projects with two or three people) was also a career-management option. It makes easier and cheaper to book bands and allowing salaries to be divided among fewer people. In line with data revealed by other investigations (Banks and Hesmondhalgh, 2009; McRobbie, 2016), this aspect reveals the influence and impact of neoliberal ideals and their logic of individualization on musicians' trajectories, potentially generating feelings of isolation. Another strategy often used by these actors is the planning and definition of a work methodology, as well as the maintenance of continuous musical activity and the realization of a concert circuit. A differentiating element of this career profile, which clearly reveals an authorial vision of the artistic work, is the use of copyrights [9], which enable them to generate income from their music, often an essential supplement in periods when income from other sources is scarce. The words of one of the interviewees show that a music career requires knowledge about these mechanisms:

> You must understand a minimum of collective management of copyrights: know what that is and how you can get the money that is yours. You must know how you can make your music profitable without selling records or concerts (publishing, placement,…). These are important sources of income. You must know how copyright works and what happens if your music is used without your permission.
>
> Male, 27 years old, BA, musician, Porto.

For most of these interviewees, music has a professional dimension. Consequently, and like the 'non-stop musicians', these actors manage the uncertainties associated with a professional trajectory in music through planning and dedication to work and the adoption of a perseverant posture. The trajectories of these actors are also marked by DIY, which translates into their desire to control the different phases of the processes of music creation, production, and dissemination. It is in this career profile where we find the actors with a more privileged family background in socioeconomic terms. If we consider that this is the only career profile in which musicians manage to live from the music they create for themselves, this seems to suggest that the safety net provided by a middle or upper-class origin acts as a crucial element in enhancing the maintenance of the musical careers of these actors, as is also evidenced by other authors (Bennett, 2018; Threadgold, 2018).

Mediators

We come to the last career profile, the mediators, which includes an extensive set of interviewees—25%. This is a heterogeneous group that is distinct from the others because it does not include musicians. These are social actors who play crucial roles in the Portuguese independent music scenes, acting as journalists/ music critics, radio broadcasters, promoters, managers, label heads and music venue owners and/or programmers. Because almost all live exclusively from their activity in the music field, they have a professional perception of music. The only exception is one person in charge of a record label, who has another job, his main

[9] Musicians in other career profiles also use copyrights, but this is less significant for them.

source of income. In this case, even if the publishing activity requires him to work a lot of time, it is a hobby, reflecting a strong passion for music. In all the other cases, the economic sustainability of their careers is entirely anchored in the musical sphere, often combining editorial activity with promotion or management. The professional trajectories in this career profile are also developed on a DIY basis. Except for the journalists, who mostly had higher professional education, in the other cases, learning was based on trial-and-error as their involvement in music grew. After the 'mediator musicians', this is the career profile where we find more women (24%), which suggests that a music career for women continues to pass essentially through the sphere of mediation. The following excerpt illustrates the trajectory of a woman, highlighting DIY as a way of learning the role played in the music scene. It also shows that over the years, the music stopped being a hobby and became her main occupation:

> I went to London to do my degree (engineering). I worked in this area, but from the beginning, I had a very close relationship with music. I saw a lot of concerts, I socialized a lot with people. The music industries fascinated me. One day I decided to start a record label with a friend. Later, a job offer came up in Portugal, which had nothing to do with music, and I accepted it. I worked as a management consultant, but soon I started working with bands again. After some time, I created an agency, left my other job, and began to dedicate myself 100% to music.
>
> Female, 40 years old, BA, entrepreneur in charge of a music agency, Lisbon.

In another dimension of this research, which is not the focus of this article, we applied Social Network Analysis to understand the structure of the relational networks that sustain the two music scenes, and we perceived the centrality of the people who belong to this career profile. They are catalyst figures who support and assure the maintenance of the scenes, acting as an important link in the cooperative network that Becker (1982) showed to be a feature of the art worlds.

Conclusion

Through a pioneering analysis in Portugal, this article augments the literature on the ways of working and the configurations DIY careers assume in independent music scenes. Based on a mixed-methods approach, it identifies the strategies and modes of action as well as the difficulties and tensions involved in these trajectories. It brings major contributions to the ongoing international discussion on DIY music practices and careers. The first is that it is the accumulation of roles that allows a wider range of interviewees to earn a living from music, albeit not always exclusively from their activity as musicians. Far from being a homogeneous and linear experience, having a career in the Portuguese independent music scenes is a multifaceted and complex process, where different possibilities and modalities of trajectories fit, as reflected in the diversity of the five career profiles of the typology we have identified.

This multiplicity and the non-linear character of these trajectories are intensified with situations such as the one experienced with the COVID-19 pandemic. In Portugal, it deepened and made more visible fragilities that had already been felt by cultural workers for a long time. This was felt particularly in the performing arts. The lockdowns have meant sharp income losses for musicians and other actors in the live music ecosystem. Support measures from the Portuguese government were scarce and did not always reach all actors involved in the

independent music scenes, which tend to benefit from less support when compared to other music genres. As a result, the combination of music with other professions became even more necessary for many of the protagonists of Lisbon and Porto's independent scenes. These actors had to reinvent themselves in the search for new strategies to deal with the challenges imposed by the pandemic. And in this process, digital tools and platforms have assumed a crucial place in music production and promotion (Green et al., 2023).

A second contribution is that, although a music career is associated with a wide diversity of possible strategies and trajectories, there is one common denominator: the DIY ethos and practices. It is a requirement for a career in the independent music scene. DIY practices were important to most actors from the beginning of their cultural activities to the present day. They manifested in different learnings such as singing and playing instruments; recording, producing, booking, and organizing concerts and tours; or producing contents for social media. In all these learning axes, we speak of informal learning processes and contexts characterized by trial-and-error and the sharing of information and skills based on belonging to creative-artistic communities and local music scenes (DIT), facilitated by digital technologies. Discursively, DIY does not fail to appear connoted with the will to affirm an alternative positioning to the dominant paradigms and ways of making, assuming an ideological character and one of resistance. But what prevails above all is its imminently pragmatic character. DIY appears as a necessity and as a strategy for survival in music.

Third, although there is greater awareness and more efforts to make music scenes truly equal spaces for men, women and gender minorities, women continue to develop careers mainly as 'mediators' and 'mediator musicians'. Music genres such as punk and independent/alternative music are associated with more inclusive attitudes and contexts and a disruptive posture towards the current system and its configurations. However, our research adds to the theoretical and empirical body that demonstrates that the 'cumulative disadvantage' (Acker, 2009 in Buscatto, 2018) that women face when trying to build their trajectories continues to be a reality in Portuguese independent music scenes.

The last implication of this study is to show that the family socioeconomic background and the social class of these actors continue to play a crucial role as an element that enhances the pursuit of musical careers. This is an argument that our typology proves, and it is especially evident in the 'author musicians' career profile. It is the only one in which musicians live exclusively from the music they create for themselves. It is also the one in which its members have a more privileged socioeconomic family background. If, when applied to music and music careers, DIY ethos and praxis might suggest that these careers, and their viability and sustainability, could become accessible to a broader set of social actors, our research shows that they are not a sufficient condition for this.

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CHAPTER 31

The Political Economy of Financially Successful Independent Hip-Hop Artists

Geoff Ostrove

Class, Race and Corporate Power 2, no. 1 (2014).

Abstract

From 2000 to 2010, America's music industry's annual revenue went from $4 billion to $2 billion. Much of this is attributed to the internet's ability to provide consumers with easy access to free music, and hip hop has been especially impacted by this trend. Utilizing document analysis and personal interviews, this study found that the success of independent artists has influenced the business strategies of major record companies. In response to a dramatic decrease in record sales, major labels have made more of an effort to sign their artists to 360 deals, which allow the labels to profit from every aspect of an artist's brand or identity. While some independent artists are the main beneficiary of the profits generated from their music and personal brand, they also reify the commodity-form capitalist system by attempting to turn their music and brand into a fetishized commodity and by turning their audience into a fetishized commodity.

Keywords

Hip Hop, Political Economy, Fetishism, Music Industry, Culture, Reification, Commodities

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Introduction

The internet has become the world's greatest tool for consumption. Many acts of consumption that previously occurred in a physical, face-to-face, human-to-human setting now take place within the internet's digital hyperreality. In response, the music industry must adjust its business strategies to keep up with an increasingly digital world and consumer behavior. This study explores the ways in which financially successful independent hip hop artists are able to maintain consistent income, and in what ways their business strategies have influenced the actions of major record labels.

Traditionally, most artists would need to receive cash advances from major record labels in order to be able to fund the recording and production of their music. After receiving the cash advance, however, the artist would no longer control the music. The label that issued the cash advance would then sell the artist's sound recordings and be the main financial beneficiary. Known as working "for hire," this was the traditional way in which artists were able to make a living and record companies were able to turn a profit.

Nowadays, instead of simply making money by selling an artist's music, record companies demand to control more than just the sound recordings. Most major labels now control all of the image and branding rights associated with the artist, which includes merchandising, sponsorships, and touring. Known as "expanded-rights deals," this is an emerging way in which recording artists are able to make a living and record companies are able to turn a profit.

Because of the internet, however, musicians who previously needed the capital and resources of major record labels can now create, record, produce, and distribute music completely independently. The internet has created easy access to resources that were not previously available to independent artists. On the other hand, the internet has also increased the ability of consumers to easily access free music. There are now many ways for consumers to listen and possess music without actually purchasing it. On top of the rising rates of illegal music piracy, there are now a growing number of legal internet sites that allow consumers to listen to music for free, such as Pandora, Groove Shark, YouTube, MySpace, and many others.

The aim of this project is to explore the strategies utilized by financially successful independent hip-hop artists in order to maintain consistent income in an age when consumers do not necessarily need to purchase music in order to listen and possess it. Specifically, this project explores how independent hip-hop artists make the majority of their money (whether it be by selling records, performing at live events, selling merchandise, etc.), and whether independent hip-hop artists are the ones taking home the majority of the money made from their art. In other words, while the "expanded-rights deal" model allows for the record company to be the main financial beneficiary of an artist's work, do independent artists break away from this paradigm by receiving the majority of the profits?

In addition, this paper explores whether or not major record labels have been impacted by the success of independent artists. With the decreasing need to turn to major record labels in order to record, produce, and distribute music, how have major record labels changed their business strategies in order to keep up with the cultural and societal changes that have resulted from technological advancements? How much do record labels still rely on record sales as a major source of revenue?

In other words, this paper answers three main research questions:

1. How do financially successful independent hip-hop artists generate the majority of their income?
2. How have major record labels adjusted their business strategies as a result of the financial success of these independent hip-hop artists?
3. Are these independent hip-hop artists the main beneficiaries of the revenues generated from their labor?

The Political Economy of Communication

Political economists of communication have sought to decenter the media of communication by investigating its economic, political, and other material constituents. At the heart of political economy is the notion of "viewing systems of communication as integral to fundamental economic, political, social, and cultural processes in society."[1] This includes considering those people who set the parameters and goals for media and information production and distribution, and for the introduction and developments of new communications and information technologies. In other words, political economists of communication analyze how power and control is produced and reproduced within the media industry.

Power and control is central to any understanding of modern society and "any adequate analysis of the distribution of power and of the process of legitimation must necessarily include an analysis of the mass media."[2] Political economists understand that power is located at different levels. It can be held within specific ownership structures, hierarchies and political alliances with media corporations, and, also, in access and reception.

Understanding the role of commodities is also central to the political economy of communication. Karl Marx noted that the value of a commodity reflects the value of the labor that has gone into producing it; but Dallas Smythe felt that when it came to communications, Marxist theory had a blind spot.[3] His question to Marx was: What is the commodity form of mass-produced, advertiser supported communications under monopoly capitalism? And his answer: audiences. In other words, Smythe realized that the mass media had turned the audience into a commodity. In fact, what many people would consider "leisure time" is really just the time when the audience is being sold to advertisers. This means the audience is really doing unpaid work. Therefore, the selling of audiences to advertisers not only serves as an essential marketing function, it also helps to reproduce labor power within society. It is not just "a question of the increasing control of the large media companies over a particular media sector or even several sectors, but also their increasing influence over the whole field of non-work time."[4]

This relates to the mode of production. The mode of production is "the way in which a society chooses to appropriate and allocate all of the productive resources and surpluses needed for and created by the process of production," and "capitalists create rules defending

[1] Vincent Mosco. *The Political Economy of Communication*. Sage, 2009, 66.

[2] Vincent Mosco. *The Political Economy of Communication*. Sage, 2009, 67.

[3] Dallas Smythe. "Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism." *Canadian Journal of Political and Society Theory*, 3, 1977, 1–28.

[4] Ibid.

unequal distribution determined by competition between capitalists and each individual's willingness to pay for goods and services."[5] In regards to commodification, the capitalist mode of production helps to separate conception from execution within the media industry. For instance, it is not uncommon for a commodity to begin within working-class culture, and then be transformed into a product and offered back to working class audiences.

Markets play a big part in political economy, as well. Meehan and Torre point out that in the media industry these "markets tend to be oligopolized and stratified, with the proverbial 'big boys' exerting the most influence over the market's shape and workings."[6] Therefore, the organizational structure of the economy, not the particular market, is the major force guiding production, distribution, and exchange of goods and services.

In the media industry, five major corporations basically run the show: The Walt Disney Company, News Corporation, Time Warner, CBS Corporation and Viacom. The myth is that they compete against each other. The truth is that the intertwining of these big corporations through joint ventures gives each participant an interest in the success of the specific venture but also an active concern for the health of its partner.

These corporations also integrate their products across different markets to increase profitability. Vertical integration involves the same company owning different aspects of the same product line, like a car manufacturer also owning a tire company or a record label owning a CD manufacturer. Horizontal integration involves moving to markets similar to one's original product.

For example, Warner Bros. was involved in distributing *Krush Groove*, a film released in 1985 that chronicles the success of Def Jam. For Def Jam, though, *Krush Groove* was more than a film. *Krush Groove* was an opportunity to showcase Def Jam's rising stars, help these young stars make some money, and advertise the label all at the same time. Def Jam artists, such as LL Cool J, the Beastie Boys, The Fat Boys, Kurtis Blow, and Run-DMC, made appearances in the film and contributed to the soundtrack. The film itself, which grossed $3 million in its first weekend, highlights the path that Russell Simmons and Rick Rubin took to make Def Jam one of the first successful independent hip-hop labels. *Krush Groove* serves as an important artifact in the history of hip-hop culture, as well as an excellent example of synergy.

The Fetishism of Commodities

Marx's *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* begins with an analysis of the basic component of the capitalist economy: the commodity. From this he explains how many of the contradictions within a capitalist society arise. In the case of commodity-form capitalism, the intrinsic quality of something no longer determines its value, only its base of exchange.

The nature of commodities, though, does not arise from the fact that people produce them. People in all societies produce useful goods, but not all these goods are commodities. A good becomes a commodity when the good becomes fetishized. Traditionally, the term "fetish" refers to the religious practice of attributing human characteristics to material objects. In

[5] Dean Colby. "New Media as a New Mode of Production?" In McKercher (Ed.), *Knowledge Workers in the Information Society*. 1997, 193.

[6] Eileen Meehan. "Markets in Theory and Markets in Television. In Wasko, Murdock, and Sousa (Eds.), *The Handbook of Political Economy of Communication*. Blackwell Publishing, 2001, 68.

the general sense, though, the concept of "fetishism" refers to people finding more value in a good other than just simply its physical production value.

In the music industry, the concept of "hype" is very similar to the notion of fetishism. Hype should be understood in three distinct ways: 1) as a result of material changes in the music industry over a period of time; 2) as a multifaceted discursive process that involves the creation, circulation, and debate of journalistic writing; and 3) as a rhetorical strategy employed by music artists to distance themselves from the aforementioned process.[7] In other words, financially successful musicians must create hype for themselves in the very same way that a commodity must be fetishized.

Sarah Thornton studied how self-conscious subcultures that are brought together by a particular niche media (such as music) can sometimes be recast as "movements" within popular cultures. In her analysis, she coined the notion of "subcultural capital" to refer to the distinctions made by subcultures to remain unique from "mainstream" society. This subcultural capital, however, can sometimes be used by mainstream society to generate financial wealth.[8]

Some scholars have pointed to the usefulness of the term "scenes" for describing this phenomenon, noting that the "sense of purpose articulated within a musical community normally depends on an affective link between two terms: contemporary musical practices, on the one hand, and the musical heritage which is seen to render this contemporary activity appropriate to a given context, on the other."[9] In other words, in a musical scene or subculture, there is a relationship between particular musical practices and a particular geographic space at a particular moment in time.

Other scholars highlight the notion of the "brand community" to refer to cultures such as hip hop. They define a brand community as a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand. Like other communities, it is marked by a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility. In short, subcultural branding is an important concept for understanding the evolution of hip hop culture. Because of its international success, however, hip hop can no longer be considered a subculture.

Instead, hip hop should be seen as a major part of contemporary mainstream popular culture. For example, Coca-Cola specifically targets hip-hop culture in their marketing campaigns. Sprite, a soft drink produced by Coca-Cola, since its inception, has always included hip hop in its marketing strategies. Sprite has recently even teamed up with the National Basketball Association (NBA) in a campaign that commoditizes rap music and other aspects of the hip-hop culture.

To Coca-Cola, Sprite's "Obey Your Thirst" slogan sends a clear message to corporate America about the financial viability of hip hop: "It's okay to work with this culture, Proctor & Gamble. It's okay, Ford Motor Company. It's okay, IBM. Because this great American brand aligned itself with hip-hop. And it's beating everybody."[10]

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[7] Devon Powers. "Bruce Springsteen, Rock Criticism, and the Music Business: Towards a Theory and History of Hype." *Popular Music & Society*, 34, 2011, 203–219.

[8] Sarah Thornton. *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*. 1995.

[9] Will Straw. "Communities and Scenes in Popular Music." In Gelder, K. and Thornton, S. (Eds.), *The Subcultures Reader*. Routledge, 1991, 494 .

[10] Dan Charnas. *The Big Payback: The History of the Business of Hip-Hop*. Penguin, 2010, 495.

Procedures for Conducting this Study

In his preface to *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Marx outlines political economy's method of analysis. To Marx, the purpose of political economy is to analyze the capitalist economy, not as the sum of individual acts of exchange, but as a complex system, dominated by laws of its own which are as powerful as the laws of nature.

Document analysis is a major methodological component of political economy. In fact, documentary investigation was the main research tool of many classical sociologists. For example, "Marx made extensive use of the reports of the factory inspectors, Weber utilized religious tracts and pamphlets, and Durkheim employed official statistics on suicide." [11]

One of the most important and widely read early research on power was *Who Rules America?*, which was originally written by G. William Domhoff in 1967. Domhoff suggests that the best strategy in conducting power structure research is to first create a network analysis. A network analysis traces all the people and organizations that make up the power structure, and then it figures out how they connect to and influence government. This is achieved by analyzing annual financial reports and studying the people who sit on boards of directors or serve as high-ranking executives. Then, Domhoff suggests conducting a content analysis, which is the term for the systematic study of the power structure's ideologies, policies, and plans, which are learned about through the careful study of documents such as the texts for speeches, policy statements by organizations, and drafts of legislation. [12]

Although classical sociologists utilized document analysis as a main research tool, they also recognized other qualitative methods as useful tools for analyzing society. Geertz once said that he agreed "with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun. I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning." [13]

Participant observation is a useful method because it allows a phenomenon to be perceived from a normal everyday setting. This method of analysis is great for researchers who are analyzing live events (such as concerts) and other phenomena that take place in an open and public setting. This method allows the researcher to observe a phenomenon without dramatically affecting it.

Using a mix of methods within a research project allows for a greater level of comparison and accuracy. This study utilizes political economic methods like document analysis, as well as qualitative methods such as personal interviews, e-mailed questionnaires, and participant observation.

To conduct this study, the researcher began by analyzing important financial documents pertaining to the Big 4 record companies. These documents included corporate financial reports, transcripts of legislative hearings, and court records. The researcher also interviewed individuals who have experience working within the music industry. Rappers, DJs, promoters, publicists, managers, and executives were all interviewed. A full list of the individuals interviewed can be found in the appendix.

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[11] John Scott. *A Matter of Record: Documentary Sources in Social Research*. Polity Press, 1990.

[12] William Domhoff. "Who Rules America?" http://sociology.ucsc.edu/whorulesamerica/.2006.

[13] Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. 1973, 5.

Potential interview participants were contacted via email. Some interviews were conducted in person, some interviews were conducted on the phone, and some interviewees simply answered a questionnaire and emailed it back to the researcher. The researcher also attended live music events where the interviewees were performing in order to observe the experience of being a successful independent hip-hop artists and to analyze the behaviors of consumers attending the concerts and purchasing merchandise.

Political economists are not content merely to criticize the system. Instead they take up the tools of empirical social science and use them to document the domination of big corporations and the upper class over American political life and to analyze the mechanisms by which that domination is maintained. By analyzing documents and incorporating the notion of praxis into its ideology, political economy analyzes how power is produced and reproduced within specific markets and industries, and reveals where and how active resistance is possible.

The purpose of the following section is to highlight trends within the mainstream music industry and to gain an understanding of how financially successful independent hip hop artists are influencing the business strategies of major record labels. This section also reveals the ways in which major record labels are currently able to profit from the success of independent artists.

The Big 4, the RIAA, and the Rise of Expanded-Rights Deals

As internet use has risen in the 21st century, so has the rates of music piracy. Major record companies, as well as the federal government, have struggled to figure out how to handle this trend. On July 19, 2000, the Congressional Committee on International Relations held a House hearing entitled, "Costs of Internet Piracy for the Music and Software Industries." This meeting was held by the Subcommittee on International Economic Policy and Trade in order to discuss the rising rates of internet piracy and how specific industries, such as the music and computer software, were being dramatically affected by this new trend. The hearing referenced research from the International Intellectual Property Alliance, which estimated the total losses attributed to these so-called content industries to be over $8.5 billion in 1999. [14]

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Representative from Florida and the head of this Subcommittee, suggested that the music industry itself might be to blame for this trend. She argued:

> It has been estimated that a compact disk costs as little as 60 cents to manufacture, and depending on where you live, a new CD will cost you around $15. When CDs were first introduced in the early 1980s, manufacturing costs represented $3 to $5 per CD and retailed for $15 to $20. As the manufacturing price per CD has fallen, there has not been a parallel drop in the retail price. When compared to the prices offered for music and software by Internet counterfeiters, there can be little doubt as to why many ordinarily law abiding citizens are swayed into breaking the law. This is not an excuse or a justification for on-line piracy, but merely one example of the need to look at all sides when approaching a problem as insidious as piracy. [15]

[14] US Congress. House Hearing 106–174: Costs of Internet Piracy for the Music and Software Industries. Subcommittee on International Economic Policy and Trade. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office. (2000, July 9).

[15] Ibid

Ros-Lehtinen's sympathy towards those who pirate music, though, was not shared by her congressional colleagues. This House hearing represents a major turning point in the way in which the United States government responded to music piracy. From that point on, the government made efforts to make it harder for consumers to have free access to music.

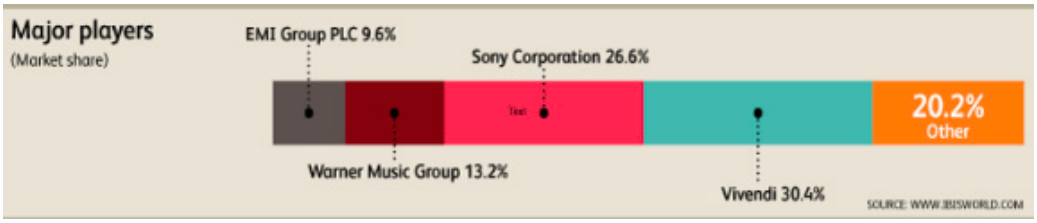
Much of this effort has been inspired by the effective lobbying strategies of the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), which according to its own website is:

> …the trade organization that supports and promotes the creative and financial vitality of the major music companies. Its members are the music labels that comprise the most vibrant record industry in the world. RIAA members create, manufacture and/or distribute approximately 85% of all legitimate recorded music produced and sold in the United States. In support of this mission, the RIAA works to protect the intellectual property and First Amendment rights of artists and music labels; conduct consumer, industry and technical research; and monitor and review state and federal laws, regulations and policies. [16]

In other words, the RIAA is an organization that consists of most of the major record labels in America. Its main focus is to preserve the financial productivity of the music record industry by influencing policies and legislation at a federal level. Based on a study conducted by the Institute for Policy Innovation, the RIAA claims that music piracy results in more than 70,000 lost jobs and $2 billion in lost wages to American workers every single year. [17]

Universal Music Group (Vivendi), Sony Music Entertainment, EMI Group, and Warner Music Group were known as the "Big 4" in the music industry. These companies, along with their many subsidiaries, accounted for almost 80% of the revenue generated within the music industry in 2011. [18] 2011 total market share can be seen below:

Figure 1. 2011 Music Industry Market Share



(IBIS World 2012)

Between 2000 and 2008, the RIAA brought lawsuits to over 35,000 people for music piracy. The RIAA credited the lawsuit campaign with raising awareness of piracy and keeping the number of illegal file-sharers in check while the legal market for digital music took off. However, the RIAA's decision to stop pursuing legal action against those pirating music coincided with an important shift in the music industry.

2008 was the first year that a record label reported that digital sales made up the majority of its revenue. Atlantic Records, a subsidiary of Warner Music Group, reported that digital

[16] RIAA (2012). riaa.com

[17] Ibid

[18] IBIS World. 2012. Clients. IBISworld.com.

sales represented 51% of its fourth quarter revenue that year. This moment represents a shifting trend in the music industry.

Because of contemporary changes in technology, musicians now realize they can record, produce, and distribute their music independently. This also means they can receive the majority of the revenue generated from their music. Therefore, fewer artists need to sign record contracts.

In response, major record labels began to focus more on finding artists who would be interested in signing an "expanded-rights deal," a strategy pioneered by Warner Music Group. The results of this effort are obvious when analyzing Warner Music Group's annual reports. In 2008, Warner Music Group had almost one-third of its artists signed to expanded-right deals. That same year, at the Web 2.0 Summit, WMG CEO Edgar Bronfman told the audience that his label now requires all new artists to sign 360-deals. By 2010, over half of Warner Music Group's artists were signed to expanded-rights deals.

Major record companies, like Warner, have become determined to sign their artists to expanded-rights deals because, despite the fact that digital sales are now greater than physical music sales, digital sales do not generate as much income. Therefore, profits must be made through live events and merchandise. Expanded-rights deals allow record labels to potentially profit without having to focus on album sales as the main source of revenue. Digital album distribution, however, has the potential to generate higher profits than physical sales because the production and distribution costs of physical albums are much higher than digital production and distribution.

For example, in November of 2011, Pittsburgh-based rapper Mac Miller's *Blue Slide Park* debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 chart, selling 144,487 copies according to Nielsen SoundScan. This marks the first time that an independently released debut album hit No.1 on the charts since Tha Dogg Pound's *Dogg Food* was released in 1995. In fact, SoundScan shows that 76% of his total 144,487 sales came through online retailers. [19]

Mac Miller's success, however, did not come over night. Between 2007 and 2010, he released four EPs for free online. He also toured constantly. So, by the time he released his first LP in 2011, he had generated a tremendous amount of publicity for his music and for his personal brand. When *Blue Side Park* debuted on the album sales charts at number one, it was a watershed moment for his Pittsburgh-based record label, Rostrum; his San Francisco-based digital distribution and marketing partner, Ingrooves; and his physical distribution partner, Fontana, which is the independent artists' sales and marketing division of Universal Music Group.

"This is a big moment for the independent music community," said Dave Zierler, EVP & General Manager of Ingrooves. "Rostrum and Mac are proof that a digitally-focused independent effort works in today's dynamic music marketplace, by engaging fans directly and maximizing availability to all consumers via our global online retail network." [20]

With more than a million Twitter followers, and videos on YouTube approaching a total of nearly 100 million views, Rostrum Records helped Mac build a huge fan base online, which made a digital partnership with Ingrooves even more logical. Mac Miller's use of the internet to promote his music and his personal brand is a major component of his financial success

[19] Ingrooves. 2012. http://www.ingrooves.com/blog/?p=4953.

[20] Ibid

as an independent artist. This is evident when considering that over 76% of his album sales were digitally distributed. [21]

Increasing use of internet technology is substantially affecting the industry's revenue earning capability, as freely available music online (whether legally or not) is devaluing the rights held to music by publishing companies and record labels. As more and more countries establish intellectual property rights protections and crackdown on websites that allow illegal file sharing, record labels' profits from international sales improve. For example, Sweden strengthened the legal rights of music labels in 2009 and, according to the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI), music revenues were up 10% overall, driven by a 98.6% increase in digital sales. [22]

This has not been the trend in most of the world, however. EMI Group, a UK-based music company, has, like its competitors, experienced difficulties as a result of the changing music and media environment. Although it still is the fourth largest record company in the world, the company's total revenue has fallen at an average rate of 6.1% per year over the five years to 2011. [23]

Music publishing revenue has risen at an estimated rate of 2.4% per year, as EMI managed to derive considerable revenue from existing licensing agreements, whereas revenue in music production and sales requires new music to be produced and purchased, and this is where the industry is experiencing difficulties. Over the past three years, licensing and publishing has gone from representing less than 20% of revenue to more than 30%, a clear indication of the state of the industry at large. [24]

EMI's success in the publishing sector, however, was not enough to save the struggling label from needing to sell off many of its assets to the other three major record companies. In February of 2011, Citigroup took a big step toward exiting from its disastrous involvement in EMI when it assumed control of the major from British private-equity firm Terra Firma, paving the way for EMI's sale. The auction of EMI eventually culminated in November of 2011 with a Sony-led consortium agreeing to buy EMI Music Publishing and Universal Music Group signing a definitive agreement to buy EMI's recorded-music operation.

Music publishers work for musicians, songwriters and composers. They are responsible for licensing the intellectual property of their clients and ensuring that royalties are collected. Royalties are earned each time a song is downloaded on iTunes, sold on a CD, reproduced by another artist, or played on the radio, a television show, a movie or other media. Increasing independence of artists is another growing concern for the industry. As artists and bands grow more aware of the capacity of the internet to distribute their music, the need for artists, even small ones, to directly license intellectual property to record companies diminishes.

The chart below highlights the percentage of the market share that subsidiaries of the "Big 4" hold within the music publishing industry in 2011. As a result of EMI's sale, these figures look dramatically different in 2012, with Sony being an even bigger part of the publishing industry.

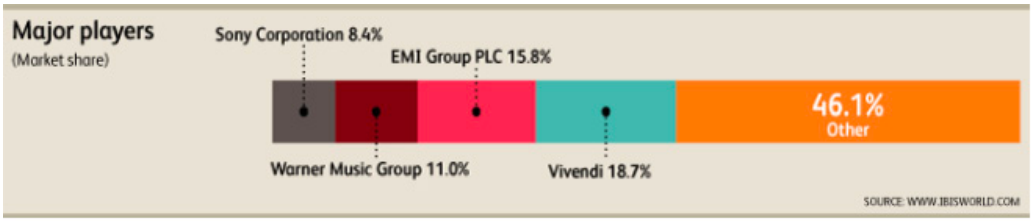
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[21] Ibid

[22] IBIS World. 2012. Clients. IBISworld.com.

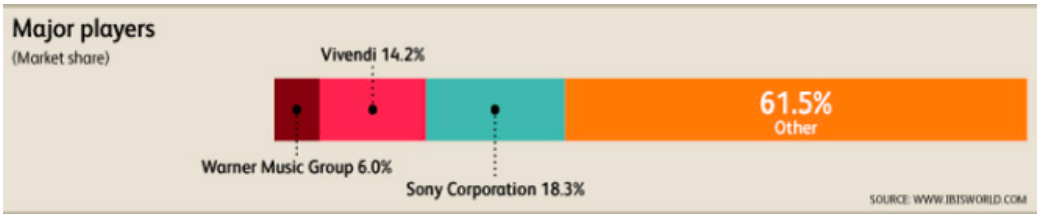
[23] Ibid

[24] Ibid



(IBIS World 2012)

Figure 2. 2011 Music Publishing Share



(IBIS World 2013)

Figure 3. 2012 Music Publishing Share

The advent of digital transfer of music online presents positive and negative possibilities for the music publishing industry. On one hand, overall demand for music may actually increase, despite the revenue from CD and online sales combined falling over recent years, as more fans access music by artists they were previously unaware of, creating greater opportunities and possibly increasing the value of assets held by the industry. However, as fewer consumers purchase their music legitimately, more direct lines of revenue, such as releasing songs for compilations and radio, means revenue could fall. Also, it becomes more difficult to identify which music is popular as illegal downloads are not publicized, hence discouraging companies from investing too heavily in music as a promotional tool.

One strategy the music industry has employed in this attempt to mitigate the negative economic effects of free music is to create an organization that attempts to collect royalties on behalf of artists whose music is being played and downloaded digitally. This institution, known as Sound Exchange, is a non-profit performance rights organization that collects statutory royalties from satellite radio (such as SIRIUS XM), internet radio, cable TV music channels and similar platforms for downloading and streaming sound recordings. On top of that, the "Copyright Royalty Board, which is appointed by The U.S. Library of Congress, has entrusted Sound Exchange as the sole entity in the United States to collect and distribute these digital performance royalties on behalf of featured recording artists, master rights owners (like record labels), and independent artists who record and own their masters."[25]

In short, analyzing documents, such as financial records, judicial reports, and transcripts of legislative hearings, reveals a trend of 360-deals becoming more popular amongst the Big 4, now the Big 3. They have been forced to utilize this strategy within recent years because contemporary changes in technology allow consumers to easily access music for free via the internet. On top of that, artists can now record and distribute music without the resources of a major label. Therefore, why would an artist sign with a major record label in the 21st Century?

[25] SoundExchange. 2012. soundexchange.com.

The next section discusses the findings from interviews conducted by the researcher. The purpose of these interviews was to gauge exactly how much independent hip-hop artists value controlling their image, branding, sounds recordings, and publishing copyrights. These interviews also served the purpose of discovering whether independent hip hop artists actually are the main financial beneficiaries of the revenues generated from their creative labor. These interviews were either conducted in person, over the phone, or via email. A full list of the interviewees can be found in the appendix.

"There Is No Industry for Dreams"

Marv Ellis is an Oregon-based rapper who has definitely noticed the shift in the way artists and major record labels interact. He says:

> Basically, when I first started rapping like 10 years ago, I was like, "I wanna get signed! I wanna get signed!" And now I'm like, "I don't wanna get signed! I don't wanna get signed!" Because basically, when it came to music, you could sell it back in the day. And now, people don't buy it. So what happens when you don't need to buy it and when there's a mass influx of people who can make the music in house and put it online, and all of a sudden their promotional capabilities are the same as a major artist, it puts pressure on the major record labels. So those labels started tying up musicians in LA and changing their deals to 360 deals so they could be making money off of marketing and promotion. So what happens is that the music really becomes a calling card to YOU. So now you're selling YOU. Your brand is YOU. [26]

According to Sony Records' Vice President of Sales, Scott Van Horn, there has definitely been a dramatic shift in how music companies sell & market music due increased access to free music:

> The US music industry revenue has been halved in the last 10 years—from $4B to $2B (2000–2010). Much of this has been attributed to the easy accessibility of 'free' downloads through a myriad of illegitimate sites, primarily in eastern European/Asian countries whose lax intellectual property laws allow them to flourish. [27]

Del the Funky Homosapien is an Oakland, California-based hip-hop artist who has witnessed this shift from the perspective of an independent artist, as well as from the perspective of an artist signed with a major record deal. In the early 1990s, Del released two albums for Elektra Records, a subsidiary of Warner Music Group. His relationship with Elektra, however, soon went sour. In 1997, about a month before the release of his third album, Del received a letter from Elektra stating that his contract had been terminated.

Elektra Records was experiencing the same financial hardships that other labels were experiencing at that time as a result of changing industry. In 2004, Warner decided to merge the label with another subsidiary, Atlantic Records. This merger, however, caused even more cut backs. According to a former Electra Vice President of Video Production, Diane Van Horn:

> Elektra was a stand-alone label (meaning it had its own promotion/sales/marketing/publicity staff) within the Warner Music Group. In 2004, Edgar Bronfman Jr. and other investors purchased WMG. They merged Elektra and Atlantic records together to cut expenses. Elektra lost about 60–70% of

[26] Marv Ellis. Interview conducted in Eugene, Or, on September 24, 2011.

[27] Scott Van Horn. Email questionnaire answered on February 12, 2012.

> its staff. The remaining employees were folded into Atlantic Records and began working with their staff and artists. [28]

Since leaving Elektra, Del has been a major part of the Hieroglyphics, one of the most successful independent hip hop groups of all time. Del recalls the financial problems that Elektra was having in the late 1990s:

> They weren't really making money any more. They wanted to keep me; but I was just being too demanding. They would ask me things like, "Would you work with a Premier? Would you work with a Pete Rock?" And I was like, "I mean yeah I'll work with them 'cause I like their music. But why should I? I mean I'm doing just what they're doing." And I know in their minds they were thinking, "No you aren't. You ain't making no money." [29]

The Hieroglyphics, which consists of seven rappers, a DJ, and a producer, is a LLC where all members are equal owners. They also release their music through their own label. The label, known as Hieroglyphics Imperium Recordings, was created by the collective in 1995 in order to publish and market the group's, and individual members', releases, as well as releases from other affiliated artist's that major labels would deem not commercially successful enough for mass distribution.

The Living Legends is another California hip-hop collective with a similar business plan as the Hieroglyphics. Consisting of eight rappers, the Living Legends is also an equal member LLC that also releases their music through their own label, which they call Legendary Music. Eamon Mulligan, the label's manager, believes that even in the case of independent hip-hop music there is "still definitely a case of capital resources, whether financial or human, affecting the amount of success of an artist and/or album-success being defined as units sold and monetary gains." [30]

To Mulligan, the internet has been a great tool for independent artists who are trying to compete with more popular mainstream entertainers:

> The internet has democratized the music industry and allowed people from the mainstream to the underground to play on the same level as each other… Sites such as YouTube are crucial because it is essentially today's MTV, but it is completely customizable at the click of a button and you can go from watching a Beyonce video to a Living Legends video. [31]

Mulligan also understands, however, that the music industry is a business. It doesn't matter whether the artist is mainstream or underground. He points out that a "truly independent artist though, with no label, at the end of the day would still like to be able to sustain themselves purely from their art. In a time where record sales are declining, the revenue streams for artists are becoming more and more sparse. One great way that an artist can earn revenue is from licensing their songs for movies, television, and video games." [32]

When it comes to licensing, though, it makes a big difference whether the artist is independent or signed to a record deal. If artists are independent, they receive the majority of the royalties for licensing the song; however, if artists have contracts such as expanded-rights

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[28] Diane Van Horn. Email questionnaire answered on February 12, 2012.

[29] Del. Interview conducted in Portland, Or, on August 7, 2011.

[30] Eamon Mulligan. Email questionnaire answered on August 12, 2011.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid

deals, they might not receive any of the licensing profits. That is why Eligh, a member of the Living Legends, notes that although the business tactics are similar for all artists, independent artists maintain more control over their art.

For example, when it comes to promoting and putting on a live concert, he says that, although he's never been in the mainstream, all of the tactics for putting on a show are basically the same:

> You've got the promoter, you got the club itself, you got the artists, you got probably the managers of the artists, there's a bunch of people in play. But in the underground, you know, we book our own shows sometimes. Sometimes it's just us and the promoter and that's it. So in the underground, the power lies with the artist. [33]

Rhymesayers Entertainment is another independent hip-hop label that allows artists to maintain control over their own music, brand, and image. It was founded in 1995 by Atmosphere, a hip-hop duo consisting of Slug, the group's MC, and Ant, the group's DJ/producer. In 1999, the label became vertically integrated when it opened its own record store called Fifth Element, which is located with the label in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In March of 2007, Rhymesayers ditched its former distributor, Navarre Corp., and now has its catalog distributed by Alternative Distribution Alliance (ADA), WMG's "indie" distributor. Later that year, Rhymesayers Entertainment first began to distribute their music digitally. [34]

Some independent artists have even begun to throw their own live music festivals. Murs, a member of the Living Legends, has been instrumental in producing the Paid Dues festival, a live independent hip hop event that brings together some of the most popular and successful artists. On March 11th, 2006, the first Paid Dues festival sold out, with over 5,000 concert-goers packing the Shrine Expo Center in Los Angeles.

Following the success of the next Paid Dues show in 2007, Murs announced that the festival would begin touring with Guerrilla Union's Rock the Bells Festival, a much larger live music event. Formed in 1998 by Chang Weisberg, Guerilla Union began as a concert promotion company, but it has since evolved into much more. According to acclaimed DJ and producer 9th Wonder, these festivals are essential to the contemporary hip-hop culture. He says:

> I think it's beautiful man. I think what Murs and Chang are doing with Guerilla Union is something that we need. I mean we need it. I think it's dope. I love it. I love it. It's one of the only ways today that artists can get together and just sit and talk and see people we haven't seen in a long time and things like that. You know, we don't get to do that as much as we should. I think Murs and Chang are doing something that's needed. Without Paid Dues, without Rock the Bells, hip hop would be missing something. [35]

Despite the financial success of these festivals, though, they have been highly criticized for utilizing corporate sponsorship, such as Coca Cola. Sunspot Jonz, another Living Legend, is offended by this criticism of Murs. He says:

> Any one hating on Murs… fuck them. The whole point of this was to not go to work for someone who has no care of what you're about. They only see you as workers, as employees. Create your own moment for your life. That is what Murs did. He created his own moment for his own life. That is so

[33] Eligh. Interview conducted in Santa Cruz, Ca, on July 14, 2011.

[34] Kevin Beacham. Phone interview conducted on January 21, 2012.

[35] 9th Wonder. Phone Interview Conducted on September 12, 2011.

> much more important than you will ever realize. And you can say, 'Yo, you sold out for this, or you sold out for that.' I don't know what that even means. You didn't even know who I was before you were telling me I was selling out. My whole thing is this: There is no loyalty; there is no industry for dreams. There is no loyalty; there is no industry for dreams. There is no loyalty; there is no industry for dreams. Create your own moment. [36]

James Dunn, who does public relations work for such hip hop artists as Murs and the RZA, also agrees that working with major corporations can sometimes be a benefit to artists who are mainly independent. [37] For instance, in 2008, Murs released an album on Warner Bros. Records. While the record ultimately did not lead to the financial success that both he and the label expected, it sold over twelve thousand albums in the first week. It entered the sales charts at #43, and made the release Warner Brothers' best hip-hop showing of the year. It also allowed Murs to receive massive amounts of marketing and advertising for his album and his brand that he would have otherwise not received. In other words, working with a major label on a project or two can allow independent artists to reach a wider demographic of music consumers.

Spose is a hip-hop artist who used his successful relationship with a major record label to jump start his own independent music career.

> I signed a single deal with Universal Republic Records in 2010, for them to promote my song 'I'm Awesome,'" explains Spose. "The deal basically gave them a guaranteed hit record (as it already had become before they signed me) and gave me $35,000 with potential for more should Universal decide it would be to their financial benefit." [38]

Spose learned from his experiences interacting with Universal, and started PDank Entertainment:

> At a show for any PDank artist, the artist collects somewhere between 50% and 100% of the profits. I've played enough shiesty, terrible shows to know how to keep this percentage closer to 100% than 50%. Some venues and promoters, however, will take 50% right away before the artist sees a penny. [39]

The majority of money made by PDank artists comes from live shows. According to Spose, subsequently acts like the Educated Advocates, which contains three members instead of one, like Cam Groves or Spose, make less money at live shows than other artists:

> I think as tour-heavy artists like Wiz Khalifa have shown, a musician's money is made on the road. Basically, as label owner, I take 10% of the profits after recoupment. This is inconsistent with the industry because the big record labels, and even midsize ones, take between 75% and 90% of the profits from the artist. My deal with Universal afforded me just 16% of my sales after recoupment. [40]

RA Scion, from the Seattle, Washington-based duo Common Market, agrees with Spose's business tactics:

> Independence means you don't rely on others to take care of those tasks, which, in turn, means that your slice of the pie is larger. On the other hand, it means the pie itself is smaller, so there are inher-

[36] Sunspot Jonz. Interview conducted in Eugene, Or, on September 17, 2011.

[37] James Dunn. Interview conducted in Los Angeles, Ca, on November 13, 2011.

[38] Spose. Email questionnaire answered on August 31, 2011.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

> ent benefits and drawbacks. When Common Market had an agent and a management company, we got much larger guarantees and everybody got a little piece. These days, I do all the booking and management myself; the payoff is modest but it's all mine. If the point of the question is to establish whether or not it's more lucrative to be an independent artist then there's no definitive answer. U2 grossed $130M in 2011. I don't know about you, but I'd be hella happy with just 10% of that. [41]

Erik Abel is the producer for a Portland, Oregon-based independent hip hop group called Animal Farm. In his view:

> Hip hop is absolutely a microcosm of the world and the practice of capitalism. The major players in the music industry are the people with money, who have the capital to put hundreds of thousands of dollars into hiring publicists, radio promoters, video promoters, placing advertisements, etc. The underground community, however, needs to be more creative, utilizing guerilla marketing tactics and creating higher quality music for the most part. Even within the underground though, YouTube views, press, free music download counts, and twitter fans are all accumulated with the hopes it will lead to additional album sales or interest from sponsors or people with deeper pockets within the music business. [42]

In short, many artists remain independent because it is more financially profitable to do so, not because they are adhering to any sort of moral or ethical code. Even artists such as Del, who has had tremendous success as an independent artist, wouldn't rule out the possibility of signing with a record label if the right situation would come along. The main reason most artists remain independent is because they want to control their personal brand. Instead of having some record company commoditize their brand, they would rather commoditize it themselves and be the main beneficiaries of the profits generated from their labor.

The Fetishism of Independent Hip Hop

In order to be a financially successful independent hip-hop artist in the 21st century, artists must create hype for their music and personal identity in order to convince consumers to make the seemingly irrational choice of purchasing music that is, most likely, readily available to them for free. This means that a major component of being a financially successful musician is generating a fetish for one's music and identity. In other words, in order to allow independent hip-hop artists to be financially successful, an artist's music and brand must become a fetishized commodity.

Mac Miller's success can certainly be attributed to his ability to create a fetish for his music and personal brand. After years of incessant touring and releasing his music for free, he had created so much hype for his products that when he finally released a full-length album music consumers bought his albums in droves. He received thousands of album sales despite already having a reputation for allowing his music to be freely distributed throughout the internet.

Independent hip hop itself, however, is also becoming a fetishized commodity. This is evident when looking at the rising trend of conglomeration between major record labels and independents. For instance, most of the independent artists and record labels analyzed in this study are somehow connected to one of the "Big 3" major record companies: Rhymesayers Entertainment signed a promotion, marketing, and distribution deal with Warner Music

[41] RA Scion. Interview Questionnaire answered on January 10, 2012.

[42] Erik Abel. Email Questionnaire answered on August 23, 2011.

Group's Independent Label Group; Rostrum has a physical distribution partnership with Fontana, the independent artists' sales and marketing division of Universal Music Group; Murs recorded an album for Warner Bros. Records; and Spose got started by taking a deal from Universal Republic Records.

Contemporary hip-hop artists don't rely on album sales any more as a main outlet for financial success. According to DJ/producer Nima Fadavi, however, just because a song is obtained for free doesn't necessarily mean that the song no longer has any value. Instead, as Marv Ellis pointed out, the recorded music is really a "business card" that gets music consumers to pay attention to their personal brand and identity. Therefore, if recorded music is no longer a viable option for gaining profits, independent hip-hop artists need consumers to attend live events and purchase merchandise in order to be financially successful.

In terms of live events, the labor of independent artists is commoditized less than the labor of artists who are signed to expanded-rights deals because independent artists receive the majority of the profits made from the show, as opposed to those artists with expanded-rights deals whose label makes the majority of the profits gained from the event. Even in the case of festivals such as Rock the Bells or Paid Dues, where there is corporate sponsorship such as Coca-Cola, the artists, not the sponsors or promoters, take home the majority of the profits. Therefore, although there is corporate sponsorship, festivals such as Paid Dues and Rock the Bells represent a resistance to the dominant means of production because they allow the artists to be the main financial beneficiaries of their labor.

In other words, while independent hip hop artists must work to create a fetish for their records, live events, and merchandise, they attempt to resist the dominant means of production by not having their labor commodified. However, major corporations such as Coca-Cola and the music industry's "Big 3," have figured out how to profit from the publishing and distribution of recorded independent hip-hop music, as well as live events and merchandise. On top of that, independent hip-hop artists still rely on exchange-value, not use-value, in order to be financially successful. Therefore, independent hip hop itself has become a fetishized commodity.

The Internet, Free Music, and Subcultural Branding

The internet has undoubtedly played a major role in the way the business structure of the music industry has shifted over the past couple of decades. Major recording labels, as well as independent hip-hop artists, can no longer rely on album sales as a consistent source of revenue. Except for the extreme cases, such as artists like Mac Miller, music consumers are no longer purchasing music at high enough rates in order to rely on record sales as an outlet for financial success.

The increasing independence of artists is another growing concern for the industry. As artists grow more aware of the capacity of the internet to distribute their music, the need for artists to have their intellectual property licensed by record companies diminishes. In response, major record labels have sought out more expanded—rights deals in order to profit from every aspect of the artist's brand and identity.

As RA Scion pointed out, artists and groups such as U2 only receive about 10 % of the revenue generated from their music and products. Yet, their music and products bring in millions of dollars every year; so, they make significantly more money than most independent

hip-hop artists. Therefore, the central question is: Do you want a lot of a little or a little of a lot? Artists such as Immortal Technique, Del, and 9th Wonder, as well critical philosophers and political economists such as Marx and Engels, would argue that it is better to receive the majority of the profits which come from one's labor, as opposed to allowing one's own labor to become a commodity.

In some ways, however, even artists that are completely independent still have their labor commoditized. For example, the venue that hosts the show needs the artists' labor in order to make money. That also goes for the show promoters, artist managers, and companies involved in making the merchandise. Therefore, independent hip hop itself has become a fetishized commodity.

Independent hip-hop artists must rely on performing at live events and selling merchandise in order to be financially successful. That means they need to create a fetish for their own personal brand, as well as for the merchandise they are selling. In other words, an artist's albums, live events, and merchandise all need to become fetishized commodities in order for the artist to be financially successful.

In that sense, independent hip-hop artists offer no resistance to the dominant means of production. They are still participating in the reification of the commodity-form capitalist system. Even artists, such as Immortal Technique, who dialectically critique the dominant means of production, are still guilty of contributing to the creation of what makes this capitalist system exist: fetishized commodities.

There are many examples of subcultures being coopted by corporate brands. The independent hip-hop industry certainly does not escape this distinction. Companies, such as Coca-Cola, have begun to invest in hip hop shows and festivals; Smirnoff sponsors a show on Viacom-owned BET (Black Entertainment Television) that's centered on a DJ competition; and most independent labels need to utilize publishing and distribution outlets associated with the "Big 3."

Therefore, independent hip hop is also guilty of turning its consumers into a commodity. Major corporations that have realized the widespread popularity of hip-hop music and products make investments that allow them to profit from the commodification of the culture. These corporations use subcultures as a way to market their brand to a particular demographic. In other words, by allowing corporations such as Viacom, Smirnoff, Coca-Cola, and others to fund events, to invest in merchandise, and to profit from the labor of the artists, independent hip hop contributes to the creation of the audience commodity.

This promotes the dominant mode of production. As noted earlier, the mode of production is "the way in which a society chooses to appropriate and allocate all of the productive resources and surpluses needed for and created by the process of production;" and it should be noted that "capitalists create rules defending unequal distribution determined by competition between capitalists and each individual's willingness to pay for goods and services."[43] In regards to commodification, the capitalist mode of production helps to separate conception from execution within the media industry. For instance, it is not uncommon for the conception of a commodity to begin within working-class culture, and then be transformed into a product and offered back to working class audiences.

[43] Dean Colby. New media as a new mode of production? In McKercher (Ed.), *Knowledge workers in the information society*. 1997, 193.

This is certainly the case for hip-hop music created by artists who are signed to major record labels. Those major corporations invest in artists in order to profit from a specific culture. In terms of hip hop, major record labels look for artists who are consistent with the image of hip hop that they deem to be profitable. The artists then release music that is consistent with that image.

Independent hip-hop artists, however, are not guilty of contributing to this trend. Although they still reify the commodity-form capitalist system by creating a fetish for their personal brand and turning their consumers into a commodity, independent artists make music that is still authentic and genuine. Their music isn't influenced by the opinion of a major record executive.

Therefore, while there are plenty of similarities between being signed to a major record label and being an independent artist, there are also some very important distinctions. For example, independent artists take home the majority of the profits generated from their music, while record companies are the main financial beneficiaries of the profits generated from artists signed to their label. On the other hand, major and independent artists both rely on turning their music, merchandise, personal brand, as well as the hip-hop culture itself, into a fetishized commodity.

Independent artists are also guilty of turning their fan base into a commodity. Most independent artists and labels rely on subsidiaries of the "Big 3" for publishing and distribution. With the dramatic decrease in album sales, major corporations are given more opportunities to invest in the marketing, advertising, and promotion of independent hip-hop artists, labels, and events as independent artists are forced to utilize touring and selling merchandise as their main way of generating profit.

In many ways, however, these new trends within the music industry are empowering for independent artists. They are able to personally control the entire process of recording, distributing, and advertising their music. Independent artists have had so much success, in fact, that major record labels are being forced to change their business strategies in order to keep up with a dynamic market that is being greatly influenced by contemporary changes in culture and technology.

Although this study fills a needed void in the existing literature pertaining to independent hip-hop artists, there are still many more opportunities for research. This article is hindered by the researcher's limited access to potential interviewees and the financial records of independent artists. Yet, this study represents a significant contribution to the study of hip hop.

No other studies have focused specifically on how the success of independent artists is a major influence on the business strategies of major record labels. There are also no other studies that compare the ways in which independent artists commoditize their own brand and the ways in which a record company commoditizes an artist's brand. This study does just that.

This study reveals that independent artists make the majority of their money through touring and selling merchandise. Like the rest of the music industry, hip-hop music has experienced a dramatic decrease in album sales, making physical distribution of recorded music and outdated strategy for making money. This has had a major impact on the major record labels. Noticing the success of independent artists who focus specifically on touring and selling merchandise, major record labels have made a concerted effort to sign more of their artists to 360-deals in order to profit from every aspect of their artists' brands and identities.

While most independent artists attempt to be the main beneficiary of the revenues generated from their labor, not all of them actually are. The Big 3, through their many subsidiaries, dominate the music publishing industry. So much so, that it is difficult to release any recorded music without using a subsidiary of the Big 3. Therefore, many artists now release music for free and focus only on touring and selling merchandise.

Even in the case of exceptions, such as Mac Miller, where independent artists are able to profit from their album sales, free online distribution plays a major role in promoting their music and creating a fetish for their brand and identity. That is why touring and selling merchandise will become the main focus of financially successful independent hip-hop artists and labels in the years to come. Independent hip-hop artists who wish to be financially successful will need to continue to tour incessantly.

This will result in the opportunity for more corporate sponsorship of tours, festivals, and merchandise. In that sense, financially successful independent hip-hop artists will continue to turn their fans into a commodity. Like any person looking to profit in the entertainment industry, independent hip-hop artists contribute to the audience commodity. By allowing major corporations such as Coca-Cola to profit off of live music events and merchandise, and by allowing the "Big 3" to continue to dominate the publishing and distribution sectors of the music industry, the independent hip-hop culture itself is increasingly becoming a fetishized commodity.

CHAPTER 32

Autonomy, Integration, and the Work of Cultural Intermediation in Indie Games

Matthew E. Perks, Felan Parker, Jennifer R. Whitson, Bart Simon, Gabrielle Lavenir, Ceyda Yolgörmez, Pierson Browne, and Brian Schram

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Abstract [1]

Based on empirical research, this article addresses the role of cultural intermediaries in the production, distribution, and reception of independent or "indie" digital games. Festival and showcase curators, local community organizers, co-working space managers, promoters, critics, funders, granting agencies, and other support actors are central to sustaining indie game cultures, but are often overlooked. Our research makes visible the diverse taskscapes of cultural intermediaries; the wide variety of brokering, translating, value-ascribing, connection-making, and care work involved; and the attendant tensions and challenges. We contend that cultural intermediary work in the game industry is characterized by precarity, extensive and largely invisible behind-the-scenes work, complex networks of interdependence and sup-

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port, blurred boundaries between the personal and the professional, and a delicate balance between autonomy and integration.[2]

Keywords

Game Industry, Indie Games, Cultural Intermediaries, Autonomy

Introduction

In the industry and culture of digital games, community and event organizers, festival coordinators, showcase curators, co-working space managers, promoters, critics, funders, granting agencies, and other such "support" actors are often seen as secondary or peripheral to the "real" work of making games (or else overlooked completely). Based on ethnographic and interview research, we contend that these cultural intermediaries play a pivotal role in small- to medium-scale independent or "indie" game production, distribution, and reception. Our research contributes to growing critical awareness and understanding of cultural intermediation and illustrates that the experiences and practices of cultural intermediaries are more diverse and dispersed than typically understood. We argue that cultural intermediation is multifaceted, spread throughout the industry, and involves an immense amount of underappreciated labor that goes beyond common conceptions of cultural intermediaries as primarily gatekeepers or cultural brokers. Examining cultural intermediation in the game industry paints a very different picture of indie game development—and cultural work more generally—compared with romanticized popular representations,[3] characterized by precarity, extensive and largely invisible behind-the-scenes work, complex networks of interdependence and support, and a delicate balance between autonomy and integration.[4]

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[3] Paolo Ruffino, "Narratives of Independent Production in Video Game Culture," *Loading . . . Journal of the Canadian Game Studies Association* 7 (11, 2013): 106–121.

[4] Mark Deuze, "Work in the Media," *Media Industries Journal* 1 (2), published electronically February 1, 2014.

Cultural intermediation, originally theorized by Bourdieu [5] but more recently taken up and elaborated by scholars in sociology, media studies, and cultural studies, refers to work that takes place *between*, *but apart from*, other actors and sectors within a field of cultural production. Cultural intermediaries are in part gatekeepers, brokers, and mediators that use their strategic in-between position, specialized knowledge, and networks to connect cultural producers with the resources, institutions, and audiences they need to succeed. [6] Cultural intermediaries are connective tissue, sitting "at the boundaries of multiple fields, not only between culture and economy but also culture, society, and community" [7] and shaping the heterogeneous relations between diverse actors and activities that make up cultural industries. [8] Research on cultural intermediation reveals a diverse and growing range of frequently overlooked cultural workers wearing many hats, herding many cats, and exerting a constitutive influence on their fields. [9]

There is a pressing need in media and cultural industries research to examine what cultural workers actually think and do, [10] but this can be difficult to accomplish. The work of cultural intermediaries has a low degree of organization, formalization, and recognition (both internally and externally) that colors their careers with uncertainty and disrupts their sense of identity. Given the strong emphasis on the work of "creatives" (i.e., designers, programmers, artists) in game development and other cultural industries, intermediation is rarely fully visible, existing in the interstices and on the peripheries. Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star describe a similar problem associated with classifying and defining just what it is that nurses do. [11] This inability to describe work practices has negative impacts, including the devaluation of essential work, as well as massive variability in quality and consistency in everyday practice, recognition, and education. [12] Following this trajectory, and respond-

doi:10.3998/mij.15031809.0001.201

[5] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

[6] Jennifer Smith Maguire and Julian Matthews, "Are We All Cultural Intermediaries Now? An Introduction to Cultural Intermediaries in Context," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 15 (5, 2012): 551–62. doi:10.1177/1367549412445762

[7] Beth Perry, Karen Smith, and Saskia Warren, "Revealing and Re-Valuing Cultural Intermediaries in the 'Real' Creative City: Insights from a Diary-Keeping Exercise," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 18 (6, 2015): 724–40.

[8] Benjamin Woo, "Is There a Comic Book Industry?" *Media Industries Journal* 5 (1), published electronically June 5, 2018, doi:10.3998/mij.15031809.0005.102

[9] Julian Matthews and Jennifer Smith Maguire, "Introduction: Thinking with Cultural Intermediaries," in *The Cultural Intermediaries Reader*, ed. Julian Matthews and Jennifer Smith Maguire (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014), 1–12; Benjamin Woo, *Getting a Life: The Social Worlds of Geek Culture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018); Benjamin Shultz, "The Work behind the Scenes: The New Intermediaries of the Indie Crafts Business," *Regional Studies* 49 (3, March 4, 2015): 451–60. doi:10.1080/00343404.2013.770597; Brian J. Hracs, "Cultural Intermediaries in the Digital Age: The Case of Independent Musicians and Managers in Toronto." *Regional Studies* 49 (3, March 4, 2015): 461–75. doi:10.1080/00343404.2012.750425

[10] Matthews and Smith Maguire, "Introduction: Thinking with Cultural Intermediaries," 6; John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

[11] Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 252.

[12] Geoffrey C. Bowker, Stefan Timmermans, and Susan Leigh Star, "Infrastructure and Organizational Transformation: Classifying Nurses' Work," in *Information Technology and Changes in Organizational Work: Proceedings of the IFIP WG8.2 Working Conference on Information Technology and Changes in Organizational Work, Decem-*

ing to Julian Matthews and Jennifer Smith Maguire's call to examine "the broader range of occupations involved in cultural production" and "better specify cultural intermediaries' shared contexts and characteristics, and their points of differentiation," we specifically focus on defining the taskscapes of cultural intermediaries in games.[13] Our research also aligns with Beth Perry, Karen Smith, and Saskia Warren's conception of a "third wave" of cultural intermediary studies that reclaims and revalues this work.[14]

As we have argued elsewhere, cultural intermediation tends to be difficult to discern and "only becomes 'sensible' within the broader networks of intermediaries spread out across the entire cultural industry in which they are embedded."[15] Unlike some more traditional intermediary jobs (such as the local geek shop owners examined by Benjamin Woo),[16] cultural intermediaries in the game industry are members of a geographically dispersed and socially fragmented pseudo-occupational group, often lacking a fixed place of work or a regular schedule. The cultural intermediaries studied in this article include co-working space coordinators, festival curators, funding and awards panel judges, community organizers, and public advocates for indie games who (at least in their intermediary capacity) are not affiliated with any one game development team and are distributed across different international game industries and scenes. In order to address these issues, we hosted an international symposium at the Technoculture, Art, and Games Research Centre at Concordia University, explicitly framed as a way to better understand their work. As a kind of pop-up water cooler, our unconventional symposium-as-research-site method was able to bring indie intermediaries and their networks to the surface, granting participants who rarely have time to pause for reflection or mutual commiseration the time, space, and social prompting to do so. In the process, we were also able to collectively name and make visible the particular form of cultural work that our participants are engaged in, which generally goes unnamed and unacknowledged even by those who perform it.[17] The site was documented via note-taking, photos, audio recordings of interviews, and video recordings of talks and panels. Written ethnographic vignettes and reflections, along with the interviews, are the primary basis for our arguments in this article.

In this article, we strive for a more fully realized account of the work of cultural intermediation, one that takes into consideration its diversity and intermediaries' own difficulties in establishing and maintaining their positions within cultural industries. First, we map the multifarious taskscapes of cultural intermediaries; second, we examine some of the core functions of cultural intermediation: brokering, translating, and ascribing value; third, we examine the wide variety of care work involved in cultural intermediation that routinely goes unrecognized; fourth, we examine how cultural intermediaries balance the relative

ber 1995 (IFIP Advances in Information and Communication Technology), ed. Wanda J. Orlikowski, Geoff Walsham, Matthew R. Jones, and Janice I. Degross (Boston, MA: Springer, 1996), 344–70. doi:10.1007/978-0-387-34872-8_21

[13] Matthews and Smith Maguire, "Introduction: Thinking with Cultural Intermediaries," 6, 2.

[14] Perry, Smith, and Warren, "Revealing and Re-Valuing Cultural Intermediaries in the 'Real' Creative City," 724.

[15] Pierson Browne, Brian Schram, Jennifer Whitson, Bart Simon, Felan Parker, Matthew Perks, Ceyda Yolgörmez, and Gabrielle Lavenir, "Hosting a Symposium as Data Collection: Bringing Together Dispersed Participants & Creating "The Field"," forthcoming.

[16] Benjamin Woo, "Alpha Nerds: Cultural Intermediaries in a Subcultural Scene," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 15 (5, October 1, 2012): 659–76. doi:10.1177/ 1367549412445758; Woo, *Getting a Life*.

[17] Perry, Smith, and Warren, 729–30.

autonomy necessary for intermediation against integration into the communities, networks, and industries in which they operate. We conclude by considering the wider implications of the many tensions and blurred boundaries that inhere in the process of cultural intermediation, between autonomy and integration, personal and professional, work and play, art and commerce, accumulation and sustainability.



Figure 1. Participants work to organize their taskscape Post-It notes into emergent categories. Photo by Authors.

Mapping Cultural Intermediary Taskscapes

Identifying a commonality between different kinds of cultural intermediaries in the game industry is relatively straightforward, but it is more challenging to identify what their actual day-to-day activities look like. The symposium offered an opportunity to ask intermediaries directly about their work and to have them discuss and compare their respective "taskscapes"—the particular range of roles and duties they take on. To draw out this theme, we organized a small group activity where participants listed all their tasks in a typical week on "Post-It" sticky notes and collaboratively sorted the resulting 440 notes into emergent categories (Figure 1), offering sketches of an archetypal cultural intermediary's taskscape. Examining how identities are reconciled in the face of this unruly diversity of tasks allows us to more fully recognize, connect, and make visible the work of cultural intermediation.

We organized these tasks into four categories, relating broadly to game-related activities; outreach, networking, and promotional activities; business and finance-related activities; and

management-related activities (Table 1). The broad range of activities is noteworthy in itself, but also emphasizes the considerable amount of "slippage" between tasks as many crossed multiple categories. Cultural intermediaries spend a substantial amount of time immersed in game-related activities, whether playing, making, or both. Playing as many games as possible is key to maintaining cultural currency and feeds into other tasks such as networking, research, and knowledge-gathering activities. Outreach, networking, and promotional activities centers on collecting and disseminating information, connecting others, and directly promoting one's own activities, events, and organization. The final two categories relate to managing both material and human infrastructures. Business and finance-related activities relates to applying for (and dispersing) funds, and management-related activities refers to the logistic and maintenance work associated with operating physical spaces (e.g., events and offices), as well as activities associated with managing humans, such as coordination, mentorship, and conflict resolution. These management tasks, and the amount of time and effort required of them, occupied a significant portion of our discussions.

Table 1. Taskscape of Cultural Intermediaries.

Typology	**Key tasks**	**"Post-It" examples**
Game-related activities	Game-making; game-playing	Writing game prototypes; supervising art direction; writing code; fixing bugs; playtesting; reviewing games; submitting for games festivals
Outreach, networking and promotional activities	Social media; direct communication; contact building and networking; event attendance	Browsing and posting on social media; updating websites; reading, answering, writing e-mails; introducing contacts to one another; moderating discussions; going for drinks; visiting games festivals, tournaments, opening parties
Business and finance-related activities	Applications; accounting; dispersing funds	Writing applications for jobs, funds, and grants; assisting with applications; writing and assessing budgets; navigating government bureaucracy; negotiating funding, rent, and investments; accounting; preparing for audits; invoicing members; paying bills
Management-related activities	Spaces: maintaining/managing material infrastructure; event planning; travel planning	Organizing and attending meetings; scheduling events; organizing maintenance; buying supplies; booking travel and attending; curatorial discussions and decision making
	Humans: managing human resources; relationship management; leadership	Providing emotional support; reviewing others' work; defusing conflicts; mentoring

Table by Authors.

A cultural intermediary's claim to authority rests on the competent execution of a diverse taskscape, aspects of which may not align with a clear occupational role. Amir provides a telling anecdote, about his first game industry job:

> I had to get business cards printed, and Andy, the boss, was designing the card and was like, 'What do you want your title to be on the card?' [. . .] So I said: either put 'developer' on it or leave it blank. In some ways, putting a title on the card will be confusing, because I will be doing so many different things.

As Amir notes, what he actually did within the studio, and in the larger community, did not fit into a discrete occupational category. The status of intermediaries is always uncertain—untitled—even as they exert considerable influence.

Bringing together indie game cultural intermediaries and collectively mapping and discussing their taskscapes reaffirmed many of the tasks traditionally associated with cultural intermediaries (networking, curating, brokering of material and symbolic resources, etc.) and also highlighted activities and agencies less commonly associated with the role. This exercise suggests that the most commonly shared characteristic may be in their uncertain and always-negotiated boundaries; we might even be tempted to answer the question of what cultural intermediaries actually do simply by saying "everything."[18] This is a challenge for cultural intermediaries, whose struggles to define their own work and workload ultimately reduce their visibility and external understanding of what they do. But this ambiguity is also their strength: Cultural intermediation thrives on flexible connections across multiple networks and is inevitably an uncertain endeavor. Understanding the tensions faced by cultural intermediaries who may be unable to construe their own work is the focus of the rest of this article. Drawing on interview data and observations gathered at our symposium-as-research-site, we offer a deeper analysis of the slippages between autonomy and integration faced by cultural intermediaries. In doing so, we offer new insights into the evolving ways that cultural intermediaries perform and characterize their own work, and in particular the under-explored question of how intermediaries situate themselves in relation to one another.

Brokering, Translation, and Ascribing Value

Cultural intermediation in indie game development, as in other industries, conditions the social and cultural existence of its products. Cultural intermediaries help make certain games visible and understandable to the various actors who co-create "game culture." Leveraging their in-between position and connections, intermediaries gain access to, broker, and translate valuable social, cultural, and economic resources such as access to publishers and platforms; press, influencer, and industry connections; sources of funding; and featured spots at festivals and showcases.[19] These resources are increasingly seen as a necessary precondition for indie game developers to legitimate their work in crowded digital marketplaces dominated by a small handful of heavily marketed AAA franchises backed by massive, vertically integrated, multinational corporations. Reliant instead on more "horizontal" management and mentorship structures, the context of indie game development is unique in its heavy reliance on social capital, cultural intermediaries, and tastemakers to break through an oversaturated and competitive market. The work of cultural intermediaries is thus especially important for smaller independent studios who cannot access these platforms, resources, and networks on their own (or who can access them but are not able to leverage them to their full potential).

As Liz McFall contends, intermediation is not only about qualifying finished products for consumption, but is rather an open-ended process of "forging more and more relationships

[18] Smith Maguire and Matthews, "Are We All Cultural Intermediaries Now?"

[19] Pacey Foster and Richard E, Ocejo, "Brokerage, Mediation, and Social Networks in the Creative Industries," in *The Oxford Handbook of Creative Industries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199603510.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199603510-e-012.

in an expanding network" in order to secure the position and status of a cultural object or practice.[20] Tracey describes how connections are commonly brokered between developers and influential industry actors in the co-working space she manages:

> if you're going to release on Steam, I should know, so that when the opportunity arises, I can help [you] meet the influencers and tastemakers. Kickstarter was in the space last week and one of our teams has a Kickstarter campaign, I told them to go and sit with Luke [to discuss their campaign].

Networking events organized by or hosted in the space offer potential points of connection that Tracey is able to mediate. Cultural intermediaries also broker connections to other intermediary institutions, such as festivals, awards, and press coverage, that have a ripple effect in the wider local community. Co-working space directors, local developer organizations, and other intermediaries thus produce (more or less permanent) hubs of inward and outward connection for indie developers that organize the flow of mutual encouragement, mentorship, advice-giving, reviewing, and knowledge exchange (about funding institutions, financial opportunities, working conditions, etc.) as well as more substantive opportunities.[21]

Aspiring and early-career independent cultural producers often operate with little to no actual capital, but "alternative forms of capital—social, cultural, and symbolic—are readily available resources to be mobilized and converted in the struggle to build a career."[22] Cultural intermediaries play a key role in these processes of "capital intraconversion,"[23] for their own benefit and for others. For instance, they can trade on the "indie coolness" of the scenes and communities they inhabit in exchange for sponsorship and in-kind contributions. Amir recounts how he used his co-working space's reputation in his local indie scene to obtain a financial contribution from a large tech company that "doesn't have a very good reputation, because devs would talk about how much they disliked working there. I was like, your HQ are in [this city], I'm doing this thing in [the city] if you really care. They gave us 50,000 dollars." In this case, Amir was able to identify an opportunity to "spend" cultural capital (in the form of indie credibility) to gain economic capital (in the form of a major sponsorship).

Indie intermediaries also facilitate the trajectory of developers' creative work outward and toward various audiences, some of which may fall outside of the usual gaming public. Independent games have a complex relationship to cultural legitimacy, sometimes materialized in an ambition to be understood and appreciated in artistic terms, which may be problematized by commercial or enthusiast ambitions.[24] This version of indie legitimacy is discursively positioned against the mainstream commercial game industry's traditional focus on marketing and entertainment. When indie game developers want their games to be recognized as a form of artistic expression (whether for the sake of prestige or in order to

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[20] Liz McFall, "The Problem of Cultural Intermediaries in the Economy of Qualities," in *The Cultural Intermediaries Reader*, ed. Jennifer Smith Maguire and Julian Matthews (London: SAGE, 2014), 42–51. doi:10.4135/9781473912281.n5

[21] Patrick Crogan, "The Good Hubbing Guide: Building Indie Game Maker Collectives," Creative Territories. Digital Cultures Research Center, UWE Bristol, 2015. https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/831480.

[22] Michael Scott, "Cultural Entrepreneurs, Cultural Entrepreneurship: Music Producers Mobilising and Converting Bourdieu's Alternative Capitals," Poetics 40 (3, June 2012): 237–55. doi:10.1016/j.poetic.2012.03.002

[23] James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

[24] Felan Parker, "An Art World for Artgames," *Loading . . . Journal of the Canadian Game Studies Association* 7 (11, 2013): 41–60.

access material resources like arts funding), they may look to cultural intermediaries with one foot in the art world or other media industries, who are equipped to perform the necessary legitimation and translation work.[25] As knowledgeable and well-connected actors in indie scenes, intermediaries contribute to legitimation of games and developers, whether within the game industry or in the broader cultural and artistic field. Emilia explicitly describes her work with a local indie game community organization in these terms. Game culture is "very commercialized" and often seen as juvenile, making it hard for developers to gain outside recognition; so much of her work involves adapting time-tested legitimation strategies from other artistic fields such as film and theater for indie game developers.[26]

Emilia organizes workshops in which she literally translates the commercial, fan language of game developers into an artistic language that is more appropriate for cultural institutions such as arts councils and granting agencies, which may not be accessible to developers otherwise.[27] "People call themselves 'content creators' instead of artists. They talk about return on investment, you don't even know what that means!" She provides an example:

> One particular applicant wanted to make a mobile game with a comedy clown duo. It was theater. [. . .] But the way they described it in the application was, it's a franchise, pre-existing intellectual property. That's an example of those terms that the jury read and think, "That's not something an Arts Council should fund." But if you framed it in terms of artistic collaboration with theater, merging media art and theater, that would have been perfect.

In order to facilitate the integration of game developers into the wider artistic field, Emilia encourages them to "de-specialize" the language they use, coaching them on "how to describe your game to people who don't play games" because "not everyone on the jury is gonna be a video game player." Similarly, co-working space director Lee and festival organizer Viktor maintain active relationships with government and arts agencies as a means of mediating between developers and potential sources of funding beyond investors, loans, and other market-oriented models emphasized in the game industry, in doing so influencing how governments "define and place" games as a medium and a business.[28] Mobilizing their expertise, social connections, and cultural capital as a "third who translates," each of these intermediaries uses their position to bridge across seemingly disparate cultural worlds.[29]

Qualifying and adding value to cultural objects is a well-established function for cultural intermediaries, and several strategies for tastemaking and highlighting certain games among the chaff of a crowded indie market were discussed by participants involved in festival curation and event organizing. Festivals and showcases for indie developers can be incredibly important for cutting through the noise and gaining access to larger audiences and key industry contacts. Identifying trends, highlighting promising but not yet well-known developers, and

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[25] Smith Maguire and Matthews, "Are We All Cultural Intermediaries Now?," 2.

[26] Felan Parker, "Roger Ebert and the Games-as-Art Debate," *Cinema Journal* 57 (3, 2018): 77–100. doi:10.1353/cj.2018.0032

[27] Felan Parker and Jennifer Jenson, "Canadian Indie Games between the Global and the Local," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 42 (5), published electronically December 16, 2017. doi:10.22230/cjc.2017v4n5a3229

[28] Aphra Kerr, "Placing International Media Production," *Media Industries Journal* 1 (1), published electronically January 1, 2014. doi:10.3998/mij.15031809.0001.106

[29] Foster and Ocejo, "Brokerage, Mediation, and Social Networks in the Creative Industries," 4.

putting games in front of other influential intermediaries are common tactics.[30] Describing his event coordination and promotion work, Viktor explains that he spends his days talking to journalists about what the current trends are in digital art and indie games, a straightforward instance of tastemaking in which the cultural intermediary uses their specialized knowledge and position to put forward an authoritative stance on what is relevant in their cultural field, circulated via field-specific or mainstream media coverage. However, like other participants, he expresses uneasiness with the idea he is a cultural gatekeeper. Tastemaking activities do not always play out as intended and may be taken up or misrepresented in unexpected ways. Viktor often finds his words and intent decontextualized, becoming a spokesperson for game design practices and technologies he is personally ambivalent about, or outright critical of, such as virtual reality (VR). This is echoed by Robert, who states he is aware he "works for [Facebook CEO Mark] Zuckerberg" when he advocates for VR and that this "isn't a good feeling." In these cases, cultural intermediaries have found themselves uncomfortable with the compromises and tensions inherent in their work. By bringing together many intermediaries into one place, with the explicit goal of reflecting on their work, our findings demonstrate that the support cultural intermediaries offer to cultural producers and other actors is manifold and far-reaching, but not without complications.

Fostering Care and Boundary Work

Contrary to some formulations of cultural intermediation as the insertion of self-interested, exploitative "middle men" between production and consumption, we contend that cultural intermediation is not a simple or straightforward process limited to value extraction and symbolic qualification of cultural objects—nor is this how intermediaries understand or experience their work. Intermediation actively shapes *cultures* of production. As McFall contends, "production and consumption have to be always already, dynamically connected to continue at all," and intermediation is a distributed, nonlinear process involving "a whole 'crowd' of intermediaries [. . .] many of whom may be engaged in activities that are not easily designated production or consumption, but might be anywhere within the surrounding space."[31] This resonates with our conversations with game industry intermediaries, who point to aspects of their work that are more aligned with noncommercial, non-materially productive work such as parenting. Accordingly, we argue for a conception of cultural intermediation that renders visible the most invisible, naturalized aspects of an already largely invisible occupation.[32]

Emphasizing commodification or gatekeeping as the primary task of cultural intermediaries does not reflect how cultural intermediaries themselves understand their work. Much of the work of cultural intermediation is personal, relational, and emotional at its core.[33]

[30] Felan Parker, Jennifer R. Whitson, and Bart Simon, "Megabooth: The Cultural Intermediation of Indie Games," *New Media & Society* 20 (5, May 2018): 1953–72. doi:10.1177/1461444817711403

[31] McFall, "The Problem of Cultural Intermediaries in the Economy of Qualities," 5, 7.

[32] Nancy C. M. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science* (Synthese Library), ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (Dordrecht: Springer, 1983), 283–310. doi:10.1007/0-306-48017-4_15

[33] Nancy K. Baym, "Connect with Your Audience! The Relational Labor of Connection," *The Communication Review* 18 (1, January 2, 2015): 14–22. doi:10.1080/10714421.201 5.996401; J. Smith Maguire, "The Personal Is Professional: Personal Trainers as a Case Study of Cultural Intermediaries," *International Journal of Cultural*

Our participants are acutely aware of this: One "Post-It" note from the taskscape exercise reads, "How hard it is to reject someone's work/project, esp. when you know them well: extra care and emotional work to make the feedback less difficult to hear." As Perry et al. argue, formulations of cultural intermediation that emphasize self-interest and personal gain are ill-equipped to account for more community- and sustainability-oriented aspects of cultural intermediation, but these are central to the self-identification of many intermediaries.[34]

Community-minded cultural intermediaries express a strong sense of responsibility for attracting and retaining game developers in indie game scenes. They perform emotional and care work in order to ensure that projects go through and teams stay together, performing invisible, gendered tasks that fall outside of the game development "triangle" of designer-coder-artist and can go neglected on smaller indie teams.[35] This side of their work causes some friction, because it complicates the notion that intermediaries must maintain a degree of autonomy and not become too deeply involved—after all, they generally work with many different teams and projects at the same time. In conversations with co-working space coordinator Tracey, she remarks that while she is not a member of any one team, and at the end of the day is not responsible for any decisions, she performs a great deal of work and care to aid these studios. She manifests this care as an "open arms policy" of membership that is not reducible to the for-profit business model of other co-working spaces. This extra work, of fostering a space of acceptance and support for developers, is work that goes unrecognized among Tracey's day-to-day tasks of managing the space but is both resource- and time-consuming.

The number of sticky notes with what may be perceived as nonwork activities—such as playing games or having drinks—suggests an erasure of boundaries between the professional and personal that is endemic throughout the game industry. As Nancy Baym argues, the "boundary between social and economic relationships has always been far blurrier than theoretical distinctions might suggest,"[36] and the work of cultural intermediaries is characterized by blurred boundaries between work time and personal time, as well as between personal, professional, and mentoring relationships. Our participants are keenly aware of this erasure of boundaries. For example, having a meal with friends is a form of work when all your friends work in the same industry, and even more so when they are looking to you for informal mentorship or connections. Many cultural intermediaries work constantly and certainly do not have prototypical nine-to-five days. Thus, they fit personal responsibilities into the idiosyncratic rhythms of their workdays (driving the kids to school, cleaning the apartment, etc.), compounding the erasure of work/life boundaries. This is consistent with research on cultural work and intermediation in other fields—the work of intermediation bleeds out into all aspects of everyday life, making their work even more difficult to "name" and study.[37]

Studies 11 (2, June 1, 2008): 211–29. doi:10.1177/1367877908089265; Liz Czach, "Affective Labor and the Work of Film Festival Programming," in *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, ed. Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist (New York: Routledge, 2016), 196–208.

[34] Perry, Smith, and Warren, "Revealing and Re-Valuing Cultural Intermediaries in the 'Real' Creative City."

[35] Whitson, Simon, and Parker, "Rethinking Cultural Production: Entrepreneurship, Relational Labour and Sustainability in Indie Game Development."

[36] Baym, "Connect with Your Audience! The Relational Labor of Connection," 16.

[37] Perry, Smith, and Warren, "Revealing and Re-Valuing Cultural Intermediaries in the 'Real' Creative City"; Hracs, "Cultural Intermediaries in the Digital Age"; Baym, "Connect with Your Audience! The Relational Labor

During the symposium, several participants indicated displeasure with this aspect of their work, among themselves and in interviews, and their comments suggest a "helping fatigue." Tracey explains that she resents having to provide certain kinds of care to developers in her space, which she feels should not be part of her job: "Most of the emotional labor management is when teams don't talk to each other and try to talk through me or vent. [. . .] they use me as a sponge to hold their emotions," she explains, expressively capturing the gendered dynamics of emotional labor and care work in cultural intermediation, which women are expected to take on regardless of their actual job. [38]

A parenting metaphor emerged to describe this dimension of intermediary work. Kyra is sometimes referred to in her scene as "indie mom," an honorific she greets with ambivalence, while Lee is often confronted with the reality that he is acting as both a landlord and a mentor to the developers in his co-working space. The tension between these competing identities becomes apparent when they backfire: Kyra notes studios that have failed to find commercial success may hold intermediaries responsible as invested parent-mentors, rather than as noncomplicit landlords. In one respect, Lee's identity is tied to the idea that he is here to help these developers learn to run their businesses—a role Tracey also identifies with—but they are often put in difficult positions. Lee compares his space to a university dormitory, notorious for cramped conditions and uncleanliness, and describes his discomfort with needing to chide developers to clean the kitchens before sponsors, government agencies, or press visit the space. The delicate balance required for cultural intermediation is complicated by the many roles and tasks they are expected to perform.

While some intermediaries are placed in roles where care is expected, others actively care for their scenes and communities through advocacy for diversity and inclusion. All cultural intermediation work is, of course, political [39] —if not undertaken with an explicit political mandate, it is likely reproducing the inequitable status quo of the game industry. [40] Although most participants spoke in favor of improving diversity, Emilia addressed the issue head on, explaining that her mandate is primarily about making indie gaming spaces less exclusionary. To this end, she has implemented several changes regarding her staff's salary and working conditions: $25/hour for everyone, converting volunteers into paid employees, and taking diversity explicitly into account during recruitment. This effort shows how intermediaries can direct their efforts to pursue a form of "creative justice" that actively works to counter the precarity of cultural work in order to do right by the people involved. [41]

While gatekeeping and tastemaking are undeniably part of the process of cultural intermediation, close examination invites a more multifaceted understanding of their work. Much of this work involves care, spread across the taskscape in subtle ways and rarely noted in critical

of Connection."

[38] Mary Ellen Guy and Meredith A. Newman, "Women's Jobs, Men's Jobs: Sex Segregation and Emotional Labor," *Public Administration Review* 64 (3, May 1, 2004): 289–98. doi:10.1111/j.1540-6210.2004.00373.x

[39] Keith Negus, "The Work of Cultural Intermediaries and the Enduring Distance between Production and Consumption," *Cultural Studies* 16 (4, July 2002): 501–515. doi:10.1080/09502380210139089; Foster and Ocejo, "Brokerage, Mediation, and Social Networks in the Creative Industries."

[40] Kishonna L. Gray, Bertan Buyukozturk, and Zachary G. Hill, 'Blurring the Boundaries: Using Gamergate to Examine "Real' and Symbolic Violence Against Women in Contemporary Gaming Culture," *Sociology Compass* 11 (3, March 2017): e12458. doi:10.1111/soc4.12458

[41] Mark Banks, *Creative Justice: Cultural Industries, Work and Inequality* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

work on the production of cultural value and taste.[42] As such, we argue for a conception of cultural intermediary work that is affective, everywhere, and dispersed throughout networks of production, distribution, and reception. Moreover, the blurring of boundaries inherent in the work of cultural intermediaries—between care and commerce, interpersonal and professional—impacts how these intermediaries are situated in creative communities and industries and how they establish their autonomy as cultural workers themselves.

Networks, Autonomy, and Integration

Expanding the cultural intermediary taskscape to include activities usually left invisible or considered nonwork broadens our understanding of this category of cultural work. This also has implications for how we understand the struggle for autonomy and authenticity in creative work and how they are established, maintained, and experienced through their diverse array of activities. We contend that cultural intermediaries' claims to authority and competence rest on a precarious balance between integration with and autonomy from the surrounding industry. As Matthews and Smith Maguire argue, intermediaries derive much of their authority from their relative autonomy.[43] They operate in the cultural sphere of indie games, but their status as neither developer nor consumer places them at the boundaries of this sphere, which affords certain kinds of influence. However, autonomy is not a clear-cut value in cultural work,[44] and at the same time they are deeply integrated in the markets, social networks, scenes, communities of practice, and other collectivities without which their work would have no purpose or meaning.[45] Intermediaries must keep these competing values in balance to avoid losing touch with their networks, on the one hand, and becoming absorbed into other people's projects, on the other.

Maintaining this balance is a daily struggle for cultural intermediaries that colors virtually all aspects of their work. In this way, our work suggests that Mark Banks' conception of "negotiated autonomy," wherein cultural producers strive to balance the artistic and the commercial, the ethical and the social, can be extended to cultural intermediaries as well.[46] This balance produces opportunities for cultural intermediaries as they explore the mutable possibilities of connection, as described above, but is also marred by precarity and exploitation.[47] Much like the indie game developers they work with, who strive to remain independent from outside influence even as they are deeply dependent on indie scenes as well as distribution platforms and economic opportunities afforded by interfacing with the "mainstream" game industry, intermediation is a compromised and compromising pursuit.

Cultural intermediary work depends on the ability to purposefully position oneself in relation to various actors and networks while maintaining a degree of autonomy and avoiding

[42] Czach, "Affective Labor and the Work of Film Festival Programming."

[43] Matthews and Smith Maguire, "Introduction: Thinking with Cultural Intermediaries," 3.

[44] Mark Banks, "Autonomy Guaranteed? Cultural Work and the 'Art-Commerce Relation'," *Journal for Cultural Research* 14 (3, July 2010): 251–69. doi:10.1080/14797581003791487; Martin Beirne, Matt Jennings, and Stephanie Knight, "Autonomy and Resilience in Cultural Work: Looking Beyond the 'Creative Industries'," *Journal for Cultural Research* 21 (2, April 3, 2017): 204–221. doi:10.1080/14797585.2016.1275311

[45] Deuze, "Work in the Media," 2.

[46] Banks, "Autonomy Guaranteed?," July 2010, 266.

[47] Ibid., 263.

total integration or absorption into other entities. This balancing act of gaining the necessary access to perform intermediation without being reduced to taken-for-granted nodes within larger networks represents an ongoing challenge. For cultural intermediaries, as we will show, this manifests as a constant, dynamic renegotiation of position, connections, and workload. As an ice-breaking activity, at the entrance to the symposium we invited participants to take an instant photo of themselves, paste it on a large sheet of paper, and draw lines indicating personal and professional links between themselves and other participants. The result was a dense, tangled web of nodes and interconnections that exemplified the central role of cultivating and leveraging networks in cultural intermediation. However, despite these dense connections, many of the participants were meeting in person for the first time. Both the strength and precarity of cultural intermediation lie in the management of large, low-intensity networks, and symposium participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of this never-ending task.

The tension between integration and autonomy in cultivating networks is apparent in the way co-working space manager and former event organizer Amir prides himself on his extensive knowledge of people in the industry. During an interview, he displays his high degree of integration by going through the list of symposium attendees and explaining how he has interacted with almost all of them after years of working in the industry. Conversely, Amir notes that he and his fellow participants generally keep one foot outside of the indie scenes and communities they work with, referencing two other attendees across the room:

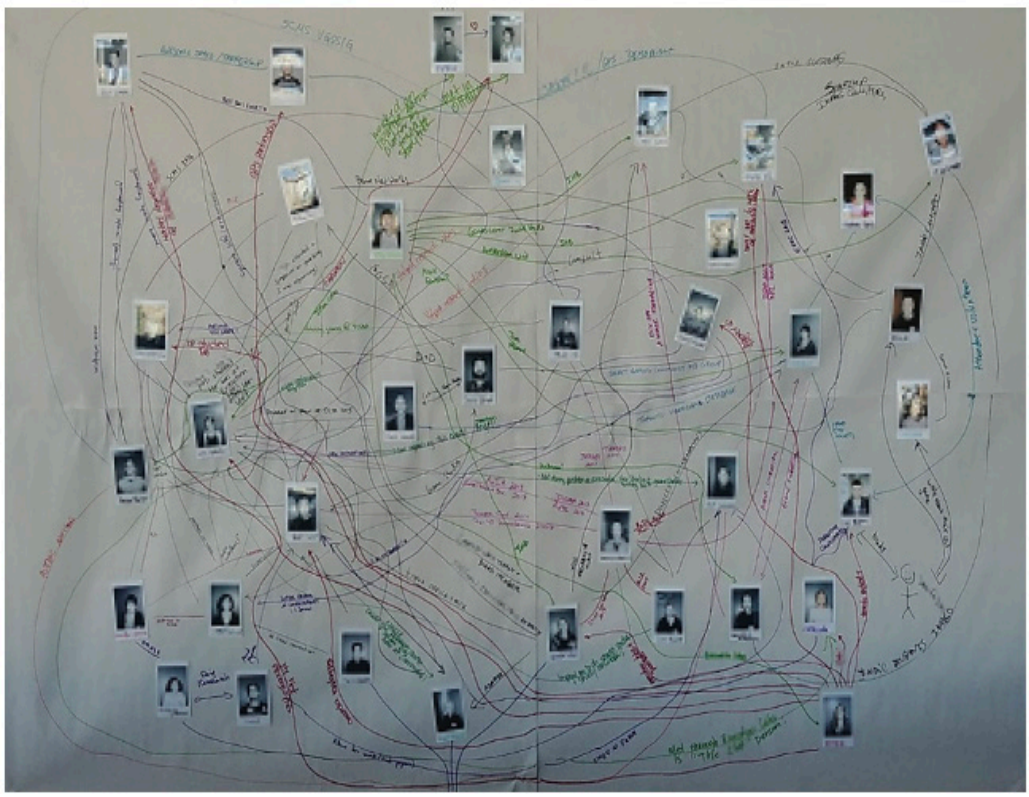


Figure 2. An anonymized photo of our network map, where participants each drew how they were connected to each other professionally and personally.

Photo by Authors.

> You mentioned how I've done many different things, and in some ways Rishi and Keith have the same story. We're all people that have [a lot of] touchpoints, like there was so many different reasons we could have possibly met.

This distinguishes intermediaries from developers and other creative actors who generally remain "inside" specific indie scenes or sectors of the industry, and relative exteriority affords certain advantages. Following Martin Beirne, Matt Jennings, and Stephanie Knight, we suggest this level of integration in a cultural industry, however loose, allows Amir and other cultural intermediaries to maintain a higher degree of resilience in their careers than is common in indie game development.[48]

One prominent indie intermediary and developer, Rishi, mentions in an interview that he has worked hard to establish an extensive network of contacts and relationships in the game industry. This network allows him to bypass certain hurdles and speed up parts of the development process, such as releasing games across multiple platforms and consoles, by calling in favors. He is also part of a network of indie developers that provides assistance to promising indie studios, shepherding them through complicated processes that would be difficult for up-and-coming developers in the industry. All of this is based on building up relationships of trust with a wide range of actors[49] and suturing selected games and developers into as wide a "network of interactions" as possible in hopes of ensuring their success.[50] The lack of formal corporate structures and resources in the indie game space means that these networks are increasingly important. The blurring of boundaries discussed in the previous section comes into play here as well. Rishi notes that he has to keep up with his contacts' birthdays, illnesses, and family news in addition to their game releases in order to keep the valuable relationships going. This no doubt benefits cultural intermediaries and the developers they work with, but at a high cost in terms of their constant "relational labor of connection," which in many cases goes unnoticed and unreciprocated.[51]

As cultural intermediaries take on a prodigious range of tasks, they make themselves indispensable to the people they work with. As a consequence, intermediaries sometimes come to personally embody the spaces, organizations, or networks they maintain. With such a diverse taskscape and lacking a stable professional identity, cultural intermediary work results in a disassociation from traditional organizational frameworks, instead becoming "essential services." Nobody notices these services until they stop working, and likewise intermediaries' professional and personal identities become indistinguishable from the surrounding assemblage. This is particularly apparent in the interactions we observed between managers and coordinators of local game development co-working spaces, who formed a close peer group over the course of the symposium.[52]

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[48] Beirne, Jennings, and Knight, "Autonomy and Resilience in Cultural Work."

[49] Perry, Smith, and Warren, "Revealing and Re-Valuing Cultural Intermediaries in the 'Real' Creative City," 733.

[50] McFall, "The Problem of Cultural Intermediaries in the Economy of Qualities," 5.

[51] Baym, "Connect with Your Audience! The Relational Labor of Connection"; Whitson, Simon, and Parker, "Rethinking Cultural Production."

[52] Crogan, "The Good Hubbing Guide: Building Indie Game Maker Collectives"; Pierson Browne, "Jumping the Gap: Indie Labour and the Imagined Indie Community" (MA thesis, Concordia University, 2015). http://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/980737/.

For example, Tracey reflected on the differences and similarities between her space and the other co-working directors' spaces. In her view, she essentially *is* the space; without her labor, the space could not function. Until recently, she was a one-woman operation, answering only to a board of directors who did not work in the space or aid in day-to-day work. While her work mainly revolves around the mentorship and support of the studios working in the space, she remains on the outside. Even with the more recent hiring of additional staff, she remarks that her work week will still be over forty hours. Deeply integrated cultural intermediaries in similarly indispensable positions may find difficulty securing new positions in a niche industry if their existing organization disappears. Padma reflects on this difficulty, speaking about the closing of her past organization and how a co-worker is now "lost in the woods." Despite being exemplary at their jobs in terms of networking and brokering relationships between studios, as well as the less visible tasks of intermediation, without the infrastructure of the now-shuttered organization, prospective employers weren't sure how those specialized but wide-ranging skills translate to new scenarios. Cultural intermediaries may find themselves in precarious situations if they are too highly integrated in a specific context while their surrounding networks expand and evolve.

The experiences of these cultural intermediaries clearly show that their work is not only between production and consumption but dispersed across many facets of cultural industries. Following Mark Granovetter's social network theory, cultural intermediaries specialize the administration of weak ties and brokerage across different networks,[53] increasingly enabled by social media platforms.[54] The weak (and arguably shallow) connections Rishi describes can take just as much effort and investment as "strong" ties, and thus are taxing in terms of his involvement in other people's lives and work, but were he not to maintain them it is unlikely he would be able to do the work he needs to do as effectively. By contrast, the ties that Tracey describes are fewer in number, but more personal and demanding to manage, leading to feelings of unappreciation and isolation. Given their greater emphasis on social and cultural capital and legitimacy compared with corporate AAA game development, working in indie game scenes necessitates navigation between these two poles. Herein lies the difficulty: Cultural intermediaries work to resist the pull of any one specific network, institution, or project, because it could negate their intermediary position and endanger their effort to maintain a widespread network (resulting in an ever-smaller number of stronger ties). At the same time, it is fruitful to be well integrated in specific networks and institutions, because those stronger ties can yield greater resources. The resilience (or lack thereof) in cultural intermediation lies in this balancing act.[55]

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[53] Mark S. Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (6, May 1973): 1360–80. doi:10.1086/225469

[54] Kelly Quinn and Zizi Papacharissi, "Our Networked Selves: Personal Connection and Relational Maintenance in Social Media Use," in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, ed. Jean Burgess, Alice Marwick, and Thomas Poell (London: SAGE, 2018), 353–71. doi:10.4135/9781473984066

[55] Banks, "Autonomy Guaranteed?," July 2010; Beirne, Jennings, and Knight, "Autonomy and Resilience in Cultural Work."

Conclusion

As Matthews and Smith Maguire suggest, "cultural intermediaries serve as an empirically grounded point of entry to highly complex political, economic and cultural processes."[56] The findings and anecdotes presented in this article demonstrate that cultural intermediary work is both broader and deeper than commonly understood. By putting our participants in the same room and encouraging them to reflect on these questions, we have been able to affirm intermediation as a distinct category of cultural work that is central, not peripheral, to indie game development and which goes well beyond traditional notions of gatekeeping and tastemaking. Far from simplistically re-presenting cultural objects to interested audiences as in linear "transmission" models of culture,[57] indie intermediaries engage in a whole host of networking, brokerage, translation, care, and support activities that impact all aspects of game production, distribution, and reception. In discussing their blurry professional and personal lives, intermediaries return frequently to concerns about how autonomous or integrated they are in relation to other actors and networks, resonating with the more general fixation on autonomy and cooptation in independent cultural production.[58]

These tensions for cultural intermediaries are ultimately "bound up as part of the complexity of their work," which is difficult to capture in abstract theorizing.[59] By engaging directly with on-the-ground cultural workers, we are able to offer an empirical perspective on these questions. Rather than positing "indie intermediaries" as a fixed role or position, we see here a "distributed, crowded network of intermediaries,"[60] ranging from small-scale and individual actors to sizable operations, all of whom move strategically through and between other actors and entities in the game industry, maintaining claims to specialized knowledge of different aspects of indie game development, and undertaking diverse and shifting taskscapes in order to accomplish their equally diverse and shifting social, cultural, and economic goals. In doing so, indie intermediaries must constantly balance their autonomy as third-party actors with their integration into the communities they service and the larger, institutional structures of the game industry they navigate. By drawing attention to the wide variety of tasks and underlying tensions involved, we hope to satisfy McFall's imperative to avoid getting "carried away with all that symbolism, signification, and taste-making at the expense of the more mundane work,"[61] as well as Mark Deuze's call for "a renewed focus on the social, communal, and collaborative aspects of contemporary cultural work."[62] The work of cultural intermediaries is neither straightforward nor glamorous nor lucrative and is often laced with ambivalence and uncertainty, but as our participant Lee proudly declares, it is the oil that keeps the engine of independent cultural production in motion.

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[56] Matthews and Smith Maguire, "Introduction: Thinking with Cultural Intermediaries," 7.

[57] Negus, "The Work of Cultural Intermediaries and the Enduring Distance between Production and Consumption," 4.

[58] David Hesmondhalgh, "Indie: The Institutional Politics and Aesthetics of a Popular Music Genre," *Cultural Studies* 13 (1, 1999): 34.

[59] Matthews and Smith Maguire, "Introduction: Thinking with Cultural Intermediaries," 6.

[60] McFall, "The Problem of Cultural Intermediaries in the Economy of Qualities," 8.

[61] Ibid., 8.

[62] Deuze, "Work in the Media," 3.

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CHAPTER 33

Seeking Deep Relations in a Precarious Industry: Addressing Mental Health through Independent Videogame Development

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Abstract

Anxiety, depression, burnout and impostor syndrome are frequently reported among those who work in the videogame industry, and are exacerbated among independents and freelancers. The article draws on interviews with four London-based independent videogame developers who have engaged with the production of videogames about mental health. The article argues that conceiving, producing and releasing these games is understood by their makers as a strategy to establish relations with consumers, participants and other developers that could break the invisible barriers that prevent dialogs around mental wellness. More than being concerned with the outcome of their work or its commercial success, developers seek relations with other game workers and players through the process of making, researching, testing, and showing their videogames. The development of videogames about mental health is interpreted by the participants as facilitating exchanges of autobiographical experiences that are otherwise regulated by the norms of professional networking.

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Keywords

independent videogames, mental health, videogame development, videogame industry, deep games, network sociality

Deep Relations in a Precarious Industry

As demonstrated in previous research and reports, workers of the videogame industry experience conditions of precariousness and competitiveness that often lead to or exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, burnout and impostor syndrome (Bulut 2020; Kerr 2017). The article looks into the current trend of making videogames about mental health and investigates, through interviews with four London-based independent developers, how this choice is motivated. It argues that developers identify in this strategy the potential to establish connections with other developers and players and open a dialog on their conditions of work. More than the commercial success of their game, they are interested in the conversations that happen while conducting research for their game, while talking with other developers in co-working spaces and with players at festivals and through the testing stage. While acknowledging that the efficacy of this strategy could hardly be evaluated in the short term, the article observes that game workers identify strategies to cope with and potentially resolve their conditions even when social barriers make them appear insurmountable and unspeakable. Listening to their motivations sheds light on the strategies adopted to tackle issues deriving from isolation, and from myths of meritocracy and entrepreneurship that pervade the videogame industry. The study also emphasizes the importance of spaces of physical co-presence as facilitating intimate dialogs: an opportunity that is currently affected by the social distancing measures imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interviewees refer to their projects as deep games, a categorization that is gaining popularity in videogame development. The term is used in this article to refer to a broad category of videogames that try to make sense of human experience, address the complexity of personal and social lives, aim to represent emotions, psychological traumas, abstract concepts and habits of thought, and make these playable (Freeplay Independent Games Festival 2019; Rusch 2017). The definition of a deep game is partial and limited, and this article is mostly concerned with the popularity and use of such a categorization, rather than its specificity. The label is used by a number of designers and authors and refers to interactive texts that draw on an established tradition of autobiographical game design, originating from independent videogame development and the "queer games avant-garde" (Anthropy 2012; Ruberg 2019a, 2019b, 2020). Recent productions and the introduction in 2017 of the BAFTA award category "Game Beyond Entertainment" demonstrate attention among videogame developers toward introspection, social relations, and the difficulties of understanding and speaking about one's own inner psychological states.

The research supporting this article started by exploring the motivations that bring independent developers to approach mental health as a theme in their videogames. It concludes that mental health is mobilized strategically by the interviewees to address the conditions of productions of independent videogames. In so doing, interviewees develop their autobio-

graphical self-reflexivity by connecting their work with their personal life stories, and as part of the same gesture think of their work as instrumental to enable new and *deeper* relations with others.

The attention toward the representation of mental health in videogames is becoming prominent at a time when it is explicitly discussed among groups and associations representing workers of the videogame industry. At the Game Developers Conference 2020 the association Take This revealed that at least 50% of workers in the sector experience psychological burnout in their careers, according to their survey (Take This 2020). The UK Games Industry Census published in February 2020 discovered that 31% of respondents suffered anxiety and depression, compared to the national average of 17% (Taylor 2020, 48–52). The causes are identified in the instability of these professions, frequent forms of harassment and microaggression, and stories of unfair treatment on the workplace. The lack of diversity in the field (still predominantly white and male) causes those who do not belong to the dominant gender, race and class to keep silent about these issues, which further impacts on their mental wellness. The videogame industry has been traditionally adopting practices such as "crunching," working over sixty hours per week in the months preceding the release of a title: a result of poor management which is often interpreted as a rite of passage, a proof of being committed to the job (Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter 2009; Woodcock 2019). Take This (2020) reveal that, on average, an employee changes 2.2 employers every five years, a tendency that leads to the absence of mentoring for new hires, and makes it unlikely for a worker to stay long enough in the same company to change its internal social dynamics.

Interviewees involved in this article admit having switched to an independent career after experiencing forms of harassment and unfair treatment in a videogame company, and realizing it would have been easier to leave than to propose structural changes. Job insecurity brings to an ongoing process of self-branding and self-marketing on social media which, in its own turn, causes feelings of inadequacy and impostor syndrome when career updates are not as frequent as it would be expected (Arvidsson et al. 2016; Gregg 2011). Achievements and skills are constantly scrutinized, in a labor context where completed projects are "badges of honor" and inseparable from the worker's identity (Deuze et al. 2007). Those who are struggling psychologically feel that they must suffer in silence due to the social stigma that perceives disclosure of emotional difficulty or distress as a sign of weakness or inadequacy (O'Donnell 2014). The shame and fear of judgment isolates individuals who are suffering and prevents them from getting help when they need it most. This can further exacerbate the challenges facing the mental health and wellbeing of game workers. These conditions are thought to impact those working independently more than employed workers, due to the pressure to self-promote on social media and to network (Browne and Whitson 2021; Tyni 2020).

This article draws on the analysis of a series of semi-structured interviews with four independent London-based videogame developers who have been designing games about mental health. In the initial stage, in early 2020, the research was motivated by finding out more about the objectives and motivations of the developers and their interests toward deep games, at a time when discourses surrounding mental health were becoming prominent in the videogame industry and society at large. Interviewees have been asked about the reasons that brought them to develop a videogame on mental health, their goals, and their perception of how mental health issues are treated in our contemporary society and in the industry.

Each participant has been interviewed separately, and their answers were color-coded by the researcher to identity recurring topics, arguments, lexical choices. The first round of interviews highlighted three trends: (1) frequent references to the developers' biographical narratives; (2) comments on how videogame development could either enable or deny agency over one's own life; (3) motivation to establish meaningful relationships with other human beings through the development process. Other topics, such as the content of the games or their commercial feasibility, were less prominent than what was initially expected. Participants have been invited to a follow-up interview to expand the three main areas of analysis. The results feed into the findings of this article, organized around the three key areas: biographies, agency, and relations. Participants were also invited to comment on a draft of the article in a third and final stage, a process that gave them the opportunity to reflect on the argumentation, suggest changes, and read each other's comments. All interviewees have agreed to appear with their full names and including references to their work, personal life stories and connections with mental health. They have been made aware of the option to remain anonymous and of the potential risks involved, but have preferred to appear publicly. Their choice has not been further discussed, but it is likely to be due to the fact that their work and opinions on the subject have already been publicized through their accounts on social media or in other public contexts.

Research started at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and has been conducted mostly online. It has been facilitated by previous contacts established in the area of London, where the researcher is established. London is a geographic location with a significant presence of videogame companies and independents (UKIE 2017). The number of graduates who aspire to an independent gaming career grows year-on-year due to the high number of universities offering degrees in game development across the UK (Harvey 2019). Many of those graduates who drop out of roles in larger companies hope to take closer control of the content and pace of their work by becoming self-employed. The significant presence of independent creatives has traditionally made London a privileged case of study to evaluate the effects of the neoliberal politics of labor, where work is increasingly "impermanent, short-term, project-based," "passionate," and deprived of welfare and social security (McRobbie 2016, 33–59). Within these conditions, the union organizing project Game Workers Unite found a fertile ground in London and across the UK in 2018, demonstrating that interventions of collective solidarity and support among workers in the UK game industry might be gaining popularity (Ruffino and Woodcock 2020). The four interviewees involved in this study are enmeshed in the cultural and economic context of the UK capital, each showing a high level of awareness of the difficulty and competitiveness of their job, and being particularly receptive toward unionization and collective organizing.

The article concludes that working at deep videogames is seen by the interviewees as a strategy to establish new, different, and more meaningful relations, in an industry that has problematized relations in the first place. The hyper-individualism and competitiveness of this context turn both friends and colleagues into "contacts," toward which one needs to carefully consider whether to disclose feelings of mistrust and uneasiness in relation to their careers (McRobbie 2016, 17–32; Wittel 2001). Designing deep games about mental health is seen as a strategy to bring into play an internal state that is made invisible by work relations, and legitimizing talking about mental health. The deep relations that the interviewees aim

to establish through the development of their games are intended to reach consumers, other developers, and even those involved in the production process as co-workers and participants, with the objective of initiating a dialog that breaks the barrier of secrecy. From this perspective, the content of the games becomes less important. This becomes evident in the accounts of two interviewees who have been designing games on Alzheimer and Asperger syndromes, which are not directly caused by working conditions, but are discussed by the interviewees as enabling conversations about their own work.

Mental Health and Independence: An Industry of Biographies

The videogame industry and the culture surrounding it have often sought to imitate the focus of the film and music industries on the figure of the auteur (Caldwell 2008; Dovey and Kennedy 2006; Mayer et al. 2009). The notion of independent labor in videogame culture has been framed to a significant extent on the myth of the solitary author. There is a long history of self-releasing videogames without the backing of a publisher, producer or investor (Indiecade 2014; Nooney 2014). However, in the late 2000s and early 2010s the aspiration of working independently at a videogame became more prominent in Western economies, and intersected with the availability of online distribution platforms, crowdfunding, and freely available tools of production. In the United Kingdom the effects of this technological and social imaginary are particularly visible. According to the innovation agency NESTA (2014), up to 95% of the workforce in the videogame sector in the UK is employed in small or micro-companies, and is often self-funding their initiative (p. 16). Working individually at a videogame is not a new practice, but it is now becoming the standard for videogame developers, at least at some stage in their careers (Vanderhoef 2020).

Drawing on the vision that sees developers as auteurs, independents are expected to promote themselves on social media and are considered responsible for their attitudes toward the public, their choices in the production of games, and even in their habits of cultural consumption. Biographical reflexivity is brought forward in independent game development, and various strategies are enacted in the process of branding oneself as part of a design aesthetic. As already noted by Beck (1992) in his study of "risk societies," individuals "become the agents of their educational and market-mediated subsistence and the related life planning and organization. Biography itself is acquiring a reflexive project" (p. 90). Biographies are mobilized when justifying one's own presence in the industry and networking with potential collaborators and consumers. As a result, social media such as Twitter become the ideal context where to engage with audiences and collaborators while constructing a biographical narrative framed around passion toward videogames.

However, the narratives of individualization often overlook the standardization and adaptation that the independent developer must undergo in the process of becoming publicly visible. An aspiring independent developer must comply with the entrepreneurial and neoliberal practices that determine the existence and survival of their job. In this process, the independent videogame developer is expected to frame their passion toward work through a "moral calculus," where vocational and profit-driven labor must be rightly balanced (Chia 2019). The independent developer is dependent on the labor market, which, despite claims of it being unregulated and open to all, presents a certain set of rules of engagement: it

becomes necessary to comply with the rules of the cultural intermediaries, of social media and other contexts of PR and marketing, and appear in first person at multiple publicity, promotion, and networking events (Parker et al. 2017). These tasks demand time and effort, especially since the support originally provided by the professional figure of the producer has been eliminated in independent careers (Whitson et al. 2018). The cultural labor of the independent developer is often invisible, deprived of mentoring schemes or clear patterns of progression, characterized by long working hours spent on networking and fundraising. Independent developers have marginal agency when it comes to deciding whether, and how, they are going to appear to players, other indies, and the general public. Yet, they need to be prepared to take all the responsibility for their products, public actions, and statements.

It is within this context that independent gaming and its failures are discussed as individual affairs. These failures typically give rise to social, psychological, and emotional crises, and frequently force independent developers to abandon their projects, social media presence, or, in some cases, even their careers. The dynamics of distribution and marketization of videogame products give rise to the praising and shaming of specific individuals, while treating each story as a separate case, attributable to the (successful or otherwise) life choices of a single person. Narratives of independent failures replicate the same terms and criteria that are used in instructing and directing developers toward a career in gaming. Learning to be a successful indie developer is often presented as a process of self-discovery and production of potential, consistently with the "turn to passion" of career guides and coaching in other creative sectors (Hong 2015; Mäkinen 2016). Contexts of mentoring and education—such as the workshops and how-to guides orientated to aspiring independent developers—are articulated as a series of practical suggestions as to how to change one's own life in order to make it as an independent developer. These suggestions often involve making the right life choices: how to manage one's personal and family finances; which habits of consumption to take or give up; who to talk to and meet up with to create a solid professional network; which costs and economic factors to consider when choosing a place to live, and so on. The road to success is allegedly made up of personal life choices, which implicitly suggest that failure is the result of not having managed to live well enough.

Similar trends are evident across the creative industries. Economies of precarious employment tend to celebrate stories of self-made success, especially on social media (Duffy et al. 2019). In these contexts mental health is often influenced by an individualized and gendered narrative of competitiveness and meritocracy (Franssen 2019). Videogame culture has been adapting the concept of the ideal worker to that of the gamer: an obsessive, addicted, competitive consumer. An ideal consumer that has been, in its own turn, normalized by videogame press across the 1980s (Kirkpatrick 2014). These cultural imaginaries frame a context where syndromes and disorders might be seen favorably, as signs of dedication and commitment. A number of associations are campaigning for mental health awareness in the videogame industry. On top of the aforementioned Take This, the charity Safe in Our World was founded in the UK in 2019 to foster positive mental wellness for "players, developers, publishers and retailers" (Safe in Our World 2020). The UK charity GamesAid (2020) has organized special game jam events and published articles on mental health.

The dynamics surrounding the acts of blaming and praising a specific individual are specific to the contemporary modalities in which videogames are made, distributed, and consumed,

and intersect with the economic and cultural promises that have been made regarding the emergence of independent forms of videogame development over the last ten to fifteen years (Crogan 2018; Martin et al. 2009). This modality of labor is characterized by systemic contradictions that promise personal emancipation, creative control, and economic success, while simultaneously rendering these almost entirely unachievable (Bulut 2020). In response to this new condition only biographical strategies appear to be possible: techniques of self-management, ways of relating to one's own friends, followers, and professional contacts. In this view, suffering from depression, anxiety and burnout become personal deficiencies, rather than embodied responses to the specific occupational stressors and systemic biases of the work environment and culture. At the same time, the pressures of creative labor are made to appear as transcendental obstacles to circumnavigate in isolation, rather than as the result of contingent choices that could be challenged by collective action.

Within this context, developers identify strategies to address a systemic and structural problem of their work. These strategies are not necessarily to be evaluated for what they are achieving, but as signs of what is interpreted as a viable response to an otherwise suffocating condition. Making deep games, as the following section will argue, is seen by the developers as a personal solution to tackle their anxieties and fears. Ultimately, the purpose of their project consists in establishing relations with others from where the (in)visibility of mental health can be addressed, and possibly dealt with, as a systemic issue of the videogame industry.

Interviewees

The research has involved four independent game developers. Marina Diez is CEO of Three of Cups, and at the time when she was interviewed she had released I'm sorry (2020), a game about over-apologizing, made for the GamesAid Mental Health Game Jam 2020. In 2019 she has designed and released PTSD, a game about post-traumatic stress disorder; I'm New Here, about introversion and learning how to take care of oneself; Consent, Empathy and Intimacy, each game addressing the implications of feelings and attitudes toward others. Federico Fasce is a game designer, lecturer at Goldsmiths, University of London, and co-founder of Game Happens, an association that organizes events for independent developers in Italy. Federico had released The Ballad of Past Lou (2020) at the time of the interview, an autobiographical and playable reflection on emotional distress and forgiving. Xu He is a game designer with a record of academic publications in psychology. She has designed and developed Happy Land (2018), a VR game about the difficulty of communicating sadness, and Disconnected (2019), a game that makes players experience the life of an autistic girl, involving interviews with participants. Tim Kaufmann has been working at the game Misfolded as lead designer and developer. Misfolded is a game about melancholy and forgetting, based on Tim's research on Alzheimer as a neuro-scientist. Tim has also designed Don't Blame Baby (2017), a VR game about passive aggressive relations in domestic environments, and The Prisoner (2018), a game about the passing of time for a prisoner serving a life sentence.

Biographies

Each participant connects their work to their life experiences, finding in their personal biographies a justification for the videogames they are making. Marina recalls starting her career as designer with Hey Dad (2018), a game based on memories of her father at the time he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder: "I made my first game, Hey Dad, based on my experience. My father was diagnosed when I was a child." The design process "helped making connections and looking at things differently." The work prepared the ground for PTSD (2019). Marina admits suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. She believes that making a game about her own life experience had a therapeutic effect on her: "it has been of great help, it was difficult because these are personal issues and are hard to think through the design of a game, but it helped me making new connections and made me think a lot." Federico looks at The Ballad of Past Lou as a reflection on his life around 2016, when he moved to London from Italy and started a new life having only a few contacts. Federico defines this process as a traumatic experience that involved his work and life to the same extent:

> "I had to make decisions on how to present myself to game companies, and who I was as a person. What I want to do, what I want to talk about. I had never been in psychotherapy but I started, at that time, getting in touch with a professional through Skype. [. . .] At a point I decided I would make games in two to three weeks max. That would allow me to finish what I started and focus on a skill that I wanted to improve. It had a therapeutic effect on me."

The Ballad of Past Lou, a relatively short game, is seen by Federico as a result of such process of autobiographical reflection.

Xu He and Tim have a background in academic research around cognitive neuroscience. Xu He realized she had been suffering from Asperger syndrome while researching the subject. Such a realization, which "explains a lot about my life" as she says, is made playable through Disconnected. She observes: "I read articles on Asperger and realized that I am on the spectrum. I realized that there are a lot of people who never get diagnosed. And I thought I could make a game about it." Tim has been researching Alzheimer as neuroscientist. He has looked into this syndrome because his grandfather suffered from it. Reading about Alzheimer and its effects helped him making sense of his memories and of the experiences of his parents while taking care of Tim's grandfather. Tim defines his decision to make a videogame about Alzheimer around the desire to make the syndrome playable and understandable to others, and as part of a process of self-discovery: "I first worried about how much research I could illustrate into the game [. . .] but talked with people who went through something similar and understood that the emotional journey and understanding the story behind is the most important part."

The motivations for each interviewee are presented as being deeply entangled with personal cases and memories of family members. Deep games are for them a way of processing their life stories and make them accessible to others, an aspiration to construct and re-embed their biographies within a network sociality. As argued by Wittel (2001), networking does not necessarily amount to the formation of social groupings, shared narratives, and values; rather, it is made up of a "multitude of experiences and biographies" (p. 65). However, on this occasion the connection between work and biography made by the interviewees is mobilized to create the conditions for mutual understanding and collective strategies. In this sense it

has a double function: first, to re-claim a form of agency in a context of labor that has largely overlooked the psychological and physical needs of the individual and, secondly, establish relations with others where invisible mental states, such as mental disorders and syndromes, could be addressed.

Agency

The games made by the interviewees are presented through an autobiographical narrative which opens to a redefinition of their own agency on at least two levels and meanings. First, agency is re-claimed by the designers in relation to the problems of the videogame industry. Mental health in the industry is perceived as an issue by the participants, affecting those working at large companies as much as the independents. This is often reconnected to personal experiences and many "heard of" stories of colleagues being subject of abuse, unfair treatment, prolonged working sessions, eventually leading to stress, burnout, and impostor syndrome. Making deep games is a strategy to identify areas of intervention within the industry and to reclaim agency over a social and economic condition that has eroded the possibility for change.

Secondly, videogames are frequently defined by the participants as ideal tools for understanding psychological states. The interactive and iterative experience of playing a videogame requires one to perform similar actions over time and, according to the participants, be confronted with a simulation of the hurdles of those who are suffering from mental health issues. Making the player "step into the shoes" of the affected patient is a common approach in deep games, and is largely inspired by theories on the effects of representation and simulation that have been at foundation of the early studies on digital games (Frasca 2003). As the interviewees often put it, it is a strategy that gives power to both the designer and player in a context, that of mental health, defined by powerlessness and difficulty of communication.

Marina identifies the four most common mental problems of the game industry in "anxiety, depression, burnout, and post-traumatic stress disorder." The same issues that brought her to make a game such as PTSD, and made her decide to work as an independent. Making interactive games can "show these personal experiences" in a unique and effective manner, she claims, and can be used to address issues that are frequently seen in the workplace. Videogame companies are defined by Marina as being over-competitive, and characterized by low levels of empathy and tolerance for those who claim to have mental or physical problems. Thus, making videogames about these issues is seen as the ideal strategy to "normalize mental health," as she says, and change the industry from within.

Federico explicitly connects the potential of videogames with the lack of control on mental safety in the workplace. He says that, at the time when the company he was working for gave him a temporary contract, he experienced anxieties that he would then communicate through his games: "I started using games as an expressive tool, a way of challenging my emotions and fears. Making videogames became for me a way to unpack certain feelings and think through them in a familiar language." Attending game industry events such as the Game Developers Conference, and engaging with other developers at the Game Happens festival in Italy, made him realize that many want to talk about these issues. There are structural problems in the industry that make these forms of intervention nearly impossible, Federico admits, saying that "it is certainly a cultural problem [and] a problem of management" and that there is a pressure

to "sacrifice your private life to make games." Moreover, many cannot even recognize when they are experiencing mental health issues. Making deep games is then defined by Federico as "a therapeutic process, which takes out of you things that are deeply personal and makes you challenge them." He also says that "initially there is fear, it takes effort to make the first step. It took me three months to decide I really wanted to go through that path." The process then creates "a channel of communication with others because others have the same experiences, and the process gets you closer to them."

Tim's account maintains that mental health issues are often invisible, or made invisible, by those working in the videogame industry. He recognizes that in the development of Misfolded some of his collaborators started experiencing anxieties and stress as a consequence of the pressure to complete the whole project within eight months. Collaboration in the team was immediately affected, but Tim remembers being capable to identify these issues when they happened: "I've seen it before and I said I need to recover before it gets worse, I was lucky enough to spot it. A lot of people in the development team didn't spot it, and this led to burnout and physical problems, because they are connected." The invisibility of the degradation of mental health is perceived as a complex area where to intervene, or even talk about. It is also entangled with the myth that working in the game industry is "passion labor." As Tim says: "people are passionate about the work they are doing because it's part of themselves [. . .] and suddenly their self-worth is tied to the work they are doing and if that is not good enough than it's them who are not good enough and that starts to spiral and it becomes all consuming."

At the same time, videogames are perceived as enabling that intervention. Xu He claims that in games "there is more control, it is more than just animation" and that "we can use the power of games to do positive things and make people understand mental illness better." Asperger is invisible, Xu He observes, and even "watching a film about it might not reveal its implications or enable spectators to recognize its effects." Videogames, instead, "drag the player into the characters [and] make people feel the frustration." However, to make those games is extremely demanding for a developer. "When I worked for a company I had no spare time to make (my) game" Xu He admits, and claims that to experiment she "needs funding, and I can't get funding easily." Marina further acknowledges that making deep games can, in its own turn, exacerbate stress and burnout as these productions are not at all deprived of deadlines or external pressures.

The accounts of the interviewees reflect on their practices and experiences by identifying two areas where control becomes problematic. It is difficult to understand, recognize, and talk about mental health issues, particularly within the videogame industry where labor is perceived as being purely driven by passion. Also, videogames make the player experience varied degrees of control over the simulation. Deep games are then seen as texts through which agency could be re-claimed, even if temporarily and partially, in a way that could enable both players and designers to understand those unspeakable, and unspoken, internal states.

Relations

Working with videogames often brings to physical and mental issues, but videogames are also seen as enabling a process of self-discovery that paves the way for a safer and healthier

industry. For this purpose, participants find that it is fundamental to share deep games and talk about them with players, colleagues and collaborators. The most significant memories that the involved participants associate with their work are contextualized in face-to-face exchanges and dialogs. Festivals, cultural institutions and universities play in this respect a pivotal role in connecting developers with their audiences and with each other (Parker et al. 2017; Pearce 2021). Each participant is strongly convinced that their videogames must be "relatable" (a word that frequently appears in their interviews): they should be played on a common ground, where both players and designers can understand each other and share experiences that would otherwise remain invisible.

Knowing that others will find the videogame relatable is the principal reason to make the videogame in the first place. Making the videogame is "therapeutic"—something that each participant explicitly mentions. It is also defined as a "process of self-discovery," mostly because it opens to the possibility that others will relate to it. Marina says: "Showing your experience helps because you're probably not the only person who lived through it, and others out there feel the same. Thus, making this kind of games helps people building a community and feel less isolated. So you know you've got to finish making the game because others will play it." Federico says that "making the game is therapeutic [and] it is a channel of communication with others, it gets you closer to others." Tim observes:

> "From the feedback we got people found it such an emotional rollercoaster because they could relate to it. They could relate personally through their own experiences of family members to what they were seeing in the games. Because the game was made from my own experience that made the game relatable on a personal level to the people playing it."

Those "relatable" experiences are enabled by institutions that facilitate contact between developers and consumers, testers and research participants. For instance, Xu He's game Disconnected is made as part of her degree at the National Film and Television School, and it is the result of engaging with four participants in the autism spectrum. One of the participants was a classmate of Xu He, who revealed to be autistic after knowing she was making a game about it. "No one knew she was autistic before, she is good at masking," Xu He says, acknowledging that the production process allowed both her and her classmate to confess to each other a condition they were keeping secret. The game has been shown at the EGX festival, and players have been asked to leave written feedback after playing the game. The feedback has then been shown on the Twitter account and webpage of the project, with a view of "exploring further relations," as Xu He comments.

Tim's game Misfolded has also been shown at EGX, and Tim remembers that the audience was "incredibly engaged and seemed to relate to it and become emotionally drawn into it." Marina recalls that, at the time when she made Hey Dad, she met a player of the game in Valencia, Spain during a game design workshop. The girl approached Marina saying that she traveled there to meet her, and that her father was bipolar and she always felt lonely until she played the game. "It's only when you meet people that you can see that it actually helps, even if it's only a little thing," says Marina.

Federico admits to have received support in the early days when he transitioned toward an independent career by the Hack Space in Hackney, London:

> "At the time there were 3 or 4 friends there and I would go there and this would make my work more real. Some of the things I was talking about felt strictly personal and I would feel ashamed sometimes. You feel like you're the only person in the world and by taking this out I will make myself ridiculous, and then you realize that others are going through the same, and living the same. And having this kind of relation. . .it's relatable!"

These accounts corroborate the fundamental role of cultural intermediators and contexts of networking in shaping the culture surrounding independent videogames (Browne and Whitson 2021; Parker et al. 2017). The interviews show that contexts of physical proximity could become places for the exchange of information that escapes the norms of professional networking. These are contexts that "make work real," as Federico says, and where unspoken opinions might be confidentially shared with others. Working at a deep game is perceived as facilitating these less visible exchanges. The interviews also confirm the fundamental role played by research institutes and academia in facilitating experimental videogame development, a role often overlooked but essential, among other things, in establishing intimate connections and sharing of ideas (Pearce 2021). It should be noted, in this respect, that each participant is involved in either academic research (Xu He and Tim), teaching at higher education institutions (Federico), or regularly attending academic conferences on game design (Marina).

Conclusion

Workers in the videogame industry have started becoming vocal about the problems faced in their workplace. Working conditions are often excruciating, both physically and mentally, and end up marginalizing those who cannot, or do not want to, comply with them. The ways in which mental health is discussed (or not discussed) contribute to raise invisible barriers of inclusivity. Academic research, associations for mental health, and the union organizing project Game Workers Unite, are among those who are currently offering broader visions and structural solutions. The interviewees maintain that the dynamics of production of the videogame industry can be physically and mentally detrimental for game workers. They also elaborate strategies to address these issues and to enable new contexts of exchange and participation with others. Their responses reveal a high degree of self-reflexivity and willingness to discuss the problems affecting their professional sector. Their visions are not necessarily challenging the individualized narratives of independence and of auctorial control now popular within the videogame industry, but build on these pre-existing beliefs to articulate a potential response that could open to new forms of solidarity among workers.

Starting from the findings of previous research projects and associations, this article has looked at how individual strategies are brought forward by those who perceive to suffer from these conditions. Their responses have been evaluated not in their efficacy or internal consistency, but as personal coping mechanisms that might inspire new pathways for collective intervention. Engaging with a limited number of London-based independent game developers has shed light on a number of strategies that they put into practice. Participants make games about mental health to dig a tunnel under those invisible barriers that they have encountered in the past. They are not necessarily convinced that they will find someone along or at the end of the path, but they believe that this will certainly move the ground. Beyond a deterministic belief in the power of interactive texts, their accounts show that contexts of

physical co-presence (such as festivals, game jams, research, and collaboration centers) are vital for enabling social connections. These places make work "real," in the words of Federico, as they make it immediately "relatable" to others and enable a dialog that would otherwise remain unspoken. Through these encounters along the way, participants feel that their internal feelings of dissatisfaction are shared by others, and could be challenged collectively.

The participants acknowledge that game-making has become more individualized as a result of the emergence of independent development and of the vision of the auteur in game design, and that these tendencies have been increasing individual pressures and further exacerbating the mental distress of game workers. Their responses are articulated within an industry of biographies, and as part of a network sociality that keeps the individual at the center. At the same time, research participants have been seeking solutions by drawing on their autobiographical self-reflexivity. They believe that articulating personal life stories in their games, and in the ways they talk about and present their games, could enable new relations with others and bring to a better, fairer and more inclusive videogame industry. Their solutions are partly consistent with the vision of the auteur, but are orientated toward re-enabling their individual agency toward the creation of new contexts of intimate exchanges.

The present study contributes to existing scholarship on videogame development by providing an analysis of the accounts of workers involved in the game industry who have been addressing the problems deriving from mental distress. It shows how strategies are elaborated by the participants even in contexts that appear to provide structural and impassable barriers. The strategies might not necessarily lead to radical changes. Nonetheless, they demonstrate a fervent activity that is certainly worth of further investigation. The emphasis put on physical co-presence and proximity as enabling dialogs around mental health is a potential area of further research. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives and work of independent videogame developers might have serious repercussions not just on their mental health, but on the very possibility of discussing and addressing issues of mental distress. As festivals get cancelled, and offices and co-working spaces remain closed, there is a lack of availability of spaces where to engage in informal and "off the records" conversations about work. It is worth exploring whether, and how, game workers have been seeking alternative connections and contexts throughout the pandemic where to discuss issues related to their labor practices.

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PART 6

Messages, Narratives, and Representations

CHAPTER 34

What I Know Now: Radio as a Means of Empowerment for Women of Lived Prison Experience

Heather Anderson and Charlotte Bedford

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Abstract

Incarceration rates are increasing almost everywhere and, while women and girls make up only a small percentage of the overall prison population, there has been a significant increase in their representation—especially over the past 20 years (Carlton and Segrave, 2013). Despite the fact that societies are locking women up at increasingly high rates, the fundamental understandings regarding prison reform are based on a male norm, and do not meet the needs of female offenders (Walmsley, 2016). This article outlines the findings from the first stage of a grassroots action research project conducted with a support group for women of lived prison experience, based in Adelaide, South Australia, to investigate radio production as a means for supporting women in their transition to life outside of prison. The research found that empowerment manifested itself in a number of distinct ways, through both processes and the products of the project. Through the production of radio, women of prison experience recognised their own expertise and took ownership of their stories, while the radio products educated the wider public and validated the participants' experiences.

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Keywords

Action research, arts-led research, community radio, prisoners, prisoner radio, women prisoners

Introduction

The world is experiencing a crisis in the form of a prison population explosion, cheered on by a dominant media discourse informed and inspired by an international 'tough on crime' movement (Beckett and Sasson, 2005; Newell, 2013). Incarceration rates are increasing almost everywhere, and especially in Oceania (59.1 per cent between 2000 and 2015) and the Americas (40.5 per cent during the same period) (Walmsley, 2016). While women and girls make up a small percentage of the overall prison population, there has been a significant increase in their representation, especially over the past 20 years (Carlton and Segrave, 2013). International research shows that the female prison population has increased by 50 per cent since about 2000, while the equivalent statistic for male prisoners sits at 18 per cent. Increases in the female prison population in Asia, Oceania and the Americas have been, respectively, five, four and three times the increase in the population of those continents (Walmsley, 2015). Despite the fact that societies are locking women up at increasingly high rates, the fundamental understandings regarding prison reform are based on a male norm and do not meet the needs of female offenders (Walmsley, 2016). As Segrave and Carlton (2013: 2) insist, 'there is a need to draw public attention to criminalised women's lives [and the] contexts that drive injustice and institutionalisation'.

This article outlines the findings from the first stage of a grassroots action research project conducted with a support group for women of lived prison experience, based in Adelaide, South Australia, to investigate radio production as a means for supporting women in their transition to life outside of prison. The researchers recognise that release from prison is not a singular event, but rather 'part of lifetime trajectories characterised by complex levels of disadvantage, experiences of injustice and oppression, cycles of state intervention (often from an early age), criminalisation and serial imprisonment' (Segrave and Carlton, 2013: 1). The project discussed here focuses on radio as a means of empowerment, in an attempt to engage creative industries more effectively to address the specific needs of women of lived prison experience. The research found that empowerment manifested itself in a number of distinct ways, through both processes and the products of the project. After discussing the relevance of radio to a prison research agenda, and examining the importance of action research and arts-led methods as tools of social change, we will outline the preliminary outcomes of the project, as well as suggesting future directions for research in this area.

Radio, prisoners and empowerment

Radio remains relatively affordable to make, transmit and listen to, leading to its position as the most enduring, pervasive and democratic media worldwide (Hendy, 2000). It is uniquely positioned because it has the potential to overcome many literacy issues that limit access to print and web-based publications (Waltz, 2005). This is particularly relevant when working

with prison communities, which struggle with literacy issues. In the United States, it is estimated that over 60 per cent of adults in the prison system read at or below the fourth grade level (Kutner et al., 2006), while in the United Kingdom, half of the prisoner population can be classified as functionally literate compared with 85 per cent of the general population (Creese, 2015). In Canada, 75 per cent of prisoners have low literacy skills (Abokor, 2003), with 82 per cent testing below a Grade 10 reading level (Nursall, 2012), and in Australia, where Corrections Services are structured at a state level, the Victorian Government reports that only 40 per cent of prisoners have sufficient literacy and numeracy skills to cope independently in the workforce (McDonald, 2015).

Radio has a strong background in participatory community development. In fact, community radio is explicitly a participatory venture—in Australia (where this case study is situated), it is specifically legislated to involve local communities in both production and management. Community broadcasting was founded, according to Rennie, Spurgeon and Barraket (2017: 1), on 'social good principles', including but not limited to 'creating opportunities for media self-representation through direct participation'. Community radio has also been identified as a tool of empowerment. As Forde, Meadows and Foxwell-Norton (2002) describe the Australian sector, it is 'a site where citizens claim cultural rights … planning a community radio station can be thought of as a process of cultural empowerment'. The *Community Media Matters* report (Meadows et al., 2007) found that community radio empowers local citizens to participate in their communities in a variety of ways, and that for communities that experience a significant degree of social disadvantage, such as prisoners and their families, community broadcasting provides a critical service. Furthermore, community radio has been found to enable community members to connect through their engagement with radio programming. This makes it an ideal medium for working with prisoners (Anderson, 2012), who are among the most silent and isolated members of society—and women prisoners even more so, given that the prison system itself has been designed around the male norm.

Previous research (Anderson, 2012, 2013; Bedford, 2014, 2016) shows ways in which radio can be used to engage prisoners in education, to maintain community links and to improve access to services and information. Prisoner radio comes in two main formats that, combined, represent prisoner radio broadcasting by and to communities both inside and out of correctional facilities (Anderson and Bedford, 2017). First, prison radio stations, although few in number, are operated inside of correctional facilities around the world, and used to internally disseminate information, provide a creative outlet and deliver both informal training and, in certain cases, formalised educational outcomes. Second, there are community radio stations (again internationally, albeit in small numbers) that feature prisoners' radio programs and work with prisoners, former prisoners, their families, friends and support networks to maintain personal connections and broadcast alternative discourses on criminal justice issues. It is within this second framework that this research project is situated.

There is limited published research on the topic of prisoner radio, and most of the literature concentrates on specific case studies with no connecting themes across the research—a limitation the authors seek to address. Anderson (2012) is currently the only comprehensive work on prisoners' radio internationally; it includes an inventory of prisoners' radio programs (including prison radio) as well as detailed case studies from Australia and Canada. A few articles have been published that deal with specific issues identified as salient through the

study of prisoners' radio, all within an Australian context. Anderson (2013) uses the Beyond the Bars project to look at relationships between prisoners' radio and Aboriginal communities. Minc, Butler and Gahan (2007) explore drug policies through a study of the radio program *Jailbreak*, while Fisher (2009) examines how prisoners' request shows and other radio forms mediate kinship in Aboriginal communities in Northern Australia.

Prison radio stations are also beginning to attract academic interest. For example, the Prison Radio Association (PRA) and its National Prison Radio (NPR) initiative in the United Kingdom have been examined by Bedford (2014, 2016). Through an intensive focus on an early PRA partnership project with the BBC, the author argues that alternative media have a role to play in redefining and reimagining public service broadcasting values and practice within an increasingly commercialised and fragmented mediascape. According to Bedford (2016), the success and effectiveness of the NPR model was grounded in the importance of gradually building effective partnerships to make it happen. As an independent group, the Prison Radio Association (which established NPR) was able to play a key role in balancing the needs of both the prison service and prisoners while prioritising prisoner involvement in process. Grimes and Stevenson (2012) also touch on the early years of the PRA activity to discuss radio as a tool for rehabilitation and social inclusion. Doliwa (2013) explores the characteristics and roles of prison radio in Poland, arguing that the genre is a form of community radio. In addition, both McDermott (2004) and Allan (2006) argue for the criminal justice impact of early UK prison radio initiative Radio Wanno.

Recognising women prisoners

It is important to consider the specific needs of women in prison, especially given that, on average, two-thirds of women in prison are primary caregivers (Stathopoulos et al., 2012). The Australian Institute of Family Studies (Stathopoulos et al., 2012) has found that the incarceration of women causes disruptions to families disproportionate to the crimes committed. The effects of a mother's imprisonment on children include developmental problems, social withdrawal and anti-social behaviours that impact on the wider community. In addition, 80 to 90 per cent of women prisoners are survivors of some form of emotional, physical or sexual abuse (particularly domestic violence and childhood abuse) prior to their incarceration (Johnson, 2004) and many also exhibit high rates of mental illness (Boyd, 2011). The World Health Organization (Møller et al., 2007) recognises that the nature of imprisonment is likely to worsen people's mental health if they have problems upon entry, or cause mental health problems in some people who are healthy upon entry. Imprisoned women also experience higher rates of disability and of poor mental and physical health than men, and most have histories of drug and alcohol use that are connected to cycles of trauma (Baldry, 2010).

Worldwide, there is a higher rate of recidivism for women, who tend to have shorter but more frequent custodial sentences, typically for non-violent crime that are embedded within the conditions of their lives (Bloom, Owen and Covington, 2003). Despite 'over a century of rehabilitationist rhetoric [the] majority of women ex-prisoners are repeatedly released back into those same circumstances of poverty and malign neglect which catapulted them into jail in the first place' (Carlen, 2013: xiii). According to Segrave and Carlton (2013), the

increase in the rate of imprisonment and re-imprisonment of women is causally connected to the entrenchment of social disadvantage enabled under the conditions of neo-liberalism.

Release from prison marks a period of heightened precariousness (Carlton and Segrave, 2013), and often means leaving the structure of prison life for chaotic uncertainty on the outside (Baldry, 2010). The instability of women's post-release mental health often materialises with disproportionately high rates of post-release harm and death, both in Australia and internationally (Segrave and Carlton, 2011) and the needs of formerly imprisoned women often reflect a 'survival strategy from abuse and poverty' (Parsons and Warner-Robbins, 2002: 40). Carlton and Baldry (2013: 56) highlight that post-release support programs for criminalised women can often amplify their experiences of institutionalisation, and 'consolidate and increase women's experiences of being controlled' because they extend 'post-prison governance and control'. Without practical and respectful support that takes the specific contexts of women's lives seriously, 'injustice and discrimination are compounded with each incarceration and release' (Carlton and Baldry, 2013: 60).

Our research opposes a more accepted approach to recidivism that 'positions disadvantage through the narrow lens of individual failure and social inadequacy' (Segrave and Carlton, 2013: 4), and punishes and excludes those who cannot or are deemed unable to manage their own well-being. Rather, it aligns with a growing body of feminist scholarship that recognises and critically analyses the role of institutions (including, in this case, media institutions) in sustaining discrimination and the further expansion of correctional service industries (see, for example, the Special 10th Anniversary Issue of the journal Feminist Criminology titled 'Is Criminology Still Male Dominated?').

Methodology

This article draws on a participatory action research project, which is part of a broader ongoing research program involving the authors and the community organisation Seeds of Affinity: Pathways for Women (known more colloquially as 'Seeds'). Seeds is a not-for-profit, grassroots, volunteer-run community group that supports women to support each other upon their release from prison. The organisation began in 2006 and was founded by a group of South Australian women with lived prison experience. According to its website, Seeds 'works together to challenge the ongoing stigmatisation faced by women leaving prison, and to build a community where women felt a sense of belonging, solidarity and self worth' (Seeds of Affinity, 2016). Carlen (2013: xiv) says women leaving prison tend to prefer, and find more empowering, grassroots projects opposed to 'the coercive but superficial cognitive programmes provided by the international in-prison rehabilitation industry', making Seeds a highly appropriate organisation with which to form an action research partnership.

This pilot project engaged in action research (AR), a method that involves testing ideas in practice as a means of improving social, economic or environmental conditions and increasing knowledge; it is particularly valuable as a means of exploring new media initiatives (Hearn et al., 2009). AR works as 'a collaborative approach to inquiry or investigation that provides people with the means to take systematic action to resolve specific problems' (Stringer, 1996: 15), and aligns with feminist-oriented approaches to social justice research (Pickering, 2014). According to Pickering, as a community-based approach, AR brings researchers and participants

together as partners who 'contribute unique strengths and share responsibilities to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation', which in the case of this project was to investigate how radio production might be useful to Seeds of Affinity (and ultimately more broadly) as a tool to support women of lived prison experience.

This project can also be situated within an arts-led research model, grounded in the understanding that arts can 'engage in research as a participatory act that allows those involved to more directly express their voices' (Walsh, Rutherford and Crough, 2013: 121). Arts-based research is also strongly embedded within a social justice methodology, as it emphasises the voice of the marginalised, empowering participants and promoting a more equal relationship between researcher and research participant (Huss and Cwikel, 2005). Our definition of 'arts' extends to include radio and other creative industries beyond the more traditional genres of, for example, creative writing, theatre and visual art. Barndt (2004: 230) reminds us that popular communications can democratise art and communication tools integral to grassroots organising, and share 'the concerns of community arts for socially critical content and participatory process of production'. This is especially the case for community radio. In her work using community radio in Nicaragua as participatory action research to develop a community-based resource management plan, Barndt explicitly describes the processes of making radio as participatory research that affirms people's knowledge.

While action research and arts-based research methods have been identified and employed as effective and appropriate for working with prisoners, and the formerly imprisoned (see, for example, Jarldorn, 2016; Parsons and Warmer-Robbins, 2002; Pickering, 2014; Walsh, Rutherford and Crough, 2013), there is sparse literature that specifically addresses the outcomes of such projects involving radio. However, AR involving photo-voice is becoming increasingly popular in ways with which parallels can be drawn for the purposes of this article. Photovoice uses photography as means of self-expression, to challenge 'the politics of representation, providing ex-prisoners a means to surveil operations of power, [and] validate their shared experience' (Jarldorn, 2016: 213). Pickering (2014: 278) found that formerly incarcerated women involved in a Photovoice AR project used the medium as a means to help the community 'come to be on closer terms' and 'see beyond the label of ex-con', and the workshops enhanced both the bonding and bridging social capital of the participants. Transformation was identified to have occurred in many ways, on personal, professional and public levels, and not only for the women of lived prison experience but also the researchers and the audiences of the Photovoice exhibitions. Walsh, Rutherford and Crough (2013: 120) identified Photovoice (and other arts-led research methods, including writing and digital storytelling) to be effective approaches to promote the voices of formerly and currently incarcerated women, and to offer opportunities that were meaningful and empowering for the women involved while also contributing to broader change and social justice. They also cite O'Neill (2008) to say that arts-based methods produce knowledge in a collaborative manner, where cooperativity is paramount in terms of success.

The research project gathered data through a number of distinct approaches, mainly:

- ethnographic participant observations and reflection notes taken during and after the workshops
- official documents produced during the project (e.g. project proposal, grant application)

- content analysis of the radio segments produced as a result of the workshops
- content analysis of a one-hour live radio show presented by the participants, and
- audio recordings produced during the training project, but not intended for broadcast.

In essence, these data-collection methods focused on collecting what Wang (2013) has coined 'thick data', which provide the story that humanises quantitative data. The concept of thick data is a response to the importance that tends to be attached to 'big data'. Big data comprise quantitative information that is produced through analysis of large data sets. Although large quantities of information can be generated through this process, more is needed to reveal and/or bridge knowledge gaps, and this can be provided through thick data. Thick data, produced within the realm of ethnography, provide context and connection, and counteract the notion that qualitative data are 'small data'. This article takes a macro approach to the data gathered and considers the radio project as a whole, rather than focusing on specific aspects such as dominant thematic structures of the broadcast content or commentary on the mainstream media coverage of the project itself.

Establishing What I Know Now

It was vitally important to the research team that the project be led by the women at Seeds of Affinity, in the true spirit of action research. Meaningful action research requires close collaboration between practitioners and researchers (Hearn et al., 2009), and therefore the first step was to meet with Seeds members to gauge their levels of interest. We initially met with the organisation without a proposal. Rather, we introduced ourselves as both academics and community radio practitioners who had worked extensively in prison broadcasting before moving to Adelaide. Seeds meets twice a week and a cooked lunch is included as part of this routine; it was over a meal that we shared stories of the radio projects we had either been a part of, or were aware of, with the suggestion that the organisation may be interested in experimenting with radio. A number of those in attendance showed strong interest in radio, bolstered by the close proximity of a local community radio station, WOW FM. These women immediately recognised radio's potential to reach women both inside and outside prison, as well as the opportunities it presented for building relationships in the local community to raise awareness of the issues faced by women on their release from prison. The theme of 'what I know now' emerged almost immediately.

From the very first meeting, there was a strong commitment that the Seeds women wanted to help others who were going through what they already had survived. *What I Know Now* represents the knowledge held by women who have successfully transitioned from a prison sentence to life in the free world—knowledge they wished they had upon their release. According to the Seeds of Affinity members in attendance at the first information session, women in prison, or immediately post-release, are quite often vulnerable, isolated and misinformed about their rights and the support to which they are entitled. This aligns with the scholarship discussed above, describing the period immediately following release as 'not only usually a traumatic time but … also framed by a woman's history of previous imprisonments and releases' (Carlton and Baldry, 2013: 61). It also addresses concerns that 're-entry research' often focuses on failed cases, consequently overlooking the experiences of 'a significant minority'

who avoid recidivism (Hlavka, Wheelock and Jones, 2015: 407). Conveying the positive message 'what I know now' was at the core of the project from its inception, and informed the direction of the radio series from workshop planning to final broadcast. As one participant said early in the project, 'So I can feel like I've achieved something, so that being in prison hasn't been in vain, so I can help other people'.

Following the initial meeting, the researchers wrote a proposal for the Seeds of Affinity board of directors to deliver a workshop series to enable Seeds participants to produce a short series of radio features to support women preparing to leave prison. It was envisioned that the features would be broadcast through community and online radio partners with the hope of additional distribution through the Correctional Services. According to the initial proposal, the audio would 'be used to share experiences and advice to inform women in prison, strengthen family and community links and raise awareness within the wider community'. Once the proposal was accepted by the Seeds of Affinity board, a small amount of seed funding was secured through the University of South Australia, Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences, Division Research Performance Fund.

Tangible outcomes

The project was built around a series of six practical radio production workshops. A small group of four women developed skills in preparing and conducting interviews, recording voice-overs and scripting radio packages, and explored a variety of storytelling techniques to produce a radio series. While only four women were involved in the actual radio production, the workshops were held at the Seeds of Affinity meeting place (a church hall) during the organisation's regular meeting time. This meant there were always other 'Seeds women' listening to the draft work, being interviewed as talent, stepping in as 'actors' and providing commentary and support to the broadcast team. At any given moment during a Friday afternoon workshop session, there could be women putting together personal hygiene packs to be delivered to the Adelaide Women's Prison, casting moulds for the children of prisoners to decorate during visits or cooking biscuits to be sold for fundraising purposes, while the radio team planned its content and conducted interviews in and around the same space. While chaotic at times, this helped to keep the organisation connected to the radio project as a whole, rather than only through the four direct participants. This was especially represented on final showcase day—while the four women presented their live radio show on WOW FM, many other Seeds of Affinity women gathered to listen at the church hall while preparing for a wedding for which they were due to cater the following day.

It was important to begin with small, practical and achievable goals; as such, the team decided on the production of four short radio features. These focused on real experiences and positive case studies to encourage and guide women prisoners through the release process, based around the following themes:

- 'Seeds of Affinity'— tells the story of the organisation and the services it provides
- 'Surviving on the inside'— gives practical advice on legal rights on the inside
- 'Surviving when you first get out'— gives practical advice and guidance including available organisations and services

- 'How I survived'— a collection of inspirational stories from women who have rebuilt their lives.

As already mentioned, the project was launched through a live broadcast on a local community radio station. In the hour-long show, the women talked about their experiences of making radio, introduced their stories and selected music. The launch achieved national and local television and radio news coverage, and gave participants a taste of live broadcasting. The radio segments produced by the participants were podcast via a WordPress site [1] and the Seeds of Affinity website, and broadcast through the following outlets:

- WOW FM (as part of the live launch)
- UniCast internet radio (connected to the School of Communication, International Studies and Languages at the University of South Australia)
- 3D Radio (Adelaide community radio, on *The Prison Show*)
- Radio Adelaide (community radio)
- SBS Radio Living Black (multicultural, multilingual government funded national public radio)
- Community Radio Network (received by all member stations of the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia).

Discussion: Empowering processes and products [2]

> [It gave] women an opportunity to use their voice, because most women are voiceless, so it's great to hear the women's voices on the radio.
>
> It's been amazing, watching the empowerment of women.

Empowerment is a concept that can be tricky to encapsulate—'everyone is for it, but rarely do people mean the same thing by it' (Young, 1994: 48). Empowerment discourse has gained momentum within the field of criminology, especially when framed as a psychological quality that promotes the confidence to control the direction of one's own life (Pollack, 2000). Empowerment can also carry a community dimension that manifests through 'sharing experiences, raising consciousness, collective action and advocacy' (Browne, cited in Pollack, 2000: 76). It was clear throughout the project that the participants themselves used the language of empowerment to define, explain and understand experiences during the project, and as such, our findings are presented within this framework.

Empowerment manifested itself in a number of distinct ways during the project, and is best identified by considering both the processes and products of the *What I Know Now* project. The processes involved in media production can assist 'everyday' people to intervene and transform the mediascape and become empowered to the point where transformations and change are possible (Rodríguez, 2001). At the same time, the radio training workshops gave participants the skills and tools to convert their ideas and knowledge into a media product, a tangible outcome that could be shared with others. This dual analysis allows for a more holistic understand of participatory media projects.

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[1] See https://drheatheranderson.wordpress.com/2016/05/27/what-i-know-now.

[2] All the indented quotes included in the discussion section of this paper are taken from radio project participants.

Empowerment through recognition

'What I know now' validated the knowledge of the participants, reframing their past experiences as information worth sharing for the benefit of others. This was important not only for the four radio producers but the other members of Seeds of Affinity who were interviewed. For example, in the process of producing the episode *How I Survived*, there was much discussion about which women at the organisation were considered inspirational in the way they had rebuilt their lives. This sense of pride was passed on from interviewer to interviewees, as the latter were encouraged to discuss their experiences and give advice to the audience, reinforcing the positive choices those women had made since leaving prison:

> It was actually really an important part to hear that people do succeed when leaving prison. That they find ways to cope and that there are mechanisms that you can use to find your self-worth and grow again within yourself … Listening to the girls' stories, their growth, what it felt like for them leaving prison, and their successes, where they are now.

At the same time, the women directly involved in the project were also empowered by being identified as holding important knowledge. When planning for the episode *Surviving on the Inside*, it was originally thought that a lawyer, or similar 'official' voice, was needed to explain the legal rights of an incarcerated woman. However, the producer herself already knew the *Correctional Services Act* intimately from advocating for herself and other prisoners for over 15 years; all that was needed was a shift in perception about who had the authority to provide the 'official' voice in that narrative. The defining moment for this particular segment occurred when the participant was able to help herself, rather than turn to an expert voice:

> I chose to do something very important to me as I hear over and over again that the young women in the prison don't know how to navigate through the maze that is the criminal justice system … I wanted to help them do that.

Empowerment through ownership

The Seeds women held ownership of the project throughout— with the workshop facilitators acting as conduits to achieve the desired outcomes (i.e. acting as a sounding board for ideas, providing technical assistance and editing). This extended to the live radio show, with the participants planning the way they would introduce and discuss this content. Even the simple act of choosing the music to be played in between their pre-produced segments was a meaningful process and allowed another means for the women to convey their thoughts, ideas and inspirations to the audience:

> I think that song celebrates the simple things in life. I think we can get bogged down with the worries of life and life is meant to be enjoyed.
>
> I chose that song because it keeps pushing me every day to move forward, and that's what you have to do, you can't get stuck.
>
> There's a line in that song that states that hands are for shaking and not for tying, and I think that's a great metaphor for how the system treats the individual.

The high level of thought and preparation that went towards both the pre-recorded segments and live radio presentation demonstrates the investment of the participants in making *What I Know Now* a success.

As already mentioned, the *What I Know Now* project produced two main products—the radio segments (which together make a series) and the live radio show on WOW FM that showcased the radio series. There was also a third media output—a WordPress page that podcast the audio content, produced by the research team for Seeds of Affinity to share the material online. These radio products were produced to provide valuable information for women (and, as it turned out, also for men)[3] inside prison, or making the transition to post-prison life. Each episode gave practical information and advice on a wide variety of topics relating to surviving both inside and outside prison—for example, planning for home detention, what is needed to apply for Centrelink (welfare) benefits and how to make sure there is time to bond with a child born during incarceration. This type of content aligned with the original focus of the project—to tell others 'what I know now that I wish I'd known then' and to fill the gaps in existing common knowledge as identified by the participants.

Empowerment through education

At the same time, these products were also listened to by people who have never been incarcerated. As Walsh, Rutherford and Crough (2013: 122) explain, 'for true social and political change to occur, not only must marginalised voices be heard, but also they must be able to elicit attentiveness and responsiveness from the mainstream community and its seats of power'. The general public probably knows less about imprisonment than about any other stage of the justice system (Surette, 2007; Roberts and Hough, 2005; Blakely and Bumphus, 2005), with prisoners 'barely register(ing) on the daily media radar screen' (Lumby, 2002: 104). People often do not go to a prison, either as resident, employee or visitor—the 1996 British Crime Survey (as cited in Roberts and Hough, 2005) found four out of five respondents had never been to a prison in any capacity. More often than not, other sources need to be drawn upon for understandings about the prison system. A wide range of cultural products 'feed the popular imaginary with representations of life in prison' (Ek, 2005), and such portrayals directly influence political and public support for prison initiatives and reform, as well as the ways in which the wider public perceive prisoners themselves (Blakely and Bumphus, 2005; Stern, 2005). However, such coverage is often inadequate and often sensational. *What I Know Now* also manifested empowerment for women of lived prison experience by directly challenging the stereotype of the criminal woman:

> Basically it can happen to anyone and the stigmatisation that goes with being a prisoner is very hard to overcome when you're trying to build a life and assimilate back into the community.

The series focused on positive stories that highlighted the achievements of women of lived prison experience in their lives post-incarceration. It showcased women who had overcome drug addiction, travelled through their work and succeeded in study, not to mention establishing Seeds of Affinity and supporting other women to realise their dreams. The radio

[3] After broadcasts on *The Prison Show*, 3D Radio, male prisoners phoned the station asking to be put in touch with Seeds of Affinity members to ask whether they could assist them to obtain copies of the *Correctional Services Act*.

series also showcased articulate, compassionate women who wanted to improve opportunities for others, so that their own journey was a little less daunting. It introduced alternative representations of women prisoners (or, more to the point, former prisoners) to the wider public, expanding on the discourses available for discussing issues of law and order, and the criminal justice system. Such representations directly work against what Kendall (2013) describes as neo-liberal policies and practices that rationalise inequality as the consequence of individual failure.

Empowerment through validation

According to O'Neill (in Walsh, Rutherford and Crough, 2013: 122), arts-based research practices can create dialogic spaces 'wherein the mainstream meets with the marginalised'. This was certainly the case for the *What I Know Now* project, which attracted interest from local and national radio and television outlets of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), the country's main government-funded public broadcaster. On the morning of the live broadcast, one participant and one researcher were interviewed during a live segment on ABC Adelaide, the city's highest rating radio station (*In Daily*, 2016). Later in the day, a journalist and camera operator from the Adelaide ABC newsroom visited Seeds of Affinity and interviewed a researcher and a participant before the live radio program, then returned to film during the broadcast, remaining at the radio station for the entirety of the show. The resulting story was broadcast on the national television news service and repackaged for ABC News Radio. This positive mainstream media coverage of the project and the radio series further empowered the women involved in the project, as it demonstrated the validity of their work outside of the immediate Seeds community. It also had a personal impact on the participants. One participant in particular chose to participate in the radio interview but did not want to take part in television or print media, as she didn't want to be identified. Following the radio interview, she received a text message from an in-law family member who congratulated her, saying how proud she was and that she was 'proof that anyone can make a mistake but go on to do bigger and better things', or words to that effect. As a result, the participant changed her mind and chose to participate in the ABC TV news report, a decision she later said she was very grateful to have made.

Conclusions and future directions

Empowerment through media training comes from being given an opportunity to broadcast one's voice—a space in the media sphere to feel legitimised, and ideally also to be listened to. In the process of producing the radio segments, the women were able to recognise that, when it came to sharing valuable knowledge related to survival in a post-prison environment, they were in fact the experts. As well as communicating with women (and men) of lived prison experience, the participants also presented content that was meaningful to the wider community within which criminalised and non-criminalised people coexist.

This research project contributes to a sparse yet growing body of work that views transitions from incarceration through the lens of success rather than failure; it also adds to our understandings about the value of arts-led research methods and the role of radio *(and potentially other creative industries)* in supporting women of lived prison experience. Furthermore,

the research highlights the integral role of the participant and promotes action research as a tool for social justice and social change. As mentioned above, this project is part of a broader and ongoing action research collaboration between the authors and Seeds of Affinity. It was the first such venture, and was considered a success by the participants. As verbalised by one radio presenter during the live broadcast:

> One of the main things that we've gotten out of it is the great partnership with you guys [the researchers] which is really important. Part of the thing about being a women when you come out of prison is that you don't feel connected to community so building partnerships is really, really important.

An important element of the action research arts-led model is to continually build upon previous work, findings and relationships to create a collaborative cycle of knowledge. This article has outlined a linear pattern of collaboration, creation and content; to create a meaningful cycle, we need to return to the collaboration phase. Recent discussions have revealed a desire to host a regular radio show on WOW FM, and to also hold a listening group inside the Adelaide Women's Prison to gather formal feedback on the first series of radio segments and seek guidance on the types of content women inside prison would like to hear in the future. It is through these potential ventures that the next phase of research will be developed.

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CHAPTER 35

Are You Okay? Mental Health Narratives in Art Zines from the Zineopolis Collection

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Abstract

This article explores art zines that contain visual narratives about mental health from this special collection. It questions how visual narratives about issues such as general anxiety disorder, burnout, and post-traumatic stress disorder can communicate to a reader through art zines. It will consider authorial illustration within self-publishing and how personal stories can be shared in an ultimately positive context. Well-being has become a particular focus for higher education in the UK with many students struggling with anxiety and depression. Art zines have an immediacy and democracy of production that means more stories can be shared beyond what is available in the mainstream. Ethical issues of circulating these art zines within a collection is also commented upon. Mental health issues have often been portrayed though the popular media unsympathetically creating stigma, whereas these selected art zines show care and understanding offering an alternative narrative.

Keywords

Zines, Mental-Health, Self-Publishing, Illustration, Graphic Medicine

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Art Zines and the Zineopolis Collection

Zineopolis is the art zine collection at the University of Portsmouth, UK. It focuses on zines where the content is mostly conveyed through sequences of images. The majority of the collection is by illustrators, artists, photographers, and designers of all ages, genders, and abilities. Since the collection is primarily image-based we hold zines from makers in a variety of languages. Although it is outside the scope of this article to define in any depth the genre of zines, a short description from *Cite This Zine* (Giari 2009) may be useful at this point, "What are Zines? Short for magazine or fanzine, a zine is a self-publication, motivated by a desire for self-expression, not for profit. Zines are excellent primary resources that give a voice to underrepresented demographics."

For context, a general survey of zines, *Fanzines* (Triggs 2010), is fully illustrated and covers a wide array of titles and genres from the 1950s through to contemporary publications as does *Zines* (Farrelly, Dorrian, and Recchia 2001). A more political approach is seen in *Notes from the Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (Duncombe 1996) which covers the essential qualities of the zines asks the question whether it is possible to rebel culturally in a modern consumer society that eats up rebellious culture. A feminist perspective is explored in *The Riot Grrrl Collection* (Darms 2014). A few titles focus more on production methods and distribution such as the excellent *Whatcha Mean, What's a Zine?: The Art of Making Zines and Minicomics* (Watson and Todd 2006) and *Make a Zine!: A Guide to Self-publishing Disguised as a book on how to Produce a Zine*. Due to the ephemeral and limited-run nature of zines, much material is available online via the makers' blogs and websites which includes many collectives and review sites. The total authorial control of the zine from concept through to final artifact is what makes zines unique within publishing; they sit with independent press, self-publishing, and pamphleteering and we can view the whole uncensored narrative as it was intended by the author.

Zines are often cited as being outside mainstream publishing and can give a voice to underrepresented groups, which is why libraries are collecting and cataloguing them currently in) their thousands, which now includes many sub groups such as art zines; perzines; queer zines, punk zines, football zines; fanzines; etc.) This article focusses specifically on art zines, which are more closely defined in my earlier paper, *Art-Zines—The Self-Publishing Revolution: The Zineopolis Art-Zine Collection* (Batey 2012). Art Zines contain primarily image-based content and the tactility and aesthetic of the self-published artifact is an important consideration for the creator. They are mostly created by individuals who are visual communicators. This often includes illustrators, artists, photographers, and designers. The Art Zine collection I curate at the University of Portsmouth has many selected examples of this genre created by students, staff, and people working in the creative industries. Themes covered are expansive but all use illustration and imagery rather than text to communicate their primary message.

Authorial Illustration and the Art Zine

"Authorial illustration" can be described as a body of artistic expression that has been defined and developed by an illustrator with no direction or censorship from external sources. This may resemble a visual diary and contain biographical or autobiographical information. Un-

like commercial illustration, it is up to the authorial illustrator to develop their practice with a view to defining and identifying their own audience; this may happen at the latter stages of a project or in a few cases, the audience may be the author themselves. "The Authorial Illustrator seeks to reassert illustration as a developing practice; working against the tendency for the discipline of illustration to be seen as a repetitive commodity where the illustrator is presented with an already clearly defined concept" (Braund, Osmond, and Morgan 2012, 15)

This genre of illustration can often find a means of dissemination through self-publishing, more recently in art zines. The rise in interest in all zines, more libraries initiating collections and zine festivals, events, and workshops becoming more prevalent around the world has helped the authorial illustrator find a new audience.

I would like to suggest authorial illustration could be seen as a means of communication for more visually orientated people. As an illustrator/educator I often hear myself saying, when struggling to verbally explain something, "let me draw it for you." It is this act of drawing, the creation of images that can capture the subtleties of situations that we may not be able to find the right words for. Drawing is the process through which we can visually describe emotions, moods, sequences, thoughts, hesitations, and anxieties with immediacy.

As the course leader of MA Illustration at the University of Portsmouth, UK, I saw the value of collecting and archiving art zines when I setup the Zineopolis Collection originally intended as a student resource in 2007. More recently, I have been struck by the number of wellbeing and mental health issues that are being explored through this format, some key examples of which I will share in this article. I have sought to explore the question, "What do authorial narratives about mental health in zines teach us?"

The portrayal of mental health issues in popular culture has historically been unsympathetic and exaggerated in order to add tension and excitement to a narrative. Mainstream literature, horror film, and thriller genres often make use of tropes such as the "twisted serial killer," "oddball loner," and "crazy cat lady." Generic characters are often the result of reselling similar stories, and these tropes become embedded into popular culture, much as the witch, evil stepmother, and handsome prince have been through fairy tales (Luomala and Campbell 1950). Authorial illustration is autobiography and biography where the illustrator is also the author and the designer; most commonly within the genre of zines (both online and in print), they are also the producer, marketer, and distributer.

Mental health is a large and complex subject and the examples I have selected cover a range of issues all written and illustrated mostly from the perspective of the person experiencing the symptoms. The visual narratives selected have varying amounts of text, but the sequential nature of the images remains the priority.

When considering mental health issues, it is important to note there is a lot of work being done to try and understand and lessen "stigma" (Goffman 1963). Some good contemporary examples include *Asylum Magazine* (published by PCCS Books in the UK) and *Hyperbole and a Half* (Brosh 2013). In the UK media, many high-profile names have been positive in stepping forward to share their experiences, often with the aim of encouraging others to also share and talk. Visual narratives have a unique place within this debate as some of us are more visually orientated than others and for some, "seeing" the story can connect more successfully than reading about it. This article highlights examples from Zineopolis, but more importantly I

have interviewed the creators and want to share their own words and thoughts on drawings, creativity, and mental health.

Mental Health Narratives in Art Zines

Visualising Anxiety

Anxiety is a human trait that is biologically necessary, altering the individual so that they are able to perceive and overcome potential obstacles (Rycroft 1968). However, there are also many anxiety disorders, the main ones being generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, phobic disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Kitchener and Jorm 2016). Anxiety is often described as an emotion that is concerned with the future, with what "might" happen. *Anxiety Comics* (Bru 2015) beautifully illustrates this aspect. The emotion of anxiety is personified as a floating tormentor that constantly seeks to undermine the protagonist.

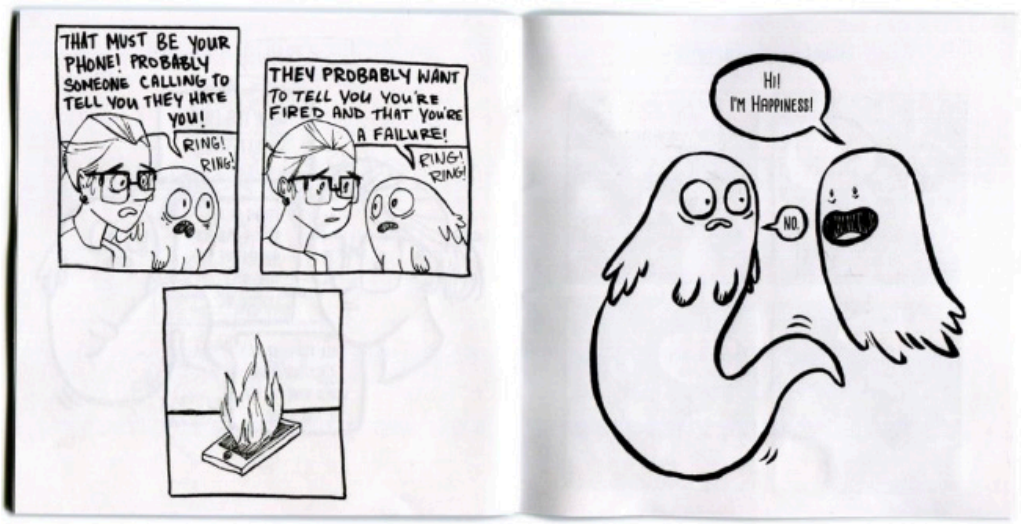


Figure 1: Anxiety Comics, Vol. 3, 16-17.
Source: Bru 2015.

As can be seen in Figure 1, the phone rings and "Anxiety" tells the author, "That must be your phone! Probably someone calling to tell you they hate you" followed by "They probably want to tell you you're fired and that you're a failure!" (Bru 2015, 16). The zine is a collection of drawings, not necessarily in sequence, that explore the relationship with the author and her anxious inner voice. When asked about the motivation for this zine Stacey says:

> *Anxiety Comics* came about as a result of art therapy! Whenever I was stuck on a negative thought or having a difficult time articulating my feelings, I would doodle myself and the anxiety monster. Making the comics not only provided a way for me to explore my feelings, but also allowed me to turn my struggles into something positive
>
> …*Anxiety Comics* was actually done in a purposely unplanned way. Since I used *Anxiety Comics* as a coping method, they were made with whatever I had on hand, and published as-is in most cases. After I had a few comics built up, I would start to plan the zines. The zines follow a very loose struc-

> ture, placing similar comics next to each other. (Stacey Bru, author/illustrator of Anxiety Comics, interviewed by Jackie Batey, personal communication, August 2018)

This method of illustrating incidents and episodes is often referred to (within UK University Art and Design, Degree Program Specification documents) as a "visual diary." Drawing daily incidents or moments can be a way of describing mood and memories, often this unplanned immediate way of recording events can be very honest, almost raw. There is less time for the tempering of feelings, and drawings are not corrected or re-drawn. Stacey's line work often reflects mood varying from sure solid strokes to tentative gestural lines, as can be seen in Figure 2 where the protagonist is crying with frustration.



Figure 2: Anxiety Comics, Vol. 3, 14–15.
Source: Bru 2015

Another good example of employing the visual diary methodology can be seen in *Sad Sack* (Roberts 2016). This risograph zine seeks to visualize "paranoia," including drawings about wakeful nights, strong anxiety about the dentist, and questions about appearance or self-image. Figure 3 shows social anxiety that affects the author when entering a room full of unknown people. With the lines "Here's to the fist clenching stress and the overwhelming nausea…of walking into a room full of strangers" (2016, 8). The text is handwritten with "stress" double-underlined and "nausea" emphasized with gestural lines to suggest that the word is flashing, much like a neon sign. The attention that is placed on the text on the left-hand page is contrasted abruptly with the illustration of the "room full of strangers" on the right-hand page. The seven strangers are looking away from the viewer, mostly with eyes closed. They are illustrated as unthreatening with gentle expressions and most are softly smiling. This is an effective rebuff to the text opposite, which represents the author's internal fears. In this illustration, the author is aware that the anxiety of meeting the strangers is overblown and she is showing us how the emotions experienced prior to the event are not a true reflection of that event. This has come from her experience, and in this zine she is sharing her innermost feelings with the reader. This duality of expectation and reality are captured using the

informal format of the zine, in particular the mechanism of the double-page spread. Roberts says of her creative process during her periods of depression and anxiety:

> Drawing was the one place I felt like I could articulate what I was thinking and feeling without have to actually talk to people. Fortunately, as I started to draw all of the sad things I had been thinking/telling myself, I started to feel more inspired and wanted to draw a lot more, which made me feel, well not happy, but like the fog was lifting a bit. (Blair Roberts interviewed by Jackie Batey, personal communication, August 2018)

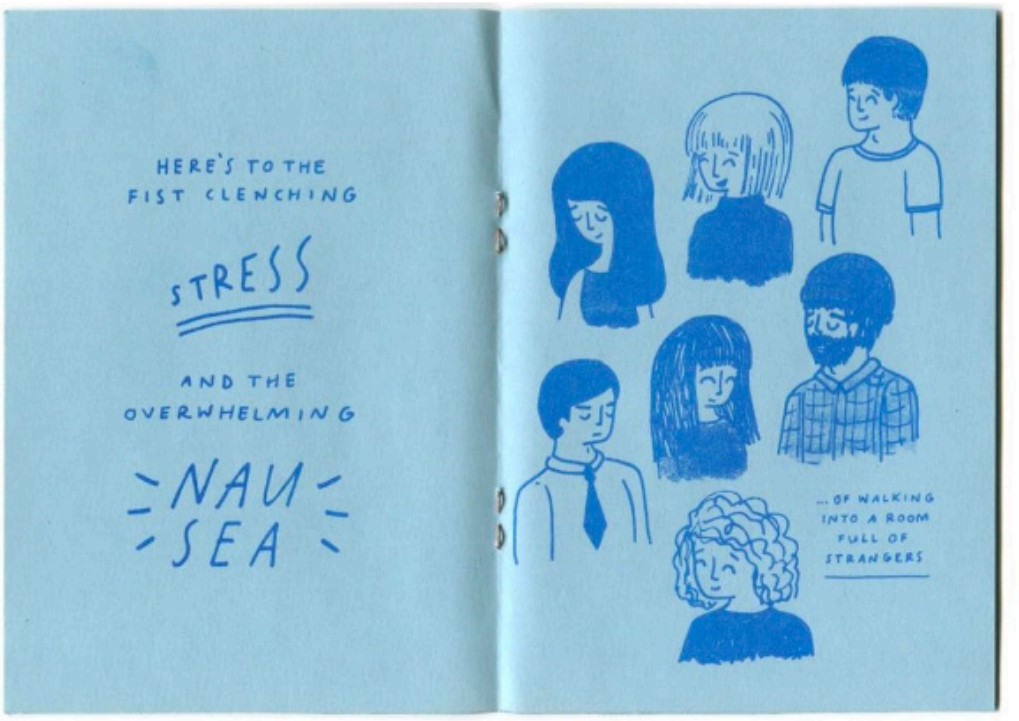


Figure 3: Sad Sack, 8–9
Source: Roberts 2016

A more explanatory approach is shown in *Generalized Anxiety Disorder; A Crash Course in Understanding* (Macalister 2016). This follows the design and layout of a more traditional comic with text panels interspersed with the illustrations. This is very much a sequence illustrated in hindsight where reflections on the diagnosis and subsequent treatment are offered, clarity is uppermost, and the text uses short sequences which are easy to follow. The zine ends with a page listing additional online resources such as Canadian Mental Health Organisations, Calm Clinic, Guides to Meditation, and the Anxiety and Depression Association of America. The zine is described by the author as providing narrative detail about her personal journey when she was diagnosed with GAD including her "fights with the monster within," and her "somewhat tumultuous" journey through treatment options. The zine can be seen as a step-by-step personal narrative although there are occasions where the author speaks directly to the viewer about seeking medical advice. The inward looking and outward looking are blended so the experience of the illustrator is there to inform the reader, should they be experienc-

ing something similar. Macalister created this zine in the spirit of sharing and supporting others and has also made this zine available on her website so it can be widely read for free.

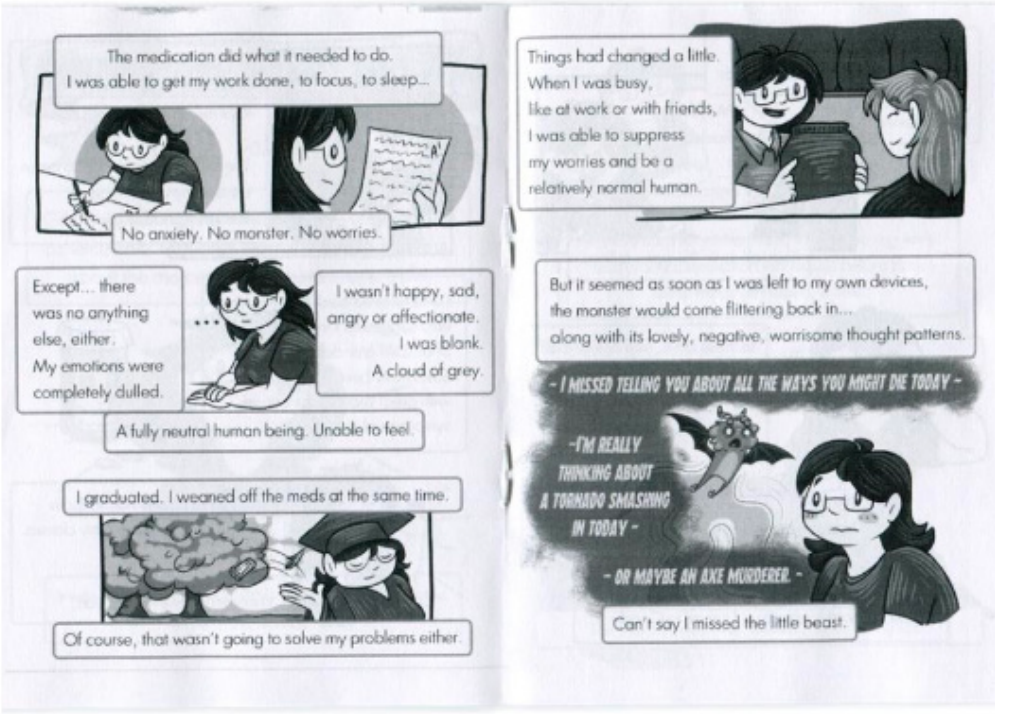


Figure 4: Generalized Anxiety Disorder; A Crash Course in Understanding, 7–8
Source: Macalister 2016

Visualizing Panic Attacks

Frustration at the quality of the existing medical support material drove Riley James to create an alternative visualization of PTSD and panic attacks in the zine, *Panic* (James 2012). He discusses his motivation here:

> I am a visual learner as I have learning difficulties and wanted to find information booklets that were easier to process, but I found the resources limited, and in some cases, didn't seem appropriate. (An NHS booklet had a section about phobias with pictures of spiders and injections, which if you're looking for help, using pictures that people might be scared of isn't a good start). I felt like it was produced by someone who had only ever read about anxiety and mental health issues but had no real-life experience and it frustrated me. (Riley James, interviewed by Jackie Batey, personal communication, August 2018)

Riley goes on to describe his working methodology of writing a diary of actual events as they occurred and then creating thumbnail illustrations of key elements. This was placed in sequential order to create a narrative through the panic attack. The illustrations accompany typewritten text presented in the first person (Figure 5); it is immediately urgent and engaging, and conveys the author's emotions. "I felt around for the coffee table and found my phone…" followed by reflective comments such as "If you lose your vision, smart phones are useless. I couldn't unlock it, let alone dial 999" (James 2012, 6). The illustration opposite shows the author sitting on the stairs sweating and shaking trying to call an ambulance. The figure is

drained of color and gestural lines above the head depict dizziness. The character is drawn with bare feet, wearing night-clothes adding to his vulnerability.



Figure 5: Panic, 6–7
Source: James 2012

Riley comments on the process of image-making or drawing as a method for making sense of difficult emotions, "I think it [visualizing by drawing] helps me process those lived experiences, I get to understand why things happened the way that they did by breaking down those written experiences into illustrations" (James, personal communication 2018). Riley found, after publishing the zine, that he had an influx of messages from people sharing their own stories. He used social media to share images from *Panic* online and was also contacted by Time to Change, a campaign run by UK charities Mind and Rethink Mental Illness, supported by The Department of Health and Social Care. Time to Change asked permission to share Riley's illustrations and comments to support others experiencing similar issues. It is positive to see how a very personal narrative can be developed through sequential illustration in an art zine to speak to a much broader audience than first imagined.

Visualising Burnout

In my own serial zine, *Future Fantasteek!*, starting with Issue no. 1 in 2006 through to *Marshland*, which is the twentieth issue, I have sought to draw a visual diary of what is going on around me, synthesized through illustration, humor, and characterization. These visual diary drawings are created in sketchbooks and scanned directly to form the art zine, with

very little digital intervention. Through this serial, I have sought to retain the immediacy of the original sketch, including spelling mistakes, corrections, and wobbly lines. I see these sketchbook drawings akin to confused conversations that contain many idiosyncrasies that would get edited out of a final typed version.

The most recent issue *Marshland* (Batey 2018) was created via a drawing exercise called *Inktober* (where illustrators draw an image each day throughout October and share this on social media). I shared drawings via Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook as part of *Inktober*, and interestingly during this process, I was contacted by several mental health professionals requesting permission to share my illustrations. I had already been sharing this illustrated diary on social media which illustrated many of my day-to-day internal thoughts whilst undergoing CBT support for burnout. It became apparent that these visualizations connected immediately with an audience and often elicited the 'you too?' response which became a gentle entry point for more difficult conversations. I sought to use illustrated humor through the sequence to add a level of approachability and try to remove the fear that can be associated through feeling a loss of control.

This process was not only cathartic for the artist, but also helped explain complex emotions to the CBT counsellor. As can be seen in Figure 6, I sought to visually show the "internal chatter" I was experiencing when trying to action simple tasks, often referred to as "overthinking." In this illustration, the internal dialogue fizzles out in order to watch Columbo on TV, a much easier option than arguing with yourself. This helped explain to others my "inaction" which was a particularly frustrating and unusual state. When I look back at the sequence of illustrations I am clearly reminded of how I felt at that time, more so than if I were to read my own textual account of the same experiences.

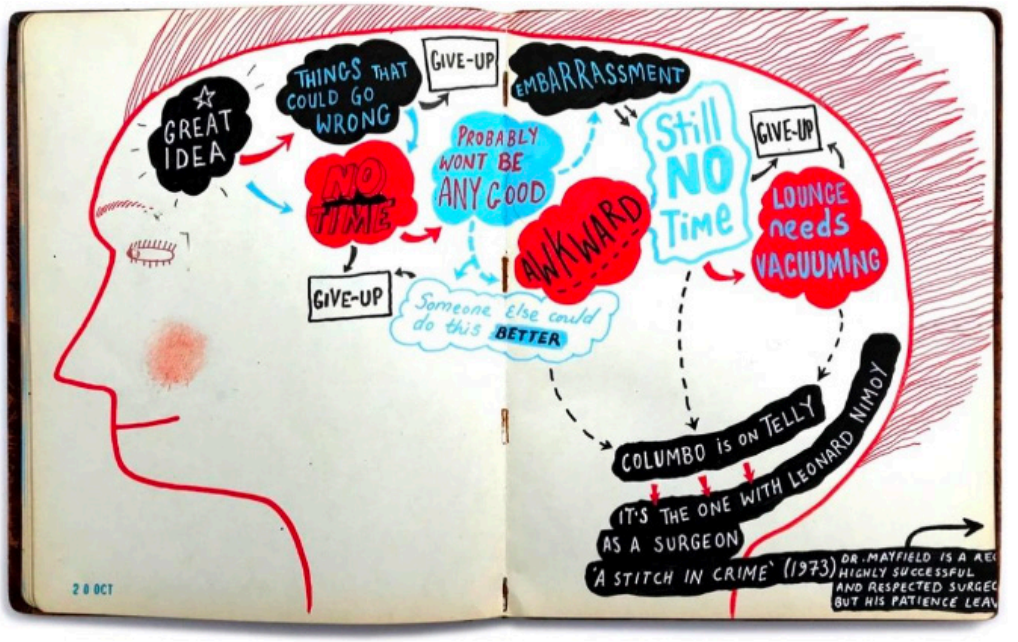


Figure 6: Marshland, 44–45
Source: Batey a.k.a. Future Fanstasteek! 2018.

It can be seen that more visually orientated people can use drawing/illustration as a way of recording emotions, thoughts, and reality. This capturing of a moment on paper, can offer a way to clear the mind, since the feeling has been trapped in the sketchbook. In Figure 7 I was trying to capture external pressures that were exacerbating the feelings associated with burnout. In this drawing email is visualized as falling weapons that are striking the two alarmed figures as they run for cover. The figures have heads collaged from 'post-it' notes situating them in an office environment. The ongoing emotion of running to keep up with emails and tasks was shown as a hostile environment that was overpowering the couple.



Figure 7: Marshland, 56–57.
Source: Batey a.k.a. Future Fanstasteek! 2018

Through the sharing of this visual diary as an art zine I feel it has allowed me to not only to better consider my own mental-health but discuss with others how drawing can be a tool for capturing emotions, visualizing issues and drawing solutions/options. As a senior lecturer in Illustration looking at drawing as a positive action that can support mental health has been very valuable to the student experience, staff development and curriculum design.

In conjunction with this, it is positive to see emerging networks such as Graphic Medicine (established in 2015 by Dr. Ian Williams), publishing in the area of visual narratives on a variety of medical issues. Graphic Medicine is described as "graphic medicine narratives can engage members of the health professions with literary and visual representations and symbolic practices that offer patients, family members, physicians, and other caregivers new ways to experience and work with the complex challenges of the medical experience" (Czerwiec et al. 2015, 13). The greater awareness of visual narratives that can share health and wellbeing experiences outside mainstream publishing will broaden the debate and allow more voices to be heard and increase engagement and support.

Mental Health Issues within Higher Education in the UK

There has been a rising awareness of mental health issues within UK universities; often narrative stories in the media highlight example cases. Mental Health training for Higher Education teaching staff has become more widely available in the UK. As a senior lecturer for around twenty years, my colleagues and I have noticed the pressures on students and staff have changed and increased. Issues such as rising fees, living costs, independent living, loneliness, workload pressures, and expectations to succeed have all added to the burden of studying and working at University. The IPPR, a registered charity and the UK's pre-eminent progressive think tank, released a report Not by Degrees: Improving Student Mental Health in the UK's universities (Thorley 2017) where it is stated, "In 2015/16, 15,395 UK-domiciled first-year students disclosed a mental health condition—almost five times the number in 2006/07. This equates to 2 per cent of first-year students in 2015/16, up from 0.4 per cent in 2006/07." In addition, Universities UK, a collective of 137 universities in the UK have researched and published information about mental health matters. The recommendations encourage universities to adopt a strategic and holistic approach to supporting the wellbeing of staff and students with a project called #stepchange.

> Through research and clinical education, universities already play an important role. But as participation in higher education has expanded, national trends in mental ill-health among young people have materialized in student populations, and there are sharp increases in demand for support services. The focus has turned to how universities look after their own communities of students and staff, to support them through mental health difficulties and help them to thrive and succeed. (Professor Steve West, Chair, Universities UK Mental Health in Higher Education Working Group, 2017)

It is in this context that the Zineopolis collection of art zines can add to the support available to students in Art and Design, who are more likely to be visual learners. The visual narratives contained within the zines may help students to share stories and accept support; it is interesting within illustration that reading the narratives or creating/drawing your own can ultimately lead to the same appreciation of mental wellbeing. Zine narratives and projects based around social issues have been designed into the curriculum of the Illustration course to allow for development and discussion of these themes.

Ethical Issues Relating to Art Zines on Sensitive Issues

A zine collection that can be accessed by staff and students does raise questions of the ethics of sharing personal or sensitive material. For example, an illustrator may make a zine in order to share their story with a friend, but they may not want this shared more widely to people they do not know. Zine donations through a third party can be challenging for the collection in terms of whether to accept them/make them accessible or not. In all cases, Zineopolis requests permission from the creator to share the zine with an audience of staff and students. Permission is also sought to add the cover and indicative spread to an online searchable database. It is only when permission is gained that zines are added to the Zineopolis collection. The zine makers included in this article were contacted for interview on the understanding their words and illustrations would be shared within the research. An excellent source of reference is the *Zine Librarians Code of Ethics Zine* (Berthoud et al. 2015) that talks about respect and trust

when cataloguing and sharing zines. "Zines are not mass-produced books. They are often self-published and self-distributed, printed in very small runs, and intended for a small audience. Zinesters may feel differently about having their work openly available on the internet or in print, made available to a much wider audience." As the curator I also understand that permission to share material may be revoked at a later date and this is respected.

The Benefits of an Art Zine Collection

The history of medical illustration shows us how effective drawing can be in describing physical conditions. There are many anthologies celebrating this specific genre of illustration e.g. *The Sick Rose: Or; Disease and the Art of Medical Illustration* (Barnett 2014). I would like to see the same become true for mental health where illustration can be used effectively to help visualize often non-visible emotional states and conditions.

The majority of art zines in Zineopolis are tangible artifacts—to be held in the hands—this encourages a tactile connection between the creator and reader. Zines can be shared, shown to others, or borrowed to be read privately. The portability and tactility of these art zines can lend this format to the immediacy of sharing. Often the stylistic look, where economy of production has been a consideration, can be interpreted as informal and personal. The creator can connect directly to the reader bypassing publishers, editors, printers, or censors; one person sharing a story directly with another much like talking to a friend. Helen Spandler, the editor of *Asylum*—the radical mental health magazine—has written about how drawings/cartoon can encourage an alternative dialogue.

> These cartoons are able to cut through complexity and present contentious ideas in a vivid, direct and accessible way. This makes their message visible and potentially more digestible. Therefore, it represents a form of critical pedagogy (or consciousness raising) which assumes people learn when their experience and emotions are engaged, rather than just their intellect. By engaging other ways of knowing, cartoons are able to bypass our 'normal' and accepted ways of thinking and help to see things in a different way. (Spandler 2019)

To underline this quote Figure 8 shows a double page spread from *Debbie Downer* (Roberts 2015). It is the visual diary of the author who is exploring the catharsis of drawing. Roberts describes her relationship with drawing in the following.

> *Debbie Downer*, which was made about a year later, started as a way to take my mind off my depression and anxiety, and sort of force myself to be creative again, and it turned into a pretty cathartic experience for me. As I drew more sad stuff, more positive ideas for drawings came to me, so the narrative just kind of formed as I was drawing it. (Blair Roberts, author/illustrator of *Debbie Downer*, interviewed by Jackie Batey, personal communication, August 2018)

The illustration shows the author on the left taking a selfie with the image showing a confident woman looking relaxed. The pages opposite ask the question, "What happens when people open their hearts?" The answer beneath reads' "They get better" (2015, 17). The spot illustrations show a cup of coffee, reading glasses, and a book symbolic of the type of restful or enjoyable activity the author can now engage in.

I am considering how this research can be extended in the future; it may be possible to identify a body of art zines that respond to mental-health narratives over a number of col-



Figure 8: Debbie Downer, p.16–17.
Source: Roberts 2015.

lections internationally. This could form the basis of further research into how mental health can be supported through independent and democratic publications such as the art zine.

Acknowledgement

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CHAPTER 36

"I Want to Tell You about My Life Now": The Voice of Palestinian Refugees in Frontiers of Dreams and Fears

Catherine Burwell

Refuge 21, no. 1 (2003): 32–40. https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.21288.

Abstract

Many individuals and institutions—from scholar Edward Said to media watchdog *Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting*—have noted the Western media's imbalance in presenting the struggles of the Palestinian people, particularly during the ongoing Al-Aqsa Intifada. Yet as the mainstream media continue to under-report violence against Palestinians and misrepresent the occupation of Palestinian lands, Palestinian filmmakers have begun to generate their own images, often through the genre of the documentary. This article examines one such documentary, Mai Masri's *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears*, a study of the daily lives of children living in Shatila and Dheisheh refugee camps. It argues that Masri's film, through its restoration of the lost voice of the refugee child and its insistence on Palestinian narrative, provides an essential alternative to the exploitative images of the institutionalized media.

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Résumé

Bon nombre de personnes et d'organismes, parmi lesquels l'intellectuel Edward Saïd et le groupe de surveillance des médias *Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting*—ont eu l'occasion de souligner le déséquilibre qui caractérise la façon dont les médias occidentaux présentent la lutte du peuple palestinien, tout spécialement durant la période en cours de l'Intifada Al-Aqsa. Toutefois, alors même que la presse continue de sous rapporter les violences commises contre les Palestiniens et de donner une fausse image de ce qu'est réellement l'occupation des terres palestiniennes, des réalisateurs palestiniens ont commencé à produire leurs propres images, souvent sous forme de films documentaires. Cet article examine un tel documentaire—« *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears* » (« *Frontières entre rêves et frayeurs* »)—de Mai Masri, qui est une étude de la vie quotidienne d'enfants habitant les camps de réfugiés de Shatila et de Dheisheh. L'article soutient qu'en redonnant sa voix perdue à l'enfant réfugié et en privilégiant le récit palestinien, le film de Masri fournit une précieuse alternative aux images exploitées par les médias institutionnalisés.

> We are here near there, the tent has thirty doors.
>
> We are here a place between the pebbles and the shadows.
>
> A place for a voice.
>
> —Mahmud Darwish, "We Are Here Near There"

Writing in September 2001, almost one year after Ariel Sharon entered Jerusalem's Haram al-Sharif and sparked the second Palestinian intifada, Edward Said suggested that "never have the media been so influential in determining the course of war as during the Al-Aqsa Intifada, which, as far as the Western media are concerned, has essentially become a battle over images and ideas."[1] And as many critics have pointed out, it is a battle that the Palestinians are losing. In their survey of U.S. media coverage of the uprising, Ali Abunimah and Hussein Ibish highlight a number of distressing patterns, including the under-reporting of violence against Palestinians, a refusal to acknowledge Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, and the demonization of Yasser Arafat.[2] Their examination of editorials over a three-month period reveals the extent of the imbalance. In the *New York Times*, for example, twenty-five of thirty-three op-ed pieces devoted to the issue of Palestinian-Israeli relations strongly supported Israel's position.[3] A recent survey by the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) shows just what effect such media representations have on the U.S. public: only 4 per cent of Americans surveyed knew there was an Israeli occupation, and most viewed Palestinians as "uncompromising" and "aggressive."[4] All of these trends form part of

[1] Edward Said, "Propaganda and War," *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, 549, par. 1 (30 August 2001), online: <www.ahram.org.eg/weekly/2001/549/op9.htm> (date accessed: 1 August 2002).

[2] Ali Abunimah and Hussein Ibish, "The US Media and the New Intifada," in *The New Intifada: Resisting Israel's Apartheid*, ed. Roane Carey (New York: Verso, 2001).

[3] Ibid.

[4] Said, "Propaganda and War," para. 7.

what Said sees as the overall dehumanization of Palestinians and the erasure of their stories through the mainstream media.

But voices do emerge from what Homi Bhabha has called the spaces in between,[5] between the pebbles and the shadows, the fences and the guns. For even while the intifada closes in on the people of Palestine, leaving them literally confined to their own homes, and narrows the spectrum of dominant media opinion, the range of Palestinian cultural expressions still grows and shifts. Committed, political art of the twentieth century sought, in Kyo MacLear's words, new "passages into events" and struggled with "representational clichés which condense[d] history;"[6] now, for a Palestine of the twenty-first century, such a commitment means struggling to create narratives beyond the endlessly repeating images of stone-throwing boys and flag-draped martyrs. And just such a struggle is taking place, in the work of Palestinian poets, diarists, filmmakers, curators, and artists. The Sakakini Cultural Centre in Ramallah, for example, is currently hosting a memorial exhibit that aims to give a name and face to each of the first one hundred people killed in the intifada. The Sixth Biennale of Arab Cinema in Paris in July 2002 included an extensive program of Palestinian film, and earlier, in May 2001, the Al-Jana Arab Centre for Popular Culture in Beirut hosted the Palestinian film festival "Between Two Intifadas." In the U.S., American-based internet sites such as the Electronic Intifada provide analysis, photographs, and war diaries from the ground. In many different locations—in exile, in Israel, in the occupied territories and refugee camps—Palestinians are resisting their own erasure by filling silences with sound and replacing simplified icons with a plurality of images and stories.

Amongst those resisting oppression, documentary filmmaking has had a historically significant place. While documentary makers and theorists in recent years have argued over concepts of reality, authenticity, and form, the importance of the independent documentary as a tool to interrupt the flow of dominant visual norms and reimagine more radical forms of democracy remains. Fittingly, independent documentary has played an important role within Palestinian artistic communities since the start of the intifada. Both David Tresilian, reviewing the Sixth Biennale of Arab Cinema, and Viola Shafik, reviewing the Al-Jana Film Festival, note the large number of documentaries being produced by Palestinian directors. In the catalogue of the Sixth Biennale, coordinator of the Palestinian program Michket Krifa considers the reasons for this new flourishing of documentary, and suggests that "the younger generation has now moved in to occupy the field of visual creativity, due to its vital need to express the reality of Palestinian life. To correct images provided of Palestine by foreign television, these young people have decided to produce their own images of a region sometimes called the most mediatised on the planet."[7]

Palestinian-American filmmaker Mai Masri, who has in a short time built a significant body of work, must be counted among this new generation of documentary makers intent on producing their own images. Since the 1980s, Masri has directed or co-directed seven documentaries. These include *Wildflowers: Women of South Lebanon*, a biography of Palestinian intellectual and political leader Hanan Ashrawi, and three films focused specifically on

[5] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 193.

[6] Kyo MacLear, *Beclouded Visions: Hiroshima-Nagasaki and the Art of Witness* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 100.

[7] Michket Krifa quoted in David Tresilian, "Ten Years of Euro-Arab Cinema," *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, 593, para. 6 (4 July 2002), online:<www.ahram.org.eg/weekly/2002/593/cu1.htm> (date accessed: 16 July 2002).

refugee children—*Children of Fire, Children of Shatila, and Frontiers of Dreams and Fears*. Masri has garnered several awards for her documentaries, which have been broadcast on television stations around the world, including Channel Four, France2 and PBS. Her most recent work, *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears*, focuses on the friendship that develops between two Palestinian girls, both third-generation refugees. Mona Zaaroura, living in Shatila Camp in Beirut, and Manar Majed Faraj, living in Dheisheh Camp in Bethlehem, form a friendship through e-mail and letters. As the girls' friendship—and the filming of it—progress, two historic events occur. The first is the Israeli army's withdrawal from South Lebanon, which allows many of the refugees of Shatila Camp to see their homeland for the first time. The second event is the beginning of the intifada, which disrupts the girls' already chaotic existences. Although many children appear and speak in the film, and even become minor characters, the film's loose narrative structure is based on the evolution of the friendship between Mona and Manar, and the two girls provide all its voice-over narration.

In considering the large number of documentaries presented at the Al-Jana Film Festival, Viola Shafik divides the offerings into two broad categories: those films which "operated rhetorically, underlining the emotional repercussions of the occupation" and those which she deems more analytical and self-reflexive, and which favour irony or a sense of absurdity over realism.[8] *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears* she places firmly in the category of the rhetorical film, noting what she calls the "director's desire to promote sympathy and solidarity" and even referring to the film as "tear-jerking."[9] Yet such a categorization—and even covert dismissal—of Masri's film overlooks the film's political purposes and its radical content. Admittedly, *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears* does not use Brechtian "distancing" techniques of filmmaker intervention employed in many postmodern productions and favoured as a way of "demystifying" the documentary and countering false realism. On the other hand, Masri does use anti-realism techniques such as music, impressionistic sequences, voice-over, and symbolism to create what she calls "lyrical layers."[10] These techniques are, in fact, as Shafik suggests, used to create sympathy and identification with the children's lives, but as Diane Waldman and Janet Walker write in *Feminism and Documentary*, a stance that encourages identification and a spectorial response is not always objectionable, especially when the subjects are suffering from oppression.[11] Certainly, Masri does not shy away from either the emotional reactions of her subjects, nor from the intent to create emotional responses in her audience; as a long-time advocate of the rights of Palestinian refugees, she seems to embrace emotion as a vehicle for change. But perhaps the most important element missing from Shafik's categorization of Masri's work is "the significant nuance of who is doing the talking."[12] *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears* gives voice to a group of people—adolescents, and in particular adolescent girls—whose words are rarely heard and who are mostly inaudible in mainstream ideological constructions of national identity—be they Palestinian or otherwise.

[8] Viola Shafik, "Blood and tears," *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, 534, paras. 2–4 (17 May 2001), online: <www.ahram.org.eg/weekly2002/ 534/cu1.htm> (date accessed: 27 July 2002).

[9] Ibid., pars. 5 and 11.

[10] Mai Masri quoted in Mohamed El-Assyouti, "Longing and Belonging," *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, 561, para. 6 (22 November 2001), online:<www.ahram.org.eg/weekly/2001/561/li1.htm> (date accessed: 7 August 2002).

[11] Diane Waldman and Janet Walker, *Feminism and Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 12.

[12] Ibid., 12.

If *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears* is about advocating for change—and it is—then Masri is clearly showing us that these young women's complex experiences as refugees, and their personal histories of poverty, politics, friendship, family hardship, and violence—histories rendered almost invisible by the Western media—must be taken into account.

This article, then, is an examination of Masri's film as a radical intervention into current Western reporting of the intifada and the experiences of Palestinian refugees. The article itself is divided into three strands, which consider representations of Palestinian children, Palestinian histories, and Palestinians' relationship to the land. Though these broad bands provide the structure of the essay, I also try to weave in other important considerations, such as nation, identity, and gender. Each of the three main strands is divided into two parts. In the first, I analyze how the mainstream Western media have represented the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in general, and the Al-Aqsa Intifada in particular—how they have framed, fetishized, omitted, or denied various elements of the Palestinians' uprising. In the second half of each strand, I consider the way that *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears* confronts such representations, providing an alternative point of view through its restoration of lost voices and images and its insistence on narrative and history. Ultimately, what I want to suggest is that Masri's film is a corrective (as Michket Krifa suggests) and an emotionally charged work of advocacy (as Viola Shafik suggests) but that it is also more than that. It is a means of interjecting story in a media environment obsessed with 10-second clips; a way of creating spectorial identification against an institutionalized discourse that consistently pathologizes and "otherizes" Palestinians; a strategy of honouring historical memories at a moment when the Palestinian past is in danger of being erased; and, finally, a way of interjecting the unheard voice of the child refugee into formulations of nation and national identity.

The Contested Image of Palestinian Childhood

Perhaps most disturbing amongst the host of misrepresentations of the Palestinian struggle is the creation of a new symbol of "Palestinian violence"—the Palestinian child. Indeed, Palestinian children—their activities, their lives, their bodies—have become contested ground. In the militaristic battle that has transformed the streets of the occupied territories, countless children and youths have lost their lives at the hands of Israeli soldiers, deadly shootings that many believe are deliberate.[13] But the children of Palestine are not only the targets of military warfare; they are also markers in the corresponding war over "images and ideas." In the Western media, young Palestinians are often portrayed as the instigators of violence. Filmed and frozen in the act of throwing rocks, their desperate gestures are rarely contextualized to include the heavily armed Israeli soldiers at the end of the street. "Terrorists" and "attackers," writes Omar Barghouti, are the words commonly applied to these young people.[14] When the flow of horrific images won't allow this portrait, the mainstream media reconfigures the Palestinian child not as perpetrator but victim of violence. Such was the case with twelve-year-old Muhammad Al-Durra, whose death in his father's arms was caught on film and broadcast internationally. Immediately, Muhammad (who, unusually, was granted a name and an age) became a symbol of Palestinian suffering. Yet even the dubious distinction of victimhood can

[13] Omar Barghouti, "Palestine's Tell-tale Heart," in *The New Intifada*, 167.

[14] Ibid., 167.

be easily erased; within days of showing the damning, tragic footage, American news outlets began to report that the boy had earlier been throwing stones, as if to justify his murder. [15] Moreover, another disturbing distortion concerning the assignation of blame is also occurring in the West. As a number of media watchers, including Abunimah, Ibish, and Said have noted, the American media have made widespread claims that Palestinian parents are deliberately sacrificing their children, pushing them into the line of fire in order to further the Palestinian cause. Such accusations not only absolve the Israeli soldiers of responsibility for the children's deaths, but work to dehumanize the Palestinians; such accusations, says Hanan Ashrawi, are "the essence, the epitome of racism." [16] Yet whether as terrorist, victim, or sacrificial pawn, the Palestinian youth, in the lens of the Western media, is always caught in a present moment of violence, never permitted to live inside her own, unfolding narrative.

In *States of Emergency: Documentaries, Wars, Democracies*, Patricia Zimmerman regards this category of violent, static, repetitive visuals as iconic "fetishes," suggesting the obsessive nature of the Western viewer, in need of a nightly "fix" of spectacle. These fetishized images, which thrive during times of war, exist outside of time and place, in a space of "non-sense and antinarrative," [17] and are used as a means of pacifying the viewer and silencing rational debate. In the case of Western coverage of the Palestinian intifada, these fetishized images are, as Michket Krifa describes them, "a series of stereotypes in viewers' minds—the child martyr, the suicide-bomber, the stone-thrower, the mother-in-tears," [18] images of the child-at-war. Without context such images have become emptied of meaning; rather than sparking dialogue, they appear as definitive answers to questions we were never able to ask.

If such fetishized images produce a mute collective trance, then the way to break open that trance is through speech. Zimmerman suggests that it is the voice of testimony, a voice that embodies history, memory, and narrative, that can break through the non-sense of the spectacle. And this is precisely what *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears* does. Confronted with images of children caught in an endless cycle of destruction, Masri excises these visuals by resuscitating the story and speech of the Palestinian child, and in doing so releases the confined image into the open space of narrative, and dispels the limiting binary of victim/ victimizer.

One of the ways in which this liberation is conducted is through Masri's profound commitment to the words of the Palestinian refugee child. Simply by choosing to place the child's voice foremost in her documentary, Masri performs a corrective of the silent, anonymous images of the mainstream media. But Masri goes beyond this, celebrating the girls' language, and allowing it to give rise to their own individuality. Indeed, Masri chose to focus on Mona and Manar chiefly because of their use of language, Mona for her poetic voice, and Manar for her articulate political expression. [19] As each girl is introduced to the viewer, her characteristic speaking voice is heard through voice-over: Mona, walking through the muddy, garbage-strewn alleys of Shatila Camp, says, "I wish I were a bird. At first I wanted to be a butterfly,

[15] Abunimah and Ibish, 240.

[16] Hanan Ashrawi speaking on *60 Minutes*; quoted in Abunimah and Ibish, 252.

[17] Patricia Zimmerman, *States of Emergency: Documentaries, Wars, Democracies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 59.

[18] Michket Krifa, quoted in Tresilian, para. 10.

[19] Susanah Tarbush, review of Frontiers of Dreams and Fears, *Saudi Gazette*, pars. 15–16 (10 September 2001), online: <www.caabu.org/events/masri.html> (date accessed: 27 July 2002), pars. 15–16.

but, then a butterfly is so beautiful that people catch it and imprison it in their notebooks. I don't want anyone to shut me in. The camp is like a bird's cage. A bird that's cut off from freedom. No electricity, no water. Nothing. This bird would die of loneliness." Manar, walking through the streets of Dheisheh Camp, past graffitied walls that declare in English and Arabic "No peace without the exercise of our right of return," narrates, "I'd like to photograph the writing of the walls of the camp. I'd like to photograph the streets and the downtrodden people and the children who have nowhere to play but the streets." In "Mechanical Eye, Electronic Ear, and the Lure of Authenticity," Trihn T. Minh-Ha warns against the danger of a documentary form that cuts out "language as voice and music—grain, tone, inflections, pauses, silences, repetitions" and replaces it with "a commentary that will objectively describe/interpret the images."[20] But Masri never gives in to this objective impulse, instead allowing the emotion, political urgency, and defiance in the children's voices to guide the audience's visual experience of the camps.

But perhaps the most important element in Masri's commitment to the radical potential embodied in the child's act of speech is her strategy of allowing Mona, Manar, and their friends to comment on their own experience of significant political events. When the intifada begins, for example, and Dheisheh Camp is involved in the uprising, no adult voice or "outside expert" intervenes to explain this historical moment. Instead, we understand the rapid and often simultaneous series of events through the girls' lived experiences. Manar, filmed writing a letter to Mona, narrates, "I want to tell you about my life now. I'm very worried these days. I've changed a lot. I don't know whether it's fear or sadness. Our school is in the war zone. Every time we hear a plane we're frightened and we scream. I don't sleep properly anymore." Mona replies with details from her own life in Lebanon; "Manar we've been demonstrating but we're not achieving anything. We're under so much pressure that we feel we're going to explode." And it is also the girls who *interpret* the events of the intifada, giving them their meaning. As Manar is filmed throwing stones, she explains, "If we have to live under occupation and injustice, then why live at all? When I throw a stone, it means I reject injustice. I want to be free, safe." As she flings each stone, she proclaims, "This one is for Samar. This one is for Mona." With these words, Manar—and Masri—reclaim the oft-seen image of the Palestinian youth throwing stones by explaining the political intent, solidarity, and resistance embodied within the gesture.

While this displacement of the mainstream representation of the Palestinian child is mostly created through spoken language, it is also reinforced through a number of short distinct scenes focused on the children's activities. Two of these are worth mentioning. The first of these scenes shows the children of Shatila involved in a group project. Using cardboard, string, and pens, but most importantly the words and memories of other children, the children create "keys to Palestine." After cutting out the cardboard keys, they circulate amongst their peers and ask them to write down details of their home villages. "What do you know of your town? What is Jaffa famous for?" Mona asks a younger girl. What they don't know the children look up in books. After filling up their keys with words and history, the children display them around their necks. Here, the act of making the keys becomes a process of retrieving memory to create an imagined home, a place where one is "free, safe,"

[20] Trihn T. Minh-Ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 60.

and takes the children out of the realm of violence to show them in innovative, imaginative acts of change. The second scene also shows children acting creatively. Here, Manar films Mona's village using a digital camera. Masri's camera—and the viewer—follow Manar as she films the abandoned village. This simple scene echoes Edward Said's words in *After the Last Sky*. Commenting on Jean Mohr's photograph in which two Palestinian girls hold the camera and direct it at the photographer standing above them, Said writes, "we too are looking, we too are scrutinizing, assessing, judging. We are more than someone's object. We do more than stand passively in front of whoever, for whatever reason, has wanted to look at us."[21] Manar walks through the village, comments on the destruction, records what is left, and in the end announces, "Mona, you have a beautiful village." Holding the camera, not held by it, she looks, assesses, judges—not the object of the media's gaze but the subject of her own, Palestinian eyes. No longer trapped at the violent checkpoints of the Western gaze, the child pictured here actively creates, forging for herself a story that includes a past and a future, and building friendship, solidarity, and a community of peers.

Telling Omissions: The Restoration of History

A recent study undertaken by the Glasgow University Media Group reveals the Western media's distortion of the Palestinian past. Published in *The Guardian* under the headline "Missing in Action," an article by director of research Greg Philo summarizes the group's findings. These include an analysis of eighty-nine television news stories collected during the first days of the intifada, which reveal that of 3,536 lines of text, only seventeen explained the history of the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. Not surprisingly, when a sample audience of young adults aged seventeen to twenty-two was later asked where Palestinian refugees had come from and how they had become refugees, 80 per cent did not know. As well, the study found that while British journalists (unlike their American counterparts) sometimes used the word "occupation," they did not explain that it was the Israelis occupying Palestinian land. Again, this omission appeared to have a direct impact on audiences' perceptions; in the focus group, 71 per cent did not realize that Israelis were occupying the territories. In fact, 11 per cent believed that the Palestinians were occupying the territories, while only 9 per cent knew it was the Israelis. Philo suggests that without discussion of its origins, the intifada appears to audiences as a disruption of normal life caused only by Palestinian bombs or riots.[22] It becomes clear, then, that what is "missing" in the "action" of television coverage is history itself.

The findings of the Glasgow University Media Group underline the complex anti-historicism of coverage of the intifada, an anti-historicism that not only omits the occurrence of events such as the 1948 *Nakba*, or catastrophe, the 1967 occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, and the 1982 invasion of Lebanon but also denies the experiences of exile, dispossession, occupation, and life in the refugee camps. While the Western media has failed to provide adequate context in its coverage of the Palestinian struggle for many years, this failure has deepened during the second intifada. Many observers, including Ali Abunimah and Hussein

[21] Edward Said and Jean Mohr, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 166.

[22] Greg Philo, "Missing in Action," *Guardian* (London), 16 April 2002, online: <www.zmag.org/content/Mideast/philomedia.cfm> (date accessed: 7 August 2002).

Ibish, link this crisis in history with a rise in the "clash of civilizations" notion popularized by Samuel Huntington in his eponymous 1997 book. As described by Abunimah and Ibish, the clash of civilizations is an inherently racist and reductionist cliché which sees the West as a coherent, distinct and superior segment of humanity that is being increasingly challenged by inferior but highly dangerous "Islamic" and, to a lesser degree, "Confucian" civilizations. In the case of the intifada, Israel is represented as an outpost of the West surrounded by the rival civilization, as represented by Palestinian protesters. [23]

The application of this theory to recent events in Palestine denies any notion of a historical basis for the intifada, claiming instead that Palestinians are acting out of instinctual and inexplicable behaviour inculcated by their "volatile" Arab and Islamic civilization. Mostly ahistorical in its suppositions, the clash of civilizations occasionally dresses up as history, but only of the most diaphanous kind, often referring to vague notions of the ancient past, or introducing old images from the crusades. In the *New York Times*, for example, Reuel Marc Gerecht, a former CIA official, says that "the Muslim reluctance to concede that 'Muslim lands' can ever legitimately be relinquished to infidels is age-old, imbedded into Islamic law and custom." [24]

Ervand Abrahamian has also suggested that the "clash of civilizations" cliché has not only been used to cover up Palestinian history, but has, since September 11, been used to cover up any mention of Palestine at all. He notes that "by placing the September 11 crisis in particular and the question 'Why is the U.S. so unpopular in the Middle East?' in general within the framework of Islam and the clash of civilizations, one can avoid the dreaded P word— Palestine—and the even more dreaded term 'Occupied Territories.'" [25] He suggests that the press has deliberately avoided linking September 11 to the U.S.'s economic and political support of Israel, and their rejection of Palestinian claims. "This severance of the Palestinian plight from September 11," he writes, "fitted in nicely with the official mantra that 'we are attacked not because of what we do but because of who we are.'" [26] In such an atmosphere, the intifada becomes severed from its precedents—including the increase in Israeli settlements during the peace process, the continued denial of the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and the steady weakening of the Palestinian economy—and instead typified as an outburst of irrational "hatred."

In light of such distortions, one of the most important functions of Masri's *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears* is its role in the process of restoring Palestinian histories. Masri undertakes two projects in this regard. First, in the historical void created by the mainstream media, she asserts the importance of Nakba as a marker in contemporary Palestinian experience. In "Palestine's Tell-Tale Heart," Omar Barghouti notes that the Nakba, in which 750,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes, has dominated political discourse since the start of the second intifada, and that many Palestinians, young and old, feel a renewed link with

[23] Abunimah and Ibish, 244.

[24] Reuel Marc Gerecht, "The Price of America's Naivete," *New York Times*, 14 October 2000, quoted in Abunimah and Ibish, 244.

[25] Ervand Abrahamian, "The US Media, Samuel Huntington and September 11," *Middle East Report* 223 (2002): 63.

[26] Ibid., 63.

the past.[27] Though it rarely makes its way into the mainstream media, 1948 plays an important role in Palestinian constructions of identity and self. In her narrative of "generational intersections," for example, Isis Nusair writes, "Both my grandmother and mother related to the year 1948 as a demarcating event in their lives. In 1948, my grandmother's life was turned upside down. My mother would subsequently bear the results of that new situation of poverty and fear of the unknown." Nusair goes on to note "the continuity between the experiences of my grandmother, mother and myself" and the way she herself is linked back to that date.[28] The narrative of *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears* also returns to 1948. The film begins with a short text that reads, "This is the story of 2 Palestinian refugee girls whose grandparents were forced to flee from their homes in Palestine in 1948." Thus, Masri makes it clear that the girls' refugee status is a direct result of the actions their grandparents were forced to take in 1948. The next two sequences, in which a map traces the grandparents' route out of Palestine, followed by a wide sweep showing the crowded squalor of the refugee camps, reinforce the link between 1948 and 2000. Later, as Manar and her grandfather are filmed making a trip to their village, a title appears reading, "Ras Abou Ammar village, destroyed by Israel army in 1948." Once there, the two of them walk through the remains of the mostly destroyed family home. As her grandfather takes her through the ruined rooms and narrates his life there and the eventual loss of the family home, Manar is filmed in tears. She—and the audience through her—understand that the 1948 dispossession has also had an impact on her, particularly when the beauty of the overgrown village and wide valley nearby are compared with earlier shots of the cramped streets of Dheisheh Camp and later shots of the violence that erupts in those same streets.

Masri's second restorative project is her recognition of family memories as a means of understanding and honouring the past. As both Isis Nusair's narrative and Manar's filmed excursion suggest, one way to make the link back to 1948 is through family history. In Masri's documentary of the first intifada, *Children of Fire*, eleven-year-old Hannah recounts a complex family narrative of loss and disruption that rings with the political history of occupation left out of mainstream representations: "My mother was told not to nurse me when I was a baby because she was depressed. They had arrested her brother and sister and demolished the house. My grandpa, her father, died of grief. And when my mum gave birth to my brother my father was in jail."

In *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears*, too, Masri chooses to emphasize the importance of family history. Mona's, Samar's, and Manar's family histories are all recounted by the girls near the beginning of the film. Mona, speaking to the camera, explains how she lost her father to a heart attack when she was two, a speech that ends in tears; Samar, reading her diary to her friend Mona, reveals that her father was killed in a massacre and that her mother abandoned her; and Manar, in a voice-over, explains that her father was in prison when she was born. The revelations of the girls' family histories encapsulate the past experiences of many Palestinians—depression, trauma, arrest, loss of home, loss of family, imprisonment, death. These family histories also posit a connection between past and present, but what we see

[27] Barghouti, 165.

[28] Isis Nusair, "Gendered Politics of Dislocation: Generational Intersections," in *Women and the Politics of Military Confrontation: Palestinian and Israeli Gendered Narratives of Dislocation*, ed. Nahla Abdo and Ronit Levin (New York: Berghahn, 2002), 98.

here is more than just continuity—the events of the past resurface forcefully in the girls' lives, often as waves of difficult emotion or memory. The Palestinian past in *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears* not only exists, and impinges on the current moment, but is experienced as recurring memory that troubles any simple understandings of the present. It is these memories, these links with the past constructed through family history—and their public expression through documentary—that have the power to displace the distortions and disfigurations of Western media, and to reveal the exploitative nature of images that flatten history, memory, and culture into one-dimensional, consumable spectacle.

The Censorship of Geography

History and geography, temporality and space—these are of course deeply intertwined in the plight of Palestinian refugees, for it is the Palestinians' connection to *place* that has been radically disrupted through time. Geography, then—as land, people, and their relationship—requires some examination here, particularly as Edward Said has noted an almost total "censorship of geography" in mainstream American media representations of Palestine. This censorship occurs on a number of levels. The first is the simple but profound absence of maps. Said notes that during the first months of the intifada, none of the print or broadcast reports in the U.S. showed a map to help explain the crisis.[29] Yet there are many maps that could reveal a great deal about the conflict. Maps of historical Palestine, maps of Israeli settlements and barricades, maps showing the complex system of governance set down under the Oslo agreement, maps showing distribution of wealth, water, or employment—all would reveal the source of the Palestinians' discontent and help to contextualize the intifada, yet all are strangely absent from media discourse, constituting, in Said's words, not simply an omission but a deliberate "misrepresentation."[30]

A second misrepresentation circulated by the American media concerns the relationship of the people to the land. Palestine in the first half of the twentieth century was constructed by many Zionists as a wasteland, a desert in which only a few nomads—a term used pejoratively—straggled across the barren land. In such a configuration, with the land seen as empty, the new Israelis were not colonists, or even settlers, but pioneers intent on making the desert "bloom." The production of this image continues today through the selective use of geographical terms, or what Israeli new historian Ilan Pappé has called "lexical weapons."[31] For example, Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting has noted that, in the American media, Israeli settlements are called "neighbourhoods,"[32] thus disguising the fact that they are settlements built on the land confiscated by Israel in 1967. Similarly, the words "occupied" and "occupation," which once had some circulation, have become taboo. Words such as "bantustan" and "segregation," sometimes used in independent media to link Israel to apartheid South Africa, never make an appearance. Again, these representations appear to have an impact on public opinion; the recent survey undertaken by the ADC showed that most Americans believed Israelis to be a

[29] Edward Said, "America's Last Taboo," in *The New Intifada*, 259.

[30] Edward Said, "Palestinians under Siege," in *The New Intifada*, 31.

[31] Ilan Pappé, "Donning the Uniform: The Military and the Media in Israel," *Middle East Report* 223 (2002): 50.

[32] FAIR, "Media Advisory: Euphemisms for Israeli Settlements Confuse Coverage," para. 3 (26 June 2002), online: <www.fair.org/press-releases/settlement-euphemisms.html> (date accessed: 22 September 2002).

"pioneering" people [33] rather than settlers, colonizers or occupiers, legitimizing and honouring the settlers' link to what is, under the Geneva Convention, illegally occupied land.

The third geographical misrepresentation concerns Palestinian immobility, and is perhaps the most complex. Since the start of the second intifada, the already limited movement of the Palestinians has become even more restricted, yet the full effects of barricades, bypass roads, checkpoints, security zones, curfews, road closures, and travel permits are not fully reported. While individual aspects of this network—such as checkpoints or curfews—may be shown, they are never revealed in their totality as a system which confines people in their homes, leaving them unable to attend schools, universities, or workplaces. Ironically, in fact, many North Americans may have exactly the opposite image of Palestinians. Stephen Prince's study of Hollywood representations after the Persian Gulf War shows that the people of the Middle East are depicted as an enemy which "occupies no terrain specifiable on a map's coordinates but is rather a hazy, nebulous, threatening Other;" [34] in other words, the Middle Eastern "enemy" is depicted with limitless boundaries to commit "terror," and vast powers of movement and subterfuge, an image that is even more pervasive after the events of September 11. And now, as the media attempts to equate Palestinian protesters and PLO leaders with members of the Al-Qaeda network, [35] the true restriction of the Palestinian people becomes even less apparent, lost to an image of the "international" terrorist.

These layers of obscurity around the relationship of Palestinians to the land of Palestine are dense and seemingly deliberate, but in *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears* Masri employs powerful visual strategies to reilluminate that relationship and reveal the media's powerful "lexical weapons." The first of these visual strategies is a straightforward corrective to the absence of maps. Masri uses maps throughout the film, both as a pedagogical tool for audiences and as a visual symbol of the connection between Palestinians and the land. The initial and most prominent map appears within the first two minutes of the film. Fittingly, this map and the people signified on it undergo change and movement in a series of steps. In the first step, a map shows the historical shift from Palestine in 1948, before the Nakba, to its division into Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. In the second, the movement of the girls' grandparents out of Palestine and into the West Bank and Lebanon is traced with arrows. Finally, the girls' birthplaces in Shatila Camp and Dheisheh Camp are located on the map. Though simple, this sequence clearly illustrates the original expulsion of the Palestinians and explains the girls' refugee status. It also suggests the limited space on which Palestinians now live, a suggestion reinforced photographically by the wide pan of the crowded buildings of Shatila in the following shot. But maps make at least two more significant appearances in the film. In the first of two closely linked scenes, Manar and her friends research the location of Mona's village. In order to find it, they take down a large, framed map entitled "Palestine, 1948" from the walls of the family home. In a follow-up scene, the girls plan the journey Manar will take to reach Mona's village of Saffouri. A close-up shot converges on the map and follows the girls' hands as they trace the route and, together, recite the names of the towns and regions Manar will pass through. The initial scene, in which the family map is framed and publicly

[33] Said, "Propaganda and War," para. 7.

[34] Stephen Prince, "Celluloid Heroes and Smart Bombs: Hollywood at War in the Middle East," in *The Media and the Persian Gulf War*, ed. Robert E. Denton Jr. (Westport: Praeger, 1993), 246.

[35] Pappé, 50.

displayed, presents the land as both treasured memory and a source of identity; the second scene, uniting the map and the girls' hands, implies a physical connection to the land, a connection that appears in many Palestinian narratives. In her meditative essay "Yaffawiyya [I am from Jaffa]," for example, Souad Dajani asks "Are the sights, sounds and smells of Jaffa encoded in my genes?"[36] —a question that suggests a connection to the terrain that is historic, familial, even bodily.

Masri's second visual symbol—the heavily guarded barbed-wire fence that separates Lebanon from Israel—is depicted in three major scenes throughout the documentary, and evolves into a potent and complex representation of Palestinian refugees' longing for the land, restricted movement, and familial separation. The first of these scenes is a celebratory one, in which Mona and her peers arrive at the border just after the Israeli evacuation. Mona, ecstatic, declares that it is the first time she has ever seen Palestine. Much of this hopeful scene focuses on groups on the Lebanese side dancing and singing; seeing the land for the first time produces a joyous, kinesthetic reaction. The second scene is made up of a series of vignettes. Families reunite, kissing, hugging, and holding hands. The two groups of children from Shatila and Dheisheh Camps meet and discuss their lives, joking, flirting, and searching for common ground. Gifts—watches, fruit, t-shirts, necklaces, bread—are exchanged. Yet each of these joyful encounters holds a visual paradox; the routine acts of affection between friends and family are punctuated by the fence, which restricts movement and defers the attainment of union. The final scene, after the start of the intifada, is the darkest. A young girl looks at the border and cries, asking, "Is this the fence separating us?" A montage of hands is shown gripping the rolls of barbed wire and, this time, the reunions are met with an anguish that causes people to cry, yell, even faint. In the progression of these scenes, the fence becomes a symbol loaded with the weight of separation from land and from others, producing not just grief but a visceral, bodily reaction. We are taken back to the start of the film in which Mona announces, "I don't want anyone to shut me in," snapping her hands shut for emphasis, a gesture and a sentiment which reinforce the confinement and separation experienced by many so Palestinian refugees, yet so rarely acknowledged in the mainstream media.

Conclusion

"In this country, we all get filmed," says filmmaker Azza Al-Hassan in her experimental documentary *News Time*. "Cameras are running all the time, recording every move we make. Camera people come from all over the world. From France, Italy, Germany and other places. They say we make good news." Palestinian refugees have much to struggle with, politically and economically, but how to counter this callous foreign insistence that Palestinians "make good news" is surely a central question. As Michket Krifa suggests, one solution is the production of uniquely Palestinian images. And Palestinians have shown there are many ways to do this. In *News Time*, after commenting on the constant presence of the media, Al-Hassan declares, "Still, we try to look our best," and follows with a montage in which ordinary Palestinians primp and preen before having their picture taken in front of various "exotic" backdrops. A similar send-up is used in Sobhi Al-Zobaidi's mock documentary *Looking Awry*, in which American television producers in Jerusalem search for perfectly framed shots of a mosque,

[36] Souad Dajani, "Yaffawiyya (I am from Jaffa)," in *Women and the Politics of Military Confrontation*, 73.

synagogue, and church, even as the second intifada erupts in another part of the city. This ironic impulse is an important tool in deflating the power of the mainstream media to control the images and lives of Palestinians, but there are other methods too. In her documentary about the first intifada, *Children of Fire*, Mai Masri includes numerous scenes in which she is forced to turn off her camera by Israeli soldiers, revealing the fact that only some views of the uprising make it to the screen. And in the final sequence of Chronicles of a Disappearance, Elia Sulieman suggests the very problem of Palestinian apathy to the importance of media images, as a couple sleeps in front of a television screen flying the Israeli flag and playing the Israeli anthem.

All of these various representations—whether verbal or visual, satirical or direct—are necessary attacks on an institutionalized media that has routinely misrepresented Palestinians throughout the course of the second intifada. And their variety is essential. Edward Said, still one of the few to comment on a unique Palestinian cultural presence, says in an interview with Salman Rushdie, "There are many different kinds of Palestinian experience, which cannot all be assembled into one. One would therefore have to write parallel histories of the communities in Lebanon, the occupied territories, and so on It is almost impossible to imagine a single narrative."[37] Plurality, then, is the key to Palestine, as shown in the new variety and energy of Palestinian filmic voices. Amongst such voices, *Frontiers of Dreams and Fears* is an important contribution. It is, in Masri's words, a "lyrical" attempt to counter the mainstream media's powers of representation with a combination of symbolic visuals and the voices of that most under-represented group, adolescent girls. With an intelligence that vibrates with emotion, the film shows the girls addressing the most urgent issues of Palestinian refugees—homelessness, poverty, violence, family disintegration—in a way that both underlines the loss and affirms the possibility of a changed future. Bringing to the surface suppressed memory, imagination, and longing, it enters new narratives in the changing frontiers of Palestine.

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[37] Edward Said, *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969–1994* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 119.

CHAPTER 37

American Realities on Public Television: Analysis of the Independent Television Service's Documentaries, 2007–2016

Caty Borum Chattoo, Patricia Aufderheide, Michele Alexander, and Chandler Green

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Abstract

Fifty years after the passage of the Public Broadcasting Act, this study examines the way in which TV documentaries produced by the Independent Television Service (ITVS)—the largest public funder and coproducer of independent documentaries in the U.S. public broadcasting system—represent the America they are mandated to portray. The study examines the geographic, demographic, and topical diversity of ITVS documentaries against U.S. Census and polling data. Using quantitative content analysis of ITVS film archival data, this study of a decade (2007–16) of U.S. public television documentaries (*N = 342*) shows that the representation of American realities on public TV broadly reflects U.S. Census demographics and Americans' social concerns, as reflected in a decade (2007–16) of aggregated Gallup monthly "Most Important Problem [Facing the Country Today]" poll data. ITVS-funded filmmakers are disproportionately female and diverse, and they come from 33 states and the District of Columbia. Films portray life in all quadrants of the United States, in both rural and urban

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communities. These public TV documentaries represent a geographically, racially, and ethnically diverse America. [1]

Keywords

public broadcasting, television, diversity, representation, documentary

Since the passage of the Public Broadcasting Act in 1967, U.S. public media have provided the American people with public affairs news programming, journalism, and independent documentary storytelling (Aufderheide, Clark, & Shapiro, 2008; Day, 1995; Engelman, 1996). This function has become increasingly important with consolidation of American news and entertainment media, digital disruption challenging once bedrock journalistic institutions, and more unreliable and untrustworthy information (Baker, 2007; Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, 2009; Lewis, 2014; Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Waldman & Federal Communications Commission, 2011). National surveys register public trust in public media; one in 2015 showed that "PBS and its member stations are rated number-one in trust among nationally known institutions, and are called an 'excellent' use of tax dollars by the American public for the 12th year in a row" (PBS, 2015, para. 1). Public media's provision of trusted public affairs journalism and independent documentary storytelling thus increasingly serves a critical function in a democracy.

Within U.S. public TV, the organization that coproduces and funds the most point-of-view documentaries is the Independent Television Service *(ITVS)*. ITVS was created in 1988 and funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting *(CPB)* as a commitment to incubate and showcase independently produced documentary storytelling reflective of the American people with a mandate to serve underserved audiences and to tell underrepresented stories (Aufderheide, 2000; Public Telecommunications Act of 1988). ITVS was created in part to "'further the federal public broadcasting policy of encouraging the development of programming that involves creative risks and that addresses the needs of unserved and underserved audiences, particularly children and minorities'" (Sefton, 2017, para. 3). The service coproduces, with independent filmmakers, programs that, according to its mission statement, "enrich the cultural landscape with the voices and visions of underrepresented communities, and reflect the interests and concerns of a diverse society" (ITVS, n.d.-a, para. 6). In 2016, ITVS was awarded the Peabody Institutional Award (Peabody Awards, 2016), one of the highest honors in American journalism. Each year, the independent documentaries coproduced by ITVS also win major journalism and film accolades such as Oscar nominations and Emmy and Peabody Awards. They form the backbone of the two major U.S. public television series for documentaries—POV and Independent Lens—and contribute to other PBS series such as *FRONTLINE, American Experience,* and *American Masters* (ITVS, n.d.-b).

Despite PBS's consistently high public trust and free availability to Americans across the country (PBS, 2015), Republicans continue to threaten to end funding for the CPB (Naylor, 2017). The threats explicitly single out ITVS; Rep. Andy Harris (R-MD), a member of the U.S.

[1] We wish to thank and acknowledge Bill Harder, PhD, at American University's Center for Teaching, Research and Learning, for his assistance with the Gallup "Most Important Problem" data set. We also recognize Elisabeth Drabkin, graduate student in the Strategic Communication program at the American University School of Communication, for her assistance with formatting and copyediting. We note that one author on this study, Patricia Aufderheide, serves on the board of directors for ITVS.

House of Representatives' Appropriations Committee, which determines the CPB budget, has recommended cutting all funding to ITVS, calling its programming "controversial" (Sefton, 2017, para. 28), saying it pushes "an agenda," and stating that "ITVS is funding programming not in the mainstream" (para. 16).

No systematic analysis of publicly funded independent documentary storytelling in the United States has investigated how ITVS documentary programming represents the diversity of American lives and social concerns over the past decade. To address this gap in the midst of partisan claims and a threat to U.S. public media, this study examines the demographic and topical characteristics—filmmakers, on-screen characters, story settings, core narratives—of ITVS-funded and -coproduced public TV documentaries focused on U.S. stories (N = 342) over the decade from 2007 to 2016. We employed content analysis to examine topics and themes of all films using ITVS data and comparisons with top categories from Gallup's (2017) long-running "Most Important Problem [Facing the Country Today]" poll. We also compared gender, race, and ethnic proportions of ITVS-funded filmmakers to U.S. Census proportions of the U.S. population, and we summarized the rural or urban focus of ITVS films' story settings by census-designated rural and urban locations.

The results of this work address the content of one public broadcast entity instead of engaging in refuting a false correlation between diversity and "liberal bias" that politically motivated culture-wars rhetoric provides. Such work has not yet been completed, including by public broadcasting entities. ITVS's required reports to the CPB—while showcasing a broad portrait of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity among filmmakers, given its diversity mandate—do not include an examination of public concerns and social issues or a focus on the urban and rural diversity of the stories. Thus, this study fills gaps in both public knowledge and scholarly literature by addressing a central question in a neutral way, with representativeness examined in geographical, demographic, and issue diversity: What America is featured on social-issue independent documentaries on U.S. public television?

Literature Review

Debates Over U.S. Public Broadcasting

The most recent attacks on public broadcasting are the latest of such politically motivated charges of a liberal tilt to public broadcasting. Partisan interests often portray public broadcasting programming as biased for strategic purposes. Such charges have been made since its origins in 1967 because of the way its federal funding is structured. Public broadcasting was established deliberately as a minority service, and leaders eschewed clarity about the nature of its public function (Avery & Pepper, 1980). Whereas some have criticized it from the left as White, elitist, and conservative, others from the right have attacked it as liberal and left leaning (Rowland, 1986). There is always a venue for such debates. Public broadcasting's three-year appropriation process involves, potentially, political debate over content in every year (Aufderheide et al., 2008).

Debate over the representation of American issues and values in public television has historically focused on public affairs, often on documentaries. Documentaries contribute to what theorist Bill Nichols (1991) calls the "discourse of sobriety," especially in the Gri-

ersonian tradition of social responsibility (Winston, 1995) that has had powerful influence on U.S. documentary. Documentaries have carried weight in U.S. public discourse from the New Deal-era's government-commissioned films, such as *Power and the Land* (Snyder, 1993), to post-World War II TV network public affairs documentaries (Doherty, 2003; McCarthy, 2010) and through to the present day. Beginning with the vérité movement of the 1960s, independent documentary filmmakers sought to showcase their stories on public TV, and their work contributed to public TV's claim to offer content not available on commercial TV (McEnteer, 2006).

Documentaries have also been the source of public broadcasters' challenges amid partisan claims. Public broadcasting funding was nearly eliminated soon after the 1967 Public Broadcasting Act was passed because of the redlining documentary *Banks and the Poor,* which targeted the bank of a Nixon campaign funder (Engelman, 1996). Sen. Jesse Helms repeatedly accused public television of a liberal political tilt (Aufderheide, 1994). Independent producers have repeatedly faced challenges from public TV programmers concerned about conservative attacks; public TV thus internalizes the political conflict over representation of American realities (Bullert, 1997; Zimmermann, 1982). This conflict continues in the present, as evidenced by Rep. Harris's statements (Sefton, 2017).

Accusations of liberal-left bias have been a feature in a larger conservative movement over decades to critique social inquiry under the rubric of partisan "political correctness." Claims about the "liberal media" developed on two fronts in the late 1950s and 1960s. In the American South, White Southerners found coverage of the civil rights movement to be sympathetic to the rights of people of color and, in turn, claimed this perception as biased against the White Southern culture that denied such rights to them (McCarthy, 2010). Sen. Helms used the liberal media argument to rally Southern support. The right-wing political movement that developed in the 1950s and 1960s, including media pundits such as William Safire and the anticommunist and antipress Sen. Joseph McCarthy, strategically used the charge for political capital (Greenberg, 2008). The evolution of objectivity standards in journalism (Schudson, 2012) made journalism that situated itself in the mainstream vulnerable and forced journalists to cover charges of their own bias. A body of social science research has failed to show such a bias, the perception of which appears to be related to conservative political conviction and political cynicism (Lee, 2005). Accusations of liberal bias are often linked to accusations of political correctness, as examples of minority and elite cultural affections. As scholar Norman Fairclough (2003) has noted:

> "Political correctness" and being "politically correct" are, in the main, identifications imposed upon people by their political opponents. But this in itself is also a form of cultural politics, an intervention to change representations, values, and identities as a way of achieving social change. (Cameron, 1995. p. 21)

As scholars have repeatedly demonstrated, journalism generally develops narratives that may cause discomfort and awareness of problems that may trigger concern for action, without exhibiting partisan bias (Scheufele, 1999). Indeed, the role of exposing issues has, from the origins of the nation, been seen as a core function of democratic life, in which ordinary citizens take political action based on knowledge. Research on the relationship of media and democracy demonstrates the vital link between a rich information environment and

democratic participation (Baker, 2007; Barber, 1984; Keane, 1991). This relationship is not merely about an informed citizenry but about a rich media ecology; indeed, a narrow focus on political information and a highly motivated citizenry can function to exclude voices (Schudson, 1998).

There is also a tradition, older than that of liberal bias, critiquing media as conservative, from a left-wing perspective. Media makers who seek greater access to public media (Bullert, 1997) and scholars and activists who argue for diversity of voices in media and democracy have participated in and built on this critique, arguing that both CPB and PBS reflect conservative bias (Hoynes, 1994; McChesney, Newman, & Scott, 2005). They point to a tilt toward corporate and away from labor interests in programming, underwriting, and funding standards; toward an avoidance of controversial topics such as nuclear energy and financial policy; and toward systemic slighting of people of color. Their critique thus also understands public television as not merely a reflector but a shaper of ideology and reality, revealing the insight of communication scholar James Carey (1989), who noted that cultural expression is a site of "social conflict over the real" (p. 89).

This debate over the public function and role of public television, and particularly its documentaries, often gets reduced to a simplistic debate about bias. For instance, with news of potential defunding of public broadcasting in 2017, a *New York Times* article addressed the framing of the debate through such a lens (Anderson, 2017). Partisan attacks on media representation as either liberal or conservative belie the complexity of routine media decision making, shaped around institutional mandates, cultural expectations, and resource realities. More helpful is a social constructionist approach, in which narratives are seen as rich social constructions participating in a reflexive, constantly active process of creating meaning, developing culture, and asserting agency (Carey, 1989; Dewey, 1927; Hall, Hobson, Lowe, & Willis, 1980). The field of media sociology (Waisbord, 2012, 2014) demonstrates the importance of looking closely at institutional practices, the content of media products, and the media ecology. The present study follows this perspective, examining a reflection of both institutional practices and media products in ITVS independent documentaries.

Establishment of ITVS in the Public Telecommunications Act of 1988

The journey to create the Independent Television Service was a product of intense political debate over the public function of public television, in which charges of liberal and conservative bias played a role. Independent documentary filmmakers supported the founding and early years of public television. But they found themselves marginalized as stations and programming services looked for reliable, uncontroversial programs with broad appeal. Over 10 years, through their national associations, independent documentary filmmakers pressured public television, arguing that their films enriched public discourse by revealing perspectives marginalized in popular media. They participated, in this microcosm, in the vigorous national debate about the role of government as Reagan-era policies challenged postwar liberal consensus on social welfare and regulation (Barnouw, 1997; McCartin, 2011).

In 1988, Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA) built a broad congressional coalition that approved a dedicated line item in the CPB budget for a new entity: the ITVS (Aufderheide, 2000). In its early days, ITVS positioned itself as a version of anti-public TV, claiming a diverse, elec-

tronically cutting-edge role in a democratic America. In its early days, such experimentation was not consistently supported by the public TV entities that could program ITVS filmmakers' work. Over time, the service began building trust with CPB, station managers, and filmmakers, making its top mandate the diversity of makers and programs. ITVS programs began winning major journalism and filmmaking awards, a new series (*Independent Lens*) was launched in coordination with PBS, and so were outreach projects such as local screenings of ITVS films and experiments such as an interactive game, a futuristic short-film series, and online miniseries (ITVS, 2007). CPB has used ITVS's achievements in its reports to Congress to demonstrate public TV's concern with diversity and the prestige of its journalism (CPB, 2015). ITVS President Sally Fifer explained the current ITVS mandate upon receiving, on behalf of the organization, the 2017 Governor's Award from the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences:

> For 25 years, ITVS has partnered with independent filmmakers from nearly every state in our country—filmmakers who win Emmy Awards because their stories are real, human, and too complex to fit into one box, or one side of an aisle. Receiving the Governor's Award tonight reaffirms our vision of an industry where all voices, in front of and behind the camera, get heard because diversity and inclusion is core to our being American, what makes us strong. (ITVS, 2017, para. 3)

Thus, ITVS today positions itself as grounded in diversity to tell stories that expand beyond partisan ideology. This aligns ITVS with traditional journalistic goals to support an informed democracy composed of increasingly diverse members. It also aligns ITVS with CPB, which heralds diversity as a primary value in its self-descriptive materials. CPB's goals note:

> The purpose of public media is to provide programs and services that inform, educate, enlighten, and enrich the public and help inform civil discourse essential to American society. It is CPB's particular responsibility to encourage the development of content that involves creative risk and that addresses the needs of unserved and underserved audiences, especially children and minorities. CPB acts as a guardian of the mission and purposes for which public broadcasting was established. (CPB, n.d., para. 2)

As Rep. Harris's remarks demonstrate, however, public TV now operates in a political climate in which the acknowledgment of diversity can be disparaged in a partisan context.

Representation in U.S. Media

A long history of social science research shows the power of representation on social attitudes (Berry, 2007). Following cultivation theory, scholars have shown that the flow of television carries underlying themes and messages that influence perceptions about people and reality (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2009; Potter, 2014).

This has been a consistent argument for the existence of public media, which can offer programming beyond the commercial constraints in the service of public knowledge and benefit, particularly in an increasingly decentralized and often unreliable media environment (Blumler, 1992; Debrett, 2010; Raboy, 1995). However, U.S. documentary today generally reflects a general lack of diversity among makers. Documentaries reflected in commercial and public media are more likely to be produced by White, male makers, although the portrait is more diverse—and reflective of the American population—in public media (Borum Chattoo, Aufderheide, Merrill, & Oyebolu, forthcoming). Oscar-shortlisted and -nominated

documentary feature films over the past decade were overwhelmingly made by White, male directors (Borum Chattoo, 2018). Thus, public TV's diversity priorities, in this environment, become monitors of American public media's ability to reflect the diversity of American lives and experiences.

Research Questions

Based on existing research and gaps in the literature, this study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1*: Filmmakers: Who are the storytellers (directors, producers) represented in ITVS-funded documentaries in terms of race, gender, and age, and how do they compare with the general American population? In what states do the filmmakers reside?*

RQ2: *Places: What kinds of American communities are represented in ITVS-funded documentary stories, in terms of region and rurality or urbanity?*

RQ3: *Characters: Who are the primary on-screen characters in these stories? How do they compare with the general American population?*

RQ4: *Social Issues: On what topical social issues do the ITVS-funded and -coproduced films focus?*

Method

We examined ITVS's archived film data from the decade from 2007 to 2016. This time period spans two White House administrations, both Republican (George W. Bush) and Democrat (Barack Obama). As part of ITVS's internal record-keeping protocol and mandate, each film and film team that received ITVS funding was required to record demographic and summary records about its funded films and filmmakers.

Over the past decade (2007–16), ITVS coproduced 430 films; 88 of these were stories focused on international topics exclusively, and thus not included in this analysis. ITVS provided limited access to its in-house data about each film in the following areas: (a) filmmaker information (filmmakers' self-identified broad racial and ethnic groupings, gender and age groupings, and states of residence); (b) story setting (country region, rural vs. urban designation); and (c) film synopses, which contain information about the on-screen stories, social issues, and major characters.

We used quantitative content analysis to examine the written narrative synopsis data—that is, the 500-word detailed description summaries that include information about narrative focus, social issues, and on-screen characters—from the complete list of 342 U.S.-focused films. Additionally, we calculated totals based on ITVS's archival data, including self-reported filmmaker information and regions of the United States in which stories are based.

Self-Reported Information and Analysis

Filmmakers

ITVS-funded filmmakers provide self-identified information about their race and ethnicity, gender, and age group. These data are reflected in the final totals and analysis. Not all filmmakers chose to reveal this information. For the 342 total U.S.-focused ITVS films, 553 individuals were credited as the self-reported decision-making filmmakers (directors and producers) for this analysis. Additionally, based on this self-reported information, we listed the states in which the filmmakers reside and compared the information with the proportional population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a).

Places (Where the Documentary Takes Place)

We summarized this information at two levels: in community and regional settings.

Community Setting. Based on archived ITVS information about the locality in which the story takes place, each film story was cross-referenced with the U.S. Census Bureau's designations for rural and urban communities. Based on population density, urban regions are classified by county as either Urbanized Areas ("50,000 or more people") or *Urban Clusters* ("at least 2,500 but less than 50,000 people") (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., paras. 3–4), and Rural "encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area" (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., para. 5). According to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau County Classification Table, which lists every county in the United States alongside its official rural or urban designation, "Counties with less than 50% of the population living in rural areas are classified as mostly urban; 50% to 99.9% rural are classified as mostly rural; 100% rural are classified as completely rural" (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-a, para. 1). Each county associated with each film story was matched by ITVS with this official U.S. Census designation in the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau County Classification Table (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-a). We calculated totals for urban and rural stories based on this archived ITVS information.

Regional Setting. Based on archived, available ITVS information identifying the regional location of each film's story, we calculated totals based on the U.S. Census-designated regions of the United States: Midwest, West, South, and Northeast (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016b).

Film Synopsis Coding Scheme: People and Social Issues

Each film's synopsis information was analyzed and coded by two trained graduate students and checked by the study's lead authors. Both coders were briefed and trained with the full codebook and discussion of the coding rules, and any questions were resolved in subsequent discussions with the study's lead authors. The presence of each variable was coded as 1, and the absence of each variable was coded as 0. Before coding the full sample of films and filmmakers, both coders independently analyzed a subset of the full sample to assess and verify intercoder reliability (Krippendorff, 2004a). Two waves of reliability samples included 68 randomly selected films in each wave of sampling and 20% of the population (342 films) in each intercoder reliability sample; coding questions were discussed and clarified between the two reliability samples. To ensure intercoder reliability, Krippendorff (2004a) recommended

a range of acceptability from $\alpha \geq .800$ to $\alpha \geq .667$. He acknowledged challenges in particular coding scenarios such as the one we present here, in which many variables present as zeroes (Krippendorff, 2004b). For this reason, we report intercoder reliability results with percentage of agreement between the coders (with percentages rounded up) and Krippendorff's alpha; in cases where intercoder agreement was based on all zeroes, alpha is undefined. We used Freelon's ReCal ("Reliability Calculator") tool to compute intercoder reliability (Freelon, 2010, 2013).

For 37 of the 41 total variables we coded for story themes and social concerns and on-screen characters, percentage of agreement was at least 88%, and Krippendorff's alpha was at least .66. Of the total variables we coded, 4 fell below the threshold of Krippendorff's $\alpha \geq .66$ for intercoder reliability (Krippendorff, 2004a), but only minimally; thus, we have reported them here. The story themes category includes gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (GLBT) themes (96% agreement, $\alpha = .64$) and mental health themes (96% agreement, $\alpha = .64$). The on-screen characters category includes Native American (96% agreement, $\alpha = .64$) and child or teen (91% agreement, $\alpha = .61$) characters.

People (Lead Characters)

Each documentary story is told through the portrayal and reflection of people who drive the main narrative, typically referred to in documentary filmmaking as "lead characters." These characters were coded based on two factors: (a) any evident occupation referenced in the film synopsis, and (b) any evident demographic characteristics referenced in the film synopsis. Only an explicit reference to a character's description in the film's synopsis was coded. Thus, the results reflect not the total demographic or occupational reality and presence of all characters in the documentary but only descriptions of lead characters explicitly referenced in the film's synopsis. Identified on-screen characters were coded for the presence of non-mutually exclusive descriptions within two themes: occupation and demographic.

For the occupation theme, we coded the following where present: (a) education professional (K–12 and college or university; 100% agreement, $\alpha = 1.0$); (b) parent (94% agreement, $\alpha = .85$); (c) immigrant or refugee (93% agreement, $\alpha = .69$); (d) military service member (97% agreement, $\alpha = .73$); (e) religious or faith leader or member (99% agreement, $\alpha = .85$); (f) artist (including writers, playwrights, painters, and filmmakers; 96% agreement, $\alpha = .84$); (g) community activist (100% agreement, $\alpha = 1.0$); (h) medical personnel (including emergency medical technicians, emergency responders, and firefighters; 100% agreement, $\alpha = 1.0$); (i) community leader or elected official (93% agreement, $\alpha = .69$); (j) law enforcement (including attorneys, judges, police, and prison officials; 97% agreement, $\alpha = .88$); and (k) celebrity or notable public figure (not including elected officials; 99% agreement, $\alpha = .90$).

For the demographic theme, we coded the following where present: (a) African American (90% agreement, $\alpha = .75$); (b) Native American (96% agreement, $\alpha = .64$); (c) Asian American or Asian (96% agreement, $\alpha = .74$); (d) Hispanic or Latino American, or Hispanic (99% agreement, $\alpha = .93$); (e) woman (91% agreement, $\alpha = .77$); (f) GLBT (99% agreement, $\alpha = .93$); (g) child or teen (91% agreement, $\alpha = .61$); and (h) elderly (100% agreement, $\alpha = 1.0$).

Social Issues

A narrative story synopsis for each film includes the summary of the film, its characters, and the major story themes. To identify a comprehensive list of Americans' most important social challenges, we used the social-issue categories provided by Gallup's (2017) long-running "Most Important Problem" poll, which has asked a random sample of the general U.S. population, "What is the most important problem facing the country today?" since 1935 (Aisch & Parlapiano, 2017). To create a comprehensive portrait of the paramount American concerns over the same decade as the ITVS films studied (2007–16), we calculated decade averages from the monthly Gallup data for all variables; we accessed the monthly data from the Roper Center's (n.d.) iPoll searchable database.

We coded the presence of all social issues included in the films' written synopses. The social issues, which are not mutually exclusive, are (a) health and health care (99% agreement, $\alpha = .90$); (b) civic participation and engagement (91% agreement, $\alpha = .82$); (c) criminal justice (including crime; 96% agreement, $\alpha = .86$); (d) economy and working (including jobs, finding jobs, job flight, wages, and taxes; 94% agreement, $\alpha = .68$); (e) poverty (including hunger, homelessness, and joblessness; 97% agreement, $\alpha = .81$); (f) government and leadership (including government corruption, quality of governmental leadership, and gridlock; 99% agreement, $\alpha = .96$); (g) corporate corruption (100% agreement); (h) national security and war (including terrorism and ISIS; 96% agreement, $\alpha = .80$); (i) education (both K–12 and higher education; 96% agreement, $\alpha = .77$); (j) immigration (97% agreement, $\alpha = .90$), (k) religion or faith (99% agreement, $\alpha = .91$); (l) drugs (including drug addiction, the war on drugs, drug policy, and drug-related deaths; 100% agreement); (m) race relations and racism (99% agreement, $\alpha = .97$); (n) environment (including climate change; 99% agreement, $\alpha = .85$); and (o) GLBT (96% agreement, $\alpha = .64$).

External to the Gallup "Most Important Problem" poll, we also coded for the following themes that emerged in the film synopses, which are not mutually exclusive: (a) food and agriculture (100% agreement, $\alpha = 1.0$); (b) family life (88% agreement, $\alpha = .66$); (c) mental health (96% agreement, $\alpha = .64$); (d) disability (97% agreement, $\alpha = .73$); and (e) reproductive health (100% agreement, $\alpha = 1.0$).

Results

Filmmakers

Gender

Figure 1 shows that of 553 credited filmmakers, 38% identified themselves as male, and 48% identified themselves as female (13% declined to identify themselves in the gender category). By comparison, the most recent 2016 U.S. Census data showed that the U.S. is 49% male and 51% female (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a), as Figure 2 illustrates.

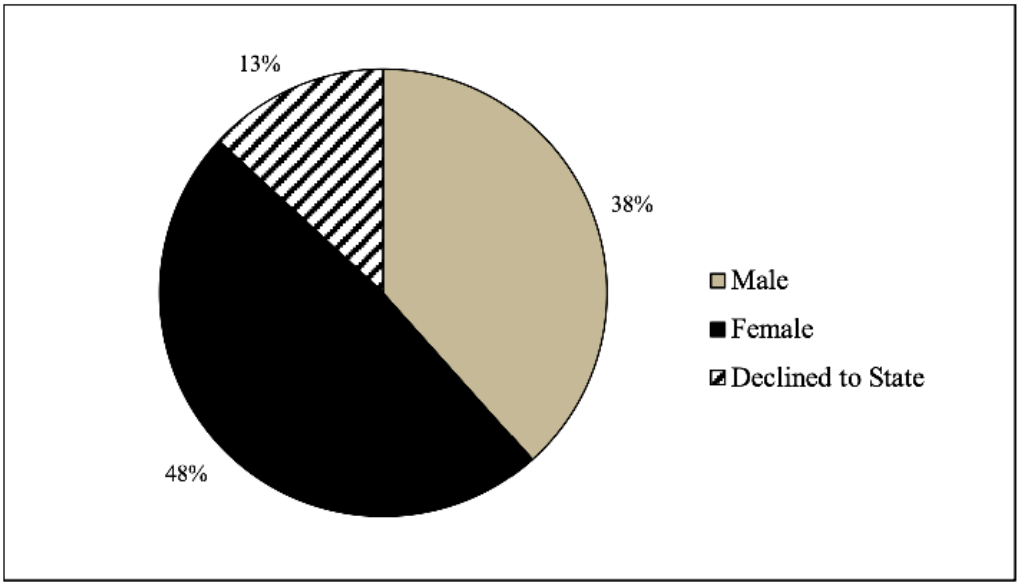


Figure 1. Credited filmmakers: Gender.

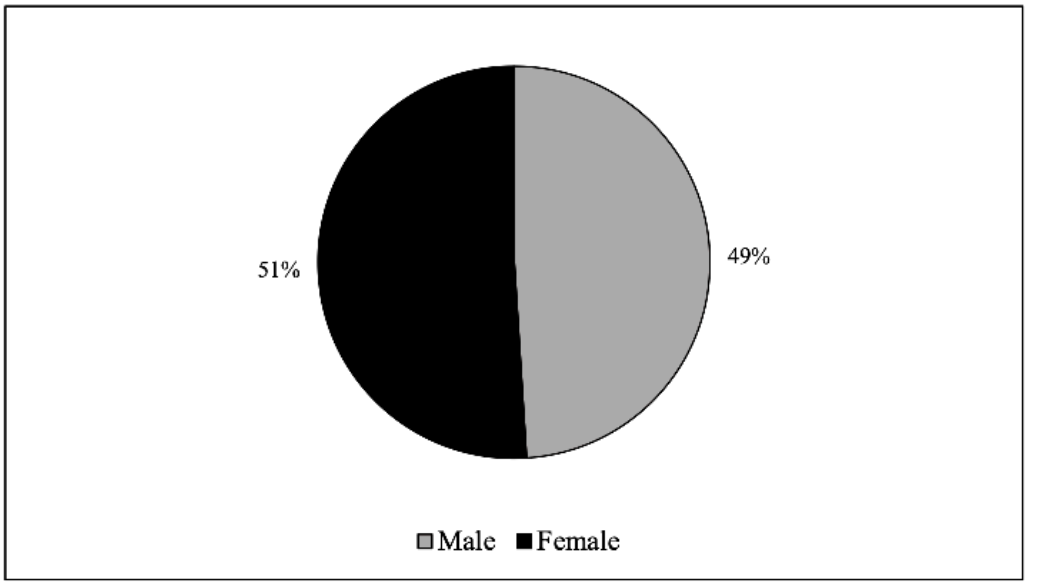


Figure 2. 2016 U.S. Census: Gender.

Race and Ethnicity

As Figure 3 depicts, of the list of 553 credited filmmakers, 42% self-identified as White, 11% self-identified as African American, 11% self-identified as Asian American or Asian, 9% self-identified as Hispanic or Latino, 3% self-identified as Native American or Alaska Native, 2% self-identified as Pacific Islander (about 15% declined to state racial identification, and 6% indicated Other). For comparison, as Figure 4 shows, the most recent 2016 U.S. Census data showed that the U.S. identifies as 61% White (listed as "White alone, not Hispanic or Latino"), 13% African American, 6% Asian American, 18% Hispanic, and 1% Native American or Alaska

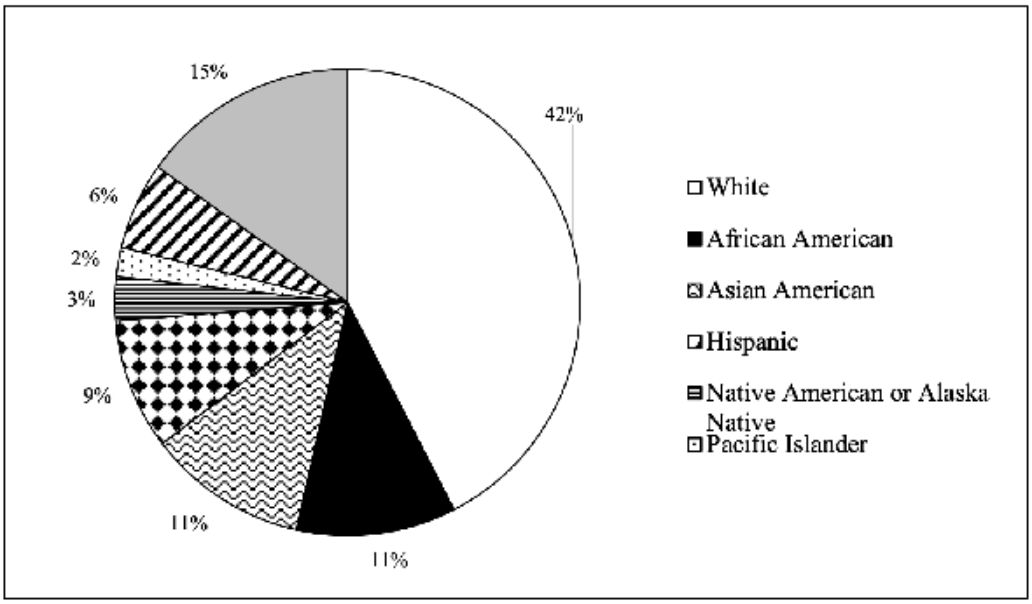


Figure 3. Credited filmmakers: Race and Ethnicity.

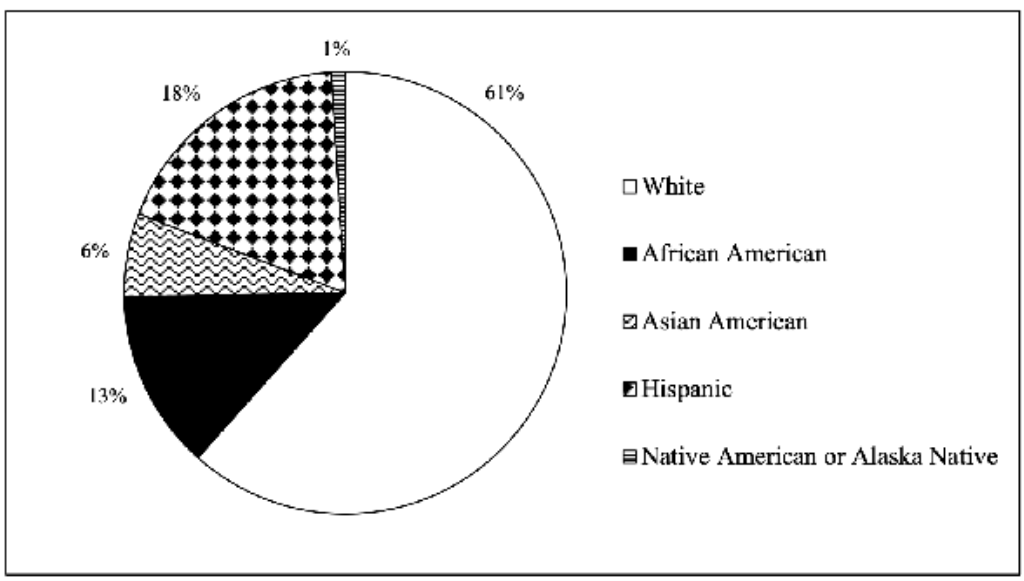


Figure 4. 2016 U.S. Census: Race and Ethnicity.

Native (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a). The U.S. Census also notes 0.2% identify as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander alone (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016a); this not depicted in Figure 4.

Age Group

As Figure 5 shows, of the 553 credited filmmakers, 26% were 40–49 years old, 25% were 30–39, 13% were 50–59, 7% were 60–69, 5% were 18–29, and 2% were 70 years or older. Approximately 22% declined to provide their age.

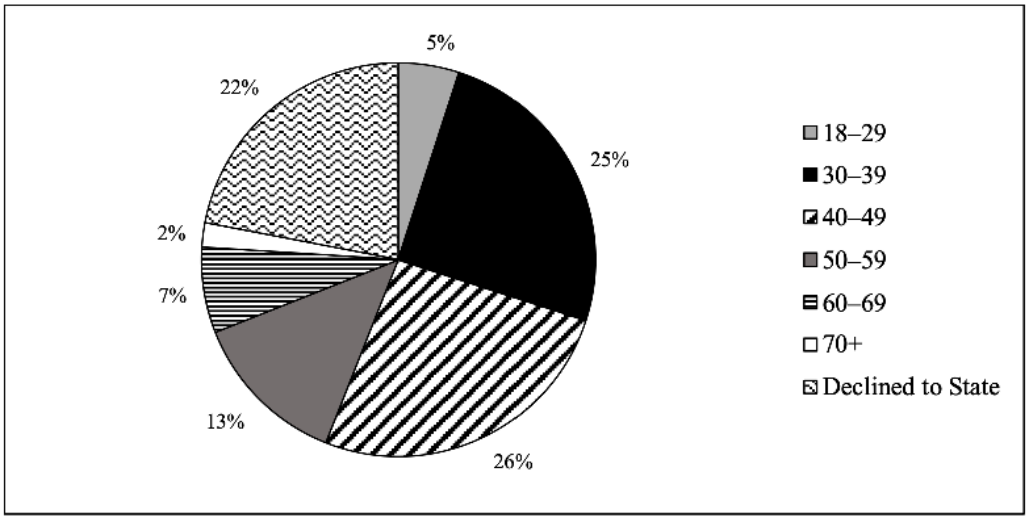


Figure 5. Credited filmmakers: Age.

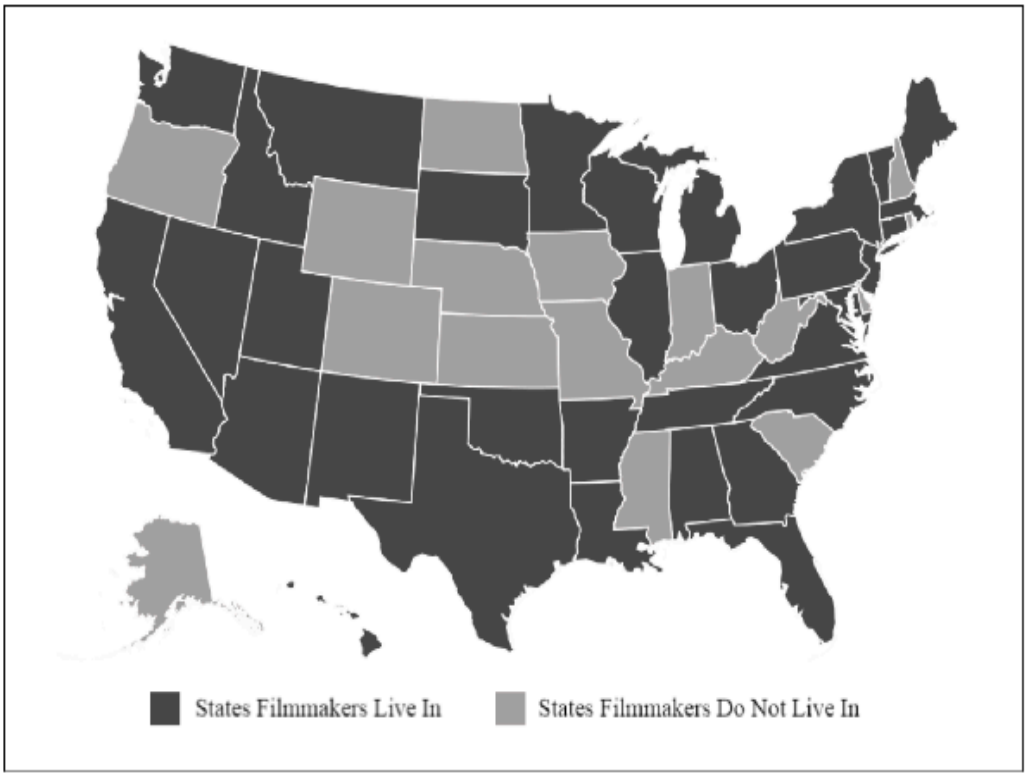


Figure 6. Filmmakers' states.

States of Residence

Across 10 years of ITVS films, stories were funded and showcased from filmmakers living in the following 33 U.S. states and the District of Columbia: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New

Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin (see Figure 6).

According to the 2016 U.S. Census report, *2016 Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for the United States, Regions, States, and Puerto Rico*, these 33 states, plus the District of Columbia, represent a little more than 84% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016b).

Places

Community Setting

According to U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.-a) definitions of "rural" and "urban" communities, ITVS-funded U.S.-based independent films focused on a mix of urban and rural locations. As Figure 7 illustrates, across 10 years, of the U.S.-focused films in which ITVS identified particular cities and towns as settings (318 films), 72% of the stories focused on urban settings, and 28% were a mix of rural and urban (21%) or only rural (7%).

According to the most recent statement by the U.S. Census Bureau *(2016c)*, rural areas in the United States contain about 19% of the U.S. population, compared with the remaining 81% of U.S. residents who reside in urban centers.

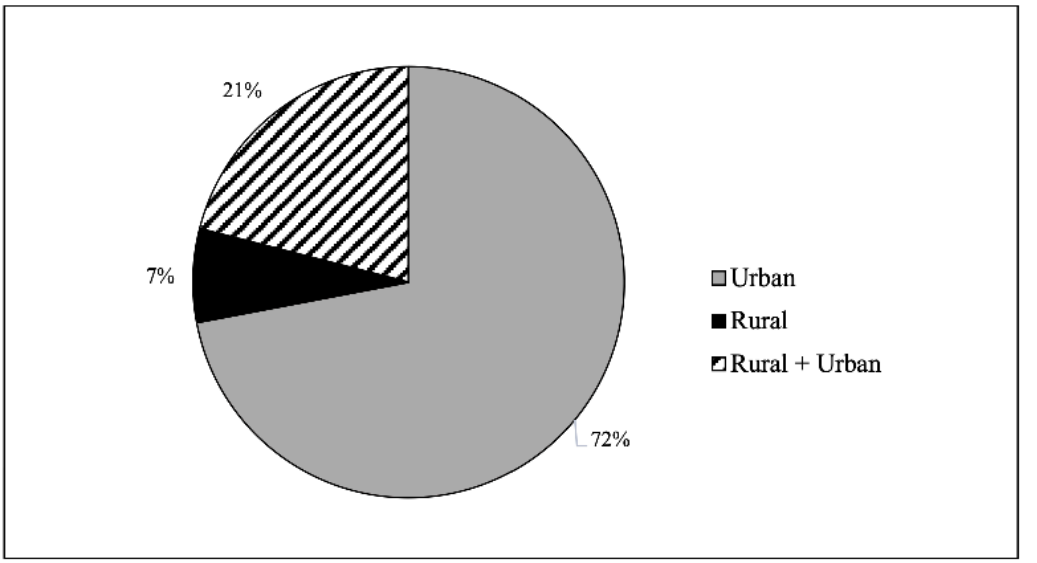


Figure 7. Community settings: Rural and urban America.

Regional Setting

In ITVS U.S.-based films, all four major regions of the United States are represented within stories, as Figure 8 shows: Midwest (12%), West (28%), South (19%), and Northeast (18%). (Unspecified U.S. accounts for 4%, and unspecified U.S. plus additional international identification accounts for 19%, as the figure shows.)

According to the U.S. Census report *2016 Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for the United States, Regions, States, and Puerto Rico*, the U.S. population is distributed in the four

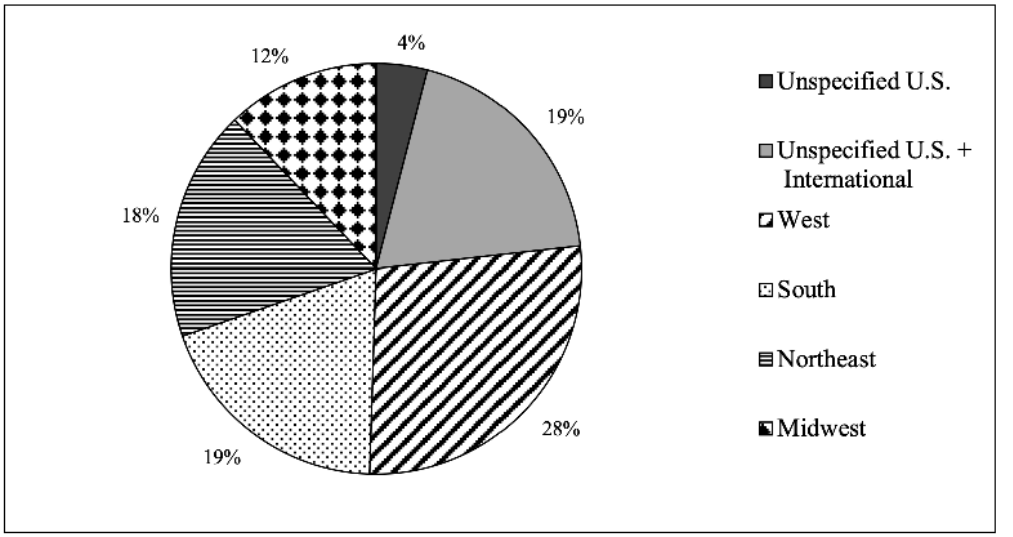


Figure 8. U.S. regions as story settings.

regions as follows: 38% in the South, 24% in the West, 21% in the Midwest, and 17% in the Northeast (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016b).

Occupation

Across 342 films, 492 lead characters were identified and categorized based on their role-based descriptions in story synopses. In 10 years of ITVS-funded U.S.-focused films, as Figure 9 shows, top depicted characters fall into the following major categories: (a) professionals serving the community (19%), which includes military service members (6%), law enforcement personnel (4%), educators (3%), religious or faith leaders (3%), and medical personnel (3%); (b) parents (14%); (c) artists (14%), including authors, playwrights, painters, poets, and filmmakers; (d) community activists (14%), who are civically engaged community members advocating for improvement or change; (e) community leaders and elected officials (9%); and (f) immigrants and refugees (9%). Other on-screen characters coded but not depicted in Figure 9 were notable public figures or celebrities (7%).

Demographic Descriptors

Across 342 films, 387 lead characters were identified and categorized based on their explicit demographic descriptions in written story synopses; thus, this does not account for all characters portrayed in the films. Of those 387 lead characters identified in narrative synopses by demographic characteristics, ITVS films identified and portrayed women, African Americans, children and teens, Hispanics, and Native Americans the most, as Figure 10 shows. Other on-screen lead characters who were explicitly identified demographically are Asian American *(7%)*, GLBT *(6%)*, and elderly *(4%)*.

Social Issues

We identified 1,063 non-mutually exclusive story themes for categorization across 342 films, based on a broad listing of social issues included in Gallup's (2017) long-running U.S.-based

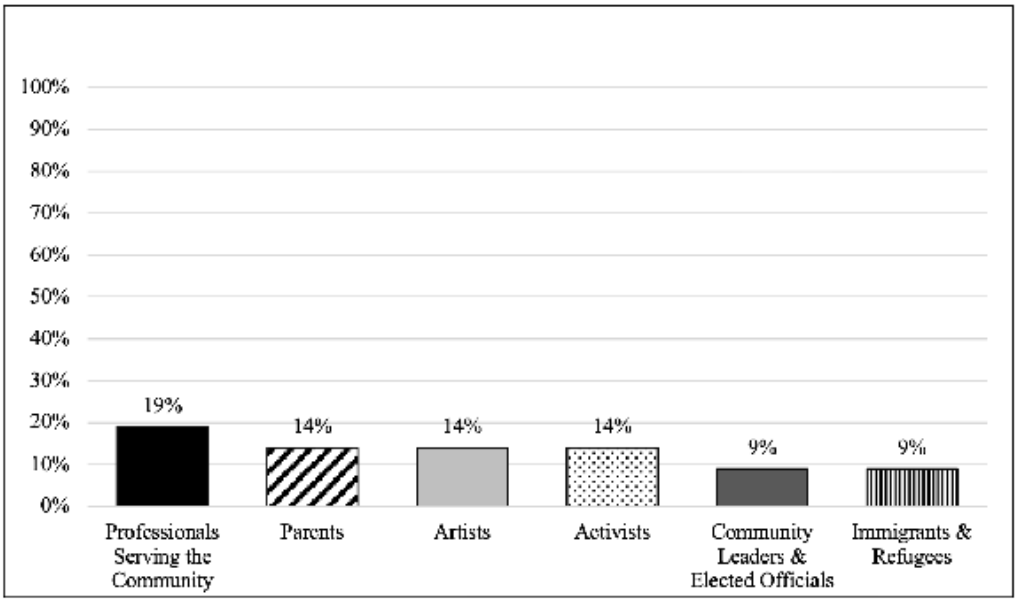


Figure 9. Characters: occupation or status.

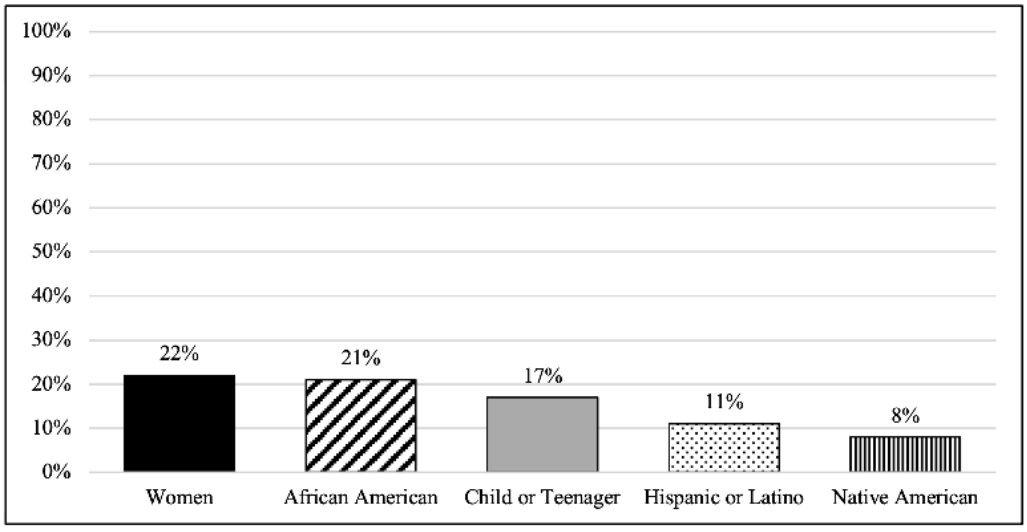


Figure 10. Characters: Demographics.

"Most Important Problem" survey. As Table 1 illustrates, the top 10 issues and concerns portrayed in the past decade of ITVS films are (a) race relations and racism (14%); (b) civic participation (9%); (c) government (including poor leadership; 9%); (d) family life (8%); (e) criminal justice and crime (7%); (f) immigration (6%); (g) economy or working (6%); (h) education (5%); (i) health and health care (5%); and (j) national security and war (including terrorism; 4%).

Other coded story themes and social issues that exist in the examined ITVS films, but minimally, are poverty (3%), religion or faith (3%), GLBT (3%), environment (2%), mental health (2%), food and agriculture (2%), drugs (1%), science and technology (1%), reproductive health (1%), and disability (1%).

The top 10 social-issue story themes found in the ITVS films reflect 6 of the top 10 social concerns articulated by Americans in the 2007–16 Gallup "Most Important Problem" poll findings, an aggregate data set of all variables indicated in the monthly Gallup surveys over the decade.[2] As illustrated in Table 1, each total here indicates the percentage of the American population that lists that issue as "the most important problem facing the country today," in order: (1) economy (24%); (2) unemployment or jobs (15%); (3) dissatisfaction with government (including poor leadership; 13%); (4) health care and hospitals (9%); (5) the situation in Iraq (9%); (6) the federal budget deficit (6%); (7) the government, president, Congress, or politicians (6%); (8) immigration (5%); (9) ethics, morals, or family decline (4%); and (10) education (4%). Down in the top 25 issues stated by Americans, race relations and racism ranks around 2% for a decade average.

Table 1. Top 10 Issues and Concerns.

ITVS Films (2007–16)		**Gallup Poll (2007–16)**	
Issue or Concern	Portrayed (%)	Issue or Concern	Importance (%)
Race relations and racism	14	Economy*	24
Civic participation	9	Unemployment/Jobs	15
Government (including poor leadership)*	9	Dissatisfaction with government (including poor leadership)*	13
Family life*	8	Health care*	9
Criminal justice and crime	7	Situation in Iraq	9
Immigration*	6	Federal budget deficit	6
Economy*	6	Government/President/Congress	6
Education*	5	Immigration*	5
Health and health care*	5	Ethics/morals/family decline*	4
National security and war (including terrorism)	4	Education*	4

*Issues overlapping the two Top 10 lists.

Based on the Top 10 lists, the decade of ITVS films' social issues and Americans' social concerns, based on Gallup's 10-year averages, overlap on these six issues: government (including poor leadership), family life, immigration, economy, education, and health and health care.

Discussion

This study analyzed the diversity of people, places, and social issues reflected in American life, as seen through the past decade of U.S.-focused documentaries funded and coproduced by

[2] Several items in the Gallup variables over the decade have almost identical phrasing but are indicated as separate variables in the raw data (which come from respondents' open-ended responses). Most of these combined variables do not show up in the top 15 issues, and thus, they are a moot point for this study. Of the top-level Gallup "Most Important Problem" issues list, we combined the following variable labels in final calculations: (a) "government (including poor leadership)" comprises dissatisfaction with government/Congress/politicians; poor leadership/corruption/abuse of power; dissatisfaction with government/Congress/politicians/candidates, poor leadership, corruption; dissatisfaction with government/Congress/politicians/poor leadership, corruption/abuse of power; and dissatisfaction with government/poor leadership; and (b) "health and health care" comprises health care, health care/hospitals and high cost of health care, and poor health care/hospitals.

the dominant public broadcasting organization engaged in such work, ITVS. These results do not address claims of liberal bias. Such claims, including the ones put forth now from politicians, have, as we noted earlier, been recognized as partisan tools exploiting the journalistic standard of objectivity—itself a construction of battles over purported media bias (Schudson, 2012)—and using political correctness as a tool of political attack (Fairclough, 2003) rather than an evidence-based claim of liberal bias to be disproved (Lee, 2005). This analysis, rather, looks at finished and distributed work in terms of characteristics of the American population at large. Given the mission of CPB generally, and the mandate of ITVS explicitly, to reflect a diversity of lives and people, this study endeavored to paint a portrait of this range of stories and storytellers as a reflection of contemporary American life.

Demographically, ITVS filmmakers who reported their gender were more likely to be female than male. If all who declined to report were male, the female population would still be relatively high, particularly compared with typical female media makers, who are markedly underrepresented both in news and public affairs and in entertainment media (American Society of News Editors, 2015; Hunt, Ramon, & Price, 2014; Papper, 2015). Additionally, as a group, the storytellers were more likely to be members of racial and ethnic minority groups than the general population. This conforms to the mandate of ITVS to make diversity a top priority in telling innovative stories to underrepresented audiences. That said, Hispanics are still underrepresented as filmmakers in the ITVS film list, relative to their proportion of the American population, indicating an area of focus for the future in aspiring for equity of representation. In terms of locality, the filmmakers came from 33 states, plus Washington, DC, which represent more than 84% of the population. The documentary stories themselves also reflected American geographic diversity as a lived experience. Overall, ITVS programs are set in all regions of the country, rural and urban.

On-screen characters are important in the stories told in these documentaries because of the roles they play there: as teachers, veterans and members of the armed services, police, religious leaders, community activists, and artists. The lead characters are more likely than the general population to be people of color or members of a federally recognized ethnic minority. This reflects the ITVS explicit mandate for diversity to address the chronic, continuing underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minority groups in commercial media. However, there is room for improvement where gender representation is concerned: Lead characters listed in film synopses are more likely to be male than female. Considering that decision-making documentary directors are still predominantly male, this remains an area for concerted focus in the industry (Borum Chattoo, 2018; Borum Chattoo et al., forthcoming).

Finally, the primary American issues presented in ITVS documentaries overlap substantially with concerns Americans express in the ongoing Gallup (2017) "Most Important Problem" poll. Many of the categories we devised to categorize ITVS-produced films are found with similar terminology in the top 25 variables reflected in the Gallup poll findings over the same decade, although the lead categories in the two lists show different emphases. ITVS's top category, "race and racism," aligns with its diversity mandate. Although the decade-long average shows "race relations and racism" as a top concern for an average of 2% of Americans, Gallup notes that 2016 represented a pivotal turning point for Americans' concerns about race relations in America, with a dramatic increase to 8% of Americans calling this the most important problem facing the country today—the fourth-most important issue of the year,

just under "economy," "government," and "unemployment/jobs" (Smith & Saad, 2016). Gallup notes this 2016 finding shows race relations as an American concern as "the highest in Gallup polling since 1970" (Smith & Saad, 2016, para. 7).

This study's limitations offer opportunities for future research. We used written synopses of production information rather than independent viewing of stories for coding. In particular, the synopsis data did not offer an exhaustive listing of all on-screen or lead characters. Future research could conduct a content analysis of the full experience of the films' visual material, engaging in discourse analysis and narrative analysis. Additionally, because of limitations in the available data, we were unable to complete a direct statistical comparison between U.S. Census designations of race, gender, and ethnicity, given the proportion of ITVS filmmakers who opted out of identifying themselves. Future research could include independent verification of race, gender, and ethnic identification of filmmakers, as in similar examinations of diversity in documentary (Borum Chattoo, 2018).

Both practically and theoretically speaking, we argue that endeavoring to move beyond ad hoc partisan attacks to reveal a holistic portrait of American life as reflected in public broadcasting independent documentaries is valuable. Diversity, as it is articulated in the mandates of both the CPB and ITVS, reflects a public-interest value in showcasing the lives and concerns of individuals often on the sidelines in commercial TV portrayals and decision making. Rather than reducing diversity to an ideological weapon, and thus a claim to liberal or conservative bias, this study aimed to create a deeper answer to a neutral question often framed in partisan terms: What does diversity look like in American stories, concerns, and lives as they are reflected in a source of independent storytelling? Independent documentaries are shaped outside media institutions, and thus may be more able to capture the concerns, perspectives, and voices of communities. As such, they contribute to the diverse and rich media ecology that is vital to an informed, motivated group of citizens (Schudson, 1998). Showcasing the lives, concerns, and experiences of a geographically, racially, and ethnically diverse group of Americans, with stories told by an equally diverse group of makers, bolsters the continuation of a rich information landscape that fosters democratic participation in community and national challenges (Baker, 2007).

In sum, this study reveals a portrait of America as a diverse nation whose citizens take an active role in their societies and communities, in all corners of the country. These are the American realities presented by independent documentary stories to broad publics, who experience these stories on local public TV stations. They do not fit neatly into polarized stereotypes of a partisan America.

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CHAPTER 38

Against Hollywood: American Independent Film as a Critical Cultural Movement

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Abstract

In the late 1980s, American independent film broke out of the tiny "art houses" (specialty theaters) of a few major American cities and became a much stronger presence in American public culture. Independent filmmakers see themselves as challenging the hegemony of Hollywood, eschewing *entertainment—fantasy*, pleasure, happy endings—and offering instead harsh and "edgy" stories about life in contemporary society. The present article draws on interviews, panel discussions, filmmaker Q & As, and other contexts in which independent film people talk about what they are trying to do: to make what one indie producer called "movies that matter."

Keywords

independent film, Hollywood, art vs. commerce, public culture, cultural critique, realism

"Hollywood" as both fantasy and material reality dominated the world of American entertainment for virtually the entire twentieth century. But from very early in the

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history of the industry, there were challenges to the Hollywood hegemony, with various attempts to create alternative sites of movie-making outside of the big studios.[1] This article is part of a larger project on the most recent movement toward independent filmmaking on the American landscape, one that began roughly in the mid-1980s and thrived through the 1990s and into the mid-2000s (Ortner 2010, forthcoming). In this period, independent production companies sprang up, festivals showcasing independent films proliferated, many independent films made it into mainstream theaters, and many won major awards, including Academy Awards. Despite being hit hard by the Great Recession since about 2007, and despite widespread (but questionable) pronouncements that independent film has collectively sold out to Hollywood, the movement still retains a good deal of artistic and political independence and force.

What then is an independent film? The simplest place to start is to say that an independent film is defined—to varying degrees and in varying ways—as the antithesis of a Hollywood studio film. The contrast can be seen in a variety of relatively objective indicators. Where studio films are very expensive, independent films are made on relatively low budgets; where studio films are in the business of "entertainment," independent films often set out to challenge their viewers with relatively difficult subject matter or techniques or both; where Hollywood films generally eschew taking sides on political issues, independent films are often explicitly political and critical; where Hollywood films are in the business of fantasy and illusion, independent films include virtually all documentary films, and even features are usually highly realist; and finally, where Hollywood films classically have happy endings, independent films rarely do.[2]

Two caveats must immediately be entered here. First, all references to "Hollywood movies" must be understood as referring to the big-money-making movies that are the bread-and-butter of the Hollywood studios. I do not mean to suggest that Hollywood has never produced a movie with complex characters, or progressive politics, or challenging subject matter. But these movies have always been in the minority within the total Hollywood output, whereas they tend to constitute the majority of independent films. Second, it must be understood that there is a spectrum of what is seen as an independent film, with a more Hollywood-y end of the spectrum and a more radically avant-garde and experimental end. For present purposes, however, I write as if there were a clear binary contrast between the two ideal types, and use the above list of typical indie characteristics—low budget, challenging subject matter, few happy endings, et cetera—to provide some simple rules of thumb for distinguishing an independent film (an "indie") from a "Hollywood" or "studio" film.

As a further aid to picturing the indie object, I present here the winners of the Best Picture awards of the two leading American independent film competitions, the Sundance Film Festival and The Independent Spirit Awards, for the past ten years. The two lists also give some sense of the range of variation just referred to, as Sundance leans more toward the strictly independent end of the spectrum and the Independent Spirit Awards lean more toward the Hollywood end of the spectrum. If the reader has been watching independent

[1] The first, and still in some ways most spectacular, example of film artists breaking with the studios is the founding of United Artists in 1919 (Balio 1976). For a good overall history of the movies, including both Hollywood and extra- or anti-Hollywood, see Mast and Kawin (2011).

[2] See Levy (1999) and King (2005) for other attempts to define the genre.

films (and most of the people reading this article will have seen at least some, whether they realized it or not), they will probably have seen more from the Independent Spirit Awards column than the Sundance column.

Year	Sundance	Independent Spirit Awards
2003	*American Splendor*	*Far From Heaven*
2004	*Primer*	*Lost in Translation*
2005	*Forty Shades of Blue*	*Sideways*
2006	*Quinceañera*	*Brokeback Mountain*
2007	*Padre Nuestro*	*Little Miss Sunshine*
2008	*Frozen River*	*Juno*
2009	*Precious*	*The Wrestler*
2010	*Winter's Bone*	*Precious*
2011	*Like Crazy*	*Black Swan*
2012	*Beasts of the Southern Wild*	*The Artist*

In addition to these feature (i.e., fiction) films, virtually all documentaries are independent films. With rare exceptions, Hollywood studios do not make documentaries as they are not considered commercially viable, and in any event are not seen as fulfilling the fundamental mandate to entertain. Even the big box office documentaries of recent years—most of Michael Moore's films, as well as *An Inconvenient Truth* starring Al Gore—have not really changed the fact that documentaries almost never attract studio financing.

One of the striking features of contemporary independent films is a pervasive darkness—of mood, of tone, of look, of story. Many of the films range from very gloomy to "pitch-black" (see David Ansen [2007: 65] on Se7en). Newsweek film critic Ramin Setoodeh complained that between 2005 and 2009 "roughly three fourths of all the films [nominated for Academy Awards] fixated on death" and described many films as "piling on the pain" in what "is starting to feel like Misery Porn." (2009: 70) David Denby of the *New Yorker* described a recent indie as "grating, almost punitive" (see Denby 2010 on *Margot at the Wedding*). Hollywood-oriented producer/director Jennifer Farmer described independent films in general as "dark, dysfunctional, heavy, violent, twisted, alternative kinds of things" (quoted in Stubbs and Rodriguez 2000: 28).

The darkness of so much of independent film raises many questions: Who is making these films? Who is watching them? Why did a movement toward such a harsh view of life emerge when it did? In the larger project noted above, I try to answer these questions, in terms of the dramatically changing class configuration of the United States under neoliberal capitalism.[3] I argue that the indie movement that emerged in the 1980s represented a critical cultural movement, an attempt to critique the dominant culture (represented by Hollywood) through film. With the phrase "dominant culture" I signal Raymond Williams' by now classic model of social stasis and change (1977). In this model, at any given moment, certain ideas and institutional formations are dominant or hegemonic in the sense of being deeply embedded in social life

[3] I have discussed neoliberalism elsewhere; see Ortner (2011), drawing on Harvey (2005) and Klein (2007). Briefly, I take it to be a combination of the unregulated capitalist profiteering and the shrinkage of state services and benefits that has taken over the American economy and much of the world economy starting in the 1970s.

and naturalized for social actors as sheer common sense. But other ideas and formations are also always in play, representing alternatives to the dominant culture with the potential for change if not radical transformation. Acknowledging and setting aside many complexities of both Hollywood movies and independent films, for the purposes of this discussion I treat "Hollywood" as part of the dominant culture, and the post-1980s independent film movement as, in Williams' (1977) terms, an "emergent," "alternative" formation.

As such, independent films can be productively read as embodying what George Marcus and Michael Fischer (1986) have called "cultural critique."[4] Marcus and Fischer develop this idea in relation to discussing the critical role of anthropology: "[One] promise of anthropology has been to serve as a form of cultural critique for ourselves. In using portraits of other cultural patterns to reflect self-critically on our own ways, anthropology disrupts common sense and makes us reexamine our taken-for-granted assumptions" (1986: 1). It is not a stretch to transpose this idea to the world of independent film, which often uses many of the same de-familiarizing strategies of anthropology and ethnography to "disrupt common sense and make us reexamine our taken-for-granted assumptions." Specifically, many independent films embrace a kind of harsh realism, making films that display the dark realities in contemporary life, and that make demands on the viewer to viscerally experience and come to grips with those realities.

Most independent filmmakers[5] would not use a language of "cultural critique." But they do have very strong ideas about the importance of "independence," which is to say, independence from Hollywood and all that it stands for. I will approach this central issue through an examination of the discourse, the self-representations, circulating within the world of independent filmmaking. The notion of discourse has had a long and complex life in the field of linguistics, and also plays a distinctive role in the philosophy of Michel Foucault (see especially Foucault 1986). But I use it here in the nontechnical sense of the vocabulary of terms, tropes, and styles distinctive to a particular social universe, in this case, the universe of independent filmmaking and all its associated institutions and support structures.

I locate "discourse" in this sense within ordinary talk among the participants in the independent film world, derived from interviews and from attendance at hundreds of panels and Q & As with filmmakers. I locate discourse as well in the public culture of the independent film world: public representations beamed out from film festivals, filmmaking magazines, and films-about-filmmaking that construct both film people and audiences as part of a complex public that shares a particular worldview and a value system. I will return to the idea of ethnography through discourse interpretation in the conclusions.

One more caveat before going on: There is a widespread, even vast, skepticism among observers of the culture industries as to whether independent film has been able to remain truly independent, or whether it has not in fact become simply another kind of Hollywood product for a particular niche audience (see e.g., Curtin 1996; Klawans 2000; Wyatt 2001; Timberg 2004). The most common version of this position is that there may have once, briefly,

[4] There are of course other traditions of "critique," beginning with Kant, and including the "critical theory" of the Frankfurt school. For my purposes here, the Marcus and Fischer (1986) concept of "cultural critique," specifically situated within an anthropological context, is the most useful.

[5] The "filmmaker" is normally both writer and director of the film, and receives virtually all of the creative credit. Independent filmmakers are contrasted with Hollywood directors who do not write their own material. Producers are very important in the indie world as well, but receive much less credit for the final product.

been a moment of real independent filmmaking, perhaps in the 1980s, but it has all by now been absorbed or infected by Hollywood in one way or another. Of course there must be some degree of truth to this view. After all, Hollywood and the American cultural hegemony of which it is a part, is indeed very powerful; that is the whole point. Yet I resist—at the risk of charges of naiveté—buying into this view completely. Insofar as the independent film movement tries to position itself in opposition to mainstream culture, I am less interested in deconstructing and debunking their self-constructions (and their films), and more interested in exploring the oppositional political potential in those claims (and those films).

Against Hollywood

The discourse of independent filmmaking is always a reactive discourse, always set strongly against certain stereotypical notions of "Hollywood." Producer Larry Drubner* called Hollywood blockbusters "disgusting" (interview, March 23, 2007), and said, "I don't love the industry, I hate it."[6] Independent filmmaker Ramin Bahrani (e.g., *Man Push Cart*, *Chop Shop*) said Hollywood movies "just don't make any sense. They create massive confusion" (in Scott 2009: 43). Producer Ted Hope, one of the pioneers of the indie movement, talked about his early move toward independent film production:

> [I was 19, 20, but] was already [thinking], what is this junk that Hollywood is producing? . . . It was all supposed to be hip and cool, and I was just, this is such saccharine crap, and I remember just being angry at what was supposed to be groundbreaking and wasn't. (Interview, March 15, 2006)

Not all indie film people are literally angry about Hollywood, but all by definition are in some sense against what Hollywood is and stands for; that is the basis of the decision to work independently and to go against the grain of the standard Hollywood movie.

But this negative stance toward Hollywood is set at two relatively distinct levels. The first level might be called the level of cultures and practices: independent filmmaking sees itself as different from or better than Hollywood in its ethos and practices of making films, specifically in terms of the commercial intention of the studios and the relatively noncommercial intention of independent filmmaking. The other level concerns the nature of the films themselves in the two worlds. Here there is a critique of the stereotypical Hollywood movie not only as informed primarily by the commercial intent, but also by a relatively unquestioning relationship to the dominant or mainstream culture. Here then we can find in the discourse of independent filmmaking a more articulated set of ideas about critical filmmaking: making films that challenge the dominant culture, making films that challenge the audience, making, in the words of independent producer Christine Vachon, "movies that matter"(Vachon and Edelstein 1998).

Before getting to that discussion, I need to say a few words about the approach to the interpretation of discourse I will be using here. I will not be doing what is called "discourse analysis" in linguistic anthropology, a method that entails a close, and relatively technical, examination of conversational texts. Instead I will be doing something we might call cultural ethnography through discourse, listening to the ways in which people spontaneously seem to say or write the same things in many different contexts. For example, many people in

[6] All names in the article are real names unless marked with an asterisk (*).

the independent film world will say things like "I hate Hollywood" or "Hollywood is crap," or "you have to stay out of the studios or they will destroy your film." After the fourth or fifth repetition of these sorts of statements by different people in different contexts it seems reasonable to conclude that there is something like an established discourse of contempt for Hollywood prevalent in the indie world.

But—and this is very important—this does not mean that everyone who says something like this has the same intention or relationship to the discourse. For some people it expresses a genuine and deep-seated personal animosity toward Hollywood and its products. For others it is a kind of posturing: to say something like this is to declare one's status as an *auteur* (a unique artistic creator). For yet others (and we will see examples), they might say something like this today and sign up for a studio contract tomorrow.

For the most part I am not interested in this kind of individual variation and with the quest for getting behind informants' backs that this would imply. At the level of discourse, informants are always right; that is, regardless of their intentions or their subjective relationship to what they are saying, they nonetheless say what they say, and what they say is, from this perspective, an instance of a particular discourse. (I am, on the other hand, interested in contestations over the discourse itself, but that is a different issue and unfortunately I do not have the space to explore it within the confines of this article.) Here I turn to the most central term in the language of independent filmmaking, "independence."

The discourse of independence

Bob Rosen, former Dean of the UCLA School of Theater, Film, and Television, was one of the founding board members of IFP/West (Independent Features Project/West, now Film Independent), in which they tried, in the early years, to hammer out—amid "prolonged and heated debate"—a definition of what made a film "independent." They came up with four criteria: that the film be "risk-taking in content and style"; embody a "personal vision"; be funded by "non-Hollywood financing"; and embody the "valuation of art over money" (interviews, July 25, 2006 and November 10, 2008). Would-be and practicing independent filmmakers are encouraged and liberated to make "personal" films, in which they tell the stories they want to tell in the ways they want to tell them. As Hollywood is famous for controlling directors and the contents of their films, "non-Hollywood financing" is meant to ensure that the filmmaker is truly independent.

The value of independence from Hollywood (and ultimately from the necessity for pleasing an American public that has been programmed with Hollywood values and expectations) is repeated over and over in the public representations of the independent film community. One site in which it is particularly audible is at the annual Independent Spirit awards, hosted by Film Independent. At the 2007 awards ceremony, a short film was shown at the beginning of the ceremony. As I wrote in my notes while watching:

> Film Independent staged a competition for a short film about the idea of "independence." The winning film, called *Independence*, was really pretty good, starring a homeless guy [standing amid his junk, including a TV with no screen]. He just sort of raps along in a funny way about the upsides and the downsides of independence. On the one hand, nobody can tell you what to do. On the other hand,

> your TV set doesn't have a screen. It ended with the guy saying, "Of course, in order to be independent you needs lots of other people." (Fieldnotes, February 24, 2007)

The last point is important. "Independence" does not mean isolation, it means being part of a community of people who share the value of being independent from the mainstream represented by Hollywood.

More generally, the term "independence" must have been repeated a hundred times in the course of the awards event:

> People went on and on and ON about the value and meaning of "independence," and how everyone in this room shares this ultimate value. . . . The foreign directors seemed especially passionate about it—the Mexican cinematographer [Guillermo Navarro] who took best cinematography for *Pan's Labyrinth*, and the German Director [Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck] who took best foreign film for *The Lives of Others.* One got the feeling from them that the ultimate horror is to have to bow to the views of others, and the thing about independence is really just following your vision without interference The German filmmaker said, the best way to have independence is to lower your budget. He made *The Lives of Others* [which went on to win many prizes] for $2 million. He said, "People are not in this for the money." (Fieldnotes, February 24, 2007)

Another major site for the public reiteration of the discourse of independence is at the Sundance Film Festival, which I attended in 2007. I have a large-format (11 x 16.5 inches) brochure about the Sundance Institute that I think was handed to me as part of my packet when I picked up my pass, or perhaps was just lying around among the volumes of free literature at the festival.[7] The front of the brochure has the word INDEPENDENT in all caps and very large font. Above the word it says, "Free the Artist," and below the word it says, "Free the Audience." We open the brochure and see the "Free the Artist" spread, which asks, "What if the question, 'How will your film . . . make money?' were never asked? Then only two questions remain: 'Is this the story you want to tell?' and 'What is the best way to tell it?'"(Sundance Institute 2007: 3). The idea of artistic independence is then given an urgent political spin: "What's ultimately at stake—the creative use of freedom in an open society—is far too important to trust to economic or political forces, or to the whims of fashion" (Robert Redford, quoted in Sundance Institute 2007: 5). As with Film Independent, but less strongly emphasized, there is an invocation of a balance between celebrating the artistic independence of the filmmaker and situating the filmmaker in a collaborative community: "Here, the tenuous coalition between independence and productive collaboration strives to achieve surprising results" (Sundance Institute 2007: 7).

At the same time there is much greater emphasis on reaching and indeed creating the audience that will appreciate these films. We first read the following: "When independent artists, free from the constraints of the marketplace and political pressures, find their own truth, audiences are freed to experience new truths within themselves. The affect is intoxicating, addictive, and life-sustaining" (ibid.: 5). The brochure seeks to conjure an audience that is not merely open to the kinds of films these filmmakers will make, but is actually thirsting for them: "The Institute continually explores innovative ways to put the voice of freely expressed ideas before audiences that crave originality, diversity, and authenticity" (ibid.: 7).

[7] Brochure kept in author's files; copy available on request.

All of this comes together at the Film Festival, "Where independent film meets independent audiences" (ibid.: 11).

The discourse of passion

In *The field of cultural production*, Pierre Bourdieu (1993) provides a theoretically sophisticated exploration and analysis of the world of "art." Opposing both reductive social interpretations (e.g., linking specific kinds of works to specific social groups) and reductive "charismatic" interpretations (vesting the value of the work of art in the creative genius of its creator), Bourdieu develops the concept of the "field of cultural production," a social field in which artists and a large cast of supporting players vie with one another for recognition and prestige, in the course of which specific values—of what counts as art, and of what constitutes good and bad artists, genres, and works—are constantly created, maintained, and transformed.

At the base of the field of cultural production is the fundamental opposition between art and commerce. The world of art as a whole sets itself off from the wider social and economic world as what Bourdieu calls "an anti-economy," which "is so ordered that those who enter it have an interest in disinterestedness" (1993: 40). More importantly, the art/commerce opposition structures the relationships between different kinds of art *within* the field of cultural production:

> The opposition between the "commercial" and the "non-commercial" reappears everywhere. It is the generative principle of most of the judgments which, in the theater, cinema, painting or literature, claim to establish the frontier between what is and what is not art, i.e., in practice, between "bourgeois" art and "intellectual" art [or] between "traditional" and "avant-garde" art. (1993: 82)

In certain parts of his discussion, Bourdieu divides the field of cultural production into two subfields, a "field of restricted production" and a "field of large-scale production." The field of large-scale production is the more or less commercially and popularly oriented zone of the field of cultural production, producing for large/mass audiences. On the other hand, the field of restricted production at its most extreme is one in which cultural producers produce only for the recognition and approval of other like-minded cultural producers, and not for more widespread recognition (ibid.: 53 and passim). The opposition between large-scale and restricted fields obviously maps reasonably well onto the Hollywood/indie opposition, and I will return to it later. Here I want to explore a particular manifestation of the commerce versus art opposition in American independent film, the opposition between money and "passion."

From the point of view of the indie world, independent films are made from passion, from the filmmaker's intense personal commitment (*personal* is another keyword here) to tell a particular story in a particular way. Passion is the opposite of a commercial sensibility; the heat of passion is opposed to the coldness of cash. Passion is also the opposite of a mechanical filmmaking sensibility; a film emerges from the filmmaker's personal vision, as opposed to (in the worst case) the formulas and franchises and mechanically stamped out "cookie cutter" movies of Hollywood. Filmmaker Richard Linklater wrote about going to a commercial casting agency when he was casting *Slacker*:

> The place smells so much like the business side of filmmaking we run in horror. We're now determined more than ever to avoid these industry types *who have no passion* for cinema. We'll find ALL of our people elsewhere and do the film a full 100% against the industry way. (Linklater 1992: 4, italics added)

Passion-talk can be heard everywhere in the film world; "passion projects" are virtually synonymous with independent films. Ursula Jackson,* a partner in an independent but studio-oriented production company, had this to say:

> A really good friend of mine just won one of the Nichols contests [for a film set in Bosnia], which is the screenplay contest that is run by the Academy. And everything that wins that is *so much a passion piece*, almost a documentary, the films are so involved in true life and all that. (Interview, December 2, 2005)

For another example, Cherien Dabis (*Amreeka*), a young Palestinian-American independent filmmaker, spoke about doing two kinds of filmmaking:

> My career is such that I have *my passion projects* that I want to write and direct, and those are really mostly Middle Eastern stories, and then I also have this commercial sensibility, like writing on *The L Word* [where she is a staff writer], things I feel like I need to do to pay the bills, things I think are fun, that I would like to see made. (Interview, April 4, 2006)

Or Fred Irving,* the head of a specialty division of a studio, was talking about why producers would take risks investing in certain independent films:

> There are *movies of passion* and the people putting up the money realize it's a huge risk, a bigger risk [than backing studio films]. It's like buying junk bonds instead of buying high quality municipals or something. [In the latter case] you know what your return is going to be, or you think you do, [like] on a movie with Tom Cruise in it . . . or with certain subject matter. But other movies [like *Brokeback Mountain*] about gay cowboys, you sort of would say you'll be lucky to make your money back. Everybody does this for the love of the movie; that's the only reason you're doing it. (Interview, March 27, 06)

In all of these examples, independent films as passion projects are contrasted with studio or commercial films: passion projects are personal (Dabis' Middle Eastern films; Jackson's friend's film about Bosnia); and they are made first and foremost for love, not money (commercial films are things that "pay the bills," that generate big "returns on investment," and are "good business").

The discourse of passion as against the coldness of commercialism and of formulaic filmmaking is one version of the art/commerce opposition in the world of independent film. Another is the discourse of staying out of the studios, where the commercialism of the studios represents the death of creativity.

Trying to stay out of the studios

Hollywood is often represented as a dangerous place for a filmmaker with vision and integrity, and many filmmakers believe that it is important to stay out of the Hollywood studios entirely in order to maintain their artistic independence. The ideal of filmmaking independence is symbolized, even mythologized, in the very low budget film. The "no-budget, DIY [do-it-yourself], down-and-dirty, whatever-it-takes filmmakers" (Adam Fish, personal communication) who manage to put the film together with grit, ingenuity, and their moth-

ers holding the lights are the heroes of independent filmmaking. Kevin Smith, who worked in a convenience store in Red Bank, NJ, and who made *Clerks* (1994) for $27,575 by maxing out all his credit cards, is one such indie hero. So is Mark Borchardt, hero of Chris Smith's documentary, *American Movie* (1999), who had no job, who scrounged money from relatives, and who cast his entire family in a little horror film called *Coven* (2000). John Cassavetes, who is one of the ancestors of the contemporary indie movement, made very low budget films on his own in the 1950s and 1960s, outside of studio control (e.g., *Faces*, *A Woman Under the Influence*). The Independent Spirit Awards still have a category called the John Cassavetes Award, given to films with budgets of $500,000 or less.

Some filmmakers who have yielded to the temptation to make a film in a studio felt they have been badly burned by the experience. Kevin Smith talked about his bad experience with *Jersey Girl* (2004), which was made by Miramax/Disney; it involved expensive stars (especially Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez), and it earned mostly very bad reviews:

> I had to actually listen to studio notes [comments] So there were changes made to the movie. I never want to go through this shit again. I don't want to work with fucking really famous people. It got me to a point where I was like, "I don't want to fucking work with a lot of money, because that means that the studio is going to make you do whatever you can to make it more palatable to the masses." (Horowitz 2006: 279)

Or here is Guillermo del Toro talking about a bad experience making his film, *Mimic* (1997), speaking during a Q & A after a screening of his new film, *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006):

> MODERATOR. Let me ask you about your relationship with studios.
>
> DEL TORO: This film [*Pan's Labyrinth*] was completely independently financed. [He had had a bad experience with Miramax, for his film *Mimic*.] It turned into a cockroach movie. Hollywood is not like a tidal wave, it is like mildew, fuckin' fungi. It was a very shocking experience. The way they do marketing is obscene. (fieldnotes, November 11, 2006)

Steven Soderbergh (e.g., *sex, lies, and videotape*, *The Informant!*) similarly yielded to the studio temptation, and found it a bad experience when he made *Ocean's 11* (2001) for Warner's.

> "For me, *Ocean's* made no sense," he says. "It was the hardest thing I ever did. It's a movie about absolutely nothing. I found it just brain crushing. I never felt fluent, never felt comfortable. Every day I was hanging on by my fingernails. . . . About two weeks into it, I was feeling like, I want to do a little, a guerrilla movie. I just need to wash this out of my system." (quoted in Biskind 2004: 416)

And finally, when Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, director of *The Lives of Others*, received his Academy Award for that film, he brandished the statue and exclaimed, "Filmmakers, the only way you can make the films you want is to remain independent! Lower the budget! Stay out of the studios!" (fieldnotes, February 24, 2007).

Insiders will be quick to point out some of the ironies forecast earlier. Despite his strong comments, Soderbergh went on to make more *Ocean's* films for the studio, although he is famous for using the money to finance the more challenging indies that he also continued to make. Von Donnersmarck seemed passionately sincere at the time he accepted his Academy Award about exhorting filmmakers to stay out of the studios. Nonetheless he went on to make a big commercial film called *The Tourist* (2010), starring megaexpensive stars Angelina

Jolie and Johnny Depp, which incidentally flopped both critically and at the box office. And there are other examples one could name.

But it is important to recall that we are talking about a discourse, a kind of accepted vocabulary of terms and tropes and ideas that makes ongoing sense within a particular social world even when it is violated by individuals. Discourses are maintained in many ways—through reiteration at the level of talk, through at least some level of behavioral conformity in practice, but also, and importantly, through certain kinds of reflexive representations. Specifically, in relation to the present discussion, the idea that the studios are dangerous places for an independent filmmaker has been dramatized in several independent films. Space prohibits discussing any films in detail in this article, but I mention two here for the curious reader: a relatively small film called *The Big Picture* (Christopher Guest, 1989), and Robert Altman's classic, *The Player* (1992). In both films, idealistic independent filmmakers are crushed when they try to work within a studio context. Their films are messed up beyond recognition and their personal integrity is corrupted. These and other films thus turn the key messages of the indie world—good films are made from passion, not money; stay out of the studios or they will eat your soul—into public-cultural morality tales, full of drama, pathos, irony, and humor, and with real (at least within the films) material consequences.

Telling the truth, showing the real

What then makes independent films different from, and ideally better than, your stereotypical Hollywood movie? If one listens to the discourse in conjunction with watching the films, the short answer is something like this: Independent films seek to tell the truth about contemporary society. Where Hollywood films seek to provide escape and fantasy, independent films seek to tell realist or hyper(bolic)-realist stories about the world as it really is, in all its ugliness and cruelty, or all its weirdness and strangeness, and if this makes audiences uncomfortable, so be it. In order to get to these points about truth and realism, I need to work through the discourse of pleasing or not pleasing the audience.

Independent filmmakers and their audiences

Independent filmmakers often have a prickly and somewhat adversarial relationship with the imagined audience, that is, the mainstream American audience schooled in Hollywood movies, and presumed to want only to be mindlessly entertained. Hollywood-oriented screenwriters and directors like John Hamburg (e.g., *Little Fockers*) have found themselves looked down on because they cared about pleasing the audience:

> [I was making] a comedy in film school. And at NYU, there weren't a lot of guys doing comedy. There were a lot of movies about homeless people in Washington Square Park. . . . I remember getting into arguments with people who were like, "Oh, you just care about the audience." (quoted in Horowitz 2006: 107)

Many independent filmmakers by contrast make films to please only themselves and a small handful of people who share their tastes. In "The Good Machine No-Budget Commandments," producer Ted Hope and his business partners set out a list of dos and don'ts for making independent films. Point eight is, "Write for a very limited audience—your closest friends. Do

not try to please anyone—crowd pleasing costs"(Hope 2010). Screenwriter/filmmaker Charlie Kaufman (e.g., *Synecdoche, NY*) is quoted as saying "It's never my goal to win an award or to write a screenplay *that people will really enjoy*. It is about a subject that I am exploring and to do it in a truthful way" (quoted in Muñoz 2008: 5, italics added).

Independent filmmakers hope their films will find an audience—they certainly have to persuade their financial backers that their films will find an audience—but ultimately they are ready to say to hell with the audience if necessary. Filmmaker Rodrigo García has made films like *Things You Could Tell Just By Looking at Her* (1999), which he described as "practically a thesis on what an uncommercial movie is" (interview, July 14, 2006). I asked him about the degree to which he thought independent filmmakers do or should listen to the advice and feedback of others. He replied:

> I think it [varies from] movie to movie. I have a script right now that I've written that I want to make. It touches on a lot of things that I want to make a movie about Not many people say to me it's bad, but a lot of them say, "what is this?" So I'm not listening [to them]. Or I'm listening but I think there are just some movies you have to make the way you see them. This will be one of them and I may make it and crash and burn and it will never see the light of day but screw it. (Interview, July 14, 2006)

And here is a more extended example, from the screening of a documentary called *Kabul Transit* at the 2006 LA Film Festival. The film, showing Kabul as a heartbreakingly ruined city but its people as survivors, is presented with no narration, no story line, and no clarifying information for the viewer. It is simply a series of striking and beautiful scenes that follow one after the other. After the screening, anthropologist/filmmaker David Edwards and his codirectors Greg Whitmore and Meliya Zulfacar, participated in a Q & A session:

> Q. [Somebody in the audience starts out saying admiringly that the film is really cool, all fragmented as it is, he wants to congratulate the filmmakers.]
>
> DAVID. Yes, there is no single story, no single character . . . And anyway that's the way it is, Kabul is really very fragmented.
>
> Q. [from another audience member, approvingly] Non-Western films and European films are like this, they don't "mollycoddle the audience."
>
> Q. [from a woman who seemed to know she was swimming against the tide of the previous comments] But I think it was too fragmenting, you didn't provide enough context, I couldn't make sense out of the film.
>
> MELIYA. The situation *is* very fragmented.
>
> DAVID. Some people like the way the film is made and some people get frustrated. *[emphatically] We made a decision.*
>
> SPONTANEOUS APPLAUSE. [In favor of this position and against the previous question.] (Fieldnotes, June 28, 2006)

As we were walking out, David was approached by someone with a press badge from *Variety*. He commented to David about the low level of sophistication of American audiences who want simple stories. He blamed it on TV. As he was walking away another man walked up and congratulated David on a brilliant film. I asked David if he would compromise the film

by adding narration or other signposts, since that might enhance the possibility of getting a television contract. He said, "Absolutely not, I'd rather put it on Google Video" (ibid.).

All of this is very much in the vein of Bourdieu's arguments about the field of "restricted production," noted earlier. We hear artists who hope people will see and like their films, but who will not compromise their artistic values, shared with a relatively small group of cognoscenti, in order to please the audience. From Bourdieu's point of view this performance of an "interest in disinterestedness" is a kind of posture that seeks the highest possible level of prestige within the field of cultural production as a whole, at the furthest remove from an interest in commerce and money. I am sure there is some element of truth to this; independent filmmakers are certainly not immune to the calls of the ego.

Yet I would argue that a purely Bourdieusian reading of these kinds of statements, at least in the world of independent film (and perhaps in general) is simply too thin, too focused on the prestige effects of this positioning, too cynical about the ideals behind this attitude. For behind the negative stance toward the (mainstream) audience are a number of positive values related to the critical function of independent film. One has to do with the idea of telling the truth about the world around us, showing it "as it really is." The other has to do with disturbing or shaking up the complacent or passive audience so that people will become aware of these realities.

Real vs. Fake

I indicated earlier that some independent producers and filmmakers can get quite angry about what Hollywood films are doing and saying. When they are explicit about what makes them so upset, the issue almost always revolves around things like truth versus lies, and reality versus fakery, with independent film on the side of truth and the real. Of course truthfulness is not necessarily the same thing as realism. One can tell all kinds of truths in nonrealist modes—through fantasy, poetry, abstraction, and so forth. But in practice in the world of independent film, truth-talk tends to be intertwined with reality-talk at the level of discourse, and it translates much of the time into an ethic and an aesthetic of realism or hyper(bolic)-realism at the level of film.

For the purposes of the present essay, we remain at the level of discourse. For example, indie screenwriter/filmmaker Charlie Kaufman said:

> I hate *movies that lie to me*. Should I sit there thinking my life sucks because it's not like the ones on the screen, and I'm not getting these life lessons? My life, anyone's life, is more like a muddle, and these [Hollywood] movies are just dangerous garbage. (quoted in Waxman 2006: 155, italics added)

Or independent filmmaker Harmony Korine (e.g., *Kids, Gummo*) said, "I can't stand plots, because *I don't feel life has plots*. There is no beginning, middle, or end, and it upsets me when things are tied up so perfectly" (quoted in King 2005: *59*, italics added). Similarly, in the interview quoted above independent producer Ted Hope later said:

> Looking at the crap Hollywood was turning out when I was 20, I was like, nobody is making a movie for me and I am just this normal kid from the suburbs. Really all I wanted was a story of a normal person with normal problems because at the end of the day that is what I thought made movies really work. It was not so much even what you saw, but what you were able to talk about afterwards.

> And that is not often the story of alien invasions, but the *story of real life problems*. (Interview, March 15, 2006, italics added)

What Hope means by "a story of a normal person with normal problems" is not necessarily what the average filmgoer might envision by the word "normal"; Hope has produced films like *American Splendor* (2003), about the underground cartoonist Harvey Pekar, who was physically unattractive and chronically depressed. But that is clearly Hope's point—that most "normal" people are not beautiful and happy, and certainly not all the time.

Closely connected to the question of truth in independent films is the question of endings. Hollywood feels compelled to deliver the happy ending, while independent filmmakers feel such endings are usually false, far from the realities of life. Director Brian De Palma started his career as an independent filmmaker, and always remained something of a maverick in Hollywood. We learn from an account of the making of *Bonfire of the Vanities* that De Palma was worried about the ending:

> He understood audiences wanted catharsis, some way to synthesize everything they had just seen. . . . He understood that one reason people went to the theater and movies was for the chance to experience the kind of satisfying endings they rarely found in life . . . [but] such moments seemed elusive to him, and false (Salamon [1991] 2002: 373–74; sentence order rearranged)

Similarly, Danish filmmaker Susanne Bier discussed the nonhappy ending of her film *After the Wedding* (2007) at a screening in Los Angeles. Here is an exchange between Bier and various audience members during the Q & A:

> MODERATOR. I read a quote from you, to the effect that the world is a hurtful place.
>
> BIER. I am a happy person. But there is a lot of pain in life. AUDIENCE MEMBER. Americans want happy endings.
>
> ANOTHER AUDIENCE MEMBER. I'm Scandinavian. Most Americans like happy endings. But life is not about happy endings.
>
> BIER: Happy endings *are not truthful*. (Fieldnotes, February 26, 2007) [8]

Beyond the question of endings, most independent filmmakers and producers are committed to a kind of realism in their films that represents a more general commitment to tell the truth to their viewers. As one young filmmaker recently blogged about his new film, about to open in a theater, "If it speaks with honesty, people will listen and respond" (Porterfield 2011). Filmmaker Rodrigo García discussed honesty and realism (again, the two are always very closely tied together) in an (unrecorded) interview:

> He went off at some length about how bad Hollywood movies are, how fake—that was the difference, between fakeness and honesty When he was talking about what he valued in filmmaking, he kept using the word "naked," trying to look at something *as it really is*. He also kept using the phrase, "taking a truthful look." He said you could make a film about anything, the important thing was looking at it as nakedly as possible, taking a completely truthful look at whatever it was. (Fieldnotes, July 13, 2006)

Or take Christine Vachon, another of the major independent producing pioneers: "I built my company on a rebellion against conventional taste, against the no-rough-edges, film-by-

[8] The focus of the study is on American independent cinema. But international films are a significant part of the independent film circuit in the United States, and I occasionally include them in the discussion.

consensus style [of Hollywood]" (2006: 4). She continues, "At Killer [Films] we don't believe that people make the right choice, and then the wrong choice, then fix everything with minutes to spare"(ibid.: 12). She then goes to the reality issue:

> The most dangerous movies Killer [Films] has made are the ones that reflected the real world back with the least amount of artifice: *Kids*, *Happiness*, *Boys Don't Cry*. I wouldn't call these films "realistic"; nothing on screen is. What they are are stories without clear heroes or redemptive "arcs." People may or may not get what is coming to them, and those plots spook an industry premised on wish fulfilment and getting the girl. (Vachon 2006: 75)

If we look back at many of the comments disparaging "Hollywood" or "American audiences" quoted earlier for other purposes, we can see in them too that the issue is one of truth or realism or both. Thus we heard Charlie Kaufman say that his goal in filmmaking was not to please audiences but to explore particular subjects "in a truthful way." Or we heard David Edwards and his codirectors defending the fragmented and hard-to-understand nature of their film about Kabul by saying that fragmentation was the reality of Kabul as a city today. Or we earlier heard Hollywood-oriented producer Ursula Jackson (condescendingly) describe independent films as "almost documentary, . . . so involved in true life."

Film critic A. O. Scott has dubbed this trend in independent film "neo-neo- realism." Discussing a number of contemporary independent films in this realist mold (*Wendy and Lucy*, *Man Push Cart*, *Ballast*, and others), Scott locates them in a lineage that begins with Italian neorealism after World War II (the iconic example being Vittorio de Sica's *The Bicycle Thief* [1948]). He describes the art of these films as lying "in their discovery of a mysterious, volatile alloy of documentary and theatrical elements" (2009: 40). Although he, like the filmmakers, does not use a language of "cultural critique," he recognizes the critical function these films serve:

> To counter the tyranny of fantasy entrenched on Wall Street and in Washington as well as in Hollywood, it seems possible that engagement with the world as it is might reassert itself as an aesthetic strategy. Perhaps it would be worth considering that what we need from movies, in the face of a dismaying and confusing real world, is realism. (Scott 2009: 40)

There is one final piece to this reading of independent film as setting itself up against the cultural hegemony embodied in Hollywood movies. We have already seen that many independent filmmakers refuse to try to please the audience. In fact, many go further than that and actively seek to make audiences uncomfortable to one or another degree. For example, filmmaker Karen Moncrieff (e.g., *The Dead Girl*) said, "I'm interested in movies that make people feel something, and that's what I gravitate toward. I like to be pushed off my center when I go to the movies. I like to be invited to feel and think" (Moncrieff n.d., circa 2006). Rodrigo García, in the interview discussed earlier, made similar comments about "how a film needs to make demands on you, and throw you off balance" (fieldnotes February 10, 2007). He went on to say that "art is not supposed to make you feel good, it's supposed to question things, hold up the mirror, take you somewhere you won't or would rather not go in real life." He also used stronger language about the kind of impact he sought from a good film. Talking about how Americans are conditioned by Hollywood movies to want "entertainment" and a happy ending, he said "he just can't stand it, for him a film is only worth something if it really 'beats him up'" (ibid.).

I see this urge to disturb the audience as part of the larger project of cultural critique behind the independent film movement, which I have tried to frame and forecast in this article. Without using a language of "cultural critique," independent film people (producers and filmmakers) seek to challenge the dominant culture, as embodied not only in Hollywood movies but also in the mainstream audience that voraciously consumes those movies.

Some conclusions

In this article I have sought to tease out some of the distinctive values, and ways of seeing, of the world of independent film. I have approached this through an interpretation of the terms and tropes and categories—the discourse—to be found in the talk and texts of the indie world. I should say immediately that the entire project (again see Ortner, forthcoming) is not devoted to the interpretation of discourse. Other parts of the study include a history of the post-1980s independent film movement,[9] the social profiles of producers and filmmakers, a participant-observational account of production work on film sets, and more. But the kind of listening-for-discourse, and the effort to understand what some repetition of a striking term or phrase is telling us about how indie people see the world, has been an essential part of my overall methodological tool kit.

By way of conclusion, I would like to spend a little time on two phrases that have been central to this discussion: "public culture" and "cultural critique." The idea of public culture underlies the entire discussion of this paper, but in two slightly different senses. The first is a kind of Geertzian sense, in which the public culture of the independent film world is read as emerging from and speaking to that world. Geertz never actually used the phrase "public culture," but it was part of the originality of his theory that he defined all culture as "public," in the sense of seeing culture as embodied in public symbolic forms (like language) rather than hiding in the recesses of people's heads (1973a). From this point of view, I have looked at the (public) culture of the world of independent film as embodied in the ordinary talk of the participants in that world, as well as in more "made" texts like the Sundance brochure or Robert Altman's *The Player*. And I have read these cultural forms as, in the famous Geertzian phrase, the stories indie people tell themselves about themselves (Geertz 1973b: 448).[10]

The second sense derives from Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge's development of the concept in the context of naming the journal they founded in the late 1980s, *Public Culture*. "Public culture" in this context is intended as a way of grasping how culture works in a globalizing world, a world in which cultural products circulate and confront one another on a vast and always-in-motion global terrain. Appadurai and Breckenridge explain their choice of the phrase as follows: "[it] allow[s] us to hypothesize not a type of cultural phenomenon but a zone of cultural debate, . . . an arena where other types of cultural phenomena are encountering, interrogating, and contesting each other in new and unexpected ways"(1988: 6). In relation

[9] For an excellent account of the on-the-ground emergence of the independent film scene in the 1980s, see Biskind (2004).

[10] Geertz's place in contemporary anthropological theory is complex. His work has been called into question as part of the critique of the culture concept more generally, and also because of his commitment to the now largely discredited "modernization theory." Nonetheless, his theorizing of the formal (as opposed to political) aspects of culture, as used here, remains powerful.

to the present project, independent film in this sense represents one entry in the larger field of American public culture, challenging and contesting the hegemony of "Hollywood."

This brings me then to the question of "cultural critique." For I argue—though I have only been able to note this very briefly in this essay—that independent film's challenge to Hollywood beginning in the 1980s needs to be understood as a response and a challenge to much larger social changes in American society and culture. Dark and violent films about the misery of work in the new economy, or about the dysfunctionality of families in a world of absent parents, among others, tell stories that Hollywood is almost never willing to tell, about the fraying social fabric of American society today. As against the cynicism of many observers about the survival of "independence" in independent film, I have chosen to take their self-representations seriously, and to read the movement and its films as at least embodying, and sometimes articulating, "cultural critique."

"Cultural critique" in indie *features* is almost always implicit, embedded in the stories and mise-en-scènes of the films. It is for the most part only in documentaries that we see more overt and explicit critical representation and analysis of contemporary society, including among other things a critique of contemporary neoliberal capitalism. Documentaries often go beyond "cultural critique" and enter the space of more direct political criticism and even action. But that is another part of the story.

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L'anti-Hollywood : le cinéma indépendant américain, un mouvement culturel critique

Résumé

Vers la fin des années 1980, le cinéma indépendant américain s'échappait des salles de cinémas d'art et d'essai de quelques grandes villes américaines pour acquérir une notoriété nouvelle au sein de la culture populaire américaine. Les réalisateurs indépendants résistaient à l'hégémonie d'Hollywood et s'opposaient au « spectacle de divertissement » : le fantastique, le plaisir, le « happy-end ». Ces réalisateurs présentaient au contraire dans leurs œuvres des histoires décrivant dans un style plus dur et avant-gardiste la société contemporaine. Cet article se penche sur des entretiens, des conférences et des discussions auxquels ont participé des réalisateurs, ainsi que sur d'autres contextes dans lesquels les acteurs du monde du cinéma indépendant parlent de ce qu'ils tentent de réaliser : des « films qui ont de l'importance », selon la formule d'un producteur indépendant.

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CHAPTER 39

Alternative Media, Self-Representation and Arab-American Women

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Abstract

Arab-American women often find themselves represented in the mainstream media as oppressed victims in need of saving, but what sometimes gets less attention are the ways in which Arab-American women themselves are adding to the media landscape, through poetry, film and other forms. This article offers a textual analysis of artistic interventions circulated by Arab-American women in the media sphere, and supplements the analysis of the content and context of these interventions with individual interviews with the artists involved. It focuses on the poetry of Suheir Hammad and the cinematic interventions of Annemarie Jacir, which I situate as alternative media. I conceptualise alternative media as media content that challenges dominant assumptions and offers stylistic innovations for the purpose of inspiring social change. In addition, I argue that alternative media consist of transforming the existing stock of material into one's own language in order to promote social justice. The article concludes with remarks regarding the opportunities and the limitations of alternative media in effecting social transformation.

Keywords

Alternative media, Annemarie Jacir, Arab, cinema, Palestinian, poetry, Suheir Hammad, gender

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Introduction

Arab women are often represented as helpless victims in need of saving. Academic literature on the subject describes in considerable depth the workings of these reductionist and Orientalist representations of Arab and Muslim women (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Ayotte and Husain, 2005; Butler, 2004; Jiwani, 2006; Khan, 1998; Macdonald, 2006; Nayak, 2006; Parameswaran, 2006; Razack, 2008; Todd, 1998; Vivian, 1999; Yeğenoğlu, 1998). One of the key figures in this discourse is the image of the veiled woman, and particularly the core stereotype of the figure of the veiled woman as oppressed. The veil has carried symbolic and political implications since before colonial times. As Fanon (1963) demonstrates, part of the colonial mission involved controlling the dress code of local women, and more specifically unveiling Algerian women. Some Algerian women posed a threat to French colons because they carried weapons beneath their veils. Since then, the veil has continued to be a central theme in the government-led initiatives, public debates and media of many Western countries. This public discourse has been organised around a dichotomy between complete assimilation, which would involve letting go of what is perceived as problematic cultural practices, and so-called non-assimilation, encapsulated in the portrayal of the ungrateful immigrant who must not be accommodated. Such public debates of whether the veil should be tolerated have been documented in studies covering British and North American (Ayotte and Husain, 2005; Butler, 2004; Macdonald, 2006; Nayak, 2006; Todd, 1998), as well as French (Vivian, 1999) contexts. These polarisations remind us of Mamdani's (2005) description of the 'good' Muslim versus the 'bad' Muslim, whereby the 'good' Muslim's position stands on shaky ground and can easily shift to that of the 'bad' Muslim.

While one aspect of the construction of Arab female identity in mainstream media relies on the notion of an oppressed Arab womanhood that needs to be rescued; the other side of it revolves around eroticised and exoticised portrayals: these women have also been represented as objects of desire for consumption—as commodified sexual objects and belly dancers (Shaheen, 2001; Yeğenoğlu, 1998). Indeed, as Said (1994) and Karim (2000) explain, the construction of this imaginary geographical area called the Orient consisted of images of revulsion and attraction, inferiority and fascination. Yeğenoğlu (1998: 11) demonstrates that:

> the Orient as it figures in several eighteenth and nineteenth century European texts is a *fantasy* built upon sexual difference … the figure of 'veiled Oriental woman' has a particular place in these texts, not only as signifying Oriental woman as mysterious and exotic but also as signifying the Orient as feminine, always veiled, seductive, and dangerous.

Responding to the pervasive circulation of this discourse, some women have recently engaged in practices of creating their own media to alter—albeit in small ways—the flow of information. These diasporic women artists and media practitioners include Suheir Hammad, Annemarie Jacir, Maysoon Zayyid, Sundus Abdul-Hadi, Jackie Salloum and Layla Essaydi.

This article focuses particularly on the works of Palestinian-American poet Suheir Hammad and Palestinian-American filmmaker Annemarie Jacir because they have circulated long-term interventions that are attracting considerable attention. Both artists have received many awards for their work.[1] In addition, looking at these two cases enables the researcher

[1] Hammad received the Audre Lorde Writing Award, Hunter College (1995, 2000); the Morris Center for Healing Poetry Award (1996); the New York Mills Artist Residency (1998); the Van Lier Fellowship (1999); the

to take into consideration two different media: literature and cinema. I situate these works as alternative media. Based on the existing literature and on my analysis of the selected case studies, I conceptualise alternative media as media content that challenges dominant assumptions and offers stylistic innovations for the purpose of inspiring social change. Furthermore, I argue that alternative media consist of transforming the existing stock of material into one's own language in order to promote social justice. Using textual analysis and semi-structured interviews, this article focuses primarily on the ways in which the poetry of Suheir Hammad and the films of Annemarie Jacir respond to dominant representations of their identities in order to intervene in the mediasphere. In this analysis, I situate Hammad and Jacir's works as alternative because they exemplify self-representational art, serve the interests of marginalised communities and seek to challenge dominant notions about their identity—that is, they are alternative in terms of their content as well.

Alternative media

Alternative media provide an opportunity for audiences to create their own news and report on what they think is newsworthy, regardless of the editorial lines of the mainstream media (Platon and Deuze, 2003). Entertainment media enable non-professional media practitioners to present material that would differ in content and form from that presented through mainstream channels (Baltruschat, 2004; Ginsburg, 2002).

The area of alternative media studies is an emerging field of inquiry. This research interest derives from the realisation that it is not only important to understand the prevalence and influence of mainstream/mass media; it is also imperative to pay attention to other types of media that circulate in the public sphere. Among the existing types of media content, this body of literature discusses which can be defined as alternative media (Bailey, Cammaert and Carpentier, 2008; Carroll and Hackett, 2006; Hamilton, 2001; Kidd, 1999; Rodriguez, 2001). It hence explores key debates in academic and media establishments concerning the criteria used to conceptualise alternative media. For some scholars, such as Albert (1997), it is the organisation of the media institution that makes it alternative (or not); in this view, an alternative media institution (1) does not seek to maximize profit; (2) does not pursue advertisers; (3) aims to challenge traditional hierarchical relationships; and (4) is independent from state and market forces. Other scholars claim that alternative media need to be "native" to the communities they serve (Kidd, 1999) and that they also need to advocate for social change (Hamilton, 2001). This body of literature also includes an examination of the limits

2001 Emerging Artist Award, Asian/Pacific/American Studies Institute at NYU; the Tony Award for Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry Jam on Broadway (2003); and the 2009 American Book Award. Likewise, Jacir's work received many awards and distinctions, including: World Premiere, Cannes Film Festival, Official Selection, Cinéfondation; National Finalist, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Student Academy Awards; Best Short Screenplay, Nantucket Film Festival; Best Short Film, Palm Springs International Short Film Festival; Best Short Film (Emerging Narrative), IFP/New York; Silver Plaque, Chicago International Film Festival; Best Short Film, Institute Du Monde Arabe Biennial; Audience Choice Award, Polo Ralph Lauren Columbia University Festival; Special Jury Prize, Ramallah International Film Festival; Best Films of the Year list, 2003, Film Comment Magazine; and 25 New Faces of Independent Cinema, 2004, Filmmaker Magazine. More recently, Jacir was selected as one of 2010/2011's Rolex Protégées and worked under the mentorship of acclaimed Chinese director Zhang Yimou.

of alternative media in terms of effecting social transformation—see, for example, the studies of Atton (2006) and Daniels (2009) about regressive uses of alternative media.

The form of alternative media could range from a film to a video, a blog or a magazine. In his proposal of montage as a visual practice prevalent in alternative media, Hamilton (2001) articulates this idea of using the available stock of raw materials from popular culture and transforming them into something else. An interesting example of a montage that parodies Hollywood's representation of Arabs is illustrated in *Planet of the Arabs* (2005), produced by Jacqueline Salloum and inspired by Shaheen's book *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. This montage uses various shots depicting Arabs from different Hollywood movies from 1896 to 2000 to highlight the recurrent stereotypes and negative images that have consistently circulated. The montage ends with a diagnosis of these images as mass-madness and a call to turn off television sets. Personal zines could be another form of alternative media, as Poletti (2005) explains. Poletti's study focuses on modes of narrative in personal zines, located within a context of do-it-yourself (DIY) and independent cultural practices.

Clearly, new technologies have played a role in facilitating mounting challenges to dominance. Montagner (2001) describes this phenomenon as 'cyber-democracy', while Carty (2002) speaks of it as 'web resistance'. Carty examines technology and counter-hegemonic movements around issues of labour and consumption in her case study of Nike Corporation. In describing sites promoting activism on the web, Carty reflects on how the internet has served activists as an ally through such examples as the use of open-publishing newswires for grassroots coverage of protests.

Some of the main tactics of alternative media include culture jamming. Bailey, Cammaert and Carpentier (2008) situate détournement as the most relevant reference to what is described today as culture jamming. The idea of the serious parody suggests reversing, transgressing or subverting. The Situationist movement deployed the tactic of détournement as a way to fight The Spectacle through the modification of ads, news items, cartoons, and other types of cultural products. Its aim was to use manipulation in order to strip these commodities and events of their intended meanings and to subvert messages (Debord, 1994). Branwyn (1997: 14) relates jamming in alternative media to music and radio, defining it as:

> using media in new and creative ways, 'jamming' like musicians jam, making it up as they go along. Jamming also refers to the scrambling of broadcast signals, as in the interruption of a radio signal by electronic means … The whole point of alternative media is to jam the status quo with ideas and viewpoints not found in conventional media and not subject to the tidal influences of commercial sponsorship and demographics.

Other tactical interventions have involved bearing witness to political events from the position of the margins. Montagner (2001) reports on how protesters at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Melbourne loudly chanted 'the whole world is watching' at police as they came with their own video cameras and recording equipment to document any potential abuse, and to create their own coverage of the event. Montagner also identifies other internet media groups who are similarly engaged. She concludes (2001: 16–17) that 'activists are now taking care of their own representation', and that political activists are now becoming media activists. [2]

[2] For further discussion of types of tactics deployed by alternative media practitioners, see Oumlil (2012).

Method

The works of Hammad and Jacir were selected as case studies for this analysis based on the criterion of self-representation and because they represent different forms of talking back (poetry, performance, cinema). Furthermore, I selected these case studies because they constitute long-term interventions. Jiwani (2006: 85) argues that, for change to be long-lasting, interventions must be 'consistent and persistent in challenging dominant definitions'. This article focuses on the ways in which Hammad and Jacir have responded to dominant representations of their identity in order to stage interventions in the media landscape. Drawing from postcolonial theory, critical race and gender studies, and research on Arab and Muslim representations in the media, this article uses a textual analysis and juxtaposes the main tropes of dominant discourse to the artists' responses. While all Hammad's publications—*Drops of This Story* (1996), *Born Palestinian, Born Black* (1995), *Zaatar Diva* (2005) and *Breaking Poems* (2008)—were taken into consideration for this analysis, only a few examples are used here due to space restrictions. The analysis of Jacir's cinematic interventions is based on her short films, and focuses particularly on her first feature film, *Salt of This Sea* (2008), which is also the first feature film by a Palestinian woman director. Drawing from the previously mentioned literature on alternative media, the analysis identifies the alternative media concepts and tools deployed by the selected artists to make their voices heard in the mediasphere. It is supplemented with semi- structured interviews with the artists to understand the individual motivations and the challenges the artists might have encountered in the processes of disseminating their perspectives. This analysis also relies on observations derived from Hammad's 30 March 2009 performance at Club Lambi in Montreal, which I attended in order to examine how the poet enacts her identity on stage, since it is through the performance and (re)presentation of identity that the selected artists circulate meaning.

The alternative potential of Hammad and Jacir's works

Self-representational art

The selected case studies can be described as self-representational art. Hammad and Jacir define their works as constitutive of countercultural practices. Loomba (1998) describes self-representation of the colonised as spaces for negotiation, change and resistance to colonial power. In a chapter called 'Grandma's Story', Trinh (1989: 150) addresses the need for marginalised voices to be recorded and documented. Using a specific example of a woman of colour telling a story, she says that 'even if the telling condemns her present life, what is more important is to (re-)tell the story as she thinks it should be told; in other words, to maintain the difference that allows (her) truth to live on'. According to Trinh, the importance of storytelling lies in the telling of difference. In this sense, it is not a matter of convincing the other party or winning an argument; rather, it is about preserving and circulating one's truth, one's difference, one's reality. It reflects an effort to sustain the marginalised.

The importance of producing work in one's own voice, of being one's own storyteller to recodify one's identity, has been discussed by several researchers. Rodriguez (2001) par-

ticipated in the production of a video about the work of the *grupos populares* [3] work in the Columbian Andes, and found that when the *campesinos* (or peasants) looked at themselves in the video, they transformed their self-image. She also noticed that by directing men in the process of making the video, women were empowering themselves. Rodriguez relates that the *campesinos'* ways of looking at themselves changed: the ceased being passive when they became producers of their own media images. Similarly, Juhasz (1995) reports on the vital significance of self- expression. She retraces a history of alternative media production, noting that minority producers (mostly women and people of colour) in the United States in the 1970s produced identity films for 'the promise of personal and political liberation' (1995: 40). In this light, Ginsburg (1995) speaks of the liberationist potential of indigenous and alternative media mobilised for self-determination and to resist to cultural domination. Similarly, in his analysis of the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), Baltruschat (2004) reports that in the 1960s, Canada's First Nations started creating their own media and telling their own stories.

On the Arab-American side, Salaita (2006: 105) argues that there is an imperative to speak: 'Arabs don't speak, or aren't allowed to speak, very often in print and visual media.' Criticising how often non-Arabs moderate and mediate discussions about Arab questions in the media, he posits this situation as 'alarming' because it feeds into an environment of anti-Arab racism in which Arabs are not allowed to articulate their own sensibilities. Whereas Salaita clearly distances himself from the view that only Arabs have the right to speak about themselves, he calls for discussion of Arab issues that would include and involve community members.

When considering the significance of representations, it is important to note that concerned communities have sought to participate in deciding how they are represented. As Hall (1997) explains, representation is the way by which meaning is given to what is depicted and a key element in producing culture. He draws the connection between representation and culture by arguing that culture—a system of representations—is about shared meanings and that language (encompassing various forms of what we call today verbal and non-verbal communication) is the privileged medium for making sense of things. Thus language constructs meaning as it operates through representations.

Several scholars have called for the self-representation of marginalised communities (Baltruschat, 2004; Juhasz, 1995; Loomba, 1998; Rodriguez, 2001; Salaita, 2006; Trinh, 1989). In response to how this call has been associated with identity politics, which is supportive of the self-representation of marginalised groups, Shohat and Stam (1994) draw on Mohanty's (1991) work in order to argue that the question is not who can speak for whom, but rather how to speak together with others rather than for them. Mohanty contends that a common context of struggle is needed to build alliances/constitute commonality, rather than some essentialist understanding of identity: 'thus, it is the common context of struggle against specific exploitative structures and systems that determines our potential political alliances' (1991: 7). Hence Mohanty challenges the essentialist understanding of identity politics in favour of a politicised understanding of oppositional identity. However, such alliances are not always easy to build, as historical instances of the failure to stand in solidarity with other struggles

[3] According to Rodriguez (2001: 1), the term *grupos populares* is synonymous with 'peasants' in Latin America, and can also signify 'grassroots group'.

demonstrate: 'sadly, the record speaks for itself of many suffragists' failures to oppose slavery, of many abolitionists' failures to support women's suffrage, and of much of organized labor's failure in relation to both women workers and workers of color' (Downing, 2001: 8).

Identity politics typically is mobilised in order to achieve collective goals. Identity has always been used strategically. Spivak (2005: 477) argues that 'essentialism is always used strategically, to bypass or acknowledge difference'. Echoing the sentiment, Trinh advocates for the necessity on the part of the marginalised to maintain their existence and difference. What should not be dismissed here is the imperative of taking voice by those who have been historically silenced, a need undergirded by the necessity to circulate different and empowering narratives. These narratives are not only personal; they also reflect a position of shared marginality, and can thus be mobilised for collective political goals. With this said, the cultural producers selected for this analysis are privileged economically compared with Spivak's subaltern.[4] The hierarchy (within a marginalised bracket) creates another disjuncture in terms of who has access to speak.

Jacir has situated her work within the framework of self-representational art. In New York, with Professor Hamid Dabashi, Jacir co-founded the *Dreams of a Nation* Project, of which she was the chief curator. This project aims to provide support for Palestinian filmmaking, access to Palestinian films and a digital archive of Palestinian cinema. Furthermore, the *Dreams of a Nation* official website articulates the mission of the project within the larger framework of self-representational art, as only films made by Palestinians are included. *Dreams of a Nation* was envisioned as an intervention based on a dissatisfaction with existing portrayals of Palestinians in the dominant mediascape. The project was consciously launched to mark a rupture, to make an alternative contribution to the dominant public sphere. As Jacir (2006: 25) puts it:

> This project, of which the [2003 *Dream of Nation* film festival in New York] was a part, of presenting, archiving, and studying Palestinian cinema, in an effective manner to support the continuing struggle of Palestinians to use colors, symbols, and images to represent ourselves in the peril of the destruction of our culture … In organizing *Dreams of a Nation* we wanted to highlight and discuss the impressive feat that Palestinian filmmakers were attempting—to develop an aesthetically and socially relevant body of filmmaking just when decades of cultural development in the West Bank, Gaza, and elsewhere, were being newly threatened, and we wanted to intervene and contribute to the present rather disappointing cultural discourse on Palestine in the US by introducing the nuanced and compelling work we were seeing from Palestinian filmmakers around the world.

In a similar vein, Hammad presents the urgent need to circulate her writings when she reiterates that 'our' stories need to be told—for accuracy, for sanity. This relates to how she connects her experiences to communal ones, emphasising the sense of being part of a larger

[4] For Spivak, subalternity signifies a condition where one is removed from all social lines of mobility. In her seminal text *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Spivak (1988) cites the example of Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, who committed suicide in North Calcutta in 1926. The young woman had been a member of an armed struggle group for Indian independence. When the group asked her to carry out a political assassination, she killed herself. Because she was menstruating when she committed suicide, Spivak interprets this act as a 'displacing gesture' that denies the charge that she killed herself because of an illicit pregnancy (1988: 104). Spivak furthermore contends that, as a subaltern, Bhaduri rewrote the social text of sati-suicide, challenging the practice of widow burning in colonial India. In a subsequent article titled 'Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular', she argues that 'subalternity is where social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognisable basis of action' (Spivak, 2005: 476).

community marked by similar struggles and aspirations, without falling into reductionist thinking, as in her writings Hammad clearly recognises difference within identity categories. The next section addresses the communal sensibility of Jacir and Hammad's works.

Serving a community

The notion of serving a community and maintaining an indigenous voice above the surface of the water was apparent in this analysis of Jacir's work. As Jacir suggests, one of the main goals of the *Dream of a Nation* project was to create an archive of Palestinian films that academics, festival curators and other people interested in cinema could use. Jacir spoke then about the imperative of preserving a culture that is at risk of being lost:

> The other big part of the project was creating this online database to gather information and make sure it would be available so that other festivals, other academics, and other people interested in cinema could find it. We kept hearing over and over again that people were interested in these films; they heard about them or they hadn't heard about them but they couldn't find them. They didn't know how to reach the filmmakers. So it was about getting information. The main thing was to get information out there that was lacking.

In *Salt of This Sea*, Jacir depicts the lead character, Soraya, as swimming in the forbidden Palestinian sea and trying to maintain her head above the surface of the water. This sense of 'our stories' needing to be told is a shared characteristic of Jacir and Hammad's works.

The collective nature of Hammad's work has been evident since her earlier writings. A young Hammad writes in *Drops of This Story* (1996) about how the 'I' in her writings is a 'we': 'I'm still writing. So that our stories be told. For revolution. For sanity. So that we don't forget. So we always remember. I is we' (Hammad, 1996: Author's Note). In his analysis of Hammad's poem 'First Writing Since', Rothberg (2003: 153) speaks of this collective dimension: 'the poem attempts to document something of the collective dimension of the trauma and of the heterogeneity of the city'. The poem effectively speaks to multiple realities by, for example, naming some of the victims of the 9/11 attacks who belong to different ethnic groups. From the names of the victims, we know that some of them were Latino and Arab.

The collective orientation of Hammad's work is grounded in a need to take voice, which further delineates her writings as belonging to the realm of self-representational art. In her author's note to *Born Palestinian, Born Black*, Hammad (2010: ix) writes:

> Why do I write? 'Cause I have to. 'Cause my voice, in all its dialects, has been silenced too long. 'Cause women are still abused as naturally as breath. Peoples are still without land. Slavery exists, hunger persists and mothers cry. My mother cries. Those are reasons enough, but there are so many more.

Thus Hammad writes because her voice has been silenced, and here she refers to how the perspectives of marginalised communities have been erased. She also writes because she needs to speak out against the injustices they endure (the marginalised communities exemplified here are women, the colonised, the enslaved and the poor). The poet often employs the word 'community' and the notion of collectivity. During the interview, she states, 'I come from all these different communities who complement each other.' Hammad hence views her standpoint as situated in multiple communities. Since she started writing, her poetry has been infused with a notion of coming together in respect and of building bridges of solidarity between different positions and locations of marginality. But beyond being located as self-

representational art that serves the interests of particular communities, what aspects of the works of Hammad and Jacir belong to the realm of alternative media content?

Alternative content

Drawing from the previously mentioned literature on alternative media, I argue that one of the key characteristics of alternative media is the type of content it circulates, which needs to be different from that presented in the mainstream. It also needs to articulate a social justice agenda. The two selected case studies both present the characteristics of such content. Hammad's poetry responds to a large repertoire of Palestinian, Arab and Muslim representations that attempt to naturalise, normalise and fix these images and dominant tropes in order to provide alternative framings. Said (1994) examines the large body of work that constructs the East as backward and inferior, and labels it Orientalist discourse. Shaheen (2001) denounces how Palestinians are constructed as animals in Hollywood films, and are quite simply denied their status of human beings. Hammad attempts to make these stereotypes uninhabitable. Hall (1997) contends that we may reverse stereotypes if we make them uninhabitable by interrogating them and asking, among other questions, where the images come from, who is silenced in the production of the images and what is missing (what is not there is just as important as what is represented).

Hammad's publications include a memoir and three collections of poems. *Drops of This Story*, a memoir that chronicles her life as a young Palestinian female growing up in Brooklyn, was written at the age of 19 and subsequently published four years later in 1996. She has also published three collections of poems: *Born Palestinian, Born Black* (1995), *Zaatar Diva* (2005) and *Breaking Poems* (2008). Overall, her work responds to harmful portrayals by negating their very foundation while also offering an alternative language. Her work has a live dimension, as she performs her poetry on stage across the world. I attended one of her performances in Montreal on 30 March 2009. The Simone de Beauvoir Institute at Concordia University was the primary organiser of the event, which was held at Club Lambi on Saint Laurent Boulevard in Montreal. That evening, Hammad opened her performance with her poem 'not your erotic/not your exotic'. The significance of this opening is situated in its double negation: the poem simultaneously deals with gender and race as it deconstructs the assumptions of gendered and exoticised portrayals. Here, Hammad demonstrates an awareness of dominant constructions of Arab women's identity and chooses to challenge this dominant discourse by the use of a double negation, clearly stating that she does not see herself in the image of the sexualised and objectified other. The poem goes on to mention several of the core stereotypes used to denigrate women, and alludes to the international nature of the objectification of women, as not only 'harem girl[s]' are targeted, but also 'geisha doll[s]' and others, thereby building bridges between the different struggles women experience throughout the world.

Hammad's poetry presents contemporary counter-narratives of race and gender. Whereas it gravitates between impulses to translate these 'profane' bodies and reminders that they are closed to translation, Hammad's writings break stereotypes and expose what was made unreal in an effort to rewrite experiences of otherness and marginality. Here I refer to Butler's *(2004)* notion of the 'derealisation of the other' that, when applied to existing stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims, frames them as beyond discursive dehumanisation. For Butler, 'derealisation' implies that these bodies are neither alive nor dead. Violence inflicted on unreal bodies can-

not be conceived as causing injury or death because their lives have already been annulled. Butler adds that these lives become ungrievable.

Hammad connects various forms of oppression based on difference and describes them as situated in a 'system based on money' (quoted in 'letter to anthony (critical resistance)', published in 2005 in Zaatar Diva). The author's note in the first edition of *Born Palestinian, Born Black* (1996: ix) opens the volume with June Jordan's poem 'Moving Towards Home': 'I was born a Black woman / and now / I am become a Palestinian'. Furthermore, in 'letter to anthony (critical resistance)', Hammad writes, 'and these people / bronx bomber they imagine a world / where money can't be made off the hurt / of the young the poor the colored the / sexualized the different' (2005: 67).

Hammad's poetry also unsettles dominant discourses by negating pejorative linguistic constructions and offering alternative portrayals to these hegemonic representations. Her writings often identify the dominant categories constructing subordinated identities (Palestinian, Muslim, Arab, woman) in order to unmask the workings of linguistic domination. She sums up these central tropes as operating under a dehumanising framework imposed by 'those who've denied our humanity eternally' (1996: 7). Simultaneously, she creates categories to talk back (hooks, 1989), by using both literal and subtle language. For example, the poem *Exotic* (Hammad, 1996) contains a literal double negation that brings together race and gender: 'don't wanna be / your erotic / not your exotic.' Therefore, she refuses eroticisation and exoticisation of herself. In her memoir, Hammad (1996: 75) relates an experience of being looked down upon as being unintelligent, a characteristic that is often associated with working-class immigrants who are portrayed as uneducated, backward, uncivilised and pre-modern:

> SWAM the ocean to be written. I wrote this out in English class in high school, while my teacher kept her eye on me, 'cause she was sure I was gonna cheat. She was so busy copping me, wouldn't notice the other students scheming right under her nose. These drops dripped off the Shakespeare I had to re-read so new teachers would believe that I understood it.

This quote addresses institutionalised racism and discrimination due to difference in schools. It challenges the notion of the classroom environment as separate from the real world, together with any notion that presupposes that instructors encourage an environment of equal learning for all. The quote also speaks of the immensity of writing that remains to be done when Hammad says, 'swam the ocean to be written', referring to how voices like hers have historically been silenced, and how other/dominant discourses have appropriated her identity and her story to tell it in a way that exerts their dominance. The word 'drops' subsequently alludes to how her memoir, which is entitled *Drops of This Story*, can only provide a few drops [of water] to fill in the gap—a gap so large that it resembles an ocean.

An example of proposing an alternative portrayal to the dominant notion of Muslim masculinity as dangerous, threatening and violent can be found in 'First Writing Since'. Hammad associates Muslim masculinity with being 'gentle': 'both my brothers, gentle Muslim men'. This statement negates the central trope of the violent Muslim man. Like all statements that talk back (hooks, 1989), it is inevitably positioned *vis-à-vis* a dominant logic that has been disseminated widely through mainstream media.

In an early postcolonial text that deconstructs the dominant tropes of colonial discourse, Césaire (1972) identifies and denounces the framing of the colonised in animalistic terms.

The mainstream media have often constructed Palestinians as less human and more animal like (Salaita, 2002; Shaheen, 2001). In his analysis of representations of Arabs in Hollywood films, Shaheen (2001) describes how Palestinians and Arabs are described as animals, pigs, dogs, rats and savages. Hammad (2005: 66–67) brings this central colonial trope to the surface through a sarcastic reiteration in her poem 'letter to anthony (critical resistance)' when she says:

> the world pointed and Palestinians do not exist Palestinians are roaches Palestinians are two legged dogs and Israel built jails and weapons and a history based on the absence of a people Israel made itself holy and chosen and my existence a crime.

In this case, Hammad uses sarcasm to express the opposite of what 'the world' says—'the world' here points to how overwhelming and powerful dominant discourses about Palestinians are; it highlights the repetition of these hurtful images that depict Palestinians as animals. Hammad does not use capitalisation throughout, further emphasising that language is a construction—that is, something that is not real. Immediately after denaturalising (by revealing) the colonial trope of Palestinians as animals, Hammad follows with the real implications of these words: 'Israel built jails and weapons'. At the same time that she denounces the irony of representing Palestinians as animals, Hammad reveals the erasure of the existence of Palestinians—'the absence of a people'—thereby showing in one stanza the binary and paradox of this representation. On one hand, Palestinians do not exist, yet on the other hand, they are depicted as animals. She ends this stanza by depicting how they are criminalised (another central trope of the same discourse).

Annemarie Jacir's work also presents alternatives to mainstream discourses. While *Salt of This Sea* is her first feature film, Jacir has been working in independent cinema since the early 1990s. She has written, directed and produced several short films and videos since 1994, including *A Post Oslo History* (1998), *Sayyad al-satilayt/The Satellite Shooters* (2001), *Filastin tantazir/Palestine is Waiting* (2002), and *Kanhun 'ashrun mustahil/Like Twenty Impossibles* (2003), which also premiered at Cannes and is a winner of several awards. The symbolism of the titles, *Like Twenty Impossibles*, tellingly reveals the impossible conditions of doing this type of work and producing such films.

In response to Palestinians' forced invisibility, this film affirms their existence in an attempt to rupture efforts to erase history. Said (2006) contends that Palestinian cinema stands in relationship with and/or in opposition to two main elements: a forced position of invisibility and a wide-reaching repertoire of dominant representations. He argues (2006: 3):

> Palestinian cinema must be understood in this context. That is to say, Palestinians stand against invisibility, which is the fate they have resisted since the beginning; and on the other hand, they stand against the stereotype in the media: the masked Arab, the *kufiyya*, the stone-throwing Palestinian—a visual identity associated with terrorism and violence.

Said (2006: 2) also describes the Zionist effort to render the existence of Palestinians invisible, quoting an early rallying phrase of Zionism: 'We are a people without a land going to a land without a people? It pronounced the emptiness of the land and the non-existence of a people.'

Salt of This Sea rewrites history from the point of view of the 'weak'. De Certeau (1984) defines a tactic as the 'art of the weak', which introduces clever tricks into the foundations of power. For de Certeau, while a tactic is time-based, a strategy (of the state, for example) is space-based. A number of scholars mention rewriting history as an intervention (Ginsberg,

2002; Shohat and Stam, 1997; Stam and Spence, 1985). Ginsberg (2002) additionally discusses the use of footage as a means to provide visual evidence of indigenous existence, which serves to counteract the erasure of indigenous stories and histories from dominant national narratives. *Salt of This Sea* opens with this type of historical footage [5] —which originates from the military archives in Jerusalem—showing soon-to-be Palestinian refugees being forced to leave from the port of Jaffa in 1948. [6]

The plot revolves around the retrieval of Soraya's grandfather's savings from the bank by the three main characters (Soraya, Emad, and Marwan), which is not defined as theft in the film as his bank account was frozen when he was exiled in 1948. After they recuperate Soraya's grandfather's savings, they decide to travel to the sea. They first go to Jerusalem, then to the port city of Jaffa. In order to cross over to Israel, they need to disguise themselves. In this scene, they each must pass for another body in order to have access— specifically, they must pass as Jews to enter Israel. Humour is also used in the same scene via carnivalesque tactics of play. For example, Emad wears a t-shirt that reads, 'America don't worry'. This offers spectators a temporary and therapeutic escape from oppressive circumstances.

When the trio arrives at the beach, their presence bothers the Israeli sunbathers; they are clearly unwelcome. We hear and see a helicopter flying over the scene, which symbolises the apparatus of high surveillance that polices the circulation of bodies. Foucault (1977) exemplifies such surveillance in the figure of the panopticon. Visually represented by the watchtower within the prison, for Foucault the panopticon is a structure of surveillance that disciplines subjects to behave in docile ways because they know that they are being watched. In this figure, the few see the many. Thus one tower guard can oversee the movements of the entire prison population.

The beach scene in *Salt of This Sea* visually depicts the Palestinian characters' presence as being uncomfortably noticeable. While they are delighted to have made it there, they are subjected to the dominant gaze when Israeli sunbathers start to look their way upon hearing them speak in Arabic. The characters' ambiguous relationship with this particular sea is introduced. Jacir tells us that, on one hand, every Palestinian wants to go to the *forbidden* sea: we see Marwan transported into a realm of joy; we see the sun kissing Emad's face in scenes that depict the characters' happiness when they finally reach their destination. On the other hand, as Jacir notes, this sea has also taken refugees away from their homes.

Salt of This Sea attempts to undo efforts to erase history; it tries to affirm Palestinian existence and document their passage through that land. The film places a determined heroine at the centre of its narrative in opposition to more common representations, including the infamous figure of the oppressed veiled female in need of saving. It also attempts to reverse the understanding of criminality in the Middle East. Although emerging from a position of marginality, this film achieved considerable popularity among specific interpretive communities, for whom it has attempted to alleviate certain socio-political stresses and provide mental nourishment through tactics of playfulness, as demonstrated by the characters in several scenes. Such scenes include the planned robbery of the bank; the crossing into Jerusalem and then travelling on to Jaffa; and the journey on the road, which highlights their life on the run and emphasises the notion of escaping from a burdensome reality. However, as

[5] In Like Twenty Impossibles, Jacir also relies on the use of documentary footage.

[6] This information is derived from Mullenneaux's (2010) interview with Jacir.

Entman (2003) and Said (1994) argue, the circulation of a few divergent stories is insufficient to effect any sort of significant social change. These stories could end up washed away in the sea of dominant discourses.

Conclusions

Ample research shows that Arab women have been represented in limited and negative ways. The racialised construction of Arab women's identity is linked to the historical stereotyping of other marginalised groups. Wilson, Gutierrez and Chao (2003) demonstrate that different ethnic groups have been represented as inferior at various moments in history, according to the political mood of the time. Other research demonstrates the pervasiveness of the dominant media because of the concentration of media ownership and the exportation of the US media system to the rest of the world (McChesney, 2004). It is because of this media conundrum that alternative media provide a means, a set of tools and a different view of the role of media in society. I have here sought to reflect on the scholarly debate regarding the definition of alternative media and the criteria used to evaluate their potential.

This article examined the artistic interventions of Palestinian-American poet Suheir Hammad and Palestinian-American filmmaker Annemarie Jacir. The analysis revealed that their interventions present unique insights into the processes of creating and circulating alternative media. Both artists directly and eloquently call for the self-representation of Palestinians. Situated as self-representational art, their works speak from the location of community on behalf of the interests of marginalised groups. Just as importantly, the ideas they have circulated present alternatives to the hegemonic contents of mainstream media.

I have conceptualised alternative media as media content that challenges dominant assumptions and offers stylistic innovations for the purpose of promoting social justice. Based on the selected case studies, the contribution I offer to the study of alternative media highlights the importance of three main criteria for conceptualising the value of alternative media: using self-representation, serving a particular community and presenting alternative content.

This call for self-representation is not new; other scholars have made the point previously (Baltruschat, 2004; Ginsburg, 1995; Juhasz, 1995; Rodriguez, 2001; Salaita, 2006). While we have been discussing this for a number of years, Arab-American women are just entering the field of media as producers of content and contributors to public discourse. The scarcity of Arab-American voices has implications that can be linked directly to discourses of racism (Salaita, 2006). It hence becomes imperative to study the ways in which Arab voices in general, and Arab women's voices in particular, get to participate in the public sphere.

The second criterion of serving the interests of a particular community, and of society at large, is also presented in the literature (Hamilton, 1999; Kidd, 1999). Both Hammad and Jacir provide alternative messages and perspectives in their works, by rewriting narratives of otherness, rectifying erasures of history and advocating for social justice via the use of collective memory and communal language. In sum, they have placed their works within broader socio-political struggles.

The third criterion of presenting alternative content needs particular emphasis. I have argued here for the imperative of refraining from conceptualising alternative media solely based on its organisational structure, the funding it receives, its independence from state and

market forces, and other factors. I propose to also take into account the messages communicated. Taking into consideration the question of content would involve asking the following questions: is the proposed discourse alternative? Does it offer counter-narratives to discourses of domination? Does it invent a new language to inspire social change? It must be reiterated here that how marginalised groups say things is connected to how they see them, and that seeing them in a certain way does not depend on some innate ability unique to marginalised groups. But if those who have been historically silenced continue to be denied the opportunity to speak, then we as audiences will continue to be blind to their perspectives.

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PART 7

Audiences: Participation, Engagement, and Access

CHAPTER 40

Conventions, Computers, and Collective Action (1991–2007)

Francesca Coppa

In *Vidding: A History* (University of Michigan Press, 2022).

Vidding as a fandom in itself—by which I mean vidding not just as a tool used to express love for some other story world or universe but also as an art form with its own developmental trajectory, canon of influential work, and critical language—was codified in and around two fan conventions: Escapade (1991–) and Vividcon (2002–18). The heyday of these two conventions coincides with fandom's rapid expansion onto the Internet. As early adopters of technology, media fans organized online in the early 1990s on Usenet and in IRC; on topic-specific mailing lists, on web rings, forums, and blogs; and eventually on the nascent social networks. Analog media and distribution methods were supplanted by their digital counterparts as letterzines gave way to e-mail lists and discussion forums, and as fanfiction zines were superseded by online archives. However, vidding remained primarily analog through the 1990s and an off-line phenomenon well into the aughts. For most fans during those years, seeing new vids meant physically going to where vids were shown; secondarily, it might mean getting a nonattending membership at a convention with a vid show and having them mail you a VHS tape or DVD of premiering vids.

But conventions were where the conversations were happening and where an artistic community—contentious, invested—was forming. Fans came together annually in places like Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, and Chicago to watch vids—and talk about them. These conventions became a place not only to hammer out a language for articulating different vidding aesthetics (and thus a kind of grassroots film school) but also to provide a context within which fans could collectively grapple with the technological, legal, and political issues

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of the digital revolution. These included the practical problems having to do with creating and sharing vids in the digital age, like building sufficiently powerful computers; learning new software; obtaining footage; getting online; and negotiating the advantages and disadvantages of different modes of digital distribution, including their technological difficulty, artistic presentation, and legal terms of service. However, they also included a host of issues that have turned out to be crucial in this brave new digital world: questions of copyright and sampling; of spreadability, context, and artistic control; of privacy, publicity, and pseudonymity; of credit and profit; and of the vast constellation of problems that form the field of what we now call technical ethics.[1]

These issues are part of our current international conversation about the Internet, but fans in general, and vidders in particular, were talking through them years before most people. The vidding community of 1991–2007 was both tightly connected and well informed, and therefore easily mobilized as activists when digital concerns became higher profile in the second half of the aughts. Vidders helped to found the Organization for Transformative Works, the fan advocacy nonprofit that created the Archive of Our Own to house fanfiction, and that has done much political lobbying and other work on behalf of fans and remixers. Vidders also formed coalitions, joining forces with anime vidders, political remixers, vloggers, machinima makers, and others. And vidders organized testimony and collaborated in various ways with Internet advocacy organizations, such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation, Public Knowledge, MediaCommons, Critical Commons, and the Institute for Multimedia Literacy to fight for the digital rights of ordinary people. Vidders were ultimately instrumental in securing the 2009 DMCA exemption for noncommercial remixing, as well as its renewals and expansions in 2012, 2015, and 2018. But all these accomplishments were built on organizational and community work that vidders and other fans had done two decades earlier, starting at a California fan convention called Escapade.

Fan Vidders and Conventions

Escapade: California's Slash Slumber Party

Escapade is a convention dedicated to slash—that is, to creating and enjoying interpretations of pop culture texts that imagine same-sex romance or sexual intimacy between characters. Historically, slash was used to refer almost exclusively to fan works (fiction, art, vids) that foregrounded or created male/male romances (Kirk/Spock, Starsky/ Hutch), at least partly because male characters tended to take center stage[2] in the stories that fans liked, though there were femslash vids featuring pairings like Xena/Gabrielle, Janeway/Seven of Nine, and Buffy/ Faith. Much as MediaWest offered a collective home to fans of many individual sci-

[1] Casey Fiesler, "Tech Ethics Curricula: A Collection of Syllabi," *Medium*, July 5, 2018, https://medium.com/@cfiesler/tech-ethics-curricula-a-collection-of-syllabi-3eedfb76be18

[2] Even today, surprisingly few genre TV shows and movies pass the Bechdel test, the three-part test developed by Alison Bechdel in her comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* (1983–2008): whether (1) two (named) female characters (2) talk to each other (3) about something other than a man. *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings*, and most of the original Star Trek (TV and movies) fail. Genre TV shows and movies tend either to be buddy-focused (with female characters secondary or absent) or team-focused (where the team is made of a bunch of men and a token woman; hello, Black Widow!).

ence fiction and fantasy media universes, Escapade was an outgrowth of the single-fandom conventions of the 1980s dedicated to slash-heavy fandoms like *Starsky and Hutch* and *Blake's 7*. Founded by slash fans Charlotte C. Hill and Megan Kent, Escapade was designed to appeal to what they saw as a younger, hipper audience. These were fans of particular slash pairings, but they were also fans for whom slash itself was the attraction. For such fans, "slash" was not just a noun but also a verb indicating an interpretive strategy and a shared activity. Being a slasher was thus both an identity and a practice. Slash fans did something active: they slashed the television they watched, creating homoerotic readings that they shared in conversation or through art. Because they watched television with their so-called slash goggles on, we shouldn't be surprised that Escapade became a center for vidding and vid culture. Being a slash fan was already correlated with a particular way of seeing, a distinct and active mode of spectatorship.

Slash fans have had an outsize impact on fandom and on the discourse about fandom. Slash is certainly overrepresented in the scholarly literature, probably because as a phenomenon, women coming together to make homoerotic art seems to demand explanation. But I would argue that slash fans have earned their oversized footprint. They have been unusually productive and innovative, mostly because they were forced to be. The kinds of stories slash fans liked were simply not available in the mass media,[3] so they had to write their own. Then, having written the stories, slash fans had to create an infrastructure to share and distribute them, which required negotiating with other fans' desires not to see queer or erotic material. This was easy enough when it was just a matter of separating gen from slash zines in the dealers' room (slash zines were kept under the table), but things got complicated online, when different kinds of fans were attracted to the same groups, mailing lists, and forums. Fandom's solution was to design and build elaborate tagging systems for their work, creating labels to tell readers what's in the tin. These came into use as story headers and found their apogee in the curated folksonomy of the Archive of Our Own. This metadata has subsequently attracted the attention of computer scientists, librarians, web developers, and other information specialists[4] who admire fandom's organizational creativity. For instance, Maciej Ceglowski, the owner of Pinboard, was surprised when his new bookmarking site was suddenly "filled with slash fiction." However, he eventually concluded, "The fans are all right." Better than all right, in fact; Ceglowski realized that fans

> had constructed an edifice of incredibly elaborate tagging conventions, plugins, and scripts to organize their output along a bewildering number of dimensions. If you wanted to read a 3000 word fic where Picard forces Gandalf into sexual bondage, and it seems unconsensual but secretly both want it, and it's R-explicit but not NC-17 explicit, all you had to do was search along the appropriate combination of tags (and if you couldn't find it, someone would probably write it for you). By 2008 a whole suite of theoretical ideas about folksonomy, crowdsourcing, faceted information retrieval,

[3] Today slash fans have colonized certain parts of the publishing world, but homoerotic fiction remains a relatively niche interest. Moreover, as fans will be quick to point out, we still haven't had a major superhero, detective, starship captain, or Jedi involved in a same-sex romance, though we now have canonical gay characters on *Star Trek: Discovery* (2017–).

[4] See Casey Fiesler, Shannon Morrison, and Amy S. Bruckman, "An Archive of Their Own: A Case Study of Feminist HCI and Values in Design," in *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '16)*, 2574–85, https://doi.org/10.1145/2858036.2858409

> collaborative editing and emergent ontology had been implemented by a bunch of friendly people so that they could read about Kirk drilling Spock.[5]

This is the sort of thing that gives slash fandom its reputation: the combination of cheerful female depravity and an unbelievably obsessive commitment to information technology. But slash fans had to work hard to make and distribute the kind of stories they wanted to see. They also had to carve out and defend spaces for themselves, often against the will of more mainstream fans.

For instance, in "Fandom and Male Privilege: Seven Years Later," Rebecca Lucy Busker talks about her experience with the Batman LiveJournal community site Scans_daily in 2005:

> [Scans_daily] had been founded by women fans to be friendly, but not exclusive, to slashy interpretations and discussions of these comics panels and pages. Many of the fans who initially came to post and discuss comics there approached comics as part of their larger media fandom, and also as a part of their larger *slash* fandom. However . . . the community began attracting more mainstream comics fans, whose background was in the broader realms of geekdom, and for whom slash was either unknown or at least a very strange thing (slash being at least slightly less mainstream at the time). Not surprisingly, most of these fans were men. Also perhaps not surprisingly, many of them missed the community information that said "slash-friendly" on the way in.[6]

According to Busker, it wasn't enough that female fans had created this community and let male fans join if they wanted; the men wanted to control (in this case limit) what was talked about. This kind of community building and defense draws people together—another reason why slash fandom is so coherent and organized. Moreover, many slash fans have made long-term commitments to fandom, building projects over many years (archives, challenges, forums) and sticking around to administer or maintain them. Fans of gen aren't confined to fandom the same way. They have the whole commercial art world to choose from.[7]

For these and other reasons, slash fans in general, and the slash fans who congregated around Escapade in particular, have had an outsize impact on fandom, including vidding and vid culture. (This is not even to mention fan studies: Henry Jenkins, Constance Penley,[8] and Camille Bacon-Smith all went to Escapade.) Their collectivity was key. Fans who didn't come to multifannish conventions did not make the same sort of impact, and it's fair to fear that consolidated slash fandom may have run roughshod over or otherwise obscured the work of smaller, less organized, or more marginalized groups of fans. For example, fans of *Xena: Warrior Princess* made VHS vids and showed them at weekly "Xena nights" at Meow Mix,[9] a famous lesbian bar on New York's Lower East Side. Vids were also shown at commercial *Xena* conventions. But most of those vids never made it out of their specific community; they

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[5] Maciej Ceglow, "The Fans Are All Right," Pinboard Blog, October 2, 2011, https://blog.pinboard.in/2011/10/the_fans_are_all_right/

[6] Rebecca Lucy Busker, "Fandom and Male Privilege: Seven Years Later," in "Appropriating, Interpreting, and Transforming Comic Books," ed. Matthew J. Costello, special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 13 (2013), https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0473

[7] Relatedly, creators of gen fan works have found it easier to go pro. Wattpad (https://www.wattpad.com/) is premised on this.

[8] Constance Penley describes vidding panels at Escapade in NASA/Trek (New York: Verso, 1997), 113–15.

[9] Beth Greenfield, "Sapphic Princess: Dyke Bar Parties Celebrating Xena's Lesbian Subject Are Flourishing All Over Town. A Report from the Trenches," in *HX for Her: The Totally Biased Politically Incorrect Party Paper for Lesbians*, June 4, 1997, scanned at http://www.ausxip.com/articles/1997/hxforher/index.html

weren't shared via song tapes or digitized and put on the Internet. But the fans who came together at Escapade were from many fandoms and so created multifandom structures and institutions that became influential.

All vidding—and indeed all filmmaking—is about getting others to see through the filmmaker's eyes. Slash fans had a particular interpretation of the world that they wanted to literally make visible to spectators, with the goal both of pleasing the converted and converting the uninitiated. According to Sandy Herrold of the Media Cannibals, "Sometimes a vid can be a fight—a fannish fight set to music," where fans argue for particular versions of canon by foregrounding their competing interpretations in their vids. In slash and femslash vidding, these interpretations are often about a character's sexuality. As fellow Cannibal Rachael Sabotini elaborates:

> We have been fighting it out visually and in fiction for—you know, since everything was founded. Since fandom was first kicked out of science fiction fandom. We have vids that present a character's bisexuality . . . because everyone's argued this character is always straight. Well, if you take and synthesize the three minutes of clips of the way he looks at other men, perhaps when you put all three of those three minutes together—set to good music—you come away with the idea that maybe he's not so straight after all.[10]

Successful slash and femslash vidding could make fans see the romantic possibilities of same-sex pairings. More broadly, it was a way of making queer sexuality visible in the world. Sandy Herrold talks passionately about the power of slash vidding:

> The first time I made a *Highlander* vid and showed it to a guy who I had explained about slash to, he was like, "Eh, as if. It's not there. There's no way that you can convince me that they would ever do that." By "they," he admitted later, he meant both of them, both the producers and the characters. Neither of them would do that, whatever *that* is. And then he watched a *Highlander* vid that I had made with the group and said, "Oh my God. Oh my God! I think—Ohhh! You put it in my head! You put it in my head!" And I was like, "Yeah! That's what I'm doing here! I'm putting pictures in your head—they're not even my pictures, but by putting them together in this way I have changed your picture of the whole universe."[11]

The desire to seize the means of production, to subvert the meanings of mainstream television and film for politics and pleasure, obviously has important feminist and queer implications. These were not lost on the fans who congregated at Escapade in the 1990s. The Media Cannibals, a "semi-autonomous Media Fan Collective" based in the progressive Pacific Northwest, chose a rainbow for their credit logo, "because even that point in time [c. 1992], we were about queer awareness."[12] Katherine Scarritt, a longtime fan, con organizer, and vidder who ran the Escapade vid show in the late '90s, is typical of media fans in recognizing the feminist implications of participation in fandom's female art world:

> You know, one thing people with [Camille Bacon-Smith's 1991 book] *Enterprising Women* and all that stuff got right is: this is something particularly about women, and women's feelings and issues and all that. Even though there are some men here and there in the fandom . . . I know one thing Sandy

[10] Interview by Killa and Jarrow of Sandy, Rache, and Gwyn of the Media Cannibals, plus Mlyn for MIT Vidding Documentary, 2007.

[11] Interview by Killa and Jarrow of Sandy, Rache, and Gwyn of the Media Cannibals, plus Mlyn for MIT Vidding Documentary, 2007.

[12] Sandy and Rache of the Media Cannibals, interviewed by Coppa, August 2008.

> [Herrold] has talked about is how she really didn't want men to come to Escapade because women tended to defer to men, and it just ends up as an inhibiting factor. Because we're automatically trained to do that, and especially, any of us, again, over thirty: that is in us, whether we like it or not. I don't want to be that way, but I find myself doing it too, sometimes. And so, if they're looking for the key to it [fandom] or whatever, that's where it's going to be found. But it's women saying things the way they want it to be, not the way they are told it ought to be, even by the women's movement. [13]

Vidding was a chance for women to put their desires on screen without any thought for the male spectator. As Media Cannibal Gwyneth put it, "But what I *really* want to do is direct!" [14]

To direct this way, to use vidding to subvert mass media texts, vidders had to learn the language of television and film. Vid fans got increasingly serious about their art form at Escapade; they began to look at the media as makers, not just spectators. Sandy Herrold says:

> In trying to learn how to tell my story visually, I have learned the visual vocabulary that they use, that I'd never realized was there. So the ability of television and movies to manipulate me visually is still there, I still react to it, but now I notice what they're doing: *oh, this is how they're making this one more important than this one, this is how they're setting things up for us to react to later*. I've learned to notice their language in trying to subvert their language. [15]

Vidders like the Media Cannibals were not just interested in learning the language of film; they also wanted to develop a language for vidding. Because both Charlotte C. Hill and Megan Kent were vidders—Kent in particular was known for vids such as the *Starsky and Hutch* comedy **DON'T USE YOUR PENIS FOR A BRAIN** (1988) (see Video 99 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.99 and "Spotlight on: Phallic Critique" in the online appendix)—they wanted Escapade to have a formal vid show. Kandy Fong was tapped to run it. The MediaWest vid show had segregated slash from gen and showed slash vids only at night, which was the vidding equivalent of keeping slash zines under the table. But Escapade's vid show was oriented around slash and femslash. Escapade also eliminated MediaWest's vidding contests. There were no competitions at Escapade, other than the contested interpretations of the vids themselves. The first year, Fong curated a show from existing vids, but the next year, the show featured premieres, and for the next decade, Escapade was *the* place to debut new work. Escapade became a meeting ground for the many different cultures of VCR vidding, be they old-school *Star Trek* and *Starsky and Hutch* vidders, the aggrieved slash vidders of MediaWest, literary vidders who'd been inspired by Mary Van Deusen, or members of the San Francisco School. It also created a community for new vidders from all around the United States: the Media Cannibals from the Pacific Northwest, the Chicago Loop, the East Coast Consortium, JAM, Cybel Harper, T'Rhys (notable for being the first known computer vidder), and many others. Vidders asked each other, "What are you bringing to Escapade?"

But Escapade's most important contribution to vidding was arguably the creation of Vid Review, a space given to reviewing and discussing premiering vids modeled on the group critiques of art school. Sandy Herrold claims that this influenced vidding in a way that changed vidding forever, because, as she notes wryly, "That's when we start to talk about vids in large,

[13] Katherine Scarritt, interview at Escapade with Franzeska Dickson for the OTW's Oral History Project, March 7, 2015.

[14] Interview by Killa and Jarrow of Sandy, Rache, and Gwyn of the Media Cannibals, plus Mlyn for MIT Vidding Documentary, 2007.

[15] Interview by Killa and Jarrow of Sandy, Rache, and Gwyn of the Media Cannibals, plus Mlyn for MIT Vidding Documentary, 2007.

painful groups." "Before Escapade," Rachael Sabotini remembers, "you'd go to a con, you'd show your vids, but there was nothing afterwards." Vid Review started off as a postpremiere show vid discussion, except everyone quickly realized that they didn't have the language for a good discussion. As one fan said, "It was like trying to discuss poetry without a common understanding of grammar or spelling." [16] They couldn't even explain why some vids had gone over better than others. Sabotini remembers, "Some people would show their vid and it would not get a good reaction, and other vids would get a *great* reaction. So there was a lot of pissiness about 'Why did your vid get such a great reaction and ours didn't, because ours is better quality and more technically competent than yours is.'" Later vidders might have said that the "quality" vid wasn't received as well in the con setting because it was a living room vid that required great canon familiarity and multiple watches to get all the layers. However, as Herrold points out, "We didn't have the vocabulary to say that. So what were we saying? 'Your vid is too . . . small? Your vid wasn't . . . caught?'" This lack of precise terminology led to arguments—what Herrold describes as "five years of learning to talk about vids in ways that didn't end friendships." Sabotini remembers early Vid Reviews as "incredibly fraught, because one of the things we were interested in was honesty about our reactions to things. And we had people from lots of different disciplines, that were attending . . . but things that were important to one group were not necessarily important to another group, and we fought. Like. Crazy." [17]

Vid Review was where these arguments happened, and where a common language was eventually hammered out. A public critique that went vid by vid, Vid Review soon expanded from one to two hours. It was hosted each year by a different vidder so as to air different perspectives and philosophies. Escapade also began to distribute Vid Comment forms during the premiere show so fans could write down their responses or give anonymous feedback. Panels and roundtables on vidding became part of Escapade's regular programming, as the examples in Box 2 demonstrate.

Box 2. Panels and roundtables on vidding at Escapade.

Panel Title	**Panel Description**
"Song Video Roundtable" (1994), led by Kandy Fong and Deejay Driscoll	"Bring works in progress or finished works you're having difficulty with for a quick jump-start."
"Songvid Editing" (1994), led by Megan Kent and Sandy Herrold	"Authors get edited and usually have to do at least one rewrite of a story. Artists have erasers. What stops songvid makers from doing drafts and re-edits of their work? Let's talk about editing style (what cuts to use for best emphasis) and technique (how to physically do the inserts)."
"Music Video Critique and Workshop" (1996), led by the Media Cannibals	"Roundtable critique of videos, how to tell/recognize story, POV, rhythm. Also, tricks of the trade."
"Con Vids vs. Living Room Vids" (1998), led by Jill and Stacy	"What are the elements that make a music vid accessible to a large crowd, or more appropriate to an intimate setting?

[16] Quoted in "Vid Review," Fanlore, https://fanlore.org/

[17] Francesca Coppa, "Interview with Sandy and Rache ('The Clucking Belles')," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 6 (2011), ¶ 7.2–7.4, https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2011.0242

The Media Cannibals in particular pushed for these discursive innovations. As a large group themselves, they were used to talking about vids, and they wanted more and better discussion with others. Compared to fanfiction culture, which had, and indeed still has, a strong tradition of writing detailed feedback to authors, vidding was a relative black hole. In the VCR era, vids were either shown at cons, where people might clap with more or less enthusiasm, then move on to the next panel or the bar, or distributed via VHS tapes, which you had no idea if the audience even watched. It was hard to get quality responses. Escapade tried to change that.

By the end of the 1990s, conversation had gotten to a point that discussions could be summarized and codified on handouts or online. Mary Schmidt's "Making Fannish Music Videos" (See Image N. https://doi. org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.185) came out in its third edition in August 1997, but that was just one of any number of booklets and essays: "Structuring Your Vid: Knowing Your Audience" by Sandy Herrold (1995), "Vidding 101" by Stacy Doyle and Carol Stoneburner (2000), "Creating Mood" by Laura Shapiro (2004), "How to Do Music Videos" by Stacy Doyle, "The Language of Vidding" by here's luck (2004), "The Craft of Vidding" by Killa and Carol S. (2003), "Editing Techniques and Vidding" by P. R. Zed and Carol S. (2004), and "The Life Cycle of Vid and Vidder" by Luminosity (2002). Other meta was posted to the web, like Sandy Herrold's "Don't Touch the 3rd Rail! or Vidding *Suggestions* for Serious Vids" (1999, Box 3).

Box 3. Don't Touch the 3rd Rail! or "Vidding Suggestions for Serious Vids."

On Vidder (*a mailing list for people who make and enjoy songvids*), we've discussed whether vids have a grammar or not; a set of rules that people agree on to make communication easier. Whoo-boy! Not an easy question, and one that evokes a rather emotional response.

After some conversation, we agreed that there aren't a lot of **rules** that make sense in vidding. But we were able to compile a list of techniques that in **serious** vids, tend to be *misused* more often than not.

So, vidding techniques to use sparingly, or think seriously before using:

Blooper reel clips in serious vids

But, it can work if it isn't an obviously 'blooperish' clip or it is the **perfect** clip or the serious song has a more humorous section.

Jump cuts

Can work if the show itself has a fairly jerky style or if you use three or four in a row . . .

Use of credits

But here's some counter-examples. I don't know if any of you have had a chance to see the UK vid . . . I *think* it's called "So Long." It's a vid that says goodbye to the characters of Kes from Voyager and Ivanova from B5 that uses the credits to establish the actors/characters—both clips say "Character as Actor's Name" and then we get a shot of the character disappearing and then we get credit shots of Jeri Ryan as Seven of Nine and Tracy Scoggins as Captain Lochley . . . introducing the replacement characters. I thought this was an excellent use of credits.The Chicago Loop showed a Buffy video recently that used the Buffy credits in an interesting way—I guess it can be done!

Songs with illegible lyrics

But there are some beautiful vids to instrumentals with no lyrics at all . . . Maybe this one should just say, "if your lyrics can't/don't carry the narrative, you'll have to work harder to make sure the clips do."

Black, or fade to black, within the body of the vid

But black can add drama, and fading to black can end a verse or a chorus, or even change POV if it's done very carefully.

Single cuts longer than 8 seconds

Except that once in a while a really long clip is just what you need; what the whole vid has been leading up to.

Clips (with internal cuts) longer than 15–20 seconds

Again, there are rare times when letting the scene run (especially if the camera work in the scene is really well shot) can work.

Unusual versions of well-known songs

Many fans will hate a new version of a song, at least until they've heard it a few times; on the other hand, the new version may give you the gender change you need, or speed up the song enough to be useful, or have much clearer lyrics than the better-known version of the song.

POV changes

They can be very powerful—especially when you're making some sort of compare and contrast of two characters' situation, or their feelings for each other. But, done sloppily or casually, they utterly confuse your audience. (*Personally*, I don't think you can change POV in all songs—you need either a song that has a mood change, or a bridge or in the middle, *or* a song with some strong "I" statements right after the place you want to change, to reorient your audience. *Even more personally*, I think you only get to change POV once—or maybe twice, if the music *really* supported you, perhaps in a duet—and after that, there's almost no chance that the audience will understand what you're trying to say. There are vidders with twice my experience and skill that disagree with me on this one, though.)

These are harder to defend—can someone find examples of these that work?

- Many cuts in a row all the same length (i.e., vary your clip length)
- Many cuts in a row all of head shots (i.e., vary your clip type)
- Doing a whole vid to one show, but including just one clip of the actor from a different show
- Freeze frames
- Speeding up the clip

And this last one isn't really negotiable:

NEVER, EVER, leave any patches of lost signal or gunk between the clips. To quote Methos, "Cut clean."

Vidders now distinguished not just between con vids and living room vids but also between action vids, character studies, comedy vids, constructed reality vids, catharsis vids, ensemble vids, lyric vids, mimic vids, mood vids, narrative vids, persuasive (or argument) vids, recruiter (or promoter) vids, relationship vids, and universe vids.[18] Vidders had learned how cinematic techniques could be used to create a mood; they compiled lists of shots (long shot, medium shot, close-up, two-shot, rack focus, handheld) and kinds of motion (internal vs. external motion; pans, whip pans, pushes and pulls, dolly and zoom shots); they also tried to learn how

[18] These and more were codified by here's luck in her 2004 handout, "The Language of Vidding."

those shots could be deployed to create certain effects (Box 4). Similarly, vidders formulated and disseminated definitions of musical terms: lyrics, mood, tempo, instrumentation, musical movement, verse, chorus, bridge, climax. Whole panels at conventions were devoted to song choice: what makes a good vid song?

These analytical conversations—what fans call meta—also took place on the VIDDER mailing list started by Chicago Loop member tzikeh in July 1997. One hundred vidders and vid fans from all over joined the list, which invited "vidders, vidders-in-training, or vidder-groupies" to "focus on all aspects of vidding, from song choice to technical questions to finding the right clips and anything in between."[19] The list was explicitly for "both slash and gen vidders," and it hosted a few male vidders as well. VIDDER list members debated aesthetics, reported on vid shows they'd seen, swapped tapes with each other, and reviewed them. Together, they confronted the future that was looming: computers and the Internet. "Care to join me on the bleeding edge?" list member Randy Reed asked in a February 1998 post.

> My latest video is available as a real video file at [URL] its 1.8 mb file so it takes about 20 minutes at 28.8 (less at 56k) assuming the server doesn't stall. The video itself is not exactly crystal clear, it plays at a little over 10fps so its not particularly smooth and the song sounds like its being filtered through a tin can. I can solve some of these problems by making the file bigger but my isp will only let my webpage be 2mb so at 1.8 i'm too close to the limit to do more. If someone knew an isp that actually had a real video server that they would license access to cheap, we wouldn't even have to download it.
>
> But whatever you may think of quality issues, i think its good enough that you can see what I'm doing with the vid and give me some feed back. To those of you who despise Jewel a priori I do humbly apologize but I just thought it expressed the angst of Mulder bereft of Scully.

Box 4. Excerpt from "Creating Mood," a handout by Laura Shapiro distributed at Escapade 2004

Cutting Tempo/Clip Length

- Fast (Short Clips)—Hectic, pressure, stress, excitement, unsettling, chaotic, acceleration, rising tension, anger, sexiness
- Slow (Long Clips)—Mellow, relaxed, sadness, romance, sensuality, release, peaceful, thoughtful, denouement

Organizing Shots in a Sequence

- Alternating Close-ups of Two Characters—Intimacy, shared connection, shared emotion
- Moving In—Cutting from a long shot to a medium shot to a close-up creates a sense of focusing in, heightened interest and tension, specificity
- Moving Out—Cutting from a close-up to a medium shot to a long shot creates a sense of distance, space, generalityw
- Jump Cuts—Disorientation, erratic

A more '90s post can hardly be imagined. But online distribution *was* the bleeding edge in the age of dial-up Internet: it took twenty minutes to download a postage-stamp-size video file.[20]

[19] "Vid: The FAQ," reposted to VIDDER mailing list, March 17, 1999.

[20] Later vidders tried sharing vids using early peer-to-peer networks like Kazaa. In the "About Us" section of Headtilt.com, a now-defunct Buffy vidding site, vidder Dr. Dawn teases the other vidders on the site: "You

Reed was also an early proselytizer of digital vidding, putting up an information page on the now- defunct Angelfire web hosting site. DIGITAL VIDEO IS THE FUTURE, it announced. "In the next five years (maybe less) vidding will be done on computers and completely (or at least mostly) digital. Do you want to be left behind?"[21] Vidders most certainly did not want to be left behind, but in this era, vidding on a computer meant building your own system from scratch. Nothing out of the box had enough memory or storage space, or the right capture card. So the VIDDER list became a place to trade information about systems, software, and peripherals, leading to endless threads sharing technical advice.

> Q: I've got a Miro Motion DC20 . . . , but I don't think my drive is fast enough. Where can I find the specs—do I have to open the machine?
>
> A: Depends. <PC advice> If you have a mass-market machine (like a Packard Hell or Compaq), you should be able to find out the specs from documentation that came with your machine. If you had a machine custom-built, then it should say somewhere on the invoice or you could call the place you got it from. Alternately, if you know enough, you can check out what it says when the machine starts and in the bios. </PC advice>
>
> Q: Also, can I purchase an external EIDE?
>
> A: Not as far as I know. However, it's not hard to add a hard drive to your system (if your motherboard supports EIDE). The other option is to add a good SCSI card and get an external SCSI drive, but that's the more expensive route. You can get a good 8.4 gig EIDE drive (Quantum Fireball) for about $350 at the moment, and prices are only going down.[22]

What these vidders are trying to do is to build a computer system that will allow them to capture, digitize, edit, and export their VHS footage. This is what computer vidding was from the mid-1990s to the mid-aughts—the era of dial-up—and it's a distinction that might not be immediately obvious from Randy Reed's information page. Digital video was the future (meaning digital footage via DVD; Internet video distribution is further off), but the present avant-garde thing was computer vidding: the use of hardware and software to import and edit VHS clips on a computer. In 1998, most movies and TV were not yet on DVD, let alone the relatively niche genre television shows—*Blake's 7, The Professionals, Quantum Leap*—beloved by fandom. *Star Trek* was released on DVD from 1999 to 2000, *Starsky and Hutch* from 2004 to 2006. Other shows that fans wanted to vid—*The X-Files*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The Sentinel*—were still running and so being taped onto VHS while airing. Cutting-edge vidders used capture devices like the Miro DC20 to digitize their VHS clips, assembled them with software like Media Studio or Premiere, and then exported them back onto VHS for distribution through the usual channels: convention showings or song tapes. Vidding with DVD footage didn't come until later, and sharing video online required the widespread adoption of broadband Internet. Broadband users didn't break 50 percent until 2007.[23]

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two would be nothing without me. You would still be desperately peddling your videos on Kazaa, and sending scary, stalky emails to anyone that uploaded from you." Headtilt, n.d., http://www.headtilt.com/about_us.htm (via the Wayback Machine).

[21] "Digital Vidding on a Budget," http://www.angelfire.com/or/vidding (via the Wayback Machine).

[22] Thread, VIDDER post, June 15, 1998.

[23] "Internet/Broadband Fact Sheet," Pew Research Center, June 12, 2019, http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/internet-broadband/

While vidding with computers was gathering steam in the late 1990s, the first computer vid that we know of had been made a few years earlier: T'Rhys's **IN THE AIR TONIGHT** (1994). (See Video 37. https://doi. org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.37) This vid was also notable for being a *Star Trek/Blake's 7* crossover. T'Rhys not only edited using a computer but also used a computer to create effects, so the *Blake's 7* ship, the *Liberator*, appeared on the *Enterprise*'s viewscreen, creating the first blended clips and thus creating an encounter (in this case a hostile one) between characters right in front of our eyes.

The vid was shown at Virgule, a slash con in Seattle. Fans were blown away:

> The best thing happened at the Virgule music vids. I was watching "In the Air Tonight" done for TOS [*Star Trek: The Original Series*], and realizing that the almost slo-mo like jerkiness in the images wasn't a special effect of a video machine, but that it was DIGITIZED, that the images had COME THRU A COMPUTER . . . not video tape to video tape. I was impressed. And then, on the old Enterprise's view screen, right there in space and time, WAS THE LIBERATOR. AND IT MOVED. My heart nearly stopped.

It's perhaps not surprising that this first computer vid was slash; it was in many ways a fanfiction story come to life. Sandy Herrold posted to the VIDDER list: "All of the technical



Fig. 17. The art of montage: Blake fires, Spock is hit.

wizardry was placed in support of a fabulously over-the-top slash narrative: Avon shoots and kills Spock, and Kirk, driven mad through his pain, presses the self-destruct on the Enterprise and kills them all"[24] (Figure 17 https://doi.org/10.3998/ mpub.10069132.cmp.153). Where else were you going to get a story like this? In terms of quality melodrama, it was the best of *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* and *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* combined. It was the sort of story that fans of genre TV had to make for themselves.

In 1994, In the Air Tonight was considered a rarity and T'Rhys was hailed as a visionary, but by the end of the century, computer vidding was well on its way to disrupting the VHS vidding world. Hardware and software that had only been available to industry professionals was suddenly within the reach of (obsessed, dedicated, technically minded) consumers, so a new generation of vidders—including the many vidders associated with groups such as the WOAD Society, the Chicago Loop, and the East Coast Consortium—went immediately to editing VHS footage via computer, eschewing methods that VCR vidders had collectively hacked into being over two decades. Computer editing software, having been designed for the purpose, easily did all the things that vidders had tortured VCRs into doing. Clean cuts were

[24] Sandy Herrold, quoted in "In the Air Tonight," Fanlore, https://fanlore.org/

no longer difficult, and you could sequence and resequence clips with ease. You no longer had only a few chances at an edit; unlike tape, digitized footage didn't stretch, blur, or break. Moreover, computer editing brought new powers that VCR vidders had only dreamed of. You could change a clip's speed or color, crop the frame, use transitions beyond hard cuts, though the really transformative effects would have to wait until digital footage became standard. There was only so much manipulation that digitized VHS footage would take.

Between the coalescing of aesthetic expertise and the new accessibility of digital editing software, vids suddenly took an enormous aesthetic leap. The late 1990s and early 2000s produced a run of vids at and around Escapade that have become canonical to the community, including many already featured in this book or its online appendix, including Dante's Prayer (Video 5 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132. cmp.5), Wouldn't It Be Nice? (Video 9 https://doi.org/10.3998/ mpub.10069132.cmp.9), and Data's Dream (Video 34 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.34). It's important to note that some of these are VCR vids by VCR vidders working at the top of their game, while others are by computer vidders who are expressing old community aesthetics with new tools. But there was an explosion of energy and creativity all around.

VCR vidders like Katherine Scarritt and Gwyneth Rhys experimented with analog tools like mixing boards to get fades and other effects on VHS. Scarritt took advantage of the coming digital revolution to purchase used analog equipment on what was then a brand-new site: eBay. Scarritt remembers, "Equipment that had previously only been available to professionals, price-wise, was now available on eBay for something reasonable. I was able to buy a mixer, for seven hundred dollars at the time, and it would mix two video streams together."[25] Scarritt used this mixer to make **SCARBOROUGH FAIR** (1997) (Video 38 https://doi. org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.38), a *Highlander* vid about Duncan McLeod set to Simon and Garfunkle's "Scarborough Fair/Canticle." Scarritt had a specific artistic goal for the vid, noting that the song "is actually two songs that are layered together. And the voices are layered. It's beautifully done. One of them's about war, and one of them's about love. And so I want[ed] to be able to layer the video together about Duncan, war and love, same kind of thing." The mixing board allowed her to do that. However, it had to be done live: you had to have two complete video streams to mix together. "So basically, I had to make one whole vid to the one song, and another whole vid for the other," Scarritt remembers. "And then I played them, and I mixed as I went." The result is a visually textured reading of Duncan's life. As a man who's lived many hundreds of years, Duncan moves through the song's repetitive cycles of impossible love, always in the past tense or, improbably, the future ("she *once was* a true love . . . then *she'll be* a true love "), fighting a never-ending war (soldiers fighting "for a cause they have long ago forgotten"). The vid, which fades dreamily between Duncan's romantic and military narratives, conveys the sense of swirling history that fans loved about the show.

A year later, Gwyneth borrowed Scarritt's mixing board to make her first VCR vid, **THERE'S NO WAY OUT OF HERE** (1998) (Video 39 https:// doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.39), a vid paralleling the experiences of three heroic female protagonists: Buffy (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), *Scully* (*The X-Files*), *and Nikita* (*La Femme Nikita*). Gwyneth introduces each of the characters at the start, then devotes a section of Gilmour's song to each protagonist—three

[25] Katherine Scarritt, interview at Escapade with Franzeska Dickson for the OTW's Oral History Project, March 7, 2015.

repetitions, three heroines—using the numbing, almost trippy repetition of the music to enforce the sense of claustrophobia. She also uses the board to enforce the parallels between the characters using fades and dissolve: "I knew that all three women enter a room in the series pilots and I wanted to start drawing their parallel lines immediately." Like many of the best Media Cannibals vids, There's No Way Out of Here gains power through close analytical observation of the visual text. Rhys herself describes this as "a refinement of something the Cannibals were doing in a way that other vidders weren't then," which was "finding similar shots, similar ideas in different shows, and really bringing them out."[26] Rhys pulls out shots that visually echo each other: "I was inspired by all the parallel imagery to make this: the shots of their own gravestones, coming into mysterious rooms, etc." Stitched together, those shots create a tapestry of female heroism that gives emotional weight to their struggles and angst. The vid was received rapturously at Escapade and has been shown many times since. Like many influential VCR vids, it's been remastered with digital footage and thus dragged forward into the digital age.

But it was computer vidding that was really changing the landscape. Many of the computer vidders who attended Escapade had met in and around *Highlander* fandom, which may explain why they released their vids under the collective banner of the WOAD Society, with "woad" referring to the plant that yields the blue dye that is used to color the warriors' faces in the show. However, the vidders associated with the WOAD Society—which included such influencers as Luminosity, Killa, T. Jonesy, and Carol S., and which later came to include sisabet, Destina, and Melina—vidded in most of the popular fandoms of the day. Their first collection, *It Came from Outer Space* (2002), featured three VHS tapes of vids from *The X-Files*, *Stargate SG-1*, *Star Wars*, *Blake's 7*, and of course *Star Trek* (both Original Series and Next Generation). But computer vidders like these began showing work at Escapade that was truly visual art as well as fannish storytelling and media criticism.

Consider a vid like Carol S.'s **LANGUAGE** (2002, *Stargate SG-1*). (See Video 40. https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.40) The vid was described as "bizarrely experimental" in a review on the VIDDER list: "The source is heavily digitally modified—I have no idea of the technical term for what's been done, but the images end up violently stylized." The images were posturized—that is, processed so that the image consists of distinct, flat areas of color. In addition, Carol S. had a scroll of calligraphic text rise up over the images as the song progressed, creating an aesthetic composition more like a painting than a frame of Hollywood film. (See Image P. https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.187)

In a vid about language and the impossibility of communication, this vid shows as well as tells: language is a tangible thing that stands between us and the images. The text, composed for the vid by another fan named Quinn, begins, "*If I reach for you, will you reach back? Will you meet me halfway, or will you turn your back, walking away? I want to find the words to tell you what you mean to me, what I want to mean to you, but I can't.*" But fans trained to read vids whose every shot carried recognizable context were flummoxed: "The clips are strongly decontextualized. The text that scrolled up the screen was an interesting idea, but I think ultimately I'd have to call it a failure. It was impossible to read—were we supposed to be able to read it? What's the effect of a vid called Language filled with language that cannot be deciphered?"[27] But of

[26] Gywneth, "No Way Out," Dreamwidth, October 3, 2005, https://gwyn.dreamwidth.org/293074.html

[27] Shoshanna, VIDDER post, February 24, 2002.

course that frustration with words is the point of the vid. Similarly, decontextualization is a theme of the song. Suzanne Vega sings, "I'd like to meet you / in a timeless placeless place / Somewhere out of context." But this was a new aesthetic for vidding, which had historically valued visual clarity (partly because quality footage was so hard to obtain) and meanings built out of fandom's shared narrative contexts. Language is not Mary Van Deusen's idea of a literary music video; ironically, Carol S.'s Language is painterly and poetic. In Vid Review, one fan noted that the vid reminded her of Peter Greenaway's *The Pillow Book* (1996), not traditionally thought of as a fannish text.

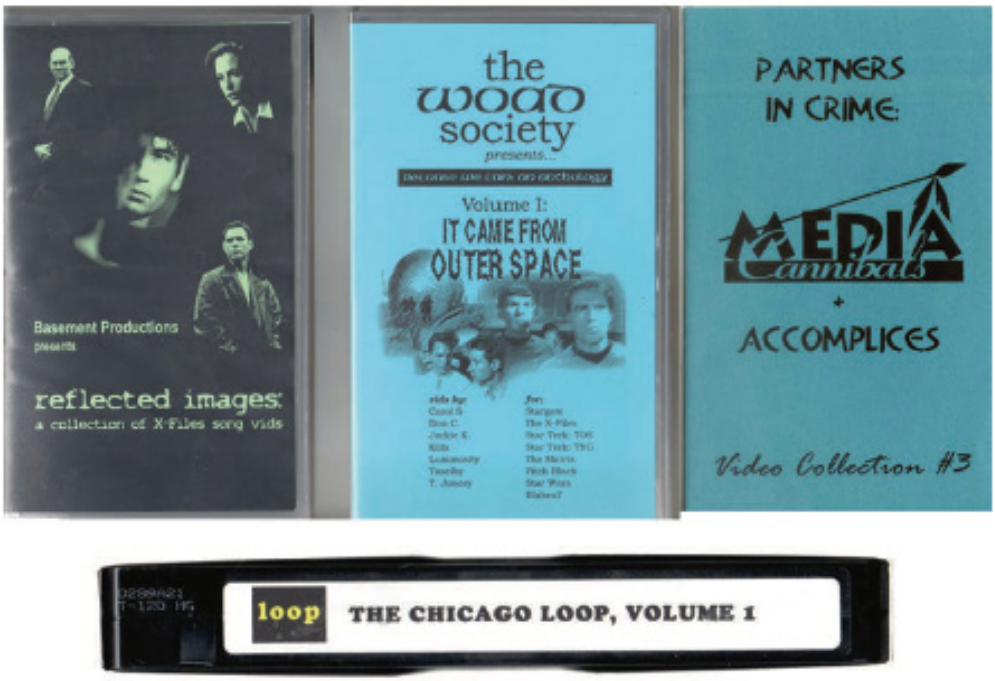


Fig. 18. Branded VHS song tape collections, c. 2000.

Vidding was at this point an art form on full boil. Like the California Crew before them, many of the Escapade vidders had a strong sense of auteurship. This expressed itself not only in the range of work that was getting made—which showed that vidders were only now beginning to see what was possible—but also in credit sequences, song tape boxes, liner notes, T-shirts, and other identarian branding (Figure 18 https:// doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.154). As tzikeh puts it in her trademark signature line: "VENI, VIDI, VIDDED: I showed up, I watched TV, I made something of it." The bold assertion "I made something of it" was an identity-creating move for the vidder as artist.[28]

Ironically, this explosion of creative energy brought vidders into conflict with Escapade, the convention that had enabled all this development, because not all of the new work was slash, and Escapade was first and foremost a slash con. Where some fans had once said "slash is my fandom," others were now saying "vidding is my fandom." Some were beginning to ask whether Escapade's vid show was fully meeting the needs of its slash-oriented audience.

[28] It also played on *X-Files* creator Chris Carter's logo for Ten Thirteen Productions, in which a child pipes up over the sound of a film reel to declare, "I made this!"

Discussion broke out on the VIDDER list, with Shoshanna Green opening her (pro-vidding) post with "Escapade is not only a great slash con, it's also a great vid con" before going on to discuss the incipient conflict that was brewing:

> There's been some talk, both last year and this, that the Escapade vid show is "too het." I could not disagree more. As I said above, one of the attractions of the con for me is the great vid show, and I don't discriminate among slash, gen, and het vids, the way I do in fiction. . . . I'm just there to see *vids*. Both vidders and non-vidder viewers, in various groupings, have been talking since the con (and probably since before it) about whether a significant number of people (whatever that means) dislike seeing het vids in the show and, if so, whether anything should "be done" about it. My sense is (certainly my hope is) that nobody on the con com is going to ban or even officially discourage "het vids" (how could they even be defined?) [29]

Ironically, among the proposals that had been raised was the creation of a "het ghetto" at Escapade to mirror the segregation of slash vids at MediaWest. In the ensuing discussion, vidders articulated how important Escapade had become to vidding as an art form. LynnC defended the importance of Escapade as a forum for artists regardless of audience: "Vid shows aren't strictly put together as entertainment for the con goers. They are a forum for vidders to show artwork done in the last year—yes, most of the vidders are slashfen, or they wouldn't be there, but art is inspired by many things on the screen, including het relationships. If the audience has expectations that aren't met by the show, the audience needs educating. NOT the vidders." [30] Lynn further elaborated that she went to Escapade "to see the state of the art and what my friends are thinking about." Carol S. also noted the importance of Escapade as a venue for all her vids, slash and otherwise: "The Escapade main show is the only place I *ever* get a wide range of feedback (if you corner your friends and make them watch your vids they are unlikely to be truly negative no matter how they feel). It's not just that Escapade is the only con I consistently attend that has a vid show at all, it's also that the main show at Escapade is the only place that hands out feedback forms." [31]

But not everyone at Escapade wanted an art scene. One VIDDER list member articulated the case for the other side, claiming that vidders had turned Escapade into a captive audience for their artistic explorations. That fan claimed that vidders were taking advantage, ventriloquizing their thoughts as, "I want 100 people in a room to watch this, even though I know better than anyone that it's a vid that most people won't get, and it's not appropriate for this venue"—because it requires multiple rewatches, for instance. The fan asked vidders to consider whether their vids were appropriate for Escapade: "Maybe because it's got major het cooties, or because it's a combo of a very obscure show and very context driven clips and an obscure and inaccessible song." [32] To be fair, the 2001 show had featured thirty-four vids and was three hours long.

Although this explosion of new and experimental vids exhausted some, it energized others—and inspired them to vid. Vividcon founder astolat saw Dante's Prayer at Escapade in 2001 and made her own first vid a month later. Others were similarly inspired, and the 2002 Escapade vid show was, if anything, even stronger. Reviews from that year were gleeful: "Oh

[29] Shoshanna, VIDDER post, February 21, 2001.

[30] LynnC, VIDDER post, February 21, 2001.

[31] Carol S., VIDDER post, February 22, 2001.

[32] Lark, VIDDER post, February 22, 2001.

my GOD, what fantastic vid shows."[33] "It was amazing, and my mind is still awhirl."[34] "Best. Fucking. Show. Ever."[35] Fan and fan critic Eliade attributed the strength of the 2002 show to the impact of computers: "Digital computer vidding is beginning to solidify into the revolution it is—the source for most vids was shockingly clean and the cumulative effect of seeing that much vidding technique just blows me away."[36]

At this point, it was clear that there was enough interest in vidding, not to mention enough vids, to sustain an entire convention. Shortly after the end of Escapade 2002, astolat sent out the first announcement of a new con, Vividcon, to the VIDDER list:

> Vividcon is currently in the planning stages. Our goal is to provide a con dedicated to fannish vidding, for people who like to make vids and people who like to watch them.
>
> Think continuous vid shows throughout the weekend, fandom-specific vid shows, panels to discuss vids, panels on novice and advanced vidding techniques (both for digital and VCR-to-VCR vidding), a try-it-yourself room with vidding systems you can play around with, collaborative vidding sessions, and <insert your idea here>.[37]

Because the new convention was dedicated to vidding itself, all kinds of vids of would be welcome. There would be no more arguments about whether this or that kind of vid was appropriate, as had happened at MediaWest and Escapade. As astolat quickly clarified in response to questions, Vividcon was to be "an equal opportunity con," by which she meant, "We do not discriminate against vids for genre, sexual orientation, fandom, age, technique, or anything else. That means, among other things, that gen, het, slash, and adult (for violence, e.g.) vids are all welcome and will all be given equal opportunity to be shown and discussed."[38]

The first Vividcon was put together quickly and took place in Chicago on August 16–18, 2002. That first con had only two days of programming, though it expanded the next year to three days. However, even at that first Vividcon, a fan could watch an astonishing fifteen hours of vids on a big screen in a theatre setting; as astolat later recollected, "Vividcon was designed to give vid fans a massive fix to hold them for the entire year and to give vidders a great showcase for their vids."[39]

Vividcon: Vivid Constructed Realities

For no reason than anyone can remember, the mascot of Vividcon is a llama with its foot resting on a videocassette.[40] (See Image Q. https:// doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.188) In fact, the 2002 Vividcon premiere show would be the only one ever released on VHS, which was on its way out; future Vividcon shows were distributed on DVD. But by then, both the llama and its VHS cassette had become iconic. The first Vividcon llama was tinted with rainbow colors to evoke the rainbow noise that had so plagued vidders of the past. In subsequent

[33] Shoshanna, VIDDER post, February 24, 2002.

[34] Laura Shapiro, VIDDER post, February 19, 2002.

[35] Eliade on her blog, February 18, 2001, quoted in "Escapade/Escapade 2002," Fanlore, https://fanlore.org/

[36] Eliade, quoted in "Escapade/Escapade 2002."

[37] Astolat/shalott VIDDER post, February 22, 2002.

[38] Astolat/shalott VIDDER post, February 25, 2002.

[39] Astolat, "About Vividcon," Dreamwidth, June 6, 2017, https://astolat.dreamwidth.org/302253.html

[40] My own peripheral recollection is that the word "llama" was evoked by the abbreviation LLC—that is, a limited liability company, because one was needed to administer the convention.

years, the llama would be dressed to evoke a theme that reflected that year in fandom, with a subtitle to match. For instance, 2003's Pirate!Llama ("Vids Ahoy!") evoked the popular *Pirates of the Caribbean* fandom of that year; 2007 gave us a bespectacled Harry Potter llama ("Accio Vids!"), 2009 a Star Trek llama ("To Boldly Vid!"), and 2014 a Captain America llama ("Even When I Had Nothing, I Had Vids").

The VHS cassette under the llama's foot was only one way in which the history of vidding was evoked by the branding around the con. As I noted in the introduction, the word "vid" was itself embedded in the name "Vividcon," and the limited liability company that astolat and her crew formed to administer the convention was called Vivid Constructed Realities, a name that both alluded to the genre of the "constructed reality" vid and was also easily shortened to VCR.

Vividcon adopted many aspects of vidding practices and culture that had developed at Escapade. This included a Vid Review of the entire premiere show as well as an in-depth review of only one or two vids. Vids were shown in a theatre-like setting, in the dark, without talking or singing. At the 2001 Escapade, the audience had been instructed to sit down and be quiet because the year before, there had been "problems with people talking and walking around during the vids."[41] The next year, vidders addressed the problem creatively by means of an "intro vid." They created a genre of fan video analogous to the short videos that run before the feature at the movies to establish etiquette. Made by tzikeh of the Chicago Loop, Escapade's **INTRO VID 2002** (Video 41 https:// doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.41) instructed the audience to follow four simple rules: don't talk, don't walk around, don't sing along with the vids, and turn off all cellphones and beepers (yes, beepers were still a thing). These rules applied to all of Vividcon's vid shows. They were enforced not only with a series of increasingly meta intro vids but also through the convention's infrastructure. The first year, the doors to the screening room were locked, with audience members not allowed to enter once the show started or to reenter if they left. When this proved to be too draconian, the con committee rigged the main door with a button that triggered a discreet light manned by a volunteer, who would quickly let people in and out between vids. To make the room as dark as possible, blackout curtains were drawn and the hotel's emergency light bulbs were removed. A surround-sound system was brought into the hotel. All of this is to say that Vividcon took vidding seriously as filmic art and worked hard to create what they considered to be the best atmosphere possible for spectatorship. Vidders responded accordingly and upped their game.

That said, Vividcon also made space for people who wanted (or needed, for disability or other reasons) to view vids differently. An overflow room was set up for premieres that permitted talking and moving around, like at the convention vid shows of old. Vividcon also established a vid library that stocked a large collection of VHS tapes (and later DVDs), which members of the convention could check out and watch in their rooms, just in case fifteen, twenty, or twenty-five hours of theatre-style shows were not enough. The Springhill Suites in Chicago had been chosen partly because each suite had a living area with TV and VHS (later DVD) players, so congoers could have a living room vid experience with friends as well as more formal theatre-style vid viewing. Vividcon also innovated new vid-watching experiences, like Vid Karaoke, a late-night event in which fans, mostly properly lubricated,

[41] Shoshanna, "The Prehistory (and Current Events) of Vividcon," LiveJournal, March 29, 2011, https://the-shoshanna.livejournal.com/335062.html

did karaoke to vids subtitled for the purpose. This allowed singing back into the vid-watching experience, albeit in this highly structured way.

But the chief alternative vid-watching experience was Club Vivid, a dance party during which vids were projected on large screens on both sides of the dance floor. Club Vivid was initially intended simply as fun convention programming—a night of dancing and drinking and canapés set to a curated playlist of danceable vids. But after the first year, the Club Vivid VJs, having learned which vids were good to dance to and which ones weren't, put out a call for new vids to be made specifically for Club Vivid. Club Vivid thus became a space for debuting new work.

As a result, vidders began making what I will call dance vids, which are arguably a different genre than the con vids or living room vids of old. Dance vids are designed to be danced to, so they're particularly rhythmic and fast paced in their cutting as well as in their song choice. Dance vids are also designed to be viewed while the spectator is moving and may also be partly obscured by the crowd of other dancers, so they tend to be particularly colorful and spectacular. In *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (2008), William H. McNeill describes the pleasure humans take in synchronized motion and argues for the importance of dance in creating emotional bonds. In a Club Vivid vid, those pleasures can triple: not only do the clips dance through raccord and rhythmic editing, but characters are made to dance on screen, their choreography emphasized, and the fans dance with them and with each other.

Club Vivid always began with what was essentially a found vid, which fans call The Joxer Dance (2003). (See Video 13. https:// doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.13) The Joxer Dance is an untouched sequence from *Xena: Warrior Princess* in which the ancient Greek characters perform a hilariously over-the-top rendition of the 1972 pop-rock hit "Dancing in the Moonlight," complete with conga line, as part of an anachronistic "Battle of the Bands." The original idea, according to Melina, who cut the clip, was simply to play the footage as the first "vid" of Club Vivid so as to draw people into the room. The first year, people just watched it and laughed. But afterward, spurred on by vidder F1renze, some fans began trying to learn the sequence's complicated choreography and to perform it along with the characters on screen. Each year, more fans joined in the choreography, but everyone could participate in the conga line, which saw fans snaking around the room and dancing, just as Xena, Gabrielle, and the other characters were doing on screen. The Joxer Dance became a Club Vivid signature event, a happy start to the night. Club Vivid's closing vid, the colorful anime spectacular **STOP THE ROCK** (2003) by Nappy (Video 42 https:// doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.42), was ritualized into an event as well. It's no accident that the night's final vid is an anime music video. Because it's the last vid after a multihour dance party with an open bar, few people have seen Stop the Rock while sober, which makes it great for a final, sweaty blowout. It's not a story or an interpretation; it's a sensation.

Many of the vids already discussed were made for Club Vivid: A Fannish Taxonomy of Hotness (*Hot Hot Hot*) (Video 20 https://doi. org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.20), Snakes on a Plane (*Video 10* https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.10), Starships (*Video 31* https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.31). However, notable dance vids also include fan favorites like astolat's **DROP DEAD GORGEOUS** (2003, *Smallville*) (Video 43 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132. cmp.43), Dualbunny's God Is a DJ (2006, *Battlestar Galactica*)

(Video 44 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.44) and **RAISE YOUR GLASS** (2013, *Community*) (Video 45 https://doi.org/10.3998/ mpub.10069132.cmp.45), jarrow's **PAUL MCCARTNEY** (2007, *Will & Grace*) (Video 46 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.46) and, perhaps most famously, Luminosity's *300* vid **VOGUE** (2007) (Video 47 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.47), which was recognized by *New York Magazine* and which has had one of the most fascinating afterlives of all vids. (See "Spotlight on: Vogue" in the online appendix.) I justify my designation of "fan favorite" by how immediately and how long the vid stayed in Club Vivid's rotation. Many of these vids were repeated year after year because fans would be disappointed not to see them and dance to them. Several were sequenced into a climatic segment near the party's feverish end.

Most Club Vivid vids literally make their stories or analysis dance: Drop Dead Gorgeous sets its analysis of Clark's Kent's character (he lies about everything, but he's drop dead gorgeous) in the context of shots of Club Zero, a fictional nightclub on the show, and scenes of gyrating bodies; in God Is a DJ, the song tells us that life is a dance floor, and the vidders tells us that *Battlestar Galactica*'s Starbuck dances when she moves, fights, or pilots a spaceship. **A FANNISH TAXONOMY OF HOTNESS (HOT HOT HOT)** constructs a montage that puts characters from a variety of party scenes across television shows onto a single dance floor. "People at the party, hot hot hot!" Buster Poindexter sings, providing the voice of the vidders; the vid takes on new meaning when you realize that it was made for a context in which fans are dancing alongside the characters. Fandom is not just at this giant televisual party; this is *our* party. And in vids like Raise Your Glass and Paul McCartney, vidders continue a tradition that goes all the way back to The Boy Can't Help It: editing comic choreography to emphasize its continuities with dance. In Paul McCartney, jarrow edits footage from *Will & Grace* so that the characters bounce and gyrate, gesticulate, snap, and boogie together.

There is joy in creating and observing these kinds of patterns. As jarrow recollects, "I decided to start by grouping similar clips together (fainting, victorious arm pumps, hugs and kisses, gasping in shock, dances, etc.) and see if I could make sense of it. When I was rewatching the episodes, I grabbed interesting motion-y bits with absolutely no idea that they would be paralleled later (by other characters or themselves). It was such a delightful surprise to end up with something like twenty different clumps of paralleled motion." [42]

If the atmosphere of Club Vivid tends to favor vids with a celebratory aspect, then this celebration is not only of the shows or the characters—though certainly many do celebrate shows and characters. Consider Gwyneth's **BRICK HOUSE** (2010) (Video 48 https://doi.org/10.3998/ mpub.10069132.cmp.48), which asks its spectators to admire magnificent fan-favorite actress Gina Torres. However, many Club Vivid vids have a meta aspect. In vids like **FANNISH TAXONOMY OF HOTNESS**, **GOD IS A DJ**, **RAISE YOUR GLASS**, and **VOGUE**, it's fandom's own creative power that's being celebrated. God is not the DJ here. Fandom is; the vidders are.

In this meta aspect, Club Vivid vids exemplify the vids of Vividcon generally. Many Vividcon vids celebrate vidding or vidding's history. From the first, Vividcon kicked off with a recitation of that history. In 2002, the congoers gathered on the first morning of the convention for a combination vid show/panel called "Retrospective: How on Earth Did We Get

[42] Jarrow, "New Vid: Paul McCartney," LiveJournal, August 15, 2007, https://jarrow.livejournal.com/957773.html

Here?" where one version of vidding history was rehearsed. That first year, tzikeh gave a talk and showed older vids, including **BOTH SIDES NOW** (Video 22 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.22), **THE ROSE** (Video 25 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.25), **PRESSURE** (Video 32 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132. cmp.32), and **SCARBOROUGH FAIR** (Video 38 https://doi.org/10.3998/ mpub.10069132.cmp.38). That genealogy was itself later made into a vid by Seah & Margie: **WALKING ON THE GROUND** (2005) (Video 30 https:// doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.30), which tells the story of vidding's evolving technological and cultural practices. (See "Spotlight on: **WALKING ON THE GROUND**" in the online appendix.) In subsequent years, Vividcon's history panel/show was called "The Wayback Machine," "Genealogy of Vidding," or simply "Vidding History," and other moderators rehearsed a variety of subhistories, all of which have informed this book. No other programming was ever scheduled against this annual history lesson. These panels, in conjunction with Vividcon's vid library, demonstrated the con's commitment to establishing an artistic history of the form.

But Vividcon also wanted to be forward looking. Attendees came not only from the vidding communities of the past but also from the new online communities. Vividcon attracted vidders from groups like Nummy Treat (2002), a mailing list dedicated to Buffyverse vids, and from online communities like the Fourth Wall (2007). The con also attracted a few interested anime vidders as the increased visibility of user-generated video online opened doors between the worlds of AMV and live-action vidding. These vidders shared aesthetics and tips in panels with titles like "Topics in Craft: POV," "Timing Is Everything," "The Language of Music," "Typography in Vids," "Literalism vs. Metaphor" and "Curse You, After Effects!" These panels were often paired with vid shows that illustrated the point; other vid shows were curated by theme (for instance, "You're My Best Friend," "End of the World," "Spies Like Us") or technique ("Unreliable Narrators," "Constructed Reality," "No Source? No Problem").

The moment of Vividcon—a moment defined by this combination of artistic cross-pollination, rapidly accelerating technology, and the regular opportunity to present new work—produced an explosion of high-quality vids, with many vidders consciously trying to top themselves from year to year. Many of the vids I discuss in this book were Vividcon premieres. But Vividcon arguably established its own canon. For example, in the 2011 vid show "Ten Years of Vividcon," the moderators chose a premiering vid representing each of the con's first ten years, and chose vids like sisabet's *Farscape* vid **BE SO GLAD** (2006) (Video 49 https://doi. org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.49), AbsoluteDestiny's *Firefly* and *Serenity* vid **RODEOHEAD** (2007) (Video 50 https://doi.org/10.3998/ mpub.10069132.cmp.50), and hollywoodgrrl's *Fringe* vid **BOOM BOOM POW** (2010) (Video 51 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132. cmp.51). This list not only tells you about the vids that were valued within the community but also illustrates the diversification of the vidding community in the aughts. Sisabet came out of online *Buffy* vidding; AbsoluteDestiny is an anime turned live-action vidder; hollywoodgrrl is a multiple winner at the Fourth Wall.

Luminosity and Melina's 2010 intro vid **PREVIOUSLY . . .** (Video 52 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.52) creates another canon. It is a parody of the "Previously on . . ." voice-overs that bring the viewer up to date on the plot of a serialized television show. The vidders got a male narrator with a broadcaster voice to solemnly intone, "Previously, at the Vividcon Premiere show . . ." to tell you what vids you missed; at the same time, the list

assumes the spectator's familiarity with the twenty-six vids that are name checked or, even more interestingly, only alluded to.

> Previously, at the Vividcon Premiere show: Aeryn and John danced **THE MASOCHISM TANGO** [1], Connor and Murphy were **REBELS OF THE SACRED HEART** [2], Hannibal Lecter was **UNINVITED** [3], Iron Man had no **HANDLEBARS** [4], Frodo and Aragorn Climbed a **MOUNTAIN** [5], *Stargate Atlantis* Built Its City on Rock and Roll [6], Duncan had **TROUBLE WITH POETS [7],** *Farscape* was an **ECSTATIC DRUM TRIP** [8], Jaye had a **BRIGHT FUTURE IN SALES** [9], The Doctor explored **THE MOONS OF JUPITER** [10], Jason Bourne visited a **STREET CAFÉ** [11], Joan Built a **BIG RED BOAT** [12], Skies were Blue for Everyone [13], Starbuck was a **JOKER** [14], Charlie Jade Remembered [15], Faith was a **SUPERSTAR** [16], Kirk had **RAZZLE DAZZLE** [17], Jeremiah went to **WOODSTOCK** [18], Cylons want to **FIX YOU** [19], Girls were **SUPERSMART** [20], Sam Tyler was **CRAZ**Y [21], We Put Giles There [22], War was Hell [23], Astronauts Soared [24], Penguins Marched [25], and then the Earth Exploded [26]! And that's what you missed at Vividcon Premieres.

By the end of this recitation, the allusions are coming fast. "We Put Giles There" at least echoes the title of Laura Shapiro and Lithium Doll's vid, **I PUT YOU THERE** (2006)[43] (Video 122 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.122), but you have to know that "War was Hell" refers to a comment made about Feochadn's *Band of Brothers* vid, **EBBEN? NE ANDRO LONTANA** (2002). (Video 123 https://doi.org/10.3998/ mpub.10069132.cmp.123). You also have to know in which vids astronauts soared, penguins marched, and the earth exploded. (For the answer to these and other questions, see "Spotlight on: Previously . . ." in the online appendix.) This is not just a canon of vids but a rehearsal of collective experience within a community.

The Collapse of Context

However, even as Vividcon was becoming a hub for vidding, vidding was breaking out of old-school fannish spaces thanks to the digital revolution, Web 2.0, and the Internet. As I noted in the introduction, 2005 marked the thirty-year anniversary of vidding, the third year of Vividcon, and the debut of YouTube. Online video was only made possible by the spread of broadband Internet, which in 2005 was only at 37 percent in the United States, but growing fast. Broadband enabled the development of video streaming sites like Imeem, Blip, Vimeo, Bam Vid Vault, and YouTube, and these sites made user-generated videos like fan vids visible.

The vidders of the early aughts didn't like YouTube. Many of them didn't like the loss of control over one's work that streaming represented, but even those who were willing to trade control for ease of spectatorship preferred Imeem to YouTube. Imeem had social networking features that fans liked, but more importantly, it offered better visual quality and sync. Vidders complained that "YouTube's conversion process throws the video and audio out of sync by a half second,"[44] which might not have mattered to most people but was crazy making to vidders who had timed their videos to the frame. Images were also often pixelated. (Later iterations of YouTube improved both image quality and synchronization.)

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[43] For analyses of I PUT YOU THERE, see Tushnet, "I Put You There"; and Tisha Turk, "Metalepsis in Fan Vids and Fan Fiction," in *Metalepsis in Popular Culture*, ed. Karin Kukkonen and Sonja Klimek (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 213–31.

[44] Comment on "YouTube Opinions," Vidding (LiveJournal community), August 2, 2006, https://vidding.livejournal.com/740102.html

However, the real problem with YouTube was that it created a culture of indiscriminate uploading, which YouTubers framed as sharing but which vidders experienced as theft. One vidder bluntly described "the people on YouTube" as thieves: "Many vidders have had their work stolen, myself included, and put up by users who claim it as their own."[45] This did happen, and sometimes still happens, not only with vids but also with fanfiction and fan art; vidding credits or artists' signatures are cut off, or characters' names are changed. But in addition to outright theft, there was also the problem of—well, fannish behavior. Someone who saw your vid and really, really liked it might feel compelled to share it with the wider public, regardless of whether the vidder wanted that kind of exposure. YouTube made this easy to do.

Typical of vidding history, the clash of cultures started with *Star Trek.* Killa and T. Jonesy's *Star Trek* comedy vid, **KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE** (2005) (Video 53 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.53), which closed that year's Vividcon premiere show, went viral on YouTube almost as soon as such a thing was possible. The vid was put up by someone not the vidders in July 2006. A masterpiece of timing and lip synching, Knights of the Round Table was called "the best-edited fanvid ever in the history of YouTube" in 2011, and the claim remains credible today.[46] The *Star Trek* footage is impeccably matched to music from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*; even the song's opening dialogue ("Look, my liege!" "Camelot!" "Camelot!" "Camelot!" "It's only a model." "Shh!") is matched to the position and affect of the *Star Trek* characters as well as to the movement of their lips. The characters' stylized gestures perfectly match the beats of the song, and while the vid is easily understood and accessible to novice vid watchers, it also provides contextual and canon-based pleasures for harcore fans. For example, for the climactic phrase "I have to push the pram a lot," we see Spock pushing the futuristic wheelchair of previous Enterprise captain Christopher Pike—a meaningful scene for fans.

The self-declared nerds of the Internet went wild for the *Python/Trek* crossover, posting on blogs, lists, and forums urging others to check out this little bit of "geek heaven."[47] The vid even jumped from the Internet to television: I remember seeing a clip from Knights of the Round Table presented as a humorous outro at the end of a local news broadcast in New York City. Some might see this intense attention as success, but as noted previously, vidders at this time feared exposure. They worried that vidding would be seen as piracy and they'd be seen as copyright violators. Killa and T. Jonesy contacted the user who'd put the vid up on YouTube and requested that it be removed. What happened next can be gleaned by reading between the lines of a MetaFilter thread, "I have to push the pram a lot" (July 18, 2006):

> "This video has been removed by the user.": (
>
> —posted by potsmokinghippieoverlord at 1:44 PM on July 19, 2006
>
> Please tell me there's another source! I tried to show the hilarity to someone else, and now it is gone!
>
> —posted by piratebowling at 1:27 PM on July 19, 2006

[45] Comment on "YouTube Opinions."

[46] Rosemary Van Deuren, "Top Ten Funny YouTube Links for Insomniacs," IdlerMag, January 12, 2011, https://idlermag.com/2011/01/12/top-ten-funny-youtube-links-for-insomniacs/

[47] "I have to push the pram a lot!," MetaFilter thread posted by jonson, July 18, 2006, https://www.metafilter.com/53105/I-have-to-push-the-pram-a-lot.

> The Youtube poster says he was asked by the creator to remove the video from YouTube. (*The* Creator . . . ?)
>
> —posted by Snerd at 1:28 PM on July 19, 2006
>
> Is this it listed on this page? Scroll a little over half way down in the page, or search for "Knights of the Round Table" http:// seacouver.slashcity.net/vidland/vids.html
>
> —posted by BillsR100 at 1:23 PM on July 19, 2006
>
> Holy Dilithium Crystals! Check out the other stuff on that creator page—FIFTEEN Trek music video remixes and much MUCH more.
>
> —posted by mwhybark at 1:29 PM on July 19, 2006
>
> That site is going to get hit with the Slashdot effect, but you can't stop the YouTube.
>
> —posted by etoile at 1:28 PM on July 19, 2006

Here we can see, almost in real time, the discovery of vidding by the larger Internet. In searching for "another source," these MetaFilter users discover Killa's own small fannish website, "Vids by Killa and Friends," on which she offers her vids for download to other fans in the old-school manner. "Holy Dilithium Crystals! Check out the other stuff on that creator page," one user yells, driving eyeballs to a fan site that had been made with a smaller, more insular audience in mind.

The MetaFilter fans are aware that driving traffic to Killa's site could have huge negative repercussions for her. The "Slashdot effect" is a sudden and huge increase in traffic, of the kind that would typically bring a website down back in the days when bandwidth caps were small and owners paid out of pocket for web hosting. At this moment of Internet history, before social media, most websites were personal and not ad supported, so there was no upside to getting more clicks or views. Increased traffic, particularly if you were hosting large files like videos, meant only more bandwidth and a bigger bill, which most people couldn't afford. Your site would go down, or a savvy webmaster would quickly take it down to avoid running up costs.

While some sites would try to get back up again as soon as possible, Killa instead chose to take her page down for good, not wanting to expose her fan works to the gaze of outsiders, copyright holders, and network TV stations. But as MetaFilter user etoile predicted, that didn't stop the YouTube: copies of Knights of the Round Table continued to pop up on YouTube, racking up millions of hits. A month later, another of T. Jonesy and Killa's collaborations, **CLOSER** (2003)(Video 54 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.54), became perhaps the most famous example of a fan vid gone viral and taken out of context. (See "Spotlight on: Closer" in the online appendix.) A slash vid that told a disturbing story of a Vulcan *pon farr*—a mating ritual—gone wrong, Closer garnered intense and baffled admiration from people who didn't really understand what they were seeing. While the vid's editing was admired, many mistook it for parody[48] and left comments like "too funny," "hilarious," "the best spoof . . . that I've seen in a long time," apparently assuming that anything having to do with

[48] For more on this, see Henry Jenkins's analysis of CLOSER, "How to Watch a Fan-Vid," Confessions of an Aca-Fan (blog), September 17, 2006, http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2006/09/how_to_watch_a_fanvid.html

male/male desire ("lol @ gay star trek") or rape ("Vulcan rape lol")[49] must be meant mockingly, as a kind of slam (in the same vein as "George Lucas raped my childhood," or, as Julie Levin Russo argues, homophobic *Brokeback Mountain* parody trailers[50]). Accordingly, most YouTube comments assumed the vidder was male: "Dude knows his Star Trek," "That's the sickest thing I've seen in a while . . . LOL! Good job man," "Dude, ew."[51] The vid got millions of hits and was even brought to the attention of Shatner and Nimoy—not what the vidders intended, and definitely not the vidder's intended audience.

While CLOSER was perhaps the most famous case of a vid wrenched out of context, it was hardly the only one. The years after YouTube's debut saw many vidders complaining about unauthorized uploads as well as worrying about the repercussions of this unintended exposure. In one thread, "Stolen vids on YouTube," vidder StarCrossedGirl discovered that one of her *Star Trek* vids had been put up by multiple users, some claiming it as their own work. When she contacted them, some apologized and took it down, but one replied, in a public comment: "If anyone is a thief on You Tube, it's you StarCrossedGirl! I have a gut feeling that you never thought about breaking copyright laws concerning Star Trek, Jefferson Airplane & Led Zeppelin owners rights. The You Tube executives have been sent and informed of your nasty letter. If any videos are to be taken down, it will be yours! !!"[52] Talk about adding insult to injury! The vidder wondered, would her vids be taken down? Could she get into real trouble? Other vidders had similar experiences—and similar fears: "Don't post at YouTube," "Don't post in the open," "Bottom line—vidders create and host illegal downloads, plain and simple. Don't be stupid about it."[53] Ironically, however, fan vids soon came to typify YouTube's culture of remix and user-generated content, even as they sent individual vidders scurrying for cover, afraid of piracy, bankruptcy, and humiliation.

The Move to Collective Action

But even in this moment of fear and panic, other perspectives began to emerge. Laura Shapiro, an early and influential voice, wrote an essay for the LiveJournal Vidding community called "You Can't Stop the Signal" (December 4, 2006) in which she argued that vidders ought to seize the moment and step into greater public visibility. Shapiro described a vidding community torn between controlling their work and claiming their place in the emerging narrative of remix video. But, Shapiro argued, the moment of control had already passed:

> However legitimate a vidder's fears may be, the fact is that the vids are already out there. The minute we put our vids online, we expose ourselves to the world. We can't stop people from finding and watching vids, especially since the advent of YouTube and similar sites. We can't stop people from

[49] These comments come from the version put up on YouTube by user alexanderadb on September 8, 2006 (https://youtu.be/3uxTpyCdriY).

[50] Julie Levin Russo, "User-Penetrated Content: Fan Video in the Age of Convergence," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 125–230.

[51] Comments from alexanderab, "Star Trek + Nine Inch Nails = Closer," YouTube, September 8, 2006, https://youtu.be/3uxTpyCdriY

[52] Starcrossedgirl, "Stolen Vids on YouTube: FUBAR," Vidding (LiveJournal community), October 21, 2008, https://vidding.livejournal.com/1629542.html

[53] Margie, "VVC 2007: Disc Zero—At the Con (1/5)," Dreamwidth, November 16, 2007, https://flummery.dreamwidth.org/2007/11/16/

> sharing our vids without our consent or even our knowledge. We can't control the distribution of our own work in a viral medium.
>
> We also can't control other people's attitudes. New vidders arrive on the scene every day, without any historical context or legal fears, and plunk their vids onto YouTube without a second thought. They post publicly and promote themselves enthusiastically, and why not? That's what everybody does on the Internet, from the AMV creators to machinima makers to Brokeback Mountain parodists to political remixers. All of these works are potentially infringing, but these creators don't hide, and they are drawing attention. Lots of it. Bloggers and news sites are writing about independent media and the rise of user-generated content, and academics are writing books about fannish creations of all kinds. Almost nobody is talking about us yet, but it's only a matter of time. If we aren't there to represent our points of view, what do you think they will say about vidders? [54]

Shapiro's views were no doubt affected by the fact that the month before, she had been asked by Henry Jenkins to participate in the planning of what would become the 2008 24/7 DIY Video Summit at the University of Southern California. Jenkins, then the rare aca-fan who had both attended Escapade and published about vidding, contacted Laura Shapiro so that she could bring the perspective of live-action vidders to the table. The 24/7 DIY festival, put together by Steve Anderson and Mimi Ito, was intended "to bring together DIY video creators, activists, policymakers, Internet companies, and media industries to celebrate new forms of creative practice, debate competing visions of the future, and craft shared agenda." [55] Shapiro, a vidder from the tech-central Bay Area and a political activist, was intrigued by the conference's goals, which included bringing digital video communities together and creating alliances between them. She joined the 24/7 DIY Video Summit planning committee and began to publicize the festival to vidders.

These and other issues were pressing enough that Vividcon 2007 organized a Town Hall on Vidding and Visibility to discuss these questions within the community—or at least as much of it as could be gotten together in person at one time. Almost all of the convention's 150 or so members crowded into the main panel room to discuss the "question of should vidding be more or less visible, and how do we control it, assuming we can or should control it." [56] Various postconvention reports summarized the discussion, which turned into a debate about personal privacy versus normalizing fan works, particularly women's fan works. Vidders shared stories about engaging the broader world outside of fandom. For example, Luminosity described showing vids at 2003's Slayage, an academic *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* convention, and getting only condescension in the panel that followed, with one male scholar referring to "your little movies" and a woman academic asking where the male vidders were, implying that if men weren't doing it, it was only a hobby, not art. Another example: Jackie K. Jono discussed an interaction she'd had on the academic media site In Media Res, where a male media critic had uploaded a fan vid as a prompt for discussion, which he described as "a generic YouTube redaction of scenes from *Bleak House* under a soundtrack of Andain's 'Beautiful Things,' a song apparently about teenage suicide. It is classic DIY self-made creative content, using television (without regard to IP law) to produce a personal 'trance' or reverie

[54] Laura Shapiro, "Vidding Meta: You Can't Stop the Signal," Vidding (LiveJournal community), December 4, 2006, https://vidding.livejournal.com/893694.html

[55] Laura Shapiro, "Representing Vidding to the Wider World: Suggestions Needed," Vidding (LiveJournal community), April 8, 2007, https://vidding.livejournal.com/1035085.html

[56] Margie, "VVC 2007."

about *watching television with thoughts in your head*."[57] The critic thought that the vid had failed to explicate the source text's Marxist critique, but Jono took offense at the critic's dismissive tone. Replying "I am a vidder," Jono explained in a comment what she thought the vid was doing and why it might matter:

> The vidder has taken this story and pulled out of it a theme I find more interesting. She is exploring what it means to be beautiful in the context of this society. The woman who is the main character of the vid has a beautiful soul but has been disfigured by smallpox. The social status of women in this world is based primarily on their appearance and the context of their character is completely irrelevant. That theme goes right to the heart of the psychological, social, and philosophical issues of self worth, jealousy, and identity that I have to deal with every day The fact that the vidder chose to focus on that theme rather than the more directly economic one that is central to the story is, in a way, quite political.[58]

Jono concluded: "Fan fiction and fan vids have a very long history. Historically, they have been made by women for other women about stuff women tend to like and men often scoff at." Jono told the Town Hall that she had felt compelled to defend this random vid, which had been pulled from YouTube and made by a fan she didn't know.

Vidders SDWolfpup and Rowena discovered that their vids, respectively **COIN OPERATED BOY** (2004) (Video 55 https://doi.org/10.3998/ mpub.10069132.cmp.55) and **BUFFY, ABRIDGED** (2004) (Video 56 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.56), were being shown in theatres around the United States as part of the sing-along screenings of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s musical episode, "Once More, With Feeling." The sing-along people had gotten permission from Fox, the program's owner, to show the episode in theatres (though Fox revoked those permissions a year later), but nobody asked the vidders for permission to show their work as part of the entertainment, though *Buffy* creator Joss Whedon had posted a "shout-out to our video making peeps" on the Whedonesque blog after attending a showing of the sing-along in Los Angeles.[59]

Laura Shapiro told the room about the coming 24/7 DIY Video Summit, and I told the story I told at the start of this book: that I had attended Signal/Noise 2k5: Creative Revolution at Harvard with fellow fans Naomi Novik and Rebecca Tushnet, only to hear that people started making cool remix videos in the '90s. Six months before Vividcon's Town Hall, in December 2006, *Time* had decided that You—the You who makes videos for YouTube—was the person of the year. Now vidders at the Town Hall asked each other, "Are we Time Magazine's 'Person of the Year' or are we criminals?"[60]

After listening and talking, fandom came to a number of conclusions: "People are finding us whether we want it or not. We can't hide in plain sight anymore. We could choose to require passwords again, or we could explain." The suggestion was made that "those who can afford to be public about their involvement in vidding, *and who are willing to take that step*, should do what they can to be a normalizing presence in the world, whether that be publish-

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[57] John Hartley, "Bleak House—Beautiful Things," In Media Res, November 17, 2007, http://mediacommons.org/imr/2006/11/17/bleak-house-beautiful-things

[58] Jackie K. Jono, comment to Hartley, "Bleak House—Beautiful Things."

[59] Joss Whedon, "Me Links to Me," June 30, 2007, Whedonesque, http://whedonesque.com/comments/13590

[60] Par Avion, "Panel Notes from VVC 2007 Town Hall on Vidding and Visibility, August 16, 2007," Vividcon (LiveJournal community), https://vividcon.livejournal.com/119137.html

ing academically, or talking about one's vids at work or at home, or whatever else people might be comfortable doing. Those who can't afford to be public can be supportive in other ways."[61] Vidders' decision to raise their profile—to normalize, to explain, to be "out" as a vidder if you could be—aligned with decisions that were being made in other parts of fandom. Naomi Novik, Rebecca Tushnet, and I, along with seventy other volunteers, had founded the nonprofit Organization for Transformative Works three months earlier, in May 2007. The OTW was also dedicated to creating a fan-controlled, public-facing side of fandom. Its very name articulated and promulgated a legal theory of fan works: that they are transformative, and thus a fair use of copyrighted material. The women who built the OTW feared that unless grassroots fandom became more visible, venture capitalists would create the front doors that new fans would walk through—and then buy and sell fans and fandom as a product. People were still joining the Internet in droves. When new fans searched online for "Buffy fanfiction" or "Star Trek vids" what would they find? What sites would they be sent to?

As I write this, we're more aware of the damaging effects of commercial social media: Cambridge Analytica hacking Facebook, Russian bots on Twitter, YouTube's algorithms steering spectators to ever more extreme videos, including those of white supremacists, to boost "engagement." But the fan communities that I come from, which included many early adopters of technology and scientifically minded women, were worried about the damaging effects of capitalism on their online networks almost as soon as social media arrived. It wasn't just prescience, though fans were indeed prescient; it was also that they were more fully online than most people and thus able to witness negative effects as they happened. Many Web 2.0 startups wrote terms of service (TOS) that clearly or implicitly excluded fans. Other social networks seemed more fan friendly, but then they would be sold—or more precisely, they would sell their large "user base" of "highly engaged content creators" (aka fans) for huge amounts of money, whereupon, like as not, the new owners would rewrite the TOS. (Fans, like other early Internet denizens, had a fear of being TOSed, or removed for violating the terms of service.) Each time that happened, fandom's network would be disrupted and its fan works—fanfiction, art, vids—put at risk.

The OTW was an attempt to take some control in that Wild West environment. Fans wanted a stable environment, a homestead. There was a lot of focus in the early OTW on ownership. Fans wanted to own the servers that housed their works; they wanted to own the means of production when it came to making fan works; they wanted their labor to benefit them, not some venture capitalist who wanted to scoop them up cheap and sell them or their data at a profit. In this spirit, the OTW's flagship project was called the Archive of Our Own (AO3), invoking both a Marxist ownership of the means of production and Virginia Woolf's dictum that "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." The OTW also launched an academic journal (*Transformative Works and Cultures*), a community wiki (Fanlore), and a project for rescuing at-risk fan works, including analog works like zines and VHS vids (Open Doors). The OTW also launched a legal advocacy project and a vidding committee (later renamed "fan video and multimedia"). Many of the attendees of the 2007 Vividcon Town Hall on Vidding and Visibility were already involved with the nascent OTW, but more got involved afterward. Other vidders chose different forms of advocacy.

[61] Margie, "VVC 2007."

The vidders who had chosen visibility went at it with gusto. To the surprise of the organizers, a bloc of vidders showed up at the 24/7 DIY Video Summit, revealing themselves to be more highly organized (and more opinionated) than video makers in other genres. As the first chair of the OTW's vidding committee, I collaborated with Laura Shapiro on the 24/7 DIY showcase and gave a talk drawn from Vividcon's many history panels. (Notably, I was one of only three female speakers out of seventeen; remix culture was still heavily male dominated.) The summit was hugely influential, creating connections that later produced many positive outcomes, as I discuss below. The vidders who attended intermingled with other online video creators—AMV makers, political remixers, vloggers, machinima creators, activist media makers, and documentarians—as well as with media activists and scholars like Lawrence Lessig, Yochai Benkler, Henry Jenkins, Howard Rheingold, Michael Wesch, and John Seeley Brown. They also engaged policy makers from institutions like the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), Critical Commons, and the Participatory Culture Foundation. Laura Shapiro and I filmed interviews with many of the vidders who attend the summit, and we used these and other interviews to make *Vidding (2008)*,[62] a series of short videos for MIT's New Media Literacies project.[63] Topics included "What is Vidding?" (1:28), "Technology and Tools" (1:29), "Good Vids, Bad Vids" (1:28), "I Like to Watch" (1:29), "Collaboration and Community" (1:23), and "Why We Vid" (1:20).

OTW's communications team also became a hub for public relations and journalistic inquiry about fandom, giving quotes to journalists or connecting them to knowledgeable sources or people to interview. In 2007, Luminosity's Vogue (Video 47 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.47) went viral and was picked by New York Magazine as one of "The Twenty (Intentionally) Funniest Web Videos of 2007."[64] This time, however, the aftermath of exposure was very different. Luminosity contacted the OTW, who helped her negotiate inquiries from the press. The result was "The Vidder," by Logan Hill,[65] a profile of Luminosity that, according to Henry Jenkins, "is respectful of her accomplishments and seeks to reclaim a place for women's creative work in the larger history of online video."[66] It begins, "Luminosity is the best fan that shows like *Friday Night Lights*, *Highlander*, *Farscape*, and *Buffy* ever had—but she can't use her real name in this interview for fear that their producers will sue her. As a vidder—a director of passionate tributes and critiques of her favorite shows—Luminosity samples video in order to remix and reinterpret it, bending source material to her own purposes."[67] Rather than treat Luminosity as someone doing something weird or laughable, Hill asked her about her body of work and her visual influences.[68] Luminosity

[62] See "Vidding," Organization for Transformative Works, https://www.transformativeworks.org/vidding-index/vidding_en/; and the ProjectNML YouTube channel Fanvidding, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xCUw_M_U30

[63] See also Henry Jenkins, "Fan Vidding: A Labor of Love (Part One)," Confessions of an Aca-Fan (blog), December 5, 2008, http://henryjenkins.org/2008/12/fanvidding.html

[64] "The Twenty (Intentionally) Funniest Web Videos of 2007," *New York Magazine*, November 8, 2007, https://nymag.com/movies/features/videos/40663/index1.html.

[65] Logan Hill, "The Vidder," *New York Magazine*, November 8, 2007, http://nymag.com/movies/features/videos/40622/

[66] Henry Jenkins, "Vidder Luminosity Profiled in *New York Magazine*," Confessions of an Aca-Fan (blog), November 20, 2007, http://henryjenkins.org/2007/11/vidder_luminosity_profiled_in.html

[67] Hill, "Vidder."

[68] Luminosity's answer: "My favorites were the film noir directors of the forties and fifties—Orson Welles,

was subsequently asked by the magazine to judge "The Best Fan Vids of 2008": "Last year, we raved about underground fan vidder Luminosity's brilliant video riffs on *300* and *Supernatural*. So this year, we asked *her* to pick the best fan vids of the year. 'Vidders are becoming more comfortable with their tech, which allows some daring creativity, and it really shows,' says Luminosity, who doesn't use her real name owing to copyright issues." [69] Luminosity was also asked to be one of the judges of Total Recut's video remix challenge of 2008; other judges that year included media scholars and fair use advocates such as Lawrence Lessig, Henry Jenkins, Patricia Aufderheide, J. D. Lasica, Kembrew McLeod, and Mark Hosler—an excellent group, but again, note the skewed gender breakdown. Still, this was a marked difference from Killa and T. Jonesy's experience of going viral in 2006.

The vidding activism of this period culminated with the successful campaign to get a Digital Millennium Copyright Act exemption for non-commercial remixers like vidders. The DMCA posed a legal obstacle to vidders in that it protected DVD encryption technology and made the breaking of those encryptions illegal; in other words, even though it was technologically possible to do so, it was illegal for vidders to rip their own, legally purchased DVDs to get source clips for vidding. The prohibition against ripping was meant to prevent piracy, not remix; legal scholar Rebecca Tushnet often uses the metaphor of fans as dolphins caught in nets meant for tuna. For vidders, DMCA's prohibition of decryption was particularly bitter in that they believed that the vids they were making were textbook fair use: vids are non-commercial, they use only short clips, and they're transformative in meaning and message, creating new interpretations and making analytical arguments. Whether as transformative art or protected speech, vidding ought to be a fair use. But because ripping DVDs was prohibited by the DMCA, vidders, like other remixers, were guilty on a technicality before they could even argue. As Michael Wesch explained in his "anthropological introduction to YouTube," "The simple act of ripping a DVD is actually illegal, which makes virtually everything we do illegal." [70]

The proposal for a DMCA exemption aligned vidders with other remix artists as well as with documentary filmmakers, who also wanted to incorporate short clips into their work. A coalition formed, with many of the key players having met at the 24/7 DIY Video Summit. The EFF proposed the exemption to the Library of Congress, and the OTW submitted a reply comment in support. The OTW also marshaled exhibits and testimony specific to vidding, both live at the open hearings and in writing. Vidders testified about vidding as a practice and about the ways they had been adversely affected by the DMCA. I talked about vidding history and rehearsed many of the arguments of this book. Vidder and vid scholar Tisha Turk gave more practical testimony, explaining why the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA)'s remedy for remixers—getting clips by filming their screens with a camcorder (which ironically doesn't violate the DMCA)—wouldn't work for vidders, who need high-quality, information-dense images that can be manipulated without degradation.

Jacques Tourneur. On TV, I admire David Nutter, Kim and Kelly Manners, and Joss Whedon." Hill, "Vidder."

[69] Logan Hill, "The Best Fan Vids of 2008," Vulture, November 25, 2008, https://www.vulture.com/2008/11/best_fan_vids_of_2008_1.html

[70] Michael Wesch, "An Anthropological Introduction to YouTube," presented at the Library of Congress, June 23, 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPAO-lZ4_hU

The OTW also created and posted an online Test Suite of Fair Use Vids, a group of contextualized vids offered in support of arguments like the following:

> Vidding is a legitimate artistic and culturally valuable pursuit that represents an established and growing community.
>
> Vidding promotes both technical ability and creativity. Vids are forms of legitimate cultural criticism.
>
> Vids propose alternate readings and realities.[71]

The original Test Suite comprised four vids: Luminosity and sisabet's **WOMEN'S WORK** (2007) (Video 57 https://doi.org/10.3998/ mpub.10069132.cmp.57), lim's **THIS IS HOW IT WORKS** (2006) (Video 58 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.58), **HANDLEBARS** (2008) (Video 59 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.59) by Seah & Margie, and Closer, by T. Jonesy and Killa (Video 54 https://doi. org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.54). (See "Spotlight on: The OTW's Test Suite of Fair Use Vids" in the online appendix.) It was expanded in 2012 to include The Price by thingswithwings (discussed in the introduction), **PIECE OF ME** (2008) (Video 60 https://doi.org/10.3998/ mpub.10069132.cmp.60) by Obsessive24, **IT DEPENDS ON WHAT YOU PAY** (2009) (Video 61 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.61) by Gianduja Kiss, **"WHITE" AND NERDY** (2009) (Video 62 https://doi. org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.62) by talitha78, **THE TEST** (2010) (Video 63 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.63) by here's luck, and also **BUFFY VS. EDWARD** (2009), a non-musical *Buffy/Twilight* remix video by political remixer Jonathan McIntosh in which the feminist Buffy meets, rejects, and then kills Edward Cullen, *Twilight*'s stalkery vampire. In making Buffy vs. Edward, McIntosh "was influenced by vidding and vidders like Laura Shapiro."[72] Political remixers and vidders had begun to intermingle and exchange ideas in the wake of the 24/7 DIY Video Summit.

The DMCA exemption for noncommercial remixers was granted in 2009 (and was renewed and expanded in 2012, 2015, and 2018. The 2021 renewal is in process as this book goes to press). "We won!" Turk crowed in her LiveJournal. "I am so happy, and also possibly a little overwhelmed." She added in a comment: "I have to say, the vidders in the OTW test suite are my superheroes; their work is cited all over the Register's recommendations. Vidders make art; once we made the copyright office look closely at that art and understand how and why it gets made, they had to acknowledge that the DMCA was restricting fair uses of copyrighted material."[73] This was true. In the recommendation, the register of copyrights recognized vidding as an art and understood and accepted the arguments about what vidders need to make them: "Noncommercial, transformative users have also sufficiently demonstrated that certain uses require high quality in order for the purpose of the use to be sufficiently expressed and communicated. For instance, where focus on background material in a motion picture

[71] Organization for Transformative Works, "Test Suite of Fair Use Vids," https://www.transformativeworks.org/legal/vidtestsuite/

[72] "Buffy v. Edward: Twilight Remixed," by Jonathan McIntosh, June 20, 2009, http://popculturedetective.agency/2009/buffy-vs-edward-twilight-remixed

[73] Tisha Turk, "DMCA Exemption for Noncommercial Remix Video!," LiveJournal, July 26, 2010, https://tishaturk.livejournal.com/7355.html

is essential to the transformative purpose, as exemplified in the situation of bringing the background to the foreground, the use of decrypted DVDs is necessary to make the point."[74]

The register cited as an example Lierdumoa's **HOW MUCH IS THAT GEISHA IN THE WINDOW** (2008) (Video 64 https://doi.org/10.3998/ mpub.10069132.cmp.64), a vid that was made in order to construct an absence—that is, to show how few Asian characters exist in a show, *Firefly*, that ostensibly describes a future in which the United States and China now form a single superpower. All of the characters can and often do speak Chinese, but, as the register noted, "the vid demonstrates that almost no Asian characters are featured and that they appear only in the background. The vid concludes with a text screen that states: 'There is only one Asian actor with English dialogue in all of *Firefly'* and in the next screen states, 'She plays a whore.'"[75] This was understood as a transformative use, and the register further understood Lierdumoa's focus on the background of the show meant that she needed high-quality footage, concluding that "if a transformative user begins with a work of degraded quality, the further degradation that will likely occur in rendering the work to the public can completely obscure the purpose of the use." The register then rehearsed others examples from vidding:

> For instance, Women's Work, by Luminosity and sisabet, assembles short clips from the television series *Supernatural* depicting images of women who are "shown only as eroticized, suffering or demonized." In a number of the clips, the images are difficult to see and had this video been made using pixilated video capture, it is reasonably likely that the point of many scenes' inclusion would not be perceptible. Several vids cited in the record reveal that extensive editing is often performed on the clips reproduced from motion pictures. For instance, in Luminosity's Vogue (using clips from the motion picture *300* to cast the violence in scenes from the movie in an aesthetically modified manner), not only are clips often rendered side-by-side and synchronized, but there is also color and timing modification of the clips used. Other vids also modify the original clips and images, saturating them with color and morphing images into others. For instance, lim's This Is How It Works (using clips from the series *Stargate: Atlantis*) and Us (with clips from a long list of movies) both morph and colorize clips to serve the messages of the vids. Although some vids cited do not significantly alter the actual images, the pace of the clips or the focus on a particular part of the clip by the vidder tend to demand clarity of the clips in order to perceive the purpose for inclusion. For instance, in Closer, by T. Jonesy and Killa, the vidders present an alternative interpretation of an episode from *Star Trek* in order to hypothesize about the relationship between Captain Kirk and Spock. In Handlebars, by Seah and Margie, the vidders examine the Doctor character in the series *Dr. Who* [sic], extracting a multitude of short clips from the series to demonstrate the development of the character while also choosing scenes that fit the lyrics of the song that accompanies the clips. In the course of the character development, the vidders begin whimsically, and then reveal how the smaller exercises of power lead to violence and destruction at the Doctor's hands. This vid criticizes the "moral blind spots by recontextualizing events viewers have already seen." Although some may question the significance of the comment or criticism at issue in these vids, some comment or criticism is involved that either requires or significantly benefits from the use of high quality reproductions of the clips from motion pictures.[76]

This validation was heady; in fact, this entire period of organization, visibility, and activism was exciting. In a very short period, vidders went from being completely underground

[74] Marybeth Peters, "Recommendation of the Register of Copyrights," Copyright.gov, June 11, 2010, 66.

[75] Peters, "Recommendation," 66.

[76] Peters, "Recommendation," 66–68.

artists to being profiled in national publications and formally recognized by the Library of Congress. "We are amazing and enormous—more than we realize," one vidder said at the Town Hall. "We have secret strengths as a community that we don't know about because we hide."[77] Now that vidding had come out of hiding, vidders felt suddenly energized, powerful, jubilant.

Being vidders, of course they vidded it. In the midst of what felt like a movement, Counteragent made **DESTINY CALLING: A TRIBUTE TO VIDDING** (2008) (Video 65 https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.10069132.cmp.65) for More Joy Day, an annual online festival dedicated to spreading joy. "I was giddy with the flush of infatuation with the craft, the vids, and the vidders," Counteragent later told Henry Jenkins. "I was shouting my love from the mountaintops.[78] A metavid made from other (properly credited) vids, Destiny Calling has the same swelling pride as the Oscars montage of the year's best films. It is a joyful boast, a triumphant showing off of the art.

"So we may be gorgeous / So we may be famous," the song begins, cutting to instantly recognizable shots from lim's Us and Luminosity's Vogue before going on to name check and celebrate a host of other vids. The song's chorus runs, "This is our destiny calling / We're freaks / Unique / This is our destiny calling now," which nicely encapsulates both vidding's heroic public triumphs and the residual sense of being part of a freakish geek culture. In "Nothing

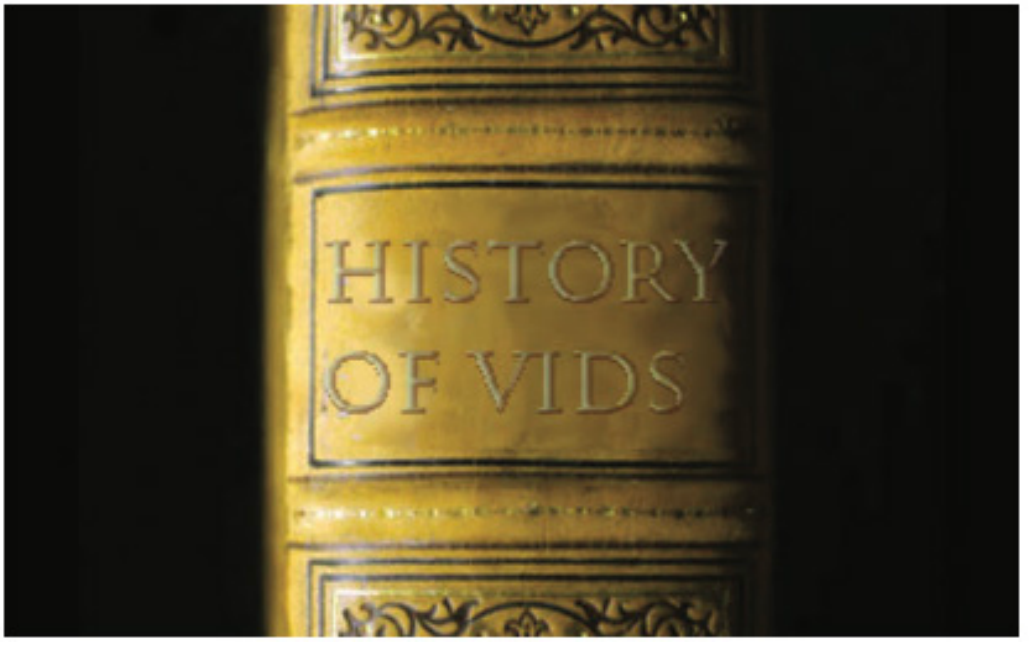


Fig. 19. History of vids from Counteragent's DESTINY CALLING: A TRIBUTE TO VIDDING (2008).

but Net: When Cultures Collide," Cathy Cupitt describes Destiny Calling as "a snapshot of the fannish zeitgeist of that moment," noting that it not only alludes to the formation of "a

[77] Par Avion, "Panel Notes from VVC 2007."

[78] Henry Jenkins, "DIY Media 2010: Fan Vids (Part Four)," Confessions of An Aca-Fan (blog), November 30, 2010, http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2010/12/diy_media_2010_fan_vids_part_f.html

recognizable canon" but also references current events in vidding culture.[79] In Destiny Calling, Counteragent includes shots of Luminosity's *New York Magazine* profile, OTW's website, video editing software, and vids on YouTube. She also imagines a leather-bound History of Vids on the shelf of a library (leather-bound *History of Vids on the shelf of a library* (Figure 19 https://doi.org/10.3998/ mpub.10069132.cmp.155)—a book very like this one.

[79] Cathy Cupitt, "Nothing but Net: When Cultures Collide," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 1 (2008), https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2008.055

CHAPTER 41

Coming Out as Popular Media Practice: The Politics of Queer Youth Coming Out on YouTube

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Abstract

This contribution explores the popularity of coming out videos in contemporary media culture. Examining coming out videos as a collection of popular media practices, it demonstrates how media cultures are shaping and regulating the meanings of coming out videos in queer youth culture. The aim of this paper is to deconstruct the functionalistic logics in which society and academic insights are taken the emancipatory potentials of an online coming out for granted. This paper argues that the politics of coming out stories on YouTube should be seen in relation to how media authenticate value in the form of symbolic capital to coming out stories. It is shown how these values relate to sexual hierarchies; such popular media practices silence the emotional investment of queer teens necessary to acquire such symbolic capital. Thereby, media cultures attain a value (economic or symbolic) to queer youths' most vulnerable and defining moment.

Keywords

Queer Youth, Coming Out, Authenticity, YouTube, Popular Media Culture

CC BY

> *your support means the absolute world to me & i hope this doesn't change a thing. i love you guys & can't thank you enough for everything xx*
>
> YouTube celebrity ConnorFranta on his coming out video [1]

Preceded by a large number of queer youths, [2] popular YouTube stud ConnorFranta decided to record his own coming out story on his popular YouTube channel. He wanted to share his story to support other queer youth, and in doing so, he received an overwhelmingly positive response. The popularity of the video exploded rapidly, having been shared countless times across social media networks and reported on an international level by newspapers such as *The Guardian* (Parkinson, 2014). It seems that YouTube coming out videos, which may be seen as an opportunity for queer youth to come out of invisibility and receive support (Pullen, 2012), have rapidly expanded beyond their primary use within the queer community and became a popular mainstream genre on YouTube (Alexander & Losh, 2010). However, the popularity of coming out stories can be observed in mass media as well. The coming out genre has been adopted by celebrities, such as Olympic swimmer Tom Daley, while television talk shows, such as *Oprah*, are known for granting people the ability to disclose information about their intimate lives, including coming out stories. Some shows have been developed with the specific aim of helping youths come out to their parents, albeit on (live) television. For example, broadcasters in the Netherlands and the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium aired the reality TV show *Uit De Kast* (*Out of the Closet*), in which the host of the show emotionally guides a queer teen participant to come out to parents, family, and friends, while "live" on the air, in the presence of a television production crew (Boross & Reijnders, 2015).

The Internet and social media platforms have been applauded for the opportunities they offer to queer youths for a variety of different reasons, most notably in the process of coming out (Szulc & Dhoest, 2013). The Internet has been known to provide young queer teens with information about coming out. Additionally, social media offer queer teenagers the ability to participate in their own media representations and the opportunity for a kind of political activism wherein teens can share coming out stories to provide and gain support in queer communities, but also wherein queer youths can become more visible in mainstream culture (Wuest, 2014). Although coming out on social media can be therapeutic for individual storytellers, the current popularity of these coming out stories situates their personal and intimate narratives firmly within broader popular media cultures; coming out stories have become media spectacles—entertaining stories that are performed for "live" audiences by "ordinary" citizens as well as celebrities.

Our aim is to offer critical insights that investigate the conjunctions between queer youth culture and the culture of contemporary media, thereby deconstructing functionalistic insights that see digital media platforms as no more than meaningless intermediators. It is often argued—uncritically—that current participatory media cultures are offering queer youth digital platforms (such as YouTube) to allow emancipation (Wuest, 2014) and a political activism that successfully challenges normative gender and sexual identities (Alexander & Losh, 2010; Pullen 2012; Vivienne & Burgess, 2012). Examining coming out stories as popular

[1] See ConnorFranta (2014)

[2] Within the context of this chapter, the concept of "queer" will be used as an umbrella term for those who do not consider their sexual identity to be heterosexual, and who may identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer.

media practices, we challenge this idea of emancipation by reflecting on the politics of queer youth's coming out stories on YouTube. We consider the politics of these mediated coming out stories to be intertwined with the politics of sexuality.[3] Furthermore, we will relate these sexual politics to the way media cultures could be understood as shaping, but also regulating, the meanings of coming out stories in queer youth culture. Drawing on five YouTube coming out videos of gay male youths from the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium and the Netherlands, we will discuss the content of the videos as well as offering a grounded exploration of the comments from the audiences (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012), while also drawing on the context in which these video appeared to understand how they became popular. First, we will explore the role of coming out stories in queer youth culture and contemporary media culture. Second, we will analyze the particular subjectivities produced in YouTube coming out videos, and the process of 'making' them. Through these explorations, we will deconstruct a powerful myth related to coming out on YouTube—the myth that YouTube functions as a site of emancipation in queer youth culture. Third, we will reflect on the politics, arguing that coming out has particular symbolic and economic value authenticated by media, which is essential in understanding its popularity.

Coming Out Stories as Popular Media-Related Practices

A coming out moment, according to Susanne Driver, "is one of the main features of queer youth culture" (Driver 2008, p. 166). Although the act of coming out can be therapeutic for individuals, it is inherently a social process; a modern coming out story connects the private and personal spheres of an individual to the public and the political (Plummer, 1995, p. 82). Because of the perceived deviance of queer stories (Cohler & Hammack, 2007), a coming out story is, essentially, a political act, as it represents the movement of an individual out of a normal heterosexual subject position to something that is "Other." Since the 1960s, coming out stories have been an important aspect of gay and lesbian life. Through a collective coming out experience, a community has been established that has allowed for a sense of belonging to a group in which friendships and intimate and erotic experiences have been developed, and in which partners could be found (Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001, p. 88). Previously, coming out stories had been "dramatically excluded"—symbolically annihilated, we could say—while in the 1980s, coming out stories were publicized as an empowerment strategy (Plummer, 1995, p. 27). Today, coming out stories support the construction of identity for queer youth, granting them agency on which to act in everyday life (Driver, 2008). These self-reflexive stories are said to stimulate progression by neutralizing stigma (Pullen, 2012); moreover, coming out stories have steered a wide "politicalisation of sexual difference" (Plummer, 1995, p. 89–90) that opened up the path for the democratization of diverse intimate sexualities in Western life-worlds (Giddens, 1992).

From a more critical sociological perspective or from a queer non-normative point of view, coming out stories are more complex, as they involve the cost of passing as heteronormative subjects (Smith & Watson, 2010). Coming out stories are considered being about conforming to a societal demand for coherent gender and sexual identities (Butler, 2006; Chambers & Carver, 2008), a demand that subjects people to making clear choices between fixed and

[3] The politics of sexuality concern the making and contesting of sexual hierarchies (Seidman 2010, p. 55).

essentialist identity categories. The identity work of coming out stories is "deeply paradoxical" (Weeks, 2007; 88), in that the need to create sexual identity narratives for empowerment narrows a whole range of queer experiences. For queer youth who do not want to inscribe themselves into the heteronormative sexual and gender order, the work of coming out can intensify the sense of insecurity if there is any uncertainty about how to label their sexuality (Driver, 2008). Rather than allowing queer teens the capacity to disclose their sexual identities, coming out stories are often discursively framed as "brave" acts of assimilation to a coherent gender and sexual order that allows a functioning in heteronormative society (Hackford-Peer, 2010). These narratives of assimilation have been adopted by gay civil rights movements; however, they have been proven to be problematic for those youths who do not conform to normative gender norms, such as the effeminate boy or the masculine girl (Driver, 2008). Eminent scholar on sexuality Jeffrey Weeks, referencing Judith Butler's (2006) *Gender Trouble*, argues that these stories are no more than stylized repetitions of performative acts, indicating that coming out stories are no more than "fictions" structured through the repetitive use of a particular language (Weeks, 2007, p. 88). While coming out stories may be important for queer youths in everyday life on an individual and social level, the deeply paradoxical nature of coming out stories should make us aware that they only become meaningful in larger heteronormative societies and cultures.

Contributions to the study of queer youth culture have focused on digital media as opportunity structures in which one can participate in empowering storytelling that gives meanings to a diversity of gender and sexual identities to (possibly) large audiences (Wuest, 2014). Other studies have been critical of the democratic value of this storytelling (Sender, 2012; Cover & Prosser, 2013, Alexander & Losh, 2010)—we will discuss these studies further in this article. Although these two perspectives might seem to be in opposition, their views regarding the role of the media within the politics of telling stories about gender and sexual identities seem to be in agreement. Both these perspectives explore the deeply paradoxical nature of everyday life stories on gender and sexual identities (as we have explained in our discussion of coming out stories), though they both reduce the role of storytelling platforms, such as YouTube, to meaningless intermediators (De Ridder, 2015; van Dijck, 2012). However, deeming the role of the media to be meaningless is problematic when investigating the conjunctions between queer youth culture and contemporary media culture. We argue that "the media" must be viewed as a meaningful mediator that centralizes symbolic power.

"The media," as we will use the term, does not refer to a particular media institution (as, in our case, YouTube) or to a particular media text, but rather, is used as a way to make sense of societal and cultural practices related to the media (Couldry, 2012); specifically, we consider how coming out stories, which were not media-related before, become meaningful as popular media-related practices. By "popular," we mean that they are popular in a quantitative sense (e.g., "coming out" generates more than 12,800,000 results on YouTube), and also in a qualitative sense, in that these deeply personal stories have become an entertaining genre that features a recognizable narrative (Alexander & Losh, 2010; Cover & Prosser, 2013). This genre has become significant in media culture and does not limit itself to YouTube; it is also well-known to include moments of "live" emotional confessions in television talk shows, such as Oprah (Oprah.com, 2013), or in the aforementioned reality TV show Uit De Kast (Boross and Reijnders, 2015).

Sexual Subjectivities and YouTube Coming Out Videos

Queer youth culture has benefitted from the Internet in many ways. Not surprisingly, the Internet has been considered a "lifesaver" for many queer teens (Gross, 2007). This has been demonstrated in the work of Mary L. Gray (2009) who argues that the Internet offers queer rural youth the opportunity to transcend their everyday life spaces to come "out of invisibility" in ways that would not otherwise be possible. Moreover, the moment of coming out is known to structure Internet use of queer youth; specifically, it has been shown that the use of the Internet for "sexual identity formation" (e.g., to seek contact with other lesbian, gay, and bisexual people or to look for information) is significantly higher in the period before coming out (Szulc & Dhoest, 2013). Bryan Wuest's (2014) essay "Coming Out Videos and Queer Identities on YouTube" supports this view by presenting the example of a 19-year-old gay boy who, in an online interview, declared that YouTube "opened up a world" for him in times when he felt alone without any contact with gay peers (Wuest, 2014, p.23). Such insights show that for queer youths, with regard to their social lives, the role of the Internet must not be taken lightly, but should be seen as playing a key role in the young person's rite of passage in terms of gender and sexual identity development. For Wuest, YouTube coming out stories function as texts that are used to achieve acculturation and visibility. Acculturation refers to the notion of "queer youth receiving information about a shared culture and experience in order to better equip themselves to both interact within the queer community and to survive in mainstream culture," while "visibility" refers to the idea of "viewers seeing varied representations of queerness, and vloggers deliberately making themselves visible and 'real'" (2014, p. 24).

While Wuest's arguments focus on the function of coming out videos on YouTube as producing empowered sexual subjectivities by supporting acculturation and visibility, others have argued that these videos could reproduce normative subjectivities, rather than reflect a wide range of queer experiences in youth culture. Jonathan Alexander and Elisabeth Losh (2010) argue that coming out stories on YouTube "may still be subjected to architectures of corporate control that can contain and filter out certain queer experiences" (2010, p. 48). Rob Cover and Rosslyn Foster focus on the memorial accounts in coming out stories on YouTube, stating "The memorial accounts in coming out stories, whether in older texts and face-to-face groups or across new sites such as YouTube, indicate the persistence of stereotypes as a narrative form deployed for the coherence of sexual subjectivity" (2013, p. 92). Cover and Foster argue that in the narrative structure of coming out videos, a linear trajectory from the past to the future is established. Such a linear trajectory argues how the storyteller always knew he was gay: "I always knew I was gay from early childhood" (2013, p. 86). The authors argue that these memorial accounts, or "acts of re-remembering," are constructed out of a cultural demand for coherent, stable, and fixed gender and sexual identities, and that they should be seen as normative and stereotypical interpretations of memories, rather than based on "true facts." This stabilization of queer identities in the YouTube coming out videos through the act of re-remembering is viewed as the standardized genre for coming out narratives online, constituting a performative queer identity that reinforces clear normative conventions and coherence.

Exploring YouTube Coming Out Videos

We have explored five coming out videos on YouTube as shown in table one. We will describe the story they have to tell, but also show fragments resulting from a grounded analyses of the comments responding to the YouTube coming out videos. Of each video, we analysed 100 comments (the first 50 and last 50 comments on each video). Our cases are posted by gay youth from the Netherlands and the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. [4] Focusing on videos from the relatively small Dutch-speaking language community, allows us to show how coming out stories, as a genre, travelled outside of the Anglophone language context that is usually dominantly reported upon. Furthermore, we will elaborate on the societal debates surrounding these YouTube videos. Rather than taking a representative sample of Dutch-speaking YouTube coming out videos, we have chosen to elaborate in-depth on five topical cases to demonstrate our theoretical arguments.

Table 1: Overview of the five cases

Youtube channel title	**Title of the video**	**Date uploaded**	**Number of views**	**Number of comments**	**Likes / dislikes**
Broer.	*Coming-out Jeltje | Broer*	8 May 2015	14.099	113	580 likes/16 dislikes
EricosVlogs	*Mijn Coming Out Verhaal*	12 October 2010	70.046	519	1103 likes/65 dislikes
Furtjuh	*Mijn Coming Out Verhaal | #Furtjuh*	10 December 2015	594.460	26.333	44244 likes/1042 dislikes
Hjalmar	*MIJN COMING OUT—Hjalmar*	29 June 2015	22.537	237	682 likes/26 dislikes
Luka Peeters	*Coming Out*	12 December 2014	167.698	252	1682 likes/90 dislikes

The coming out stories included in our sample all have some common textual elements that are typical for the genre, such as the use of a talking head (a narrator viewed in a close-up talking in the camera lens as used in vlogging), while the background is usually a bedroom. While *Luka Peeters* filmed the video in black and white, which gave the video a more emotional appeal, the other videos used bright and colorful lightening. *Hjalmar*, for example, included a rainbow flag in the editing to introduce the video, which faded away once he started talking. *Hjalmar's* use of the rainbow flag symbol underscores the video's political goal; all of the included examples were very much about empowering other gay youths and minorities. All of the stories had more or less the same structure, each of them was ending with the most important message they wanted to share: [5]

> We should stop judging people based on their sexual identity (Broer.)

[4] We consider all the narrators included in the five case studies as youth. Although we do not know the exact ages of the narrators, *Broer., Hjalmar and Luka Peeter*s are teenagers older than 16, while *EricosVlogs* and *Furtjuh* are in their twenties.

[5] We translated all of the examples (the texts from the YouTube coming out videos, comments on the YouTube videos and extracts from newspaper articles) we include here from Dutch to English for practical reasons. We have been very careful not to change the intended meaning.

> You are who you are and people should respect you (EricosVlogs)
>
> Be yourself and become the best version of yourself (Furtjuh)
>
> Be yourself (Hjalmar)
>
> You are who you are and people should respect you (Luka Peeters)

These political acts of empowerment are not only limited to the video either but are also found in the comments responding to the videos. The comments section often reinforces the supportive goal of the video, with commenters sharing their own experiences of coming out and numerous affirmative reactions that show respect, pride, courage, and gratitude for the sharing. In this way, YouTube coming out videos were contextualized as brave acts that can help other people through the process of sharing their own stories, allowing queer youth to cope with the rejection and trauma of everyday life:

> When I found out I was gay I was terrified and did not dare to tell it to anyone. […] I told my friends but one of them told it to everyone else at school. I'm still bullied now, but not by my friends. (commentary on the video of Hjalmar).

The coming out stories in the videos had a clear symbolic formula, which means there was a recognizable narrative in which the storyteller constructs a linear progression towards an essential gay identity, starting from the position of a confused sexual subject. This creates, as mentioned by Cover and Prosser (2013), a performative identity that is based on repetitive communicative acts. For example, *EricosVlogs, Furtjuh* and *Hjalmar* start their coming out story at the moment when they are 14 or 15 years of age. Such a consistent narrative construction of a gay identity is essential to a video's political identity project and is attached to the act of re-remembering what it was like to realize they were gay. The videos of *Luka Peeters* and *Broer.* are somewhat different. *Luka Peeters'* video is an actual coming out moment, in which he addresses himself to the many friends and acquaintances that did not know he was gay yet; "I want everyone to know, this is the reason I'm making this video". The YouTube video of Broer. has an interesting twist; the video shows a boy coming out as straight, while relying on the same storytelling conventions as those of the typical genre of gay coming out videos. *Broer.* is a YouTube channel run by two teenage Dutch boys calling themselves "best friends". One of them identifies as gay, while the other is straight. Showing the straight boy coming out instead of the gay one, the video exposes coming out discourses as fictions.[6] The video explains how coming out as gay makes no sense, as it is based on a system of inequality. Broer. illustrates the coming out genre's potential for resistance by questioning the idea of assimilation; gay youth are expected to be 'brave' and therefore expose their sexual identities. The comment section attached to the YouTube video of Broer. opened up as a space for critical reflection on the idea of 'coming out':

> I think it is ridiculous that you still need to come out of the closet. This means people are still not equal. Good you are showing this in the video! (commentary on the video of Broer.)

While all of the included videos were clearly political and aimed at helping other gay peers, for some of those young people that were telling the story on YouTube, it demanded a considerable emotional investment to do so. This was illustrated in the video of *Luka Peeters* in which he

[6] Other videos on the YouTube channel of *Broer*. make clear one of the friends is gay, while the other is straight.

clearly showed his emotional discomfort, talking with a slow and almost whispering voice. At the beginning of the video he claimed: "I have never been so nervous in my life". *Furtjuh* started the video with reading the many cruel and homophobic comments he received on his Instagram posts that include a picture of him and his boyfriend. While he continuous talking about the many difficulties he experienced when he needed to come out as gay (dealing with bullying and feeling excluded), he starts crying.

Further, while it is shown in table one that the coming out videos are much more liked than disliked, there are a considerable number of commenters rejecting the coming out videos. Some comments respond to coming out videos in a way that privileges heterosexuality or use homophobic language (McCormack, 2012); these comments contribute to the meaning-making of coming out as on the YouTube platform. Moreover, they illustrate how the emotional discomfort of the storytellers is real, they are aware they will need to deal with negative comments. As *Furtjuh* states at the end of his video: "I know that, probably, when you see this, you will find haters in the comment section saying nasty things". Also, the emotional investment is recognized on YouTube, as one commenter on the video of *Hjalmar* states: "It is so brave that you dare to share this on YouTube, I would be too afraid". We observed that religious positions and convictions were used to reject the coming out story. More direct homophobic language, on the other hand, is aimed at ridiculing the coming out video. Often such homophobic comments were examples of anonymous trolling.

> Gays are just not normal, just read the Bible (commentary on the video of Hjalmar)
>
> You nasty gay, just go away (commentary on the video of EricosVlogs)
>
> You had better stayed in the closed and locked yourself up, hahaha (commentary on the video of Luka Peeters)
>
> I really don't like gays, I think they are dirty (commentary on the video of Broer.)

As made clear by these examples, producing coming out videos demands an emotional investment of the narrator; an analysis of the comments shows that coming out stories on YouTube are not only received positively, but often harshly judged and rejected.

How the Popularity of Coming Out on YouTube "Functions"

The YouTube platform is a mediator; it has a strategy to push the popularity of certain videos through quantifying the video's views and the times it was liked. When YouTube realized how coming out stories are a popular genre worldwide on the platform, YouTube celebrated coming out stories when the U.S. Supreme Court recognized the constitutional right for all couples to marry. YouTube made a compilation of coming out videos and put them in the "spotlight", launching the hashtag #ProudToLove, which generated a lot of views (YouTube, 2015). Looking at our included cases and the number of views (shown in table one), it can be seen that they are somewhat high, taking into account the Dutch language in which they are produced. While *Luka Peeters* is an exception, the other coming out videos are produced by regular vloggers of whom the coming out video was one of the most popular on the channel, which was the case for *Broer., EricosVlogs* and *Hjalmar*. As argued by Cohler and Hammack, coming out stories are often 'hyperrecognized' because of their 'perceived deviance' (Cohler & Hammack 2007, p. 56). Sometimes, YouTube coming out stories are not only hyperrecog-

nized by 'ordinary' people watching on YouTube, but also followed with a special attention by other mass media. An awareness of the political economy of current media cultures should make it clear that platforms such as YouTube are not separate from the mass media industry and culture, but that both are inextricably intertwined. People's participation in social media and their stories are increasingly becoming promoted, reproduced, and circulated as mass media commodities. In current media culture, there exists a complex convergence between users and producers, amateurs and professionals, media makers and consumers (van Dijck 2013a, p. 128).

Luka Peeters' coming out video became widely recirculated as a mass media commodity. Many Belgian newspapers reported on *Luka Peeters'* coming out video, as shown by the following examples of Belgian newspaper headlines shortly after *Luka Peeters* uploaded his coming out:

> Luka: from fear to fame thanks to YouTube (Krant van West-Vlaanderen)
>
> Luka overwhelmed with praise for coming out video (Het Nieuwsblad)
>
> New trend: out of the closet by making a video (Het Laatste Nieuws)
>
> "One click and all my problems disappeared" (Het Laatste Nieuws)

Because of the significant attention in the national press, *Luka Peeters*'s video became a media spectacle quickly generating over 150.000 YouTube views, reproduced in mass media and shared on numerous social media. This is rather remarkable, as *Luka Peeters* had not uploaded any other video before, he was not a popular vlogger as some of the others were. As argued by Douglas Kellner, (2003), media spectacles centralize a large amount of media power. The political economy of social media "deploys spectacle to promote, reproduce, and circulate commodities" (Kellner, 2003, p. 1) from which mass media, including popular newspapers, are also benefitting.

While there is no particular powerful "center" to the media—no particular corporation, audience, or individual is controlling which coming out video will be made or become 'popular', it is clear that media and its institutions as a whole hold a massive amount of symbolic power; often that power is naturalized in cultures and societies, something which digital and participatory media have made even more complex (Couldry, 2012). Participatory media such as YouTube constructed themselves as "natural" access points to social space wherein queer youths are able to come out. Moreover, it is seen as giving us access to the social reality of queer teens, which is, as we contend, a powerful *myth* that has become naturalized with regard to the way that the media and mediated coming out stories "function." This mythical construction is powerful, as it normalizes the way coming out stories, as previously mentioned, are deeply paradoxical in everyday life (Weeks, 2007). Moreover, it normalizes the reliance of coming out stories on heteronormative culture. This myth is primarily based on a functionalist understanding of the workings of the media (Couldry, 2003)—as if the media were an intermediator where people could participate in a safe space as their "true" selves. In the case of *Luka Peeters*, it is illustrated how media spaces hold particular symbolic power of which there is no control. Several comments on the video of Luka Peeters blamed him for seeking the attention of the media: "I respect you for being gay, but not for the fact that you are demanding so much attention!". Others were harsher, saying things such as "you sick

attention whore". *Luka Peeters* himself responded himself in one of the comments, saying he was not in control of the video becoming so popular in the Belgian press:

> I did not ask for all the attention. When you would have looked at my video than you can see I'm talking to people I actually know, I did not expect to get more than 100 views. So please stop this bullshit. I think I have been able to help many other people with this, so that is what counts.

Recent research on YouTube coming out stories has not deconstructed the myth of how coming out stories "function," but rather has reinforced the naturalized status of the media and their reliance on symbolic power. In his work, Wuest (2014) argues that coming out videos on YouTube produce empowered sexual subjectivities through acculturation and visibility, whereas Cover and Prosser's assertion that queer identities are stabilized on YouTube; yet both see this medium as no more than a meaningless platform on which gender and sexual ideologies are either resisted or incorporated (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998). The arguments of Wuest (2014) with regard to the function of YouTube as a platform for the acculturation or visibility of queer youth is problematic precisely because it reproduces the myth *as if* the media were a natural way to become "visible" and "real," and as if the media provided a space to become "acculturated" as a young queer person. Rather, we should ask different questions: How do coming out stories become visible on YouTube? How are media platforms such as YouTube constructed as natural spaces for the acculturation of queer youth culture?

Discussing the Politics of Coming Out Stories on YouTube

The politics of YouTube coming out stories should be considered in relation to the workings of media culture, which would allow for an understanding of how the media shapes and regulates the meanings of coming out stories in queer youth culture. We contend that coming out stories, as a popular media practice, are related to two recent developments in Western culture. The first development involves the specific way in which media have participated in the production of culture in the last two decades. The second evolution is related to the transformation of intimate sexualities that have become endless public dialogues instead of being exclusively private (Plummer, 1995; 2003). Graeme Turner (2010) has referred to these developments in media and culture as "demotic," referring to the "increasing number of ordinary people that appear in the media" (2010, p. 1). The increased participation of "ordinary" people in the media, such as for emotional self-disclosures in talk shows like *Oprah*, but also found in the popular genre of reality TV, have shown that media spectacles are immensely popular. In the current culture, becoming a celebrity is seen as relatively easy as the barrier to large audiences has been lowered, and can be achieved by participating in a game show or launching an entertaining YouTube channel (e.g., the "YouTube celebrity" has become a well-known concept). Turner relates these new forms of media to the increasing commercial challenges for media industries, but also to a crisis of credibility, authority, and what is seen as "real" in the media (2010, p. 2). For example, using "ordinary" people as witnesses in news reports, or granting people access to the media to tell their stories on a talk show, constructs the media as a more credible source of social reality. Recently, digital media culture has constructed, under the form of so-called "social media," the ultimate access point to what is

"real." Social media promises a "live" connection with our families and friends through the use of their platforms (Couldry, 2011).

In tandem with these developments in media culture, we observe a second development: A plethora of sexual stories and images are currently widespread in cultures and societies. Particularly in the media; whether through the consumption of mass media representations, through the creation of self-representations on social networking sites, or through communications with their lovers on (semi-) public digital media platforms (Plummer 1995; 2003; Pascoe, 2011). These endless productions of intimate stories on different media platforms may intervene in how to make sense of cultural identities, such as those of queer youth; these endless productions shape the way "queer" becomes "real." Numerous representations in mass or digital media have the power to authenticate queerness (Gray, 2009).

Both the demotic turn in media and the transformation of intimacies and sexualities in Western cultures have legitimized media as a stage for coming out stories. Whether through reality TV shows, such as *Uit De Kast,* which allow us to follow the "live" and "real" coming out stories of a young gay boy or girl to friends and family, or whether on digital platforms, such as YouTube, wherein we can see people participating in the mediation of their coming out stories, "people are willing to reveal significant and often painful aspects of their lives to large audiences. Meanwhile, media institutions persist and claim legitimacy for their power, based in media's underlying claim to stand in for the social" (Couldry, 2012, p. 72). An apparent question is then: why are people willing to reveal those significant and often painful aspects of their lives?

Behind coming out stories in the media, there seems to be an underlying value; when symbolic forms become valuable, they create symbolic capital, which involves certain distinctions and hierarchies connected to cultural capital (knowledge), but also to economic capital (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984). We could say that through participation in certain media forms, coming out stories give shape to different media-related practices that have a value that is associated with the media. For example, this value could be that queer youth receive enormous support for sharing their "brave" coming out story, which leads to a higher status and reputation within the online economy of YouTube. The media—in this case, YouTube—are essential tools through which this value can be attained through the construction of the myth as if it were the natural access point to queer youths' coming out stories.

The Value of Coming Out on YouTube

The importance of deconstructing the myth of how coming out on YouTube functions becomes clear when the coming out stories we have discussed are considered in relation to the way they generate value within culture and society; understanding their value exposes their relatedness to sexual hierarchies. The use of social media to mediate coming out stories fits within what José van Dijck has described as a wider "culture of connectivity" augmented by the marketing of social media platforms and companies. These platforms have made self-promotion and the branding of the self increasingly valuable in current cultures, and in youth culture specifically; according to van Dijck:

> Promoting and branding the self has also become a normalized, accepted phenomenon in ordinary people's lives. Following the examples of celebrities' self-promotion, many users (especially young

> adults and teenagers) shape their online identities in order to gain popularity and hopefully reach a comfortable level of recognition and connectedness. (van Dijck, 2013b, p. 203)

As coming out stories are popular stories, they maximize the data traffic between people on social media platforms such as YouTube. Both connectivity and storytelling are principles by which social media platforms stir their economic and symbolic power. Coming out stories have value for social media platforms, but also for the individuals who share these stories. As shown in the case studies, the coming out videos were very popular contributions to the vloggers' YouTube channels. A coming out video on YouTube adds value to a coming out story through its extensive visibility and social interactions through likes and comments. In turn, this media visibility can lead to symbolic capital; specifically, the media visibility gained by posting a coming out story on YouTube engenders a specific form of celebrity capital that is intertwined with being visible in the media (Driessens, 2013). *Furtjuh* is one of the examples of YouTube vloggers that has turned his YouTube channel into a carefully styled popular brand. *Furtjuh* is considered as one of the most popular vloggers of the Netherlands and uses many different tactics to generate as much visibility and social traffic on his channel as possible; when *Luka Peeters'* video became popular, he made use of this visibility and started uploading more videos on his channel. Some other international YouTube vloggers take it one step further by using the specific advantage of liveness to add value to their videos. YouTube coming out videos that are internationally the most popular have titles such as "coming out live" or "coming out live to parents"; these titles make coming out stories feel more real and authentic, but they also make coming out videos more spectacular.

Mediated coming out videos take on a hierarchical status as they use particular media categories (such as taking advantage of the "live" element) to become popular, which may provide the storyteller with celebrity capital and connected symbolic capital. Indeed, these videos can provide vloggers with strong online reputations and large audiences. Two stories in Belgian newspapers about YouTube videos in which gay twins come out live to their parents gained significant attention. In one example, an American twin secretly recorded their coming out to their parents (HLN, 2014b), while the other set of gay twins recorded coming out live to their father in a telephone conversation (HLN, 2015). The play with media categories such as blending liveness with dramatization and spectacularization—e.g., the drama of the parents reacting to their twin sons announcing that they are gay at the same time—created an enormous international buzz (travelling far beyond the US context) and popularity for the YouTube channels of both twins. Not only do we need to be aware of the commercial context of these coming out stories, but also of social media culture's obsession with status and self-promotion and what Katherine Sender describes as "emotional labour" (2012). The emotional labor of coming out on YouTube refers to the effort of queer youths to transform a shameful identity into one of pride in order to gain value from a coming out story. This could be seen as a form of immaterial labor that demands an emotional investment. As we have shown in the discussed cases, the narrators were often very nervous to share their coming out stories, while others started crying when talking about the pain and suffering they went through. These queer youths not only have to deal with members of the audience that reject the coming out story, but they must also publicly deal with painful aspects of queer trauma, which was especially the case for *Furtjuh*. This emotional investment is necessary to acquire

dramatic entertainment and spectacle—and thus value. Moreover, this particular investment is linked with the construction of a coherent and recognizable identity and community that is intelligible by a wide audience.

The way that coming out stories have become popular media practices on YouTube should make us question the notion that these videos are simply sharing experiences and providing support within queer communities. We do not argue that all coming out videos are carefully constructed spectacles made by the narrators to acquire symbolic capital; but they do all operate within the logic of social media culture. The practice of publicly "sharing" a coming out experience to publicly support these coming out videos not only provides economic currency for social media companies like YouTube (see our example on #ProudToLove), but even more symbolic, as social media companies construct themselves as the central hub to queer youth sociality at its most vulnerable and defining moment.

Conclusion

While exploring the conjunctions between queer youth culture and contemporary media culture with a critical analysis of the popular media practice of coming out, we deconstructed how coming out on YouTube functions. Thereby, we argued how the media naturalizes the paradox of coming out stories, in that the symbolic power of participatory media such as YouTube normalizes the reliance of these stories' meanings on a heteronormative culture (Weeks, 2007). Even more so, this so-called participatory media have constructed themselves as "natural" access points for young queer teens' socialities, while the workings of social media, which rely mostly on status and self-promotion, are not questioned. By introducing the idea that coming out stories are extending beyond YouTube to be turned into mass media spectacles, we should be aware that popular coming out stories are being promoted, reproduced, and circulated as commodities (Kellner, 2003). This is demonstrated by the visibility of coming out stories on YouTube, as well as by the utilization of dramatization and a "live" element and by the appropriation of coming out stories by commercial reality TV shows such as *Uit De Kast*. Behind coming out stories, there seems to be an underlying value through the acquisition of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984), such as the achievement of status as a celebrity (Driessens, 2013).

Coming out stories as popular media practices in queer youth culture raises some moral questions and the need for reflection on media ethics. These moral questions are—in a broad sense—about how to deal with the lives of queer youth that are emerging in newly pluralized mediated spheres such as social media (Plummer, 2003). Such moral questions always need to be situated in a political context, and more specifically, the politics of sexuality. Social media can offer a space for a democratic voicing of difference (Thumim, 2012) and can, therefore, be relevant for queer youth to come out of invisibility and deal with queer trauma. However, social media logic, such as self-branding, status, and its symbolic power, creates new conflict for the intimate lives of queer youth. For example, the rejection of a coming out video of a queer teen (e.g., homophobic comments responding to the video) could generate a positive democratic conflict; it is possible for the creator of the video and other commenters to rebuke and question these homophobic rejections; however, as previously argued, this could be at the emotional cost of the queer youths involved (Sender, 2012).

Asking the question than if it would not be better for queer youth not to share coming-out stories on YouTube, is asking the wrong question. The ethical question here is how to become different from YouTube (Kember & Zylinska, 2012, p. 172). With becoming different from YouTube, we do not mean using another technology or platform, as YouTube can offer some excellent opportunities. What we do mean is becoming different from popular media cultures that attain an economic or symbolic value to queer youths most vulnerable and defining moment.

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CHAPTER 42

Public Value and Participation of Civil Society—A Case for Public Service or Community Media?

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Abstract

Within this article, public service media and community media will be compared with regard to their potential to provide *access*, *interaction* and *participation* of civil society. These potentials will be identified at the level of organizational structures as well as the level of content production and evaluation. The theoretical considerations finally lead to the question whether and how the concept of *public value* as participation of civil society and accountability of media organizations is applicable to different forms of media organizations and which problems could arise out of that. By discussing how different dimensions of participation are realized within public service media and community media in the Austrian media market, we want to show how different structural prerequisites can also lead to different materializations of participation. In the end, this leads to the conclusion that public service media and community media in Austria do not only realize participation in different ways but thereby also fulfill their roles and tasks in democratic societies differently. We argue that instead of trying to

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apply a common framework, the output of and values created by public service media and community media have to be evaluated and measured in particular ways.

Keywords

Public Value, Public Service Media, Community Media, Civil Society, Access, Interaction, Participation, Democracy

1. Introduction: public value as co-production

The aim of this paper is to compare the potential of public service and community media with regard to the creation of inclusive and integrating values for society and to clarify the *public value* concept in this context. Is the concept of *public value,* defined as increased participation of civil society within organizational decision making, applicable for different forms of media organizations? The basic underlying assumption for us is the notion of Mark Moore, who concluded that *public value* can only be created by cooperation between public organizations and society (Moore 1995: 56). The term *public value* has its origins in neoclassical economics and has therefore not been closely tied to the media and democratic concerns right from the beginning. Moore (1995) tried to develop a concept for public administration in order to make it more efficient and effective. He identified two main components of *public value*: *contestation* and *co-production*. The concept of *public value* we use here basically relies on Mark Moore's latter notion (Moore 1995: 56). It is the element which has been overtaken by public service broadcasters, first and foremost the BBC [1]: In order to create *public value* for society, it seems necessary to collaborate and cooperate with citizens. This implies the consideration of people as citizens rather than consumers. The re-definition of functions and tasks of public organizations therefore should always happen by feedback-loops and cooperation with societal actors. These practices seem to be useful for fostering accountability of media organizations. Since then, the concept is seen as a means of producing public service content which serves democratic values and enables citizens to build their own political opinion. Public service media have occupied the term to describe their performance and benefits for society quite successfully, and also community media recently tend to stress their potential for creating *public value*. Therefore, we should ask what this benefit actually is and at which levels it can be localized. We argue in this paper that there are differences between public service and community media in particular when it comes to ways and measures how citizens' participation and the organizations accountability practices are realized. To be able to identify the core principles of *public value*, we must start by discussing the roots of the media's particular role for society in democratic theory.

[1] The BBC has transferred the term to the discussion about broadcasting policies for the first time in 2004 by publishing the paper "Building Public Value" (BBC 2004). The so-called *public value test* was subsequently established in 2007 and was followed by similar approaches in several European countries. For the BBC, *public value* has three elements: "Value to people as individuals" (individual value), "Value to the society as a whole" (citizen value) and "Impact on the performance of the wider commercial market" (net economic value) (BBC 2004: 29).

2. Media accountability and democracy

Different overviews on democratic theory (Held 2006; Cunningham 2008) conclude that the abundant concept of democracy is far from being consistent. Democracy is always related in some form to the people's sovereignty and the principle that power must be rooted in the people and the governing actors stay accountable to the people at any time.

> "Democracy means popular sovereignty. In whatever particular form it might take, a democratic community represents the triumph of the rule of the many over rule by the few. (…) While different theories of democracy define popular sovereignty in different ways, they almost always agree on its two basic constituents: equality and liberty." (Christians et al. 2009: 91)

The different ways in which equality, liberty and participation of people within decision-making processes are defined in a democratic system leads to the realization of many different forms of democracy. Recent systematizations tend to allocate different models of democracy along a continuum of minimalist to maximalist positions concerning key values of democracy. Baker (2002) differentiates between elite, republican and liberal pluralist democracy and suggests the consideration of a fourth model which he calls complex democracy. Strömbäcks (2005) distinction is similar and foresees four models of democracy, namely procedural, competitive, deliberative and participatory democracy, that are compared with regard to their normative expectations on the citizens' role and the central mechanisms of governing. The most useful and sophisticated systematization of democratic models was, however, delivered by Christians et al. (2009: 93–105). Their discussion of principles and practices of democracy led to the identification of two traditions of modern democratic thought (liberalism and republicanism) alongside which four models of democracy can be described: pluralist, administrative, civic and direct democracy. Their differentiation is realized according to key values [2] and how they are materialized differently. Moreover, this systematization is a valuable concept for media analysis as it has been transposed into different roles of (news) media in democracy. This includes a monitorial, a facilitative, a radical and a collaborative role (Christians et al.: 139–218) that all (to some extent and in different ways) result from the basic tasks of journalism in democracy which can be summarized as observing and informing, participating in public discussions and providing a forum for voices to be heard.

> The special relationship between democratic and media structures suggests the classification of different media systems alongside the classification of different models of democracy (cf. Held: 2006; Cunningham: 2008; Lijphart: 1999) as it was developed by several scholars (cf. Baker 2002; Strömbäck 2005; Christians et al. 2009). Certain values and tasks of media organizations might be realized in different ways, the normative implications of the main functions of media for democracy, however, remain quite universal to all democratic societies. Media organizations and media production are therefore often strongly linked to the idea of being able and obliged to serve the public interest. Public interest is the object of analysis within the work of McQuail (2005: 136ff). He distinguishes between two components of the public interest: the *majoritarian view*, which refers to "what the public is interested in" and the *unitarian view*, which refers to promoting democratic values such as avoiding commercialization, serving the interests of minorities and creating cultural diversity.

[2] These key values are the following: sovereignty, civil society, liberty, equality, public opinion, community and journalism (Christians et al. 2009: 97).

The relationship between media and democracy was often described as a "social contract" (for example by McQuail 1992). On the one hand, democracy promotes individual rights like freedom of speech, expression and information and fosters the independence of media organizations from other social actors and the state. On the other hand, democracy requires circulation of information due to its prerequisite of accountability of those in power to the people. Media "(…) fulfil their part of the social contract by providing citizens with the information they need in order to be free and self-governing, the government with the information it needs in order to make decisions in the common interest sensitive to public sentiments, an arena for public discussion, and by acting as a watchdog against abuse of power in politics and other parts of society." (Strömbäck 2005: 332) Democracy does not only require the transmission of information through media; this information should also be equally accessible by everyone and media should provide a certain form of control of those who are in power (Habermas 2008: 141). The discussion of the social contract between media and democracy, however, also implies the consideration of certain obligations of media organizations in democracies that directly result from the guarantees of universal freedom rights that democracy secures for media organizations but also for every citizen.

> "The media therefore act as trustees for this fundamental civic right. With it, however, comes an increased level of public accountability. Media cannot interpret their freedom of expression as absolute freedom to act in their own interest." (Nieminen/Trappel 2011: 141)

To whom media organizations should be accountable to and by which means such processes of justification and legitimization of media organizations and their actions and procedures can be achieved, is one of the most central questions for democratic societies. "Accountability refers to the willingness of the media to answer for what they do by their acts of publication, including what they do to society at large and refers as well to the feasibility of securing accountability where there is unwillingness. Being accountable is normally linked to accepting or being given, certain responsibilities, tasks, or goals." (Christians et al. 2009: 132) The authors distinguish between four different ways how public accountability can be realized within media organizations: laws and regulations provide obligations and tasks for media organizations in an institutionalized form, but also include sanctions in case of non-compliance. Public pressure in cases of a failure in fulfilling societal tasks and needs is another way of establishing accountability of media organizations. However, it only works in a negative way in the case of failure in promoting democratic values. The third way relates to professional forms of self-regulation that also require media organizations to open up to the integration of non-professional actors. Finally, interest mediation is a mechanism that promotes exchange of and agreement on needs and requirements of civil society. Baldi (2007) acknowledges that concepts of media accountability have been entering the political agenda of several European countries in the last couple of years. "Improving the formal and informal procedures used by broadcasters, regulators or self-regulating bodies for listening to audiences' interests and informing them about their activities—taking them into 'account'—has recently become a more serious concern." (Baldi 2007: 17) How successfully and innovatively such measures were developed and implemented varies not only from country to country but also within media sectors, as some organizational structures are more directly bound to democratic tasks than others. Finally, the concept of media accountability also refers to

the public value concept as participation of audiences goes hand in hand with the need for democratic accountability of media organizations. In the following chapter, it is our aim to clarify how audience participation can be theorized.

3. In search of a model for analyzing media participation

Central in this discussion about *public value* and its link to democracy as well as accountability practices is how and to what extent civil society is included in these communication practices and procedures and if its role is rather representational or participatory. The term civil society, as it is used here, includes not only formal associations and lobbies (Adloff 2005: 8), but also every single actor that acts in the public interest and voluntarily participates in the political decision-making process. Therefore, the term civil society is strongly corresponding with "citizen engagement", which aims to solve small or big problems that cannot be adequately solved by the state or private actors. According to Habermas (1996: 367) people in civil society discuss values, norms, laws and policies, through which public opinion is built. The on-going media policy paradigm shift from media regulation to media governance (Van Cuilenburg/McQuail 2003) is also linked to the inclusion of citizens through participatory processes. According to Meier (2011: 158), "Governance is seen as a possibility for Civil Society to gain or to consolidate some new forms of participation in political processes and decisions". Public service broadcasters have for a long time been seen as the main platform for integration of civil society, since they have legal obligations to do so (Christl/Süssenbacher 2010; Moe 2010). Nevertheless, direct participation and integration of civil society in content production and regulation procedures require trust in the audience and a commitment to adjust power relations in favor of strengthening the position of citizens by equalizing their role in media production and organizational decision-making.

> The inclusion of civil society in organizational decision-making and content production directly refers to a particular understanding of participation[3] that is the outcome of a certain power-relation between media organizations and citizens. "Within all fields, debates about participation focus exactly on the legitimization or the questioning and critiquing of the power (in-)equilibrium that structures these social relationships." (Carpentier 2011: 125)

Carpentier (2011: 69) therefore argues that the extent of inclusion or exclusion of citizens in decision-making processes can be situated in a continuum between minimalist and maximalist forms of participation. In minimal forms of participation in/through media control and power remain to a large extent with media professionals focusing rather on the provision of access to media content or organizations and interaction with non-professionals.

> "Importantly, though, the audience activities are developed on the media's term; feedback opportunities are developed according to institutional, editorial and economical considerations rather than societal considerations of media participation as an empowering tool. This implies that the activities initiated by the media are increasingly media centric." (Enli/Syvertson 2007: 158)

[3] The concepts of access and participation have their origins in the discussions on communication rights and the debates on a "New World Information and Communication Order" in the UNESCO. One of the main arguments of the MacBride-Report was the necessity of defining the role of participation in media systems (UNESCO 1980).

Such media-centered approaches turn out to be rather unidirectional and focused on some sort of a homogeneous audience. In contrast, maximalist forms of participation concepts focus on a balance between professional control and popular participation that is based on a broader definition of political engagement and social life. "This in turn, allows me to further characterize minimalist democratic participation as mainly concerned with the field of (institutionalized) politics, while maximalist democratic participation relates to the political." (Capentier 2011: 19) This is also stressed by Pateman (1970: 106): "The notion of a participatory society requires that the scope of the term 'political' is extended to cover spheres outside national government." Pateman (1970: 69ff) differentiates several forms of participation according to how strict they are on avoiding power inequalities and argues that only what she calls "real participation" reveals democratic practices but therefore also has extended prerequisites. Real participation (other than pseudo or partial participation) requires that all parties receive all information they need for decision-making. This establishes equal power relations between all parties. Partial participation is characterized by one party influencing the outcome by giving feedback, however the actual decision still rests with the other party. Equal power relations in this case are not realized to a sufficient extent. Full participation can only be reached if all stakeholders are able to equally determine the outcome of the decision. This, however, requires not only an open and transparent flow of information but also the ability of all participants to contribute to this process: "(…) participation requires skills that may be obtained on other arenas. In this light, the increased possibilities for participating in media-related activities may have psychological and educational effects through providing skills and experiences with democratic praxis." (Enli/Syvertson 2007: 158) Therefore, one can argue that the realization of participatory media activities can foster the implementation of democratic practices—such as media accountability—in everyday life and therefore contributes to the democratic values that media fulfill in society.

Furthermore, the distinction between participation *in* and *through* media is crucial as it leads to different considerations of both the media's and the citizen's role in democratic societies. Participation *through* media focusses on the use of mediated content and information for citizens to engage in public debates on relevant issues: The intensity of citizen's inclusion depends on whether minimalist or maximalist notions of participation are dominant. Nevertheless, in this context the role of media organizations is rather focused on its information or opinion building functions. On the other hand, participation in media can go beyond this: It includes either content-related participation concerning the integration of citizens in producing media output or structural participation granting an active role to citizens in the media organization's decision-making processes. "These forms of media participation allow citizens to be active in one of the many (micro-)spheres relevant to daily life, and to put into practice their right to communicate." (Carpentier 2011: 68) In particular, such forms of media participation will be discussed and analyzed in the following chapters.

As we have seen, the concept of participation and its realization in social practices are still inconsistent. Carpentier (2011: 16) states: "The concept of participation features in a surprising variety of frameworks, which have been transformed through an almost infinite number of materializations." Dealing with this inconsistency of the term participation, Carpentier (2011: 128ff and 2007: 225) suggests the differentiation of the three dimensions *access*, *interaction* and *participation* in the *AIP-model*. This concept is related to four relevant areas

(technology, content, people and organization) in media production and reception in which rather equalized or dominant power-relations can be prevalent depending on the extent of citizens' inclusion or exclusion in decision-making processes.

Access is linked to the presence of citizens within the media production processes (through allocation and distribution of media content and openness of organizational procedures). It can be described as the possibility for audiences to receive relevant und diverse content at any time and place through several distinct devices. Furthermore, it strongly refers to forms of fostering transparency, which means the possibility for audiences to inform themselves about on-going processes within media organizations at any time and via several channels. *Interaction* is described as measures to establish and shape socio-communicative relationships between media professionals and non-professional actors that affect their engagement in media production and consumption but still tend to remain rather biased in favor of communicators. The primary aim is the creation of a dialogue with members of civil society in order to establish feedback loops. *Participation*, in this context, is reserved for processes of co-decision-making on the levels of organization and production. For production as well as reception, participation then is strongly linked to the state of equalization of power-relations. At his point, "(…) the distinction between content-related participation and structural participation can then be used to point to different spheres of decision-making." (Carpentier 2011:131) Therefore, co-decision-making of citizens in matters of organizational policy as well as content production or delivery can be discussed under this perspective. Nevertheless, the analytical separation of the dimensions *access*, *interaction* and *participation* cannot be considered to be final but must rather be seen as interrelated and additional. *Participation* turns out to be a multidirectional concept reflecting the diversity of media audiences and a tendency to maximize its inclusion in media production beyond granting access and facilitating interaction. "Access and interaction do matter for participatory processes in media—they are actually its conditions of possibility—but they are also very distinct from participation because of their less explicit emphasis on power dynamics and decision making." (Carpentier 2011: 69)

The debate about the three concepts of the *AIP*-Model in this paper will be realized considering different forms of materialization of *access*, *interaction* and *participation* in public service media and community media organizations. The focus lies on the organization's mechanisms to achieve content-related and structural participation. On the one hand, this can be realized by participation in organizational structures, which requires mechanisms and procedures for co-decision making. It can only be achieved if facilities for granting the presence of non-professional actors in the organization's output and working procedures can be ensured (for instance through the provision of feedback mechanisms and transparency of organizational procedures). Therefore, access to the media organization's procedures is crucial for the inclusion of citizens in organizational decisions. Access at the organizational level refers to the "presence of organizational structures and facilities to produce and distribute content" (Carpentier 2011: 130). Moreover, there is also a requirement for feedback from non-professionals being discussed and integrated in the organizational context. This feedback should also affect organizational procedures. In this case, a communicative relationship between media professionals and other societal actors can be established and continuously shaped through measures of interaction. Participation at the organizational level also implies co-decision-making on management and policy structures within the media organization.

On the other hand, participation can also be realized with regard to media content production. The notion of access at this point basically describes the dissemination and reception of relevant and diverse media content to and by citizens. Here again, *access* "implies achieving presence" (Carpentier 2011: 129) of information. This refers to presence of audiences within media organizations in order to have their voice heard, but also internal diversity of formats, genres and opinion (objectivity and balance). The concept of *interaction* goes beyond that and refers to the establishment of socio- communicative relations between the organization and its audiences when it comes to producing, selecting and interpreting content. Furthermore, it refers to collective forms of viewing in family and the public that possibly affect the way the audience is taking part in content production and reception. Finally, participation in media content explicitly refers to inclusion of non-professionals in content production and selection. Decision-making describes the importance of citizens on the side of media reception by selecting and distributing content, but also of non-professionals by taking part in the actual production processes of media content with equalized rights and duties concerning the media output.

Nevertheless, even though *access* and *interaction* are required to permit *participation*, its establishment does not lead to participatory co-decisions in media organizations and media content at once if the power equilibrium remains biased. *Participation* requires a multidirectional relationship based on equalized power-relations. Those sometimes can be hard to achieve or even not favorable for institutionalized media organizations such as broadcasting organizations, in particular when it comes to the inclusion of citizens in decisions on organizational policies or programming. How public service media and community media realize these concepts of access, interaction and participation shall now be analyzed.

4. Access, interaction and participation in public service media—the Austrian case

According to Moe, public service media in democratic societies have two important functions. They should "make important information available for all and, second, enable citizens to communicate with each other about relevant issues" (Moe 2008: 319). According to Trappel (2008: 314)

> Public service broadcasting was and is commissioned to provide high quality services for a wide variety of tastes and preferences. It should cater for minorities and functions as a counterbalance to overwhelming commercialism.

In order to constitute public sphere, which is one main task of public service media, there is a need for both *dissemination* of information and *dialogue* (Moe 2008: 320). While radio and television would contribute to the dissemination of information, the internet is said to being able to foster dialogue and public participation (Froomkin 2004). In the case of public service media, the greatest potential for promoting *access*, *interaction* and *participation* one could assume lies in the internet activities and the new forms of online communication which have emerged out of it, but is probably not limited to these forms of new media.

According to Coleman (2004: 91), the internet could be a medium "for new relations between citizens". He sees the central role of moderating these relations in public service broadcast-

ing. The internet and forms of online communication would also have consequences for the constitution of public sphere, which gets activated by new forms of interaction (Bohman 2004: 139). Indeed, public service media seem to have implemented a wide range of online communication strategies (Trappel 2008: 313). On the other hand, one should not limit the potential of public service media to promote *access*, *interaction* and *participation* exclusively to online communication. Especially the categories of access and interaction are designed to unfold in television and radio content and newsrooms, as well. Since public service media operate under the pressure of having to fulfill a public service remit, access, interaction and participation practices have to be part of the latter. Regarding these aspects, some important changes were initiated by the new ORF-Act in 2010 for the Austrian public broadcaster ORF.

4.1 Access

As mentioned above, access refers to the presence of relevant content, diversity and organizational structures which provide a possibility for civil society to give feedback. Furthermore, it also refers to presence of civil society members within Public service media content. According to the BVG Rundfunk [4] (1974: Art.1, (2)), the ORF is obliged to create objective and well-balanced content. This high-level regulation can be described as very broad, but is determined further by several clauses within the ORF-Act. § 4 ORF-Act determines the core public remit. The ORF should contribute to inform the general public about „all important political, social, economic, cultural subjects" (ORF-Act 2010: § 4 (1), 1). Furthermore, it should take into account the requirements and needs of men and women, disabled persons as well as all ethnic and age groups (ORF-Act 2010: § 4 (1), 9-11) The latter categories also have to be applied to the two special interest channels (ORF-Act 2010: §§ 4b, 4d). Moreover, content should be differentiated, diverse and well-balanced (ORF-Act 2010: § 4 (2)) sophisticated (§ 4 (3)), highly qualitative (§ 4 (4)), objective (§ 4 (5), 1), and finally relevant (§ 4 (5), 2). The last point seems to be crucial for providing access in our sense. Nevertheless, the term "relevance" is not further defined, which is a deficit.

Thus, the ORF is obliged to serve minorities. This is ensured by § 4 (5a) ORF-Act, which includes the duty to distribute content for ethnic minorities through all available channels (which are TV, radio and online). There is also a requirement for the implementation of a special interest channel for information and cultural programs as well as a TV program which is available all over Europe (ORF-Act 2010: § 4c, 4d). The ORF should also provide online content (ORF-Act 2010: § 4e), which should guide and accompany broadcasting content. The latter should be deepening and explanatory, but not expanded further, which was highly disputed and a basic demand of private broadcasting interest groups in the pre-process of implementing the new act (VÖZ [5] 2012).

Besides these traditional obligations, a quality-safeguarding system has been implemented (ORF-Act 2010: § 4a). It consists of the following parts (ORF 2012): structural content analysis, the *public-value-report* which is published once a year, monitoring mechanisms, the construction of quality profiles, qualitative audience and expert interviews and finally annual studies. The content analysis has qualitative and quantitative parts and is conducted by the market

[4] Bundesverfassungsgesetz über die Sicherung der Unabhängigkeit des Rundfunks (Federal Constitutional Act on the Protection of the Independence of Broadcasting)

[5] Verband österreichischer Zeitungsverleger (Association of Austrian Newspaper Publishers)

research institute *Gfk Austria*. The *public value* report is designed to present the activities of the organization that were operated to fulfill the public remit (ORF 2012: 3). Audience polls are a part of the quality safeguarding system. The quality profiles present an ideal program category, which is controlled by external evaluation and "can lead to optimization of the program" (ORF 2012: 8). The expert and audience interviews complement the quantitative opinion polls and are conducted through group discussions (ORF 2012: 10). Finally, the annual ORF-Report that refers to a special aspect of the remit shall ensure deepened evaluation of a certain program area (ORF-Act 2010: § 4a (2)).

In 2010, a public value test (*Auftragsvorprüfung*) was established, which obliges the ORF to evaluate and assess new formats and content (ORF-Act 2010: § 6f) with regard to their contribution to the social, cultural and democratic needs of society. The establishment of this assessment was the main objective of the European Commission in 2008, which demanded a re-definition of the public service remit and stronger external control of the ORF in order to meet the state aid-rules of the European Union treaties (European Commission 2009)[6]. This regular evaluation might contribute to improve organizational accountability.

Besides these traditional forms of providing access to public service media audiences, digital communication opened up new spaces for making relevant content available within public service media operations. Due to digitalization, new forms of data saving have emerged, which promote public service media's potential to provide more content for a longer time. However, these possibilities for providing pull down archives are legally limited. According to § 4e (1), 4 ORF-Act, the ORF can provide such a pull down service, which can only consist of content that was commissioned by the ORF itself (ORF-G 2010: § 4e (4)). This was realized by implementing the *TVThek*[7]. The establishment of download-possibilities is prohibited, and the content must not be available for more than seven days after airing (except for content on contemporary history or culture). Special interest formats of ORF online are running short: The special interest offer *Futurezone* has been removed and sold to the privately organized publishing house *Mediaprint* (derstandard.at 2010a) which was again a demand from private interest groups in 2010 (Fidler 2010).

A further requirement for content diversity is the autonomy of the online-newsroom. According to Trappel (2008: 313) public service online newsrooms which operate autonomously from TV and radio newsrooms provide more content diversity, more journalistic quality and have more users. Therefore, personal and content-diversity is expected to rise with the degree of institutional autonomy. As it is the case for the ORF, television, radio and online newsrooms are formally separated (ORF Kundendienst 2012): The online newsroom is part of the sub-company *Online und Teletext GmbH & Co KG* which is formally and geographically separated from the ORF television and radio newsrooms.

In particular public service media content contributes to external diversity: The Austrian media market in general is dominated by strong market players (like the publishing house *Mediaprint*), which is also reflected by online media (Trappel 2008: 314). Austrian journalistic online media with a great number of users and unique clients often belong to the dominating

[6] This basically refers to compliance with Art. 107 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)

[7] All of the ORF-formats are available at http://tvthek.orf.at/ for a maximum of seven days.

print publishers and titles (ÖWA[8] 2012). Furthermore, the ORF should realize the concept of internal diversity of formats as well as of persons: license fee payers have the possibility to send a complaint to the *Publikumsrat*[9] (ORF- Publikumsrat 2012), which functions as a board that promotes the audience's interest. Information about meetings of the boards can easily be accessed[10]. In 2011, a new internal Code of Conduct for journalists was established (diepresse.com 2011). By January 2012, ORF-Journalists fought actively for independent content production practices, which was evident when the protest video[11] from January 2012 (diepresse.com 2012) was released.

To conclude, the ORF seems to be powerful in providing access in the sense of relevant and diverse content. This results from its strict legal obligations for all three channels (TV, radio and online) and the regular evaluation of these obligations. Furthermore, this also provides access at the organizational level to give feedback, which is promoted by the existence of the *Publikumsrat* and journalists actively fighting for the political autonomy of their newsrooms.

4.2 Interaction

Interaction defined as citizens being part of and present within programs (such as live-shows, etc.) has long tradition also in public service broadcasting: Since the beginning of broadcasting, people were invited to participate in talk shows etc. This includes citizens suggesting subjects or participating as show guests or audiences[12]. Apart from that, there are also formats with service character which try to meet the citizen's demands and help them with their problems[13]. Within the last decades, several other forms of audience participation emerged, for example in live-shows via call-ins or via postal voting. With regard to this, public service media do not seem to provide one-way communication all the time:

> Broadcasting is not merely one-way. Radio and television programmes have used direct feedback from listeners and viewers as an integrated part of their form for decades. Whether by mail or telephone, or by direct participation as audiences or contestants, the receivers have talked back and had their say. Recent widespread formats depend on the mobile phone as return channel for the audience to contribute their preferences. Despite questionable democratic potential and debatable impact on the future of television, such formats do include dialogically structured communication. (Moe 2008: 326)

At this stage, interaction in the sense of a socio-communicative relationship takes place in every day practice of content production. New media provide lots of chances and possibilities to facilitate direct interaction of the audience in matters of content. Since the ORF was one of the first organizations to establish a regular online platform, these activities again caused intense debates within private media interest groups, such as the VÖP[14] (2012) and the VÖZ (2012). They argued that these activities would provide more possibilities for their public service competitors in order to increase their advertising revenues. A fulfillment of

[8] Österreichische Webanalyse (Austrian Webanalysis)

[9] Viewers' and Listeners' Council

[10] See http://publikumsrat.orf.at/

[11] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6SzZmMNfNg

[12] For example the TV format *help.tv* or the online site *help.orf.at*.

[13] For example *Bürgeranwalt*., see online at http://derneue.orf.at/programm/fernsehen/orf2/buergeranwalt.html

[14] *Verband österreichischer Privatsender* (Austrian Association of Private Broadcasters)

the public remit would be impossible under these conditions. These critiques heightened the pressure on media policy actors to put regulation into force, which was realized by the new ORF-Act in 2010. This law implemented stricter rules for online advertising and limited the public service activities in online communication like chats, forums and online games. Nevertheless, online discussion forums contribute to the establishment of interaction in the sense of regular debates between the organization and non-professionals. Journalists or webmasters moderate these discussions [15], although the access is limited by the necessity of primary registration since 2010 (derstandard.at 2010b). For the time of the national elections for parliament 2008 and the regional elections in Vienna 2010 the ORF established the possibility for civil society to post their most relevant questions to the candidates of the political parties (ORF 2010). The ORF team then selected the 20 most interesting questions addressed and the answers were published online. New media tools are also used for discussion formats in television broadcasting (for example *Im Zentrum*) to provide the possibility for the audience to ask questions to the experts of the discussion round. These forms merely can be characterized as a dialogue between different audience members that is structured by media professionals, but not between the audience and organizational members themselves. This again points to the problem that these dialogues are biased and not used, discussed and re-processed within the organization with a wider effect.

By the implementation of the ORF-act in 2010, the ORF was obliged to implement a quality-safeguarding system. Part of that is the obligation to disseminate questionnaires and opinion polls in order to regularly measure audience satisfaction with the quality of ORF-content, which could be characterized as a tool to promote interaction mechanisms at the organizational level. At this point, it still does not seem to be clear what the result of these mechanisms could be. There is no obligation to use, implement or respond to the comments from the organizational side. It does not result in an exchange of views and ideas between organization and civil society. Thus, feedback seems to be fragmented and dominated by the communicators and organizational members. No interaction takes place, but rather one-sided views and ideas are distributed which are probably not further processed. Audience polls and questionnaires are complemented by qualitative audience and expert interviews (ORF 2012: 10), which are realized by conducting group discussions. While the poll-mechanisms seem to be limited to one-way feedback which is not used and reprocessed, this practice unfolds a potential to contribute to two-way communication. It provides a great chance for the organization to interact with civil society by reprocessing the feedback which they are receiving.

To conclude, the possibilities of interaction between the ORF and civil society seem to be limited to online communication forums, questionnaires, opinion polls and interviews. Apart from being part of shows and other formats as visitors and subjects, there is only marginal interaction when it comes to traditional channels like TV and radio. For other quantitative, non-personal feedback mechanisms, organizational members still decide whether they will use and reprocess civil society's feedback or not. This might be improved by the qualitative audience and expert group discussions. The service formats which were mentioned above contribute to at least a small potential for interaction between civil society and organizational members, as well.

[15] See http://debatte.orf.at/stories/ueber

4.3 Participation

Finally, the case of active *participation* of civil society, which establishes the most powerful role for citizens, is a rather difficult one. Nevertheless, it lies in the founding idea of the public service remit to provide the possibility for audiences to take part in organizational decisions. The original idea of public service broadcasting in Austria was to integrate civil society by representation at the organizational level with representatives in the boards and committees. In Austria, the aim of the *Publikumsrat* is to monitor and control the activities of the management of the ORF through societal powers (ORF-Act 2010: § 28). It functions as a means to monitor content, budgets and decisions of staff directors. These boards are obliged to integrate civil society organizations like churches, labor and industrial organizations. Nevertheless, the *Publikumsrat* is provided with restricted competences, which are limited to giving recommendations with regard to content scheduling, content for ethnic and minority groups and the quality safeguarding system (ORF-Act 2010: § 30 (1), 5,6,7). Furthermore, it is obliged to authorize the amount of license fees, to elect six members of the *Stiftungsrat* [16], and finally to call upon the regulation authority (ORF-Act 2010: § 30 (1), 2, 3, 4). By October 2011, the Austrian constitutional court repealed § 28, 6-10 ORF-G, which ruled that six members of the board were elected directly by license fee payers [17]. However, the amount of elected members was quite small, in relation to the total number of 70 members of *Publikumsrat* and *Stiftungsrat*. Furthermore, there is indirect democratic legitimacy of the *Stiftungsrat*, which supervises executives. Since government and political parties are entitled to appoint members of this board (ORF-Act 2010: § 21) these can be described as indirectly reflecting the choices made by the Austrian electorate.

Apart from that, the possibilities for participation of civil society members within organizational decision-making processes are marginal. Casting or quiz shows do not represent equal power relations between the organization and civil society. On the contrary, power remains with the organization and the journalists by being able to decide about which voice gets heard and which not. What runs short is the possibility of initiating public service content. There is no public and democratic process of production. While some board members are democratically legitimized, organizational decision-making and content production is probably not. Civil society still only has the possibility to choose from a given content and program supply, but cannot express choices. Probably, this ideal runs against the basic idea of public service media, which should promote the integration of civil society, but not the special interests of small groups or individuals. They do not seem to be at the core of the remit, which basically is about the ideal of a homogenous audience, whose members should rather be integrated than separated.

In conclusion, these forms of participation are still biased and favor the media organization, which keeps control on the main issues that concern management, internal policies as

[16] Foundation Board

[17] The paragraph was declared unconstitutional due to the limitation of the right to vote to only one member of each household, namely the person that is paying the license fee. The frequently criticized procedure of the election process via fax was not the reason for the repeal and the current members of the *Publikumsrat* were not dismissed because of the court's decision. Up to now no new decisions on the regulation for the election of members of the *Publikumsra*t by the audience were taken. For further details see Verfassungsgerichtshof (2011a and b)

well as content formats and genres. Finally, there seems to be no trust in civil society as active part of content production and the organization's decision-making processes.

5. The realization of access, interaction and participation in Austrian community media

Defining community media and providing common and undisputable criteria for deciding which media organizations should belong to the so-called third sector of media production is still an unsolved problem. From a global perspective the national framework for community media can be considered to be quite divers, yet it affects organizational structures and working-conditions of community media significantly. Rennie (2006) delivered a global overview of how media policy issues can be solved differently in different countries. Nevertheless, some dimensions can be considered to be basic for community media, which either refers to questions of funding, the medium's particular relation to civil society or its possible contribution to diversity by providing alternative views and content. Thus, the dimensions funding situation, accountability and participation can be considered to be crucial not only for the self-image of community media but for its representation in media policy debates (see also Reguero Jiménez/Sanmartín Navarro 2009). This is also reflected in the report of the European Parliament on community media:

> Community or alternative media ('CM') can be defined as: media that are non-profit and accountable to the community that they seek to serve. They are open to participation in the creation of content by members of the community. As such, they are a distinct group within the media sector alongside commercial and public media. (EU-Parliament 2008: 9)

The contribution to diversity by delivering "alternative" views, which means views that are not (or to an insignificant extent) represented in commercial or public service media, is a key element that is also stressed by the Council of Europe in its *Declaration on the Role of Community media in promoting social cohesion and intercultural dialogue* from 2009. In this declaration the community media's unique structures are emphasized putting them into contrast to both private and public service media. This document calls for recognition of community media as a distinct third sector opposing it to the commercial and the public service sector and encourages the member states to establish a legal framework that accounts for this (Council of Europe 2009). This is justified by the roles and functions community media are supposed to fulfill in society (which in this case means for a distinct part of the society—the community). Apart from media policy documents, Rennie (2006: 3) identifies similar dimensions that apply to community media: "The terms 'participation' and 'access' apply to most community media endeavors, meaning that non-professional media makers are encouraged to become involved (participation), providing individuals and communities with a platform to express their views (access)." Links to the concepts of alternative and radical media are obvious. Rennie (2006: 10) also classifies the idea of community media projects as "alternative" in order to oppose them once more to public service media. Moreover, this status of being alternative does not exclusively refer to content and opinions but also to "an alternative idea of the public interest" (Rennie 2006: 10) offered by community media that is not solely dedicated to wide reach and affection of big or many (if not universal) groups in

society, but to the marginalized and underrepresented. This dedication to a community and its integration into the media production process also stresses community media's role in "(…) making available spaces where people can speak for and about themselves in ways that empower them." (Ewart et al. 2007: 179)

In Austria, community broadcasting is still a quite young but vital phenomenon [18]. The first community radio stations received licenses and started their broadcasting operations in 1997. The special funding situation of community media—declaring themselves as non-commercial or not-for-profit organizations—is also highly dependent on media policy decisions. Ewart et al. (2007: 179) regard subscriptions and grants as usual funding sources for community media. In the Austrian case, public funding, membership fees, donations and sponsoring are declared as the main sources in community media's self-regulatory documents (Charta Community TV 2011; Charta Freie Radios 2007). A regular fund for non-commercial broadcasters was established in 2009 by amendments of the KommAustria-Act (2010) [19]. It is administrated by the regulatory authority *Rundfunk und Telekom-Regulierungs GmbH (RTR)* and receives money from the public service broadcaster's license fees that was formerly reserved for the federal budget. In addition, the directive *Richtlinie für den Fonds zur Förderung des Nichtkommerziellen Rundfunks* [20], which was established in 2011, determines an increase of the total funding sum from € 2 million in 2011 to € 2,5 million in 2012 and € 3 million in 2013 (NKRF-Richtlinie 2011). In 2011, three community television stations, 14 community radios and two community associations received a total of € 2 million for either content production or workshops and research (RTR 2011a and 2011b). That this did not totally solve the problem of the precarious funding situation in Austria is shown by the case of the recently established community television broadcaster in the region of Salzburg that had to postpone its start for a couple of months due to insufficient capital, even though it received funding from the regulator's funds.

5.1 Access

Providing access can be considered as one of the major concerns of community media. Unlike for public service media, where the concept of access is quite a universal one, the objectives of community media concentrate on activist groups and individuals and their presence in media output, preferably those that are not covered by other media forms. This refers to two quite different dimensions: community media enforce the presence of their community members in media as a target of coverage as well as the actual producer or evaluator of a program. Hence, access is given to citizens on both, the level of production and the level of content. Therefore, the emphasis of community media lies on the dissemination of knowledge and skills that are necessary for community members to achieve access. Thus, it is citizen-centered, which means that it encourages groups and individuals to become actively involved in the media production processes themselves. This does, however, also mean that through the integration of non-professionals that become eligible for positions within community media, the professional standards remain low due to a lack of experience of the community media activists and

[18] For an overview on the historic development of the Austrian community media sector see Purkarthofer/Pfisterer/Busch (2008: 13-28)

[19] Kommunikationsbehörde (Austrian Communications Authority)

[20] Directive for the Funding of Non-commercial Broadcasting

the fact that rigorous formalized rules for journalistic work are usually missing on purpose. Community media production usually occurs beyond structured professional circles and is rather of direct origin from civil society. Aiming for the highest possible quality is not prevalent for community media; more important is that content is rooted in and dedicated to the community. In this way, additional views contribute to a surplus value in the area of the community. Therefore—and due to its usually local or regional outline—community media most of the time cannot and do not reach a wide number of people beyond their defined area of community, no matter if it is defined by some geographical or social connectedness[21]. This approach is very different from public service and commercial media. In policy debates, the lack of audience reach and dissemination, even in the region where the actual community broadcaster is located, creates advantages and drawbacks. On the one hand, it allows for the dedication to marginalized groups giving a voice to minority opinions and content that may not be covered anywhere else, which is part of the self-chosen remit of most community media (Buckley et al. 2007: 209). On the other hand, audience ratings (if they exist) are usually far from being comparable to the reach of public service and commercial broadcasters in the same area. If audience is therefore defined in a universal and homogeneous way, community broadcasters hardly remain competitive. Nevertheless, it contributes to the idea of providing content which serves the public interest and is to some extent relevant for somebody in the community. This means that the emphasis of community media concerning access rather lies on the fortification of media literacy through the dissemination of knowledge, skills and practices than the formalized establishment of professional criteria of journalistic quality. This goes together with the notion of providing an alternative approach to mainstream news production. In Austria, the realization of this knowledge transfer many times occurs in form of workshops concerning different levels of content production for interested community members. In 2011, such workshops and courses were funded by the regulator's fund for non-commercial broadcasting, in total with over € 180.000 (RTR 2011a and 2011b).

In conclusion, the main concern is not dissemination on a basic level but the promotion of civil engagement in media production by providing access for individuals or groups which are not addressed by public service or commercial media. However, on the content level of media production, granting access also refers to providing a range of topics that is not or not sufficiently covered by other media institutions. The self-positioning of community media as "alternative" in this case goes along with the debate on diversity and pluralism and therefore directly comes from the discussion of democratic tasks of media. Nevertheless, the notion of access as it is provided by community media is not a universal but an additive (to what is missing in common news coverage) or particular one, where the actual relevance of media content only applies to members of the community and is even determined by them. This limitation of target groups is both their very strength and objective, but also their drawback in the debate on *public value*, as it limits their scope of responsibility. Therefore, access cannot be considered to be the final step of but a basic prerequisite for the constitutive elements of community media that include advanced forms of interaction and participation.

The notion of being *amateur* can also be interpreted as an individualized quality as it realizes a strength of community media that was also acknowledged by the Council of Europe: the

[21] For the Austrian situation concerning reach of community broadcasting see Mörth et al. (2011) and Peissl et al. (2010).

closeness of community media to their audience and to the daily business of the community members. This is of decisive importance for the questions of democratic values and political empowerment if one bears in mind that (political) engagement usually occurs within a very small range of personal concerns and issues. The understanding of the citizen's exercise of their basic democratic rights concerning communication remains citizen-centered, too, as it shows that "(…) to engage in democracy normally does not mean to step out of one's existing frames of realities, or one's dominant habitus." (Dahlgren 2009: 149) Therefore, this closeness to the audience consists of the integration and presence of the community member's realities in media production and content. It also shows that the way access is realized in community media is a direct prerequisite to its notion of building more flexible relationships between professionals and non-professionals in media production and the establishment of an environment that encourages participation. Therefore, even more than for public service media, for community media access, interaction and participation are aimed to be executed as continuous stages leading in the best way to equalized decision-making.

5.2 Interaction

In community media, the relationship between audience members and communicators is unique and fosters an unbiased way of interaction. Role assignments in community media become highly flexible as citizens are media producers and audience of community-relevant issues at the same time. This interactive relationship is a basic condition and constitutive element of community media organizations, and originates in a self- declaration (Charta Freie Radios 2007 and Charta Community TV 2011). This citizen-centered approach is not only bound to the audience but can be found at all levels of community media organizations and even between different community broadcasters. Still, boundaries of the local and regional structures of community media can be identified. In Austria, the cultural broadcasting archive (CBA) is an initiative of community radios to overcome the drawbacks of their local structures. As a collective and collaborative archiving tool, it collects and distributes radio programs from 14 Austrian non-commercial radio stations since 2000. It is an open source project that promotes sharing radio content between local radio stations and fosters the establishment of interaction and networking. As it is accessible online [22] not only to its members but also to every interested citizen, it also aims to promote open access on a broader level and to include community members into this interactive relationship. This turns out to be a citizen-centered approach of democratic objectives, and it depends to a great extent on the actual understanding of the reference groups as some kind of community that can be defined by social connectedness through common background, habits or interests of a certain kind—whether it is on a local, cultural, national or trans-national level. Interaction between the members of this reference group is crucial and can turn out to be highly innovative.

> By facilitating this degree of interactivity, community radio is not only challenging the traditional relationship that exist between media producers and audiences, but also it is actively reworking them, creating spaces where these relationships are renegotiated in unique and powerful ways. (Ewart et al. 2007: 184)

[22] See http://cba.fro.at

This comes along with the notion of a rather heterogeneous audience that consists of different groups and individuals that all have to be included into the media production processes in the best way possible. For community media, this means the establishment of highly interactive structures—both on an organizational and content production level—allowing citizens to directly and equally take part in these operations. Therefore, the interaction between content producer and audience becomes flexible and exchangeable and is subject of renegotiations at any time of the content production process. This turns out to be a basic condition for enabling real participation in media production and the consequence of the modified notion of access that community media have.

5.3 Participation

Community media finally provide a specific form of participation in media production and media organizations. The open structure of community media encourages all members that are willing to contribute on different levels (issues, content, format, organization) to the media production processes. The significance lies in the way decisions are organized within community media. This is not only bound to the level of content production, where citizens can decide on formats, issues and the way those are presented and designed, but can also be found on an organizational level. The participation of community members in organizational decisions through assemblies, reunions and elections with an equal say on the outcome of the decision is highly transparent and a classic realization of democratic rights and duties. This is a constitutive element of community media declared in their several self-regulatory documents (Charta Freie Radios 2007 and Charta Community TV 2011). The way participation is enabled in community media turns out to be rooted in bottom-up-structures rather than top-down-implementations of rules and therefore promotes a rather equalized relationship of all participants. Civil engagement is a key concept of this:

> Community media, being a media that is produced by civil society groups, has a unique relationship to the types of citizen participation that occur through civil society engagement. (Rennie 2006: 34)

More than this, the way interaction is designed as bottom-up initiatives, the governance structure of community media allows for direct participation in decision-making by all stakeholders. This marks a quite classical realization of democratic decision-making. In terms of value creation, this can lead to the assumption that through the establishment of democratic decision-making processes by involving citizens in media production, a certain surplus value has been created straight away. Through participation in democratic decision-making in the very individual experience of community media production, citizens experience democracy in their daily life which again shapes their understanding of political participation. Therefore, it can be considered as a form of empowerment of citizens through media participation. It is, thus, an allocation of power that is very different from public service and commercial media.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we started out by asking how the concepts of public interest, public value and accountability apply to different media that are characterized by a high level of commitment to civil society—and not to citizens in their roles as consumers of goods and services, thus

addressees of advertising. Public service media and community media are both characterized by their attempt to address the public in the role of citizens, not as consumers. Their organizational setting is highly different. While in many countries public service media—in most cases in form of one single company such as the ORF in Austria—are a major force in terms of audience share and market power, community media often exist below the threshold of meaningful audience measurements and have no market power whatsoever. There is not one single company but a large variety of small organizations at the local or regional level. Nonetheless, both types of organizations share the idea of creating value for society.

Table 1 illustrates the main differences at a number of *AIP*-relevant dimensions (*access, interaction, participation*).

	public service media	**community media**
access		
target groups	legally required target groups (e.g. minorities)	all activist groups and individuals
professional standards	high	low
interaction		
content-related	limited to certain program formats	constitutive element of program making
audience-related	homogeneous audience relationship biased media professional => audience	heterogeneous audience flexible role assignments content producer <=> audience
participation		
content decisions	none beyond institutionalized forms of governance media-centered	open to all members willing to contribute citizen-centered
organizational decisions	top-down according to governance rules	bottom-up according to self-regulation
accountability		
dimensions of quality	professional journalistic qualities formalized quality evaluation	amateur/individualization as unique quality
main aims/objectives remit	*defined by public service remit:* fulfillment of different values for society (e.g. education, entertainment,…) providing of information and knowledge education and leading of citizens	*defined by self-declaration ("Char-ta"):* inclusion of community in media production sharing of information and knowledge empowerment of citizens
accountability (target)	accountable to the society at large (license fee payers)	accountable to the community they serve
	public value	***civic value***

Table 1. *AIP*-profile of public service media and community media

In contrast, community media are strong in participation and interaction. Their institutional set-up allows for the inclusion of a large variety of groups in society, including those

who represent small numbers of persons and who are not considered relevant in the public discourse. Their governance structure enables bottom-up processes of democratic decision-making with equal power for those affected by the decisions.

In turn, community media are weak in access as their program output reaches a strictly limited number of people in the local or regional area. The dissemination of content is therefore limited to the communities they seek to serve. In contrast to (most) public service media they do not compete with private commercial broadcasters on advertising markets and they do not aspire towards the highest possible quality. Rather, community media fulfill their self-chosen remit by allowing as much interaction and participation as possible. By doing this, community media extend the variety and plurality of the entire media system by offering additional views and perspectives originating in civil society and not in professional circles. Therefore, we distinguish the value provided by community media from that provided by public service media and suggest calling it *civic value*.

This proposal and wording stands out against but does not contradict the attempts to demonstrate that community media provide *public value*, as well (Peissl 2011; Peissl et al. 2010). Given the overwhelming adoption of the term *public value* by public service media and the highly different profile of public service media and community media at the *AIP* dimensions (see table 1), it seems justified to label the latter value differently. *Civic value* refers much more and more accurately to the close relationship of community media with civil society. Moreover, by choosing this term it is clear that community media represent and stand out for different values than public service media. This distinction, finally, provides different arguments when it comes to media policy decisions, such as public funding.

From the media policy perspective both *public* and *civic value* are relevant. While community media are in legal terms private entities with (in the case of broadcasting) or without license (in the case of community print media), public service media exist only because of their legal enactment as public organizations. It follows that public service media require media policy provisions to ensure on permanent and sustainable grounds their economies. Such provisions are closely linked to the public remit that requires public service media to deliver what is required in there. Media policy, therefore, has to safeguard, ensure, and supervise the *public value* performance of public service media. In contrast, community media operate beyond any public supervision—as other private media companies do—as long as they do not require public money. If they do, however, *civic value* needs to be defined in terms that can be scrutinized *ex post*. In other words: Whenever community media receive public money in the form of subsidies, their individual remit needs to be transparent and their civic value performance needs to be checked in return for the subsidies.

In conclusion, the analysis of the *AIP*-model suggested by Carpentier (2011) provides a marked distinction between public service media and community media. Despite the fact that both types of media are oriented to serve the public interest, the analysis based on this model clearly shows that the value provided is different. While public service media have successfully chosen the term *public value* to circumscribe their performance, it follows from our analysis that it is appropriate to characterize the performance of community media differently. We recommend the term civic value, as this highlights its roots in civil society.

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CHAPTER 43

Moments of Danger: The Struggle for Community-Based Public Radio in Baltimore

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Abstract

This article explores the struggle of The Center for Emerging Media, an independent community media organisation in Baltimore with roots in the radical traditions of the American left, and aspirations for leveraging new media technologies to empower a new generation of voices and stories, to find audiences at the margins of the US public radio industry in a neoliberal moment of danger. As US Public radio networks have increasingly catered to well-to-do listeners keen to hear about social difference but not from the voices of the marginalised, organisations like the CEM have become increasingly endangered, resilient and necessary. This article explores those dangers and the resilience they inspire, and considers possible futures for alternative community media.

Keywords

WYPR, Marc Steiner, Center for Emerging Media, NPR, neoliberalism, public radio, Baltimore

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Introduction

The Center for Emerging Media (CEM) is a small non-profit media production company in Baltimore, Maryland, whose fortunes over the last two decades track the uncertain course of alternative community media in the US. Its 2007 Peabody-Award winning radio series, Just Words, told stories of Baltimore's most marginalised denizens, by letting them speak for themselves, a rarity on public airwaves at the time. The award came just ten days after the Center's primary outlet, *The Marc Steiner Show*, which aired the series, was peremptorily cancelled by Baltimore's NPR affiliate, WYPR. Steiner, who founded the Center and runs it with his wife Valerie Williams, called the show's posthumous award 'poetic justice' (Kaltenbach, 2009: C1). Steiner also co-founded WYPR, the station that sacked him. The story of Steiner and the Center for Emerging Media captures the irony of independent community radio in the US, with its vertiginous highs and lows and its seemingly permanent state of crisis.

This article explores the struggle of an independent community media organisation, with roots in the radical traditions of the American left and aspirations for leveraging new media technologies to empower a new generation of voices and stories, to find audiences at the margins of the US public radio industry in a neoliberal moment of danger. As US public radio networks have increasingly catered to well-to-do listeners keen to hear *about* social difference, but not from the voices of the marginalised, organisations like the CEM have become increasingly endangered, resilient and necessary. This article explores those dangers and the resilience they inspire, and considers possible futures for alternative community media.

Context: US Public Radio's Growth and Transformation

The idea of public radio has occupied a vexed position in the politics and culture of the US, since before the legislation that created it in the late 1960s. It was supposed to be a public service, but in a society whose conception of 'the public' was not fully coherent. Who is the public of public radio? How is a national public news and culture service to be funded? How is it supposed to represent its public? And what mechanisms are there for the public to represent itself to back to the new service? The birth of National Public Radio (NPR) in 1970 can be seen as the last gasp of progressivism—an optimistic faith in collective effort and a common good. And certainly, if we read the network's Founding Principles, we would find encouraging language. NPR would:

> regard the individual differences among men with respect and joy, rather than derision and hate; … celebrate the human experience as infinitely varied, rather than vacuous and banal; … encourage a sense of active constructive participation, rather than apathetic helplessness. (Siemering, 2012).

However, it is also possible to see the ambitious yet chronically underfunded public broadcasting service, with its contradictory notions of who constituted its 'public', as doomed to periodic crises and to a steady movement away from the spirit of inclusivity. The federal funding, authorised by the 1967 Public Broadcasting Act (United States Congress, 1967), for a national radio service was an afterthought—the legislation was really for a public television network, The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). The words 'and radio' were literally taped into the final draft of the bill the night before the final vote in Congress (Mitchell, 2005: 34).

The idea of a truly representative public audience for public radio was almost immediately abandoned in favour of reaching powerful members of a more narrowly defined community along the lines of education, culture and social class. Indeed, the influential 1967 Carnegie Commission report (Carnegie Commission on Educational Television, 1967) already identified the inevitability of an educated 'minority' audience for public broadcasting before the Public Broadcasting Act was even drafted. They also suggested that African Americans, a different sort of minority, might be better served by public broadcasting than by the existing commercial broadcasting system. And the even older experiences with programming, fundraising, and audience measurement of the handful of powerful university- or municipal-owned 'educational' stations suggest that, as early as 1952, non-commercial stations dedicated to public service 'did not attempt to serve all of the people all of the time, but rather to serve some of the people especially well all of the time' (Stavitsky, 1990: 109).

Public broadcasting, coming into nation-wide distribution fifty years into the commercial broadcasting era, could only be compensatory, alternative, a critique of the mass-mediated public constructed by the for-profit networks on radio and television. If the 'public' in 'public radio' was going to mean anything, it was going to have to be a sensibility, a structure of feeling for an imagined community of like-minded people who understood themselves to be distinct from the already-constituted commercially-based, mass-mediated public. For the Carnegie Commission, this meant catering to an educational elite and to racial minorities. This dual constituency formed the vexed and contradictory public of public media and for better or worse, has helped to shape the politics of liberalism ever since.

And yet public broadcasting continued to be haunted by the more inclusive, even utopian resonances associated with the notion of *the public*. The term exerted pressure on the imagination, evoking an American community bridging social and geographic divides. Radio's evocation of Enlightenment ideals of universal educational access and uplift were revived by the promise of public radio as well. Given the political, economic, and cultural pressures that greeted the 1967 public broadcast legislation, this broader public never had a chance. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting's (CPB) budget was decided every year or two by Congress, which left NPR and PBS in a constant state of concern about the political dangers of controversial journalism. Single-channel programming meant a zero-sum game in terms of whose stories would get told and whose would be ignored. Finally, the primacy of public broadcasting's educationally elite audience was an unspeakable but unavoidable pre-condition. Together, these forces put the emerging business model of public radio into conflict with its promise, a besetting condition of liberal bad faith. In Jack Mitchell's history-cum-memoir, *Listener Supported* (Mitchell, 2005), NPR's journey from the idealistic embrace of a truly democratic public audience to more modest ambitions for serving a highly educated subset of the public was as inevitable as the natural process of growing from youth to maturity. Public radio's early pioneers thought one signal could successfully serve 'a series of minority audiences broad-minded enough to want to hear the programming for other minority audiences with divergent views and tastes', Mitchell observed dryly (2005: 55). Instead, NPR succeeded by appealing to the liberal, educated baby-boomers, whose liberal ideals of community had been 'shattered' by the war in Vietnam and the scandals and economic reversals of the 1970s, according to Michael McCauley, another public radio producer turned historian (2005: 5).

NPR began just in time to document the unrest caused by the Vietnam war and, later, the unease caused by the Watergate scandal, the oil crisis and the recession. In other words, the network whose founding principles and federal funding were in part an expression of Great Society Liberalism, made it on the airwaves just in time to document the collapse of the liberal era and the debut of the long march of neoliberalism (Hall, 1979). In another irony, NPR has provided the soundtrack for the great moving right show, even as it has served as the very emblem of the 'liberal media' against which this rightward juggernaut has stormed. In this context, the turn to audience research came to be the most effective way to understand public radio's listeners, not as members of a democratic public, but as particular kinds of consumers. As it moved to court corporate underwriters and well-heeled 'highly educated' listeners exclusively, budget information became less transparent, earning a rebuke from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's Ombudsman in 2015 (Kaplan, 2015).

A Moment of Danger

For German critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin, attempting to understand the past was part of a struggle 'to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it'. The threat, as Benjamin saw it, hangs over 'both the content of the tradition and its receivers … that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes'. As public radio's ideologically promiscuous traditions of experiments, alternative voices and radical commitments fade into the past, overpowered by neoliberal funding imperatives, stylistic conformity and technological revolutions, we would do well to heed Benjamin's call to 'seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger' (Benjamin,1969: 255). The history of public media in the US has had no shortages of such moments in the half century since the passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967.

One such moment of danger was in February 2008, when the *The Marc Steiner Show* was abruptly cancelled on a Friday evening and Steiner simultaneously sacked from WYPR, the Baltimore NPR affiliate he had co-founded in 2002. *The Marc Steiner Show* was a co-production of WYPR and the Center for Emerging Media, an uneasy partnership whose fault lines echo the difficulty of local independent voices partnering with mainstream outlets like NPR. This event—and its noisy aftermath—provide a striking illustration of the precarious nature of the radical tradition that Steiner and CEM embodied and the community of listeners for whom this tradition still mattered.

The sacking of Steiner, the cancellation of his show and the dissolution of the WYPR-CEM collaboration was a stark illustration of trends in public radio away from a tradition of localism and progressive voices and towards the corporatisation of business operations and programming decisions. It provides a local case study of the challenges of sustaining the radical strains of the public media mission in a society whose understanding of 'the public interest' has often been muddled, contradictory and ambivalent (Robbins, 1993: x). As Bruce Robbins insists, for all its problems, 'public' is a word we 'cannot do without' (ibid.). In its abruptness and lack of transparency, the Friday afternoon sacking echoed the cynical and undemocratic manoeuvre of avoiding weekday news cycles common to government agencies looking to bury bad news and unpopular policies. Steiner himself was taken by surprise as

the sacking came in the midst of contract negotiations in which he was considering a pay-out and departure from the station within the next year (Rosen, 2008a: C1).

The rationale provided by station management for sacking Steiner and ending his show was justified purely as a numbers game: the Arbitron ratings, which measure the audience for commercial and public broadcasting stations in the US, dropped 21% between September 2005 and September 2007 for *The Marc Steiner Show* (compared with a 17% overall drop for the station) and showed a significant drop-off from the nationally syndicated show that preceded it (Rosen, 2008a: C3) (audience drop-off from nationally-syndicated programs to local news and cultural affairs programs is common for local NPR affiliates). Program Director Andy Bienstock defended the decision in the managerial jargon of his position: Steiner's show was 'tired' and 'it was time for something new', among other predictable neoliberal shibboleths (personal communication, 2008). Barbara Bozzuto, then chairperson of the WYPR Board of Directors, articulated the pro-growth rationale for making the change. 'We've done a tremendous job in growing listeners', Bozzuto said. 'Everything's been going up. That's been our direction for the last five years. But during this [Steiner's] time slot, there's a drop-off' (Woestendiek, 2008: C1).

Bozzuto's vague claim of an upward trajectory over the last five years did not account for the recent two-year decline in audience reach mentioned above. However, there were other significant measures by which the station could point to recent progress. The 2007 fall fund drive raised a record $373,000, up 15% over the previous year (Kaltenbach, 2007: C1). The station had also just completed a multi-year plan of signal expansion with the acquisition of stations on Maryland's Eastern Shore, Western counties, and even into the Washington DC suburbs. She may have also had in mind the addition of veteran broadcast journalist Sheilah Kast, whose morning program *Maryland Morning With Sheilah Kast* debuted in 2007 and was hailed by station insiders as the station's 'second voice', to counter Steiner's dominance. Perhaps more importantly, Bozzuto's comment reflected a widely held opinion on the board, that Steiner represented the station's past, not its future.

'Ratings go up and ratings go down, and if they are slightly down, you work to bring them back up', Steiner responded. 'After all, this is public radio, not commercial radio. At least I think we're public radio', Steiner added ruefully (Steiner, 2008). For Steiner, the firing was the culmination of a long-standing conflict in philosophy over the role of the public in public radio: 'It's a mindset', he said. 'And [my] mindset is that we, guarantors of the station, are holding this in trust for the public. Not, "*We own it*". Not, "*It's ours*". It's not theirs, it's ours—ours being the listeners and the public-radio community' (ibid.). The insistence on political and ideological conflict as a key factor in the unfolding of historical events was itself an endangered feature on the public airwaves in the 1990s and 2000s, as shows emphasising quirky interiority (think *This American Life*) replaced politics- and policy-based programming (Loviglio, 2011). Steiner's approach was rooted in what Raymond Williams might have called public radio's 'residual' commitment to political struggle of outsiders (1983: 121–127). The Center for Emerging Media, however, recalls William's 'emergent' category, an ironic juxtaposition that recalls Antonio Gramsci's motto, 'Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the Will' (1971: 175). CEM's story provides an occasion to speculate whether alternative, community-based public media's progressive streak is residual or emerging in the US. It is certainly not dominant.

The *dramatis personae* for this melodrama of beset public broadcasting could not have been cast any better. In one corner was Steiner, his voice a raspy tenor; his diction, undisciplined and fuzzy, with a penchant for bursts of laughter when kibitzing with on-air guests. A greying veteran of the Vietnam era anti-war and civil rights movements, Steiner's ponytail and work boots recalled a youth in which he was beaten by police and expelled from school for challenging Jim Crow. He was, in his very person and persona, a memory seized in flash of danger, a wresting back from conformity of a radical tradition in danger of being overwhelmed. 'He paints his struggles with WYPR in tones reminiscent of the 1960s', observed *The Baltimore Sun*'s Jill Rosen, 'the idealist versus the corporation, the creative versus the bean counter, the open mind versus the closed' (Rosen, 2008a: C3). Steiner's career on and off the microphone has been as an advocate for racial equality and educational reform in Baltimore. In many ways, his approach to the radio epitomised for his devoted listeners the sense of 'active constructive participation' called for in NPR's founding Principles.

In the opposite corner, Anthony Brandon, WYPR president and CEO, a corporate media tycoon of American General Media, a company that owns and operates 25 commercial radio stations across the country (Dechter, 2005: 27). His voice, a stentorian baritone, his response to the crisis, opaque and coolly distant. His management style, buttoned-down and by some accounts, Nixonian in its lack of transparency and ruthlessness (Ericson, 2015: 17; Marbella, 2008: B1; Woestendiek, 2008: C1). He spoke in the corporate platitudes of growth and research metrics, which NPR had perfected over the last couple of decades. A perfect set piece for re-enacting, almost 40 years later, the political and cultural battles out of which US public radio sprang.

In retrospect, the firing of Steiner seems an unsurprising conclusion given the long-simmering tensions between him and Brandon, which according to Steiner and other sources, began almost immediately after Brandon swooped in at the last minute in 2002 with the five million US dollars necessary to guarantee that the local group of investors, headed by Steiner, could purchase WYPR from Johns Hopkins University (Jansen, 2008). Like many colleges and universities with public radio stations at the dawn of the digital broadcasting era, Hopkins decided in 2001 to sell WJHU rather than pay for expensive digital equipment upgrades. This process of institutional divestment by universities of their radio licenses over the last generation represents another way in which the institution of public radio has seen its bonds with local institutions weakened. Bidders for the station included industry behemoths Minnesota Public Radio, WGBH in Boston and WAMU in Washington DC. Steiner put together a group of local investors to buy the station, a plan which faltered before Brandon fatefully stepped in with the necessary money. Brandon, president and CEO, and Steiner, executive vice president, almost immediately clashed over the approach the station should take. Over the next six years, a grim war of position ensued as Steiner fought for journalistic independence and a firewall between programming content and the interests of corporate underwriters, while Brandon slowly pushed Steiner out of the station's governance (Ericson, 2015; Rosen 2008a; Woedenstiek, 2008: C1).

At the time, Steiner's dismissal sent shockwaves throughout the city and public media. It seemed, almost immediately, to stand for something larger: a collapse of a previous compact between public media and their publics, and the betrayal of a community of listeners who had come to see WYPR and Steiner as inextricably linked. The response from loyal listeners

of *The Marc Steiner Show* was swift and merciless. 'No Marc, No Money!' bumper stickers started appearing on early-model Japanese sedans around town. A small but dedicated group of listeners formed a picket line outside the station's studio. A petition organised by protesters collected over a thousand names, many pledging never to donate to the station again until Steiner was brought back on the air. Coming during a period in which public broadcasting had been fending off another round of Republican calls for complete zeroing out of public funding, the Steiner affair presented itself as a local and intimate example of a national problem: a cycle of crisis and redemption, or yet another moment of danger.

The station's previously obscure Community Advisory Board peremptorily met and called for a public meeting, at which irate listeners could address their grievances to WYPR management. The gathering that ensued and which I attended, in the Meyerhoff Auditorium at the Baltimore Museum of Art, was impressive in both its size (over 350 people) and its passion. Radio's audience, always invisible, usually silent, was suddenly neither. On a snowy Wednesday evening, dozens of outraged listeners took to the open microphones to condemn the decision and to call for Steiner's reinstatement. Many of those who rose to speak drew upon memories as tools against what they perceived to be a moment of danger, not for Steiner, but for the future of public media and the democratic traditions that created and sustained it.

For many protestors that evening, the importance of public media could best be expressed in the idiom of memory. A nineteen-year-old African American woman recalled singing the civil rights protest anthem *We Who Believe in Freedom Cannot Rest* on Steiner's show a decade earlier as a child. Seizing this memory, she reprised her performance to the appreciative crowd, as the evening took on the air of a movement rally. Woody Curry an African-American Baltimore-based writer, activist and founder of a renowned drug recovery program, The Station, couched his protest in the nested memories of his military service in Vietnam decades earlier, and in the return trip he took to Vietnam three years earlier, in 2005 with the Center for Emerging Media, as part of its documentary program *Shared Weight*. Curry seized upon one memory in particular, overcoming his fear of venturing into a long underground tunnel, dug decades before by the Viet Cong, with Steiner on that 2005 trip, to express the importance of solidarity in this moment, confronting a very different kind of threat. In an episode of Shared Weight, Curry described that action as a moment of reconciliation with 'the thing in the tunnel', something that he had to 'accept … and get friendly with ... in order not to get destroyed by it' (CEM, 2005).

A white woman named Anita recalled her struggle as part of the Catholic laity in Boston who mobilised to get the Church to own up to years of clergy abuse in order to understand her relationship to the gathered WYPR faithful. She suggested a tactic borrowed from the earlier movement: an escrow fund of donations to be given to the station upon the reinstatement of Steiner. A civil rights lawyer named Irene, race undetermined, used the memory of 'getting dumped' to understand the experience. 'I know what you do when you get dumped. You hand back their crap!' she said to loud applause as she waved a handful of WYPR swag, the kind of small gifts given to donors. 'It wasn't just a show', she added, 'It was a relationship' (Rosen, 2008b: B1). Like Curry and many other speakers, Irene recalled not only the memories of listening to the show, but to participating in it as well. She had once been a guest on an episode dedicated to helping ex-felon women get back into the workforce.

Other listeners turned to history in search of apposite memories to wield, including references to Napoleon's campaign in Egypt (Marbella, 2008, B1). Many listeners were quick to clarify that 'this isn't about Marc' so much as it was about the larger principles of how public radio should operate. It became clear that the central conflict between listeners and station management was over who 'owns' public radio. Several others were quick to remind station management that WYPR's call letters stand for 'Your Public Radio' and that on-air hosts made sure to emphasize the 'Your' in frequent station identifications and pledge drives. The slogan now 'rings hollow', according to Fred Van Dyk, another unhappy listener. Even so, the promise of ownership emboldened Van Dyk, a white man, to demand racial, financial, political and geographic diversity' on the station board.

To make the case, listeners linked the concept of public ownership of the airwaves to the ritual patterns of listening that shaped their lives and their communities. Ted James, an African American man, who described himself as 'just a bus driver', explained the importance of public ownership in personal terms.

> At 5am, my dog and I listen on bus. I listen to radio on all day. I make my wife dinner at 5pm and we turn off radio and talk about what we heard. There goes the "Y" for "Your" and there goes your "P" for "Public." This is not about Marc Steiner, It's about the meaning of public radio [voice breaking]. I have struggled listening to YOUR public radio
>
> … today I turned it off. I will not listen and I won't contribute until they fix it and then I'll be back.

'Our funds pay one-third of WYPR's budget', observed an African American woman named Helen, 'so we should have one-third representation on the board'. A white listener, named Dana, insisted that she was 'an owner' of the station. 'I'm the "public" in public radio', added Ruth, another white woman. This ability to bring together a community, Colbert insisted, is 'what makes Marc such a dangerous subversive'. The referent for 'Your' and the meaning of 'Public' were generally in dispute for the rest of the meeting (Marbella, 2008: B1). Hard by the exit, Tony Brandon, flanked by aides, sat silently in the auditorium, looking at his BlackBerry and waiting it out. A few hundred angry listeners out of 160,000, Brandon told reporters at the end of the event, 'is not a forum that gives us usable research' (ibid.).

Brandon had a point, as subsequent Arbitron reports would bear out. His dismissal of the protest, while perhaps politically tone-deaf, echoed the larger turn towards audience research that had increasingly come to dominate programming and fundraising decisions at NPR and other public radio networks. Just two years later, in 2010, NPR commissioned SmithGeiger, a market research firm, to generate a psychographic profile for their different kinds of listeners. The report identified the most coveted types of listeners are 'Voracious Voyagers', 'Team Captains', and 'Dutiful Aggregators', categories that aligned listeners with purchase behaviour, income levels, and attitudes about education (SmithGeiger, 2010). Intensive and expensive, audience research hoped to identify listeners as specific types of consumers, not as members of a listening public with collective memories of public service and shared demands for representation.

In any case, the crowd that rose up in protest of Steiner's firing represented something larger than a single radio host or a single radio station. The visibility and audibility of radio listeners, brought together in one place to talk about the importance of public radio, struck some as a kind of a revelation. Doug Colbert, a white law school professor and occasional

guest on Steiner's show, drew an explicit connection between the listener uprising and his own evolving consciousness. 'I knew there was a community I belonged to, but now I finally see what it is'. 'WYPR's management', he continued, is 'private ownership. We are public ownership' (Marbella, 2008: B1). The appearance in an auditorium of a public radio audience—or at least an angry subset of one—opened up a conversation about the meaning of public in public media. 'We need more, not less independent voices', concluded Colbert (ibid.).

Fearing an even bigger backlash and reduced revenues, WYPR wisely cancelled its spring fund drive that year. Wary of further public reproach, some remaining station hosts stopped putting as much emphasis on the word 'Your' in 'Your Public Radio Station' during station IDs and fund drives (Kast, 2008). Its Community Advisory Board (CAB) called for more diversity on the station's board of directors, more transparency in station governance and more public input through the CAB. A Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) inspector general's report the following year seemed to bolster these calls for reform, finding that WYPR 'did not maintain a functioning community advisory board, nor did it comply with open records requirements for financial records or EEO statistics' (Everhart, 2009).

Brandon and the WYPR board responded to the calls to reinstate Steiner, or at least to justify his firing, in subsequent public statements with a list of talking points. Along with sagging ratings, the station management suggested that Steiner's Baltimore-centric focus ran counter to the station's mission to cover the entire state of Maryland. Finally, Board president Barbara Bozzuto conceded, Steiner and the Board simply had different visions for the future of the station (Woestendiek, 2008: C1).

This last explanation was the least controversial. Steiner's focus on not just the problems of people on the social margins but on their perspectives represented a counter current in the public radio mainstream. Jack Mitchell identified this key distinction in Listener Supported, his 2005 history of NPR: public radio was a service that was 'focused on the societally conscious, not a service that was societally conscious' (Mitchell, 2005: 184). Steiner, by contrast, did not just bring advocates for the city's homeless into the studio, he brought the homeless in to speak for themselves.

In another victory for Brandon, WYPR reported an increase in total listeners who contributed in the year following the sacking of Steiner. They saw a slight dip in the total listener contributions, likely attributable to the recession, which hit other markets similarly. Public radio in the US is funded by a combination of listeners members' contributions; corporate underwriting—which is essentially genteel advertising spots; grants from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the federal entity created by Congress in 1967; a smattering of state and local grants; and the occasional major donor gift. The portion of total revenue that each NPR affiliate station gets from listener member contributions varies widely, but WYPR's rate of 30% in 2009 was on the low side compared to other major cities in the Northeast. 'The fundamentals of the business are operating beautifully', Brandon boasted, when interviewed on the occasion of the one-year anniversary of the Steiner affair (Kaltenbach, 2009: C1).

Local Public Radio as Community Organising

The Marc Steiner Show debuted in 1993, well into the era of neoliberal retrenchment, on WJHU, an NPR affiliate owned by Johns Hopkins University. The public affairs show focused

on Baltimore, its problems, its resources and its people. Steiner told me he saw the show as 'an extension of community organising'. Public radio was, in those days, 'one of the most segregated institutions in the US', and early on Steiner aimed to 'bridge racial gaps' in the city and in public media. Steiner told me back in 2012 that from the start he tried to 'mix it up by consciously bringing radical voices to traditional democratic conversations' (Steiner, 2012). This attempt, to bridge the competing constituencies of public broadcasting's original mission, marked the CEM as an outlier on the airwaves through much of the early 21st century, as public radio revenues soared and the networks like NPR doubled down on the 'highly educated' demographic in its fundraising and programming strategies. Steiner joined WYPR journalists in holding that underwriters should not influence programming, a principle that many felt was under attack under Brandon's leadership (Ericson, 2015).

Steiner is 'an odd duck' in the contemporary public radio world, according to Mark Gunnery, former producer at CEM, who is now a producer for the nationally-syndicated *The Kojo Nnaamdi Show* on WAMU (Gunnery, 2017). The work of the Center represents a 'counter current' in the public media world, added Stefanie Mavronis, another former producer (Mavronis, 2017). Steiner himself identifies himself as part of a tradition stretching back to I. F. Stone's *Weekly* and the oral histories of Studs Terkel. He also traced his political lineage back through the civil rights and anti-war movements of his youth and to the tradition of social justice in Judaism. Steiner grew up white and Jewish in black Baltimore, the son of parents who embraced the ideal of integration in a very segregated city. At 11 years old, Steiner integrated his otherwise all-black Boy Scout Troop. A one-time 'teenage Trotskyist', an anti-war and civil rights activist, he was arrested and kicked out of school for his civil rights activism and beaten by police for protesting the war as part of Students for a Democratic Society.

As a young man, Steiner became a youth counsellor and educator who taught theatre in prisons. He later taught at the renowned Baltimore School for the Arts and served as principal of the Baltimore Experimental School. He tried his hand at marketing research and running political campaigns for local Democrats before coming to radio rather late in his career. Steiner started the Center for Emerging Media in 2000, as a way to leverage grants and other funds for more ambitious and independent projects. As he saw his role at WYPR diminish, CEM increasingly became the repository for seizing hold of the radical traditions that shaped Steiner. CEM turned to the power of memory as a form of personal and national healing in its first major project Shared Weight, an audio documentary featuring the voices and stories of US veterans, protesters and Vietnamese survivors of the war in Vietnam. In 2005, Steiner brought a small group of veterans, including Curry, and former war resistors to Vietnam to reckon with the past and with the families of the Vietnamese soldiers they had fought.

One episode is organised around the memory of a veteran named Homer Steedly of the moment he shot and killed a young Viet Cong soldier along the Ho Chi Minh trail in 1965. This memory and the image of the haunted wandering souls of both men form the framework for a meditation on forgiveness and grace and the transformative power of rituals of memory and grief. The CEM group find the family of this dead Vietnamese soldier and mourn with them. It is a riveting hour of audio storytelling, in which the memory of a single dead Vietnamese man becomes the means for understanding and re-building the fraught relationship between two families, separated by decades, oceans, and a terrible war that neither side can defend (CEM, 2005).

Its second major project, the Peabody-award winning *Just Words*, featured the voices of the homeless and the poor of Baltimore struggling for survival and dignity. In one compelling moment, Jacquetta Lyles, a day labourer, describes the difficulty of getting paid to clean up the Baltimore Orioles' Camden Yards ballpark after games. She also describes the challenges of being paid in cash cards from which a $1.50 deduction is taken every time they are used, resulting in yet another poor tax. A co-worker of hers with just $20 on his cash card couldn't get the minimum $20 out of an ATM because, minus the $1.50 fee, he no longer had sufficient funds to make the withdrawal. Steiner and his producer Jessica Phillips, provided important context, identifying three separate middlemen, including a for-profit temporary employment agency, that each take a cut out of the value of the labour provided by Lyles and others. In another episode, Lucille Robinson, a grandmother of six, describes the challenges of caring for her extended family on just $700 a month in Social Security payments. Lyles and Robinson's stories provide a stark expose of the feminisation of poverty, and the tremendous amount of work required to survive below the poverty line (CEM, 2007).

Interspersed throughout the stories, short bits of blues, Motown and folk songs with lyrical connections to the dignity of labour and the challenges of poverty and isolation connect the stories to multiple overlapping traditions in working class American culture. Nina Simone's 'Oh Baltimore, ain't it hard just to live' provides an on-the-nose caption for Lyles's description of maintaining a family of four on minimum wage and her role in the fledgling United Workers' Association, a union working for higher wages for day labourers in the downtown stadiums. The Peabody Awards committee, in honouring *Just Words*, observed that 'the stories told linger in the memory and accumulate poignancy and power' (Peabody Awards, 2008). Part of their power derives from a larger collective memory, of the kind that George Lipsitz (1990) has argued enlivens the narratives of popular culture, especially music, of racial minorities and the poor. In these ways, Steiner and his collaborators re-defined 'emerging media' so that 'emerging' described not the media apparatus, but the social formations that were 'making do' with the media technology available to them (De Certeau, 1984: 29).

Radical Voices, Smaller Audiences

The program that replaced the *Marc Steiner Show* on WYPR, *Midday with Dan Rodricks*, featured a lot more of the kind of anodyne lifestyle topics typical of commercial broadcasting. Rodricks, a popular columnist and reporter with the *Baltimore Sun*, sounded many of the same themes as Steiner in his column. However, as a former talk show host on a local commercial station, he was also more inclined to cooperate with the station management's desire for more upscale programming fare. Gone were the homeless people advocating for themselves in the studio. In their place, restauranteurs and home gardeners. This shift coincided with other changes in programming, like the addition of short sponsored spots including *Radio Kitchen*, *Backstage at the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra*, and *Cellar Notes*, a show about wine—'shows that sound more like genteel infomercials than public-affairs programs', according to activist Max Obuszewski, one of the more vocal protesters of Steiner's sacking. Brandon says the shorter shows are now common on public radio stations, and that they serve a triple purpose of helping businesses, helping the station and providing top quality content for listeners (Ericson, 2008).

Steiner and the CEM landed a new gig across town at WEAA, the much smaller and less well-heeled public radio station housed at Morgan University, a Historically Black College/University (HCBU). Changes in institutional resources have also wrought changes in programming. Steiner's audience was considerably smaller on WEAA than it had been at WYPR. In general, WEAA draws about half the audience of WYPR. The audience is less affluent as well, which meant less money for programming. The new contract with WEAA provided CEM with $100,000 per annum, only one quarter of the funds needed to run a daily two-hour public affairs and call-in program (Kaltenbach, 2009: C1). CEM would have to raise the rest. But it provided space and time on the airwaves and an opportunity to double-down on CEM's race-conscious human rights mission. Freed from much of the corporate expectations of growth and the not-so-subtle pressures to harmonise programming with the interests of underwriters, the new iteration of the Marc Steiner show became more radical.

Some comparisons between the two midday public affairs shows might help to clarify the different versions of public they are speaking to. In 2009, Rodricks devoted 13 programs to 'food-cuisine' compared to zero for Steiner during that same period. Steiner had 11 programs dedicated to civil rights and racial issues, compared with only three for Rodricks. Steiner dedicated 15 programs to military issues like Iraq, Afghanistan, military policy and strategy, and veterans' affairs, while Rodricks had only eight. Rodricks had twice as many programs on military history, 6–3, compared to Steiner. Steiner had 12 programs on the Middle East conflict, compared to Rodrick's zero. Rodricks had 14 programs on sports compared to Steiner's eight; and nine episodes dedicated to trends in television, to Steiner's two. [1]

Fighting to bridge the racial divide in public radio, in Baltimore, and in the US more broadly, was in some ways harder to do from a smaller station anchored at a historically black institution. Mavronis, the former CEM producer, told me that she routinely encountered white Baltimoreans who had no idea Steiner was still on the air after his departure from WYPR—a sad echo of Steiner's early observation about the racial segregation of the airwaves. Still, the WEAA era provided the CEM with a primarily African American audience with a strong connection to a university and the guests, callers and staff reflected a coming-together of the highly educated and a racial minority, fulfilling the formula of public broadcasting's founding mission. WEAA's slogan, 'The Voice of the Community', avoided the vexed terms 'public' and 'your', so contentious over at WYPR, in favour of the language of community, a word that in this context implied both a sense of common purpose and a legacy of the written and unwritten social boundaries shaped by racism. While Steiner struggled with a smaller audience, less revenue and a more marginal perch for CEM within its new public radio home, Brandon was fending off unionisation efforts at WYPR and battling criticism that the station was not honouring the Public Media Code of Integrity (Editorial Integrity for Public Media, 2013), which appears on their website, to set 'careful boundaries between contributors and content creators' (Ericson, 2014). Eric Ericson of the *Baltimore City Paper* charged in 2015 that

> The station's management makes no distinction between programming that is written and produced in house by its professional, paid staff or syndicated through National Public Radio, and that which is, directly or not, underwritten by the corporate host. (Ericson, 2015).

[1] The author would like to acknowledge the hard work of Mr. Andrew Devos in helping to create this comparative content analysis, and the sharp eyes and thoughtful suggestions of the two anonymous reviewers.

In 2016, the axe fell again on Steiner and the CEM. DeWayne Wickham, Dean of Morgan State's School of Global Journalism and Communication, was the hatchet man this time. The ostensible reason was that the move was part of a broader revamping of the station schedule to provide more opportunities for Morgan State students to use the station to report, produce, and deliver news programming. Steiner's public statement about leaving WEAA was cordial, even warm, referring to WEAA as 'like family'.[2] But in an interview a week after the announcement, Steiner described the parting as 'bittersweet' (Steiner, 2017).

Former *Steiner Show* producers were keen to point out the low cost to the university of most of the current schedule and the many opportunities for internships and employment the program offered current students and recent graduates. 'We always find something for Morgan students', insists Mavronis. 'Our board operator is a Morgan grad. Most of the staff is former students. So many of the hosts of the other regular programs are produced and hosted by unpaid volunteers who have been showing undergrads the ropes for years', she continued (Mavronis, 2017).

Former CEM producers pointed to the cosy relationship between Wickham and Baltimore's Mayor, Catherine Pugh, as a contributing factor to the decision. Steiner had been shut down the previous year when trying to schedule an on-air mayoral candidate debate between Pugh, the favourite, and several of her challengers. Pugh balked; Steiner didn't cancel the debate until he was forced to by station management. When asked if his being a high-profile white host on an otherwise predominantly black station staff housed in a HBCU contributed to his troubles at the station, Steiner demurred, saying only that it could be tricky sometimes (Steiner, 2017). Steiner's sacking was followed by a string of changes in the programming, including the departure of several other high-profile hosts, including Sean Yoes, editor of *The Baltimore Afro American* newspaper, who resigned in protest of 'profound differences with the direction of WEAA right now'. A handful of volunteers 'who hosted specialty shows in genres like blues and jazz once a week resigned or were dropped in the revamped lineup' (Zurawik, 2017). Such spasms of conflict and broken relationships within the Voice of the Community reminds us of Raymond Williams's trenchant observation that 'community' is a 'warmly persuasive word', almost never used pejoratively, that tends to obscure exclusions, hierarchies and other structural problems (Williams, 1985: 76).

In any case, it was clear that CEM and Steiner had again foundered on the fault lines of public radio, its limited funding and its complicated mandate to serve a public that never quite comes into focus. The economic and political challenges of keeping CEM's work going takes a toll, Steiner admitted: 'after a while, you lose your creative edge' (2017). The Baltimore alternative media landscape suffered another blow in the summer of 2017 with the loss of *The Baltimore City Paper*, a venerable free weekly whose arts and culture coverage was bolstered with occasional investigative journalism. Editors and reporters from *City Paper* appeared monthly on *The Marc Steiner Show* to discuss local politics and culture, a kind of alternative media synergy that will be difficult to replace in the new media landscape. In the void, it is difficult to imagine any scrutiny of the mainstream press that remains in Baltimore. *The City Paper* had, for instance, great coverage of WYPR, its struggle against unionisation in 2015 and its questionable practices regarding underwriters mentioned above. *The Baltimore Beat*

[2] Available at: http://www.bizjournals.com/baltimore/news/2017/05/10/radio-talk-show-host-marc-steiner-leaving-weaa.html.

sprang up in its place in the summer of 2017 with great promise. Edited by Lisa Snowden-McCray, an African American veteran *Baltimore Sun* journalist, and featuring a diverse and energetic staff, *The Beat* engaged the city in ways reminiscent of the *Steiner Show* and the *City Paper*. It shut down abruptly in March 2018, another blow to alternative media in Baltimore.

Conclusion

Since August 2017, Steiner has been running operations entirely out of the cramped offices and studio of the Center for Emerging Media, with Valerie Williams, the Center's Executive Director and his wife, and his small staff of producers. They are making the best of their newfound institutional freedom to pursue multimedia projects that look beyond Baltimore but that hew closely to critical social justice themes. One, tentatively titled *The Alabama Chronicles*, features interviews with Martin Luther King Jr.'s barber. Another project, in collaboration with African American public radio and TV host Tavis Smiley, will focus on the work of political theorist Benjamin Barber. The Center will also support the media productions of young people and 'new voices' in Baltimore who need access to production space and expertise (Steiner, 2017).

The Center for Emerging Media is embracing new platforms, like podcasting, and new funding models, like Indiegogo, and considering new distribution schemes, which may include yet another radio venture. Steiner's affection for the medium that has defined his career for the last 24 years is apparent. Terrestrial radio, he tells me, 'isn't going anyplace' (Steiner, 2017). Neither, apparently, is the Center for Emerging Media. However, as it approaches its 20th year of existence, it has seen its distribution platforms shrink again and again. During that same period, the fortunes of mainstream public radio and its podcast spinoffs, commercially funded and non-profit alike, have soared to new heights of audience, revenue and influence (NPR, 2018). From *Planet Money* to *Serial* to *This American Life* to *Radio Lab* to *Invisibilia*, these successful ventures sometimes traffic in stories about the marginalised and voiceless, but from the familiar and reassuring perspectives of the highly educated and socially powerful.

In the larger national context of increasingly partisan division, voices of dissent and grievance are multiplying. But as a significant swath of mainstream media outlets oriented around a centrist, neoliberal perspective put pressure on the nativism and ethno-nationalism of which Donald Trump is the latest avatar, space for radical voices of dissent are not guaranteed, and may be pushed further off the mainstream channels. Likewise, the Cambrian explosion in audio platforms and programming means more competition for listeners' ears. For media outlets like CEM moments of danger come in flashes like Friday night sackings, but also as part of waves and currents—equally unpredictable, but slower and harder to fathom. In the face of all these dangers, seizing the power of memory to wrest back a radical tradition will require more voices, more stories, and audiences that manifest visibly and audibly as publics and communities. These are fraught and unstable categories, but in battles to reclaim radical traditions and build progressive futures, they are words we cannot do without.

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CHAPTER 44

Making Media Public: On Revolutionary Street Screenings in Egypt

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Abstract

This article[1] focuses on two related street screening initiatives, Tahrir Cinema and Kazeboon, which took place in Egypt mainly between 2011 and 2013. Based on long-term ethnographic studies and activist work, we explore street screenings as place-making and describe how participants at street screenings knew with rather than from the screenings. With the point of departure that participants' experiences of the images cannot be understood detached from their experiences of everything around the images, we argue that Egyptian revolutionary street screenings enabled particular paths to knowledge because they made media engage with and take place within everyday spaces that the revolution aims to liberate and transform, and because the screenings' public and illegal manner at times embodied events portrayed in the images.

Keywords

Egypt, revolution, street screenings, information activism, media

[1] Nina Grønlykke Mollerup's part of this research was carried out under the auspices of International Media Support. We are indebted to Annette Markham and the anonymous reviewers from the *International Journal of Communication* for their very valuable comments on this article.

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Introduction

Tahrir Cinema, summer, 2011 (Sherief Gaber's experience):

Tahrir Square is full once again. The tents in the middle of the square are in place, and people are determined not to leave before Mubarak is held accountable and the hundreds killed and thousands wounded are given justice.

I hear from friends about a plan to set up a screen in the square and show footage collected over the past months to remind people why we are here. And to show others who may not have seen these images. I go, without much to offer but happy to help. I help spread out a tarp for the floor, raise the wooden frame, and stretch the canvas for the screen—simple things like that.

I take pictures that night of what turn out to be hundreds of people gathering and watching. In the photographs they are totally transfixed, with intent expressions and concentration showing on their faces (Figure 1). For much of the event, however, people are not silent but vocally engaged with the events on the screen, with everything they see, with the people around them, with the presenters and the presentation. They argue, they discuss, they laugh at what they see and at each other.

One video shows protesters attacking a police station.

A man objects. "This should not be shown," he argues. "It is not in the spirit of the revolution!" A woman stands up and defends the video. "I was there," she declares, and starts to tell her side of the story, justifying the attack. Others join in the conversation as the screening continues.



Figure 1. Participants at one of the first Tahrir Cinema screenings. (Photo: Sherief Gaber).

About six months after Mubarak was ousted, protesters occupied Tahrir Square again. During this summer occupation, activists in the square realized that many of the protesters who had also participated in the January and February protests leading to Mubarak's ouster had not seen many of the iconic images from the initial 18 days of uprising across Egypt. The occupied square provided a space to collect images filmed by ordinary people on mobile phones and cameras—images that had not received public media exposure—and show these images to people collectively. Thus the idea behind these public screenings originated, modestly, to show images to those in the square who had not seen them and to remind others of them. A projector, speakers, a computer, a makeshift screen, and electricity from a nearby lamppost, deftly rewired by an electrician in the crowd, made the screenings possible. Most crucial to the screenings, however, were people who had filmed events they participated in and seen fit to share those images with others. The first screenings in Tahrir Square, called Tahrir Cinema, were organized by a group of people who, with these screenings and other events, were in the process of becoming the activist media collective Mosireen. But Mosireen was by no means alone in producing Tahrir Cinema. Rather, the videos' curation was an interactive engagement between participants and organizers, participants and the screen itself, and different participants in discussions and arguments. As Mosireen repeated Tahrir Cinema at other sit-ins and demonstrations in Tahrir Square and elsewhere, the concept of street screenings also spread to residential neighborhoods and other locations across Egypt with the Aaskar Kazeboon[2] (The Military Are Liars) campaign, often just referred to as Kazeboon (Liars).

Kazeboon and Tahrir Cinema have been only briefly covered in academic literature. Mona Abaza (2013) and Sahar Khamis, Paul Gold, and Katherine Vaughn (2014) spoke of Kazeboon as an attempt to produce a counternarrative to the military's narrative. Similarly, Walid El Hamamsy and Mounira Soliman (2013) described Kazeboon as an attempt to expose the lies of the military. Amy Austin Holmes (n.d.) described Tahrir Cinema as a way to reach people without Internet access. These approaches to Kazeboon and Tahrir Cinema accord with descriptions of similar street cinema campaigns in other places (e.g., Ceccon, 1994 on TV Maxambomba in Brazil) and also correspond with some of the aims organizers described to us. Miriyam Aouragh and Anne Alexander (2014) use Kazeboon as an example to illustrate "that parts of the popular movement have transitioned from reliance on old and new capitalist media as simply carriers of their voices and hopes toward media practices seeking to develop media voices and infrastructures of their own" (p. 891), pointing to the significance of looking beyond distribution. All these approaches highlight important aspects of street screenings that we seek to add new layers to by examining the particular interaction with images that street screenings enable. We chose this focus because like Sherief, all other organizers we spoke with were deeply affected by the immensely transformative potential they experienced through street screenings.

They saw people change their minds, become convinced of new opinions, support something they had moments ago renounced. They saw screenings turn into marches, sometimes spontaneously, and they watched people go from unresponsive bystanders to active partici-

[2] Aaskar Kazeboon is usually transcribed *3askar Kazeboon* by people involved with the campaign, though Aaskar Kazeboon is used, e.g., in the campaign's YouTube account. This article transliterates everyday Egyptian Arabic to make terms recognizable and searchable. However, to improve readability for readers unfamiliar with this system of transliteration, we use a for the letter ʿayn and ʾ for hamza and silent qaf instead of using the numbers 3 and 2 as is customary in this system.

pants in a political demonstration in the course of a screening. And they were amazed by the discussions between participants at screenings and affirmed that they always take place. That is, organizers saw a potential for changing media from an object of individual consumption to a tactic for producing new environments and collectivities. Thus, besides the goals of reaching the most people possible, reaching people who had not seen the images before, and producing a counternarrative, the Kazeboon and Tahrir Cinema initiatives had the goal of changing the relationships between media and publics. In other words, activists sought to make media public and make it work as something other than a tool for the transmission of information.

Therefore, we are less interested in who the initiatives reached than in how they reached them. Street screenings enabled a particular way of engaging with video and surroundings. They also often led to collective action such as marches, demonstrations, and even initiatives like Mosireen, which to a considerable extent developed with Tahrir Cinema. The most important thing about these screenings, then, is that they did more than merely show images people had not seen. This article will explore this "more." We argue that revolutionary street screenings enable particular paths to knowledge because they make media engage with and take place within quotidian spaces that the revolution aims to liberate and transform, and because their public and illegal manner sometimes embodies the very events portrayed in the images. Tim Ingold (2013) argued that "knowing *is* movement" (p. 1) and that it is misleading to separate knowing from being (2000, 2013). Thus, he rejected "the epistemology that drives a wedge between the world of practical activity on the one hand and, on the other, the world of symbolic representation" (2011b, p. 324). That is, people know from the inside—from being of the world, not from standing outside observing it. Ingold also explained that "to know things you have to grow into them, and let them grow in you, so that they become a part of who you are. The mere provision of information holds no guarantee of knowledge, let alone of understanding" (2013, p. 1). Looking at street screenings with this approach to knowledge, we are able to show that participants at screenings did not know *from* the images they watched or *from* other participants. Rather, they knew *with* the screenings as the latter became part of who they are.

Our Positionality

This article grew out of our shared fascination with street screenings and recurrent discussions about what makes these screenings so compelling. Writing together, we shared the goal of understanding street screenings, but our purposes and methods differed. Sherief sought insights into street screenings that could be used to inspire change through screenings and other activism. Nina's purpose was to produce academic knowledge that might indirectly contribute to media initiatives such as Tahrir Cinema and Kazeboon. Sherief—a lawyer, housing rights researcher, and founding member of the Mosireen Collective—participated in initiating both Tahrir Cinema and Kazeboon. He has taken part in countless street screenings, often as an organizer, and contributed to the creation of many of the screened videos. His extensive work to document the revolution through video and photos has included many of the specific events mentioned in this article. Though academic research was not the purpose of this documentation, his photos and recordings of screenings served to supplement his memory and experiences of them in writing this article. At street screenings and elsewhere,

he has taken part in discussions about screenings and the events they refer to. Nina is a media anthropologist whose ethnographic research with the Mosireen Collective took place mainly during seven months she spent in Cairo in 2012 and 2013 as part of her PhD research. She interviewed Mosireen members who had taken part in both Tahrir Cinema and Kazeboon, and did participant observation at the Mosireen office and elsewhere. Though she has not participated in street screenings, she has joined in screenings in such settings as universities. She has also watched videos and footage from screenings as well as videos shown at screenings, followed tweets from screenings, read accounts about screenings, and supervised a group of students researching Kazeboon (Nasser, Rømer, Larsen, & Jørgensen, 2012). The indented vignettes in this article describe some of our different experiences. Some are explicitly based on our individual experiences while others interweave several different events and experiences, but each is a patchwork of insights gained from diverse sources: memories, field notes, videos, recordings, photos, interviews, discussions, tweets, articles, blogs, conference talks, pictures, and more.

Our claims to knowledge thus derive from our having been observers of and participants in the revolution in very different ways. We are acutely aware of the importance of our own positionality in the events we describe, and we acknowledge the substantial disagreement about the intangible notion of the revolution. Therefore, we are at pains to clarify our positionality respecting the revolution, as it naturally has implications for what we write. We understand the revolution as a process rather than a series of events defined by their outcome (Armbrust, 2013). It is particularly interesting, then, as Mark Allen Peterson (2011) pointed out, that "as [revolutions] break down pre-existing political, economic and social structures, they usher in periods of enormous creativity and imagination" (para. 3). Thus, we see the revolution as suffering and disagreement as well as creativity and cooperation. We recognize that many different people and groups have different claims to the revolution and different perceptions of what the revolution should achieve. In this article our stance toward the revolution corresponds with that of Tahrir Cinema and Kazeboon (which of course still includes different claims and perceptions): We hold the goals of the revolution to be an end to torture, corruption, police and army violence against citizens, unjust detentions, and particularly military trials for civilians, as well as achievement of a transparent and accountable state, equitable distribution of wealth, and the freedoms of speech, assembly, organization, movement, and religion. We do not see our positionality as problematic in the context of this article. Like Ingold (2013), we hold that "only because we are already of the world, only because we are fellow travellers along with the beings and things that command our attention, can we observe them" (p. 5). And following his vein, our aim here is not to accumulate information about the world, but to correspond with it (2013, p. 7).

Emplacing Media

We are inspired by the way practice theory (Bräuchler & Postill, 2010; Couldry, 2004), non-representational theory (Moores, 2005, 2012b; Thrift, 2008), and non-media-centric media studies (Moores, 2012a; Morley, 2008) have broadened understandings of media beyond representational theory and highlighted the importance of studying the emplacement of media. We follow Shaun Moores' (2012a) description of media uses as "place-making" that "need to

be explored alongside other such meaningful practices in everyday living" (p. 3). Our notion of place-making draws on an anthropological notion of place that is particularly inspired by the work of Sarah Pink (Fors, Bäckström, & Pink, 2013; Pink, 2009, 2011a, 2012; Pink & Leder Mackley, 2013). By places, then, we mean "integrations of space and time" (Massey 2005, p. 130) that are "composed of entanglements of all components of an environment" (Pink, 2011a, p. 349). These elements should be understood as "being in movement" (p. 349). This means that we see places as "intensities of activity and presence, as experienced by embodied human subjects, from specific subjectivities. In this sense place is also an 'event'" (p. 349).

This notion of place posits screenings as place-events, acknowledging that screenings entail much more than people looking at a screen. In our view, participants sitting on the concrete; the projector lighting up the air; images enlarged on makeshift screens; recorded sounds interweaving with sounds from cars and participants; participants hearing, seeing, feeling, and talking to each other; and much more contributed to the way people experienced images on the screen. Whether they actively watched the screen or not, they engaged with the images through the surroundings' engagements with the images. Arguing with others, sensing others crying, and feeling fear became part of the experience of watching the images on the screen. In other words, participants did not engage with the images in isolation. Vaike Fors, Åsa Bäckström, and Sarah Pink (2013) pointed out that "sensory-embodied experience is multisensory; it is not in any essential way reducible to being of one or another sensory modality, but rather each is contingent on and indeed part of the production of others" (p. 175). That is, the sensory experience of sitting on concrete, feeling its hardness, became part of seeing images of people being thrown against the very same concrete. Images are influenced by and influence the situations and places they circulate in as they engage and become entangled with things and people. Our aim here is not to discuss what can be called "things"; but we are thinking broadly of concrete, sheets, walls, buildings, streetlights, cars, sounds, breezes, dust, heat, tear gas, images, light from projectors, computers, bits, thoughts, and more—roughly, everything, while agreeing with Hodder (2012) that humans are a particular type of thing. People participating in screenings are entangled with things beyond the screen, and what they see on the screen is interwoven with other sensory impressions. The one cannot be understood when detached from the other.

Mosireen, Tahrir Cinema, and Kazeboon

Kazeboon screening, spring, 2012:

It is night, and the streets are dark. A screening is about to take place in a Cairo neighborhood. Streetlights and lights from shops provide the only islands of illumination. A projector is turned on, and its light brightens the air reaching a sheet hung as a makeshift screen. People are tightly gathered, some standing, others sitting on the concrete that on most days is a pathway to their homes.

Across the screen appear some of the most horrid and iconic images of the revolution so far:

The Maspero massacre, where the army killed 28 peaceful protesters when soldiers frantically drove armored military vehicles into the crowd, shooting live bullets from the hatch.

Toussi, a dead protester dragged to a pile of garbage by a military police officer.

> *Sit al-binat ("the woman of all women"), also known as "the woman in the blue bra" because her disheveled clothes revealed her blue bra as she was beaten unconscious by about 15 soldiers in riot gear. The video shows her lying on the ground by Tahrir Square. The soldiers kick her viciously and beat her with rods. They continue beating her as they drag her unconscious body down the concrete. The blows start to ease as most soldiers move on to other victims, but suddenly, with a seemingly renewed anger, one soldier lifts his leg in the air and forcefully kicks her in her chest, the force bending her body unnaturally.*
>
> *As these images move across the screen, people in the street watch determinedly with serious faces—until the images become too horrid.*
>
> *Then some move protectively away from the screen, seeking cover by shielding their heads with their arms or hiding behind the shoulder of the person next to them.*
>
> *Some cry.*
>
> *Eyes start to wander away from the screen, finding refuge on the ground. Breaths start getting longer and deeper. A woman and a man turn their heads away from the screen and toward each other at the same time, their eyes meeting briefly as they seek respite from the images.*
>
> *"Can you show something from Port Said?" a woman asks, referring to the recent police-condoned attack on soccer fans in a stadium in Port Said, where more than 70 people were killed. Some were kids.*
>
> *"Show this video," someone suggests, holding up a cell phone. Shortly after, the video arrives on the screen by way of Bluetooth, the computer, and the projector.*
>
> *As the screening proceeds, discussions begin to flourish.*
>
> *Some participants, confronted with the extent of police violence for perhaps the first time, speak up with passion. Their stories seem to start with incredulity but finish with new conviction, as if the speakers are bolstered by the confirmations and reactions of the listeners around them.*
>
> *After the screening, people start chanting "batel" ("illegitimate"), referring to the military council in charge of the country. The chant leads to others, and the screening turns into a march. Some are prepared and have brought banners. Others join spontaneously.* [3]

Kazeboon screenings were carried out in cities across Egypt, including El Mansûra, Alexandria, Asyût, and El Mahalla El Kubra. In Cairo, they took place in upper-class areas like Maadi, Roxy, and Zamalek as well as poorer neighborhoods like Embaba, Abbassia, and Al Sayeda Zeinab. Our experiences confirm that both Kazeboon and Tahrir Cinema reached people who had never seen such images and people who did not have Internet access. Participants at screenings often asked organizers how to get the videos in order to share them further. When organizers during early screenings replied, "YouTube," people asked for something physical that did not depend on Internet access. Therefore organizers started bringing DVDs with videos and footage. Bluetooth became another important means of distribution. Many of the images shown at Tahrir Cinema and Kazeboon had not been televised and were available to people mainly via the Internet, if they were publicly available at all.

Whereas Tahrir Cinema took place in Tahrir Square and was enabled by Mosireen's equipment, Kazeboon screenings were carried out with people's own equipment or equipment borrowed from people who were active in the campaign. Kazeboon screenings appeared on

[3] Some of the images and videos mentioned here are available online. For the Maspero massacre see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mh5F0ot_p3s and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00t-0NEwc3E (English); for Toussi, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xz3Rg_heqAg; for the woman in the blue bra, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNAOLf1rX_U, for Port Said, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYiYb9yT7bA.

the walls of the presidential palace and the state TV building as well as on makeshift screens consisting of sheets hung up in residential areas. Often Kazeboon screenings were organized by residents of the neighborhoods where they took place, and the screening participants were neighbors and passers-by.

Whoever organized a screening chose the material to be screened *(in collaboration with participants)*, where they would screen it, and how they would publicize the screening.[4] Whereas the initial Tahrir Cinema screenings mainly showed raw footage, Kazeboon screenings have mostly featured edited videos, not least because throughout 2011, editing skills were learned or used for organizing in different ways by a growing number of people, including Mosireen. The activist collective Mosireen grew out of the 18 days in Tahrir Square in January and February, 2011, and the subsequent events. Mosireen has taken several different shapes, and many different people have contributed to it at different times. Part of its purpose is to support the revolution by filming, editing, and distributing videos about things of importance to the revolution, and holding workshops to teach people how to do these things themselves. Their YouTube channel is a key outlet for their work.[5] From 2011 to 2014, Mosireen ran an office where activists could meet, edit, plan, conduct workshops, and more. The office closed in 2014 due to severe security crackdowns and restrictions on civil society, but the collective's work continues in modified ways. Many videos shown at Kazeboon screenings were made by Mosireen. The videos often depicted army and police violence as well as moments of triumph, celebration, and small victories against the state's oppression, but screenings have also been dedicated to issues such as workers' rights, health, housing, and detainees' rights. At present in mid-2015, both Tahrir Cinema and Kazeboon are inactive, but they are not unlikely to reemerge in one form or another at some point.

Kazeboon notably took its name from the front-page headline of the newspaper *El Tahrir* on December 18, 2011, which simply (and bravely) read "Kazeboon" (Liars), next to a photograph of Egyptian military soldiers beating a woman who was unconscious and, also because of the beatings, half-dressed—"the woman in the blue bra." On several occasions the army had declared that they would never harm Egyptians. Many people took this newspaper into the streets and held up the front page at demonstrations, or stood in the streets showing it to people in cars in the often slow-moving Cairo traffic. Significantly, the way people literally took newspapers into the streets paralleled the way videos of the assault would soon be shown at Kazeboon screenings by people literally taking videos into the streets.

Maspero Screenings: The Significance of Images

University screening, spring, 2012 (Nina Grønlykke Mollerup's experience):

The room is tense with anticipation as Mosireen activists Lobna, Omar, Jasmina, and Philip start playing their video about the Maspero massacre. This is a presentation at Cairo University rather than a screening in the streets as they are used to.

A shaky video shows a guy lying on the ground being beaten by army soldiers with rods. We hear shooting, yelling.

[4] Many screenings have been listed on a Facebook calendar in addition to other publicity; see https://www.facebook.com/3askar.Kazeboon/app_208195102528120.

[5] https://www.youtube.com/user/Mosireen.

Sounds of horror.

The picture quickly moves as if the photographer is running for cover.

Then we see images of armored army vehicles driven frenetically into the crowd, crushing protesters.

These images are accompanied by screams. Then the screams are accompanied by unmoving bodies in the street.

People carrying bodies.

More screams.

Crying.

At this point I have stopped watching, but the pictures play vividly in my memory as I hear their sounds. I watch the crowd. Some are crying. Some look down, away from the screen. Others close their eyes and breathe slowly and deeply, as if trying to regain composure. Many are physically protecting themselves from the images with their arms.

I feel like a part of the crowd. And for the first time, I physically feel like a part of the revolution.

*****

Kazeboon screening at the Maspero building, January, 2012 (Sherief Gaber's experience):

A sit-in is taking place in front of the Maspero state television building.

A projector is set up, and images from the Maspero massacre are shown—not on a screen or sheet, but on the building itself. The building, ringed with fences, a wall, and barbed wire, and guarded by armed police and soldiers, is physically inaccessible to us. But the projector bypasses these security measures, effectively breaching the building and taking it over in some small way, making it serve a purpose antithetical to itself.

The images are difficult to see on the uneven "screen" of the building, but we know what they show. The people here are protesters, and most of them have seen and felt army and police violence up close by now.

After the screening, people break into a chant: "Yangeeb ha'ahom, yanmoot zaihom" (we'll get justice for them or die like them). [6]

The Maspero massacre occurred on October 9, 2011, when the army suddenly and violently attacked a march organized by the Coptic Church as the march reached the Maspero state TV building to protest attacks on churches. In less than a half hour, soldiers killed 28 protesters, several of whom were crushed by armored vehicles racing erratically through the streets. As the army was killing people in the street, state TV presenters went on air and urged *"mowatenoon shorafa"* (honorable citizens) to take to the streets to "protect the army." These calls led to increased violence (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights et al., 2011). The above descriptions of two different screenings of the same images from the Maspero massacre exemplify how images are not the same in different places. With them, we wish to illuminate how images *become* in different ways as they move and are moved by the things and people they are entangled with. That is, images never *are* in a finite sense. Rather, they are in a process of continual becoming, and in each place they move through they become differently. As they become differently, they move things and people differently or, in another sense, they act differently.

[6] A video from the Maspero screening can be seen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSRIyLFKMeU.

The point is that the images shown at screenings, shocking as they may be, are meaningless alone. Only when they enter into a conversation with their surroundings, and when people see them and reflect on what they see, do they become alive and become actors in the revolution themselves. As Sarah Pink (2011b) has pointed out, "images only become meaningful in the context of their viewing, and as such do not 'carry' precise or universal meanings that can be read from them" (pp. 8–9), though here we find it more pertinent to speak of their showing than their viewing, since people can still engage with images when they are not viewing them, as when they hide their heads in their arms. To understand how the images can be meaningful, then, their entanglements with their surroundings must be considered. The participants in the Maspero screening were already protesters in a sit-in, so their very presence hinged on their knowledge of and stance on the events in the images screened on the building and other such events. The images shown on the building were crucial to the significance of the screening, yet whether people saw the images was not essential. The purpose of screening the images was not to pass on information to an audience. People were present exactly because they *knew.* Rather, what the screening did was breach security measures and take over the building in perhaps the only way possible for protesters.

At the university screening, people engaged intensely in watching, discussing, and relating to the images. The images created a shared sense of danger that people physically tried to protect themselves from, even though it was not immediate. It also enabled a discussion that united people in wanting to act. Perhaps it even led to new initiatives. People at the Maspero screening were already engaged in collective, revolutionary action through the sit-in. The danger there, tangibly present even before the screening, was embodied by the presence of tanks and armed soldiers. Protesters were aware of this danger, and the images of others getting killed materialized the danger that was already there rather than creating a sense of danger. Thus, these images—the "same" images shown at the university screening—were not the same in the two different screenings. The screen did not just physically alter the images, in that their appearance on a building made into a huge, makeshift screen differed considerably from their look on a traditional, dedicated screen in a university lecture hall. More significantly, the images acted in completely different ways in the two different screenings. Yet at both the university screening and the Maspero screening, the images shown were crucial—not because they had significance on their own, but because they became significant by meeting with the other elements of the screening.

Entanglements

Tim Ingold (2011a) has asked, "What kind of meaning can there be in the absence of symbolic representation?" (p. 77). Arguing for incorporating Ingold's work in media studies and media anthropology, Shaun Moores (2012a) has suggested this question is particularly pertinent for these fields "because it might lead to a further reconsideration of the objects of investigation, allowing a non-representational or more-than-representational approach to complement a non-media-centric one" (p. 3). How, then, can Kazeboon and Tahrir Cinema screenings be understood in the absence of symbolic representation, and what are the objects of investigation? We have shown how images became images as they were projected on a "screen." But just as images became images only when light met a screen, the wall or sheet was not a priori a

screen but rather was constituted as such by a projector illuminating it with images streamed from a computer, and by people looking at it. The concrete that people sat on while watching the screen was not just street pavement; it was also a battleground, not symbolically but in the sense that people were sometimes literally sitting on the dried blood of people who died in and for the revolution. The paving stones were the same stones that were pulled up and thrown, or used to build barricades. And the streets that people walked on daily were not just a way home; they were seats in a revolutionary cinema. Thus the revolution materialized through people's everyday spaces and was brought to neighborhoods through the revolutionary actions of screenings.

Tahrir Cinema and Kazeboon screenings were revolutionary actions in several regards: They criticized authorities and questioned their legitimacy; they were illegal; they drew on the history of revolutionary practices in Egypt; they claimed public space that authorities tried to control through violence, checkpoints, arrests, stone walls cutting off streets, and more; and they created opportunities for other revolutionary actions, such as political discussions, marches, and chanting. Because the Kazeboon screenings brought events that had occurred in other places into neighborhoods, and because they were revolutionary actions, they demonstrated that the revolution was not an isolated occurrence happening only in Tahrir Square or around the parliament. Rather, screenings emplaced the revolution in the neighborhoods they moved through. The events in the videos and other events of the revolution had left perceivable traces. Burned-out buildings, holes in the concrete, huge stone walls the army erected in downtown Cairo to control people's movement, and increased levels of security personnel and barbed wire outside the state TV building, as traces of previous events in the revolution, embodied how space was contested. By exposing the connections to past events and providing connections to future events, such traces were also part of screenings. Likewise, the screenings themselves left traces that continued to influence, albeit subtly, the neighborhoods where screenings took place. These traces took different forms, from an abandoned sheet hanging in the street, the fleeting vestige of a makeshift screen; to graffiti, sometimes visible years after being written on streets and walls as screenings turned into marches; to people's perceptions of their everyday spaces. Screenings were part of the continual making of the streets and squares they moved through.

As the streets and squares were continually being made and remade, people present at screenings became participants through engaging with a screen. The screen was turned into a screen by images being screened on it with a computer or a projector, and by people looking at it. When angry opponents of a screening tore down and broke the screen, participants ceased to be spectators at a street cinema. As they sat or stood on the street watching a projector light up the air without a destination to turn the flow of light into recognizable images, participants became part of a tumultuous, discordant crowd of protesters in a march—and, always, much else. The participants' engagement drew on their different connections to the events in the videos and other events of the revolution. Some had participated, others had lost loved ones, and all had a stake in the revolution. And the way participants engaged in turn influenced the videos and other participants, as well as other elements of the screening. As one organizer explained:

> There's something very powerful about street screenings that I personally really love. I remember making a video about a kid that was arrested in August, the year before [2011], it was the 1st of August; it was the first day of Ramadan. And the mother of the kid was looking for him everywhere and I filmed her testimony and it ended up on television, fragments of it, and they called her on Mahmoud Saad's talk show.
>
> And, you know, she was very shy at the beginning and then with time she became this, not only the mother, but also this persona, this strong individual that speaks to people. Speaks to other mothers, takes care of other mothers in similar situations.
>
> And she was at the street screening in Tahrir. People watching, she's in the crowd and she's on the screen at the same time. Everyone's cheering, and then she stands up all of a sudden, like, uncontrollably, she stands up: "I'm here, this is me" and she speaks of her son to the public, to the audience, while the video is running. And she's saying all these beautiful things, and she's crying and everyone's cheering and it's such an, not only emotional moment, but it's just, it's something; there's something very powerful about this, you know, cinema. Cinema in general, but these public screenings, they unleash something that you didn't know of until it happened. Like you've been unleashing these different layers to it. And I think this is the political here. Right there. Filming that woman speaking in front the screen in which there's another mirror and that is her, speaking of the same thing. And the audience mirroring that in their response. This is the political moment.
>
> It's not the image itself. It's what happens with it. With it or in relation to it.
>
> —Jasmina Metwaly, Mosireen

Jasmina's story about the mother of the imprisoned boy shows how different elements of the screening depend on each other. By standing up, the woman moved in relation to the cheering and supportive crowd, her own words and images on the screen, the setting of Tahrir Square, and more. Concurrently, in this particular event, her words and images flowing from the screen depended on her standing up and commenting on them. Standing up and enabling other participants to engage directly with her allowed still others to engage in new ways with the images on the screen. Through the screening, the woman-on-the-screen became a personalized voice of the revolution. Then, with her own image as a background, the woman-in-the-crowd was able to stand up and speak as a voice of the revolution, with authority added by her own larger-than-life image playing beside her and by the crowd cheering both the woman and the images. As she stood talking, the images helped transform and mediate relationships between different participants. That is, the different elements of the screening depended on each other as they became meaningful in the screening.

Part of the Revolution

> Tahrir Cinema, summer, 2011:
>
> *Footage from the battle of Qasr el Nil on January 28 is shown. On that day, protesters defeated security forces and conquered Tahrir Square.*
>
> *The same square that they are now sitting in, watching the battle on a screen.*
>
> *The video shows how protesters tried to cross the bridge into Tahrir Square as security forces used live bullets, tear gas, water cannons, and more to keep them on the other side of the Nile, away from Tahrir Square.*

> *The video shows how the daylong battle raged back and forth as protesters and security forces advanced in turn until eventually, as the sun started setting, protesters defeated security forces and crossed the bridge into the square.*
>
> *The video does not show what many people in the crowd know: Protesters were killed on that day. People in the crowd saw others lose their lives on that day.*
>
> *As protesters sit watching the video in Tahrir Square, they can glance over their left shoulders to see the Qasr el Nil Bridge, the site of the battle on the screen in front of them. And even as they watch previous attacks on the screen, they are once again awaiting the inevitable attack of security forces.*
>
> *Security forces will arrive on August 1, the first day of Ramadan.*[7]

A particular feature of street screenings was that at times they both showed and embodied what was at stake. The images in the videos shown at screenings demonstrated what was at stake while the event of the screening embodied what was at stake. Screenings showed what was at stake by bringing images and sounds from other violent events into the event of the screening. At the same time, the event of the screening embodied its own potentiality, because screenings themselves were potentially subject to the same types of violent assaults often shown on the screen. They were often attacked by the authorities, *"baltageya"* (paid thugs), or just people who disapproved of the screenings. Organizers knew this well. Even before they started setting up the equipment for a screening, they often had already discussed how they would escape, if necessary. The screening equipment was often borrowed and too expensive to lose, so they divided it amongst themselves, determining who would take the computer and who the projector if they had to run. Being present at a screening was a potentially dangerous action, and participants at screenings were watching a past as well as a potential future. When watching a video of people being killed from—or in an Ingoldian sense, *with*—the same square where the killings happened, facing the threat of the same perpetrators once again attacking and killing people, participants were not just connected to the revolution: They were part of what they were watching. Through the screenings they explicitly became part of the revolution because by taking part in a revolutionary event, they became endangered like others with and before them.

Conclusion

The concrete of Tahrir Square was a bed of protesters during sit-ins but abruptly became a battleground when the military charged. As stones were laid out to highlight the blood trail of a dead protester, it turned into a memorial for martyrs. As the blood dried and merged with the sand and dust of the city, the concrete became seats in a cinema that brought all the previous contexts to life while still being something entirely new. Shifting the focus from what moves to the movement itself reveals that things do not stay the same; they are transformed in the movement as they become entangled with other movements. Nothing can ever stay the same; it is what it is in its current form only in that specific place. In this article we have argued that the screenings under discussion, rather than simply showing images to people who had no other way to see them, enabled a particular way of experiencing images. The

[7] A video from the battle of Qasr el Nil Bridge can be seen here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PujwO_iY5BU.

images shown at street screenings did not have a priori significance, yet they were absolutely crucial to the screenings. The significance of images lay in the movements and entanglements of different elements of a screening. The "same" image could become something totally different in interaction with different audiences, surroundings, and moments of its screening. Our argument is not simply that the screen and the images flowing through it, the speakers and the sounds flowing from them, the darkness of the sky, the hardness of the concrete, lights from homes and shops, the warmth of others participants, and discussions between participants all influenced how people engaged with or understood the images being screened. The point is rather that they were all part of what the images were at the particular event. Similarly, images became part of the continual making of the streets and squares they moved through as they emplaced the revolution in people's everyday neighborhoods. Screenings enabled particular ways of knowing because they embodied the togetherness, danger, discussions, resistance, and other characteristics of the revolution. That is, participants at screenings knew *with* the screenings.

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CHAPTER 45

The Death of Indie Hip-Hop?: The Blurry Lines Between the Majors and Independent Hip-Hop

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Abstract

This chapter utilizes forty-six interviews with self-identified independent hip-hop listeners to navigate the changing meanings of indie hip-hop in the post-golden era. The author elaborates on listener's definitions of independent and mainstream hip-hop and analyzes their interpretations of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and oppositional consciousness. Listeners suggest that indie hip-hop often focuses on race and class but often ignores issues of gender and sexuality. Female and queer listeners are more conscious of this omission than male and straight listeners, despite a current push toward female and LGBTQ representation in hip-hop's mainstream. Also, there remains a blurry line between independents and majors that many artists navigate as they attempt to retain economic and creative freedom while still attempting to become financially successful. Technological shifts and advances, such as marketing and distribution channels, have further exacerbated the blurry lines of hip-hop.

Keywords

Authenticity, Race and class, Gender and sexuality, Technological advancements in hip-hop, Independent hip-hop movement

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A-Trak, a renowned DJ, producer, artist, and founder of the record label Fool's Gold, stated on Medium's Cuepoint that hip-hop's "leftfield seeped out of the margins and into the mainstream" (A-Trak 2014). He claimed that the way we are listening to music has changed over the past 15 years, and it is becoming clear that hip-hop's major and independent musicians are becoming more intertwined than ever. David, an independent hip-hop listener, echoes A-Trak's sentiments: "ironically the same indie emcees I used to listen to are now active in the mainstream market…(and) the emcees I've heard attack mainstream artists are now trying to be signed."

Unlike previous chapters (Chapters 2 and 3) that focused on artists' lyrics, this chapter examines how listeners interpret and navigate the changing landscape and increasingly blurry differences between major and independent hip-hop following the culture's push toward independence from 2000 to 2013, particularly in relation to race, class, gender, and sexual politics. My analysis draws on forty-six in-person and online interviews with self-identified independent hip-hop listeners of which two are also indie musicians themselves. The respondents range from the age of 18 to 35 living in Southern California and represent a heterogeneous snowball sample with regard to gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, income, self-defined social class, educational attainment, and political affiliation (see Chapter 1 and Appendix C). The age demographic represents the population that was highly influenced by hip-hop in the post-golden era and analyzes their interpretations of hip-hop and hip-hop music in that time period.

My analysis below emphasizes three main themes. Interviewees indicate that the traditional definitions of major and independent remain intact. They corroborate indie hip-hop's claims that record label affiliation remains salient to the bifurcation between mainstream and indie culture. Listeners help create a notion of authenticity for musicians through their interpretations of artists' messages regarding race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. In particular, they state that mainstream musicians' messages often do not reflect their social locations and experiences. Rather, male indies of color present lyrics that reflect the struggles of the listeners in regard to race and class; yet claims of authenticity remain vexed as respondents believe that much of independent hip-hop often ignore issues of gender and sexuality despite the increased diversity of artists and listeners. Thus, female and LGBTQA (alliance) respondents highlight artists concordant with their social identities, which helps destabilize the conceptions of authenticity as technology allows for a wider array of the population to produce and consume music.

Also, the results show that the line between the majors and independents has become increasingly blurred following hip-hop's push for independence in the early 2000s. Hip-hop culture is not viewed as binary oppositions, but rather as fluid and constantly changing as performers attempt to retain economic and creative freedom while still attempting to become financially successful. For instance, listeners recognize that large corporations frequently pull from the indie market and musicians are often pushed into the majors by financial motives. This has led to many indie acts and labels to navigate between the two markets in different ways as they try to further their careers.

Finally, respondents discuss waves of commodification and resistance in the "indie" movement. They state that a period of resistance followed the mass commodification of hip-hop in the early 2000s. Currently, major advances in technology have allowed artists to become

commercially successful without the aid of large corporations. Even so, interviews reveal that they still remain intensely intertwined with major companies in old and new ways to utilize their marketing and distribution channels. Ultimately, independent hip-hop listeners express the complexity of the music industry and hip-hop culture.

Perceived Distinctions Between the Majors and Independent Hip-Hop

Interviews indicate that record label status remains a key characteristic in hip-hop culture today. While label status remains salient, artists' access to economic and cultural resources remains a key issue. My results also find that listeners frequently believe major acts remain homogeneous in their lyrics and thus, their authenticity is consistently questioned by fans concerned about commercialization. They argue that indies are alternatively allowed more creative freedom but require validation of authenticity from listeners that usually come from meaningful social, political, and cultural messages that relate to the respondents' social locations of race, class, and gender. As discussed more fully below, both males and females emphasize the progressive nature of race and class themes found within independent hip-hop. A number of female and LGBTQA respondents suggest that, although there are notable exceptions, problems of the objectification of women and heteronormativity are common within indie hip-hop and tend to be produced by straight working-class men of color, which challenges traditional post-golden era narratives of authenticity.

Record Label Matters?

Forman (2000) argues that the formation of indie labels has historically been as a response to the economic competition with major labels and thus forms a large part of artists' identity. Nearly 75% (thirty-four) of respondents similarly state that one of the most important distinctions between acts is still their record label status. David states that "mainstream artists are financially backed by large record companies." On the other hand, indies "produce everything without the financial backing of a major record label." Instead, they are signed by smaller labels or sometimes not signed at all. Felipe argues that in many instances they are "left to fund their own music, tours, and projects." Kathy emphasizes that they are usually relegated to the underground or peripheries of hip-hop culture. Their access to resources remains limited and their public exposure is generally centered on a particular genre, fan base, or geographical location.

Both musicians interviewed note the vast economic disparity between the two industries. Anthony Colon, founder and CEO of AGC Productions, writes "the big deal and the locals are two different worlds." He recapitulates David's sentiments, stating that they remain relatively local and small scale as they are pushing to make a name for themselves in the underground market. Carlos, an unsigned rapper from San Diego who goes by the name Mac Dirrty, adds that "I'm independent cause I pay for all my own shit in music. I pay for the studio time [and] rip the beats…I even [have] homies making beats for me now." He notes that "the majors can afford to buy big name producers such as Dr. Dre for a million dollars…I have my roommates rip me beats for a couple hundred dollars and I'm only making .005 cents a stream." Like Anthony, he details the large gap in the economic disparity between the mainstream and independents. Carlos recalls having to navigate between working his full-time job to make

ends meet and making music in his spare time, which he believes is a very different experience than musicians who are economically supported by large corporations for a majority of their careers. For both listeners and rappers themselves, record label status remains salient (Fig. 4.1).



Fig. 4.1 Carlos (Stagename: Mac Dirrty) (Credit Carlos Sanchez)

What's Behind the Label?

A second dominant theme regarding the distinction between major and indie hip-hop today is the importance of creative musical freedom, which about 75% (thirty-five) of respondents mentioned in their interviews. Hibbett (2005) points out that simply looking at major record label status is a "benign" definition. In the case of indie rock, it is marked by the awareness of a new aesthetic in which punks created a movement based on the audiences' desire for social differentiation. In the 1970s, they created this desire by pushing a "do-it-yourself" ethic focused on messages less regulated than mainstream radio (Strachan 2007). David states that:

> Often major record companies [today] will make [an] artist portray a certain image for marketing, which can go against the artists' beliefs. Independent artists usually have no influence in regards to a marketing image, and they're free to be who they want to be.

David highlights that limitations on creative freedom can hinder the musicians' ability to freely make music. In addition, Kathy differentiates major and independent hip-hop by stating that

musicians in the mainstream have less control because companies view them primarily as an "avenue for sales." She alternatively mentions that indies primarily operate in the underground and are not as highly swayed by the influence of large corporations.

Both rappers Anthony and Carlos emphasize the importance of maintaining creative and economic control of their own music. As Moore (2007) argues, the act of producing music and media that is relatively autonomous from corporate industry motivates smaller acts to create an alternative field of cultural production that is not reliant upon big businesses. While Anthony and Carlos remain relatively local and underground, they understand the benefits of keeping middlemen out and controlling the day-to-day operations of their music and their label. As Anthony vehemently states, "I cut out every middle man during this project! I did not need a promoter or talent scout. My company supports only one artist, which is me."

What Is "Real" Hip-Hop?

The question of authenticity remains a recurring topic among 50% (twenty-three) of the interviewees. They argue that authenticity, or the negotiated validation by both artists and listeners, is important in determining if the performers' persona is "genuine or accurate in its depiction." Respondents highlight that major label acts are limited in their messages and their authenticity is frequently challenged, while independent musicians have more creative freedom but need to obtain their authenticity from fans.

About 70% (thirty-one) of listeners believe that the majors are highly constrained in their creative freedom. The immersion of large corporations in hip-hop has decreased lyrical and musical diversity due to the pressure to be financially successful (Fox 2004; Myer and Kleck 2007). Liz writes: "mainstream is music that is heard repeatedly on the radio. It's music that the public wants to hear." Carlos, an unsigned musician himself, calls this type of music "bubble gum [and] sing-along rap" where the "lyrics are shallow and the beats are poppy." Interviewees such as Samantha and Jackie add that hip-hop generally follows formulaic trends. For Jackie, these trends are repeated messages of "sex, money, drugs, and violence" that appeal to the broader audience. The idea of sex is prominent in a male-oriented perspective that treats women as "sexual objects," in which Samantha states she "did not even notice growing up." They both note that the obsession with money, drugs, and violence becomes the stereotypical image for rappers as it preys on "the desires of urban Americans who want to be successful themselves."

About 40% (twenty) of respondents believe that social and political messages addressing problems in contemporary American society only appear during times of social distress. Liz states that generally large label musicians do not "speak much on social or political issues." Andrew supports her statement by arguing:

> The main messages on the [radio] being shared are controlled by whatever the industry wants you to hear. The industry regulates what is to be heard or not. These are the reasons we don't hear music on police brutality or racial superiority on the radio. Mainstream hip-hop is regulating people only to what is on the radio as if that is the only music being made.

Andrew's responses indicate that messages addressing the issues of urban communities are generally ignored, with much of the music producing messages concordant with the dominant culture and status quo. Sebastian adds that the majors generally do not reflect on social

issues unless it is during a period of social crises. He believes that they do not try to rap about controversial issues, but notes that political and social messages may appear if they reflect the popular sentiments of American society at a particular time. He cites the song "FDT (Fuck Donald Trump)" by YG and Nipsey Hussle as a song that represents mainstream political issues during the 2016 presidential elections. He concludes that companies would only approve these messages if it were financially beneficial for them in the long run; otherwise, they are often dropped from publicized album releases. Sierra recaps these sentiments by stating that major acts are a reflection of "what the people specifically may 'want' to hear at a certain time and what sells rather than substance."

65% (thirty) of interviews indicate that corporate control puts into question the legitimacy of a rapper's persona and musical content. Hesmondhalgh (1999) points out that hip-hop faces similar problems to rock n' roll with the notion of "sell outs, or the pressures towards professionalization and partnership." This is particularly problematic for acts that garnered attention in the underground and were later signed by the majors to address issues of dispersion and diffusion (Jones 2002). For example, Christina thinks "the industry is a bit censored because there are only so many things you can put out in popular music…because obviously you give up something, especially if you were political before." Shawn reiterates Christina's sentiments, claiming that many rappers are questioned for selling out, which for him means changing their image and music to appease labels and appeal to a wider array of audiences. He writes, "a big part of hip-hop is the message the music sends, and that's what a lot of listeners are in it for. So I've had people tell me they don't like mainstream because the artists are 'sell outs'."

Even indies themselves corroborate the notion of selling out. Anthony, founder and CEO of AGC Productions, speaks of his fear of large corporations when he says, "yeah, I've turned down opportunities because I was afraid of people taking my ideas or trying to change me." He continues to speak of his love for the music and being afraid that his message and style would be altered by companies seeking to capitalize on his brand name and ideas. This is reinforced during his album release party when he reminds his friends that he hosts his own shows on his own terms without sponsors. More importantly for him, he argues that "[I] don't have to kiss anyone's ass…that's why this whole project is independent, all the way down bro."

In addition, roughly 50% (twenty-four) of interviews mention that musicians who choose to remain independent generally have a different "vibe" to their music. The vibe tends to focus on socially conscious messages that attempt to distance itself from mass commercialization (Rose 2008). As performers Aesop Rock and Rob Sonic state, "as long as we can do what we want to do…then [independent] is the move" (The NE Hip-Hop 2015). In this alternative underground space, there is more room to critically challenge the conventional norms of mainstream hip-hop culture (Morgan and Bennett 2011; Harrison 2006). Listeners claim that indies focus on lyrical and musical innovation not constrained by corporate executives. Crystal writes, "[indie artists'] creativity is on another level. They are not withheld so much and you feel that passion in their lyrics. You can tell that they put in the effort and are trying to reach from within to get a message out [to the public]." Janine adds that they can freely delve deeper into issues because they are not constrained by a slew of production and management teams making decisions for them. More importantly, Pathik notes that these messages and issues are visibly important to them because they willingly choose to rap about them.

Alyssa, a full-time student and part-time server at a restaurant, writes of her first experiences with Immortal Technique's music. She recalls the first time she heard the track "Dance with the Devil":

> I was 15 and after school every day I would hang out with my boyfriend. We would drink at this park in my apartment complex. It was raining so we were sitting in an obstacle course near the slides under a blanket and he showed me this song. I was…amazed. I had never heard hip-hip that actually had a message besides 'fuck bitches, get money.' Even though that particular song wasn't something I can relate to it was something that people don't like to talk about, but a lot of underground artists rap about… the issues that people ignore or don't care about enough. That's when I first really got into hip-hop.

While she points out that the song was not something she experienced herself, she finds that the meaningful images it portrayed were immediately felt. Alyssa expresses that these creative and political messages would be much harder to find with major acts that are heavily constrained in their freedom of speech.

50% (twenty-three) of interviews indicate that much of indie culture hinges on the perceived authenticity of musicians. While the notion of authenticity is constantly negotiated between performers and listeners (Harkness 2012), many fans believe authenticity to be real and measurable. Respondents similarly state that major acts have to appeal to the masses and thus are less focused on socially and politically conscious messages and musical innovation, but rather on sales and profit. Conversely, independents have greater ability to make music freely because they are appealing to smaller, niche markets. But these messages need to be positively received by the hip-hop community in order for them to build a fan base. Listeners need to validate their music in order for them to be perceived as authentic.

One such means of validation is to reconnect with hip-hop's roots. Matt writes that:

> I began listening to older hip-hop and not just the mainstream hip-hop singles on the radio. It was a form of music that was different and it featured a lot of storytelling and personal narrative(s) that reflected everyday experiences that were more relevant to the general population than just money, women, and cars. It talked about education, working-class issues, racism, politics, and the influence of money.

He adds that much of the culture today has been far removed from its origins in the streets of New York where issues of racism and classism were discussed. Samantha shares that independents are much more similar to the roots of how hip-hop used to be. She believes that you can feel the emotions and that it comes from a different place, predominantly before hip-hop was commodified and globalized by whites. Interviewee Liz believes that this is particularly important because the current generation is less informed on social and political issues and becoming more entrenched with individualism. My interviews ultimately show that fans believe authenticity still needs to be gained through the artists' messages. As Sasha writes, "independent hip-hop is more meaningful, personal, and [more about the] history attached to peoples' lives."

What's Race, Class, and Gender Got to Do with It?

Respondents frequently find a more intimate understanding of social locations with indie artists that operate outside of the mainstream market. In particular, they mention the impor-

tance of lyrics connecting with their life experiences concordant with their social locations of race, class, and gender. But interviewees state that while musicians frequently address issues of race and class critically, they often mirror broader hip-hop culture in regards to the objectification of women and heteronormativity.

First, nearly 60% (twenty-six) of listeners, overwhelmingly the working-class interviewees of color, feel independents portray similar everyday life struggles as themselves. Folami (2007) states that hip-hop provides a commentary on social life, particularly given the invisibility and marginality of poor racial minorities in American society. Interviewees similarly mention that majors depict an image of being economically successful, which creates a disjuncture with many listeners barely getting by in America. Pathik, a working-class Indian, recalls the first time he heard Strange Records' Tech N9ne:

> It was my senior year in high school and I was really feeling down in the dumps. I was being called a dumb-fool if I believed I could become something in my life. Two of my neighbors flunked out of college, while another dropped out because he was in too much debt. Inside I was super-happy to have been accepted to college, and it was always my dream. I wanted to go out into the world, get a college degree, and become something so that my parents wouldn't have to work anymore. That's when I first listened to the song "Mental Giant" by Tech N9ne. He wrote: 'Even though I'm 5 foot 8 inches and 195 pounds I'm looking down on your niggaz, so tall I can't even hear any of the sound you deliver.'

He claims that these types of songs better address class issues in the USA than the messages delivered in the mainstream because the rappers face similar struggles as their working-class listeners. Pathik emphasizes the song "Mental Giant" to represent the hardships he has endured just making it to college. He notes that he can relate his experiences with Tech N9ne's because of the struggle that he endured to create a successful career in the hip-hop game.

Issues of race remain particularly important for black and Latino interviewees. Scholars (Forman 2010; Gosa 2010) argue that Obama's recent administration has spurred multiple performers and fans to address issues of race and class in a post-Civil Rights America (Forman 2010). While respondents construct their racial and ethnic identity differently, many connect their racial and ethnic background to hip-hop through a similar struggle against a legacy of imperialism and their personal experiences of racism. Sebastian highlights music by Viper Records' Immortal Technique, particularly the song entitled "Poverty of Philosophy":

> Immortal Technique speaks about the inequality there is in the world between the rich and the poor and the history that made this evident. [But] he speaks about how the European nations during colonial imperialism used the 'new world' as a way to only export resources and did not really care about the effects on the indigenous people. He speaks about how classism is as an important issue to deal with as racism and that people at the bottom should stick together and not go against each other in order to help everyone [to] rise together and move forward.

Alternatively, white and Asian interviewees did not highlight their racial and ethnic identity and the importance of the opposition to white supremacy within independent hip-hop as frequently as black and Latino listeners. Asians in particular focus on the lack of representation in the culture's community, but emphasize their class struggle to recognize their shared marginalized position in society. Nonetheless, respondents assert that compared to the majors, independent rappers better address their personal social locations regarding race and class.

Further, interviews highlight the importance of race and class inequality in the music industry itself. Myer and Kleck (2007) argue that white males in the three major record

labels are overrepresented in managerial and ownership positions. For instance, Angelica describes the hip-hop industry as controlled by "white men." She claims that those in positions of power at record companies control the industry and seek to turn it into a profitable business. As she states,

> What started out as an outlet to rebel against mistreatment [and] a voice to fight back, has now turned and focused on the number of albums sold and tour dates. Hip-hop is directly and almost always linked with blacks. The difference between whites and blacks in the industry is the way they are portrayed in the media. Blacks are talked down upon, disregarded, and exploited…or they are seen as aggressive and angry. Whites are always talked about so respectfully, gracefully and praised for every little good thing they do.

These sentiments mirror other respondents, as they argue that white elites often control the messages presented in the music that black rappers create. While many minorities, particularly black entrepreneurs such as Dr. Dre, Jay-Z, Master P, Puff Daddy, Queen Latifah, and Russell Simmons, have been able to make a dent in white domination and the appropriation of hip-hop culture (Basu and Werbner 2001; Sköld and Rehn 2007), there remains problems of racial inequality within the music industry. Moreover, black musicians often reproduce white ideology despite the detrimental effects it may have on their own community. As a result, interviewees believe that various messages presented by major acts do not represent their social experiences but instead represent broad generalizations and stereotypes about low-income urban communities of color.

Second, listeners believe independent musicians in the post-golden era remained sexist, heteronormative, and homophobic in their lyrics and personas despite their progressive views on race and class relations. This is due to indie hip-hop still being composed predominantly of straight working-class men of color who most commonly make claims of authenticity within hip-hop culture. Oware (2014) makes a similar argument, stating that messages of violence and misogyny are still present in the underground despite claims of being rebellious and socially conscious. Of the twenty-two female and LGBTQA interviewees, nearly 70% (fifteen) mention female and LGBTQA indie artists that are more attentive to issues of gender and sexuality in their responses. They contend that hip-hop still has the potential to reproduce unequal gender relations, particularly for young black girls navigating their sexuality (Alim et al. 2010; Asante 2008; Gupta-Carlson 2010; Pough 2004). Amanda states, "Even though I listen to it and enjoy it, I still recognize that a lot of hip-hop reinforces sexism and is beyond disrespectful toward women." Samantha adds that often these representations of women are "as sex symbols, as submissive, as a commodity" viewed through a heteronormative male lens that emphasizes hegemonic masculinity (Alim et al. 2010; Hunter 2011). More importantly for Angelica, they are "not just any women, [but] usually black and Latina women." For female respondents in particular, they argue that indie culture is still an industry predominated and controlled by heterosexual men who parrot misogynistic, violent, and materialist lyrics of their mainstream counterparts.

They did report instances of socially conscious indie rappers being more attentive to the issues of gender and sexuality, which shifts the boundaries of authenticity to address increased representation by women and LBTQA members. Kathy writes that Macklemore LLC's Macklemore and Ryan Lewis have numerous songs on race, class, and gender inequality. The song "Same Love" openly addresses issues of sexuality and advocates for gay marriage.

She notes that "even though I'm straight, I hated how LGBT groups were being judged and hated just because they liked the same sex rather than the opposite sex… they're still human beings." Following the legacy of many socially conscious rappers, Sierra argues that artists and listeners can "take this norm of dehumanizing women in hip-hop music out of society… and [we can] implement a more accepting mindset."

Similarly, LGBTQ rappers have been able to create niche spaces in hip-hop's underground. As Christina states, "LGBTQ rappers are setting a new trend in the hip-hop community of defying traditional stereotypes about rappers." Mykki Blanco, an independent transgender rapper on New York-based label UNO, has obtained buzz in the hip-hop world. While his songs are outwardly vulgar, his lyrics bring attention to issues of the LGBTQ community and he gives rappers a cultural space to navigate their sexual identity (Stern 2016). For example, Mykki Blanco has publicly addressed the problem of HIV and the stigmas attached with coming out. Mykki Blanco states (Reynolds 2015):

> I've been HIV-Positive since 2011, my entire career. Fuck stigma and hiding in the dark, this is my real life. I'm healthy... I've toured the world 3 times but I've been living in the dark, it's time to actually be as punk as I say I am…No more living a lie. HAPPY PRIDE.

Other acts have also gained traction in the LGBTQ hip-hop community. After *Pitchfork*'s cosign (Raymer 2013), Mishka Records' queer rapper Cakes da Killa has obtained more mainstream success as part of the LGBTQ hip-hop genre with his album *The Eulogy*. While Queen Pen was originally seen as the first lesbian rapper in 1997, a new genre of lesbian artists such as "Kelow, Elektrik, Envy, MC Angel, RoxXxan, Yo Majesty, and God-des & She" is gaining popular support (Schwartzberg 2014). Rainbow Noise has also cultivated a movement under the premise that labels need to highlight LGBTQ talent in the hip-hop community (Carter 2014).

By reflecting on the intersections of race, class, and gender within their lyrics, independent musicians can more freely express their life experiences and ideas with audiences that understand, relate, or sympathize with marginalized social locations to promote oppositional consciousness (Harkness 2012; Jeffries 2011; Mansbridge and Morris 2001). Yet, while respondents note that indie culture is more inclined to include messages critical of the relations of dominations with regard to race, class, and gender than major musicians, they acknowledge exceptions. They often include the caveat that large label acts can present meaningful messages, while indie rappers may not be politically or socially conscious at all. Felipe notes that indie hip-hop "doesn't have to have a 'meaningful message' because I've heard underground artists rap about girls and money." He goes on to state that many indies merely reflect the ideologies of mainstream hip-hop culture and broader American culture as a whole. Like other informants, he suggests that the distinction between major and indie is not black and white but blurry.

The Blurry Lines Between the Mainstream and Indies

While interviews suggest that the division between major and indie status remains salient, responses often allude to the fact that many acts today navigate a "mixed space" by which performers attempt to retain economic and creative freedom while still attempting to become financially successful. Listeners do not view major and indie hip-hop as mutually exclusive

or opposing types of music. Instead, the distinctions between them are fluid and constantly changing, particularly in two ways. They note that independent acts are frequently pulled and pushed toward large record labels. Respondents state that numerous rappers they listen to try to remain indie. But because of the need to survive in the hip-hop industry, they believe numerous musicians have to navigate the borders of major and indie. Also, interviewees believe that the indie movement has changed over time. They frequently note the recent period of commodification by large corporations, as well as resistance by smaller businesses utilizing advances in technology to enter the market without the support of the majors. Nonetheless, results indicate that both the mainstream and indie markets remain complexly intertwined with one another in various ways such as affiliating with major companies to utilize their marketing and distribution channels.

Mixed Space Between the Majors and Indies

The blurred lines between the majors and indies exist due to frequent pull and push factors, which is cited by roughly 25% (thirteen) of respondents. On the one hand, interviewees indicate that many acts get pulled by the majors as they become increasingly popular. Karubian (2009) argues that big labels sign fewer acts today and instead focus on signing established independent acts that have already gained visibility in the underground and are looking to break into the mainstream. Pathik reinforces this point by pointing out that nearly "every artist starts off underground regardless…like Wiz Khalifa or 50 Cent before they came up." Souphakone makes a similar observation with Wiz, stating that "when Wiz Khalifa was an independent artist…hella dope. I respected his lyrics, respected the grind, even the trademark I'm high as fuck laugh." But Souphakone continues to state that certain performers get enough buzz that they eventually become popular acts that get pulled into the majors.

Alyssa states: "I feel like Logic has changed since he has gotten bigger even though he claims he hasn't." Logic, originally signed to Visionary Music Group, proclaimed on his mixtapes that he would remain independent. But in 2013, his mixtapes were approaching one million downloads and he eventually signed to Def Jam Recordings (Paine 2013). David similarly uses the example of Anderson Paak (formerly known as Breezy Lovejoy), "who worked with a lot of well-known emcees and producers…he's now on Aftermath." As Anderson Paak, he initially released an album entitled *Venice* on Steel Wool Entertainment. After obtaining more popularity in 2015 with an appearance on Dr. Dre's *Compton*, he eventually signed with Aftermath Entertainment, a subsidiary of Universal Music Group's Interscope Records (Peters and Martin 2016).

On the other hand, respondents point out that many musicians get pushed into large corporations due to the need for financial security and resources. Various artists may treat the indie and underground scene as a "waiting station or the minor leagues" until they achieve more popularity and sign lucrative contracts with major labels (Oware 2014). As Julian states, numerous rappers utilize the underground market to gain popularity with the intention of obtaining wealth and fame. He states, "Well I think what happens is that they get a taste of all that fame and fortune, and it begins to overwhelm them." Julian cites rapper Chief Keef as a primary example as he gained popularity in Chicago's underground and eventually signed a 6 million dollar deal with Interscope. The contract included $440,000 in advances and the creation of his own imprint called Glory Boyz Entertainment (Markman 2013). Carlos simi-

larly speaks of Mac Miller leaving Pittsburg indie label Rostrum Records for Warner Bros. Records. Rostrum obtained success through a strong digital presence and investing heavily in touring (Ostrove 2014). But Mac Miller joined Warner Bros. Records for a 10 million dollar signing deal and the creation of his own subsidiary label REMember Music. In both cases, the artists left smaller companies in exchange for financial advances and resources. Drake (2015), a Complex.com writer, argues that many musicians who reach a high level of popularity but lack capital may also be pushed into the majors to meet demand. He cites examples of Young Thug and Bobby Shmurda as acts that likely needed to sign deals with large companies who own a vast amount of financial capital. This is likely to push them into the mainstream, despite less favorable terms on their contract due to the need for resources (Karubian 2009).

With the frequent pull and push factors, listeners state that they are frequently left to determine if acts who shift spaces are still considered "authentic." For many listeners, it is becoming harder and harder to determine what is truly independent (Andrews 2006; Hess 2012; Oware 2014). Souphakone writes that he "doesn't listen to [Wiz Khalifa] like that anymore" because his lyrics and persona changed. Pathik adds that he understands that being signed to a large corporation can change the music because they are now controlled by outside parties with different interests. Yet, listeners also argue that rappers who sign to the majors do not always change their message. Felipe and Julian add that some rap legends like Nas and Common "came up as underground hip-hop but they've also blown up so big that they have tasted the fame and money, but I think they still stay true to what they were all about when they first came up." Academics and respondents suggest that there is a gray area between major and independent that many acts navigate as a result of the constant pull and push factors within hip-hop.

In addition, about 40% (eighteen) of listeners state that numerous musicians navigate between being major and independent. Harrison (2006) argues that underground acts, whose popularity largely consists of friends, family, and other associates, attempt to extend their fan base outside their circle. Once they do, they must decide throughout their careers whether to be unsigned, sign with or create an independent company, or sign with a big mainstream corporation. For example, some acts began their careers signing with a large label but have since dropped their label to obtain successful careers as indie artists (Hess 2012; Oware 2014). Felipe states that "I see artists like Del who are better in the indie circuit." Del the Funky Homosapien had released two commercially successful albums in the early 1990s with Elektra, a subsidiary of Warner Bros. Music. In 1997, Elektra dropped him from their label a month before the release of *Future Development*. He later signed with Hieroglyphics Imperium Recordings and released the album in 2002. Del the Funky Homosapien has remained independent and voiced his discontent with Elektra. He has since released nine studio albums and signed to indie label Definitive Jux in 2007 (Bechtel 2016; Ostrove 2014).

Julian points to Killer Mike as a successful act who also did better without a big contract. Killer Mike released *Monster* in 2003 under Sony Records' Columbia. With singles such as Akshon (Yeah!) and A.D.I.D.A.S., Killer Mike reached Billboard's Hot 100. But following his release he had a fallout with Outkast and Sony Records and was not able to release *I Pledge Allegiance to the Grind* until 2006 under his self-formed label Grind Time Official (Markman 2011). He has since released three solo albums and collaborated with El-P to form Run the Jewels on Universal subsidiary Fool's Gold.

Respondents also state that many musicians navigate between major and independent status as they try to remain culturally relevant and financially profitable. For some, this means moving between the major and indie circuit as their careers progress. Julian recalls MURS' move to Strange Records and calling his album "straight fire." In 2008, MURS garnered attention as he was set to release *MURS for President* on Warner Bros. Records. He had previously been linked to the indie hip-hop scene, but stated that he "had a bigger budget to work with… [could] get any names [he] wanted…and the album was mixed better" (Ollison 2008). After his album's debut, Warner Bros. Records released MURS over a "difference in opinion" (Cooper 2009). He has since signed with Tech N9ne's Strange Records and then released *Have A Nice Life* in 2015 to positive reviews (Moore 2015).

Rappers such as Lupe Fiasco have voiced their discontent with their contracts. Alyssa mentions that "I've always considered Lupe Fiasco to be major because I heard him on the radio." In fact, Lupe Fiasco has remained on a large record company for a majority of his career despite his tensions with Warner Bros. Music's Atlantic. The release of 2011's *Lasers* was met with much controversy. Atlantic executives felt the album needed guest stars and star-potential hits, which caused Lupe to alter the production of his album (Frazier 2010). While he ultimately worked with them to release *Lasers*, he later voiced his distaste for the work and even offered to destroy any physical copies of the record that his fans purchased (Ahmed 2011). Alyssa notes that "of all his albums, *Lasers* was by far the worst because of the production." Lupe himself has stated that he wants off Atlantic Records due to being treated as a "third class citizen" because he did not sign a 360-degree contract with them. These contracts are preferred because they allow companies to extract profits from various aspects of the signees' revenue stream to account for the downturn in record sales in the digital era, which was generally not part of traditional recording deals. These aspects can include any aspect of their career and hence the term 360 degrees, such as merchandising, touring, and commercial endorsements (Marshall 2013; Stahl and Meier 2012). More recently, Lupe departed from Atlantic and signed with Nashville-based entertainment company Thirty Tigers.

Independent labels themselves also face the same dilemma as they attempt to earn profits, obtain success, and expand. Interviewees Felix and Julian recall how small companies such as Death Row and Bad Boy were bought out or merged with big labels in the 1990s (Knab 2004). As Warner Bros. Music's owner Len Blavatnik, Universal CEO Lucian Grainge, and Sony's Music Chief Doug Morris state (Greenburg 2015), "the majors have figured out that it's smarter to bully their way into companies seeking to take their lunch." Respondents also cite the process of musicians having to sign with the majors when their indie labels are bought out. As David states, "Ironically the same indie emcees I used to listen to are now active in the mainstream market. Mos Def [is] not only well known in mainstream music and movies… [but now is] signed." Arianna adds that Mos Def still has "inspiring and thoughtful message[s], but navigate[s] between major and indie throughout the years." In Mos Def's case, he was originally signed with Rawkus Records. They gained notoriety as a premier underground hip-hop label in the 1990s. But in the early 2000s Rawkus Records folded and was bought out by Interscope (Greene 2015). Since the merger, Mos Def has verbally sparred with the company until he fulfilled his last contractual album *True Magic* in 2006 (Baker 2014). He then signed to independent label Downtown's roster and released *The Ecstatic* in 2009. Ultimately,

these cases illustrate the mixed space between major and indie by which many musicians navigate throughout their careers.

The Changing Nature of Hip-Hop's Indie Movement

Nearly 50% (twenty-two) of respondents describe how independent hip-hop has evolved and changed in numerous ways over the years. Older interviewees point to the prominence of indie rappers in the early 2000s. Like punk rock (Hesmondalgh 1999), independent hip-hop has seen periods of commodification and resistance. But as Lopes (1992) points out, these periods are specific to the industry. During its roots in the 1970s, New York hip-hop focused on performances in the streets and was concerned with social and political issues such as poverty and racism. As the culture became more popular in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the golden era saw the mass commodification of numerous acts by large corporations hoping to gain financial success. Following the decline of the golden era in the late 1990s and early 2000s came a period of underground and indie hip-hop resisting major label corporatization. For example, David writes that "ten years ago I used to pay attention to see who's either mainstream or independent. There is a lot of pride with music from an independent artist because everything was created from the artist." Jayson similarly states that "in the 2000s I did listen to a lot of underground acts because it was pushed hard back in the day." Both respondents indicate that the late 1990s and early 2000s were periods marked by the rise of an indie movement. Older interviewees recall that independents utilized an "anti-mainstream" approach that appropriated street culture and the rejection of corporate America in music. Jayson cites acts such as "Living Legends, Grouch and Eligh, Slug, Murs, and Immortal Technique back in the day at Rock the Bells and other Hip-Hop Festivals" as highly influential to the movement.

In response to the rise of a revitalized indie movement in the early 2000s, major labels attempted to remain relevant by creating 360-degree contracts. These contracts extract profits from various aspects of the signee's revenue stream such as merchandising, touring, and commercial endorsements (Marshall 2013; Stahl and Meier 2012), and utilize the new modes of musical production to offset declining record sales (Leyshon et al. 2005) (see Chapter 3). Fox (2004) also argues that large companies attempted to control online music through the creation of copyright-protected files and lawsuits against the providers of free music. As Christina writes, "popular discourse is tightly controlled by labels and corporations like iTunes." She argues that companies re-secured the modes of musical production by restricting illegal downloads and investing heavily in online models such as iTunes, Spotify, Pandora, and Shazam. In 2014, Warner Music Group bought 5% of a then bankrupt SoundCloud, while Universal owned rights to Beats by Dre and obtained 13% of Apple stock. Greenburg (2015) adds that the major labels—Warner, Universal, and Sony—owned 10–20% of the entertainment startups in the digital space in 2015. As a result, listeners contend that the indie culture of the early 2000s declined. Jayson further elaborates: "I did listen to a lot of underground because I hate the radio…but it's just different now." David clarifies by stating that "back then a lot of independent artists would attack mainstream artists for selling out, being fake and manufactured by the record label. Because of [changes to] the industry, I feel that things are different now." He argues that after re-commodification by large corporations the indie movement declined and forced many rappers to become mainstream.

Yet, slightly over 50% (twenty-four) of respondents of all ages argue that current indie culture has been able to better obtain commercial success utilizing advances in technology, such as online distribution and social media outlets, without the support of large corporations (Karubian 2009). Jones (2002) asserts that the rise of the phonograph and radio in the first quarter of the twentieth century changed the landscape of music. Up until the 1970s, the recording industry was able to monopolize access to recording studios and other means of distribution. By the early 1990s, the music industry shifted again due to the prevalence of the Internet's music distribution capabilities. Despite major labels' attempts to control the Internet, independent acts have been able to secure the means of musical production and thus the marketplace has shifted to a more democratic organizational system (McLeod 2005). As Andrews (2006) argues, "the internet and file-sharing systems have allowed for more accessibility and better distribution for smaller labels and imprints." Musicians Aesop Rock and Rob Sonic concur, stating that "technology open [ed] up different doors and avenues [for hip-hop culture]" (The NE Hip-Hop 2015). Rapper Brother Ali adds that these avenues were not even fathomable in the late 1990s (Hip Hop Since 1987 TV 2013).

Interviewees such as Carlos share similar sentiments about technological advancements. He recalls recording music on blank tapes off the radio: "I would wait for songs I liked and I would run to record them when they were about to start." He notes that major radio stations controlled the music he heard growing up, but interviewee Jessica N. remembers the rise of iPods and MP3 formats in making music consumption easier to access for both producer and consumer. David adds that the rise of "YouTube has given [artists] the ability to put music out there much easier." Nielson's study (Burgess 2012) shows that "64% of teenagers now listen to music through YouTube than through any other source." More recently Jessica F., a 21-year-old college student, points to SoundCloud as a primary medium of music consumption among the people she knows. SoundCloud acts face a low barrier to entry, with an understanding that becoming viral is highly dependent upon direct fan contact. As a result, the recent movement of "SoundCloud rap" has become more popular among performers and fans today (Caramanica 2017).

Social media web sites have spurred on the popularity of acts without the expensive traditional means of promotion such as Street Teams and fliers. Christina notes that "independent hip-hop had an opportunity with Myspace and other internet mediums." Rapper Talib Kweli (Greene 2015) shares similar views, writing that "Myspace is what got me online [in] a real way." Other Web sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter have given musicians a platform to release and promote their music. In particular, these mediums allow numerous acts to enter the eyes and ears of listeners easier and faster. As Jayson argues, "the internet plays a big role now…you can get fame easier if you put yourself out there. People talk about you and share your music through the world wide web…and you're sitting in the comforts of your own home and not going out there to promote." David states that this ultimately allows many more musicians to gain mainstream popularity.

Respondents frequently referred to rappers such as Tech N9ne and Macklemore and Ryan Lewis, who have demonstrated how small homegrown labels can promote successful acts through the use of technology and social media. More recently, unsigned performer Chance the Rapper has released music on free platforms such as Datpiff and SoundCloud, focusing on a strong relationship with listeners using social media to achieve monumental success.

Interviewee and unsigned act Carlos states that "I see artists like Tech N9ne as pioneers who changed the game." Tech N9ne, a hip-hop veteran, has chosen to remain on Strange Records since the 1990s. He attributes his success to building a strong brand name characterized by strong shows with a solid fan base (Nguyen 2015a). This is aided by a strong online presence focused on "stay[ing] within an arms-length of his fans" (Biondo 2012). Strange Music's Twitter and Facebook pages remain active and full of cosigns from other celebrities who endorse their brand. Andrew, a 21-year-old college student, additionally points to Macklemore and Ryan Lewis as trendsetters in hip-hop today. Macklemore LLC's Macklemore and Ryan Lewis have become successful through similar promotional techniques to Tech N9ne. Smith (2012) cites Macklemore's success to savvy social media marketing, a socially conscious message, a DIY stance, and a unique personal image. Like Tech N9ne, a streamlined and personal relationship with fans decreases the need of A&R from major labels (Drake 2015). Andrew also cites more recent rappers such as Migos and Fetty Wap, who have joined independent label 300 Entertainment. Under Lyor Cohen and Todd Moscowitz's vision, 300 Entertainment gives local stars an opportunity to become successful through a strong focus on analytics (Nguyen 2015b). Utilizing data, Quality Control Music's "Coach" and "Pee" were given an innovative deal with 300 Entertainment for distribution and marketing. Their successful model includes hiring their own radio and promotion staff, personally publishing and managing venues, and hiring in-demand producers and engineers (Peisner 2015). As such, Strange Records, Macklemore LLC, and 300 Entertainment all push for a strong online presence with an attuned ear to the digital age (Drake 2015). Ultimately, the new wave of indie hip-hop utilizes the technological advancements made by major corporations to resist corporatization and produce music outside of the traditional modes of distribution.

Further, the most recent wave of independent artists and labels has remained highly intertwined with major record companies as they continue to coexist in the music industry. Suhr's (2011) finds that recent shifts in the music industry show major and independent labels converging despite their consistently changing relations of tension and compatibility. For instance, many acts signed to indie labels maximize sales through the process of affiliating with large corporations (Knab 2004). They reduce the risk of bankruptcy with independent distributors by instead using a major label distribution system, which usually has the backing of a parent company such as Warner Bros. or Universal. Large corporations see the value in distribution because they still obtain a significant portion of the profits despite not owning the company (Marshall 2013).

Interviewees Julian and Felix recall several popular labels adopting this model in the 1990s. In 1998, Cash Money Records signed a widely publicized blockbuster 30 million dollar distribution deal with Universal (XXL Staff 2008). Although this received considerable attention from fans, many alleged indie labels of the era such as Def Jam, Roc-A-Fella, Bad Boy, and No Limit were also subsidiaries of large corporations. While the idea of affiliating is not new, it has become more frequent with self-proclaimed "indie-DIY" artists today, thus again challenging the significance of the term indie.

Jayson similarly remembers more recently that even Rhymesayers Entertainment, along with one of its flagship acts Brother Ali, signed a distribution deal with Alternative Distribution Alliance (ADA), Warner Bros. Music Groups' independent distributor, to expand their company. Matt similarly states that "I don't really like Macklemore and Ryan Lewis because

I question their music." He elaborates that "Sometimes I feel their message but other times they put out pop shit." Matt's concerns were shared by others in the hip-hop community as Macklemore and Ryan Lewis fell under attack by National Public Radio (NPR) and Rap Radar for falsely calling themselves independent (Smith 2013). As Figure 4 illustrates, Macklemore and Ryan Lewis were also distributed and promoted by ADA (Fig. 4.2).

In a 2012 interview, Macklemore stated that he was not opposed to major corporations but merely acting in his own best career interests (Bootleg Kev 2012). While there has been resistance to distribution deals, for example by small British labels (Gottfried 2014), indie companies have become less "indie" because of their need for capital from major corporations to keep up with demand.

Publicity and promotion also play a large part of the music industry in the digital age. Smaller labels often need to hire professional teams to market and license their songs to compete (Andrews 2006). Both of the two independent artists interviewed acknowledged the importance of successful marketing, which is easier to obtain with the help the financial resources of large companies. One method they find useful is online streaming playlist placement with corporations such as Spotify or YouTube. While this does not necessarily increase profits as the average artist only gets paid .006 to .008 cents per stream on Spotify (Sehgal



Fig. 4.2 Macklemore and Ryan Lewis' distribution model

2018), it provides high exposure for lesser-known acts that possess the capital to pay for it. Thus, many artists such as Carlos and Anthony are left to choose between sharing scant profits from streams with corporations or doing it themselves but facing the possibility of little to no airplay.

Some established indie labels such as Rhymesayers have signed promotion deals. In 2007, they signed with Warner Music Group and its co-founder Brent "Siddiq" Sayers stated that, after the deal, they had access to all the services of companies under Warner's ILB umbrella (Scholtes 2007). Macklemore and Ryan Lewis signed a similar promotion deal with ADA (Smith 2012), who provided assistance in their airplay and promotion for a "at monthly fee. In 2016, Chance the Rapper paired with Apple Music to exclusively release his album *Coloring Book* for two weeks and became the first "streaming only" album to chart on Billboard 200. While remaining unsigned, Chance has been alternatively sponsored by other large businesses such as Apple, Bud Light, and CitiBank to become commercially successful (Austen 2016; Best et al. 2017; Phillips 2017). Other major corporations such as Live Nation (Live Nation 2013) and potentially Spotify (Resnikoff 2017) are attempting to create their own record labels to

circumvent the control of the traditional three major labels. In essence, many independent acts rely on various large corporations to become commercially successful despite promoting DIY ethics.

As a result, slightly more than 20% (ten) of listeners argue that it has become more evident that rappers work with large corporations when it is in their mutual best interest (Suhr 2011). As Pathik writes, "independent artists now *need* the help of major companies to be commercially successful in our society today." Nathan S (2015) writes of the rise of nicknamed "mindie" rappers, or indie rappers who are secretly aided by big companies. He lists Kevin Gates, Skizzy Mars, and most notably Logic as examples. Funk Volume's CEO Damien Ritter (Nathan 2015) argues that these acts are promoted as indie even though they already have relations with large marketing and promotion companies to aid their success. Once they "organically" and "independently" reach financial and commercial success, they leave their "indie" status to join the label affiliated with those marketing and promotion companies. In essence, numerous musicians negotiate terms for mutually beneficial outcomes by turning indie music into a fetishized commodity to generate profits (Ostrove 2014).

Ultimately, my study indicates that listeners view major and independent hip-hop as fluid and constantly changing, which leads to a mixed space rather than binary oppositions. My findings show that there is a pull and push dynamic. Listeners believe that many musicians frequently navigate the mixed space as they try to maintain economic and creative freedom while attempting to stay culturally relevant and financially profitable. Also, interviewees state that the term indie has changed over time. They argue that hip-hop's indie movement of the early 2000s focused on anti-corporate sentiments. Following 360-degree contracts and the reassertion of technology by the majors, current independent musicians focus on online distribution and social media to circumvent their control. Yet major label and independent artists remain highly intertwined and dependent upon one another in complex ways, which makes the term "indie" a constantly evolving term for listeners today.

Conclusion

Interviews indicate that the distinction between majors and independents are still meaningful in hip-hop's culture. As Immortal Technique famously said on "Industrial Revolution" (2003a) about his rise as a rapper: "stuck in the underground, a general that rose to the limit, without distribution managers, a deal, or a gimmick." Immortal Technique's rise to fame is indicative of numerous musicians who willingly choose to remain indie. Listeners claim that access to economic and cultural resources remains a key issue in the hip-hop community. Additionally, they raise issues of authenticity, citing that indie rappers are better able to create music aligned with listeners' social locations and experiences of race and class, and in some instances gender and sexuality. The results show that many female and LGBTQA listeners believe that a large majority of musicians remain sexist, heteronormative, and homophobic in their lyrics despite having progressive views of race and class in the USA. Yet for respondents like Sierra, hip-hop still has the potential to address pertinent social issues relevant to her social life, such as "racial discrimination, gender inequality, poverty, and LGBTQ rights."

Nonetheless, the concept of "indie" has frequently been questioned by listeners. As Immortal Technique raps on 2003s "Crossing the Boundary" (2003b), "you're only minor 'til

your major." At times, listeners and the broader hip-hop community have even declared the "death" of indie hip-hop. Interviewees suggest that the categories indie and major are not binary because so many artists operate in a mixed space with blurred lines wherein independent and major companies remain highly intertwined. For example, listeners mention that indie musicians are frequently pulled and pushed into the mainstream as they attempt to be financially successful.

The definition of "indie" has changed over time as it faces waves of commodification and resistance. This has become more evident with the rapid advances in technology, namely the utilization of the Internet to distribute music and promote social media. This most recent change has created new problems for hip-hop culture, as it searches to find itself among a dispersed group of artists and listeners (Karubian 2009). Listeners are well aware that the majors and indies coexist and are codependent upon one another in the music industry. As Andrews (2006) states, "independent culture can survive…though the definition might remain ever-changing."

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PART 8

Journalism and the Public

CHAPTER 46

Podcasting as Public Media: The Future of U.S. News, Public Affairs, and Educational Podcasts

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Abstract

This article identifies a U.S.-based podcasting ecology as public media and then examines the threats to its future. It first identifies characteristics of a set of podcasts in the United States that allow them to be usefully described as public podcasting. Second, it looks at current business trends in podcasting as platformization proceeds. Third, it identifies threats to public podcasting's current business practices. Finally, it analyzes responses within public podcasting to the potential threats. The article concludes that currently, the public podcast ecology in the United States maintains some immunity from the most immediate threats, but there are also underappreciated threats to it, both internally and externally.

Keywords

podcasting, public media, platformization, business trends, public podcasting ecology

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As U.S. podcasting becomes a commercially viable part of the media landscape, are its public service functions at risk? This article explores that question, in the process postulating that the concept of *public podcasting* has utility in describing not only a range of podcasting practices, but also an ecology within the larger podcasting ecology—one that permits analysis of both business methods and social practices, and one that deserves attention and even protection. This analysis contributes to the burgeoning literature on podcasting by enabling focused research in this area, permitting analysis of the sector in ways that allow thinking about the relationship of mission and business practice sectorwide. Further, we believe that extending the concept of public media to podcasting, which exists in the United States both within and beyond public broadcasting, can enrich the academic study of public media, which historically has been focused on state-subsidized broadcasting.

Growth of Podcasting as a Business

Podcasting became a mainstream phenomenon in 2005, when Apple added a Podcast Directory to its iTunes 4.9 software. This made it possible for users to access what the company's then CEO Steve Jobs referred to as "TiVo for radio," "Wayne's World for radio," and the "hottest thing going in radio" (Herrman, 2016, para. 1). Since then, it has grown to become a small but increasingly important part of the U.S. media landscape. In 2018, more than half of people over age 12 had listened to at least one podcast, up from 44% in 2017. Podcasting has increasingly differentiated itself from the radio industry, with distinctive formats and business services and practices, including dynamic ad insertion and search recommendation engines. Some believe that podcasting has reached a tipping point, where potential advertising revenues make it suddenly interesting to a much wider range of players—what Edison senior vice president Tom Webster called "a watershed moment for podcasting—a true milestone" (Edison Research, 2019a, p. 1). Scholar John L. Sullivan (2018) calls this a moment of formalization, bringing consolidation, rationalization, and greater financial transparency.

Nonetheless, podcasting remains a small element of the U.S. media landscape, accounting for $479 million in U.S. ad sales in 2018. Podcast ad sales are less than 9% as large as the U.S. market for traditional radio advertising in 2023, and less than 1% as large as U.S. spending for Internet ads (PwC, 2019).

A mere 15% of 700,000+ podcasts have enough listeners and resources to generate revenue ("Podcorn Launches Platform," 2019). The financially viable podcasts, as Heeremans (2018) notes, have the backing of large media institutions. Of those in the top 20 podcasts (by listenership), a remarkable number feature news, public affairs, educational, and other informational content relevant to public life, and conversations about important public issues. Further, more than half of podcast listeners routinely listen to news/current events, and more than a third listen to educational programs (Westwood One, 2018).

Looking at the top 20 (Figure 1), 13 could be so characterized: Three are news programs, two are topical economics programs, two are science programs, two feature mini-lectures/discussions on general knowledge, one is a business program, one features storytelling about public issues and social values, one is a comedy show about the news, and one is an interview program on public issues and the arts.

Rank	Podcast name	Source
1	The Daily	New York Times
2	This American Life	This American Life/Serial
3	Stuff You Should Know	iHeartRadio
4	Up First	NPRw
5	The Ben Shapiro Show	Daily Wire
6	Pardon My Take	Barstool Sports
7	Call Her Daddy	Barstool Sports
8	Planet Money	NPR
9	TED Radio Hour	NPR
10	Hidden Brain	NPR
11	RadioLab	WNYC Studies
12	Wait Wait…Don't Tell Me!	NPR
13	Fresh Air	NPR
14	Freakonomics	Freakonomics
15	TED Talks Daily	PRX
16	The Ron Burgundy Podcast	iHeartRadio
17	How I Built This	NPR
18	NPR Politics Podcast	NPR
19	Fantasy Focus Footbal	ESPN
20	Sword and Scale	Kast Media

Figure 1. Top 20 podcasts by listenership in September 2019. Note. Ranking is based on Podtrac measurement data for Unique U.S. Monthly Audience. Ranking includes shows that participate in Podtrac measurement for the full month for which the ranking is being released (Podtrac, 2019).

Public Podcasting

This fact-fueled, story-driven media ecology can usefully be described as public podcasting, which has hitherto been referenced, but not analyzed as such, in podcasting literature. Scholars have looked extensively at educational uses of podcasts (e.g., Campbell, 2005; Copley, 2007; Frydenberg, 2008; Lazzari, 2009; Nwosu, Monnery, Reid, & Chapman, 2017). They have pointed to the role of particular podcasts in providing a showcase for minority voices (Copeland, 2018; Florini, 2015; Park, 2017) and as journalism (Funk, 2017). They have analyzed individual public-media podcasts (Berry, 2015; Ora, 2018) and performed case studies on cultural production of individual podcasts as exemplars of emergent innovative processes (Barrios-O'Neill, 2018). This work has demonstrated a rich array of public service functions of podcasting, and it has validated a claim to podcasting's capacity for social importance and public service.

We propose that understanding public service podcasting as an ecology extends this knowledge. We provide several ways to describe that ecology.

Public Broadcasting Support

First and simplest, we can point to the dominance and leadership of U.S. public broadcasting entities in podcasting. Of the top 20, 11 are produced by public broadcasting entities (including Freakonomics, an independently produced program whose success depends on relationships with public broadcasting entities). Furthermore, public broadcasting entities, both stations and producer/distributor networks such as American Public Media (APM), National Public Adio (NPR), and Public Radio Exchange/Public Radio International (PRX/PRI), have taken leadership in investing in the form. NPR has developed reliable metrics from its Remote Audio Data analytics technology, which uses a mobile app to measure listening in tagged podcasts, and PRX/PRI has developed dynamic ad insertion technology. They have developed aggregators that offer both discovery and consumption: NPR has NPR One, and Radiotopia, a nonprofit that works within the orbit of public broadcasting, has Radio Public. They have invested financially in platform building; NPR and related public broadcasting entities have purchased Pocket Casts.

These top-rated shows have myriad siblings and cousins not only further down the chart of popularity, but also throughout the financially viable podcast environment and throughout the public media environment. These include true-crime programs *Serial*, *In the Dark*, and *Criminal*; environmental programs such as *HumaNature*; science programming such as *Science Vs*, *Story Collider*, and *Science Friday*; history programs such as *Backstory* and *Throughline*; news analysis such as *On the Media* and *The Brian Lehrer Show*; the breakout prison show *Ear Hustle*; and many more produced through public radio stations, independent producers distributing through public broadcasting-related apps, and public broadcasting service organizations.

Public Functions

Second, we can point to the public service function of the podcasts in this mini-ecology. It has been argued that public service media (traditionally public broadcasting) functions as a space in what is sometimes called the pseudo-public sphere (Blumler, 1992), a zone in which media enacts and models behaviors of civil discourse. It has been described as a service of the "microdynamics of democracy" (Dahlgren, 2006, p. 282) by engaging viewers with important issues and providing them information to fuel informed conversation. This concept draws from a notion of publicness particular to the American tradition of pragmatism (Dewey, 1927), although it invokes the language of the more familiar Habermasian arguments about the public sphere (Calhoun, 1992; Gripsrud & Eide, 2010; Habermas, Crossley, & Roberts, 2004). For Dewey, a public shares in common the effects of both corporate and government actions; it constitutes itself in addressing them by communicating with others similarly affected in its own defense (Dewey, 1927; Westbrook, 1991). Communication becomes action.

Within that Deweyan notion, public media has more generally been defined as

> projects and behaviors that address and mobilize publics, within any media. Some media are designed for this purpose (prestige journalism, public broadcasting), while others may do that occasionally (commercial television and radio, blogs) Communicating about shared problems builds a group's awareness of itself as a public. In this context, public media are media that aim to increase public knowledge and cohere and mobilize audience members. (Aufderheide & Clark, 2008, pp. 1–3)

Given that definition, podcasts outside public broadcasting also sometimes function as public media. *The New York Times* podcasts subscribe to its mission to help "people understand the world through on-the-ground, expert and deeply reported independent journalism" (*The New York Times*, 2019). Slate has a roster of 25 largely news-and-information-oriented podcasts. iHeartMedia, a highly commercial company that has no lofty mission, nonetheless includes some programming with rigorous factual and informational standards, such as *Stuff You Should Know*. Gimlet Media's podcasts carry the public media ethos into its productions, although its leadership broke away from public broadcasting to form a for-profit company (eventually sold to Spotify). Even comic and satirical coverage of the news has been shown to fuel public conversation about relevant issues (Borum Chattoo & Feldman, 2017; Brewer, Young, & Morreale, 2013). We include relevant podcasts, which fit the definition of public media in a Deweyan sense.

These podcasts demonstrate their performance of this function in a variety of ways. First, they participate in the U.S. news and public affairs ecology, as mapped by Benkler, Faris, and Roberts (2018); their parent companies, several of which feature prominently as nodes on the authors' map of news-sharing practices (see Figures 2.1, 2.2, pp. 48–49), share the expectation of fact-based reporting, fact-checking, and ethical responsibility for presentation. For instance, *This American Life*'s featuring of Mike Daisey's fiction-laced narrative of visiting the site of Apple iPhone production in China resulted in a nationwide discussion about journalistic ethics, and an extensive retraction (Glass, 2012). *Caliphate*, a 2018 podcast miniseries from *The New York Times* that made the top-recommended lists of many critics for the year, also spurred vigorous discussion about the challenges of interviewing known terrorists (Brockes, 2018).

Second, anecdotally their work has demonstrated public effects. For example, *Serial*'s investigation into a young man's murder trial was instrumental to reopening his case. Another public media podcast, *In the Dark*, contributed to a Supreme Court decision on whether jury selection was racially biased. *Caliphate* created controversy within the Canadian legislature, among other places, over questions of the series' subject remaining in Canada (Malcolm, 2018). African American podcasts, wryly called by some podcasters the "Chitlin' Circuit," form a distinct social space, much as Black Twitter does (Florini, 2015). Podcasters themselves have been discussed as "recursive publics," networked groups that invest in protecting and developing the technologies that link them (Bonini, 2015). This is in marked contrast to the kind of engagement that entertainment podcasts routinely undertake, which typically simply promotes the program and builds its fan base (Wrather, 2016).

Third, we found some congruence between the concerns of Americans, as defined in monthly Gallup polling (Gallup, 2019), and topics covered in public media podcasts.

Congruence of Concerns and Content: Methodology and Results

In a simple, supervised one-coder exercise, we selected *The Daily*, *This American Life*, *Stuff You Should Know*, *Up First*, *Planet Money*, *TED Radio Hour*, *Hidden Brain*, *RadioLab*, *Fresh Air*, and *Freakonomics* as the top 10 podcasts with a focus on news, public affairs, and civic knowledge. We chose the period September 1 to October 20, 2019, to capture five consecutive episodes of each podcast. To identify content, we depended on descriptions on the podcasts' websites

and/or their Apple Podcast descriptions. For podcasts with descriptions that were not clear enough, we listened to the first 15 minutes of the episode.

We then selected the results of a Gallup poll (Gallup, 2019) of the general populace on what they identified as "The Most Important Problem" from May to November 2019 and compared the topics of top concern for Americans with topics in the podcasts.

For the terms in the Gallup poll, we found that all the podcasts we selected covered some of these issues, some repeatedly even in this short window. Two podcasts covered two such issues; five covered three such issues; and three covered four such issues. The raw data are available from American University's Institutional Repository (AU Digital Research Archive, 2020).

Ecology of Relationships

Finally, we argue that this is a coherent ecology because of multiple relationships between different entities. U.S. public broadcasting itself is an ecology, not a system (Aufderheide, Clark, & Shapiro, 2008). The public broadcasting audience is ultimately reached through stations, which have autonomy in programming and which may or may not be producers. The stations are served by a wide range of actors, including nonprofit producers, programmers and distributors, business back-end providers, research services, and the entity that manages the federal contribution to the budget, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Public broadcasting and commercial public media may have relationships; for instance, *The Daily* is distributed via public broadcasting. iHeartRadio and Spotify distribute NPR podcasts, including *TED Radio Hour*.

We understand public podcasting to serve the American public, with synergies with other public media such as newspapers, magazines, public radio, and public TV.

Business Trends in Podcasting

Public podcasting operates within a rapidly changing business environment for podcasting. This can create new opportunities and threats.

Podcasting in the United States has developed up until now within a relatively protected cultural and economic space. Until recently, podcasting has been more of an investment or experiment than a profit center, even for popular podcasts. Public media, including stations, consortia, and programmers/distributors such as NPR, PRX, and APM, have used synergies with existing programming and developed new programming with in-house skills. Public podcasting has also benefited from a culture of donation, over decades of pledge drives. Podcasting economics until recently was a mix of highly targeted advertising and donations (Heeremans, 2018; podcast revenues are free from public broadcasting's advertising ban.)

Podcasting, as it scales, has some features that become attractive to many more players without any public service mandate. It can be cheap to produce; some of the most successful programs yield high profit margins—18%–54%—because they cost relatively little to produce and offer good advertising value. Podcasting demographics are young, upscale, and often hard to reach via other traditional media (Ehrlich, 2019).

The advertising market has appropriately ripened, shifting from long-term sponsorships for announcer-read spots to conventional, standard-length commercials (Jin, Segal, & Carroccio, 2019). Analytics have improved; Apple began in December 2017 to offer producers anonymized listening data from its app (Quah, 2017). In 2018, the Interactive Advertising Bureau, an industry trade group, launched its podcast measurement certification program ("IAB Tech Lab," 2018). In addition, National Public Radio released an open source system that enables podcast publishers to count listeners (Goers, 2018). Programmatic advertising has increased accordingly (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2019).

Public podcasting has so far demonstrated financial success. *The New York Times' The Daily*, which is aired on public radio stations via the public radio distributor APM, is highly profitable, with ad revenue reported to have been "in the low eight figures" in 2018 (Pompeo, 2018). NPR has successfully monetized its podcast programming, and podcast revenues account for ever greater portions of NPR's budget (Jin et al., 2019). Its projected 2020 sponsorship earnings from podcasting would double its sponsorship amounts over three years and account for more than 20% of its total budget (Falk, 2019). In 2015 NPR, WNYC, and WBEZ hosted the first podcast-focused upfront presentation—a programming showcase for advertisers that encourages them to include the podcasts in their yearly buying plans ("NPR, WNYC and WBEZ Announce," 2015). Outside of public broadcasting but within the public podcasting sphere, Slate is now drawing half of its revenue from podcast sponsorship, with listenership growing dramatically from 2017 to 2018 (at 78%) and again in 2018–2019 (39%; Barber, 2019).

Changing Terms of Business

Platformization poses new challenges for many existing players, including public media. Scholars have warned for some time that podcasting's increasing popularity would change its character. The scrappy, unpredictable little-guy medium that emerged as a geekily creative space in both journalism and storytelling more generally runs the risk of being "colonized by the mainstream" (Markman, 2015). Mobile apps, which arise from a variety of sources and have various features that algorithmically channel a listener's selection while building audience, can channel listeners to a kind of Top 40 set of choices: "The homogeneous nature of recommendations and the curated lists foregrounded within mobile podcasting apps suggests that, while there exists a large range of programming, the most-listened and promoted programs are products of larger and more powerful media institutions" (Morris & Patterson, 2015, p. 228).

But 2018 was, for many industry observers, a pivot point. Venture capital was coming into the space. Venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz, citing data from PitchBook, found that dealmakers raised $203 million for 29 private podcasting-related transactions in 2018, up from $161 million for 23 deals in 2017, and $40 million for 13 deals in 2016 (Jin et al., 2019).

Platformization may be the biggest change on the horizon. The tendency for media to be located on platforms that media makers do not control has had profound effects on the business of news media, film, and games (Hindman, 2018; Lotz, 2018; Nieborg & Poell, 2018). In the field of media management, scholars including Michael Porter (1998) and Bruce Greenwald and Judd Kahn (2005) persuasively argue that companies hoping to become dependably profitable over time need to limit competition by cultivating barriers to entry, such as scale or

customer captivity. Platforms such as Google Play, Amazon Prime, Facebook, and (particularly relevant for podcasting) Apple profoundly affect the business, technical, and creative environment, as many have noted. Whether it is the opaque algorithmic management of content (Gillespie, 2018), the multisided nature of the market, such that traditional relationships are eroded (Nieborg & Poell, 2018), the network effects that lead to monopolization (Hindman, 2018; Wu, 2018), or the data-harvesting imperative that drives toward universal surveillance (Suzor, 2019; Zuboff, 2019), the rise of platforms has been seen as an often alarming signal of centralization of power and control. Power and control are centralized by a combination of tactics. One is the aggregation of the functions of storage, discovery, and consumption (Sullivan, 2019). Another is the way in which overlapping of content and conduit functions creates new opportunities for control (Lotz, 2018).

Podcasting has long been marked by decentralization; podcasts were accessed via RSS feeds, and RSS simply links to a file that can be stored anywhere. Lack of central sites to find and listen to podcasts was a barrier to growth until the Apple iPod and iPod app led to wider adoption. Sullivan (2019) has proposed that even in the decentralized environment of podcasting, platformization is an emerging reality. He sees the RSS feed declining in importance as podcasters, in search of viability, lock in listeners with premium on-site content (Sullivan, 2019). Recent investment in podcasting has focused on subscription and other premium strategies that supersede RSS. Quake Media has raised money from investors, including Jeffrey Katzenberg's WndrCo, to introduce a $6.99-a-month subscription podcast service (Quah, 2019). Sports media company The Athletic also announced a plan to offer subscription-only podcasts (Fischer, 2019). For Sullivan (2019), this opens the door to centralized control on the part of larger players.

As well, Sullivan (2019) sees platformization proceeding because very large players—Apple, Google, Spotify—are fully engaged, serving both discovery and consumption. The lure of new vistas in data collection drives the development bus (Sullivan, 2019). Apple, which links to RSS files and does not collect data, is well established. Google, with its massive global reach, capacity for personalization, and ability to control discovery and consumption, is positioning itself in the platform wars. It caches other podcasts, thus making it impossible to do dynamic ad insertion, but does not cache its own (creating a reason for consumers to prioritize its podcasts). In 2016, it added podcast features to Google Play Music (Pratt, 2018). In June 2018, it introduced its podcast app for Android users. The company also streams programs via Google Assistant-powered devices—including its Google Home smart speakers—opening the way for interoperability between devices. It expects to double worldwide podcast listening with its services in the next few years (Pratt, 2018).

But the news that Spotify—which reported that it had 217 million active monthly users globally at mid-2019—was folding podcasting into its offerings potentially changed the dynamics of platformization (Spotify Technology, 2019a). Spotify provides storage, discovery, and consumption services in one place, is well-established in music, and is an eager collector of consumer data. In 2019, it bought major podcast producers such as Gimlet and signed exclusive deals with popular producers, with 15 original or exclusive podcasts. It also announced a multiyear deal with Barack and Michelle Obama's Higher Ground production company to make podcasts exclusively for Spotify's subscription and ad-supported platforms (Spotify Technology, 2019a). Spotify is working to create discovery options for podcasts like

the ones it has for music; it has, for instance, created playlists around different genres. In 2019, it tested playlists for users internationally in Comedy, True Crime, Geek Culture, Walking (Motivational), and Relaxing (Mindfulness; Quah, 2019).

Pandora Media, which satellite radio's SiriusXM bought in 2019, has begun to offer some SiriusXM shows as podcasts, and it intended to buy many more—as many as 10,000 by the end of 2019 (SeekingAlpha, 2019). Pandora describes itself as a platform. It does not cache RSS feeds, but it does mine them extensively to support its Pandora Genome Project. Pandora believes it can drive listeners to its platform by appealing to discovery challenges; it hopes to create an industry-leading recommendation engine like the one it uses in music, which tags songs with more than 400 musical and lyrical characteristics. Its Podcast Genome Project tags programs with more than 1,500 attributes, including user skips and replay (Perez, 2018). "No one has taken the time to analyze everything that's being discussed in a podcast episode, and then extract those nuggets that might be the key discovery moments," Pandora Chief Product Officer Chris Phillips said. "If we know you care about a particular topic, we can find the podcast, the needle in the haystack, and put it in front of you" (Pandora Media, 2019, p. 22).

Other business strategies attempt to counter this platformization move. iHeartMedia, the United States' largest terrestrial radio broadcaster and commercial podcaster, developed a plan in 2019 to promote new podcasts via its stations in 160 U.S. markets and made a play to become a one-stop shop for audio advertising: Widely distributed podcasts could appeal to national brands, while individual stations continue to sell to local buyers. However, this move to create a network that captures advertising dollars with network effects could also be driven by the weakening of radio advertising. Ad company GroupM expects radio ad sales in the United States to fall 3.4% in 2020 if one factors out the election-year influx of political ads (GroupM, 2019).

Several other companies hope to create subscription-based walled gardens that could function as platforms. Luminary became the most prominent company in this group after it raised nearly $100 million in venture capital and launched a $7.99-a-month podcast subscription service (Barnes, 2019). Its exclusive programming includes some public-purpose programming, such as *The Axe Files With David Axelrod*, *Deep Background With Noah Feldman*, and *Planet Money* creator Adam Davidson's *The Passion Economy*. However, Luminary does not have the related assets of an Apple, a Google Play, or a Spotify.

Threats to the Public Podcasting Ecology

In the medium term, platformization bodes a sea change in media in general, and to podcasting in particular. The arrival of Spotify was a signal to the field that the choices will increasingly be to bulk up, be bought, or join. The emerging platform space consolidates the field of podcasting, promising to make podcasting a more central and popular media habit. It is also likely to constrain new, small, and independent players; to channel new production in ways that platform algorithms encourage; and limit the power and control of any business dependent on the platform, including public media. For instance, programmatic advertising often involves Google and Facebook, which control more than 60% of digital ad spending (Sterling, 2019). This has implications for access, given that both services use opaque algorithms to rank display of information for users. As the head of strategy for a major media

company said to us, the implications are existential for podcasters: "Are they [Google and Facebook] going to move aggressively to build their own ad businesses [in podcasting]? Or are they going to be more passive gatekeepers?" (Anonymous, personal communication, March 6, 2019). The record so far from other fields suggests the former.

The nature of this threat is well identified in scholarly literature. Not only Sullivan (2019), but also Nieborg and Poell (2018), warned generally of the "platformization of cultural production," with large companies increasingly controlling the terms of access for cultural producers and, ultimately, consumers. As Gillespie (2018), Lotz (2018), and Suzor (2019) have differently noted, these platforms have monopolistic capacities that go far beyond the platform-as-intermediary. In reality, they are not merely platforms, but hybrids, marrying old business models, such as vertical integration and subscription, while also describing new network features, including recommendation engines. Ultimately, their growth and evolution depend, as Zuboff (2018) notes chillingly, on data mining, which depends on continuous surveillance.

In the short run, even in the relatively decentralized environment, the growth of advertiser interest in podcasting leads both to an expansion of financially viable podcasts and to productions that tilt more toward the entertaining, sensational, or shocking than the informative. Comedy podcasts accounted for 18% of the medium's ad sales in the first three months of 2019, research firm Magellan (2019) reports. That was followed by News & Politics (15.9%), Society & Culture (14.2%), Sports & Recreation (10.6%), Business (8.1%), Health (7.4%), and Science & Medicine (3.2%), with other categories collecting 22.5% (Magellan, 2019).

Spotify CEO Daniel Ek and others believed, in 2019, that infotainment was accounting for most new growth, potentially crowding out more substantial or civic content. Ek told Wall Street analysts he anticipated that news "with [its] short shelf live, ends up being a smaller part of the overall mix" (Motley Fool Transcribing, 2019, p. 1).

Ek called "true crime" content

> a massive category for us and growing very, very fast. But we're also seeing, of course, music podcasts growing very fast, which if you look historically in podcasting, that's not been a big category, but that's becoming a much bigger one. (Spotify Technology, 2019b, p. 1)

iHeart's top podcasts in late 2019 included *The Ron Burgundy Show*, *Stuff You Should Know*, and the right-wing commentary *The Ben Shapiro Show* (iHeartRadio, 2019). It also offers podcasts of radio shows by some of its most popular personalities in broadcast syndication, including Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, and Glenn Beck, all of whom have been noted for conspiracy mongering and opinion over fact. Pandora's growth is fueled by entertainment content. In March 2019, its owner, SiriusXM, introduced a content team for the streaming service that it said will focus on creating programs in "music, sports, and talk content ranging across comedy, politics, and entertainment" (SiriusXM, 2019, p. 1).

By contrast, news, public affairs, and educational podcasts are typically highly produced, and public radio podcasts usually require a team of five to six people to produce a regular series. News or public affairs have short shelf lives, which makes them expensive to produce. Many public media podcasts and podcasts distributed on public media, such as *On the Media* and *The Daily*, benefit from being embedded within a large news organization. *The Daily*'s staff size is exceptional even within public media circles. It has 15 people, half of the *Times*'

audio team, which also has three studios (Southern, 2019). "*The Daily* is bolted onto a really strong newsroom and pool of journalists—making it somewhat of an interview show with *New York Times* journalists from around the world" (C. Byrne, personal communication, September 16, 2019). iHeartPodcast Network president Conal Byrne told us, "That is a difficult thing for other news and politics podcasts to replicate as they test the space" (C. Byrne, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

At the same time, an organization with deep enough pockets can afford to feature prestige programs that garner publicity and legitimacy, potentially cutting into public podcasting's core audience. David Axelrod's move to Luminary, Spotify's purchase of Gimlet, and Barack and Michelle Obama's exclusive deal with Spotify suggest that public media does not have a unique claim on public-purpose producers.

Reactions Within Public Podcasting

How concerned are public podcasters about prospects for public podcasting at a point in the field's development that scholars have identified as threatening its future? There has in fact been little public discussion about public podcasting and platformization, or indeed of centralization more generally, among practitioners, whatever the private conversations. For instance, between January 2017 and November 2019, as podcasting's economics pivoted, Current newspaper, the medium of record for public broadcasting, had no coverage of the challenges for public media's podcast production within the changing economic context; however, it did have ample coverage of individual podcasts, the acquisition of Pocket Casts, and podcast metrics. This was not a surprise, given the decentralized institutional structures (Aufderheide et al., 2008), competitive business arrangements, and lack of bridges between public broadcasting institutions and other, more commercial public podcasters.

Individual producers and executives have publicly reflected on the challenges of maintaining the public podcasting ecology, although not directly related to emerging business trends. In 2015, a major brouhaha occurred: One of public podcasting's most successful figures, Ira Glass of *This American Life*, said at an event held by public broadcasters to raise advertiser interest, "My hope is that we can move away from a model of asking listeners for money and join the free market Public radio is ready for capitalism" (Gillies, 2015, para. 1). This comment created a furor, and Glass clarified,

> Our mission is everything to me. It's the most important thing about our jobs, the premise of the whole operation and of how I've spent all my working days since I was a teenager I'm not advocating a cartoony and stupid version of embracing capitalism. I see a huge middle ground, where we keep our mission and our ideals, and bring in more money using the conventional tools of the market economy. . . . I think public radio will handle this new revenue the way we've handled all the money we've brought in until now: We'll use it to make the same idealistic and ambitious stuff we've always made. (Glass, 2015, paras. 3–8)

While public podcasters have gone on to embrace advertising enthusiastically, concerns persist. Podcasting consultant Eric Nuzum, despite having left public broadcasting after two decades, remains inspired by its promise and joined the chorus of concern over the potential loss of mission:

> One of my worries is that public radio will lose itself in the exciting evolution of podcasting. When I talk to many of the people involved in public radio's podcasting efforts, I hear lots about CPM rates and dynamic ad insertion technology. I don't hear much about mission and public service. . . .
>
> Lately, when I'm lucky enough to have a happy-hour conversation with former public radio colleagues, I've been asking them: If the Public Broadcasting Act expired after 50 years and needed to be completely rethought for today's media landscape, how would it be different? What would continue? What would go away?. . .
>
> The great news is there is a massive opportunity—right now—for public radio to have its cake and eat it too. You can find ways to monetize the content you create, while also taking a fresh look at the ideals that forged the industry and applying them to the digital age.
>
> In the exciting and increasingly commercialized podcast boom, public radio's path won't be forged by just following what everyone else does. Your essential role is to double down on mission. Stations don't need a permission slip to do this. The only gatekeeper is a lack of ambition. (Nuzum, 2019, paras. 37–41)

Radiotopia producer Julie Shapiro speculated from the front lines about the dangers of a loss of culture and mission; she too expressed awareness that the public service mission of public broadcasting was not necessarily an enduring feature of public podcasts:

> I wonder what will happen when the next generation of podcasters enters the arena, having skipped over the public media system completely . . . what will be lost, alongside this meteoric shift away from the public broadcasting system, as podcasting rockets into the future? What will happen when investors and Hollywood and celebrities crowd out the smaller voices, the passion projects, the unbridled ambition to give voice to all the people, to tell the stories of our lives, our communities and our culture?. . .
>
> Will the core directives and aspirations of the [Public Broadcasting] Act [of 1967] remain intact as podcasting spreads deep into mainstream and commercial American culture?. . . [Public] network decision-makers can (and should) uphold the quality and integrity that the Act stands for as they create new shows. Podcast execs can (and should) strive to bring on diverse talent from inside and beyond the already established arena. Stations can (and should) create and fully support opportunities for employees to explore podcasting before the best and brightest public radio talent leaves the system. (Shapiro, 2017, paras. 7, 10, 12)

For public podcasters not within public broadcasting's aura, the possibility that advertiser interests win out over mission may be even greater. For instance, in a conversation with Erik Borenstein, who is now Director of Audio and TV at *The New York Times*, we asked about the temptation to produce more entertaining and potentially less substantive coverage to attract advertising. That executive showed a reluctance to say that a news report on, say, Afghanistan would be of any more public interest than a travel feature. "The subject matter of the show is aligned with the Times' mission of seeking truth and helping people understand the world. Lots of stories fall within that lens," Borenstein said (personal communication, August 1, 2019). Yet travel features are designed for personal consumer interests in tourism, whereas information on international conflicts generally informs public conversation about policy. Mission slippage is already in evidence.

Julie Shapiro's stress on mission is related to a problem she also alludes to: the brain drain from public podcasting into the larger, more commercialized arena. Gimlet may be the most spectacular instance of that brain drain (Kachka, 2019), but the loss to public media

of other major figures, such as Adam Davidson and Eric Nuzum, is another good example. *This American Life*, which Ira Glass negotiated into an independent status with control over sponsorship and many commercial relationships, is also widely noted.

Another challenge for adaptive behavior is that the public podcasting ecology is still protean. Public broadcasting, the core of the public podcasting ecology, lacks institutional mechanisms for research and development sites. The technology that fuels easy discovery and seemingly seamless consumption requires never-ending innovation, which is a challenge for underresourced public media. Public broadcasting's decentralization makes aggregated investment difficult, competition among rival services routine, and coordinated decision-making impossible. This is something all leaders in the area face as a reality, and something that has dogged public broadcasting from the start. Indeed, one wry definition among insiders of public broadcasting is "a series of meetings interrupted occasionally by a program." Nuzum bemoaned the risk-averse culture of public radio—of course bred by a concern for public money and scarce resources, but now also a cultural characteristic (Nuzum, 2018). PRX/PRI CEO Kerri Hoffman, one of the field's more outspoken leading executives, told us, "In the nonprofit world, people cling to stability. What have we done as an industry to groom our young leaders so they can take the mantle? Not very much. How do we invest in young talent?" (personal communication, February 15, 2019). She also signaled the need for experimentation, both in business models and in perpetual technology innovation: "You have to fail and be comfortable with prototyping, failing faster. That's not a culture that's alive and well in public media."

In an extensive 2019 study, news podcasters expressed similar concerns. Many of those interviewed

> fear they could be helping platforms build profitable businesses on the back of their content. Others worry that they could lose their direct relationship with audiences, including first-party data, as platforms take the credit for content. Public broadcasters, in particular, are trying to develop their own destinations for audio content and a number have started to publish first in their own platforms or are withholding content altogether from third parties. (Newman & Gallo, 2019, p. 7)

Public Podcasting Assets

Nonetheless, we believe the public podcasting ecology has assets and advantages, even in a big-player, platform world.

Content still matters, and that depends on both culture/mission and institutional resources. Public media podcasting benefits from the long-term public commitment to and investment in broadcast journalism. Many podcasts either started out (and continue) as broadcast programs or are incubated productively within a station or network with considerable journalistic assets. To give two examples, *Ear Hustle*, about life inside and after prison, and *On the Media*, about media and public life, are both unviable on their own from an advertising perspective. The audience is not large enough to generate enough advertising to cover all costs. But *Ear Hustle* also attracts donations and foundation support, promotes the Radiotopia network's image, and provides VIP opportunities for events (K. Hoffman, personal communication, February 15, 2019). *On the Media* is carried by many public media stations as a broadcast program, and

it attracts donors and foundation money on its own (B. Garfield, personal communication, February 18, 2019). Stations are still getting over a fear of cannibalizing their audiences, but they increasingly see the synergies between the two forms of distribution.

Further, public media already has many journalistic partnerships that combine good journalism (e.g., ProPublica, Reveal) with public radio's reach, both broadly throughout the nation and deeply within communities. With organizations such as the *Washington Post*, *The Economist*, and Vox producing journalistic podcasts on the heels of *The Daily*, there are undoubtedly good opportunities for cobranding and partnerships.

Public podcasting also has higher-end advertiser appeal. Although public podcasting's upscale demographics may be minoritarian, they are also often otherwise hard to reach (Edison Research, 2019b). This is as true for The Daily and Slate's programs as it is for public broadcasting programs. Public-broadcasting-related podcasting in particular has brand recognition; this will continue to signal quality and civic responsibility that reflect a public-purpose mission, something that even a behemoth like Spotify cannot rival. This also has implications for the value proposition that can be offered to advertisers. It is not surprising that The Daily, a production of a for-profit company, is distributed for broadcast on public broadcasting.

Public podcasting's commitment to highly produced, well-crafted narrative, often from offbeat locales and sectors of society, also bodes well for another rising source of revenue: optioning for film or television productions. Vox, a digital publisher and podcaster, became an entertainment company in 2019 with its acquisition of Epic Magazine—a nonfiction producer that has a first look deal with 21st Century Fox and more than 40 film and TV projects in development. Meanwhile, Spotify's purchase of Gimlet Media was in part to secure Gimlet Pictures, which markets content to Hollywood producers (Andreeva, 2018). Amazon picked up the video rights to a Gimlet fictional psychological thriller, *Homecoming*, and turned it into an award-winning film of the same name. Another series, Bravo's true-crime *Dirty John*, started as a podcast created by Wondery and the *Los Angeles Times*. "The TV and film industry is finding a new goldmine of intellectual property in podcasting," iHeartPodcast Network President Conal Byrne told us. "The best and brightest creators in the world are able to operate with relatively total creative freedom, putting their ideas in front of audiences at scale. That's going to lead to some very good content, and Hollywood is taking notice" (C. Byrne, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

Finally, the very decentralization of U.S. public broadcasting, the set of institutions responsible for the development of the public podcasting ecology, may, ironically, work as a limited counterweight to the power of platforms. Public broadcasting at its base is a loose coalition of stations, each with a local constituency and board of directors, and with virtually guaranteed partial funding for core services from the federal government. Stations have long established a public presence, including brand awareness, in their local areas. They typically make a large minority or even majority of their operating revenue from area-level donations. The stations are bound to certain minimum obligations as users of the nonprofit portion of public spectrum, including an inability to sell assets to a for-profit entity. So long as public podcasting is associated with local stations and the entities that serve them, such as NPR and PBS, they maintain to some degree a separate sphere of influence and action from the hybrid platforms.

Conclusion

Public-purpose podcasting has created a unique and uniquely valuable space of public discourse in the precommercial phase of podcasting. This space, we have argued, can productively be defined as a public podcasting ecology in the United States. Its recent success is at risk as hybrid platforms threaten to consolidate core functions in podcasting, including storage, discovery, and consumption. In the process, they also threaten the growing advertising revenue that fuels public podcasting's most interesting (and expensive) new productions, and they challenge the ability of a public podcasting culture to maintain itself.

We believe that understanding this ecology as distinctive and publicly valuable is important to maintaining it. Currently, although commercial and noncommercial partnerships exist, the ecology is more typified by competitive than collaborating actors. The risks to public life and the informational flow that sustains it, especially of platformization, are not part of public discussion in public podcasting, although they increasingly are being discussed by regulators in both the United States and Europe. In this process, public broadcasters may have a role to play. Public broadcasting is a set of organizations with deep roots in many U.S. communities, and, given both federal and (typically) state funding, it has an ability to raise concerns and opportunities with legislators and regulators.

We believe that the concept of public podcasting can fruitfully be extended beyond the U.S. podcasting ecology. Although the conditions of the public media environment vary greatly from region to region, the notion that trusted podcasts that abide by journalistic standards are a public asset can be applied cross-regionally.

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CHAPTER 47

The Future of Public Service Media and the Internet

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In *The Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto*, edited by Christian Fuchs and Klaus Unterberger, 113–27. University of Westminster Press, 2021.

Crisis and Utopia

We are at a crossroads. Society is in a crisis. The Internet is in a crisis. Public Service Media are in a crisis. In crises, the future is uncertain. We face the prospects for both great problems and great opportunities. There are potentials both for a brighter and a darker future. **This Manifesto is a manifesto for saving and advancing democracy, democratic communications and a public service Internet**. We are asking the public to join in the quest for the renewal of Public Service Media in the 21st century and the creation of a Public Service Internet.

The idea was simple and changed everything: Media for everybody. Independent. A trusted source of information. In Great Britain, public service broadcasting stimulated this idea at the beginning of the 20th century. More than twenty years later after the devastations caused by the Second World War, the idea reemerged in Germany where it helped in restoring democracy. Public service broadcasting helped creating the backbone of the **public sphere and quality journalism**.

In 2021, the world suffers from a global pandemic. Alarming scenarios of climate change, social crisis, fragmentation and polarisation affect humanity severely. Digital technologies'

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dominant forms and uses are destroying traditional media structures. The current crisis endangers the social basis of our democracies, including the established infrastructures of PSM. Neoliberalism and authoritarianism might result in a truly **dystopian scenario for PSM's future**. We need utopias as alternatives. We need to renew Public Service Media and realise the utopia of creating a Public Service Internet.

The Way Forward

The **Internet and the media landscape are broken**. The dominant Internet platforms have broken democracy. They have harmed citizens, users, everyday life and society. Digital giants such as Apple, Alphabet/Google Microsoft, Amazon, Alibaba and Facebook form monopolies whose tremendous economic, political and cultural power colonises the world. The Internet and the media are today dominated by commerce, digital surveillance, targeted and personalised advertisements, fragmented online publics, filter bubbles; the lack of human listening, engagement and meaningful debate; a highly individualistic attention economy where a few influencers dominate visibility and voice, false news, post-factual politics, authoritarianism; online hatred in the form of digital fascism, right-wing extremism, racism and conspiracy theories that spread on the Internet and social media; algorithmic politics where bots try to control political communication and so on. The Internet has become a network that separates and divides instead of bringing together humanity. The Internet has become a threat to democracy. We are convinced that we urgently need an alternative Internet to save democracy and humanity from its own demise.

We have a dream. **We dream of a revitalisation and renewal of Public Service Media**. Public Service Media that are fit for the 21st century. We dream of a different Internet and a different media landscape. We dream of a concrete utopia that could be realised already tomorrow when enough people demand such an alternative. We dream of a Public Service Internet. An Internet that serves the public. An Internet of the public, by the public, and for the public. An Internet that advances instead of threatens democracy and the public sphere. The Public Service Internet is best realised by PSM that operate a variety of Internet platforms. The Public Service Internet consists of Public Service Media platforms. Whereas corporate Internet platforms primarily promote their owners' profits, Public Service Internet platforms promote public purposes. Public Service Internet platforms take the public service remit into the digital age. Public Service Internet platforms advance democracy, citizenship, civil society, education, learning, information, creativity, participation, political understanding and communication as well as entertainment on and through the Internet. They take the Internet to the next level and form a future-oriented Internet that enhances the public sphere.

It is time that we put this dream of a Public Service Internet and revitalised Public Service Media into reality. The realisation of a Public Service Internet and the renewal of PSM are urgent. Because it is urgent that we save democracy and the public sphere. While the contemporary Internet and the contemporary media landscape are dominated by monopolies and commerce, **the Public Service Internet and Public Service Media serve democracy**.

PSM's Challenges

Public Service Media (PSM) currently faces many challenges. The rise of global digital platforms and the COVID-19 pandemic crisis have created new ones and exacerbated some of the old ones. PSM faces societal challenges as well as internal obstacles.

PSM and Society's Big Challenges

PSM's old mission of informing, educating, and entertaining remains as relevant as ever. During the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, a huge number of individuals turned to PSM for these purposes. PSM is the best available media platform for addressing society's big challenges. There are three major challenges society faces.

1. Platform capitalism and the promotion of unsustainable hyper-consumerism:

> The dominant online platforms are massive engines of **product promotion** fuelling a culture of **unsustainable hyperconsumption**. They act as digital monopolies that exploit digital labour and try to manipulate consumers. It is essential to maintain a strong Public Service Media presence at the centre of public culture that does not address and package people primarily as consumers but as citizens. PSM play a key role in this context

2. The destruction of deliberation, the public sphere and democracy:

> A key task for PSM is to restore a functioning public sphere. **Deliberation, the public sphere, and democracy are today eroded, colonised, and undermined** by algorithmic- and data-driven commercial digital platforms, ultra-partisan unregulated news media outlets, false news, surveillance society, far-right, authoritarian and nationalist ideology, a highly accelerated and tabloidized attention economy where the power of voice, communication and visibility is asymmetrically distributed, the lack of time and space for debate, individualism, post-truth politics, automated algorithmic politics, and fragmented publics that have created filter bubbles.

3. An accelerating climate crisis and periodic pandemics linked to environmental degradation:

> PSM have a responsibility and an opportunity to deliver accurate and accountable information on **environmental and social sustainability**, which can help to establish better awareness. PSM should distinguish itself themselves from the commercial media by being the first to develop a strategy to reduce emissions and energy consumption, aiming to increase the use of green energy sources.

While PSM are best placed for addressing society's big challenges, at the same time they also face a number of external challenges that threaten their position. Next, we are listing some of them.

The rise of far-right parties:

In recent years, far-right parties and groups have vocally accusing PSM of editorial bias and waste and have questioned the existence of both the licence fee and PSM as such. PSM and the public should vividly reject attempts to destroy the independence of PSM and their journalists.

Regulatory constraints:

In a neoliberal environment, PSM organisations are often subject to regulatory constraints to technical innovation and to the development of their online services.

Changing media habits, especially among young people:

PSM experienced an upsurge in viewing during the COVID-19 crisis, though the longer-term trend has been one of falling viewership. In particular, PSM are struggling to engage and retain younger audiences whose screen time is increasingly devoted to types of content other than traditional "mass media" genres, including e-sport, short videos on TikTok, Snapchat and Twitch, influencer- and user-generated content on YouTube and Instagram, as well as on-demand content from streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Apple TV/Music and Spotify.

Digital platforms:

PSM compete in global markets. They face a kind of "total" competition by super-dominant global tech. These digital giants can buy up any production company, premium rights, writers etc. They control existing and future gateways to the audience. Some are barely regulated. It is a key question to what extent PSM should develop their own platforms or use existing capitalist platforms. Should PSM compete or co-operate with commercial streaming, video, music and social media platforms? Take podcasts for example: should PSM use Spotify's proprietary podcasting service to reach more listeners? And/or should PSM build their own platforms?

Commercialisation:

The dominance of commercialisation poses a clear threat for PSM organisations. There have been PSM operations to be downsized in the name of market freedom and efficiency. Such calls have been backed by commercial broadcasters and newspaper publishers claiming that PSM organisations distort competition and "steal" viewers and paying customers with their free services.

Declining funding:

Often, the political unwillingness to endow PSM organisations with adequate funding makes it very hard for them to innovate, attract on- and off-screen talent and compete with the giant global digital platforms and transnational media corporations that have much deeper pockets. The level of resources available is a key determinant for PSM's ability to change and innovate.

Internal Obstacles:

Internal bureaucracy and a conservative mindset:

In big organisations, there is often resistance to change. **Bureaucracy** tends to slow down any process of innovation. As big organisations, PSM themselves are often seen as fairly conservative organisations. For example, technically oriented PS personnel often needs to invest considerably in convincing senior management that the projects they pursue are worthwhile. There is a lot of focus on "legacy" products that are overall (still) popular but not attractive to young people.

Lack of workforce diversity:

The lack of sociodemographic **diversity** in PSM organisations, in terms of class, gender, age and ethnicity of its personnel, translates into a lack of diversity in on-screen representations, voice and opinion.

Skills deficit:

The **skills needed for equipping PSM to transform themselves into platforms and networks** fit for the 21st century, are scarce. The workforce holding these skills is difficult to retain because it often has far more lucrative job offers in the private sector. Often, PSMs lack of technical in-house expertise is a serious obstacle to innovation. Attracting new and dynamic talent in the face of declining funding and growing competition is a real challenge for the future.

PSM-Visions

The COVID-19 crisis has shown that PSM are a trusted source of objective and impartial information; a reliable provider of high quality and cultural content; a guardian of pluralistic and minority views; and, above all, a reference point in times of crisis. The way for PSM to survive is to strengthen its core mission and to update the means by which it brings that mission to life:

- PSM must promote **equality** in all possible ways;
- PSM must provide **opportunities for participation**;
- PSM must be the trailblazer of **new content and services** and not a conservative maintainer of established content and services;
- The survival of PSM is based on **understanding the environment we are living in and new partnerships**.

PSM must promote equality in all possible ways.

Throughout its history, PSMs have managed to turn the tide on urgent social issues such as gender representation. PSM should give opportunities to new and underrepresented genres and creators. It is equally important to guarantee equality within PSM organisations as well as in their contents and services.

PSM must fight information inequality and provide universal access offline and online.

PSM must remain a vital source of social, ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. In order to produce a service for all members of society it has to be relevant for all. This is why PSM also has to address fragmented parts of society, like less educated individuals and minorities of all kind.

PSM must represent diversity to stay relevant for society as a whole.

PSM must protect its independence.

In the midst of an overwhelming flood of news and messages in the global internet, PSM should insist on its accountability. In order to be a credible and trusted source of information, PSM's independence from governmental as well as business interests is crucial. Editorial and ethical guidelines and the protection of the rights of journalists are needed to safeguard the accountability of PSM's role as independent news provider.

PSM must reject commercial requests that it should become a niche provider.

Just like in the past, also in the digital future, entertainment and sport events will form important elements of society and the public sphere. The way we live, what we appreciate, the way we suffer or laugh, how we compete in sport events, and the emotional side of individual and social life, should not be limited to a business model for the commercial broadcasting sector. In order to connect with all members of society and all layers of individual and civic life, PSM should use all means of communication including entertainment formats and sports events. Such programmes should be produced based on high-quality criteria and standards.

PSM must provide opportunities for participation.

There is a long history of participatory budgeting and collaborative production. PSM can adapt and further develop the most successful forms of participation and engagement so that PSM audiences to become involved in creating content and services and turn from mere consumers into active, producing consumers ("prosumers"). Instead of the obscure, opaque, dark algorithms used by YouTube, Google, Facebook, public service algorithms should in a transparent manner shape PSM's schedules, contents, and services.

PSM must be the trailblazer of new content and services and not a conservative maintainer of established content and services.

In terms of datafication, automation and AI in the newsroom, PSM should strive for singularity of purpose, interdisciplinary teams all over the news outlet, and flexible newsrooms structures, and the representation of user needs. All these have to be accompanied by a long-term strategy.

PSM must increase its production so that there is more room for educational, informational and children's programmes, content and genres. PSM must dare to produce and be allowed to produce and provide more thorough, time consuming, critical content. It should not have to compete for clickbait and attention for sensationalism.

PSM should offer alternative nodes for news, interaction and entertainment. It should actively define new values to resist current models of datafication on commercial platforms.

PSM could define new values together with civil society groups and not-for-profit communities that have already created relevant principles and practices.

The survival of PSM is based on understanding the environment we are living in and new partnerships.

There is a need for a common public arena for common identity-building and connection-building. This PSM environment must be based on a new understanding of how democracy works and the changes of democracy in the context of digitalisation and the climate, health and political crises.

PSM requires stable and adequate funding; investment in news, information and high-quality content; and the public support of its strong democratic, cultural and social roles in society. The future PSM environment requires new forms of collaboration and common platforms. Future PSM have to build on the successes of PSM in a new context.

Digital PSM: Towards a Public Service Internet

While the contemporary Internet is dominated by monopolies and commerce, the **Public Service Internet is dominated by democracy**. While the contemporary Internet is dominated by surveillance, the Public Service Internet is privacy-friendly and transparent. While the contemporary Internet misinforms and separates the public, the Public Service Internet engages, informs and unites the public. While the contemporary Internet puts economic profit first and over humans, the Public Service Internet puts humans first.

Data privacy is a core aspect of the Public Service Internet. The Public Service Internet provides role model practices of data processing. Public Service Internet software and content is a common good that can be reused for noncommercial purposes. On Public Service Internet platforms, users can manage their data, download and reuse their self-curated data for reuse on other platforms.

The digital giants store every click and every online move we make on vast server farms to monitor and monetise usage behaviour. Public Service Internet platforms in contrast **minimise and decentralise data storage** and have no need to monetise and monitor Internet use. Public Service Internet platforms experiment with new forms of content licencing that advance the cultural and digital commons for not-for-profit and non-commercial purposes.

Realising the Public Service Internet requires **new ideas, new technologies, new policies and new economic models**. PSM have in the history of 20th century communications been great innovators. The social and technological innovations that will shape the future of the Internet should not be left to corporate giants. PSM have the potentials it takes for becoming the key force that advances democratic communications in the digital age. Public Service Internet platforms develop new platforms, services, formats and content. We need new policies that enable the creation of Public Service Internet platforms. Legislators have too much focused on enabling the power of the digital giants and have not enough done for enabling Public Service Media to become Internet platform providers. This situation has to change if digital democracy and the digital public sphere shall have a future. Although the power of the digital giants needs to be curtailed, Public Service Media and their Public Service

Internet platforms need support and enablement. Public Service Internet platforms should not operate for profit and should be kept free from advertising. They need funding models that are different from the ones the digital giants use. The licence fee that sustains PSM is not a mechanism of the past but one for the digital future. The digital licence fee will extend and transform PSM's licence fee in the digital age.

Public Service Internet platforms **treat users and workers fairly**. They are independent from corporate and political power. They are spaces where critical, independent journalists make high-quality news and where creative professionals make high-quality programmes that educate, inform and entertain in ways that reflect the affordances of the digital age. They engage citizens in new forms that build on the experiences, structures and content of the public service broadcast model. They combine this model with and go beyond it by making full use of and transforming the participatory and creative potentials of user-generated digital content and user participation. PSM's remit will thereby be transformed into a new digital public service remit.

On the Public Service Internet, **Artificial Intelligence (AI) is used for public purposes**. On the Public Service Internet, AI enhances the convenience of the Internet's, does not replace but support and augment journalists, while respecting data privacy and minimising the data stored about users.

The Public Service Internet's algorithms are **public service algorithms**. Such algorithms are open source and transparent. They are programmed in ways that advance the digital public service remit. Public service algorithms are algorithms by the public, for the public, and of the public. Public service algorithms help organising the platforms, formats and contents of the Public Service Internet by making recommendations and suggestions based on transparent procedures and without advertising, commerce and surveillance.

The Internet is global. The public sphere is global. Also the Public Service Internet and its platforms should be **global**. Such platforms can be accessed by anyone at any time and from anywhere. Public Service Internet platforms minimise the data stored about users and at the same time maximise the availability and permanence of Public Service Internet contents that contribute to humanity's cultural heritage. For challenging the power of the digital giants, Public Service Internet platforms are ideally operated as international networks of multiple PSM organisations. For operating PSM organisations, PSM organisations co-operate with others, including public organisations (universities, museums, libraries and so on), civil society, civic and community media, artists, digital commons projects, platform co-operatives and so on. As a result, PSM organisations together with public interest organisations form public open spaces that are mediated by Internet communication and that together form the Public Service Internet.

The contemporary Internet is the Internet of the corporate digital giants. An **alternative Internet** is possible. A Public Service Internet is possible. A Public Service Internet is needed. We dream of, envision, and want to live in a world where the Internet serves the public and advances democracy. Humans, let's together transform the Internet.

Imagining PSM Utopias in 2040

Big Tech and commercial data giants successfully gained dominance on the global communications market. In some countries, PSM are kept hostage by authoritarian regimes. In other countries, PSM suffers from a lack of resources or is marginalised by serving only small audiences and producing content that commercial media outlets do not to want to provide. Some PSM still produce high-quality content, but operate in niche sectors with an elitist mindset and without any relevance for societies.

But such a **dystopian scenario** is by far not the only perspective for PSM. Different scenarios can be realised. An alternative Internet and renewed Public Service Media are feasible and possible in the near future.

Imagine that in 2040 we live in a fair, just, democratic society where individuals have learned from the societal, environmental, social and health crises of the past, and where the full democratic potentials of digital communication are realised so that all benefit.

To cope with the future, **PSM** will need a powerful answer **beyond the defence of the status quo**. It will need a vision that is powerful enough to attract and fascinate people, create innovation and new horizons.

PSM's public purpose, public value and the common good need to be adapted, renewed and transformed.

Imagine 2040: PSM has undergone a series of radical reforms. How will it look like?

In 2040, a new, radical governance structure has made **PSM independent from any external influences** like government and business interests. The legitimacy of PSM is no longer contested. There is transparency. There are public hearings. There is an external evaluation process. There is quality control. Individuals feel represented by PSM and its programming. They feel that PSM's reporting is as neutral as possible, not influenced by any external pressures and featuring public opinion.

In 2040, PSM is **impartial**. Society is less polarised. PSM is not labelled as being biased or elitist. It reaches out to all parts of society, including fragmented and less educated audiences, info-avoiders and minorities.

In 2040, PSM operates on the **national, regional and global level**. It invests into quality journalism, including investigative journalism and innovative formats for different groups in society. Young people see public service journalism as an attractive and viable environment of information, communication, collaboration and participation.

In 2040, entertainment is an **essential part of the culture of everyday life** that the PSM environment enables. PSMs are wealth creators for the creative sector that provide visibility to many artists such as musicians and filmmakers.

In 2040, PSM's quality is **distinctive from commercial media and data companies**. It reaches the majority of the population. It serves humans' daily personal and societal needs. It addresses their role as citizens and not just their role as consumers.

In 2040, PSM will have remembered its future. It has adapted and transformed its **public service** mission to inform, educate and entertain. It advances cultural citizenship and the needs of the digital society. It renews its contract with the society.

In 2040, PSM's **workforce is highly diverse** in terms of social class, ethnicity, gender, ethnicity, age and geographic origin. PSM's hiring mechanisms are inclusive and transparent.

In 2040, PSM is present, accessible and discoverable on all relevant platforms. In 2040, PSM is fully present in the digital sphere and provides the right content at the right points of time tailored to a plurality of devices and user habits. PSM stays connected to and closely listens to all of its audiences and stakeholders. It answers to society's important challenges and issues. It effectively communicates its own contribution to society, its public value.

In 2040, PSM is a platform where **professionals and users** produce, engage and communicate based on the public service remit.

In 2040, PSM has increased its investment in **technology infrastructures** and the **digital skills** of its employees.

In 2040, PSM has developed a **collaborative programme** with schools, focusing on media literacy and digital literacy through online courses and educational kits developed by PSM.

In 2040, PSM has transformed from one-to-many-broadcasting institutions into a **network infrastructure** that is guided by principles of public network value. It is a networked infrastructure that advances the digital commons and digital citizenship. It strengthens universal access, communication, participation, co-operation, inclusion and unity in diversity.

In 2040, PSM uses **alternative success metrics** that are focused on PSM's impact on democracy and the public sphere.

In 2040, **journalism** will be a core aspect of PSM. Investigation, unique storytelling and entertainment will be important human aspects of PSM.

In 2040, PSM are **sustainably funded** and based on a **reformed licence fee** that is accepted by citizens. The licence fee is progressive, that is, based on income. In addition to the mandatory licence fee, people can make donations based on a crowdfunding scheme combined with participatory budgeting that allows the users to allocate a small portion of their fee to specific programmes and services.

In 2040, PSM still faces problems and challenges. Society is not perfect. But in 2040, society is **more sustainable, resilient, fair and just**. What if the current crises created a tipping point where risk turns into change, consumerism turns into citizenship, despair turns into opportunity, and dystopia turns into utopia?

IMAGINE 2040. Imagine positive transformations of society. Imagine a transformed media system. Imagine the PSM system of the future. We need visions of the future that guide our actions in the present.

> We invite all audience members, users, readers, experts and non- experts, inside and outside of PSM, in fact all citizens who care for the future of democracy in our countries to **participate in the quest for strengthening Public Service Media and creating a Public Service Internet**.

CHAPTER 48

Community Radio and Peace-Building in Kenya

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Abstract

In December 2007, violence broke out after the disputed general election in Kenya, which resulted in the death of 1100 Kenyans and left more than 660,000 displaced. Reports criticised media, especially vernacular media, for inflating the violence by using hate speech and incitement to violence, and suggested that Kenya would benefit from more community media to prevent history from repeating itself. This article focuses on how Koch FM and Pamoja FM, two community radio stations in Nairobi, Kenya, worked during the 2007–08 tumult and 2013 general election. The article is based on observations and interviews with community radio practitioners conducted between 2007 and 2013 [1], and addresses the following questions: How do the community radio stations work during elections—times of increased tensions? How do they discourage ethnic violence in their community? How is participation used in order to bring unity to the community?

Keywords

Community radio, election, post-election violence, unity, peace-building, Kenya

[1] All survey respondents were given a unique number to protect their identity, and all statements have been taken from the survey verbatim.

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Introduction

After the disputed general election in Kenya in December 2007, ethnic violence erupted and more than 1100 Kenyans were killed and around 660,000 became internally displaced, according to the United Nations (UN) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2013). The situation was resolved in March 2008, after UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan helped the rival parties to agree on a power-sharing deal that saw a coalition government formed. Although normal life in Kenya resumed, the situation remained unpredictable as the underlying problems—such as unequal distribution of land and wealth, corruption and tribalism—persisted. Many feared that the 2013 general election would once again engulf Kenya in violence; however, although tensions were running high, the process remained peaceful.

Ethnic violence during elections is not an abnormality in Kenya. Rather, ethnicity, constructed as an imagined community, has influenced the political sphere in Kenya since independence. Many Kenyans tend to vote along ethnic lines (Bratton and Kimenyi, 2008: 6) as those in the political elite use ethnicity to manipulate Kenyans belonging to the same ethnic group, especially during election times (Atieno-Odhiambo, 2002: 232). Consequently, widespread distrust exists towards fellow citizens of different ethnicities, and many fear that others will organise 'along exclusive ethnic lines and to govern in discriminatory fashion' (Bratton and Kimenyi, 2008: 6). Discrimination or preference based on ethnic identity is often referred to as 'tribalism' (Spitulnik, 1992: 339). Others prefer the term 'negative ethnicity', as they argue that 'tribalism' has colonial heritage. In everyday life in Kenya, however, the term 'tribalism' is commonly used (Wamwere, 2008).

Since the inception of multi-party politics in 1991, political violence—state-sponsored or private, often with ethnic undertones—has been common, especially during elections (Lafargue and Katumanga, 2008: 12). Unemployment is high among youth in urban centres in Africa, and the average transition period between school and work in Kenya is five years (Fares and Garcia, 2008: xxviii). Many politicians use the vulnerable situation of the youth and 'employ' them to do their 'dirty work' during elections, which includes everything from dancing and chanting party slogans during campaigns to intimidating opponents and, in some instances, using violence against their rivals (Adar, 2000).

The worst-affected area during the post-election violence (PEV) in 2007–08 was the Rift Valley and the slum areas in Nairobi. Some 60 to 70 per cent of Nairobi's population is estimated to live in slums (APHRC, 2014). Slums like Mathare, Kibera, Kawangware, Korogocho and Kariobangi were all badly affected by riots and violence, which initially were ethnically motivated. In the later phase of the crisis, criminal gangs took advantage of the situation to loot and rape (Lafargue and Katumanga, 2008: 14ff). The experience of the PEV started a discussion about media's role in the conflict, and vernacular radio stations **2** in particular were blamed for reinforcing the turmoil through partisan reporting and airing hate messages and incitements to violence. It was also suggested that Kenya would have benefited from having more community radio stations at the time (Abdi and Dean, 2008).

Since 2006, community radio stations have operated in the slums of Nairobi to counterbalance the negative perception of these areas, but also to promote development by facili-

[2] Vernacular radio stations target different ethnic communities by broadcasting in vernacular languages and playing music that comes from within that ethnic community to promote and strengthen that specific culture.

tating a platform for community dialogue. Several scholars argue that more research about community media in conflict-resolution and peace-building is needed, as the subject-matter has to date received little academic interest and been subject to little inquiry (Carpentier and Doudaki, 2014; Rodríguez, 2011). This article will therefore focus on the work carried out by two community radio stations, Pamoja FM (Kibera) and Koch FM (Korogocho), in connection with the post-election violence in 2007–08 and the general election in 2013. Due to the close proximity to and influence over the community of community radio stations, it is vital to examine how they work together with the community during elections and other times of heightened tension. This article therefore poses the following questions: How do the community radio stations work during elections—times of increased tensions? How do they discourage ethnic violence in their community? How is participation used in order to bring unity to the community? [3]

Community media

The notion of community radio stresses that the sender and receiver are part of the same social system—the community. The community is the frame of reference for shared interest and interpretation and the radio communicates and collectivises shared experience (Vatikiotis, 2004). The meaning of community can be conceptualised either in a spatial sense or in terms of identity or shared interests (Downing, 2001). It is therefore inevitable that the concept of community also stresses a distinction between we/they: those who belong and do not belong to the community.

Community radio stations, which are often small and operating on low budgets, are involved in civic education and raising awareness about people's rights, but their obligations are also characterised by the ownership of the people, access by the people, people's participation and their non-commercial and non-state dependence (Alumuku, 2006: 135). In some countries, community media are perceived as the third media type, different from both public service and commercial media (Carpentier and Doudaki, 2014: 416).

The participatory communication model from which community media originate is influenced by the Brazilian pedagogue and scholar Paulo Freire, who contested the distinction between student and teacher, and advocated co-learning based on dialogue, whereby 'people serve as their own examples in the struggle for and conquest of improved life chances' (Huesca, 2008: 182). Participation is therefore a central aspect of community media, as it has the potential to create a sense of belonging to the community, allowing the communication process itself to become an agent for social change and democratisation (Alumuku, 2006; Plansak and Volcic, 2010; Ufuoma, 2012: 198; Vatikiotis, 2004).

It is necessary to distinguish between participation in and through the media (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008). One way of discussing community participation is thus community members' involvement in the media production and decision-making process. Community media provide people with the opportunity to voice their needs and take control over the distribution of their own ideologies and representations. These types of participation are perceived to allow the individuals to 'be active in one of the many micro-spheres

[3] Unity is here referred to as community identity, the formation of a 'we' that transcends inter-ethnic animosity.

relevant to daily life and put into practice their right to communicate' (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008: 11). In return, the participation on a micro level is believed to enhance people's macro- participation—that is, participating in democratic processes in the wider society—by empowering them and offering practice in democratic and civic activities (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008). In order to ensure community participation, it is common to involve volunteers from within the community (Bosch, 2010: 145), which is also believed to increase the credibility of the radio stations (Myers, 2000: 95).

Participation through the media refers to community members' participation in public debates, and is closely related to the idea of the public sphere (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008)—for example, radio shows that encourage call-ins (Bosch, 2010: 145). The majority of community radio stations in Africa are not owned by the community itself, but rather by NGOs and churches (Myers, 2000), yet participation is argued to create a sense of community ownership (AMARC, 1998).

Community radio during conflicts

Due to the negative role played by the media in the Rwandan genocide, several media initiatives have emerged that promote peace and help the reconciliation process in war-torn areas in Africa (Brisset-Foucault, 2011: 205). Community media are often perceived to be vital avenues for peace initiatives, due to their close connection with the community (Brisset- Foucault, 2011: 205; Bonde, 2006: 345), the participatory elements and their cultural sensitivity (Curtis, 2000: 146), and their ability to foster diversity, intercultural dialogue and tolerance (Carpentier and Doudaki, 2014: 415).

Four media initiatives that promote peace and reconciliation can be identified:

1. activities that improve the general media environment to facilitate peace building[4] —for example, by tackling hate speech and hate media
2. local media projects that are used in order to disseminate information and educational material connected to peace-building activities
3. media that proactively work for reconciliation by aiming to foster a culture of mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence, and
4. activities that train journalists and support the development of inclusive communication policies *(Curtis, 2000: 148)*.

For media that work proactively to promote a culture of peace and inter-ethnic harmony, and aim to change the attitudes of and perceptions between different groups (Curtis, 2000: 151), it is important that the language use and the news and information they disseminate further promote the overall aim (Brisset-Foucault, 2011). This facilitates a focus on positive stories that demonstrates successful inter-group cooperation (Curtis, 2000: 151) and tones down stories that display animosity between different groups (Adam and Holguin, 2003: 4; Brisset-Foucault, 2011). The danger with these practices is that such media can easily be

[4] Peace-building refers to a broad range of activities and programs that aim to strengthen the prospects of peace and decrease the likelihood of violent conflict in society.

criticised for being biased and non-reliable (Curtis, 2000: 150). Some would also argue that it is beyond the task and capability of media to promote peace, yet one way to increase the potential success is to establish partnerships with experts in conflict resolution and NGOs that work for a similar cause (Adam and Holguin, 2003: 8). Moreover, community and peace media are often described as 'non-political'. This is connected to the negative definition of politics promoted by development agencies in order to favour development that is argued to be more 'useful' and relevant to poor people. The widespread negative perception of party politics in developing countries reinforces this thinking, and so does the overall aim to make reconciliation processes stretch beyond political affiliations (Brisset-Foucault, 2011: 216).

The 'non-political' character of community and peace media could be connected to the overall discussions about how liberal democracy is becoming increasingly 'non-political'. Mouffe (2005: 9), for example, criticises the liberal consensus model for trying to conceal conflicting interests in present-day societies. The politics of consensus suggests that collective identities in terms of we/they no longer exist, and that those who oppose this consensus are fundamentalists or traditionalists. Moreover, by linking politics to morality and exchanging the right and left parameters of the old adversarial politics with right and wrong, the adversaries are turned into enemies who should be excluded from the democratic debate. One example of how this practice is articulated is the 'war on terror' (Mouffe, 2005: 48ff). Rodríguez (2011), on the other hand, stresses that the strength of community media lies in their ability to reflect the everyday life of the community rather than focusing on the conflict (Rodríguez, 2011: 241) and that they can transform collective imaginaries by providing alternative stories, images and visions of 'who we are' that help the community to cope and heal when continuously being affected by conflict (Rodríguez, 2011: 75).

Methodology

This study is based on ethnographic research conducted between 2007 and 2013. Ethnographic approaches, including semi-structured interviews, have been used by Rodríguez (2011) to understand how community media work in order to facilitate reconciliation. It is a methodological perspective that is useful when seeking knowledge about humans and social groups in the context in which they live or work (Öhlander, 1999)—in this case, how community radio practitioners are working in times of heightened tension. Semi-structured interviews generate in-depth knowledge and allow interviewees to express their viewpoints, feelings and experiences in their own words and influence the direction of the interview (Kvale, 1997). Observations generate insights into people's daily routines that can be difficult to articulate during interviews (Öhlander, 1999; Spradley, 1979). By combining these methods, it is possible to compare what people say and what they in fact do, and thus attain a greater and more nuanced understanding of the work carried out by community radio practitioners to create unity within the community.

The majority of the data was collected between 2007 and 2010, and this dataset was enhanced with additional interviews and observations conducted between January and March 2013, in connection with the election. Between 2007 and 2010, several months were spent at the respective community radio stations, and participatory observations and semi-structured interviews were conducted to better understand how the community radio stations work in

and with the community to advocate change and promote development. This article, however, is more concerned with their efforts to promote peaceful coexistence in the ethnically diverse slums. The idea to explore the stations' work during the election and how stations tried to unite their respective community when tensions are high, came out of the original 2007–10 data, as it became apparent that one of the radio stations' greatest contributions to the community was to try to promote belonging and an identity that transcended ethnical identities (Gustafsson 2012, 2013). The rather small follow-up study in 2013 should be evaluated in the light of the deep understanding of the work of radio stations gathered throughout the years.

The interview transcripts have been structured thematically, and the themes that are relevant to the questions that this article seeks to address have been analysed systematically. The names of the interviewees have been changed in order to better protect their identity. The quotes in the analysis are selected as they illustrate different aspects of the themes, together demonstrating the complexity of the subject discussed.

The two community radio stations on which this article focuses are Koch FM and Pamoja FM, both operating from slums in Nairobi, Kenya. Koch FM, a local youth initiative, started broadcasting in 2006 in Korogocho, Nairobi's fourth largest slum, with approximately 150,000 residents. With some help from a Norwegian friend, a home-built transmitter and a shipping container to house the studio, they started broadcasting illegally on a 'free' frequency. Since Koch FM was the first community radio station to operate from a slum in East Africa, its setup was featured on prime-time news on Kenyan television, which consequently led to a visit from the Ministry of Information and Communication. Due to lack of permit, the station was closed down. For six months, Koch FM, supported by the mainstream media and Kenya Community Media Network (KCOMNET), struggled with the authorities until it received the documents needed to operate legally. This opened up the possibility of other slums starting their own radio stations, and in 2007 Pamoja FM (Kibera) and Ghetto FM (Majengo) took to the airwaves. Ghetto FM was off air in 2013, so this article focuses on the two community radio stations that were broadcasting in the slums of Nairobi at the time.

Koch FM and Pamoja FM broadcast in Kiswahili, East Africa's lingua franca, and use 'edutainment' as they aim to entertain while educating their communities on human rights, health and environmental issues. They were not begun primarily as peace projects; however, both Korogocho and Kibera are ethnically diverse and were badly affected by the PEV (Lafargue and Katumanga, 2008: 14).

Analysis of findings: The work of community radio during elections

This analysis aims to shed light on the work carried out by Koch FM and Pamoja FM carried out as a response to the violence in 2007–08 and in connection to the general election in 2013, and is organised under the following themes: the experience of the post-election violence; civic education; peace-building on and off air; preventing hate speech; and handling rumours.

The experience of the post-election violence

When the 2007 general election took place and turned into what is now commonly referred to as the post-election violence (PEV), Koch FM and Pamoja FM had existed for less than a year. Despite the fact that Kenya has a history of ethnic tensions during elections, no one

seemed to be fully prepared or to know how to handle the situation. At this time, insecurity in Korogocho and Kibera was very high, and some members of the staff could not even come to work. One of the staff members who managed to work throughout the tension described it as the 'worst part of my career' but 'the best I could have done for my community, Kibera'. When violence broke out, the community radio stations' main objective shifted to fighting the tribalism that was tearing their community apart. The radio became a tool to encourage peaceful coexistence, and one way of doing this was to set an example to the community, both on and off air:

> Abraham, news journalist, Pamoja FM: We had a Kikuyu presenter and a Luo who was the news editor. We put a Kikuyu and a Luo together and they were like discussing and addressing the people …
>
> Kennedy, radio worker, Koch FM: That time we made some jingles to promote peace. We also made some jingles about members of the community talking about peace. It is not about who won: we have been living here in harmony, so why fight today? To a point even where some of us went to the battlefield not fighting but asking why are you fighting? We were trying to bring peace.

In the slums of Nairobi, it was mainly the Luo and the Kikuyu communities that were fighting each other. They supported the two rivalry presidential candidates, and when the election result was disputed with neither of the two candidates admitting defeat, these two ethnic communities squared off against each other, despite the fact that they had been living as neighbours for years. In this context, the radio stations talked straight to the affected ethnic communities and reminded their listeners that the Luos and the Kikuyus could coexist and intermingle. Pamoja FM demonstrated that these two different ethnic communities worked together at the radio station. By doing this, the radio station not only set a positive example, but was also able to reach out to its respective ethnic communities. Similarly, Koch FM used its position within the community to advocate for peace. The station utilised ordinary community members as voices of peace. This action stressed that peace was for the common good—regardless of ethnicity. The radio staff also physically promoted peace by confronting those who were fighting, and questioned their motives, which indicates the position Koch FM had within the community. Koch FM not only promoted peace during this turbulent time, but also initiated and organised help for the victims:

> Ben, radio presenter, Koch FM: We talked to the community and said we have some people who have been displaced, they need food and clothes and any well-wisher can bring anything for these people. I can tell you the community really responded because the whole of our reception was full of food and clothing to give the people who were camping here.

Organising relief for those community members who had lost their homes encouraged the community to come together and participate in this joint action. The radio station thereby managed to strengthen the feeling of togetherness and this signalled that Korogocho did not need help from the outside—despite the fact that it was being torn apart by tensions and violence, the community could help the victims and fellow community members. In this sense, the reconciliation process started when the community took responsibility for helping the victims of the crisis. Another important step in this process was to use the radio as an avenue for reconciliation. Both Koch FM and Pamoja FM facilitated a space where the communities could deal with their experience, and where community members from the different ethnic groups could use the radio station to apologise to those affected and to come to a mutual

understanding. When the community radio workers were asked when they started preparing for the 2013 election, many of them said that that the preparation started as soon as the violence ended in 2008.

Despite the fact that these community radio stations did their outmost to intervene and stop the violence in 2007–08, and that the BBC World Service report suggests Kenya would have benefited by having more community radio stations at the time (Abdi and Deane, 2008), the community media practitioners are self-critical when looking back on their work:

> *Alex, radio presenter, Pamoja FM:* For sure we managed to quell down the violence but then in general it got many journalists unaware, not knowing what kind of reports they had to give.
>
> *Eric, radio presenter, Koch FM:* Actually it was really new in 2007—many people didn't know what to do and as I told you in 2007, many people were too unaware, many people didn't prepare for this, even me personally I didn't know what hate speech was because I was just still a young guy from school.

Many of the journalists working for the community radio stations lack formal education in journalism, and this was particularly the case when it came to reporting conflict. They did not have sufficient training to fall back on or to guide them in their work. Instead, they had to follow common sense and be guided by the overall aim of the stations to serve the community. Since their inception (before the 2007–08 PEV), the content of community radio stations in the slums of Nairobi has been ethnically sensitive and has encouraged peaceful coexistence, and posited that listeners should perceive themselves as Kenyans rather than identifying along ethnic lines (Gustafsson, 2012, 2013). Nonetheless, it is possible that the radio stations were taken off guard by the magnitude of the violence.

Civic education

One major role for these community radio stations during elections is to engage in civic education. In 2013, this was more important than ever, since the new constitution had introduced three new positions to elect. Therefore, it was imperative that people knew the differences between these positions. The independent Election and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) provided all Kenyan media with information kits and then each media house decided how to use them. At Pamoja FM, it was decided to devote a week to each position. As the following quote illustrates, interaction and participation were central to the process:

> Alex, Pamoja FM: First of all let me start whereby you are in a class as a teacher you are teaching and you don't see anybody wanting to ask any question, you may even doubt 'Did they get what I said?' I mean have they perceived, did they not get anything … you don't actually know whether they have got it or they have not. That is one. Number two if you have a class that is much participation, if some students participate it encourages others to participate and its is through participating that you can get to understand exactly what you need to do, through the discussion. Somebody said iron sharpens another iron.

In this context, participation and interaction played several roles. First, they became a way for the presenter and experts in the studio to get an idea about whether or not their message was being received and understood. Second, by articulating a question and directing it to those in the studio, the audience took a big step in the learning process, by identifying what they did not understand and then receiving an answer to that specific question. Third, other members of the audience might also benefit from the answer and be encouraged to articulate

and post their own questions. Apart from shedding light on the new positions, these discussions were also concerned with subject-matter such as the importance of rejecting ethnic voting and vote buying.

Koch FM invited guests to the studio who explained and discussed the different positions on air together with the audience. Moreover, the radio station also conducted civic education on the ground, through its community outreach department, which normally works with the community to raise awareness about constituency development funds and local governance. The radio station partnered with different stakeholders on the ground and held civic education forums in the community. Community members were encouraged to share thoughts and experiences, and post questions about the upcoming election, and experts in the field assisted the process so that the community would understand the election process. This is an example of how Koch FM used its status within the community to engage in community work off air and of how these discussions could later feed into the discussions on air, enabling the two to reinforce each other.

Peace-building on and off air

According to the community radio practitioners, their most crucial function during election times is to 'preach peace' within the community. For this purpose, some programming focusedmpurely on discussing peace and the importance of coexisting. All programs at both Koch FM and Pamoja FM had to include at least some time dedicated to peace. Even the news bulletins at the radio stations ended with a message reminding the listeners to embrace peace. Koch FM also encouraged the community to participate:

> Rose, news journalist, Koch FM: We are requesting all the presenters in every show there is three minutes you dedicate to reading peace messages, and peace quotes. We have been running peace quotes competitions in some of the programs where some would send peace quotes and whoever has the best peace quote is given something.

Organising a peace competition stimulates participation, as the community members themselves are encouraged to formulate their own peace messages based on their individual experience. Together, these individually composed messages become an impressive collection of expressions of community spirit and togetherness. In addition to airing peace messages, the stations invited and gave airtime to local NGOs involved in different peace initiatives. Opening up the studio to different groups—be they church leaders or NGO representatives—is a strategy to reach as many people as possible within the community and to increase the potential success of assuring peace by accessing expertise that the radio presenters may lack (Adam and Holguin, 2003: 8).

The cooperation with different local stakeholders was not restricted to the studio. Both Koch FM and Pamoja FM collaborated as organisations off air. Since the PEV in 2007–08, Pamoja FM has partnered with local organisations to regularly organise football tournaments for the youth in the community in order to promote harmony between different ethnicities in Kibera. To create a platform where young people from different ethnic groups can come together and play football is a simple way to allow these groups to meet under friendly conditions, and thereby strengthen a sense of a common identity and togetherness. Koch FM organised the peace event 'Linda Amani' in collaboration with the National Council of Churches of Kenya

and Norwegian Church Aid. The event showcased local talent, which strengthened the sense of belonging by making people feel proud of where they came from, and therefore perhaps making it less likely for the community to be torn apart by violence. In addition, by partnering with local celebrities such as artists and organising sporting tournaments, the stations reached the most vulnerable and crucial segment of the audience: the youth. It often is this cohort that is involved in violence in connection with the elections, primarily as a result of manipulation by politicians (Adar, 2000; Njogu, 2011: xi).

Another way to minimise manipulation from politicians is to target them directly. Koch FM organised a public event where local politicians were urged to sign an agreement to maintain the peace. The event stressed that keeping peace was in everyone's interest, and used politicians as role models. Moreover, it potentially made it harder for these same politicians to mobilise the youth for violent purposes.

Preventing hate speech

Media—especially vernacular media—were accused of inflaming tensions after the disputed election in December 2007, through the use of hate speech and incitements (Abdi and Deane, 2008). Hate speech is illegal in Kenya, and is perceived as dangerous—especially during elections, as it can spark underlying ethnic tensions (iHUb research, 2013). Before the 2013 election, all media houses were sensitised about the use of hate speech and the government came out firmly stating that it would prosecute people who engaged in hate speech. As a consequence, Koch FM did a feature on hate speech in order to gain a better overview of the situation in Korogocho:

> *Rose, news journalist, Koch FM*: I did a feature concerning hate speech and that feature, what came out with that feature is that though youth are saying that hate speech is evident in Korogocho … To them they feel like a local citizen cannot be sued, it's only a politician that can be sued and maybe the media personalities and stuff like that.

Given that many in Korogocho seemed to be unaware of the laws regulating hate speech, Koch FM invited Millie Odongo, the Vice Chair of the National Cohesion and Integration Commission, to the studio to discuss the issue with the community live on air. Members of the community were allowed to post questions and share their experiences, and Millie Odongo made it clear that anyone could be liable and sued for hate speech. The stations have also developed strategies to minimise the risk of airing hateful messages from the audience while live on air:

> *Eric, radio presenter, Koch FM*: So when someone just calls me and talks nonsense I would remind him on air, when I was starting the show I said if you think you have a negative attitude you can keep it to yourself. So I dedicated the whole of five years to positive thinking, to positive participation.

> *Alex, radio presenter, Pamoja FM*: You choose a topic but you narrow it down to specifically what you want to achieve … If we open wide, because we don't have delay effect machine in the studio, then you may end up now doing something which is not good for the society.

If the two strategies described above failed, the only remaining option was to cut the call, and when discussions were getting heated, the radio stations encouraged listeners to send SMS messages rather than phone in to the studio so that the presenters could select which mes-

sages were suitable to read live on air. In other words, the evidence from the data suggests community radio stations were using three different but similar strategies to minimise hate speech and hateful statements. First, they encouraged 'positive participation'; second, they chose and therefore controlled and limited the subject-matter; and finally, they regulated who and what was allowed to be expressed.

It is clear that caution was exercised, with the community's best interests in mind. At the end of the day, the community radio stations are there to serve the community (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008: 7). Participation is believed to be positive, as it allows the community members to participate in discussions that concern them and that include issues of peace (Curtis, 2000). However, it is clear that in order for the participation to be perceived as useful, the discussions needed to be positive and seen to benefit the community. Negative statements that might stir up tension within the community were not accepted. Consequently, some opinions, and therefore some individuals, were not included in unity of the community, as these individuals and their opinions were perceived to be threats to unity.

Media organisations that proactively promote peace tend to downgrade stories and discussions that reveal animosity between different groups in favour of positive stories (Adam and Holguin, 2003; Brisset-Foucault, 2011). However, the fact that people feel animosity towards other ethnic groups will not disappear just because their voices are discouraged from participating. Ethnic tensions exist in Kenya based on historical injustices connected to land, power and wealth (Lafargue and Katumanga, 2008), and they are therefore the outcome of political decisions. Moreover, sometimes it is hard to distinguish between political speech and hate speech (Benesch, 2012), especially in a country where politics and ethnicity are connected so closely. It is therefore a risk that, by trying to avoid airing hate speech and negative comments, the community radio stations also end up avoiding political discussions. We might also consider, however, that since tribalism in Kenya is such a deep-rooted problem, in order for it to be solved, public discussions of the issues such as land are not enough; they have to be addressed politically. It is important to underline that the community radio stations proactively work to combat tribalism—for example, by fostering identities that transcend ethnic belonging (Gustafsson, 2012) and scrutinising politicians. A few weeks prior to the election, when tensions were high and the situation was sensitive, their focus was to preach peace to minimise the risk of ethnic clashes.

Handling rumours

During elections, it is common for rumours and misinformation to circulate; these can intensify tensions between groups. Prior to the 2013 election, Koch FM organised regular peace forums with the local youth to obtain information about what was happening on the ground. Through these meetings, the staff were able to identify early rumours and misinformation circulating in the community. If it was clearly a mere rumour, it would be denied on air. Yet sometimes it was important to consult other people in the community to confirm the information first. If the rumours had any substance, the station involved the local police to investigate the case. Another strategy was inviting experts to the studio to address the rumour's underlying subject-matter:

> Rose, news journalist, Koch FM: A caller called and told us there are some politicians that are dishing out a lot of money and they are having midnight meetings where there is no press. And in those meeting there are chances that he might incite some of the youth … First we took it off air because we don't want to name the caller because it's someone from the ground, then later on we had different stakeholders and we even had some guest from Kituo Cha Sheria—it is a non-governmental organisation of lawyers—to come to talk to the people [on air] about what IEBC are saying concerning politicians and giving money and having meetings of inciting people. So just letting people know this is wrong, this is right.

It is a known fact that politicians in Kenya often pay youth not only to vote for them, but to support them during their rallies, influence other youth, intimidate opponents and, in the worst cases, act as catalysts for violence against opponents and their supporters (Adar, 2000: 105). Vote buying, which is a form of clientelism, is also common in Kenya (Kramon, 2009; Onoma, 2008). To distribute t-shirts, food and money or other gifts is a major campaign tool, especially during the last week before the election (Kramon, 2009: 3). In Kenya, the practice is referred to as *kitu kidogo*, meaning petty bribe (Adar, 2000: 105). Poor individuals are more likely to be approached by politicians and the less education a person has, the greater the risk that the bribes will influence how they vote (Kramon, 2009). It was therefore important that the community radio stations in the slums discussed these practices and condemned them, as these practices represent significant threats to democratic development.

> *George, news journalist, Pamoja FM*: In that scenario if it's in a particular village we will get that village elder or the local chief who will come on air and address that particular issue on air like through an interview, and people call in and share but we don't just like do it like as it is happening because at that time we don't spark more speculation and say 'in Laini Saba people are fighting about these issues'.

The narrative suggests that Pamoja FM was very careful when reporting on tension in the community and did not report it as news, but more as a topic to be discussed, involving both the village elder and community members. Yet some issues were too sensitive to report. Before the election in 2013, people in both Korogocho and Kibera moved due to fear of a repeat of the PEV, yet the radio stations chose not to report this since it was believed that it would increase tensions. Instead, they focused on preaching their message of peace and reminding the community that, while ordinary community members were fighting and killing each other in 2007–08, the politicians were safe and unaffected. In other words, they downplayed stories displaying tensions in favour of stories and discussions that could enhance the community spirit and sense of unity (Adam and Holguin, 2003; Brisset-Foucault, 2011; Curtis, 2000).

Conclusion

According to the radio stations, the two most important tasks during elections are civic education and discouraging tensions and violence. In that sense, the work carried out by the community radio stations during the 2013 election did not differ much from their ordinary work—indeed, it could be argued that it simply intensified (Gustafsson, 2012). Indeed, arguably the radio stations would not have been able to carry out the work they did during both the 2007–08 unrest and the 2013 elections without continuously working in and with the community. It is their consistency in serving the community that makes them respected and accepted as the voice of their community. Prior to the 2013 general election, the radio sta-

tions' presence in the community increased, as did collaboration with other actors within the community. The cooperation has symbolic value, as it demonstrates that different groups within the community can join hands for a common cause. Adam and Holguin (2003) argue media that promote peace are more likely to succeed when they collaborate with experts in the field of peace and reconciliation.

The increased cooperation was also reflected inside the studio, as the number of guests during the election period increased. In the studio, the journalists and presenters used their position as role models within the community to discuss the importance of selecting good leaders and embracing peace, whether or not a preferred candidate won. The stations also organised and participated in different forums. Through these, the stations created an opportunity to interact with different groups, potentially reaching a wider and more varied audience. This also strengthened the interaction between the stations and the community members, allowing people who would not normally phone in to the studio to have a voice and to air their views, questions and concerns. Moreover, these forums were unique occasions for the radio stations to scan the atmosphere on the ground and be informed about increased tensions.

Participation is considered crucial to community radio, as it democratises the communication process, allowing different voices to be heard, and also strengthens a sense of community ownership (Alumuku, 2006: 39; Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008: 11). At both Koch FM and Pamoja FM, the majority of the volunteers come from within the local slums, and ordinary community members are able to participate both off air, as mentioned above, and on air, as the presenters encourage the community to take part in the on-air discussions by posting questions to invited guests, participating in discussions—for example on how to maintain peace—and compete in competitions by submitting peace messages and quotes.

The participation fulfilled several purposes. During the PEV, community participation was perceived to have a healing effect and played a crucial role in the reconciliation process that worked to reunite the community. Koch FM organised relief to those community members who had lost their homes by urging community members to donate food and clothes. Later, the radio stations became important arenas where the experience of this horrific event could be shared and discussed, and involved parties could apologise to each other; this helped to strengthen mutual understanding and recognition. Alumuku (2006: 39) stresses that participation can lay the foundation for collective action. When community members join with the stations to collect clothes to help the victims of the PEV, and together put pressure on local politicians to sign contracts promising to maintain peace, it is not only a symbol of togetherness but also the outcome of joint action.

As Freire's work suggests (Huesca, 2008), participation is an essential part of learning—something the community radio practitioners expressed in relation to civic education. In order for listeners to fully grasp the election process, it is not enough to just listen; rather, it is by formulating their own questions and sharing their own experience that the invited experts' knowledge becomes meaningful to them. However, participation can also be perceived as a threat. Hate speech and incitements to violence aired on radio contributed to the chaos in 2007–08 (Abdi and Deane, 2008). The community radio stations were therefore cautious in 2013, and urged listeners to only participate positively—in other words, not to share negative statements or thoughts. The radio stations developed strategies to avoid these

kinds of negative statements and when someone expressed negative thoughts live on air, the stations cut the call. This is a form of censorship, even though the decisions were taken with the communities' best interests at heart, as no one would benefit from a repeat of the PEV.

On the other hand, in the quest to minimise the spread of hateful thoughts, there is a risk that political discussions were avoided. Banning hateful messages does not equate with restricting critic and negative opinions, yet it is obvious that the community radio stations preferred positive stories and comments from the audience. Curtis (2000) argues that this is a common trait among media that advocate peace. This is further reflected by the practice of preaching peace and the verb 'preach', both of which sound fairly non-dialogic and are thus not compatible with the participatory ideal of community radio. The data collected for this research, however, demonstrates that the practice did in fact include participatory elements. More problematic is the insinuation that the concept of peace takes on a sacred aura, and therefore becomes unquestionable. Anyone or anything that might challenge this is therefore perceived as a threat, and those voices are consequently muted.

The ethnic clashes that Kenya has experienced since the introduction of multi-party politics are rooted in historical injustices over power and resources (Lafargue and Katumanga, 2008), and the risk when one puts peace above everything else is that these issues are not addressed. In other words, the community radio stations risk failing to address the real political issues of injustice for the sake of preaching peace, and consequently become 'non-political' (Brisset-Foucault, 2011), which reflects the liberal consensus model that aims to conceal conflicting interests in society and labels all challengers as enemies who should be excluded from the public debate (Mouffe, 2005).

Since its inception, community radio in the slums of Nairobi has worked consistently to create harmony within the communities and combat 'tribalism'. The difference between 2007–08 and 2013 is that in 2007–08 the stations reacted and in 2013 they worked in a more 'preventative' manner, more aware and careful due to experience. The election in 2013 was not followed by violence; however, ethnic tensions and land disputes still remain, and so does the work of the community radio stations. Reflecting on how community media can simultaneously promote peaceful coexistence and discuss the underlying problems, such as inequalities, is therefore a task to be addressed by future research as well as the community radio stations themselves.

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CHAPTER 49

Intersectionality in Autonomous Journalism Practices

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Abstract

Media activists who are women, queer, trans*, Indigenous and/or people of colour are shifting mediascapes through intersectional autonomous journalism practices. This community-based co-research project analyses data from six semi-structured focus group workshops with media activists, who identify a contradictory logic between mainstream and alternative journalism. Two distinct autonomous journalism practices emerge that complement and extend traditional horizontal prefigurative media activist practices through an attentiveness to intersectional identities and interlocking systems of oppression. In rooted direct-action journalism, grassroots autonomous journalists collectively report from a perspective rooted in the concerns of the movement, creating media as a direct-action tactic; whereas in solidarity journalism, autonomous journalists report across movements in solidarity with intersectionally marginalised groups and communities. We argue that, emphasising intersectional mutual aid, relationship building, consent, accountability and content co-creation, these value-based practices have begun to shift dominant media and cultural logics. Finally, we offer critical reflections on some of the challenges inherent in these practices, including a meta-analysis of the intersectional value practices in our activist co-research methodology.

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Keywords

Alternative media, autonomous media, community media, direct action, intersectionality, media activism, media practices, new journalism forms, participatory action research, social movements, solidarity

Introduction

In today's highly contested contemporary mediascape, the importance of grassroots autonomous social justice media cannot be over-emphasised. Alternative and autonomous media projects supporting social movement struggles are becoming increasingly pivotal in countering the alt-right messaging that is intensifying hate speech, promoting discourses linked to violent racist, homophobic, transphobic and sexist attacks and producing a violent discursive regime in the mainstream press and public sphere.

Analysing alternative media that counter this tendency, researchers have examined both content and structures of grassroots media projects (Costanza-Chock, 2012; Downing, 2003; Kidd, 2003; Wolfson, 2014), citizen journalism (Rodríguez, 2001), community radio (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008), livestreaming (Thorburn, 2014), online activism (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012), and other forms of social justice media. In 1999, the formation of online social movement news site Indymedia was a watershed moment in the development of grassroots autonomous media and journalism (Atton, 2003; Hanke, 2005; Kidd, 2003; Milioni, 2009; Pickard, 2006; Wolfson, 2015). Dorothy Kidd (2003: 60) explains how the Independent Media Centre (IMC) movement 'is based on a nonhierarchical structure that relies on highly complex processes of networked consensus'. She argues that IMCs have opened up a new communications commons that challenges the enclosure of the communications commons (Kidd, 2003: 51), not just through counterhegemonic content but also via highly collaborative global production and decision-making practices. John Downing (2001: 70) argues that autonomous media are involved in processes of internal participatory democracy, engaging anarchist and anarchist-feminist principles such as prefiguration and horizontalism to contest the status quo. Prefiguration is a mode of organising new political and social structures that engage the politics of everyday life to transform the operation of power (Maeckelberg, 2011). Horizontalism, drawing on social movements in the Global South such as the Zapatistas, is a process that rejects hierarchy and bosses, instead developing directly democratic participatory processes (Wolfson, 2014). These scholars also identify some issues with the purportedly open, democratic processes used by Indymedia and other open source or free software movement participants. Wolfson (2014: 22) points to the predominance of 'white, male, middle-class activists [who] largely lead the Cyber Left', as well as the complexities and weaknesses of globally networked consensus decision-making. Costanza-Chock (2012: 383) argues that, 'Processes that are "open" are thus typically dominated by white straight males, by those with class, race and gender privilege, including access to free time, feeling empowered to speak in public and today, by increased access to digital literacies and ICTs.' However, as Costanza-Chock et al. (2017) have also found, media activists organising in LGBTQ communities use intersectional strategies in their media production practices that engage community and accountability in transformative media organising attentive to addressing

issues of race, gender, sexuality and more. Thus an attentiveness to intersectional community media practices may deepen our understanding of power and process in autonomous media.

The Media Action Research Group, similar to the participatory action research methodology of Costanza-Chock, Schweidler and the Transformative Media Organizing Project (2017), researches with queer, trans*, women, people of colour and Indigenous media activists to better understand and support social justice movements and media. Specifically, our research collective identified five intersectional research-activism commitments or pillars as the project's basis of unity: anti-capitalism, anti-racism, anti-colonialism, feminism, and queer and trans* liberation. The first step in the research process was to invite autonomous media activists who specifically identified with these pillars to 'radical media mixers' to discuss their greatest challenges, successes and desires for intersectional autonomous media activism today. Two specific media practices emerged from the mixers: rooted direct-action journalism, or reporting from a location rooted within a social justice movement; and solidarity journalism, or reporting on people or events outside your own direct experience in solidarity across intersections and differences.

This article maps out and critically analyses these two autonomous journalism practices to deepen our understanding of the challenges and successes of everyday intersectional media practices, with the objective of supporting the social movements with which we research through the co-creation of knowledge that can be applied in media activism today. We first present our participatory methodology and map out the key concepts of media logics, rooted direct-action journalism, solidarity journalism, and intersectionality. We then present findings from the mixers, where we explore participants' understanding of the contradictory logics of mainstream and alternative media; critically analyse autonomous media practices of direct-action journalism and solidarity journalism; and reflect on ongoing challenges within media projects and our participatory research methodology to draw some tentative conclusions about the potential of intersectional grassroots practices to challenge media and research power.

Methodology

Founded in 2013, the Media Action Research Group is a feminist, horizontal research collective co-researching with grassroots autonomous media activists to co-produce knowledge through research, media production and movement organising for transformative social change. We employ what we call a Participatory Communicative Action Research (PCAR) methodology, based on the anarchist Participatory Action Research methodology used by the Montreal based Collectif de Recherche sur l'Autonomie Collective (Breton et al., 2012a, 2012b) with the broad aims of: documenting contemporary challenges and successes faced by intersectional autonomous media activists; supporting intersectional social movements with research partnerships, sharing and co-developing resources that can strengthen networks, capacities and skills; and integrating grassroots movement practices into research to challenge intensifying neoliberal university research hierarchies.

While the projects with we research are forms of alternative media, it is important to note that within this broader field, our focus is on 'autonomous media', which can be defined as explicitly anti-capitalist grassroots media that are self-organised according to principles of collective autonomy and within broader anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian movements

(Jeppesen, 2016: 385). The media projects with which we co-research have explicit or implicit anti-capitalist politics, and are therefore attentive to issues of power and privilege with respect to social class and other intersectional axes of oppression in the media in terms of both representation and participation. Within autonomous media movements, we pay particular attention to media practices aimed at amplifying the voices of women, queer and trans* people, Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC). We therefore align our methodology with intersectional antiracist, anti-colonial, queer, trans* and feminist approaches to research in sociology, media, communication and culture (Breton et al., 2012a, 2012b; Cahill, 2007; Costanza-Chock, Schweidler & Transformative Media Organizing Project, 2017; Daring et al., 2012; Eslami & Maynard, 2013; Fine, 2006; Heckert & Cleminson, 2011; Jaggar, 2014; Patai,1991; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

The empirical findings presented in this article derive from focus group interview data from six semi-structured 'radical media mixers' conducted in 2014 and 2015 with over 90 media activists in Vancouver, Victoria, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax. The mixers were participatory workshops using spaces and practices familiar to activists. We started with check-ins, then moved to break-out group discussions using flip-charts, followed by report-backs, with check-outs to conclude. Acknowledging differences in economic access between university researchers and community media activists, we provided an honorarium, food, transportation and childcare funds.

Participants represented a range of intersectional identities across race, indigeneity, gender, sexuality, age, disability, social class and education; they worked in a variety of media genres, including film, video, music, radio, podcasts, print, digital media and hacktivism. The mixers were audio-recorded, transcribed, coded in NVivo, and analysed collaboratively within the research collective through a collaborative, iterative process of brainstorming, writing, analysis, revision and final validation. These findings were in turn validated externally by sharing a working document with research participants and providing various avenues for feedback. This article presents the findings on one of the emergent themes, autonomous journalism practices.

Theoretical framework

Mainstream media: The logic of entrepreneurial journalism

Within the journalism profession today, we see the emergence of two key crises. The first is the reorganisation of mainstream labour under neoliberalism; the second is the withdrawal of audience support through a widespread perception of media bias paired with a trend towards online 'media me'.

Nicole Cohen (2015: 515) argues that, within the field of journalism, paid labour has traditionally been organised according to 'a gendered model of employment based on a male citizen-worker who enjoys "full-time continuous employment" for one employer, works on the employer's premises, and receives employment-based benefits'. Today, journalists are 'facing mass layoffs, the shuttering of print publications, and the emergence of digital-first media organizations' (2015: 513), with journalists being pushed towards precarious freelance labour in a drive toward 'entrepreneurial journalism'. The student must learn not just to be

a news reporter, but also to package their own news, sell it to outlets, brand their name and produce multi-platform multi-genre reportage.

This organisational form of new media labour also describes 'the more marginalised, feminized end of the media worker spectrum' (Cohen, 2015: 514), where an enterprising journalist can 'make a name for herself, provided that she attunes herself to market demands and does not require secure work' (2015: 514). Marginalised groups are the most underrepresented in mainstream journalism, as both journalists and subjects (2015: 526). 'This challenge is heightened by the spread of unpaid internships, which further entrench class, race, and gender inequality in media industries' (2015: 526), making access increasingly difficult for marginalised journalists and communities.

Within this context, journalism faces a second crisis: the collapse of the traditional audience through a mass migration to the digital 'media me' based on new media's technological affordances and a perceived lack of objectivity in mainstream media. No longer participating in a nationally shared media experience that might bring people together in democratic debate, media audiences choose to remain isolated in an echo chamber of their pre-existing cognitive frames. Thus the individualism necessary to promote the entrepreneurial journalist's brand is the same individualism that drives audiences away from mainstream news media.

This neoliberal logic is precisely what autonomous journalists challenge. As Atton (2006: 16) suggests, 'alternative media practices have not simply broken with mainstream practices, they have often sought to radically redefine them'. While committed to telling the truth, autonomous journalists emphasise different values in reporting, resulting in not just different content or outcomes, but different *types* of outcomes that challenge the field of journalism to rethink its conception of ethics in reporting.

Rooted direct-action journalism

We define the term 'rooted direct-action journalism' as reporting on issues of concern from within a specific community or social movement from a supportive perspective, challenging the traditional media framing of protest. Harlow and Johnson (2011: 1359) have found that, 'Mainstream media often discredit and marginalise protest actions, with journalists relying on a "protest paradigm" that focuses on tactics, spectacles, and dramatic actions, rather than the underlying reasons for the protest.' This results in a news cycle that obscures social issues, disrespects civil society actors and sows distrust among social movement participants, who may then refuse traditional media interviews.

Challenging this paradigm, autonomous journalists are social movement actors themselves, and report on issues motivating the protest, critically analysing the movement's claims from within a sympathetic media frame. Citizen media site Global Voices, for example, reported from the perspective of Arab Spring protesters:

> Global Voices was significantly less likely than the NYT to rely on a spectacle frame; its authors instead framed their posts to emphasise the injustices being committed, to provoke sympathy for the protesters, and to legitimize and validate their causes and actions. Further, protesters were portrayed positively almost all the time. (Harlow & Johnson, 2011: 1368)

The provision of insider perspectives can shift important cognitive frames. During the 2012 Quebec Student Strike, The Media Co-op produced reportage 'from a perspective rooted

within the social movement itself' (Jeppesen, 2016: 391), as did Concordia University TV (CUTV), which 'engaged in the direct-action of the strike, providing a direct report from the streets' (2016: 396). In other words, these autonomous journalists were protesters, taking on the same types of risks, such as tear gas, kettling, arrest and police violence. They reported from an intersectional anti-capitalist perspective, and generated trust among student strikers, their supporters and the mass audience that regularly watched the coverage. Student and other autonomous journalists thus corrected for the mainstream media protest paradigm by providing insider perspectives. Costanza-Chock, Schweidler and the Transformative Media Organizing Project (2017: 177) have found that, 'Media work is most powerful and effective when it is deeply rooted in the struggles, narratives, and actions of the community.'

Three key dimensions of rooted direct-action journalism emerge: a shared sociopolitical project between journalists and social movement actors based on and generative of trust; an insider understanding and representation of intersectional issues that results in more powerful and effective reportage; and alternative value-practices shared among journalists, interview subjects and communities.

Solidarity journalism

We define solidarity journalism as a practice of autonomous journalism that constructs relationships of mutual support across communities of difference who share a political vision, accounting for ways in which journalism creates relationships among community members with a focus on collective autonomy. It provides media space for intersectional communities with systemic barriers to accessing storytelling spaces, or who are frequently stereotyped, misrepresented or invisibilised in public discourse. Solidarity journalism, moreover, is premised on creating relationships accountable to communities through an ethics of care in reporting.

While mainstream media are bound by journalist ethics, these guidelines seldom include an ethics of care—particularly between journalist and audience (Pech & Leibel, 2006). If they did, 'The result would be an institution committed not only to providing information to its community, but also to doing so in such a way that its practices promote solidarity and mutual concern among community members' (2006: 142). Journalists must therefore not just 'care about' issues, but also 'care for' audience members (2006: 143), moving towards a motivational displacement from self to other, whereby the reporter sees and understands the needs of another and feels compelled to act in their interests (2006: 144). 'Caring for' is based on the premise not that people are isolated rational beings capable of objectivity in journalism and rationally engaging in deliberative discourse (2006: 146), but rather that people exist inherently in relation with and are therefore accountable to others. Journalism practices must develop ethical relationships of care through considering the impact of news media content on audience communities, and support the development of an ethical community-oriented self among readers (2006: 145).

Pech and Leibel (2006) suggest that the role of journalism is to provide information, conceptualising this as a linear relationship as articulated in the mathematical model of communication (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). However, this erases the agency of media subjects and audience, whereas media content both shapes and is shaped by not just encoding but also decoding communities (Hall, 1980). Pech and Leibel overlook media practices within autonomous media, whereby solidarity journalism already defines its own accountability to

the public good, via the knowledge, media and communication commons, as mentioned by Kidd (2003). We must thus examine ways in which communicative action for autonomous journalists nurtures relationships among media producers, subjects, audiences, owners and content, emphasising ethics in the process of news gathering, framing, representation and audience interaction. While Pech and Leibel (2006) focus on relationships between journalists and audience, we also examine relationships of solidarity between journalists and communities being represented. Once the flawed paradigms of journalistic objectivity and the mathematical model of communication are abandoned, relationships of solidarity can be observed between the reporter and interview subjects, extending this solidarity implicitly to the community in which the subjects are rooted. This calls for a shift in the imagined audience beyond the presumed normative or universal reader through an understanding of intersectional marginalities and oppressions.

Three key dimensions of solidarity journalism emerge here: co-construction of media content in solidarity with interview subjects; ethical media practices in news gathering and reporting generative of a radical ethics of care; and intersectional horizontal relationships of equality between journalists and the overlapping representational subjects and audience communities.

Intersectionality

Our outreach criteria were developed using an intersectional approach to transformative media organising similar to that of Costanza-Chock, Schweidler and the Transformative Media Organizing Project (2017). We understand intersectionality based on our experiences of the ways in which it has developed in both academic and activist uses. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2016: 2) offer the following definition:

> Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other.

While intersectionality is an excellent analytical tool for understanding complex experiences of multiple systems of oppression, we also emphasize intersectionality as the basis for liberatory anti-oppression practices through media and social movement organising (Breton et al., 2012a).

The contradictory logics of alternative and mainstream media

Many of our co-research participants emphasised the contradictory logics between mainstream media and autonomous media. Some had the education, skills and experience of professional journalists, but felt alienated by mainstream media; others felt university journalism programs were so flawed that they preferred to avoid them altogether; and those who studied journalism had experienced many tensions.

Many participants reflected on struggles to engage in autonomous media practices, not wanting to replicate the oppressive logic of mainstream media. One participant noted that 'the journalistic media is a white male commercial institution and even if you're in alternative media, you're still gonna reproduce the logic of that to a certain extent' (HAL1-6). This echoes Cohen's (2015) findings that traditional news media encode a logic providing full-time employment for white males, and feminising and/or racialising precarious journalism employment. For our participants, this contradictory logic was evident in 'entrepreneurial journalism', where students must develop their own brand while remaining neutral. Therefore, many media activists felt uncomfortable with 'JSchool':

> There's this perception that all these often middle-class, white journalism students don't have a bias. And that's a huge problem. I talked to [a university journalism program administrator who said], 'We're trying to do outreach, but there it is, we're really failing at getting Afro-Caribbean youth and native communities represented in journalism school and you see that in coverage.' (TOR4)

This admitted inaccessibility results in mainstream media being dominated by white middle-class journalists, which impacts media content: 'You see that in coverage.' Another participant expressed misgivings about studying journalism, preferring to be an activist and produce her own media. Participating in a short-term job skills program, she gained technical radio production skills; however, many journalism skills were pre-existing, such as in-depth community knowledge, relationships of trust and a facility with Mi'kmaq language—skills valued in autonomous media, and explicitly devalued in mainstream media. Another participant noted that CBC has discouraged Indigenous journalists from reporting on Indigenous issues because 'they were too connected to it' (TOR4), and noted that a white journalist would never be discouraged from reporting on issues affecting white people.

Thus our participants used an intersectional analysis to describe ways in which the mainstream media logic presumes white middle-class journalists are objective, whereas Indigenous people, people of colour, women and other marginalised groups are subjective. Moreover, this subjectivity is understood as a negative characteristic rather than a subject-position that could improve the insights and perspectives of journalists, and thus the quality of journalism. However, 'The idea of value-neutral knowledge has come to be seen not only as empirically unlikely but perhaps even conceptually incoherent' (Pech & Leibel, 2006: 141). Autonomous journalists foreground accountability and transparency through the subjectivity of intersectionally marginalised perspectives in media projects and representations.

While there are contradictions and tensions between autonomous and mainstream media, they are not two separate spheres; rather, there are several dimensions of crossover or hybridity. First, some mainstream journalists rely on alternative journalists for stories. For example, during the 2010 anti-G20 protests in Toronto, mainstream journalists would hang around the Alternative Media Centre waiting for a scoop. Similarly, during the Quebec 2012 Student Strike, CTV journalists had trouble finding student protesters to interview, due to a lack of trust, so they interviewed the live-stream video reporters working for CUTV, generating a hybrid media form where CUTV live-streamed their reporters being interviewed by a mainstream broadcast news media outlet. Second, sometimes activists from alternative political spaces write for mainstream media, such as a noted reporter who is

> part of activism, he hangs out at the same places, he knows activists and he's a perfect example, he gets stories out. So to me, if he wasn't linked to activist communities, because he is already, his reporting wouldn't be as good, or wouldn't have all the information. (MON-01)

Being rooted in 'subjective' activist communities is not detrimental but generative of better informed and thus higher quality reporting. A third dimension of hybridity is through media activists who leave autonomous media for mainstream media positions. One participant laments the 'brain drain' (HAL2-17) from autonomous to mainstream journalism once people have developed their skills. These journalists bring their radical ethical practices with them to their mainstream positions, thus potentially shifting the mainstream media logic and continuing the project of contesting media power.

These three dimensions of hybridity illustrate how the autonomous media logic can make inroads into mainstream media. Thus it is important to consider the specificities of this new logic through two key media practices: rooted direct-action journalism and solidarity journalism.

Rooted direct-action journalism: Working within communities and movements

Autonomous media journalists engage three dimensions of rooted direct-action reporting from within communities and social movements. The objective is not just to present more sympathetic representations, but to achieve in-depth, high-quality reporting and improved relationships among reporters, interviewees, related communities, and broader audiences.

Shared political commitments

Nick Couldry (2012: 190–9) argues that there are three virtues expressed through alternative journalism practices that might be considered important to the shifting field of digital media practice: accuracy, sincerity and care. Alternative journalism focuses on accuracy of reporting on social justice issues, but for Couldry the notion of accuracy falls flat if not accompanied by the journalist's sincerity or belief in the perspectives being reported. In other words, for autonomous journalists, there must be shared political commitments with the community being reported on.

Social media can be used as a tool to produce more authentic representations of social movements from the streets through smartphone livestreaming and live-tweeting; however Dencik (2015: 204) cautions that this authenticity should not be attributed to the platforms themselves. Rather, autonomous media practices support social relationships generative of authentic collective self-reporting using a range of strategies that can strengthen social movements. Moreover, this strengthening of movements and communities is linked profoundly to Couldry's third value-practice of care exercised through media, which must account for the impact of representations on everyone to whom that media may circulate, including 'care over the consequences (of what we say and show through media) for the *common* space of communication' (Couldry, 2012: 197), or what Kidd (2003) terms the communications common.

Involved in creating this shared communicative space, our research participants emphasised being part of the social movement reported on. They noted that it was important to be taking

the same risks, and working side by side for social change, while also being a journalist and covering the issues being worked on, or being 'on the ground, in the resistance' (HAL2-13). This was perceived as key for reporters building relationships of trust with people in communities and social movements. In fact, many spoke of the impossibility of separating the role of activist from the role of journalist; some even saw autonomous journalism as activism or a form of direct action—thus the term direct-action journalism seems appropriate.

Complexifying issues from an insider perspective

Engaging in the struggle and having shared experiences helps journalists to better understand and report on the complexity of intersectional issues of oppression and action. Movement activists will trust rooted autonomous journalists to create a respectful, accurate, detailed and in-depth representation:

> I think one of the most important ways to connect activist media to the communities is to be embedded in them … [CUTV took part in protests] which put us in the place of the oppression that's happening, instead of behind the police line, where the mainstream media was filming from. (VIC2-2)

CUTV autonomous journalists in the Quebec Student Strike were protesting as and *with* students, participating in the student struggle themselves and being exposed to the same risks—such as being kettled, detained and arrested, and even facing police violence. CUTV were therefore rooted direct-action journalists engaged in every element of the protest action 'on the ground in the resistance', and thus were closer to being able to report on the complexities of the story.

Being part of the movement also means that you are able to contact movement insiders to interview them. You can ask appropriate, well-informed questions because you have a deeper understanding of the issues, making the interview more successful: 'you get the right people, and … [you] ask questions that mainstream won't cover' (VIC1-1). The coverage, contrary to mainstream media logic, is therefore more accurate, bringing new perspectives to reporting and getting closer to some of the complex details of the intersectional social issues at stake. When searching for interviewees, autonomous journalists often avoid corporate, government or university experts, preferring to hear from people with specific experience, such as people who 'spend their lives with a craft or a community project' (VIC1-4). One of our participants provided an example of coverage of the Haiti earthquake, where mainstream media interviewed Canadians working with the RCMP in Haiti, whereas:

> Groundwire [national radio program] took the perspective, 'Let's go talk to the Haitians who want to talk about the history of Canada and Haiti, and the current situation with the RCMP.' There's an inherent value to bring that news back to Canada. (VIC2-9)

This rooted reporting provided a critical perspective on the role of the RCMP in policing Haiti, and its potentially negative impacts on the people of Haiti, both historically and in the contemporary moment. People on the street are refigured by autonomous journalists as experts who can share a critical historical perspective, or other insider experience, resulting in higher quality reporting that can deepen democratic debate and advance social transformation.

Shared values and prefigurative politics

The third dimension of rooted direct-action journalism is the sharing of alternative values and related value-practices in the interview process, which emerge from and shape the logic of autonomous media. There is a commitment to prefigurative media practices that attempt to foster a consistency between the means and ends of journalism, which work to sustain respectful relationships. Research participants discussed ways in which they aimed to prefigure social change, noting it was crucial 'to incorporate your values and your practice' (VIC1-4). In other words, as Maeckelberg (2011: 4) argues, 'Practising prefigurative politics means removing the temporal distinction between the struggle in the *present* and a goal in the *future*; instead, the struggle and the goal, the real and the ideal, become one in the present' (italics in original). Prefiguration requires aligning the real, in other words autonomous media practices in the here and now, with the ideal, their values and principles, in what Jeppesen (2009) calls 'value-practices'—intersectional anti-oppression cultural and media practices shaped and underwritten by specific anarchist, autonomous or alternative anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, anti-racist, queer and trans* values oriented toward collective autonomy, self-determination and radical liberation.

The autonomous media value-practice that the people directly affected by an issue should be the ones with access to producing media about that issue, and at the forefront of the social movement itself, was expressed as well:

> A lot of the media work I've done has been very personal to me, whether that's within the queer community, or I've done a lot of documentaries around sex work and stuff. That's been a big motivator—wanting to talk about issues that directly affect me. (VIC3-11)

People reporting on issues that directly affect them is contradictory to the mainstream media logic, but key to autonomous journalism.

These three dimensions of rooted direct-action journalism are at stake when people work together to create media that report on and support the social movements in which they are involved. However, if the only reporting is rooted journalism, there is a risk that people in positions of privilege will avoid issues not directly affecting them, rather than doing solidarity media work. Therefore, solidarity journalism is a necessary set of complementary media practices.

Solidarity journalism: Working across intersectional communities and movements

Some research participants noted that there was a tendency to deny responsibility for issues across identities or communities of experience. They argued, however, that everyone in society is accountable for the multiple forms of intersectional oppressions in society, regardless of their own social location. This points to the necessity of finding ways to take responsibility for challenging injustices when we are not directly impacted, reporting as allies in solidarity with communities and movements. If we abandon the notion of objectivity in journalism, then we can more honestly and authentically engage in reporting across difference, acknowledging the role of the journalist in supporting social justice objectives, such as standing up for human rights, against racism and the like. As Dencik (2015: 206) argues, autonomous media

and social media 'have afforded a "new authenticity" of new media journalists towards its public that can potentially allow for the construct[ion] of new solidarities'.

Within social movements such as Black Lives Matter and Indigenous land defence actions like Standing Rock, the people most affected are leading movements, with allies acting in support and solidarity. Autonomous media activists debated and brainstormed how these kinds of movements might be supported by allies. Lisa Droogendyk and colleagues (2016: 316) describe allies, or so-called 'advantaged group activists', as people 'who are committed participants in action to improve the treatment and/or status of a disadvantaged group'. They caution that increased interactions among advantaged and disadvantaged groups can sometimes 'psychologically impact members of the disadvantaged group' (2016: 317), outlining several potential risks. They urge that 'advantaged group allies must effectively communicate support for social change, understand the implications of their own privilege, offer autonomy-oriented support, and resist the urge to increase their own feelings of inclusion by co-opting relevant marginalised social identities' (2016: 315). Three dimensions of solidarity journalism emerged in our mixers: co-creation of knowledge, a radical ethics of care and building intersectional horizontal relationships.

Co-creation of media content with the interview subject

Autonomous journalists engage in specific practices to destabilise top-down power structures and establish conditions more conducive to the co-creation of media content with their interviewees or media subjects. Media practices for the co-creation of content identified by our participants included: collective authoring, social authoring, building relationships with interview subjects and creating consent in interviews. The first practice mentioned in terms of creating solidarity with the interview subject was using the power that accrues to a journalist to foreground the voices of those being represented. This is contrary to the mainstream practice of entrepreneurial journalism that foregrounds the voice and brand of the journalist. Autonomous journalists with the freedom to write in their own voice can use this privilege to provide space and voice to individuals, groups and communities being covered. In other words, in the very moment when autonomous journalists have the freedom to become individualistic, self-indulgent or self-important, the ethical commitment to solidarity with social movements takes precedence.

Building on this concept, a participant discusses the problem of individualistic careerism in mainstream media, suggesting that collective authoring through writing articles or producing radio shows as a group is another way of writing in solidarity, cooperation and collaboration:

> The mainstream capitalist world is very individualistic. It's all about us individually rising to the top. And I'm not against us, as individuals, identifying ourselves when we write pieces or when we use our voice on the air, but … writing together with people, when the piece is done, you can either all sign your names to it, or can just put the *blah-blah-blah* collective, you make up a name on the spot—boom! It has a different resonance. (HAL2-17)

For this participant, collective co-production of knowledge not only generates better thinking, as the ideas people produce build on one another, but also generates a different feeling, a different set of relationships, creating an ethics of care through the co-production of knowledge. Another participant took this a step further, by providing interview questions to their

guests ahead of time, which made the guests feel more comfortable about being on the radio show. This rejection of mainstream media's journalistic model, which can intimidate guests because they never know what to expect, favours a horizontal model that shares power and trust, allowing guests to think things through and generate knowledge supported by the radio host. This is linked to an ethics of consent in autonomous journalism:

> What does consent look like in an interview? Where it's really about sharing rather than just hammering somebody. I think there's a time and place for different styles but we would also sometimes say afterwards, 'Is there anything you would like us to edit out?' Just really think about the participation of our guests. One really fun way that that came out, was asking whoever's on to pick a track and introduce the track afterwards. And, it seems pretty low level but I think it shared a sense of ownership. (VIC1-4)

The co-creation of content by the interviewer and interviewee in collaboration is put into practice by inviting the guest to shape the show by selecting music, offering opportunities to edit their audio, and fostering consent between the guest and host. Autonomous journalists co-create knowledge and relationships in solidarity with interviewees, through processes of building knowledge through collaboration, consent, trust and mutual respect.

Relationships of care and accountability to the community

A sense of accountability to the subjects or people being reported on was an important issue for research participants. Many communities have encountered a process of 'Othering' in mainstream media, for example, when white journalists interview people from Black, Indigenous or people of colour (BIPOC) communities, or when heteronormative people interview non-binary gender or queer subjects. Research participants articulated both an awareness of this problematic dynamic, and a commitment to not replicating it. Othering can have negative impacts on the community, not just in terms of the resultant representation, but also through the interview process itself—including silencing, diminishing, misrepresenting and stereotyping.

Specifically in terms of Indigenous representations, non-Indigenous or settler media activists who were interested in decolonising media noted problematic ways in which Western anthropologists had treated Indigenous people, vilifying or exotifying their expressions, experiences and culture, and portraying them in ways that emphasised difference, assuming the settler culture was normative and often also superior. For this reason, media activists noted that sometimes it might be best to step back, as Indigenous communities and journalists would be better able to self-represent in the news, providing a perspective that settler journalists may not be able to understand or convey very well. Stepping back can provide space for Indigenous voices, re-centring the Indigenous community as the subject of their own media representations, including cultural norms, outlooks, values and language, and offering better support by settler media activists and movement allies over the longer term.

A similar solidarity perspective was suggested to account for gender queer media representations: that cis-gender allies should start interviews—especially on radio or TV, but also in other genres—by identifying their own gender pronouns. This strategy develops a new prefigurative social norm that contests the stability of the gender binary by privileging trans*, non-binary, gender non-conforming and queer identities, showing solidarity and support. This

strategy develops relationships of care and trust between the interviewer and interviewee. It also demonstrates accountability to the community being represented in the media.

Creating horizontal relationships across intersectional identities

The third media practice is creating empowering horizontal intersectional relationships of equality through solidarity journalism. While it is presumed in democratic societies that people are all equal, this is clearly not the case—there is a growing income gap in most capitalist countries, and an intensifying return to overt expressions of racism, homophobia and misogyny. Addressing these intersectional oppressions, autonomous movements and media activists have developed practices that enact equality, particularly important to those in marginalised groups and with intersectional experiences of oppression. These horizontalising media practices include the explicit framing of the issue of support, stepping back to provide space for others to speak, or sharing skills and resources.

The first practice is to foreground the idea of 'what it means to feel supported in your community, and feel supported in doing the work that you do' (VIC2-7). This incorporates representation in images and narrative framing, as well as horizontal practices that build care, trust and support among those involved, including the journalist, the interview speaker, the broader community to which that speaker belongs and the audience. Support should be distinguished from the charity model of help, which may be patronising, indicative of a one-way relationship between the haves and have-nots, and thus retrenching these two disparate positions. Support is a mutual relationship—the interviewee supports the journalist by sharing their experience and knowledge, and the journalist supports the interviewee by co-creating an authentic representation that respects and empowers the speaker and their community. One research participant explained how a group of white autonomous journalists were working on better ways to foreground intersectional representations:

> We were all white people, and we were looking to connect local stories to broader issues. And we were interested in being critical of conventional society and the stereotypes that were represented on the radio that privileged white people. I guess a tactic was trying to provide space. (HAL2-16)

Providing space for people to speak is a key media practice of solidarity. This is a way in which people who already have access to creating media, through involvement in a media project of some kind, can use that resource to offer access to people who do not have this privilege or resource, 'centring those voices of people who … have some sort of direct experience with the movement' (VIC1-3). Journalists with privilege stepping back in solidarity makes space for people with direct experiences of oppression and/or within social change movements to participate as rooted, direct-action or community-based reporters. These two autonomous journalism practices are intrinsically linked. One participant discussed such a strategy, which they used to support extractivism movements:

> Having a mobile unit that could travel to [anti-pipeline] communities and deliver these workshops and then leave the tools behind so that communities can be doing things like recording their own resistance, and documenting their own resistance. (VIC1-3)

Media activists provided both technology and training to support recentring the community's voice. They also provided outlets for the radio and video produced to be broadcast through

their autonomous media sites. In this way, the digital divide that continues to impact marginalised groups through a lack of resources and skills can be addressed through solidarity journalism practices.

Conclusions

Here we offer several observations regarding some of the contradictions and tensions in these autonomous journalism practices, and suggest directions for further research in terms of the content of our findings and the process of our PCAR methodology.

First, there are critiques of the structurelessness of grassroots media organisations that do not allow for accountability and transparency within groups, or that tend to hide or deny power dynamics. The practice of direct-action journalism is open to this risk, although the media activists we interviewed were also very attentive to this issue and had attempted to develop intersectional feminist approaches that would reveal and address power dynamics. Nonetheless, groups such as The Media Coop, CUTV and other more established independent or alternative media organisations in Canada still have room for improvement around issues of inclusion. Many media activists of colour, queer and trans* people, and feminists have chosen to move on from these established groups to start their own programs or collectives that were explicitly feminist, anti-racist or focused on LGBT*Q issues.

Second, solidarity journalism is not without its own risks, as noted by Maeckleberg (2011). Always working with people who have more privilege can have a disempowering rather than an empowering effect. Activists mentioned not wanting to put pressure on those within the movement to do the journalism work, and argued that solidarity journalists have a responsibility to cover movements outside of their experience or identity as well. There was a balance between foregrounding voices from within movements while not wanting to tokenise people or demand that they write about their own experiences when they were also extremely busy organising their movements. Despite best intentions, people engaged in solidarity journalism can also risk taking up too much space, speaking for others, and misrepresenting movements because of their lack of experience.

Third, as we share values with the participants who joined our 'radical media mixers', our research methodology and the autonomous journalism practices described here demonstrate some parallels, so we offer a brief methodological meta-reflection. We have engaged in rooted direct-action research, co-researching with and supporting social movements. We share political commitments that generate a deeper understanding of the complexity of issues we are researching. Our methodology is prefigurative, researching according to horizontal grassroots feminist-informed activist practices rather than traditional top-down university-based research methods. We engage in solidarity research, creating a relational research ethics of care with participants, building horizontal relationships through participation in media movement activities and co-creating knowledge through an iterative process of questions, feedback and validation. Findings are available to the movements who contributed to them, through blog posts, a conference we organised, workshops, an interactive map and an online curriculum and documentary (these last two are still in development).

This methodology is not without its challenges, however. The student body at our rural university is not racially diverse, so the research assistants working on the project have been

predominantly Euro-Canadian, as is the larger research collective. Racism entrenched in the university system in Canada has led a collective member of colour to forgo studying for a PhD. The contradiction between neoliberal university cultures of hierarchy, productionism and confidentiality on employment issues contradicts the grassroots collective culture of horizontalism, time-consuming process orientation, community rather than academic outputs and workplace accountability. The temporary nature of grants, similar to those accessed by media organisations, means we cannot offer permanent, unionised employment, putting employees into perhaps well-paid feminist positions that are nonetheless precarious. There is an inherent power differential in the collective member positions of the principal investigator (PI), who is the employer of the research assistants and postdoctoral researcher. Moreover, as we attempted a collective self-assessment process, we were informed by Human Resources that employment feedback is confidential and cannot be provided in front of colleagues. These and other contradictions have made the activist-based research process challenging.

At one meeting, when we were planning the global interviews and analysis, we were discussing how to distribute the interviews, transcription and analysis equally among all members, challenging hierarchical assumptions that undergrads do transcription, postdocs code data and PIs do analysis. Accordingly, we were thinking that each person would do a set of interviews that they would then transcribe and code in NVivo, and together we would all contribute to the analysis. However, in a go-around, it emerged that nobody wanted to follow this structureless horizontal model. One member was not interested in interviewing people; another had never conducted interviews but wanted to learn by shadowing someone experienced. Some people wanted to do transcriptions; others did not. Some expressed concerns about capacity and preferred to do short bursts of interviews that involved travel; others had more capacity for interviews, but less time or interest in travel. When we shifted to speaking openly and honestly about capacities and interests, we scrapped the original plan to horizontalise the division of labour, and instead all took on work that we were excited about doing and felt we had the skills and capacities to complete successfully. As we have heard from our research participants, horizontalism without structure or clear roles and responsibilities can breed resentment and a lack of clarity, which can lead to confusion and burnout—problems we may have anticipated by having this frank and open discussion.

Taking an intersectional feminist approach to media activist practices of direct-action reporting and solidarity journalism has great potential to shift the mediascape and challenge established media power, and further research into these practices would benefit both scholars and activists. Similarly, PCAR shows great promise for transforming inequities in university research practices; however, some contradictions between university and activist cultures are not easily reconcilable; further methodological and institutional developments might better support this work. Through these innovative autonomous journalism and research practices, we contend that media activists and activist-researchers alike may continue to challenge intersectional power dynamics, deepen relationships of support and trust among journalists and researchers in activist communities, and strengthen our work towards social transformation.

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MARG was founded by four anarchist-feminist organisers, who are also activist-researchers, upon receiving a five-year Insight Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) in 2013 at Lakehead University, Ontario, Canada. The co-founders were two professors and two doctoral candidates; we soon added a long-time community media activist and anti-racist organiser, and one of the professors dropped out. MARG has grown and changed over the years, with the current collective comprising the original professor (Sandra Jeppesen) and community media activist (Sharmeen Khan), a postdoctoral researcher (Kamilla Petrick) and two fourth-year Media Studies students (Ellen Craig and Cassidy Croft). In terms of identities, we are four white cis-women and one cis-woman of colour, aged in our twenties to fifties, who identify as queer or heterosexual and share intersectional feminist politics. We have created community media partnerships that prioritise building relationships with intersectional activists, and continue to organise in radical media movements. As MARG members have a range of intersectional identities, we use 'we' or 'they' to signify our belonging in the movements with which we research, and at the same time to acknowledge that MARG members do not claim to represent all of our participants' identities and social locations.

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CHAPTER 50

Amplifying Counter-Public Spheres on Social Media: News Sharing of Alternative Versus Traditional Media After the 2019 Chilean Uprising

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Abstract

While much research exists on the role of digital media use in protest movements, few studies compare the long-term impact of protests on online use of alternative and mainstream digital media. This holds particularly true in countries of the global south. Our study addresses this knowledge gap by examining the massive demonstrations that occurred in Chile on 18 October 2019. Based on data from 1,221,487 Facebook posts from 31 media outlets collected 10 months before and after the protests, we detected significant discontinuities in users' interactions with news content. Whereas both media types display different baseline levels, for alternative media, the time series reflects a "step" type of shock—a long-lasting increase

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in news sharing—whereas for mainstream media, it is a "pulse" type of shock—a burst of interactions that quickly returned to pre-existing levels. These results suggest that social media users relied on alternative news media to amplify counter-public spheres in Chile.

Keywords

alternative media, mainstream media, news sharing, Facebook, protests, social movements, Chile

Media companies have become powerful political actors in most democracies around the globe—they can influence the agenda of issue priorities and define people's interpretations of those issues (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2020). It should not come as a surprise, then, that there is substantial research on the role of media use on protest behavior and social movements (Garrett, 2006; Kaun & Uldam, 2018; Theocharis & Van Deth, 2017). Most empirical studies in this area, however, focus on short-term dynamics. Quantitative research on the long-term, national-level impact of protest movements on online use of alternative and mainstream media is scant. This holds particularly true in regions of the global south, such as Latin America (Harlow, 2017; Mitchelstein et al., 2020).

This study seeks to contribute to the literature by examining social media users' social media engagement with mainstream and alternative digital news outlets. More specifically, we focus on the nationwide citizen uprising that occurred in Chile on 18 October 2019, and analyze news sharing patterns of mainstream and alternative media on Facebook—a platform used by more than 70% of Chileans—long before and after the uprising. On this basis, we deploy an event studies method, which detects significant discontinuities in users' interactions with mainstream and alternative media.

Our results suggest that the protests changed aggregate levels of news sharing—defined as "the practice of giving a defined set of people access to news content via social media platforms, as by posting or recommending it" (Kümpel et al., 2015, p. 2). Importantly, changes in news sharing were not uniform across media types. Users' reactions to mainstream media content followed what time series analysts describe as a "pulse" type of shock, that is, a sudden impact that dies out quickly. In contrast, reactions to alternative media exhibited a "step" type of shock—an abrupt, albeit more permanent, impact (Box & Tiao, 1975; for an application, see Jennings & Saunders, 2019). As we shall argue, these findings suggest the protests empowered alternative media, which helped most of these sites to successfully produce counter-information flows aligned with protestors' demands.

Alternative Media and Social Movements

Like other political actors, social movements need access to the news media to gain visibility. However, the news media are not a unified, monolithic institution. Rather, they can be described along two ends of a continuum: mainstream and alternative (Downing, 2000; Harcup, 2013; Holt, 2018). The differences are notable at all levels, from ownership structure and funding to norms and routines, content, and targeted publics. Mainstream media usually belong to media groups, are dependent upon corporate advertising, eschew overt advocacy for a partisan or ideological stance, give preponderance to official sources, and are geared

toward large audiences. Alternative media, in contrast, tend to be independent from dominant institutions, have a clearer political stance that they openly support, prefer advocacy over neutrality, and give more voice to marginalized groups (Atton, 2001; Meyers, 2008).

The dialectal opposition between alternative and mainstream news led Holt et al. (2019) to propose that "alternative news media represent a proclaimed and/or *(self-) perceived corrective*, opposing the overall tendency of public discourse emanating from what is perceived as the dominant mainstream media in a given system" (p. 862). In turn, this "alternativeness" can emerge at different levels, from the micro level of alternative content creators and news content, all the way up to the macro level of alternative media organizations' societal impact.

Importantly, the differences between mainstream and alternative media should not be interpreted as implying that mainstream media are necessarily "oppressive" and alternative media necessarily "liberating." For instance, mainstream outlets have been at the forefront of the fight against mis/ disinformation, spearheading fact-checking initiatives worldwide (Graves, 2018). Likewise, researchers have documented the rise of populist, xenophobic, and racist alternative media sites (Schwarzenegger, 2021). Nevertheless, it is still the case that most research in Latin America—in line with traditional work on alternative media (Holt et al., 2019)—finds that alternative outlets play an important role in promoting democratizing social movements (Harlow, 2015; Mitchelstein et al., 2020; Valenzuela & Somma, 2016). This is because mainstream news organizations tend to marginalize groups that challenge traditional power structures, either by excluding their voices from news coverage or by portraying them as deviant, odd, or otherwise illegitimate (Harlow et al., 2020; Hughes & Mellado, 2016).

To correct for biases in mainstream media coverage, social movements often count on alternative media to increase their visibility and mobilize supporters. These media, in turn, are often critical in the formation and expression of what Downey and Fenton (2003) termed "counter-public spheres," where "oppositional discourses are articulated and rehearsed, oppositional identities are formed, critical messages are shared, and mobilizing information is disseminated" (Lee, 2018, p. 222). Thus, the use of alternative media might increase knowledge of political information that is critical of the dominant power structures and, thereby, foment protest participation (Chan, 2017; Karduni & Sauda, 2020; Lee, 2015).

Before the internet, alternative media were typically small in scale (e.g., community radio, flyers, magazines, and graffiti). However, the development of digital media, most notably social platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, increased the potential of alternative media to reach larger publics. In fact, in the last decade, several protest movements have been labeled by the social platform of the day, such as the "Twitter revolution" (Iran 2009) and the "Facebook revolution" (Egypt 2011). While these claims are hyperbolic, it is certainly the case that social and protest movements, and the alternative media that support them, are becoming more dependent upon social media (Valenzuela, 2013).

Protests and News Sharing

In the present study, we are concerned with whether and how protests are related to social media users' engagement with both alternative and mainstream news, especially through news sharing. A central mechanism by which offline, protest movements can increase the diffusion of alternative media online is selectivity—the notion that political ideology and

attitudes are major determinants of what people do with media. While selectivity is an old concept (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948; Sears & Freedman, 1967), it regained prominence with the emergence of cable TV and digital media over the past two decades (Stroud, 2011). This is most evident with social media, the content of which depends on users' content selections and the amplification of the selected content by other users as well as the platforms' algorithms (Aruguete & Calvo, 2018; Himelboim et al., 2013).

Empirical research has found support for the existence of two related processes of selectivity that operate in a politically salient context. *Selective exposure* refers to individuals' preference for pro-attitudinal information over counter-attitudinal information when deciding what content to attend (Garrett, 2009; Mummolo, 2016). *Selective sharing*, in turn, refers to individuals' preference for pro-attitudinal information over counter-attitudinal information when deciding what content to spread (Ekstrom & Lai, 2021; Shin & Thorson, 2017).

Both individual and contextual characteristics influence the likelihood of selective exposure and sharing. The strength, importance, and extremity of political attitudes held by individuals have been found to enhance selectivity (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015; Stroud, 2011). That is, people with stronger political ideologies or partisan identities, as well as people who are more politically mobilized, are more likely to engage in selective exposure and sharing. Furthermore, in high-choice media environments, users have greater opportunities to indulge their political preferences (Fischer et al., 2008). This becomes manifest in practices such as news curation—"the reconstructing, reformulating, reframing and sharing of political news through social media" (Park & Kaye, 2019, p. 455). By engaging in news curation, politically active social media users decide what to share and when to do so based on their political identities and beliefs. Bruns (2011) defined them as "gatewatchers," individuals who curate and provide their own commentary on the news provided by mainstream media and other official sources before sharing them (p. 117). The importance of selective sharing and news curation as means to gain visibility is not lost to protest movements. Prior research has highlighted the strategically planned social media tactics used by protest movements to mobilize and gain support for their cause (Jackson & Welles, 2015; Wang & Zhou, 2021).

For these reasons, we posit that changes in news sharing patterns ought to follow a surge in protests. The reasoning is that when an unexpected event takes place, people turn to the news media to become informed (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). However, in countries where people are skeptical of the mainstream media, social media sources, especially alternative media, may become more prevalent. We believe that the events of October 2019 in Chile represent an ideal case to examine the amplification through social media of the counter-hegemonic discourses provided by alternative news media.

Recall that a broader-than-usual swath of the population became politically mobilized, joining demonstrations, rallies, and protests. Mobilization, in turn, reflects increased attitude polarization, which can trigger processes of selectivity. Mainstream media, in turn, are mostly conservative, that is, supportive of the political status quo and neoliberal policies against which the demonstrators took aim (Gronemeyer et al., 2021; Núñez-Mussa, 2021). In a quantitative content analysis of press coverage in Chile between 1990 and 2005, Hughes and Mellado (2016) found that "journalists relied upon official sources, allowed politicians to set the news agenda, and eschewed civil society in favor of representing citizens as voiceless individuals" (p. 48). Thus, alternative media provide users with an alternative to the coverage

provided by the mainstream media. Mobilized citizens could engage in selective sharing by amplifying these alternative voices over the traditional ones. Consequently, the October 2019 protests should have increased users' interactions with alternative media on social platforms.

The Political and Media Context of Chile

For most of the 1990s and 2000s, Chile was internationally praised as a model of socioeconomic development and political stability in Latin America (Siavelis, 2017). Since 18 October 2019, however, the country has been immersed in a political and social crisis that includes massive protesting, rioting, and mounting social discontent and distrust. What started as a student protest against a hike in public transportation fares quickly escalated into a full-fledged citizen uprising against socioeconomic inequality. A week later, on 25 October 2019, close to 3 million people (i.e., 16% of the total population) marched in the streets in what became known as "Chile's greatest march" ever. Subsequently, more than 30 people died and more than 3,500 citizens were injured during confrontations with the police. At the same time, protestors attacked 79 of the 136 stations of Santiago's subway system.

Seeking a solution to the social unrest, the country's political elite agreed in November 2019 to initiate a constitutional reform process, which was to start with a national referendum to draft a new constitution to be held in 2020. However, this response did little to abate the protests. Between October 2019 and March 2020, 300 police stations across the country were systematically attacked by stone-throwing crowds. Not surprisingly, by December 2019, President Sebastián Piñera's approval rating reached a record low level of 6%, according to the nationally representative CEP (2019) survey. Protests and rioting only ceased due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit the country in March 2020. Despite the public health crisis, political and social polarization continued to shape Chile's political and social dynamics in 2020 and 2021. Furthermore, the government's management of the pandemic placed Chile among the worst performers in Latin America (Bachmann et al., 2021).

Although unforeseen by the country's political and social elite, the so-called "October outbreak" was long in the making (see, for example, Toro, 2008). Since the 2000s, highly personalistic campaigning gradually compensated for vanishing political identities, especially among popular sectors alienated from traditional politics (Luna, 2014; Toro & Luna, 2011). Since 2006, a series of student protest waves took place, inaugurating a new political phase in which politics in the streets began to be conceived as an alternative to institutional politics (Somma et al., 2020). New student protests took place in 2011, leading to the emergence of new political parties and coalitions that would make significant electoral inroads in the congressional elections of 2013 and 2017 (among these new coalitions was the National Front, which would end up winning the 2021 presidential election). However, street politics continued to gain steam, while those that entered the institutional arena were framed as "sell-outs." In 2016, 750,000 protestors across the country participated in a national march against the mandatory private pension system created by the military dictatorship in 1980. In 2018, in the context of the #MeToo and #NiUnaMenos movements, feminist protests and university take-overs took place across the country. The protest of 8 March 2019 drew more than 800,000 people across the country.

Mounting social discontent coincided with a succession of corruption scandals involving political and business elites. Between 2011 and 2017, close to 20 highly visible cases involving collusion between political elites and business sectors made national headlines. Exchanges between political and business elites usually involved the exchange of campaign funding for favorable legislation and a relaxation of state regulation of key markets. Other scandals involved pivotal institutions such as the army, the police, and the Catholic church, where elite members were featured either as perpetrators and/or accomplices.

The social impact of the corruption scandals can only be assessed against the backdrop of the "Chilean model" and its unfulfilled promises. In post-transitional Chile, capitalist modernization and the expansion of tertiary education enabled the emergence of new middle-class sectors and the strengthening of upward intergenerational social mobility. However, social vulnerability, income inequality, and increasing financial debt to fund consumption were also prevalent (UNDP, 2017). Moreover, between 2010 and 2020, economic growth stalled. In such a context, the increasing exposure and politization of corruption scandals involving collusion between political and business elites gradually consolidated into a notion of "elite abuse." The social outbreak of October 2019 finally consolidated into a cleavage between sociopolitical elites and popular sectors.

This cleavage became manifest in the polls tracking confidence in institutions. In the mid-2000s, it was possible to distinguish between two types of institutions with different levels of trust: political institutions (very low levels of trust) and other public institutions, such as the police, the army, and the Catholic Church, with intermediate levels of trust. After the most recent wave of scandals, most of which were exposed by the investigative journalism outlets, the only social institution that remained relatively highly trusted was the news media. In 2018, the Reuters Institute's *Digital News Report* found that 53% of the population found the news media credible (Newman et al., 2020).

This might seem surprising considering that the ownership structure of media enterprises in Chile remained tightly associated with mainstream economic conglomerates and traditional elite groups (Valenzuela & Arriagada, 2011). In fact, Chile has the most concentrated media ownership in Latin America (Núñez-Mussa, 2021). However, in a context of generalized institutional distrust, broadcast media—especially radio stations—and national newspapers remained trusted institutions by the Chilean population. The October 2019 protests changed this situation. By 2020, the level of trust in news overall decreased by 30% (Newman et al., 2020). In fact, the rally-round-the-flag effect experienced in many countries after the COVID-19 pandemic hit, which manifested in terms of increased trust in institutions and media, was barely noticeable in Chile (Bachmann et al., 2021).

While public opinion surveys reflected a sharp decline of trust in the mainstream media in the immediate aftermath of the October uprising, our social media data suggest a corresponding decline in engagement with mainstream media. At the same time, whereas civil society began to question traditional media and its coverage of the riots, social unrest, and police repression and human rights abuses, pre-existing alternative media sources began to garner increasing public attention (Lazcano-Peña et al., 2021). Thus, in what follows, we examine how interest in alternative media manifested through news sharing before and after the 2019 protests.

Method

Data

To analyze patterns of social media news engagement and their eventual disruption after 18 October 2019, we rely on a large-n analysis of 1,221,487 Facebook posts from public pages of 31 media outlets. We used the CrowdTangle API to extract the data set from news posted between January 2019 and July 2020. CrowdTangle is an analytical platform hosted by Facebook to share data on users' interactions with public Facebook pages, groups, and verified profiles. The API tracks and quantifies performance indicators for every post by every tracked account, providing data on different types of user reactions (i.e., shares, views, comments, likes, and so forth). In this article, we analyze data on users' engagement with Facebook posts (for a similar approach, see Garz et al., 2020; Vargo & Hopp, 2020). To be sure, engagement is not equivalent to exposure, though the two phenomena are related to each other (Bright, 2016).

Recent work shows that in Chile, as in the rest of Latin America, older users are more likely to engage with news and political content on Facebook than younger users (Ortellado et al., 2021). Those who share political news are 10 years older (with an age average of 50 years) than those who view political news. Since the opposite trend applies to participation in protests (i.e., older participants are less likely to join demonstrations in Chile; Núcleo de Sociología Contingente, 2020, p. 5), our estimates on the impact of protest behavior on news sharing are likely to be conservative.

Operationalization of Mainstream and Alternative Media

Based on our research purposes and following Lee (2018), we classified media outlets with a presence on Facebook into two categories: mainstream and alternative. For mainstream media, we included the Facebook pages of the most used national TV and radio networks, newspapers, and digital news websites according to the Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2019 (Newman et al., 2019). To this initial list of 13 outlets, we added five well-known news organizations: the radio networks *ADN* and *Agricultura*, the investigative journalism website *CIPER*, and the free city dailies *La Hora* and *Publimetro*. For alternative media, we included two types of media, all of them established before the 2019 protests. First, we used the *Red de Medios de los Pueblos* (https://mediosdelospueblos.org/), a network of independent news sites, community radio stations, and indigenous media that was formed in 2009 with the specific purpose of empowering alternative media against the "informational siege" (Estrada, 2009) of news conglomerates. While this network of alternative media includes 20 different outlets, only three of them had a Facebook page tracked by CrowdTangle: *El Ciudadano*, *El Observatodo*, and *Mapuexpress*. Second, in line with Lee's (2018) operationalization, we added several digital native sites (i.e., media that do not have a corresponding offline operation). While some of these sites are conservative (e.g., *El Líbero*) or moderate (e.g., *El Dínamo*), most are progressive (e.g., Gamba), left-wing (e.g., *La Izquierda Diario Chile*), and otherwise supportive of the protests (e.g., *El Desconcierto*). In other words, while not all alternative media in Chile are constituents of a counter-public, most are in the sense that they are explicit in their stance against the for profit, conglomerate-dominated mainstream media. Thus, they can be considered sympathetic to the protest movement.

Table 1. Alternative and Mainstream Media Outlets Included in the Analysis.

	Media origin	**Year of website establishment**	**Management**	**Top 10 words in Facebook posts**[a]	**Six differentiated keywords according to keyness**
Alternative:					
Chileokulto	Digital native	2012	Amateur	Chile (20.356)*, government (14.614)* years (10.793)*, country(10466)*, Piñera (9.769), president (9.513)*, people (9.283), health* (8.495), national (8.254)*, Valparaíso (7.511)	journalism, independent, workers, people, repression, Valparaíso.
El Ciudadano	Newspaper	2005	Professional		
El Desconcierto	Digital native	2012	Amateur		
El Dínamo	Digital native	2010	Professional		
El Líbero	Digital native	2014	Professional		
El Observatodo	Digital native	2005	Amateur		
El Periscopio Chile	Digital native	2013	Professional		
Gamba	Digital native	2010	Amateur		
Interferencia	Digital native	2018	Professional		
La Izquierda Diario Chile	Digital native	2012	Amateur		
Mapuexpress	Digital native	2000	Amateur		
OPAL Prensa	Digital native	2012	Amateur		
Puranoticia	Digital native	2013	Professional		
Verdad Ahora	Digital native	2012	Amateur		
Mainstream:					
24 Horas	Television	2001	Professional	Chile (20567)*, years (16311)*, country (15580)*, pictures (11530), national (11229)*, government (10597)*, president (10508)*, people (10185)*, world (8557), health (7894)*	ministry, president, coronavirus, world, league, information.
ADN	Radio	2015	Professional		
Agricultura	Radio	1999	Professional		
CHV Noticias	Television	2001	Professional		
CIPER	Digital native	2007	Professional		
CNN Chile	Television	2009	Professional		
Cooperativa	Radio	1998	Professional		
Diario La Hora	Newspaper	2006	Professional		
El Mostrador	Digital native	2005	Professional		
Emol	Newspaper	2002	Professional		
La Cuarta	Newspaper	1997	Professional		
La Tercera	Newspaper	1997	Professional		
Meganoticias	Television	1999	Professional		
Publimetro Chile	Newspaper	2000	Professional		
Radio Bío-Bío	Radio	2010	Professional		
T13	Television	2011	Professional		
The Clinic	Newspaper	1999	Professional		

Note: Words with a * mean that they are repeated in both categories.

[a] To obtain these results, we use term frequency (tf), following Silge and Robinson (2020).\

Table 1 shows the list and classification of observed media outlets in each category. The table also displays the type of media, year of founding, whether they are professionally run or not, and the 10 most frequent keywords associated with each type of outlet. While the two lists of most frequent keywords are largely similar, posts about governmental and presidential affairs are more frequent in alternative media than in mainstream outlets. To detect differences between the two groups, we use keyness, a text-based analytical technique that computes a score for keywords that occur differentially across the categories. In this analysis, we find that, in the case of mainstream media, different keywords relate to positions of authority such as "ministers" or "president" or sports-related issues such as "league" or "players." In the case of alternative media, predominant keywords have all a highly political nature and are frequently associated to instances of bottom-up mobilization (i.e., they include terms such as "strike," "workers," "people," or "repression"). Interestingly, alternative media often rely on the concept of "journalism." That use is associated to the overarching claim that alternative media are the locus for "independent journalism."

We calculated an index of variation of shares by news post. For each media outlet, we estimated the average daily number of shares to their posts. Finally, we aggregated individual media outlet data into time series for alternative and mainstream media, and computed a daily variability index for each group, which uses the minimum daily number of shares (35.6 shares for mainstream media, and 15.3 shares for alternative media) as a baseline. The variability indicator ρi,t reflects the proportion of daily shares observed for each type of media Ii,t, considering baseline *B*. Variability was computed with the following formula:

$$\rho_{i,t} = \left(\frac{I_{i,t}}{B}\right) - 1$$

Adjusting for prior use is vital to set a proper parameter for our comparison since the raw count of stories circulating is significantly biased toward mainstream media. Moreover, the raw count is driven by the fact that mainstream media feature a broad set of nonpolitical stories (i.e., sports, entertainment), which are also more frequently shared and liked by their audience (Valenzuela et al., 2017).

Results

Our results, shown in Table 2, indicate that after the uprising of 18 October 2019, alternative media increased users' interactions by 15 times their baseline level. That increase is 10.0 times greater than the one observed for mainstream media, which increased by a factor of 4.8 only. This new pattern of interactions was largely in place even 100days after 18 October, with a level of interactions nearly 8 times greater than the baseline. Interestingly, mainstream media interactions were decreasing in the lead-up to 18 October, and 100days after the events of that day, they receded to their historical pattern.

The results are depicted in Figure 1. The information presented in that figure not only confirms the interpretation based on average interactions, but also crystallizes the notion that users' interactions with both types of media reflect qualitatively different phenomena. Whereas both media types display different baseline levels, for alternative media, the time

series reflects an abrupt, long-lasting, change—what econometricians define as exhibiting a "step" function. Meanwhile, the one observed for mainstream media shows a strong, albeit short-term, temporary impact, that is, a "pulse" function (Box & Tiao, 1975). Thus, our data reflect that alternative media attained long-lasting gains in user engagement. Mainstream media, in contrast, reverted to their usual engagement levels.

To assess our claim more systematically, we conducted an event study (ES). This technique, developed in economics to assess the impact of a specific event on financial outcomes, seeks to estimate abnormal (financial) returns (AR) produced by a given event (Kothari & Warner, 2007). In our case, such event is 18 October 2019, and the AR is the difference between users' interactions with both types of media predicted based on the time series preceding and following the event. The generic equation defining AR of media type i in period t is presented as follows:

$$AR_{i,t} = R_{i,t} - E(R_{i,t}|X_t)$$

where $R_{i,t}$ is the ex-post return in period t and $E(R_{i,t}|X_t)$ is the expected return conditioned to the information X of period t, unrelated to the event (Pacicco et al., 2017).

Table 2. Descriptive Results.

Media type	Range	Shares per day	Variation index		Distribution
		M	M	SD	
Alternative	199 to 100 days before event	65.5	3.28	4.37	
	99 to 1 days before event	47.5	2.10	2.4	
	1 to 100 days after event	243	14.9	5.04	
	101 to 200 days after event	173	10.3	4.70	
Mainstream	199 to 100 days before event	131	2.69	2.40	
	99 to 1 days before event	80.3	1.26	1.02	
	1 to 100 days after event	208	4.84	2.95	
	101 to 200 days after event	142	3.00	1.56	

Note: Event refers to the uprising of 18 October 2019. SD: standard deviation.

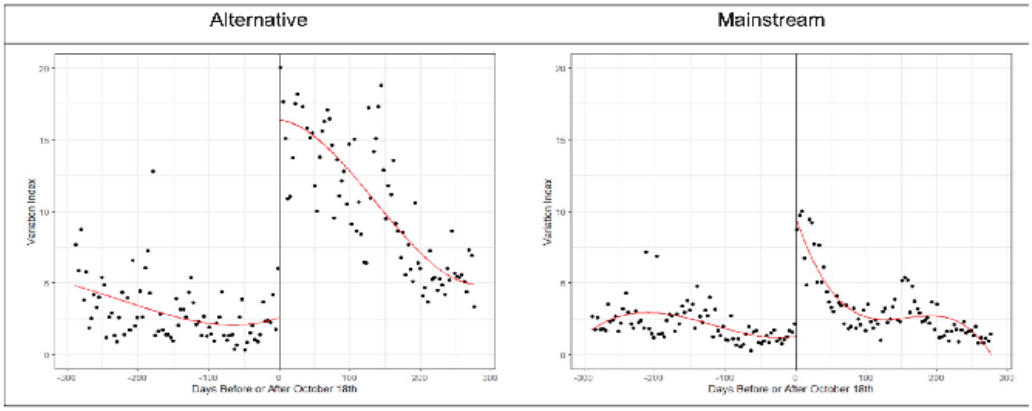


Figure 1. Trends in users' interactions with alternative and mainstream media.

To conduct an ES, an effect window (i.e., how many days before and after the event are considered for estimating the AR) needs to be defined first. We defined such period as 1 day before and 1 day after 18 October. Subsequently, we estimated AR using the historical mean model (HMM), the most used estimator to date (Pacicco et al., 2017). As shown in Table 3, the mass protests of 18 October 2019 produced a significant increase of interactions with both types of media. However, by January 2020, the trend had largely normalized for mainstream media, while continuing to show a significant increase for alternative media.

Table 3. Event Study Estimation.

Media Type	**Estimation Window**	**Event day (3-day window)**				
		18 April 2019	**18 July 2019**	**18 October 2019**	**18 January 2020**	**18 May 2020**
Alternative	1 January to 16 April 2019	1.36	-8.15	28.81***	15.76**	10.80
Mainstream	2 January to 16 April 2019	-0.45	-0.75	10.94**	-0.62	-2.37

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

Discussion

Unlike previous protest movements in Chile, the 18 October 2019 civic uprising targeted the whole political, economic, and social establishment. If prior movements had organized to enact changes in the education system, environmental policy, and women's rights—among other issues—the *estallido social* aimed at the core of the so-called Chilean model of democratic

neoliberalism (Nef, 2003). Thus, citizens protested not only against political and socioeconomic elites, but to media elites as represented by mainstream news outlets. This scenario represented a good case to examine how online engagement with news content can be influenced by social movements and protest behavior. The results of our longitudinal analysis of the diffusion of alternative and mainstream news media stories on Facebook found drastic changes in sharing patterns. Specifically, we found the diffusion of alternative media to be more stable and enduring than that of mainstream outlets.

We think that the most likely explanation for this finding is selective sharing—the notion that social media users are inclined to share pro-attitudinal content because it signals a particular identity, mobilizes like-minded peers, and counters political adversaries' oppositional discourse (Osmundsen et al., 2021). Due to their concentrated ownership structure, conservative editorial line, and dependence on corporate advertising, the news media in Chile are closely linked to the country's social and political elites (Dermota, 2002). Mainstream media have also enjoyed a strong agenda-setting and gatekeeping power over political elites (Valenzuela & Arriagada, 2011). For decades, carefully curated opinions and editorials in newspapers such as *El Mercurio*, *La Tercera*, and *La Segunda* consistently fed the agenda for subsequent political debates in radio and TV. This media ecosystem changed drastically, and quite suddenly, in the wake of the October 2019 riots. Existing alternative media gained renewed prominence in relation to the social movement, producing politically adversarial news stories and circulating evidence that was not widely covered by the mainstream media. At the same time, mainstream media, due to its close alignment to political elites, became a new target for social mobilization. While hashtags like #ApagaLaTele (translated as #TurnOffYourTV) went viral, TV stations became a target for oppositional graffities and protest activity. For example, the diffusion of police repression videos by alternative media not only challenged the claims made by the Piñera administration but crystallized the perception that alternative media exposed "reality" against a mainstream media system that was largely acquiescent to official narratives.

Our data and findings suggest that the success of most alternative media news sharing may have consolidated a counter-hegemonic public sphere in Chile. Of course, demonstrating that alternative media were proponents of a counter-public sphere requires content and discourse that go beyond our current purposes. Nevertheless, to the degree that most alternative media are left-wing oriented, and organized in networks against the for-profit, conglomerate-dominated, conservative-leaning mainstream media, it is possible that news sharing of alternative media news propelled the support for citizen-led protests.

Our evidence also suggests that the counter-hegemonic public sphere emerging around the 2019 protests produced lasting discontinuities. The causal dynamics that shape social and institutional trust are asymmetric in nature: Trust is hard to build but easy to lose. Moreover, doing the opposite of what caused losing trust does not necessarily rebuild confidence. Rather, it might deepen the reputational crisis. Our findings are consistent with this type of asymmetric causal dynamic. The 2019 social uprising revealed alternative public spheres that run counter to the dominant public sphere represented by Chile's mainstream news media.

Political communication dynamics around the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate the broader implications that the emergence of a counter-hegemonic public sphere creates for governance and public policy implementation. During 2020 and well up to 2021, when a

vaccine against coronavirus became available, the Piñera administration could not produce a coherent response to the COVID-19 crisis. The credibility crisis of the government and the mainstream media—even if not directly responsible for Chile's disproportionately high per capita contagion rates—may well have played a role in the country's health crisis. The government initially conceived the pandemic as political salvation and an opportunity to resurrect its legitimacy by reversing the effects of the October 2019 uprising. In this context, the government bet on communicating its strategy through the mainstream media to claim credit for the management of the pandemic. However, alternative media played a pivotal role in challenging the administration's figures, as well as in highlighting the disproportionate effects of the pandemic (and of the economic crisis induced by lockdowns) on the poor.

During 2020, the government thus had to constantly dispute alternative reports on the pandemic and its effects, without being able to regain control of the media agenda. In the meantime, Chile sank in world rankings as one of the worst performers in the management of COVID-19. Performance was especially problematic in terms of citizens' adherence to government instructions regarding lockdowns. As a result of the government's poor performance, President Piñera reshuffled his cabinet 3 times between June and August 2020—a record by Chilean standards.

Moreover, opposition lawmakers approved a law allowing citizens to use 10% of their retirement savings to cope with the economic crisis. The project was vocally opposed by Piñera and his cabinet through interviews, press conferences, and other media events. In addition, technocratic and business elites, both of whom opposed the initiative, were featured prominently and often in interviews and op-eds in elite media. Alternative media overwhelmingly sided with the opposition, while helping to expose conflicts of interest among the private pension fund administrators (the so-called AFP) and political and business elites. The law was finally passed in Congress with the support of numerous pro-government lawmakers who changed their vote days (and hours) before the final vote. According to available survey research, by that time, close to 90% of Chilean citizens supported the project, which saw a 10% increase in support during the week prior to the vote.

The role of alternative media in countries such as Chile remains an incipient phenomenon which long-term effects on and broader implications for political mobilization remain to be observed. New research is needed to complement our preliminary empirical analysis with other data sources. In that regard, it is essential to recall that Facebook's algorithm ranks contents in ways that remain rather obscure to researchers. Such rankings can significantly impact the currency and relevance of different contents, thus shaping news selectivity. For instance, it may be that Facebook tracked high engagement around stories shared by alternative media and boosted that early engagement by making those stories more visible. If that is the case, sharing patterns described here may not be capturing an organic set of news selections by users. In addition, we still lack access to the number of people who actually see a given post on Facebook. Hypothetically, it could be that shares increase but web traffic does not. Thus, our interpretation that increased sharing of alternative media stories supports counter-publics might be exaggerated, as the latter necessarily involves more than sharing (i.e., more profound forms of engagement such as deliberation and common-value formation, see Leung & Lee, 2014). Future studies might thus consider measuring other engagement indicators with alternative media and counter-publics and conducting qualitative interviews and focus

groups with different media audiences and citizen groups. Content analyses of viral posts offer another possibility that we plan to pursue.

Increased interactions do not necessarily tell us much about the content of those interactions. For instance, it is possible that interactions generated by alternative media were critical of the content of news pieces published by them. Moreover, given the broad definition of alternative media adopted here, it is possible that different types of outlets, within that category, display different patterns of interactions. In this article, we have focused on massive and statistically significant differences between two broadly defined media types. New research should hence analyze within-group differences, as well as qualitative appraisals of the specific content of interactions and engagement with each media type.

Limitations notwithstanding, our research strongly suggests that alternative media is instrumental in shaping subsequent sociopolitical events in Chile, such as the management of COVID-19 pandemic. Alternative media have helped challenge social and economic elites' capacity to control and frame the political agenda of the country. Alternative media has not only contributed to reshape the news diet of Chilean users but also editorial decisions in at least some mainstream media outlets. For instance, the TV network La Red changed its editorial line to match a civil society that is more critical of the status quo after the 2019 protests. Moreover, new small-scale and highly segmented media enterprises have mushroomed in the aftermath of the 2019 protests (e.g., podcasts, Twitter accounts specialized in investigative reporting, fact-checking initiatives). These new media not only compete with mainstream media for audience; they also provide professional opportunities for independent journalism to prosper in a context in which agenda-setting was previously hegemonized by an elite-controlled media system.

Although the contested reshaping of Chilean media described in this study might be thought as highly idiosyncratic, several of its structural features are shared with other cases in Latin America and elsewhere. Among others are (a) the presence of a highly concentrated mainstream media arena tied to the economic and political interests of the establishment, (b) mounting discontent that eventually breaks into massive protests and rioting, and (c) an available (web-based) technology that significantly reduces the entry costs for alternative media to contest official narratives. We are thus likely to observe similar dynamics to those described here for the Chilean case in countries sharing similar structural features.

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CHAPTER 51

Iranian Internet Cinema, a Cinema of Embodied Protest: Imperfect, Amateur, Small, Unauthorized, Global

Hamid Naficy

In *Media and Mapping Practices in the Middle East and North Africa: Producing Space,* edited by Alena Strohmaier and Angela Krewani, 119–38. Amsterdam University Press, 2017.

Abstract

This chapter examines the emergence of what I call 'internet cinema' by focusing on Iran in the late 2000s, particularly since the 2009 disputed re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president, which unleashed the opposition Green Movement undergirded by this cinema. Iran provides an example of the use of the new internet-driven digital global media in support of democratic ideals that, soon after the Green Movement, rocked many authoritarian regimes of the Middle East and North Africa.

BY-NC-ND

Keywords

Internet cinema, Iran, Green Movement, amateur

The Emergence of a Citizen's Medium

With the success of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the Islamic Republic took over the broadcast media and placed it under direct control of the 'supreme leader'. Having gotten rid of one authoritarian regime with a monopolistic state-run broadcast media under the Shah, Iranians did not take this lying down. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, they engaged in a creative cat-and- mouse game with the state to create thriving black markets for alternative media, particularly for video—by means of a mushrooming video club scene—and satellite television—by means of clandestine receivers at home and Persian extraterritorial satellite stations (Naficy 2012a, pp. 339–348). However, they did not stop there. In the 2000s, Iranians developed a third front in the struggle to create an alternative citizen-driven public medium. This was emblematized by the emergence of the internet cinema with which Iranians worldwide challenged the Islamic regime's broadcasting monopoly and mono-vocalism during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, particularly after his disputed re-election (Naficy 2012b, pp. 348–362).

This was a new, legitimate, artistic, and expressive form, regardless of its political uses. Iranian cosmopolitanism, the financial wealth of the country, and the widespread penetration of the internet and its various modalities of connectivity and interactivity drove the emergence of the internet cinema. In 2005, CIA officers at the Open Source Center trolling the internet discovered that Persian/Farsi was among the top five languages in the blogosphere, offering valuable textual and audiovisual information and insight about Iranian people and their sentiments (Shane 2005). In 2008, a Harvard University study further showed that the Persian blogosphere is 'a large discussion space of approximately 60,000 routinely updated blogs featuring a rich and varied mix of bloggers' that ranges from President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to students (Kelly and Etling 2008, p. 2). Still later studies showed that Iran has 'the most internet users in the Middle East, approaching 30 million' and that Persian is reported as the 'fourth most popular Blogging language on the Internet' (Shahab and Mousoli 2010).

However, as Sreberny and Khiabany rightly note, these figures are ambiguous, as it is not clear how the number of bloggers is calculated and what constitutes an Iranian blog. If the physical location of bloggers is the criteria (counting only those inside Iran), the calculation would ignore the large number of bloggers in the diaspora; if the language of blogging is considered (Persian/Farsi), then all those Iranians, dual national Iranians, and non-Iranians who write in other languages are ignored (2010, pp. 35–36). However they are counted, Iranian bloggers formed a formidable presence in the blogosphere in particular and in cyberspace in general. Because of this presence and because of the strangling of other forms of journalism, the internet became a vital source of information and activism in the 2000s for all sides and a highly contested public diplomacy sphere. The 25-minute film *Iran: The Cyber-Dissidents* (2006), produced by Vivien Altman and reported by Mark Corcoran for Australian Broadcasting Corporation, deals with this burgeoning phenomenon.

What I call 'internet cinema' [1] consists of the totality of the digital media connected by the internet—blogs, films, social networks, and the sharing and streaming of videos—which have turned the internet's virtual space into a vast online public sphere that, in turn, encourages discursive formations and political activism in society, such as the Green Movement, which demand government accountability and democracy. The internet thus became social, not only in its virtuality but also in its actuality. The streets, in turn, became virtual, both in their powerful representations on the internet and in their power to represent. This movement posed the biggest challenge in the lifespan of the Islamic Republic of Iran, not only to its legitimacy but also temporarily to its existence.

Mainstream Western media and exiled Iranian media lauded the power of this new virtual and discursive space ad infinitum, which prematurely and erroneously dubbed the new protests a 'Twitter Revolution', ignoring the fact that technology and media by themselves do not make a revolution (Acuff 2010). In fact, Twitter played a relatively small role at the time inside Iran, partly because of government censorship, but it proved more effective outside the country in publicizing the events (Esfandiari 2010). While Twitter and Facebook were used admirably to exchange information, file news reports and images, and organize protests domestically and internationally (Hashem and Najjar 2010), the social space and the physical place remained high on the agenda of the protesters, emblematized by a street placard carrying the following slogan, addressed to the regime: 'We'll give you back the web sites and mobile phones, but we won't give you the country' (*'Seit O' mobeil arzunitun, keshvar nemidim behetun'*), referring, on the one hand, to the power of the government to shut down the internet and mobile phones and, on the other hand, to the power of citizens to withhold support and to fight back.

The negative consequences of the shift in US and Iranian public diplomacies, from gathering secret information from enemy countries through espionage to collecting information from public sources in those countries, such as through the internet, for mobilizing soft power, was that it politicized, even militarized, all public spheres, including the streets and the internet. Both the people and the government in Iran became camera-shy in public places in major cities. If someone took out a camera to take a picture in the streets, both government agents and passers-by harassed the person—one fearing that the image would be uploaded to social networking sites or to oppositional sites, feeding the gathering anti-regime dissent; the other fearing government surveillance and future arrests. As a result, some of the early protest videos were filmed almost clandestinely, from private places like balconies and from inside apartments and offices, where the filmers were not exposed. Nevertheless, the government attempted to remove, impede, or block these public sources of information and to surveil, track down, imprison, and severely punish the internet operators and users it considered to be aiding the dissidents. Ironically, the US sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran, too, initially contributed to the suppression of the digital uprising of Iranians. Although the sanctions law, dating from the Clinton presidency, prohibited Americans from exporting goods and services to Iran, it allowed certain exceptions, among them 'information and informational materials' (Parsi, Elliot, and Disney 2010, p. 164). The problem was that internet technology, or any technology developed in the 1990s, was apparently not covered under this exception,

[1] This chapter is a modified version of a section from Nafcy 2012a, pp. 348–362.

with the result that companies such as Microsoft and Google denied their instant messaging to Iranians (MSN Messenger and Google Talk) because these depended on user downloads, which were interpreted as constituting not information but prohibited service. Even Twitter's legal status came under question until the Obama administration removed the doubt, when in the aftermath of the 2009 elections, it asked Twitter to 'forego routine maintenance in order to continue providing uninterrupted service to Iranians' (Parsi, Elliot, and Disney 2010, p. 165). Six months later, the Iranian Digital Empowerment Act, spearheaded by Representative Jim Moran, which 'authorized downloads of free mass market software by companies such as Microsoft and Google to Iran necessary for exchange of personal communications and/or sharing of information over the internet such as instant messaging, chat and email, and social networking' (Parsi, Elliot, and Disney 2010, p. 166), was passed by the US Congress.

The regime's impediments and censorship efforts did not deter the opposition, either; instead, it encouraged a creative but sometimes deadly and violent game of cat and mouse—both on the internet and in the streets. Protesters found ever more ingenuous alternatives to stay in touch, reconnect, and coordinate actions, and they sought new strategies, internal and international, to create an alternative non-governmental mediascape to publicize their own activities and grievances, organize their protests, and pressure and punish the regime. Many resorted to proxies, which redirected them to banned sites, or used anonymizers, which concealed the identities of senders and recipients. Foremost among these anti-censorship software tools were Tor, Psiphon, Mixminion, Incognito, Freegate, and the purportedly more ingenuous programme Haystack, designed especially for Iran by American hacktivist Austin Heap (Dobson 2010). Many, too, took to the streets to agitate and to record events. One placard in a street demonstration around the time of the disputed 2009 election carried the pithy slogan, 'My [mobile] phone, my medium' ('*Telefon-e man, resaneh-ye man*'), which summarized the defiance of the protesters against the state and its centralized 'big' media, the broadcast media. Amplifying that message, another said 'Every Iranian, a historiographer' ('*Har Irani tarikhnegar*'). A cartoon echoed these sentiments by depicting an Iranian woman wearing a crown of light and posing like the US Statue of Liberty, but instead of holding a lit torch, she holds up a mobile phone emanating waves.

This was the moment for the efflorescence of a new 'little medium', the internet cinema, with its simple, ubiquitous equipment—a mobile phone or a consumer model digital camera or recorder—to replace the formerly powerful little medium of analogue audio cassette, which Ayatollah Khomeini had employed so effectively to energize the Islamic Revolution in the late 1970s (Naficy 2011). This was a new era, necessitating a new medium, for a new cause. Indeed, each protester became a digital medium and a historiographer by taking to the streets, digital camera, mobile phone, or recorder in hand, defying the government's threats of force and terror and its monopoly on the big media. Oppositional film-making against the Islamic Republic of Iran took varied forms: documentaries, fiction films, agitprop films, animated films, internet films, and music videos. Here, I discuss the latter two.

Production, Distribution, Exhibition, Reception

Emboldened by their initial successes in publicizing the protests, internet cinema filmers began to record their videos from the turmoil in the streets, at ground level, instead of from

the safety of the high-rise buildings and from behind windows and curtains as before. With this shift from the private to the public space, and from a distant view to a close-up view of the subjects, came other fundamental political and aesthetic changes in what was recorded. Social barriers and divisions, such as those separating genders, crumbled. Women therefore became such a strong and defiant presence both in the streets and on internet cinema's community videos. Hamed Yusefi's 25-minute film, *The Aesthetics of Political Protest in Iran* (*Zibashenasi-ye E'terazat-e Siasi dar Iran*), aired by BBC Persian on 22 July 2010, provides insightful analysis of these points.

In addition, instead of recording from the point of view of an outsider observing news events, community videographers began to record from the point of view of insiders, engaged in action. Their recording mode thus shifted from direct cinema's fly-on-the-wall observational filming of outside events to cinéma-vérité's provocation-cum-recording of pro-filmic events (Nichols 2001). As such, theirs was not a simple recording of protests that someone else had organized, but an embodied form of protest in whose organization they themselves participated, with all the subjectivity, ambiguity, and hapticity—roughness, shakiness, and out of focus and chaotic aiming and muffled sounds—that these entailed. The result was unedited raw footage of affect, not edited films of a polished presentation. These proved to be very powerful when uploaded onto the video sharing and social networking sites, bypassing government control and censorship.

Unlike traditional films, which are highly planned affairs and involve industrial procedures, high-tech equipment, and numerous skilled personnel both in front and behind the camera, led by a hierarchical command structure, internet films are often a result of individual amateur filmers from around the world sharing their spontaneously shot scenes on video sharing and social media sites. These unplanned scenes become films not by the action of these filmers, but by the actions of others who may utilize the scenes filmed by disparate and unrelated filmers in constructing other longer films of their own or by the actions of the viewers as they surf the net, visiting this or that social media platform. If the first kind of film is a material, 'produced' film consisting of scenes contributed by multiple filmers, the second kind of film is an immaterial 'received' film created by each viewer in the act of receiving or spectating multiple unrelated film scenes. The result is not a single, authoritative film in either case, as each film is the result of the actions of one person, which, at least in the case of the received film, will be entirely individual, personal, immaterial, and immanent to the spectating subject.

However, the affective power of these internet films is often diluted when Western television channels broadcast them, for they often suppress the original Persian language soundtrack, replacing it with their own reporters' voice-over narrations or commentaries. To be sure, the video of Neda Agha-Soltan's on-camera death as broadcast by Western news media was very powerful, but this power came from its tragic content, timing, brief length (40 seconds), and the favourable semiotics of Agha-Soltan's youth, beauty, fair skin, and Westernized veil and attire, which made her a subject with whom Westerners could easily identify (Sabety 2010; Afshar 2010). Its power also came from the video's powerful visuality, the way it clearly witnessed the last eye contact of the dying young woman with the camera, as life departed from her body. However, if viewers saw the original raw footage of her on the internet, without the foreign reporters' voice-over intervention, they would hear the voices of the bystanders—all male—gathered around her trying to console her, communicate with each other, and save

her, as their voices rise into desperate cries, making the video much more compelling in its emotional and visceral impact. Here is my transcription of the bystanders' utterances, some of which are not sufficiently audible:

- 'Let's get someone to carry her away…' [to a hospital?]
- 'Neda! Watch her eyes, watch her eyes.'
- 'Her eyes are turning in.'
- 'Neda, don't be afraid, don't be afraid.'
- 'Oh, oh, oh, OH!' [voices rise to desperate shouts]
- 'Press on her, press on her.' [hands press on her chest, presumably the site of her gunshot wound]
- 'Neda, stay, stay, stay, STAY!' [man's voice rises to a frantic and horrifying shout]
- 'Open her mouth, open her mouth.'[2]

This sort of affective internet cinema augured not only entirely new relations with its social subjects, such as Neda as described above, but also new relations of production, distribution, exhibition, and reception with its viewers. While the site of production of the internet cinema in its initial phases was primarily public places—either in the streets or underground—the site of reception was chiefly private places—homes and other private or semi-private locations. Production—filming—was ad hoc, spontaneous, amateurish, and without official permission, bypassing the strict government approval and censorship apparatuses for public filming. As such, internet cinema is inherently an unauthorized, underground cinema. Its technology of recording is no longer optical and chemical, involving celuloid film or videotape, but is entirely electronic and digital. This technological shift facilitates the globalized production, distribution, and reception of the internet cinema videos.

The production of this cinema occurred in two distinct phases. In the first phase, people with digital cameras recorded the events without editing and uploaded them to internet sites, hence my designation of these practitioners as filmers or videographers, not film-makers. In the case of Agha-Soltan's video, an anonymous person recorded the incident on a mobile phone. In a growing practice, a second phase evolved, during which others, who were not necessarily involved in the first phase, compiled, aggregated, repurposed, edited, and uploaded these internet videos to create other fictional or non- fictional videos. This secondary phase turns multiple individual scenes recorded by disparate filmers into a single film.

Distribution of internet cinema videos is simultaneously both individualized and globalized. The digitized recording of events and their uploading onto social networking, video sharing, and video streaming sites as well as their publication by global news media outlets facilitates this globalized individuality or individualized globalization. In this way, ordinary videographers become not only extraordinary producers but also extraordinary distributors, who bypass the traditional commercial or governmental distribution systems with their complicated monopolistic techno-political economies. In the case of Agha-Soltan's video, the anonymous filmer forwarded the video to the British newspaper *The Guardian*, the network Voice of America, and five other individuals. Significantly, according to *The Guardian*,

[2] To see the video, go to: *Neda Agha-Soltan Shot in Iran*, http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x9oltq_neda-agha-soltan-shot-in-iran_news.

one of these latter individuals—not the filmer—uploaded the video onto Facebook, showing the two-step production of internet films. From that one posting, copies spread to YouTube and were broadcast within hours by CNN. This video was then used in, or served to inspire, numerous types of internet films—fiction, documentary, music video, and animated films. It is thus that this single video went viral and became simultaneously an icon, index, and symbol of the post-election protest and of the democratic aspirations of Iranians—the Green Movement—fulfilling all three definitions of the sign in Charles Sanders Peirce's semiology.

The exhibition venue of the internet cinema vastly differed from other forms of cinema. It shifted from the stationary brick-and-mortar cinemas where people watch films collectively according to a schedule, to small and mobile handheld devices, on which individuals with internet access can watch films at any time, anywhere in the world. This meant that internet cinema's exhibition was freed from both physical location and physical structure, becoming global and virtual. In short, in all its phases of production, distribution, exhibition, and reception, internet cinema moved from professional and formal to amateur and personal forms, marking the ultimate triumph of modernity's individuality in Iranian cinematic expression.

Because of their highly individualized production; their spontaneous, embodied, and amateur aesthetics; their small-scale, short length, and unedited raw footage; and their mobility, first-phase internet videos cannot satisfactorily be labelled as cinema. However, I am applying that term to them because they are a new form of audiovisual expression on their own, and they spawn, in their second phase, other longer, more robust, and professional works, which are exhibited both on the internet and in the cinemas. The internet cinema thus added another type to the typology of cinemas that emerged in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Whatever the most accurate terminology, the fact remains that instead of being dismissed by the world on the grounds of their amateur, improvised aesthetics and brief bursts of raw footage of affect, internet videos gained an added value precisely because of those characteristics of imperfection, which were reminiscent of the Third Cinema's aesthetics of gritty imperfection that in the 1960s and 1970s, had countered both the reigning oppressive political regimes in the world and mainstream cinema's oppressive aesthetic regime of polish and perfection. In fact, the aesthetics of imperfection, smallness, and embodiment of these videos authenticated them fully, as intimate and defiant documents of their filmers' presence on the ground, documenting, provoking, and protesting against a seemingly hegemonic and intractable state and its media.

International recognition of Iranian internet cinema of protest was swift, not only in the reiteration and transmedial dissemination of its videos but also in the awards received from film festivals and media and journalism associations—another reason to call them internet cinema. For example, in 2009 Long Island University bestowed its prestigious journalism award, the George Polk Award for Videography, to the video of Neda Agha-Soltan in recognition of 'the efforts of the people responsible for recording the death of 26-year-old Neda Agha-Soltan at a June protest in Tehran, Iran, and uploading the video to the Internet'.[3]

Internet films, such as Agha-Soltan's video, soon became the contents of other protest films and videos made in different forms—fiction, documentary, animated, and music videos—and some were used, reused, remade, remixed, homaged, signified upon, and repurposed so many

[3] See: https://liu.edu/polk-awards/past-winners#2009

times and so transmedially and rhizomatically in a meandering global chain reaction that they became viral and infectious, even though virality has usually been associated with comedy (Gurney 2011).[4] One of these is *The Green Wave* (2010), which premiered internationally at the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam in 2011. Directed by Iranian-born German film- maker Ali Samadi Ahadi, the film, according to its press book, is a 'touching documentary-collage' that illustrates the dramatic 2009 presidential election protests and expresses the feelings of the people involved in the Green Movement. Emblematic of internet cinema,

> Facebook reports, Twitter messages and videos posted in the internet are included in the film composition, and hundreds of real blog entries serve as reference for the experiences and thoughts of two young students, whose story is running through the film as the main thread. The film describes their initial hope and curiosity, their desperate fear, and the courage to yet continue to fight.[5]

These fictional storylines were animated using motion comic technique, and augmented by interviews with prominent human rights campaigners and exiled Iranians, such as Shirin Ebadi, Mohsen Kadivar, Payam Akhavan, Mehdi Mohseni, and Mitra Khalatbari.

These extended internet cinema films, too, received international praise and prizes. For example, in November 2010 the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam recognized the importance of these internet films when it gave its Unlimited Award to *The Silent Majority Speaks* (2010) by The Silent Collective, a 93-minute film anthology consisting of fourteen films made on mobile phones and similar devices by anonymous Iranians about the post-election protests and the state violence against protestors. The 5000-euro cash award given to the film was an initiative of Hivos Cultural Fund, one of the NGOs that the Iranian intelligence ministry had identified as supporting a velvet revolution against the regime. The award was given to an Iranian women's rights activist, Mahboubeh Abbasgholizade, condemned in absentia in Iran to two-and-a-half years of prison and 30 lashes, who dedicated her film to the anonymous citizen filmers.[6] In addition, in November 2010, the Foreign Press Association named Iranian journalist Saeed Kamali Dehghan, who regularly writes for *The Guardian*, 'journalist of the year' for his coverage of the disputed presidential election and gave the top award for best TV Feature/Documentary film to the HBO film *For Neda*, which Anthony Thomas had co-directed with Kamali Dehghan (Batty 2010). All these are examples of the internet cinema in its various modalities.

Hailing/Counterhailing

Music videos became one of the most powerful forms of the internet cinema, driven by the global popularity of the music video form, the emergence of dynamic Iranian rock music groups inside Iran and in the diaspora, and the continuing disenchantment of Iranians with their regime. These music videos became effective means of counterhailing the state and its repressive apparatuses. Blurred Vision, a Toronto-based rock band formed in 2007 by brothers

[4] *Neda*, an animated version, offers a historical background of the incident: http://www. youtube.com/watch?v=wXN_yCSbUYk&feature=related.

[5] *The Green Wave* press book: http://www.thegreenwave-film.com.

[6] 'Jayezeh-ye Sinemai Bara-ye "Filmsazan-e Nashenas-e" Iran', http://zamaaneh.com/news/2010/11/post_14948.html.

Sepp and Sohl, who fled Iran with their family in 1986 (and do not reveal their last name to safeguard family members' security in Iran), produced one of the more powerful music videos supporting the protesters of Ahmadinejad's re-election. This video became very popular if not viral. On 30 January 2010, the band remade the famous Pink Floyd song 'Another Brick in the Wall', popular in Iran, into a clear-eyed new protest anthem, 'Another Brick in the Wall (Hey, Ayatollah, Leave Those Kids Alone!)'. In it, they intercut footage of their purported clandestine performance of the song inside Iran, filmed by a fan on a mobile phone, with those of street clashes filmed by anonymous filmers, and an overbearing Ayatollah character who orders the security police to shut down the performance. Within a short time, the music video had been played an impressive 383,394 times on YouTube; however, the brothers were more impressed by the responses from inside Iran.[7] Sepp explained:

> We get a lot of emails, especially from the younger guys, and I remember we were in London for a film festival where we were there to receive an award for best video and Sohl was translating an email into English. And as he was translating he started crying. The email said, 'It is you guys out there that can keep this going for us, that can keep our voice alive. We're here sort of isolated from the rest of the world, we've been shut down and shut off from the rest of the world and all we can say is just keep our voice alive, keep going to allow us to reach this point of freedom. (quoted in Macedo 2010)

That YouTube was often shut down by the Islamic government made such a response all the more significant, since users had to go through extra steps to get around censorship (without censorship, the hits the video received would have been much higher). Not all the comments were positive, however, as some people accused the band of being involved in American soft-power public diplomacy against Iran, of being 'backed by the CIA and the Pentagon and making a fortune off the U.S. government', a charge the band denied, stating that it donates most of the song's download proceeds to Amnesty International. 'It's an ethos of the band that awareness can change the world and music is our tool and platform to do that,' said Sepp, 'and in my opinion it's truly working because the dialogue has begun.' (quoted in Macedo 2010)

'Hey Executioner, Get Lost!' (*'Hey Jallad, Gom Kon Gureto!'*) (2011) is another music video on the protest movement that tapped into Pink Floyd's 'Another Brick in the Wall' song and quoted a line from Blurred Vision's music video version of it, except 'Hey Executioner' is more incendiary than its predecessor. It identifies President Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Khamenei as the executioners in its title, urging them to leave a country that is no longer theirs. The video clips of the street demonstrations that accompany the lyrics include images of orderly protests, which are disrupted by police violence, causing the angry demonstrators to turn on the uniformed and plain-clothes police officers, whom they beat up mercilessly and whose van they turn over. The video's message is no longer protest but revolt, summarized in the lyrics, 'We are full of anger, like the typhoon/ We are engaged in a relentless battle/ Listen to me my enemy, there is no place for you in my homeland/ Hey executioner, get lost'.[8]

Yet another effective counterhailing song, which spawned music videos on YouTube, was 'Thorn and Riffraff' (*'Khas O' Khashak'*), which Iranians produced to counter what Ahmadinejad had once labelled the thousands of demonstrators to his re-election, as 'a few thorns and

[7] Blurred Vision's *Another Brick in the Wall*'s music video is at: http://www.dailymotion.com/ video/xcp5ua_blurred-vision-another-brick-in-the_music.

[8] *Hey Executioner, Get Lost* music video is at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wR77TN1_d8k&feature=player_embedded#at=60.

riffraff'. The song turns Ahmadinejad's own words against him and his regime, addressing them in its refrain: You are the thorn and riffraff/ You are lower than dirt/ I am the aching lover/ Ablaze, bright, and full of fervor. [9]

Clearly, these music videos and many others like them, which incorporate internet cinema footage, are examples of citizens withdrawing their support from the regime, and they constitute one of the most effective peaceful means of combatting intolerant and undemocratic regimes. However, these videos took one step further from those that did not feature music video footage. All of them reversed the interpellation that Althusser describes in his famous illustration of a police officer calling a citizen: 'Hey! You, there' (Althusser and Balibar 1971). By turning to respond to the police officer call in that example, the passer-by is hailed and becomes a subject of the state. Instead of being hailed by the state and its agents ('Hey! You, there'), in these videos it is the protesters and their global sympathizers and collaborators who counterhail the state, not only in the video's titles but also in their frequent shouted refrains addressed to the regime: 'Hey, Ayatollah, Leave Those Kids Alone!', 'Hey Executioner, Get Lost!', and 'You are the thorn and riffraff / You are lower than dirt'. It is in this power not only to withdraw consent but also to counterhail the state, of speaking truth to power, that internet cinema finds its political fulfilment.

The Iranian government moved to stifle this new form of cinema, both in its production and dissemination. It began arresting virtual and social activists and videographers, and it arrested an increasing number of bloggers, whose labour complemented the internet cinema, sentencing them to jail terms ranging from a few months to many years. In 2004 it arrested some 20 bloggers and internet journalists (Tehrani 2008), and between 2000 and 2006 Iran became the top censor of the internet in the Middle East (El Gody 2007, p. 223), thwarting the democratic potential of the internet as well as of Iranians. Within a few years, Reporters Without Borders was able to label the Islamic Republic of Iran, along with thirteen other countries, as 'enemies of the Internet' (Shahab and Mousoli 2010). In September 2008, prominent Iranian Canadian blogger, Hosain Derakhshan (nicknamed blogfather, aka Hoder.com), was arrested inside Iran on a variety of charges, among them, collaborating with hostile foreign powers, including Israel. Derakhshan had been the editor of the Internet and Film section of *Doniya-ye Tasvir* (*World of Pictures*) magazine in Tehran and after emigrating to Canada, had introduced 'a simple but groundbreaking' way to show Persian letters and characters on the internet, which contributed to the prominence of Iranians in the blogosphere. This charge of spying was apparently due to a well-publicized trip of his in 2006 to Israel (on his Canadian passport) whose aims were to show 'his 20,000 daily Iranian readers what Israel really looks like and how people live there', and to 'humanize' Iranians for Israelis (Theodoulou 2008). A controversial figure among the blogging community, he had toned down his anti-regime blogging and began supporting it, and he returned to Iran from his self-imposed exile, hoping to work inside the country. He was jailed for nearly two years before finally being sentenced to an incredible nineteen and a half years of imprisonment on charges of 'conspiring with hostile governments, spreading propaganda against the Islamic system, spreading propaganda in favour of counterrevolutionary groups, blasphemy, and creating and managing obscene Web sites' (Mackey 2010).

[9] For *Khas o Khashak*, go to: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtLp2VMYF5o.

'Like journalists, bloggers have been treated for months as if they are enemies of the regime', Reporters Without Borders said. 'But the authorities have now started to impose much harsher sentences on them. Bloggers involved in censorship circumvention are being particularly targeted as they help their fellow citizens to gain access to banned information.'[10] Internet censorship took many forms, not only imprisonment but also more subtle and structural forms, such as censorship laws and regulations, content filtering, tapping and surveillance, infrastructural control, telecom control, and self-censorship (El Gody 2007, p. 231). Imprisonment, however, remained a common form of censorship. The Committee to Protect Journalists reported that by February 2010, there were 52 journalists in Iranian jails, a record high that accounted for a third of all the journalists imprisoned in the world.[11] A month later, Reporters Without Borders noted that

> with some sixty journalists and bloggers behind bars and another 50 forced to seek asylum elsewhere, the Islamic Republic of Iran has become the largest prison in the Middle East—and one of the world's largest prisons—for journalists and netizens.[12]

Undeterred, some Iranian activists came up with another tactic: they took legal action against the Islamic Republic's interests from outside Iran. In August 2010, jailed and tortured prominent journalist Isa Saharkhiz and his son, Mehdi Saharkhiz, filed a lawsuit in the US Federal Court in Alexandria, Virginia, against Nokia Siemens Networks and its parent companies, Siemens AG and Nokia Inc., alleging their complicity in the Iranian government's human rights violations through the spying centres that the companies had supplied. The journalist claimed that such centres had conducted surveillance, eavesdropping, and tracking of his mobile phone and other communications after the 2009 elections, resulting in his incarceration and torture. The plaintiffs demanded that Nokia Siemens Networks cease its support of the Iranian intercepting centres and use its connections within the Iranian regime to secure Saharkhiz's freedom. They also called on the United States's judicial system to hold accountable business practices such as the ones engaged in by Nokia Siemens Networks in Iran.[13]

In another tactic, International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran called for the removal of Ezzatollah Zarghami, Director General of Voice and Vision of the Islamic Republic (VVIR, aka IRIB, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting), the state's national broadcast monopoly, on the charge that in addition to its close cooperation with intelligence agents and interrogators, the VVIR, under Zarghami's direction, had 'systematically produced and broadcast programs aimed to target well-known personalities through attributing undue, libellous, and untrue matters to them' (Zarghami 2010). This was a reference to the latest iteration of *Identity* and *Armageddon* shows, a new series called *Sedition Documents* that purported to offer documentaries about reformists such as Ataollah Mohajerani, Abdolkarim Sorush, Akbar Ganji, Shirin Ebadi, Fatemeh Haqiqatju, and Mohsen Sazegara, many in diaspora, aired on main VVIR channels during prime time. Having no access to them to interrogate and force them into incriminating show trials, these state-sanctioned documentaries smeared these individuals by digging up dirt in their private lives and by falsely presenting them as immoral and hostile to Islam

[10] https://rsf.org/en/news/one-blogger-freed-bail-another-blogger-denied-parole.

[11] http://cpj.org/2010/03/with-52-journalists-in-jail-iran-hits-new-shamefu.php.

[12] http://en.rsf.org/spip.php?page=article&id_article=36684.

[13] See: http://onlymehdi.posterous.com/tortured-prominent-iranian-journalist-sues-no.

and to religion (Siamand 2010). The campaign further demanded that the Iranian parliament and judiciary launch an independent inquiry into VVIR's violations of the constitution and citizens' rights on behalf of the defamed individuals who could not defend themselves in the court of public opinion because of the government monopoly of all broadcast media.[14] Assessing the success or failure of these extraterritorial legal interventions in impeding Iranian government's illegal attacks on its own citizens requires further research.

Public Diplomacy and Soft-Power Politics

The Iranian regime took a page from the US government's soft-power public diplomacy rule book, went global, and began countering the US government's funding of anti-Islamic Republic and pro-democracy NGOs inside and outside Iran. This included supporting and funding NGOs in the West that engaged in cultural programming that favoured the Islamic Republic.[15] It also began a wide-ranging 'campaign of harassing and intimidating members of its diaspora worldwide—not just prominent dissidents—who criticize the regime' (Bandow 2009). This unprecedented action consisted not only of slowing down the internet speed, blocking social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter), video-sharing sites (YouTube), internet telephone services (Skype), and cutting email service inside Iran, but also of tracking the activities of Iranians on networking sites worldwide, creating fake sites for the protesters to rope in more victims, monitoring Iranian protesters in diaspora (900 were tracked in Germany), videotaping their public demonstrations in order to harass them and their families at home, and sending them anonymous threatening emails to cease and desist from 'spreading lies and insults' (Fassihi 2009). All these measures may have been facilitated and enhanced by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' takeover of the telecom infrastructure.

It must be noted that the situation governing the internet in Iran is very complicated and conflictual not only within the opposing factions—pro- and anti-government—but also within each faction. For example, within the ruling faction, one faction bans Twitter while others turn to it as their favourite medium of communication with their cadres and to the nation. On 15 August 2018, Mohammad Jafar Montazeri, the attorney general, condemned the actions of some of the lawmakers to lift the ban on Twitter, calling it a 'highway to corruption' whose control is in the hands of 'the enemy'. His deputy accused Twitter of having had a major hand in the 'seditious' Green Movement, which led to its banning soon thereafter. Despite that ban, not only ordinary citizens and social activists but also high-ranking officials such as Abbas Ali Kadkhodai, the spokesperson for the Guardian Council, and even the supreme leader himself, Ali Khamenei, maintain their Twitter accounts and actively communicate

[14] 'Iranian State TV Acts as an Arm of the Intelligence Apparatus', http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2010/08/iranian-state-tv-acts-as-an-arm-of-the-intelligence-apparatus/print/.

[15] One NGO that purportedly received such help was the Center for Iranian Studies in Toronto; see: 'Is Toronto Cultural Centre Funded by Iran's Mullah Regime?', http://www.onlydemocracy4iran.com/2010/04/15/is-toronto-cultural-centre-funded-by-irans-mullah-regime/. National Iranian American Council (NIAC) has also been accused of promoting Islamic Republic causes by some exiles, even though it has received funding from the US government and other American foundations, which would militate against such cross-funding. NIAC denies any affiliations with the Iranian regime. See: 'EDITORIAL: Voice of the mullahs: Public diplomacy takes a pro-Islamist tilt', http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/apr/14/voice-of-the-mullahs/; http://english.iranianlobby.com/page1.php?id=22&bakhsh=JOURNAL; http://www.niacouncil. org/site/PageServer?pagename=About_myths_facts.

with them.[16] Kadkhodai went as far as to state that he does not consider using Twitter to be illegal.[17] The cat-and-mouse game around social media continues at all levels and in all sectors of society.

In 2010, Ahmadinejad's government attempted another tactic: it put on another charm offensive for the Iranians in diaspora who had previously been denigrated by the Islamic Republic leaders. It established the High Council of Iranians Abroad, which sought to attract thousands of professional Iranians and potential investors to visit, invest in, and return to Iran. It also sought to facilitate their travels by establishing a 24-hour hotline, establishing branch offices of the council in Iranian provinces, supporting the creation of 'Iran House' branches in foreign countries, and organizing in Tehran a massive Grand Conference of Iranians Living Abroad, offering to pay for participants' travel and accommodations.[18] However, instead of 'polishing Iran's image', the grand conference, 'ended up showcasing many of the country's bitter internal divisions' (Yong and Worth 2010), and the opposition was quick to post the participants' names and pictures on the internet in an effort to 'expose the double crossers'.[19]

Such politicization of digital media and the internet by the public diplomacy quartet of partners—Western powers, the Iranian regime, Iranian dissidents at home, and Iranian dissidents in diaspora—had the unfortunate result of deeply and structurally politicizing the Iranian domestic and diaspora media and internet cinema, whether their contents were political or not, degrading their professional impartiality and journalistic fairness, and undermining the media and civil society formations inside and outside the country, regardless of whether they had accepted American or Iranian governments funding or not, feeding Iranians' penchant for conspiracy thinking. It also made Iranian or binational Iranian intellectuals, academics, artists, bloggers, filmers, film-makers, and community activists, whether they were beneficiaries of public diplomacy funding or not, suspect to the Iranian and Western intelligence services or targets of their surveillance and recruitment, with serious consequences for their democratic aspirations and their lives.

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[16] See: 'Dadsetan-e Koll-e Iran: Telegram va Instagram Bala Ijad Kardehand', https://m.dw.com/fa-ir/iran/a-45090089?maca=fa-IR-Whatsapp-sharing&.

[17] See: 'Sokhangu-ye Showra-ye Negahban Estefadeh az Twitter ra Gheir-e Qanuni Nemidanad', http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-45202575?ocid=wspersian.chat-apps.in-app-msg.whatsapp.trial.link1_.auin.

[18] See: http://congress.iranianshouse.ir/; http://congress.iranianshouse.ir/.

[19] 'Barkhi Sherkat Konandegan-e dar Hamayesh-e Bozorg-e Iranian-e Moqime-e Kharej', http://greenprotests.blogspot.com/2010/08/blog-post_05.html.

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Hamid Naficy is Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani Professor Emeritus of Radio/ Television/Film at Northwestern University, Chicago and a leading authority in cultural studies of diaspora, exile, and postcolonial cinemas and media, and of Iranian and Middle Eastern cinemas. Naficy has published and lectured extensively, nationally, and internationally, on these and related topics. His English-language books are *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001); *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place* (1999); *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles* (1993); *Otherness and the Media: the Ethnography of the Imagined and the Imaged* (co-edited 1993); and *Iran Media Index* (1984). His latest work is the award-winning four-volume book *A Social History of Iranian Cinema* (2011–2012). He has also published extensively in Persian/Farsi, including a two-volume book on documentary cinema theory and history, *Film-e Mostanad* (1978–79). In addition, he has produced many educational, and instructional radio programs, films, and television programs for the training of physicians, teaching assistants, tutors, and for the education of the public.

CHAPTER 52

Media Representations of Burundi's 2020 Elections in Belgium and Burundi

Caroline Williamson Sinalo

In *Unfinished Histories: Empire and Postcolonial Resonance in Central Africa and Belgium*, edited by Pierre-Philippe Fraiture, 167–88. Leuven University Press, 2022.

On 20 May 2020, Burundians went to the polls to elect a new president. This was the first election since the 2015 political crisis, when President Pierre Nkurunziza announced that he would violate the Arusha Accord by running for a third term. Following his 2015 re-election, Nkurunziza and his wing of the ruling party, the National Council for the Defense of Democracy—Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) proceeded to consolidate power, securing 'almost complete control over state and society'.[1]

Although Nkurunziza announced that he would not run in 2020, many of the underlying issues of the 2015 conflict persisted. As predicted, the 2020 elections were marred by irregularities including reports that members of the opposition party, the National Congress for Liberty (CNL), led by Agathon Rwasa, were threatened, beaten, arrested, and even killed by the police and Imbonerakure.[2] International observers were prevented from entering the country while internal journalists faced intimidation.[3] Despite the irregularities, however, the violence never reached the scale of the 2015 crisis, and the CNDD-FDD candidate,

[1] Stef Vandeginste, 'Ethnic Quotas and For- eign NGOs in Burundi: Shrinking Civic Space Framed as Affirmative Action', *Africa Spectrum*, 54. 3 (2019), 181–200 (183).

[2] *Imbonerakure* in Kirundi means 'Those who see far'. The name refers to the youth wing of the CNDD-FDD party, which was reportedly involved in threatening and intimidating people into voting for them.

[3] Leila Keza, 'Burundi-Élections: Le Ministre de la Communication Exige la Radiation de Certains Journalistes de la Synergie des Médias', *SOS Médias*, 16 May 2020 <https://www.SOSmediasburundi.org/2020/05/16/burundi-elections-le-ministre-de-la-communication-exige-la-radiation-de-certains-journalistes-de-la-synergie-des-medias/> [accessed 03 March 2021]

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Évariste Ndayishimiye, won with 68.72 per cent of the popular vote. The elections also took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, which was downplayed by the CNDD-FDD. Less than three weeks after the poll, however, President Pierre Nkurunziza died unexpectedly from complications linked to Covid-19, although his illness was denied by the authorities, who claimed he died from a heart attack.

This chapter investigates domestic and Belgian media narratives of events surrounding the 2020 election. It explores opposing sides of the country's media conflict through an analysis of coverage by the state-run *Radio Télevision Nationale du Burundi* [Burundi National Radio and Television] (RTNB) and the independent online news outlet *SOS Médias Burundi* and compares this to coverage found in *La Libre Belgique* and *Le Soir*, outlets from Belgium, the former colonial power. International media often downplay the legacy of historical colonialism in favour of essentialist stereotypes when representing conflict in Central Africa, and the Belgian press is no exception.[4] Drawing on theories of framing and narrative, the chapter will scrutinise the varying constructions of the 2020 elections for different sets of Burundian and Belgian audiences.[5]

Belgium's Historical Role in Burundi

While much has changed in Burundi since independence, the legacy of Belgian colonialism cannot be understated, particularly its role in racialising social identities. In precolonial times, the economic system was based on a form of clientelism (*ubugabire*) between Tutsi patrons and Hutu clients, and it is generally agreed that this system provided the basis for later ethnic classification although the politics surrounding the terms Hutu and Tutsi, and the nature of precolonial social and political relationships, is highly contested.[6] Colonial domination, first by Germany (1897–1916) and then by Belgium (1916–62), brought about significant changes in Burundian society, particularly in relation to the construction of Tutsi and Hutu identities.

Like the Germans before them, the Belgians 'entered Burundi with entrenched ideological preconceptions of racial and class superiority which they used to interpret the sophisticated hierarchical political and economic structures of the society'.[7] They believed that the Tutsi were evolutionarily closer to Europeans and thus superior to the Hutu. This belief, based on the now discredited Hamitic hypothesis, stemmed from the idea that Tutsi were descendants of Noah's son Ham who had migrated to Africa from the Middle East. According to the myth, Tutsi eventually arrived in Rwanda from Somalia or Ethiopia and conquered the Hutu and

[4] Sophie Pontzeele, 'Le Schème de la « Guerre Ethnique » dans la Médiatisation des Crises Africaines: Burundi 1972 et Rwanda 1994', *Les Cahiers du Journalisme*, 18.1 (2008), 166–182; Caroline Williamson Sinalo, 'Narrating African Conflict News: An Intercultural Analysis of Burundi's 2015 Coup', Journalism, (2020), 1–16.

[5] Jerome Bruner, 'The Narrative Construction of Reality', *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (1991), 1–21; Mona Baker, 'Reframing Conflict in Translation', *Social Semiotics*, 17. 2 (2007), 151-169; Margaret Somers and Gloria Gibson, 'Reclaiming the Epistemological "Other": Narrative and the Social Constitution of Identity', in Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 37–99.

[6] Early accounts written by Europeans such as Jacques Maquet and Tutsi such as Alexis Kagame have been challenged by more recent work e.g. Jan Vansina, *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda. The Nyiginya Kingdom* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004). Most scholars acknowledge, however, the relative fluidity of these identities. Patricia Daley, *Gender and Genocide in Burundi: The Search for Spaces of Peace in the Great Lakes Region* (Oxford: James Currey, 2007), p. 46.

[7] Ibid., p. 49.

Twa as a result of their natural superiority.[8] Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa were considered to be of completely different racial groups, and the Belgians subsequently translated these beliefs into racist policies. For example, the colonial education system was designed to educate a Tutsi elite while Hutu were completely evicted from positions of power.[9]

The education system was run by the Catholic Church, which played an important role in promulgating the Hamitic hypothesis (see Chantal Gishoma's chapter in this volume). Not only did the hypothesis determine education policy, but it also dominated the Church's evangelisation strategy. Cardinal Charles Lavigerie, who established the Society of African Missions, believed that the conversion of non-Christian peoples would be most successful if evangelistic efforts focused on political leaders and so set about converting the ruling (Tutsi) class in the expectation that the (predominantly Hutu) masses would follow suit.[10] Such a policy solidified the ethnic hierarchy and also forged a direct relationship between church and state.[11]

In summary, Tutsi were reinvented by the colonial state and Catholic Church as a non-native group that was elevated above Hutu but was 'still lower down the racial hierarchy from the master [European]'.[12] According to Alexandre Raffoule, colonial rule effectively ethnicised the state and all of its institutions.[13] Indeed, Patricia Daley argues that 'Belgian colonialism laid the conditions for the traditions of genocide' in Burundi (and, moreover, in the broader Great Lakes region).[14]

The Legacy of Colonial Racialisation

Burundi gained independence in 1962 when the Belgians handed over power to Tutsi-dominated politico-military institutions. Within the first decade following independence, ethnic-based conflict was planned and executed by the state security institutions, claiming the lives of around two hundred thousand Hutu.[15] Indeed, ethnic violence would continue for the next four decades, as the Tutsi-led Union for National Progress (UPRONA) dominated the political landscape and retaliated with heavy force to localised Hutu uprisings in 1965,

[8] Timothy Longman, 'Identity Cards, Ethnic Self-Perception, and Genocide in Rwanda', in Jane Caplan and John Torpey (eds.), *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 345–59 (p. 351).

[9] Alexandre Raffoule 'The Politics of Association: Power-Sharing and the Depoliticization of Ethnicity in Post-War Burundi', *Ethnopolitics*, 19. 1 (2020), 1–18 (10).

[10] Timothy Longman, *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 39.

[11] Ibid., p. 25.

[12] Patricia Daley, *Gender and Genocide in Burundi: The Search for Spaces of Peace in the Great Lakes Region* (Oxford: James Currey, 2007), p. 50.

[13] Raffoule, 'The Politics of Association…', p. 10.

[14] Daley, *Gender and Genocide*, p. 13. The Hamitic myth lies behind genocidal ideologies in the region. In Burundi, it justified the mass killing of Hutu. In Rwanda, it was reformulated to construct Tutsi as inherently evil foreign conquerors, justifying the 1994 genocide.

[15] Ibid., p. 34.

1969, 1972, and 1988.[16] This force reached a genocidal scale in 1972, which left around three hundred thousand dead.[17]

The Tutsi-dominated military dictatorship lasted until 1993 when, in the country's first democratic elections, the Hutu Melchior Ndadaye of the Hutu-dominated Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU) was elected. Just a few months later, however, Ndadaye was assassinated by Tutsi military officers who opposed the political power shift, triggering a twelve-year civil war between a Tutsi-dominated government under Pierre Buyoya and several Hutu militias.[18] The conflict claimed the lives of about three hundred thousand people. Signed in August 2000, the Arusha Peace Agreement paved the way for democratic elections in 2005, ensuring ethnic quotas in the two chambers of legislature that enabled the de-ethnicisation of politics.[19] The extent to which such de-ethnicisation has been achieved for the long term is, however, hotly debated.

Raffoule considers that Arusha successfully reduced ethnicist discourse in Burundian politics in the period 2000–15.[20] He notes that many Tutsi political candidates joined the CNDD-FDD to increase their chances of being elected, and there was a decrease in ethnic voting, particularly among Tutsi voters.[21] Raffoule also argues 'ethnicity was not widely re-politicised' during the 2015 crisis.[22] Nevertheless, the term 'genocide' started to circulate among national and international NGOs to refer to the increased state violence since 2015.[23] In an analysis of these warnings, Andrea Purdeková argues that the 'ethnic genocide frame obfuscates the nature of the conflict in Burundi'.[24] According to her, the 'genocide reticence-turned-logorrhoea witnessed in this crisis is directly tied to the perceived close resemblance of Burundi and Rwanda and hence the pressure not to repeat the mistakes of the past'.[25] In her view, the overuse of the 'genocide' label to refer to Burundi 'has increased regime isolationism and emboldened the regime'.[26] More broadly, she observes that this framing of the political crisis 'maintains African conflict in the representational straightjacket of ethnic conflict'.[27] Similar observations have been made about media narratives surrounding the 2015 events, with news outlets, including Belgian ones, discussing the risk of events 'taking an "ethnic turn" and/or becoming genocidal' and adopting expressions such as 'ethnic enmities' or 'ethnic hatred', and, in some cases, comparing the crisis with events in Rwanda in 1994.[28]

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[16] Raffoule, p. 10. Vandeginste, 'Ethnic Quotas…', p. 182.

[17] Raffoule, p. 10.

[18] Vandeginste, p. 183.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Raffoule, p. 11.

[21] Ibid., p. 12.

[22] Ibid., p. 13–14.

[23] E.g. FIDH, 'Repression and Genocidal Dynamics in Burundi', 15 November 2016 <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/burundi/repression-and-genocidal-dynamics-in-burundi> [accessed 3 March 2021].

[24] Andrea Purdeková, '#StopThisMovie and the Pitfalls of Mass Atrocity Prevention: Framing of Violence and Anticipation of Escalation in Burundi's Crisis (2015–2017)', *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*, 13. 2 (2019), 22–37 (23 & 30).

[25] Ibid., p. 22.

[26] Ibid., p. 23.

[27] Ibid., p. 30.

[28] Williamson Sinalo, 'Narrating African Conflict News…', p. 5.

While the alarm of genocide, ethnic enmities, and comparisons with Rwanda in 1994 may have been overblown and oversimplified, a number of observers have noted a re-ethnicisation of politics in Burundi since 2015. Daley and Rowan Popplewell argue, for instance, that 'recent violence appears to be political in nature, [however] we cannot dismiss ethnicity entirely from the analysis. There are growing fears in Burundi that ethnicity will emerge as a major fault line as the political crisis progresses'.[29] These authors note that 'parts of the former Tutsi elite, while accepting the ethnic split in government, are increasingly alarmed by their marginalisation from power by the current regime, especially since, for historical reasons, they constitute the bulk of the educated people in Burundi'.[30] Furthermore, analysts of Burundi's media and civil society have noted an increasing ethnicism in politics.[31] Stef Vandeginste argues, for example, that the introduction of non-consensual ethnic quotas in the international NGO sector 'puts ethnicity back at the heart of political contestation' and that this 'contributes to a re-ethnicisation of society'.[32]

Belgium's (Non)Recognition of Colonial History

It is clear that the construction of ethnicity under Belgian colonialism has marked Burundian politics and continues to a play a fundamental if contested role. Meanwhile, Belgium seems to have difficulty acknowledging its colonial past.[33] Castryck considers the problem to be threefold:

1. the silent majority is basically not interested—and never was—in Congolese or colonial affairs,
2. African studies in Belgium are extremely minimal and the academic attitude in general attaches little importance to informing broader society, and
3. the political situation causes a preference for keeping history unknown.[34]

On the other hand, the death of George Floyd on 25 May 2020 and subsequent global Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests gained significant media attention in Belgium, raising questions about the country's colonial past and its relationship with contemporary forms of racism.[35] The movement resulted in the removal of statues of King Leopold II in Brussels, Antwerp, Leuven, and Ghent, and on 30 June 2020, Belgian King Philippe I addressed a letter to President Tshisekedi of the DRC in which he expressed regret for 'acts of violence and cruelty'

[29] Patricia Daley and Rowan Popplewell, 'The Appeal of Third Termism and Militarism in Burundi', *Review of African Political Economy*, 43.150 (2016), 648–57 (563).

[30] Ibid., p. 563.

[31] Marie-Soleil Frère, 'Silencing the Voice of the Voiceless: The Destruction of the Independent Broadcasting Sector in Burundi', *African Journalism Studies*, 37.1 (2016), 137–46 (139–40); Vandeginste, pp. 194–95.

[32] Vandeginste, pp. 194 & 195.

[33] Axel Mudahemuka C. Gossiaux, 'L'éducation Permanente en Lutte Contre le Racisme et la 184 Caroline Williamson Sinalo Colonialité en Belgique Francophone?', Fucid, (2020) <https://www.fucid.be/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/2020.ET-de%CC%81colonisation-EP.pdf> [accessed 3 March 2021].

[34] Geert Castryck, 'Whose History Is History? Singularities and Dualities of the Public Debate on Belgian Colonialism', in Sven Mörsdorf (ed.), *Being a Historian. Opportunities and Responsibilities: Past and Present* (Pisa: Cliohres.net, 2010), pp. 1–18 (p. 6).

[35] Gossiaux, 'L'éducation Permanente…', p. 14. These events coincided with the 2020 Burundian elections.

committed under the Congo Free State [36] (see Yvette Hutchison's chapter in this volume). There has yet to be any formal recognition of Belgian's role in Burundi, however, and despite the proliferation of discussions about racism and Belgian's colonial past since Floyd's death, Burundi remains peripheral if it is mentioned at all. As the analysis presented in this chapter suggests, many of the issues regarding Belgian's relationship to the past persist.

All the outlets analysed in this chapter present Nkurunziza and his successor Évariste Ndayishimye as religiously inspired leaders who trivialise the pandemic and conceal Nkurunziza's death as the result of Covid-19. This narrative is presented as legitimate in the state-run *RTNB* but is highly criticised in *SOS*, *La Libre*, and *Le Soir*, which also note the increasing authoritarian nature of the government and highlight the electoral irregularities. The principal difference between the coverage in *SOS* and that found in the Belgian outlets is that *SOS* reports the use of the reformulated Hamitic hypothesis to discredit the main opposition candidate, Rwasa, as a Tutsi accomplice, despite him being a Hutu who had previously participated in anti-Tutsi massacres. In the final discussion, this chapter argues that this ethnicist discourse reveals a sophisticated political manoeuvre, highlighting the socially constructed, rather than essential, nature of ethnicity in Burundi. Surprisingly, references to ethnicity are mostly absent in the Belgian media depictions of events. The 'ancient hatreds' stereotype, which was used in media accounts of 2015, fails to capture the construction of Rwasa as a Tutsi collaborator. [37] In their depictions of the 2020 elections, the Belgian outlets therefore opt for silence on issues of ethnicity and turn instead to alternative clichés such as irrational dictators and desperate poverty. It is argued that if they were to recognise this political use of ethnicity, the Belgian outlets would need to confront the historical nature of these constructions and, consequently, Belgium's role in current Burundian affairs. The choice to focus on dictators and poverty, on the contrary, exonerates Belgium's role in ongoing conflicts and suggests the need for Belgian support. This discussion highlights the need for further decolonisation of the Belgian media.

Methodology

Le Soir and *La Libre* are Belgium's most popular francophone newspapers. *La Libre* is generally considered more conservative than *Le Soir*, a liberal and progressive news outlet. *RTNB* is Burundi's national broadcaster that, according to Jean-Benoît Falisse and Hugues Nkengurutse, 'gives a preponderant place to spokespersons of the regime'. [38] *SOS Médias* is an online newspaper that was established following the big shutdown of independent media in Burundi in 2015. While many journalists fled in exile, some remained in the country and continued to operate. A few who had worked at Radio Bonesha, a former private, multi-ethnic radio

[36] The Belgian government had already apologised for its role in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda in 2000. Ibid., p. 16. This and all subsequent translations from French are my own.

[37] Williamson Sinalo, 'Narrating African Conflict News…', p. 13.

[38] Jean-Benoît Falisse and Hugues Nkengurutse, 'From FM Radio Stations to Internet 2.0 Overnight: Information, Participation and Social Media in Post-Failed Coup Burundi', in Maggie Dwyer and Thomas Molony (eds.), *Social Media and Politics in Africa: Democracy, Censorship and Security* (London: Zed, 2019), pp. 171–94 (p. 179).

station known for its reconciliation-oriented programmes, established *SOS Médias Burundi* by disseminating information online through social networks. [39]

The majority (thirteen) of articles published in *Le Soir* analysed here are attributed to Colette Braeckman, Central African specialist and the outlet's editor for Central Africa. Without doubt, Braeckman has elsewhere contributed to discussions of Belgian's historical role in the region through her many publications on the subject. [40] On the other hand, scholarly analyses of *Le Soir*'s past coverage of the region show that the outlet adopts stereotypical representations as do some of Braeckman's independent publications. [41] The remaining Soir articles are attributed to Agence France Presse (AFP), Belga, the Belgian press agency, and other in-house journalists. *La Libre* attributes thirteen articles to Marie-France Cros, Central African specialist and the outlet's Africa editor. The remaining articles are attributed to AFP, Belga, and other in-house journalists. Stories in the Burundian *RTNB* and *SOS Médias* are exclusively authored by in-house journalists. The outlets were selected because they offer insights into the differing ways in which the story of these events was constructed for different sets of Burundian and Belgian audiences. All articles were retrieved using keyword searches via the outlets' online search facility. [42] The total number of articles analysed for each outlet can be found in Table 1.

	Le Soir	**La Libre**	**RTNB**	**SOS Médias**
Total	23	28	25	61

Table 1: The number of articles analysed for each news source

The analysis that follows draws on the concept of framing found in narrative analysis. According to Robert Entman, framing selects 'some aspects of a perceived reality and make(s) them more salient […] in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and or treatment recommendation'. [43] Mona Baker argues that the concept of framing can best be understood through narrativity, describing narratives as 'stories that are temporally and causally constituted in such a way as to allow us to make moral decisions and act in the real world'. [44]

The analysis investigates the framing of the 2020 election by applying Margaret Somers and Gloria Gibson's narrative concepts of *causal emplotment* and *selective appropriation*, which are particularly useful for identifying frames in social texts. According to them, emplotment 'translates events into episodes. As a mode of explanation, causal emplotment is an account-

[39] Frère, 'Silencing the Voice of the Voiceless…', p. 142.

[40] E.g. Colette Braeckman, *Rwanda, histoire d'un génocide*, 1994 (Paris: Fayard, 1994); Colette Braeckman, *Congo, Rwanda-Burundi: les racines de la violence*, 1996 (Paris: Fayard, 1996).

[41] For analyses of *Le Soir*, see Pontzeele, 'Le Schème de la « Guerre Ethnique »…', p. 175; Williamson Sinalo, 'Narrating African Conflict News…', p. 13. Braeckman's book about Congolese gynaecologist, Dr Denis Mukwege, adopts the troubling 'man who fixes women' discourse. Colette Braeckman, *L'homme qui répare les femmes: Le combat du Docteur Mukwege* (Waterloo: La Renaissance du livre, 2016).

[42] 'Burundi' and 'Nkurunziza' were used to search the Belgian outlets; 'Election' and 'Nkurunziza' were used to search the Burundian ones.

[43] Robert Entman, 'Framing: Towards clarification of a Fractured Paradigm', *Journal of Communication*, 43.4 (1993), 51–58 (52); see also Denis Chong and James Druckman, 'Framing Theory', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10 (2007), 103–26 (104).

[44] Baker, 'Reframing Conflict in Translation', pp. 156 & 155.

ing (however fantastic or implicit) of why a narrative has the story line it does'.[45] As Baker explains, causal emplotment can override chronological or categorical order to 'turn a set of propositions into an intelligible sequence about which we can form an opinion, and thus charges the events depicted with moral and ethical significance'.[46] Causal emplotment also enables us to make evaluative judgements, demanding and enabling the selective appropriation of constituent elements. It would be impossible to include every detail of experience into a narrative. Selective appropriation refers to the selection of 'events or elements from the vast array of open-ended and overlapping events that constitute experience'.[47]

The analysis is divided into three sections, each examining the narration of the central elements of the story: 1) Nkurunziza's government prior to the election, 2) the government's handling of the pandemic and Nkurunziza's death, and 3) the post-Nkurunziza government. The final discussion considers the outlets' use of hermeneutic composability, a narrative feature identified by Jerome Bruner that describes how elements of a story are reconstituted to form a new whole for readers in different cultural contexts.[48]

Analysis

Nkurunziza's Government Prior to the Election

In *RTNB*, Nkurunziza is primarily framed as a legitimate, peaceful, and democratic president and also as the country's spiritual leader, reinforcing the colonial legacy of a close relationship between church and state. In one article, for example, *RTNB* focuses on a speech made by the president to the Église de Rocher in Buye, the evangelical church at which his wife, Denise Bucumi-Nkurunziza, is an ordained minister.[49] The outlet describes the president as assuring the crowds that '[…] since 1962, no leader completed his term without there being internal conflicts'. The establishment of peace and democracy is, according to Nkurunziza, thanks to Burundians' having 'reserved the first place for God'. The outlet thus frames Nkurunziza as a clerical, even sacred, figure who is able to instil faith in the people, which in turn results in peace and democracy.

For all the outlet's emphasis on democracy, however, coverage of the elections is limited to a few procedural issues, with almost no discussion of the opposition candidate, Rwasa, or the alleged electoral irregularities. The only mention of the 2015 election in the outlet is in an article covering Nkurunziza's speech on Labour Day in which he 'welcomed the contribution made by the population to the elections from 2015 until 2020. "May this good practice continue in Burundi in order to cut off foreign aid", the Head of State noted'.[50] This statement reflects the trend of isolation seen in Burundi since 2015, notably the cutting of

[45] Somers and Gibson, 'Reclaiming the Epistemological "Other"…', p. 28.

[46] Baker, p. 155.

[47] Baker, p. 155; Somers and Gibson, p. 29.

[48] Bruner, 'The Narrative Construction of Reality', p. 7. The same concept is described as 'relationality' by Somers and Gibson, p. 25.

[49] Raphaël Bigirimana, 'Le Chef de l'Etat s'associe aux fidèles de l'église du Rocher de Buye dans la prière dominicale', *RTNB*, 3 May 2020 <https://rtnb.bi/fr/art.php?idapi=4/1/131> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[50] *RTNB*, 'Le Burundi célèbre la journée internationale du travail et des travailleurs', RT- NB, 1 May 2020 <http://www.RTNB.bi/fr/art.php?idapi=4/1/128> [accessed 03 March 2021]

international aid. Since independence, Burundi has been heavily dependent on aid money, particularly from Belgium, other Western countries, and the European Union. Belgium was the first international donor to withdraw aid following the 2015 crisis, but it was soon followed by the Netherlands, the United States, and the European Union, which consequently pushed the country into an economic crisis.[51] This statement in *RTNB*, however, suggests that the move away from foreign aid is Burundi's intention rather than a decision imposed from outside.

SOS Médias reports the same Labour Day speech in its coverage, albeit with a different emphasis. According to this outlet, Nkurunziza

> largely drew up a positive assessment of his 15 years in power. He took the opportunity to explain that the first 10 years of his rule were 'painful because of political parties and civil society organizations that served the interests of the colonisers'.[52]

Like *RTNB*, *SOS* shows Nkurunziza's positive appraisal of his own presidency here, but the outlet also includes his suggestion that members of the opposition, civil society, and between the lines, those who opposed his third term, held him back until he was finally free following the 2015 elections. Moreover, he overtly accuses these actors of working in the interests of the 'colonisers'. This insinuates the decision of former colonial powers such as Belgium to cut aid following the events of 2015; however, unlike *RTNB*, here it seems that Nkurunziza is expressing disapproval of the decision and blaming the opposition for causing it. This may be because, rather than simply cutting aid, Belgium and other former donors decided to redirect money towards international NGOs, UN agencies, and national development agencies, many of whom work with local NGOs.[53]

Like *RTNB*, *SOS* highlights the government's use of religious discourse, however, such discourse is presented by the outlet as the government's attempt to consolidate power rather than provide spiritual leadership. For example, in an article about a party meeting, a party activist recites the following prayer:

> Oh Lord! Walk alongside Évariste. Direct our Rock, his steps […] make him sit in the palace of Ntare (the presidential palace), give us Burundians the spirit to respect him as we respect our eternal Pierre Nkurunziza. […] Our Rock, we ask this of you. Make sure that the enemies of Burundi who are currently in lockdown remain so. And until the end of our elections. May Kagame watch us without reaching us, may the United States observe us with their weapons without reaching us, may European Union meetings about Burundi be doomed.[54]

While the outlet highlights in the same way as *RTNB* how Nkurunziza is presented by his party as a spiritual leader, the more extremist elements of his speech (referring to Rwanda, the United States, and the European Union as state enemies) do not appear in the *RTNB*. *SOS* notes in

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[51] International Crisis Group, 'Soutenir la population burundaise face à la crise économique', Report 264, 31 August 2018 <https://www.crisisgroup.org/fr/africa/central-africa/burundi/264-soute-nir-la-population-burundaise-face-la-crise-economique> [accessed 21 June 2021]

[52] Adam Ntwari, 'Fête du travail: Nkurunziza défend son bilan et énumère les boucs émissaires', *SOS Médias*, 1 May 2020 <https://www.SOSmediasburundi.org/2020/05/01/fete-du-tra-vail-nkurunziza-defend-son-bilan-et-enumere-les-boucs-emissaires/> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[53] International Crisis Group, 'Soutenir la population burundaise'.

[54] Jean Ntumwa, 'Elections 2020: ces prières du CNDD-FDD qui s'attaquent aux occidentaux et au Rwanda', *SOS Médias*, 1 May 2020 <https://www.SOSmediasburundi.org/2020/05/01/elections-2020-ces-prieres-du-cndd-fdd-qui-sat-taquent-aux-occidentaux-et-au-rwanda/> [accessed 03 March 2021]

the same article how 'since 2015, the CNDD-FDD has banned Rwandan gospel music during its large gatherings'. Burundian and Rwandan relations deteriorated significantly following the events of 2015, largely because both states accuse the other of supporting each other's opponents.[55] Given that the 2015 protestors, educated people, civil society, and members of the opposition were considered by the regime to be constituted primarily of Tutsi, and that Rwanda is ruled by Tutsi President Paul Kagame, the singling out of Rwanda in this way could be construed as a subtle form of ethnicism, reinforced—much like in Burundi's colonial past—using religious discourse. Explicit ethnic politics are also reported in *SOS Médias*.

For example, in response to 'extensive human rights violations' committed by the *Imbonerakure*, *SOS* reports allegations by the main opposition candidate, Rwasa, that the CNDD-FDD and its allies 'spread messages inciting ethnic hatred, [Rwasa] then deplored the fact that he is considered a tool of the Tutsi, particularly the Hima'.[56] This is an interesting characterisation of Rwasa given his history as a Hutu rebel during Burundi's civil war in which he was allegedly involved in the massacre of over 150 Congolese Tutsi refugees in Gatumba.[57]

The Belgian outlets generally take a similar stance to *SOS Médias*; however, such explicit discussions of ethnic politics are altogether absent. The Belgian outlets also differ in their adoption of a somewhat paternalist tone, as can be seen in the *Soir* article discussing 'miracles' in need of explanation.[58] Framing the president in terms of his religious discourse, the article opens by asserting that 'the president of Burundi proudly proclaims that if it has been spared relatively, it is because "his country has put God first"'. Rather than a miracle, Braeckman intimates that the limited impact of the pandemic on Burundi is more likely explained by the lack of credible statistics, the youthful population, and the rupture with the international community.

The real 'miracles' of the situation, according to Braeckman, are the fact that the election took place in relative calm, that Nkurunziza was not running, and that Rwasa was allowed to organise successful rallies. Rwasa's mobilisation of the population, she notes, 'has started worrying the authorities and the *Imbonerakure* (the government's militia) are on the war footing and are already harassing Rwasa's supporters. We are therefore waiting for a miracle, or a coup d'état on the eve of the elections'. Maintaining the irony, Braeckman concludes that the one miracle needed is to save flood victims in Gatumba, where over 28,000 people remain without housing. As the author notes, 'Since international aid has deserted Burundi, these poor people live in catastrophic conditions'. Braeckman's suggestion that the country needs a miracle in the absence of Western assistance has an air of paternalism.

[55] Jill Craig, 'Relations Between Burundi, Rwanda Deteriorating', *VOA*, 14 October 2015 <https://www.voanews.com/africa/relations-between-burundi-rwanda-deteriorating> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[56] Eric Irambona, 'Burundi-élections: Agathon Rwasa demande aux Imbonerakure de changer de comportement' *SOS Médias*, 15 May 2020 <https://www.sosmediasburundi.org/2020/05/15/burundi-elections-agathon-rwasa-demande-aux-im-bonerakure-de-changer-de-comportement/> [accessed 03 March 2021] Referring to Rwasa as Hima is significant because the officers who overthrew the monarchy in 1962 and went on to monopolise power in Burundi were Tutsi-Hima. Raffoule, p. 10.

[57] HRW 'Burundi: 15 Years On, No Justice for Gatumba Massacre', 13 August 2019 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/08/13/burundi-15-years-no-justice-gatumba-massacre#> [accessed 03 March 2021] Media Representations of Burundi's 2020 Elections in Belgium and Burundi 185

[58] Colette Braeckman, 'Burundi: quelques «miracles» qui méritent une explication…', *Le Soir*, 13 May 2020 <https://plus.lesoir.be/300616/article/2020-05-13/burundi-quelques-miracles-qui-meritent-une-explication?referer=%2Farchives%2Frecherche%3Fdatefilter%3Dlastyear%26sort%3Ddate%2Bdesc%26start%3D10%26word%3Dnku-runziza> [accessed 03 March 2021]

References to Burundi's poverty appear elsewhere in *Le Soir*'s coverage, with one article highlighting that 'Burundi is ranked among the three poorest countries in the world'.[59] The same article cites the World Bank 'which estimates that 75% of the population live below the poverty line, against 65% when Mr. Nkurunziza came to power in 2005'. *La Libre* likewise adopts a paternalist tone (grouping Nkurunziza together with other world dictators without historical context) and also makes reference to Burundi as one of the three poorest countries in the world, quoting the same poverty statistic while emphasising Burundi's reliance on international aid.[60]

In summary, all outlets highlight the government's use of religious discourse. However, while *RTNB* presents Nkurunziza as a benevolent, democratic, spiritual leader, *SOS Médias* and the Belgian outlets offer a reversed pattern of causal emplotment, suggesting that such discourse is a means to consolidate authoritarian control.

There are also narrative differences between *SOS Médias* and the Belgian outlets. While they all include discussions of the government's human rights violations, use of intimidation, and other voting irregularities, the Belgian outlets are alone in emphasising Burundi's increased poverty and dependence on international aid. The selective appropriation of these themes suggests that impoverished Burundians are left at the mercy of an authoritarian dictator and in need of Western assistance.

SOS Médias makes a different use of selective appropriation, excluding the theme of poverty but introducing that of ethnicity. This outlet highlights the government's enmity with the West, civil society, Rwanda, and the opposition, who, the outlet suggests, are all accused of allying with each other. The outlet also includes allegations that the government incites ethnic hatred and accuses the opposition of collaborating with Tutsi, particularly the Hima. Such an accusation demonstrates the persistence of the Hamitic myth and its reformulation, which positions Tutsi as a power-hungry collective bent on dominating the region, the same myth that underpinned the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. *SOS Médias* thereby offers an altogether different use of causal emplotment to the other outlets by narrating the CNDD-FDD's leadership not only as a dictatorship but also as a potentially genocidal government.

The Government's Handling of the Pandemic and Nkurunziza's Death

While the colonial legacy of an alliance between church and state is maintained by the Burundian government under Nkurunziza, the response to the Covid-19 pandemic is quite different to former colonial methods. Motivated by economic, scientific, and humanitarian interests (even if marred by racist condescension), Belgian colonial responses to previous disease outbreaks, such as the sleeping sickness epidemics of 1900–40, involved a coercive approach. Influenced and often administered by the Catholic Church, this involved control-

[59] *Le Soir*, 'Élections présidentielles au Burundi: le candidat du pouvoir élu', 25 May 2020 <https://plus.lesoir.be/302888/article/2020-05-25/elections-presidentielles-au-burundi-le-candi-dat-du-pouvoir-elu?referer=%2Farchives%2Frecherche%3Fdatefilter%3Dlastyear%26sort%3D-date%2Bdesc%26start%3D0%26word%3Dnkurunziza%22> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[60] Marie-France Cros, 'Comment la situation au Burundi, un des trois pays les plus pauvres du monde, s'est encore aggravée depuis 2015', *La Libre Belgique*, 20 May 2020 <https://www.lalibre.be/international/afrique/comment-la-situation-au-burundi-un-des-trois-pays-les-plus-pau-vres-du-monde-s-est-encore-aggravee-depu-is-2015-5ec3ffbad8ad581c5400d923> [accessed 03 March 2021]

ling people's movements and herding those suspected of infection into camps where they were permanently separated from their families, lived in poor conditions, faced a lack of food, and were injected with atoxyl, an arsenic compound that caused blindness in up to 20 per cent of patients.[61]

Rather than adopting such a heavy-handed, medical approach, in a bid to gain popularity, the Nkurunziza government instead mobilised the legacy of African scepticism of Western medicine by trivialising the pandemic and ridiculing international public health advice. The narration of this response and the death of Nkurunziza varies across the outlets. For example, reflecting the government's position, *RTNB* discusses the pandemic considerably less than the others, mentioning the terms Covid, coronavirus, or pandemic just 19 times compared to 120 mentions in *SOS*, 62 in *La Libre*, and 84 mentions in *Le Soir*. The few discussions of the pandemic in *RTNB* are paired with religious reassurances and authoritative advice, suggesting that the government is in control while minimising the potential danger of the virus.[62] Significantly, there is no mention of Covid-19 in the outlet's coverage of Nkururnziza's unexpected death, which is reported as the result of 'a heart attack'.[63]

In contrast, *SOS Médias* frames the government's handling of the pandemic in reference to its general authoritarianism, reporting, for instance, how the government expelled the team of WHO experts who were in Burundi to support the country's coronavirus response.[64] The same article highlights the government's minimisation of the pandemic, noting that 'Burundi refuses to recognize the threat posed by this virus'.

Nkurunziza's personal views on the virus are revealed in an article that appeared following the elections in which he reportedly ridiculed wearing a mask: 'God controls the atmosphere in Burundi so that those [pandemics] do not reach us. Who wears a mask among you? No one. And yet you are doing well. There you go, God works miracles'.[65] When Nkurunziza died less than two weeks later, *SOS Médias* counters official reports of a heart attack, claiming that 'he succumbed to respiratory complications linked to Covid-19'.[66] The outlet reveals that people in both his government and family were also Covid positive, including his wife, who was sent to Kenya for treatment, although her illness was denied by the government as part of its Covid-denial campaign.[67]

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[61] Daniel R. Headrick, 'Sleeping Sickness Epidemics and Colonial Responses in East and Central Africa, 1900–1940', *PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases*, 8.4 (2014) <https://journals.plos.org/plosntds/article?id=10.1371/journal.pntd.0002772> [accessed 22 June 2021]

[62] E.g. *RTNB*, 'Le Burundi célèbre'.

[63] *RTNB*, 'Décès inopiné du Président de la République Pierre Nkurunziza', 10 June 2020 <https://RTNB.bi/fr/art.php?idapi=4/1/205> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[64] *SOS Médias*, 'Burundi-elections: un orage se prépare selon Human Rights Watch', 15 May 2020 <https://www.SOSmediasburundi.org/2020/05/15/burundi-elections-un-orage-se-prepare-selon-human-rights-watch/> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[65] Jean Ntumwa, 'Gitega: le CNDD-FDD et Pierre Nkurunziza (guide suprême) défient la covid-19', *SOS Médias*, 29 May 2020 <https://www.SOSh-mediasburundi.org/2020/05/29/gitega-le-cndd-fdd-et-pierre-nkurunziza-guide-supreme-defient-la-covid-19/> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[66] Eloge Willy Kaneza, 'Le Président Nkurunziza a été emporté par le virus covid-19 (sources con- cordantes)', *SOS Médias*, 12 June 2020 <https://www.SOSmediasburundi.org/2020/06/12/le-president-nkurunziza-a-ete-emporte-par-le-virus-covid-19-sources-concordantes/> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[67] E.g. Joelle Kamikazi, 'Mort de P. Nkurunziza: son épouse se confie lors d'une prière', SOS Médias, 13 June 2020 <https://www.sosmediasburunwdi.org/2020/06/13/mort-de-p-nkurunziza-son-epouse-se-confie-lors-dune-priere/> [accessed 03 March 2021]

The Belgian outlets present events similarly to *SOS Médias*, mentioning the government's ejection of the WHO, Nkurunziza's religious appraisals and denial of the threat posed by the virus, and that his death was eventually caused by the virus. One significant difference in *Le Soir*'s coverage relative to *SOS* is the outlet's explicit attribution of Nkurunziza's death to his government's denial of the pandemic:

> The denial of the coronavirus epidemic has had dramatic consequences in Burundi: it is confirmed that the outgoing president, Pierre Nkurunziza, was carried away by the virus and that the only ventilator available in the country, which was in the hospital King Khaled in Bujumbura, was sent in vain to Karusi, in the centre of the country.[68]

As can be seen here, *Le Soir* also highlights the lack of infrastructure in the country. The article goes on to note that 'King Khaled Hospital can no longer cope with the influx of patients, reagent products are lacking, Covid-19 patients are accommodated in the old maternity ward but beds are starting to run out'.

La Libre does not attribute responsibility to the government quite so explicitly as *Le Soir*, but it does also emphasise the country's relative poverty as a hinderance to dealing with the pandemic.[69] As seen elsewhere, the outlet highlights Burundi's need for Western *(Belgian)* assistance, with an article discussing how the King Baudouin Foundation raised over €200,000 to assist with the pandemic in the DRC and Burundi.[70]

In summary, *RTNB* makes only scarce reference to the pandemic, no mention of the government's ejection of the WHO, and no mention of Covid when reporting Nkurunziza's death. The few references to Covid are paired with religious and political reassurances, suggesting that the pandemic is under control. The other outlets all accentuate the potential seriousness of the virus in Burundi and highlight the government's trivialisation of the pandemic and its ejection of the WHO. They also all report that Nkurunziza died as a result of contracting the virus and that the government attempted to conceal this. Overall, these outlets offer a reversed pattern of causal emplotment to *RTNB* by presenting the pandemic as out of control.

There are, nonetheless, some differences in these outlets' use of narrative features. For example, only *Le Soir* directly attributes the death of Nkurunziza to the government's handling of the pandemic, adopting a similar but more explicit line of causal emplotment compared to *SOS* or *La Libre*. Both Belgian outlets stand alone in emphasising Burundi's poverty and lack of infrastructure, adopting a distinct line of causal emplotment that implies Burundi's need for Western/Belgian assistance to handle the pandemic, maintaining the paternalist view that Burundi still relies on its former colonisers.

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[68] Colette Braeckman, 'Burundi: le Covid-19 décapite la classe dirigeante et plonge le pays dans l'angoisse', 12 June 2020 <https://plus.le'soir.be/306777/article/2020-06-12/burun-di-le-covid-19-decapite-la-classe-dirigeante-et-plonge-le-pays-dans?referer=%2Farchives%2Frecherche%3Fdatefilter%3Dlastyear%26sort%3D-date%2Bdesc%26start%3D0%26word%3Dnkurunziza> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[69] Marie-France Cros, 'Comment la situation au Burundi…'.

[70] *La Libre Belgique*, 'La Fondation Roi Baudouin a récolté 15 millions d'euros pour 1.100 acteurs de terrain: "Avec ces soutiens, des besoins urgents ont pu rapidement être satisfaits"', 5 June 2020 <https://www.lalibre.be/belgique/societe/la-fonndation-roi-baudouin-a-recolte-15-millions-d-euros-pour-1-100-acteurs-de-terrain-avec-ces-soutiens-des-besoins-urgents-ont-pu-rapidement-etre-satisfaits-5eda0cc5d8ad58250fa92560> [accessed 03 March 2021]

Representations of the Post-Nkurunziza Government

Following Évariste Ndayishimiye's inauguration in Gitega on 18 June 2020,[71] *RTNB* reports the new president delivering a consolation prayer:

> it will be remembered that the late President Pierre Nkurunziza campaigned for dialogue between religions, cemented the links between the bureaucracy and the common people through community development and instilled in Burundians the love of God and prayer, the love of work, of the country and of mutual aid to unite society. […] By continuing in this way, you will have shown to the world that you are his disciples.[72]

As can be seen, Nkurunziza is still depicted as a spiritual leader after his death and is credited with developing the country. Maintaining the colonial church-state relationship, Ndayshimiye, whose speech was 'punctuated with biblical references', appears to follow in these footsteps. In an article describing his inauguration, Ndayishimiye sets out a range of policy priorities yet makes no reference to the coronavirus pandemic, suggesting that, like for his predecessor, Covid-19 is not a primary concern.[73]

SOS Médias offers an altogether different appraisal of the former regime, running the headline: 'Nkurunziza's disappearance: "he leaves without the truth about his crimes being known"'.[74] The article cites Lewis Mudge, Human Rights Watch director for Central Africa, who highlights 'the extrajudicial executions, tortures, disappearances and harassment of opposition' during Nkurunziza's 'reign'. *SOS Médias* refrains from taking a position on the new president, however, and instead presents a range of views about the new regime from Burundian refugees and international observers. Overall, *SOS Médias'*s coverage on the new regime is fairly neutral within the time frame studied.

La Libre, in contrast, takes an unequivocally pessimistic stance. In one article, Cros notes that 'Mr Ndayishimiye was proclaimed the winner by the Constitutional Court, despite extensive fraud that the "independent" National Election Commission had to remove the election results from its website because they were so implausible'.[75] Considering the candidate himself, the outlet suggests that Ndayishimiye is 'a man deemed malleable, dominated by the half-dozen CNDD-FDD generals who actually rule Burundi'. Having been placed in power by these generals, the outlet predicts that it is unlikely for him to oppose them since he never took action against previous abuses by the *Imbonerakure*. In contrast, *Le Soir* offers an overall positive appraisal of the election outcome. Unlike Cros and *La Libre*, Braeckman reports on the peaceful nature of the election and its impressive turnout, presenting Ndayishimiye as a moderate with a reputation for integrity.[76]

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[71] It took place two months ahead of schedule because of Nkurunziza's death.

[72] *RTNB*, 'Gitega/Prière d'action de grâce: le Chef de l'Etat livre un message de consolation', 25 June 2020 <http://www.RTNB.bi/fr/art.php?idapi=4/1/231> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[73] *RTNB*, 'Investiture du nouveau Président de la République: Gén Maj Evariste Ndayishimiye prend les rênes du pouvoir', 18 June 2020 <http://www.RTNB.bi/fr/art.php?idapi=4/1/213> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[74] David Irakoze, 'Disparition de Nkurunziza: "il part sans que la vérité sur ses crimes soit con- nue" (HRW), *SOS Médias*, 10 June 2020 <https://www.SOSmediasburundi.org/2020/06/10/mort-de-nkurunziza-il-part-sans-que-la-verite-surses-crimes-soit-connue-selon-hrw/> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[75] Marie-France Cros, 'Burundi: pourquoi le nou- veau président n'amènera que peu de change- ments?', *La Libre Belgique*, 18 June 2020 <https://www.lalibre.be/international/afrique/burundi-pourquoi-le-nouveau-president-n-amenera-que-peu-de-changements-5eeb74ca7b50a66a598c7db9> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[76] Colette Braeckman, 'Burundi: une élection con- testée, mais un vainqueur qui n'est pas le pire', Le Soir, 25

In summary, *RTNB* and *La Libre* both project a continuation of Burundi's pre-election trajectory, seeing in Ndayishimiye similar traits to Nkurunziza. However, while this is appraised positively by *RTNB* (selectively appropriating elements of the narrative that make both presidents seem like peaceful, democratic, and spiritual leaders), *La Libre* depicts them in negative terms (appropriating elements such as their use of religion to consolidate power, their indifference to criminal activity, and their overseeing an authoritarian system of governance). *Le Soir* and *SOS*, like La Libre selectively appropriate similar elements about the former regime, but Le Soir includes altogether different elements in its depiction of Nadyishimiye, portraying him as moderate and principled. Only *SOS*, which does not hesitate in its critique of Nkururnziza's regime, remains neutral in its stance about the new regime, including both positive and negative appraisals of his electoral victory.

Conclusions and Discussion

Overall, the outlets offer four distinct narratives of events. *RTNB* selectively appropriates elements of the narrative that depict Nkurunziza and Ndayishimiye as spiritual leaders who have brought Burundi peace and democracy. Despite the infection of the government's inner circle with Covid-19 and Nkurunziza's death, the outlet limits the discussion of the pandemic and minimises its impact. *SOS*, *La Libre*, and *Le Soir* also selectively appropriate the government's religious discourse; however, they include other narrative elements and offer a different pattern of causal emplotment to *RTNB*. These outlets portray Nkurunziza as an authoritarian leader who downplayed the Covid-19 pandemic, which eventually took his life. *SOS* is the only outlet to selectively appropriate the re-ethnicisation of Burundian politics in its coverage while the Belgian outlets are alone in inserting Burundi's poverty into the story. This ultimately leads to quite different patterns of causal emplotment: the *SOS Médias* narrative is about the politicisation of ethnic tensions in a country with a history of ethnic conflict caused by colonialism and an ongoing refugee crisis. In contrast, the narrative in *La Libre* and *Le Soir* is about a poor country with a dictatorial regime that still needs the support of former colonial powers and their aid money. The main difference between the two Belgian outlets is that *La Libre* projects a negative future for Burundi, while Le Soir assesses the new government in relatively positive terms.

To understand why these narratives differ, it is useful to turn to Bruner's concept of hermeneutic composability. Bruner highlights two issues affecting narrative interpretation: author intentionality and contextual factors (such as the background knowledge of both the storyteller and the listener).[77] As he writes, narratives are not '"unsponsored texts" to be taken as existing unintentionally'.[78] As the state broadcaster, it is unsurprising that *RTNB* generally portrays both Nkurunziza and Ndayishimiye in positive terms, and acts largely as a government mouthpiece. As independent media organisations, *SOS Médias*, *La Libre*, and

May 2020 <https://plus.lesoir.be/302952/article/2020-05-25/burundi-une-election-contestee-mais-un-vainqueur-qui-nest-pas-le-pire?referer=%2Farchives%2Frecherche%3Fdate-filter%3Dlastyear%26sort%3Ddate%2Bdes-c%26start%3D0%26word%3Dnkurunziza> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[77] Bruner, p. 10.

[78] Ibid., p. 10.

Le Soir are freer to adopt a critical stance; however, this is not to say that their editors are without intentionality.

As an organisation with a tradition of reconciliation and one that remained in the country in order to continue reporting on politics and human rights, it is understandable that *SOS Médias* would draw attention to the use of extremist ethnic politics. Where the outcome of the situation is unclear, such as the future under Ndayishimiye, *SOS Médias* maintains its orientation towards peace and reconciliation by depicting voices from a range of opinions, without pre-empting possible future abuses of power. In more recent coverage, however, the organisation continues its commitment to human rights, reporting about deaths and arrests during Ndayishimiye's first one hundred days in office,[79] and highlighting the renewed ethnic violence of his regime. This includes reports about *Imbonerakure* attacks against Tutsi families,[80] police encouraging the denouncement of Tutsi Kinyarwanda speakers within the country,[81] and accusations of ethnicism within government institutions.[82]

As independent media, the omission of ethnic politics in the Belgian outlets is intriguing given the Western tendency to present conflict in the Great Lakes region as 'ethnic'.[83] The ethnic frame was rolled out in representations of the 2015 conflict by both human rights organisations and the media, including in Belgium.[84] *Le Soir*, for example, reported 'fear of an ethnic turn' just a day after the first protests began and made multiple comparisons with Rwanda in 1994.[85] So why, in this case, do the Belgian outlets remain silent on the issue of ethnicity, preferring instead to emphasise poverty?

The answer to this question may lie in the main victim of the government's 'ethnic discourse'. As discussed above, Rwasa is a Hutu and former rebel allegedly responsible for the mass murder of Tutsi but who has since rebranded his public profile as a figure of peace and reconciliation.[86] The complexity of this 'ethnic' story thus goes well beyond the essentialist 'ancient hatreds' arguments, which presuppose irrational violence within an atavistic group.[87] In this case, Tutsiphobia is applied by a Hutu who is relatively innocent of crimes (i.e. Ndayishimiye) to discredit a Hutu who is allegedly responsible for mass-murdering Tutsi. Thus rather than constituting essential characteristics of Hutu or Tutsi people, the case demonstrates

[79] Jean Ntumwa, 'Cent premiers jours du gouvernement Ndayishimiye: un bilan controversé', *SOS Médias*, 18 September 2020 <https://www.sosmediasburundi.org/2020/09/18/burambi-des-familles-tutsis-de-plus-en-plus-ciblees-par-des-imbonerakure/> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[80] Jean Ntumwa, 'Burambi: des familles Tutsi de plus en plus ciblées par des Imbonerakure', *SOS Médias*, 18 September 2020 <https://www.sos-2mediasburundi.org/2020/09/18/burambi-des-familles-tutsis-de-plus-en-plus-ciblees-par-des-imbonerakure/> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[81] Leila Keza, 'Gitega: plusieurs réfugiés Banyamulenge expulsés de la ville de Gitega', *SOS Médias*, 9 October 2020 <https://www.SOSmedias-pburundi.org/2020/10/09/gitega-plusieurs-refugies-banyamulenge-expulses-de-la-ville-de-gite-ga/> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[82] Jean Ntumwa, 'Makamba-Rumonge: les décisions de la CNTB divisent', *SOS Médias*, 10 November 2020 <https://www.SOSmediasburun-Odi.org/2020/11/10/burundi-makamba-rumon-ge-les-decisions-de-la-cntb-divisent/> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[83] Daley, *Gender and Genocide*, p. 5.

[84] Purdeková, '#StopThisMovie and the Pitfalls…', p. 31; Williamson Sinalo, Narrating African Conflict News…', p. 5.

[85] Williamson Sinalo, Narrating African Conflict News…', p. 5.

[86] Eric Irambona, 'Burundi-élections: Agathon Rwasa'.

[87] Daley, *Gender and Genocide*, p. 2.

a highly sophisticated political strategy to socially construct the opposition as a dangerous 'Other' by drawing on a racist ideology that was first brought to Burundi by the Belgians.

To explain the CNDD-FDD's weaponisation of the ethnic (Hamitic) discourse would be difficult without recalling the colonial history of this ideology and Belgium would, therefore, have to acknowledge a role in contemporary Burundian affairs. Instead, the Belgian outlets turn to an alternative cliché: that of a poor African country in the hands of an authoritarian, ostentatiously religious dictator.[88] Such a framing highlights Burundi's ongoing need for Western assistance and enables the outlets to portray Belgium in a positive light, providing readers with a sense of cultural superiority.

Interestingly, this story unfolded around the same time as the death of George Floyd. During the time frame covered in this study, the Belgian outlets published a series of articles in response to the BLM protests, offering discussions about decolonising public space,[89] creating positive relations with former colonies,[90] initiating a parliamentary committee on the Belgian colonial past,[91] as well as a discussion about ongoing racism in Belgium.[92] These articles focus almost exclusively on the DRC, however. Despite the BLM movement, it seems that substantial discussions surrounding decolonisation and Burundi are yet to take place in these Belgian outlets. Based on this analysis, decolonised coverage would need to avoid essentialisations, stereotypes, and paternalist discourses that imply Burundi's need of the West. It would also need to include a greater acknowledgement of the link between Burundi's colonial past and its political present, explaining the background behind such phenomena as the church-state alliance or medical scepticism in Burundi.

In the spirit of this volume, which recognises that overly pessimistic conclusions about African affairs are yet another representational pitfall, some final comments are reserved for the laudable commitment to reconciliation and responsible reporting observed in *SOS Médias*. Before the big shutdown of independent media in 2015, Burundi was praised for the freedom of expression and professionalism of its journalists.[93] This vibrant media sector was forced into a rapid reconfiguration online as broadcasting centres were burned down and many journalists fled in exile.[94] While this change limited popular access (on account of relatively low levels of literacy and internet access), the ongoing commitment of outlets like

[88] The outlets make no mention of Belgium's role in bringing Christianity to Burundi.

[89] Colette Braeckman, 'Bruxelles, capitale du Congo de grand-père? Le parlement régional veut décoloniser l'espace public', *Le Soir*, 29 May 2020 <https://plus.lesoir.be/303946/article/2020-05-29/bruxelles-capitale-du-congo-de-grand-pere-le-parlement-region-al-veut-decoloniser?referer=%2Farchives%2Frecherche%3Fdatefilter%3Dlastyear%26sort%3-Ddate%2Bdesc%26start%3D50%26word%3Dburundi> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[90] *La Libre Belgique*, 'Organisons un débat mature et intégral sur le Congo et favorisons un menu de démarches positives', 19 June 2020 <https://www.lalibre.be/debats/opinions/organisons-un-debat-mature-et-integral-sur-le-congo-et-favorisons-un-menu-de-demarches-positives-5eec71a27b50a66a598c7e91> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[91] Martine Dubuisson, 'Une commission parlementaire sur le passé colonial belge dès la rentrée', *Le Soir*, 18 June 2020 <https://plus.le<-soir.be/art/d-20200617-GGMA5C?referer=%2Farchives%2Frecherche%3Fdatefilter%3Dlastyear%26sort%3Ddate%2Bdesc%26start%3D40%26word%3Dburundi> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[92] Lorraine Kihl, 'Belgique: un niveau de discrimination à l'embauche similaire aux Etats-Unis pour les afrodescendants', *Le Soir*, 15 June 2020 <https://plus.lesoir.be/307408/article/2020-06-15/belgique-un-niveau-de-discrimination-lembauche-similaire-aux-etats-unis-pour-les?referer=%2Farchives%2Frecherche%3Fdatefilter%3Dlastyear%26sort%3Ddate%2B-desc%26start%3D40%26word%3Dburundi> [accessed 03 March 2021]

[93] Frère, p. 138.

[94] Falisse and Nkengurutse, 'From FM Radio Stations to Internet…', pp. 175–81.

SOS Médias demonstrates the resilience of local journalism. By calling out the government's use of colonial ethnic-religious discourse to consolidate power, while avoiding the essentialisms and dependency discourse presented in the Belgian outlets, media like *SOS* clearly play an important role in resisting the internal and external legacies of colonialism in Burundi. There are also signs that Ndayishimiye's government is rekindling the media sector, suggesting that the future of Burundian journalism looks promising. [95]

[95] Jean Ntumwa, 'CNC vs Médias: une rencontre prometteuse', *SOS Médias*, 1 February 2021 <https://www.sosmediasburundi.org/2021/02/01/cnc-vs-medias-une-rencontre-prometteuse/> [accessed 03 March 2021]

CHAPTER 53

Digital Amplification of Fringe Voices: Alternative Media and Street Politics in Hong Kong

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Abstract

This study examined the development of alternative media in Hong Kong from 2012 to 2016. This time period saw a proliferation of media outlets that represented alternative voices. Adopting the theoretical framework of media ecology, I analyzed the political economy of the alternative media niche. The emergence of the alternative media niche was facilitated by digital technologies, but technological development was not the sole driving force. The centralization of media ownership collided the ability of mainstream media outlets to represent a wide spectrum of opinions. Meanwhile, the legitimacy of institutional politics was challenged by street politics, and hence the loosening of institutional control over ideology opened up a new space for political discussion and civic engagement. Alternative media used digital technologies to respond to this decreased supply and increased demand for media production that amplified fringe voices within the Hong Kong civil society.

Keywords

alternative media, media ecology, Hong Kong localism, political economy, media ownership

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Hong Kong is a media-saturated society. The city has a population of 7.3 million and a high volume of media products circulating among the local population. There are 52 daily newspapers, more than 600 periodicals, and seven licensed broadcast networks serving the 2.5 million households in Hong Kong ("Hong Kong: The Facts," 2016). The statistics do not yet include many alternative media outlets that publish on a smaller scale but represent emerging fringe voices. Alternative media production, as an umbrella term, includes various publishing practices (e.g., citizen journalism, online broadcasting, underground press). The most notable feature of alternative media is their operation outside of the institutional framework of mainstream media organizations (Atton, 2002; Downing, 2001). The case in this article revolves around the proliferation of alternative media outlets in Hong Kong from 2012 to 2016, with a particular emphasis on the interaction between the media ecology and the politico-cultural climate. During this period of time, Hong Kong saw a series of profound social changes. The ideological dominance of institutional politics waned, and the street politics with a populist appeal rose. Meanwhile, the political and economic influence of Mainland China strengthened, and the increasing "Mainlandization" provoked resistance from the Hong Kong civil society. As a result, the emergence of alternative media reacted to these ecological changes and promoted media activism to address social unrest.

The investigation in this study is conducted through the theoretical lens of media ecology. An ecological view of media (McLuhan, 1962, 1964; Postman, 1985) contextualizes the technological infrastructure of media systems within larger social structures. The theory of media ecology, which partakes of "the study of complex communication systems as environments" (Nystrom, 1973, para. 3), borrows the metaphor of natural ecology to depict the fluid, interdependent relationships between different actors. Just like in a rainforest where different species cohabit and influence the living conditions of each other, organizations and individuals in the media ecology operate within a complex set of interactions. Moreover, under the media ecology framework, technological infrastructure and the political economic factors affect each other, simultaneously conditioning media production. Technology is one of the connections people have with each other and with social institutions in a broader sense (Fuller, 2005; Stephens, 2014). An ecological understanding of media technologies bridges the material and the social dimensions of media industry and embeds the operation of media in the political, cultural, and economic systems.

It is the objective of this article to delineate the ecological story line of the rise of alternative media in Hong Kong. By showcasing the development courses of various media outlets and analyzing their contents, I seek to answer the following questions: How are the main actors positioned in Hong Kong media ecology? What niche do alternative media outlets occupy in the media ecology? How is the niche for alternative media configured by the political economy of the media ecology? It is my argument that the emergence of an alternative media niche in Hong Kong was indeed facilitated by digital technologies, but technological development was not the sole driving force. The centralization of media ownership and the political pressure from the Chinese government collided the ability of mainstream media—which had close ties to institutions in power—to represent a wide spectrum of opinions. Meanwhile, the legitimacy of institutional politics was challenged by street politics with a strong populist appeal. A new space for political discussion and civic engagement opened up as the institutional control over ideology loosened. Alternative media outlets used digital communication

technologies creatively and effectively. Their success was partly due to the decreased supply and the increased demand of media production that represented the ideological diversity of Hong Kong society.

Literature Review

Context: Postcolonial Hong Kong Politics

Before the explication of key concepts of concern to this study, some contextual information about Hong Kong politics is necessary for better understanding the scope of the case. The current constitutional framework for Hong Kong is called "One Country, Two Systems." This framework, meaning that Hong Kong is part of China but keeps its own social systems in autonomy, stipulates a composite political system containing both "liberal-democratic and corporatist-oligarchic elements" (Cheng, 2016, p. 387). This system results in tension between the directly elected part of the legislature and the guaranteed proregime majority in the legislative and executive sectors (Cheng, 2016). Before the 2016 election, the Hong Kong Legislative Council (LegCo) was divided between two major camps, with a small number of independent legislators. The two political camps are the "proestablishment" parties that support the Chinese government and local corporate interests, and the "pan-democracy" opposition that advocates installing Western democracy in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, the Hong Kong government is stuck between the governor's accountability to the Chinese government and the legislature's accountability to Hong Kong citizens, with no effective mechanism connecting those two (Zheng & Tok, 2013). The blockage in the responsive conduits of the institutional politics drives the articulation of interests and opinions to other channels, such as mass media and advocacy groups (Lau & Kuan, 2002).

The radicalization of street politics during the localist movement fully exposed the fissure in civil society of Hong Kong. The localist movement began to differentiate itself from the pan-democracy oppositional movements around 2010. A series of protests gradually articulated an ideology that reconstructed the collective memory of the local communities and resisted against the hegemony of corporate interests (Cheng, 2016). Around the 2012 LegCo election, the localist camp emerged as a new opposition political force, setting itself apart from the traditional opposition, the pan-democracy coalition. The 2014 Umbrella Movement, in which 20,000 people went on the street to protest, crystallized two assumptions of localism. One was the justifiability of civil disobedience, and the other was the right of Hong Kong people to determine the constitutional relationship between Hong Kong and Mainland China (Yuen, 2015). The core argument of the localist movement was "the preservation of the city's autonomy and local culture" (Chan, 2016, p. 904).

Political Economy of the Digital Media Ecology

An ecological positioning of media production indicates that media organizations operated within a set of political and economic constraints. Murdock and Golding (1973) argued that the political economic nature of media production lies in the media industry's industrial arrangement of capital and its commodification of cultural symbols. As a branch of the media industry, news organizations also bear the institutional structure that conditions journalism

as both a product and a practice (Picard, 2017). However, a simplistic thesis to attribute the agency of media production entirely to the control of capital and labor neglects the ecological nature of media systems. The political economy of media production should be used as a perspective to unravel the ecological ties media commodities have with regulation, technology, and culture and ideology (Garnham, 2011). The objective of analyzing media production as an economic activity is "teasing out the connections between the concrete practices of production and the wider organizational and economic shifts that shape them" (Murdock & Golding, 2016, p. 766).

Ownership is pivotal in the political economy of media ecology. From an ecological perspective, ownership functions as more than the entity legally owning a media organization; it should be understood as an institutional affiliation to a certain power arrangement (Downing, 2011). Also, in a capitalist economy, the influence of ownership is often conditioned by the political negotiation between market mechanisms and government regulations (Napoli, Stonbely, Friedland, Glaisyer, & Breitbart, 2012). Specifically relevant to my case study, media ownership has been concentrating in Hong Kong for the past two decades. Weisenhaus (2008) observed that Hong Kong media outlets were increasingly controlled by a small group of business tycoons who had close ties with political elites, and big media corporations began to expand their influence to Chinese-speaking communities across Asia. Under the pressure of owners, self-censorship was common in avoiding criticizing political powers or undermining corporate interests (Fung, 2007; Weisenhaus, 2008). The influence of the Chinese government and pro-Chinese capital was particularly strong after Hong Kong's sovereignty was handed back to China (Fung, 2007; Luqiu, 2017).

Digital technologies have become a prominent material condition of media ecology. According to Chadwick (2013), digital media ecology is characterized by hybridity, a property rooted in the hypermediacy of a given medium "in terms of its position in a system of interdependent relationships with other media" (p. 24). The connectivity and sociality contrived through computational technologies on digital media platforms, especially social media, blur the lines between the virtual sphere and real-life institutions, between production and consumption (Dijck, 2013, Webster, 2011). By contributing contents and redirecting information flows, the audience become more salient actors in the digital media ecology, where institutional media production adjusts to a participatory model (Deuze, 2007; Papacharissi, 2015).

The digital hybridity of media ecology has introduced new rhythms to the political economy of media production. Internet-based communication platforms have been taking the audience away from traditional news media like newspapers and television broadcasters because the Internet caters more to the niche demand of user gratification (Dimmick, Chen, & Li, 2004). The increasing weight of audience interactivity in digital media production reallocates economic resources to areas including user-generated content, audience engagement, and feedback management. However, Mansell (2004) warned against a technological determinist view of new media "with little regard for the associated structures and processes of power that are embedded within them" (p. 97). Although digital media production prioritizes horizontal networks and decenters institutional powers (Benkler, 2006; Castells, 2011), it is still prone to elite domination and co-option into the corporate-capitalist system (Foster & McChesney, 2011; Hindman, 2009).

Alternative Media

The notion of alternative media is relative by nature. Media outlets are considered "alternative" when they are alternative to the mainstream media. Alternative media employed production and distribution techniques in overt subversion to mainstream media (Atton, 2003). In contrast to mainstream media, alternative media tend to target niche markets of audiences, launch their services primarily on noninstitutional platforms, and actively challenge the mainstream ideologies in their products. Historically, alternative media were diverse in their ideological stances, which ranged from socialism and communism to right-wing extremism, and in their publication formats, which ranged from pamphlets to online forums. Although alternative media production tended to be ephemeral and inconsistent over time, it drove social changes in pivotal moments and recorded nonnormalized radicalism (Downing, 2001). Partly because of this reformative impulse, the boundaries around alternative media are not fixed. The relationship between alternative media and mainstream media can be best described as dialectical, especially given the hybrid nature of the digital media ecology (Rauch, 2016). The branding of alternative media versus mainstream media has always been situated within the power contestation among new and established actors in the media ecology (see Couldry & Curran, 2003).

The organizational structure of alternative media highlights access and connection while it decentralizes production bureaucracy and circulation control. This principle does not abolish organizational hierarchy that involves owners, writers, editors, and technical staff. But the editorial decision is made collectively, and the production is guided by a sharing of knowledge and skills (Atton, 2003). Bailey, Cammaerts, and Carpentier (2008) emphasized the "rhizomatic approach" to conceptualize alternative media. The metaphor of rhizome, while describing a nonlinear and interconnected structure, also captures the connective function of alternative media, which connect between specific communities and civil society, and between political, cultural, and economic institutions (Bailey et al., 2008). The inclusive and participatory impulse resides not only in the organizational structure of alternative media but also in their dealings with audiences, regulatory bodies, and other nonmedia sectors (Atton, 2002). However, adhering to grassroots coproduction and open-access distribution traps alternative media in a disadvantageous position in the predominantly capitalist media market. As pointed out by Fuchs and Sandoval (2015), the commercial operation of media outlets would undermine the autonomy of alternative media, and there are few other options to mobilize resources in the capitalist economy.

Alternative media differ from mainstream media in ideological stance. Sandoval and Fuchs (2010) argued that participatory production alone was not sufficient to challenge the dominant discourse represented by mainstream media. The essence of alternative media production is to develop critical discourse and engage the audience in political activism (Fuchs, 2010). That is, regardless of the form (citizen journalism, news curation, radio talk shows, etc.), alternative media production accumulates symbolic resources to subvert hegemonic powers and creates a space for the cultivation of resistance (Atton, 2003; Downing, 2008). This critical nature of alternative media is especially pivotal in social movements. In the case of the 2014 Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, alternative media challenged the mainstream media's portrayal of the movement as an irrational riot and provided an alternative frame that highlighted the

exploration of democratic governance (Kwong, 2015; Lin, 2016). The conceptualization of alternative media in this article gives more weight to the critical perspective than the organizational prospective, whereas the political economy of alternative media is treated as a bridge between these two perspectives.

Overview of the Hong Kong Media Ecology

In this study, I delineated the organizational characteristics of nine mainstream media outlets and tracked the development courses of 11 alternative media outlets around the time period from 2012 to 2016. The nine mainstream media outlets included the most influential and representative newspapers, broadcasting networks, and the government news agency, whereas the alternative outlets consisted of print publications and broadcasting stations. I collected information from a wide range of sources. For a given news outlet, I would look up their website, consult online resources (e.g., Wikipedia) and public records (e.g., company registry) to verify and complete the information about the outlet, and further complement my research with relevant news coverage and academic literature. For some alternative news outlets, whose organizational records were difficult to find, I contact ed them directly to get the information I needed.

Figure 1 shows the ecological map of these media outlets.

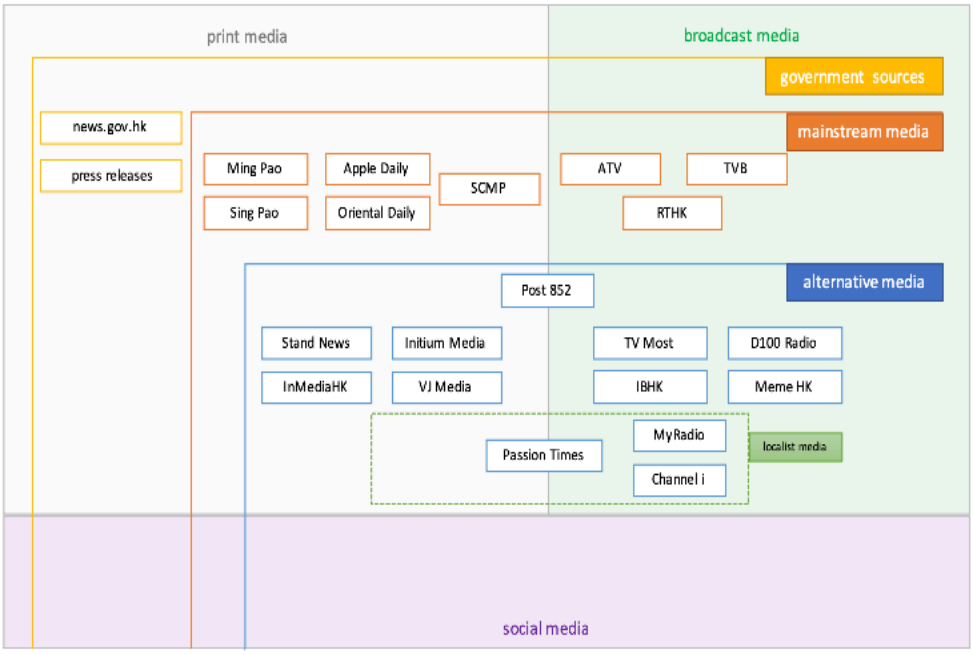


Figure 1. Media outlets in the media ecology of Hong Kong.

The outermost layer, in yellow, refers to government news sources; the next layer, in orange, is composed of mainstream media; and the last layer, in blue, contains alternative media. The background colors in Figure 1 signal the types of media production. Publications in the gray area produce content primarily in print format, whereas outlets in the green area are primarily broadcast media. Media outlets striding over the border publish in both print and broadcast. The bottom part, in purple, indicates the social media presence of these media outlets.

Figure 2 presents a time line on which events having a significant impact on Hong Kong media ecology are chronicled. First, a series of political developments changed the ideological landscape of the media market. The rally against the national education curriculum, which was accused of being Chinese propaganda, marked the radicalization of the localist movement. Two months later, the radical wing split from the moderate opposition in the 2012 LegCo election and became overtly supportive of the localist movement. The movement was

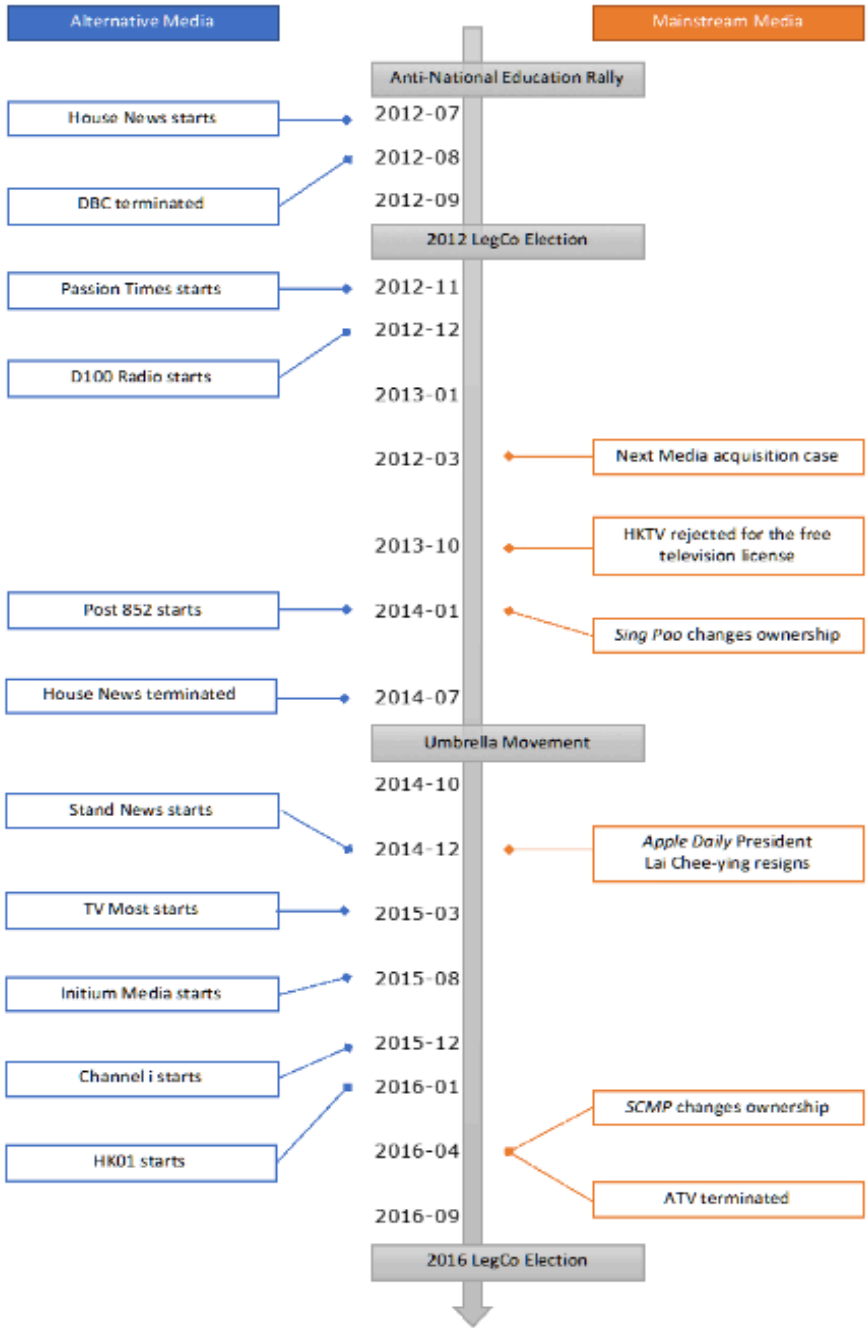


Figure 2. Major events in the Hong Kong media ecology from 2012 to 2016.

further fueled by many Hong Kong-Mainland conflicts from 2012 to 2014 and culminated in the Umbrella Movement. The localist activists formed parties afterward and made a bid for legislature seats in the 2016 election. However, the rise of radical localism motivated the Chinese government to exert more political pressure in Hong Kong, which in fact strengthened the proestablishment parties.

Meanwhile, the metamorphosis of the media landscape reflected the changing political environment. In Figure 2, the orange boxes present the developments concerning the mainstream media, and the blue boxes the alternative media. The mainstream newspapers and broadcasters became more pro-China because of ownership concentration and self-censorship. Meanwhile, alternative media outlets representing radical or progressive agendas sprung up in two waves, respectively around the anti-national-education rally and around the Umbrella Movement. Distinguished from the existing alternative publications and radio stations, the newly developed niche of alternative media amassed large audiences quickly because of its involvement in salient political issues. The new alternative media did not just cover alternative topics per se, but competed with the mainstream media, claiming to be better alternatives for the mainstream audience. The next section will analyze this alternative media niche and its positioning in the media ecology more in depth.

Mainstream Media: Main Actors to Channel Information Flow

Government Sources

The main approach that the Hong Kong government uses to steer the information flow in society is public relations. The Hong Kong government excels at "helping" the media not only by making raw news materials easily accessible but also by doing the reporting for them. News.gov.hk is the website operated by the Information Service Department, the headquarters of the government's public relations division. The website is a comprehensive news source. The content on the website, although carefully framed to present the government in a positive light, is of high journalistic quality. Other than news.gov.hk, the government also provides easy access to press releases from every government branch, video recordings and transcripts of legislative proceedings, and administrative statistics. The public relations division of the Hong Kong government is savvy to perform as an information source and to enhance the government agenda within the commercial media sector.

The Hong Kong media industry is large in appearance, but its activeness does not guarantee strong resistance against government influence or corporate powers. The mainstream media rely heavily on subsidized information by the government. There are multiple reasons behind this reliance. In line with the global trend, print media in Hong Kong have not been doing well financially. For example, South China Morning Post (SCMP), the elite English newspaper in Hong Kong, saw a 10% drop in circulation from 2011 to 2016 (Hong Kong Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2016). This decline in circulation revenue combined with drops in advertising income. At the same time, the Information Service Department got a 39% budget increase from the government in 2017 (Financial Secretary, 2017). Also, the income of journalists in Hong Kong is below the average of all professions, and there is not much room for promotion within one news organization. Local news organizations are not able to keep experienced

journalists (Hong Kong Journalists Association, 2016), and the burgeoning public relations industry, within which the government divisions offer the best salaries, becomes an easy exit for underpaid journalists. It has become more difficult for the news media, understaffed and constrained financially, to conduct independent investigations out of the agenda set by government agencies, which have equally professional employees and much more money to spend.

Mainstream Media

Mainstream Newspapers

Currently in Hong Kong, there are 13 mass-circulated daily newspapers that cover political news. The five newspapers in Table 1 are among the most influential print media outlets in Hong Kong and represent the political spectrum and the business models of Hong Kong newspapers.

Table 1. Major Mainstream Newspapers in Hong Kong.

Newspaper	**Ownership**	**Capital**	**Ideological stance**	**Business model**	**Circulation**
Apple Daily 蘋果日報	Next Digital 壹傳媒	Hong Kong	Pan-democracy, anti-China	Tabloid	226, 816 (audited)
Ming Pao 明報	Media Chinese International 世界華文媒體	Malaysia, Hong Kong	Center pan-democracy	Elite broadsheet	130,000 (claimed)
South China Morning Post 南華早報	Alibaba Group 阿里巴巴集團	China	Center pro-establishment	Elite broadsheet	100,385 (audited)
Sing Pao 成報	Sing Pao Media Enterprises 成報傳媒	China	Antiestablishment, pro-China	Tabloid/broadsheet	100,000 (claimed)
Oriental Daily 東方日報	Oriental Press Group 東方報業集團	Hong Kong	Proestablishment, pro-China	Tabloid	500,000 (claimed)

In the past five years, three of the five newspapers listed in Table 1 experienced major changes in ownership. The most prominent case was the mergers and acquisitions of Next Media, the mother company of Apple Daily. Next Media was founded and for a long time directed by Hong Kong businessman Lai Chee-ying, who held a bold political stance against the Chinese government. Lai meant to sell his media business in Taiwan after the company experienced a severe deficit, but the merger case stirred up strong opposition from both Taiwan and Hong Kong. The worry was that after the ownership transition, Next Media, virtually the only influential Chinese media company that spoke up against the Chinese government, would lose its critical edge. The deal was broken later because of political intervention and

social pressure, although the broadcast sector of Next Media was still sold to a Taiwanese businessman with a pro-China background. This unfinished merger case did not affect the editorial board of Apple Daily in any fundamental way, but Lai then started to loosen his control over his media business. After the Umbrella Movement, Lai resigned from being the president of Apple Daily and the president of Next Media at the end of 2014.

The other two newspapers, SCMP and Sing Pao, went through substantial change in ownership. South China Morning Post Publishers, already owned by pro-China tycoon Kuok Hock Nien, sold SCMP to the Alibaba Group, the Chinese corporation that surpassed Walmart as the largest retailer in the world. Sing Pao is the oldest Chinese newspaper that still circulates in Hong Kong. In 2014, the ownership of Sing Pao was handed over to Chinese businessman Gu Zhuoheng from Hong Kong businessman Yeung Ka-sing, who was convicted of money laundering by that time. In summary, after the newest round of ownership reshuffle, Hong Kong print media were to a great extent controlled by Chinese or pro-China capital at the ownership level. The concentration of ownership had a clear centralizing direction in favor of the Chinese government.

Mainstream Broadcasters

The broadcast sector of Hong Kong media faced a similar conglomeration situation, but in a different form. Television Broadcasts (TVB) had been the biggest broadcast network in Hong Kong since the 1980s. Its monopoly of the television market was partly ensured by the licensing policy of the Hong Kong government. A license was required for free broadcast services to air on public channels. In 2009, the government opened the bidding for free television licenses for the first time in 30 years. Two networks, Fantastic Television and Hong Kong Television Entertainment, received new licenses in 2013. But the decision was controversial because Hong Kong Television Network, which was considered the most prepared and promising competitor, was declined the license for virtually no reason. The government refused to disclose the licensing procedure, and a protest ensued. In 2016, Asian Television, which was the only competitor to TVB for more than 30 years, lost its license because of financial failure and stopped broadcasting in April.

As a result, the monopoly of TVB was not effectively challenged, especially in the broadcast news market. A main source of broadcast news actually diminished with the termination of Asian Television while the newcomer broadcasters focused mostly on entertainment. At the same time, the managerial level of TVB shifted in the pro-China direction, favoring capital and labor from the Chinese entertainment industry and deliberately avoiding agitating the Chinese government in the TVB news programming. The other alternative for TVB was Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), the public broadcast network in Hong Kong. The programs produced by RTHK were of reasonably high quality, and the station covered important social and political issues with in-depth reporting. Occasionally, RTHK shows would feature prominent activists from fringe political groups. But as a public media outlet operated directly under the government structure, RTHK tended to attract the intellectual elite and had limited ability to hold Hong Kong government accountable or to criticize the Chinese government explicitly.

Alternative Media: Reformers and Challengers in the Media Ecology

The political diversity of mainstream media ownership declined from 2012 to 2016. As a result, the range of opinions and values represented by the mainstream media in Hong Kong also shrank. During the same period of time, alternative media outlets proliferated to fill the void left by the mainstream media and extended the structure of media ecology in two directions. First, alternative media outlets introduced a wider spectrum of ideological stances into the media ecology, diversifying the angles and frames of news stories. Second, alternative media outlets enriched the repertoire of media representations, reaching out to more niche markets in the media ecology. Table 2 lists the major alternative media outlets in Hong Kong. It shows that many of them took off after 2012.

Table 2. Major Alternative News Outlets in Hong Kong (Establishment).

Outlet	**Time Founded**	**Director**	**Director background**
InMediaHK 香港獨立媒體	2004-08	Ip Iam-chong 葉蔭聰	Scholar
MyRadio	2007-02	Wong Yuk-man 黃毓民	Political activist
VJ Media 輔仁媒體	2012-02	Yung Lok-kei 容樂其	Political activist
House News/ Stand News 主場新聞/ 立場新聞	2012-07	Tsoi Tong-hoo 蔡東豪	Media worker, businessman
Passion Times 熱血時報	2012-11	Wong Yeung-tat 黃洋達	Script writer, political activist
D100 Radio	2012-12	Lam Yuk-wah 林旭華	Media worker
Post 852 852 郵報	2014-01	Yuen Yiu-ching 袁耀清	Media worker
TV Most 毛記電視	2015-03	Tsui Ka-ho 徐家豪	Lyricist
Initium Media 端媒體	2015-08	Zhang Jieping 張潔平	Media worker
Channel i	2015-12	Leung Tin-kei 梁天琦	Political activist, student
HK 01	2016-01	Lung King-cheong 龙景昌	Media worker

Establishment of the Alternative Media Niche

The first wave of alternative media proliferation was triggered by the political situation around the 2012 LegCo election. Starting in 2010, the pan-democracy camp experienced major fission, with parties split up. As the leading party of the pan-democracy camp, the Democratic Party absorbed a smaller pan-democracy party and shifted toward a moderate stance. This move agitated the radical wing of the pan-democracy camp to campaign against the moderate wing, causing the Democratic Party the biggest electoral loss since it was founded. After the election, many political figures and groups that had been loosely affiliated with the pan-democracy camp began to distance themselves from the mainstream political institutions, which opened up the opinion market of alternative media. One prominent example was Passion Times, which was launched two months after the election. The founder Wong Yeung-tat, a renowned radio host, started Passion Times to cover the political issues traditionally advocated by the pan-democracy camp, but from a more radical perspective. Passion Times was closely associated with Wong Yuk-man, the former legislator leading the radical wing of LegCo.

Another outlet that launched in 2012 was House News, a news curation website. The website began operation two months before the election. It aggregated news from other media outlets and analyzed news events from a supposedly independent view. Blogs and columns also constituted a large part of the content on the website. House News was founded on the idea of maintaining an information source that was independent of institutional political forces, especially the infiltration of pro-China ideologies in the mainstream media. It was not the first attempt in Hong Kong to create an independent news source. InMediaHK had existed for eight years beforehand to "break the domination and monopoly of media by the regime, corporations, and political parties, actualize the free exchange of ideas and information among citizens, and bring new voices to the increasingly unitary opinion marketplace" ("About Us," 2008, para. 4). InMediaHK focused on citizen journalism and kept minimal editorial control. Both House News and InMediaHK, despite holding independence as their core value, exhibited clear favoritism toward the antiestablishment side of the political spectrum. That is, independence from institutional politics, especially the established political parties, was crafted as a niche feature of alternative media.

The independent feature served as a moral high ground for alternative media, especially when the political pressure in the media ecology became more visible. In August 2012, a commercial radio station, Digital Broadcasting Corporation, went off the air because of financial difficulty. It was suspected that there were political motives behind the capital withdrawal. D100 Radio, an online radio station, was launched soon afterward as a substitute for Digital Broadcasting Corporation. The founding slogan of D100 Radio was "rally the people to speak for themselves" (一呼百應 還聲于民), and the station assigned itself the task to "defend the core value of Hong Kong with the freedom of expression" ("About Us," n.d., para. 2). The common value shared by these alternative media outlets—either online radio stations or news curation websites—was the populist resistance to the symbiosis of institutional politics and mainstream media cartels. This round of alternative media proliferation around 2012, albeit being the side effect of a power struggle within institutional politics, constituted a movement by itself. The movement was about diversifying the ideological voices circulated in the media

ecology, and it also vibrated deeper in the political domain to challenge the vested interest held by dominant elites.

Localist Specification Within the Alternative Media Niche

The number of new alternative media outlets surged again after the 2014 Umbrella Movement. This time, the basic structure of the alternative media market had been laid out by the 2012 precursors. Especially regarding the ideological spectrum, the opinion markets underrepresented by the mainstream media had been well explored. What the 2014 protest catalyzed was the formalization of the localist movement, and consequently an intensified competition over the ownership of the political alternative as a symbol. After the Umbrella Movement, the localist camp formally broke with the pan-democracy camp in preparation for the 2016 LegCo election. Even within the localist camp, several alliances formed to compete with each other during the election campaign. Channel i, an online radio station, was launched by Hong Kong Indigenous at the end of 2015. This channel was a response to Passion Times and MyRadio, whose founders Wong Yuk-man and Wong Yeung-tat had led a constitutionalist version of the localist movement prior to the 2014 protest. The localist alliance that founded Channel i, on the other hand, represented the post-Umbrella Movement generation of localist activists. The localist media production developed to represent different clusters of localist groups in a more specific manner.

Outside of the localist camp, the ecological space for alternative media was also getting more crowded and contested. The pressure came from opposite directions. First, the mainstream media began to catch up. After the 2014 protest, alternative ideologies like localism gained salience in the mainstream media agenda. According to Kwong's (2016) calculation, the mainstream newspapers picked up the term "localist camp" (本土派) in 2013, and the number of news articles mentioning this term surged from about 400 in 2014 to more than 1,800 in 2015. With increasing attention from the mainstream media, alternative voices were under the risk of being normalized. Second, the audience base was becoming diluted on social media. House News ceased its service shortly before the Umbrella Movement. However, the founder launched Stand News, a slightly altered version of House News, in December 2014 right after the movement. This timing to exactly avoid reporting the protest upset many supporters of the Umbrella Movement, who started dozens of parody pages on Facebook to mock Stand News. One of those mockery pages, Cemetery News, even outperformed Stand News in terms of Facebook traffic ("The Peculiar Online Media," 2015, January 19). As more actors came in, it became more difficult a task for alternative media outlets to keep competitive enough in the media market while being unconventional enough to cater for the niche audiences.

Expansion of Media Repertoire

Besides expanding the ideological spectrum of the media ecology, alternative media also brought new ways to engage the audience in civic life through media consumption (see Table 3). Two sets of alternative media repertoire had a critical impact on the Hong Kong media ecology. The first was the revival of analytical journalism. Many alternative media outlets were started or directed by distinguished journalists who had long worked for the mainstream media (see Table 2). Yuen Yiu-ching, the former deputy editor and columnist

of the Hong Kong Economic Journal, took his reporting team with him to found Post 852 in 2014. Post 852 provided original reporting in both print and broadcast and aggregated content from featured commentators and other blogs. Similarly, HK 01 was founded by the former owner of Ming Pao in 2016 and assigned Lung King-cheong, the former chief editor of Ming Pao Weekly, to supervise the news reporting team. Zhang Jieping, an experienced editor for several news magazines, also left the mainstream media in 2015 to join Initium Media as its executive editor.

Table 3. Major Alternative News Outlets in Hong Kong (Media Repertoires).

Outlet	**Ideological stance**	**Ecological niche**
InMediaHK	Prograssroots, Pro-social movement	Citizen journalist
MyRadio	Anti-institutional politics, cultural localism	Political talk show
VJ Media	Egalitarian, anticapitalist	Online subculture
House News/Stand News	Pro-media independence, prointellectual	News curation
Passion Times	Cultural localism	Online subculture, political satire, localism
D100 Radio	Pro-media independence	Public broadcasting
Post 852	Pan-democracy	Commentating analytical news
TV Most	Antiestablishment, anti-mainstream media	Spoof
Initium Media	Center, proglobalism	Analytical news, international perspective
Channel i	Racial localism	Localism
HK 01	Center, prointellectual	Analytical news

This set of alternative media outlets—Post 852, HK 01, and Initium Media—were devoted to providing quality news but at the same time labeled their products as something more than just news. The motto of Post 852 was "do when others don't, excel when others fumble, and leave when others arrive" ("About Us," 2014, para. 1). The commentary section was often highlighted by the three outlets, and some of their news reporting adopted the critical approach to analyze the covered event. Especially in political reporting, these outlets did not focus on breaking the news, but on interpreting the political implications of the news. There had been a long tradition of analytical or even argumentative reporting in Hong Kong journalism, and the Chinese newspapers had never fully embraced the normative idea of objective reporting. Released from the mainstream media that were operated under centralized ownership, these experienced journalists actually gained more room to carry out this analytical tradition. Borrowing the symbolic power of both independence and professionalism, this group of former mainstream media elites tried to reform the news media internally.

The second set of alternative media repertoire, with a more grassroots origin, was a mixture of political satire and popular culture. Passion Times and VJ Media were the pioneers within this tradition. Passion Times' director Wong Yeung-tat, other than being a political activist was also a renowned stand-up comedian and television scriptwriter. The main political satire

shows of Passion Times featured Wong as a comedian and commentator. Many other Passion Times shows covered popular subcultures like fan fiction, gaming, anime, and the occult. VJ Media, founded roughly at the same time as Passion Times, had a similar subcultural undertone. It promoted the elite hedonism in ancient Chinese culture with a populist twist. The motto of VJ Media read "meeting pals with writing and promoting benevolence with pals" (以文會友 以友輔仁), which echoed the common myth of how ancient Chinese intellectuals exerted political power. Alternative media like Passion Times and VJ Media brought the subcultural symbols from the private domain to the public domain, using those symbols to construct counter frames against elite political powers. This technique was commonly used by alternative media as a symbolic rebellion against the dominant ideologies.

TV Most, an online television station, culminated the satirical subculture with its parody of mainstream television networks. The logo of TV Most was deliberately designed in the same color scheme as the logo of TVB, the giant network that almost enjoyed a monopoly in the television broadcasting market. The news program of TV Most was called News at About Six-Thirty, which was a spoof of TVB's News at Six-Thirty. And as promised in the program name, TV Most would not broadcast their news at the same time every day. TV Most was part of the media network created by Tsui Ka-ho, a proliferate Hong Kong lyricist. During the licensing controversy in 2013, Tsui announced the intention of setting up TV Most. Two years later, the inaugural video of TV Most was produced in parody of broadcast news, with a former TVB anchor hosting the show. Throughout the "news" about the launch of TV Most, several anchors and entertainers formerly working for the mainstream broadcasters were staged as vox-pop interviewees.

TV Most ("About TV Most," n.d., para. 1) describes its mission as "providing the 6.89 million retarded youth of Hong Kong population with the best low-quality online television 36 hours a day." This facetious statement reveals how TV Most situates itself within the media ecology. Self-deprecatingly labeling its own product as low quality, TV Most is in fact distancing itself from the mainstream broadcasters and reiterating its stance as an alternative media outlet. The target audience of this "low-quality" outlet are people derided by the establishment as the "retarded youth" (廢青). The syntax of the statement suggests that the "retarded youth" actually represent the majority of Hong Kong people in contrast to a small group of politicians and tycoons. In the statement, the Hong Kong population (about 7 million) is rounded to 6.89 million. The number alludes to the 689 ballots Leung Chun-ying received to be elected as the Chief Executive of Hong Kong. Leung is nicknamed 689 as a reminder that he is the product of caucus politics instead of people's will. So a decoded translation of TV Most's statement could be: Without the abundant resources and market monopoly the mainstream media outlets enjoy, we provide Hong Kong people with the media content in which their real voices are recorded.

Digital Infrastructure of the Alternative Media Niche

These two sets of media repertoire, being the driving force for the expansion of the alternative media market, were facilitated by the digital infrastructure of the media ecology. Digital platforms provided elite journalists with the technological affordance to monitor the publication with relatively fewer people and lower expenses. The interactive functions embedded in the digital platforms also enabled this thread of alternative media to brand themselves as

accountable to their readers, constructing a virtual intimacy between the reporting team and the audience. Furthermore, it was a recent development that online publications were recognized as sources for quality news. As a result, investors were willing to finance media start-ups that relied primarily on online dissemination.

For the subcultural communities, the Internet sphere was already their base camp. Some of the outlets that featured online subcultures drew their initial audience from online forums about video games, anime, and fan fiction. For example, even after it adjusted to be a news website, Passion Times still dedicated separate sections for those subcultural topics. It was partly a historical coincidence that the new generation of media activists were both immersed in those subcultures and savvy at digital communication. The alternative media outlets operated by these activists built on the digital network that had ripened for the circulation of online subcultures, and the online subcultures also inherited the ideological mark of the early Internet culture—open source, equal access, and decentralization of power. This ideological mark had an amplified resonance when the subcultural expression was used in political activism.

Discussion

The implication of my findings and the theoretical contribution of this article can be unpacked in three ways. First, the political economic foundation of the development of alternative media is explored. My analysis shows that the critical nature of alternative media is not purely ideological. There is a solid institutional structure that conditions alternative voices. At the base of this structure are media ownership and market differentiation. Media investors seek rewards in the form of commercial gain or political influence, whereas media workers produce content in alignment with the organizational goals of media outlets. Political ideologies can be the markers of niche markets. An alternative ideology, through its media affiliates, reflects the preferred social hierarchy by a certain group of people with similar class, economic, and cultural backgrounds. These groups' influence in other social institutions is the raw material for their media activism. In this sense, the relationship between mainstream media and alternative media is not dichotomous. The two compete and contrast when the represented political agendas are at odds; placed in a broader media ecology, they can also be the complement, the response, or the inspiration to each other.

Second, despite the emphasis on the political economy of media ecology, my study conceptualizes ownership not as a self-contained base of the media industry, but as an ecological actor that is situated in social systems. It is simplistic to think of owners as the bosses who manipulate news content directly through their control over financial and human resources. Ownership rarely involves an individual person with a coherent and independent agenda, but more often entails a set of economic and political interests, sometimes contradicting ones, that are tied to the power arrangement of other social systems. The influence of ownership on media production is a constant negotiation between power articulations, and such influence can be both suppressive and generative. Especially for alternative media, the business operation is closely related to contents serving specific interest groups. Prominent content contributors may "own" the media outlet symbolically, although they do not pay for the assets. Financial investment in alternative media, many times coming from the grassroots or

nontraditional investors, can also aim at nurturing a political space for alternative ideologies. In this case, the distinction between media entrepreneurship and media activism is not clear-cut. The participatory production and the critical product are ecologically interdependent.

Third, the connection between the digitalization of media ecology and the amplification of alternative voices should not be understood as a linear correlation. Digital media do not democratize mass communication by default. It is easy to justify such causality with the perceived consequences of media digitalization. Digital media are hailed for overthrowing dictators and connecting communities, and the next second they are accused of spreading resentment and tearing the society apart. This deterministic view of media technology often neglects the social construction of technologies themselves. The diffusion of technologies is a confluence of political, economic, and cultural threads in the media ecology. These social factors affect each other through digital media production. The emergence of alternative media that represented fringe voices is fueled by the politicization of media market and contributes to a civic culture engaging the public in seeking political solutions to lifeworld predicaments.

My case study of the localist niche of alternative media in Hong Kong paints a holistic picture of how media ecologies evolve given the prevalence of digital technology. Like in a natural ecosystem, the actors in a media ecology are interconnected, and the disruption and the ensuing equilibrium at the systemic level manifest through the relational positioning among the actors. Mainstream media, despite occupying the advantageous position in the media ecology in terms of audience reach and productive resources, are also bound by other institutional forces, including governmental bureaucracy, political elites, and corporate interests. Media outlets branding themselves as the alternative voices "need" the mainstream media to stay mainstream. The market niche of alternative media blossoms when the mainstream media, constrained by politics and ownership, leave out too much of the ideological spectrum. Technological changes can catalyze this political economic dynamic. Digitalization of media production disrupts the existing ecological hierarchy in which institutional actors enjoy dominance. Although digital technologies do not directly cause the emergence of alternative voices in the media ecology, they open up a space, where media entrepreneurship and political activism mutually amplifies each other to challenge the status quo.

Conclusion

In this study, I reconstructed an ecological account of the emergence of alternative media in a specific industrial context. In general, the media market of Hong Kong had been competitive and saturated since the colonial period. For a long time, the news sector of the mainstream media was well supported by the business side of the media industry. News media outlets, especially newspapers, adopted a model in combination of commercial independence and political parallelism from the beginning. The diversity of ownership at the same time brought different political ideologies into the media ecology. However, the opinion spectrum covered by the press was shrinking, as the government became more resourceful and sophisticated in directing the information flow through public relations and the media ownership centralized toward pro-China capital.

The gap left by the mainstream media in the opinion market became the initial soil for the growth of alternative media outlets, and the increasing anti-institution sentiment among the

public boosted the demand for alternative sources of political information. At the same time, the maturation of the digital media market provided media activists with the technological affordances and financial resources to start their own publication and expand circulation. Alternative media outlets distinguished themselves from the mainstream media by emphasizing their independence from corporate interests and their audacity to speak out. Also, many established journalists left for the burgeoning alternative media market, bringing in the journalistic tradition of political commentary, while the grassroots praxis of alternative media used street culture symbols to connect with the audience and resist against institutional politics.

Grounded in a case study, this article clarifies the relationship between alternative media, mainstream media, and digital technology from the theoretical viewpoint of media ecology. Digitalization can be a pure market strategy adopted by established media actors to further centralize informational resources. Its affinity with alternative outlets and fringe voices is conditioned by political-economic and sociocultural factors. Alternative media and mainstream media are two groups of media actors that are ecologically interconnected. Their relationship to each other is fluid and contested. What is mainstream or what is alternative is relative to the structural arrangement of power. Either of the two can be constructive or detrimental to the well-being of civil society. My study indicates that future research on alternative media can benefit from media ecology theory by taking due consideration of alternative outlets' ecological positioning against mainstream outlets and better contextualizing the impact of digital technology in specific political-economic conditions.

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PART 9

Community and Localism

CHAPTER 54

Not Just Surviving but Thriving: Practices That Sustain a New Generation of Latin American Community Media Makers

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Abstract

Over ten years ago, two community media initiatives were founded by young people in their early twenties in Bogota, Colombia and Quito, Ecuador. While the Colombia-based collective, Ojo al Sancocho, has struggled to build bridges among urban and migratory communities uprooted by an entrenched, decades-old armed conflict, the Ecuadorian group, El Churo Comunicación, has fostered audiovisual autonomy and resistance among indigenous, feminist and ecological social movements that have had to defend their rights even though they were supposedly guaranteed by a so-called progressive government. Despite formidable challenges, each has fulfilled a long-held dream—a community movie theater, and the expansion of a radio-based practice to a multiplicity of practices that include community filmmaking, cyberfeminism and capacity-building of communities across Ecuador and Latin America. Together with other collectives, Ojo al Sancocho and El Churo are building a network of community filmmakers across Latin America. Using each organization's 2017 annual gathering as a point of departure, and subsequent meetings in 2018–2019, this article analyzes

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the characteristics that have led to innovation and sustainability in diverse contexts. It also indicates key challenges they face. This is an engaged, ethnographically-based, scholarly work.

Keywords

Alternative media, citizens' media, community filmmaking, community media, cultural organizing, Latin American community media, sustainability

Introduction

> *Hacer cine es un acto de amor.*
>
> *Making films is an act of love.*
>
> Cine en Movimiento (Buenos Aires, Argentina)

Latin America has always been a rich and vibrant site of alternative, citizens and community media practice and theory. Scholars such as Alfonso Gumicio Dagrón, Jesus Martin-Barbero, Clemencia Rodríguez and many others, have enriched media scholarship with their theoretical insights and have contributed to an understanding of media practices in Latin American contexts. Still, Latin American community media remains underrepresented in English-language literature, even as new generations of practitioners create and sustain vibrant organisations. Without in-depth analysis, practitioners and theorists alike miss opportunities to learn from these innovative projects. One of the aims of this text is to share experiences with individuals and groups outside of Latin America, as a point of reference for reflecting on their own dreams, histories, successes and challenges.

Over ten years ago, two community media initiatives were founded by young people in their early twenties in Bogota, Colombia, and Quito, Ecuador. The Colombia-based group Ojo al Sancocho began to work together in 2005 and eventually established a community film festival in 2008. They also started a community film school and though intertwined, this text focuses on the festival. It has laboured to build bridges among urban and migratory communities uprooted by an entrenched, decades-old armed conflict. The Ecuadorian group, El Churo Comunicación, founded in 2006, has fostered audiovisual autonomy among indigenous, feminist and ecological social movements that have had to defend their rights even though they were supposedly guaranteed by a so-called progressive government. Despite challenging social and political contexts, each collective has not only managed to survive for over a decade, but they have also expanded and innovated their practice well beyond their original goals. Ojo al Sancocho has built a community movie theatre that allows it to offer a crucial gathering space for community dialogue; El Churo has grown its radio-based practice into a multiplicity of approaches that include community radio, journalism, community filmmaking, cyberfeminism and capacity-building of communities that are defending their territories. Their radio presence has grown into a digital portal where all their work can be accessed from an online platform. Both groups, now legally constituted organisations, are internationally known and have become important references and leaders regionally and internationally. Together with other Latin American collectives and organisations, they are key social actors among a network of community filmmakers across Latin America and advocates

for communication rights and the democratisation of media. Each has maintained its vision and, equally as important, its autonomy. Using each organisation's 2017 annual gathering as a point of departure, and documents from internal meetings held in 2018 and 2019, this article analyses the characteristics of each group, and the relationships and practices that have led to innovative media praxis and sustainability in diverse settings.

Gumicio Dagrón (2005) has observed in his years of engaging with community media projects that sustainability is not limited to financial viability. He argues that social and institutional sustainability are integral aspects of a community media organisation's ability to stay alive. His concept of social sustainability speaks to the quality of relationships, practices and processes that an organisation must attend to, if it is to remain relevant to the communities with whom it works. Related to the question of relevance, Clemencia Rodríguez (2016:36) proposes that 'each context triggers specific communication and information needs', and from that space spring a plethora of practices and usages. She urges us to privilege an analysis of the connection among needs, practices and contexts, over the kinds of media and technology that a group uses. Although Rodríguez was not specifically addressing the issue of sustainability, I would argue that organisations whose practices are responsive to their context and to the needs of the communities with whom they work, have a much greater chance to sustain their work over the long haul.

The perspectives described above provide a point of departure from which to think about innovation and sustainability in contemporary community media projects in Latin America. This article first analyses the emergence, evolution, and relevance of a potent cohort of young community media makers. These makers consciously stand on the shoulders of Latin America's community media pioneers, at the same time that they innovate with transmedia pedagogies that position community communication front and centre (and 'from below and to the left', as El Churo's motto proclaims). The article then seeks to foreground some of the commonalities that these organisations share across the distinct contexts and challenges they face. Such exploration leads to a conclusion that the vibrant community media praxis and innovation that each one has cultivated for more than a decade is due, in part, to the quality and pertinence of their practices and relationships, characteristics that ultimately have helped them sustain their work. It is well-known and much-discussed that financial solvency is a great challenge, but a sole focus on raising funds can obscure the richness of practice that ultimately sustains the organisation.

This is an engaged, ethnographically-based, scholarly work that has involved interviews, co-theorising and collaborative work with members of the organisations. [1]

Ojo al Sancocho: dreams, camera, action!

Ciudad Bolívar, Bogotá, Colombia
7 October 2017

Three van loads of national and international community media makers pull up in front of Potocine, an impressive structure made with bamboo. Built in 2016, this community theatre

[1] The author has worked with these organisations and the Red de Cine Comunitario de Latinoamérica y el Caribe, and has participated in many of the events and activities over several years.

is located in Barrio Potosí, one of Ciudad Bolivar's 300-plus neighbourhoods that have been largely settled by Afro, indigenous and mestizo families displaced due to Colombia's decades-old armed conflict. The theatre is nearly filled to capacity with community residents that have come for the opening night of Ojo al Sancocho's 10th edition of its International Festival of Alternative and Community Film and Video. Luckily for us, instead of individual seats, each row's bamboo frame supports a flexible yet sturdy hammock-like material that invites us to



Figure 1: Festival screening. Photo: Ojo al Sancocho.

move closer to our neighbours. As members of Ojo al Sancocho remind us, the theatre seats 80 comfortably, but up to 100 *apretadito* (tightly).

The inaugural film is *500 Years* (Pamela Yates and Paco de Onis, 2017), the award-winning documentary about Mayan Guatemalans' struggles for reparations and justice. Two young women, protagonists of the film, lead a conversation about prospects for peace in Guatemala and Colombia, with an audience of children, teenagers, elders, artists and community leaders. I am impressed by the level of impassioned discourse, empathy and understanding shared by the speakers and audience. Afterwards, the festivities continue a few hundred feet away in the courtyard that Potocine shares with a school, also built and managed by the community. Even though it is quite cold here at 4,000 metres high in the Andes, indigenous Wounan youth don traditional dress meant for another climate for their dance presentation. Throughout the evening, several local bands entertain us with a wide range of Colombian musical genres. An intergenerational group of neighbours, international guests and festival-goers dance and sing well past midnight.

For Ojo al Sancocho,[2] Potosí and the wider community, this is an extraordinary occasion to celebrate and also to reflect on how it came to be. Arguably the only cultural space of its kind in a marginalised district of more than one million people, Potocine was built by many hands, but led by Ojo al Sancocho, a community media organisation whose work has been centred in Ciudad Bolivar for over ten years. In 2008, I met two of the co-founders, Daniel Bejarano and Alexander Yosa, at an Our Media/Nuestros Medios gathering in Rio Negro, Colombia.[3] They were just about to launch their first festival, which was to be held in a little-visited, much-feared district in the south of Bogotá. They recounted that one of their biggest challenges was convincing cultural agencies and Ciudad Bolivar residents alike that this was a viable project. Who would willingly go to Ciudad Bolívar? Who makes films here, or who would want to? Where would the invitees stay, given there are no hotels? Despite the odds, their goal was, and remains, to make visible the vibrant individuals and communities that inhabit Ciudad Bolívar. In an interview years later, Daniel Bejarano reflected on one of their beliefs that fueled the project:

> We poor people produce culture, art … that is to say, the rest of society—we are protagonists of history. Our histories need to be visible. (Daniel Bejarano, personal communication, 2014).

The name Ojo al Sancocho is inspired by the popular Colombian dish of the same name, a wonderful stew made up of diverse ingredients, that is prepared collectively. The organisation came of age during an incredibly difficult, national context of armed conflict. Locally, in Ciudad Bolívar, paramilitary groups have engaged in so-called *limpias sociales* (social cleansings), in which marginalised young people have been targeted and assassinated. One of Ojo al Sancocho's co-productions, *Desde la memoria germina la esperanza* (Hope grows from memory, Sueños Films, 2014) tells the story of some of the youth who were targeted and



Figure 2: Matinee screening at Potocine. Photo: Ojo al Sancocho.

[2] Ojo al Sancocho speaks to diversity; it literally means 'eye on the soup', with the *sancocho* being a popular Colombian soup made of a mix of different vegetable and meats.

[3] Daniel Bejarano, Alba Yaneth Gallego Betancur, and Alexander Yosa, are founders of Ojo al Sancocho and Sueño Films.

killed, and the community organising efforts to advocate for justice. Even now, with a peace accord in effect, deeply entrenched patterns of violence continue. This context has fostered an acute awareness in Colombia of the important work that community media initiatives do to repair the social fabric that has been fractured. Specifically speaking about situations of armed conflict, Clemencia Rodríguez argues:

> When grassroots communication media are deeply embedded in their communities, truly open to collective participation, and responsive to immediate and long-term local communication needs, they strengthen the agency of the community as it responds to armed violence (2016:3).

Paradoxically, although Colombia has a right-wing national government, there are progressive forces within the state that seek out active social agents that perform this crucial reparative work. These include municipal and regional cultural and arts funding agencies that have long understood the need to support organisations such as Ojo al Sancocho. The deep, long-term commitment that Ojo al Sancocho carries out has resulted in recognition and support from several of these agencies.

El Churo: Communicating from below and to the left

Quito, Ecuador
26 October 2017

Two weeks after Ojo al Sancocho's festival, El Churo Comunicación held its Fourth National Gathering of Community Communication. The first morning of the four-day event, held in various venues in Quito and the Amazonian town of Puyo, we gathered in an auditorium of the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar. The audience was largely made up of young indigenous participants representing a dozen or so pueblos and nationalities,[4] Afro-Ecuadorian and mestizo students, activists, policymakers, educators and community media makers. An international contingent, including the Network of Amazonian Communicators, were among the invited speakers. The opening panel that welcomed the crowd indicated El



Figure 3: Mural created by the Sublevo Collective at the 4th National Gathering of Community Communication in October 2017. Photo: Jorge Cano Cañizares, El Churo Comunicación.

[4] In Ecuador, the state legally recognises 18 *pueblos* and *nationalities*, which are ancestral communities.

Churo's community capital and its penchant for bringing together diverse sectors of the left: the president of CONAIE (one of the oldest indigenous social movements in Latin America), the Dean of the Faculty of Communication of Universidad Central, a union leader and a member of El Churo. El Churo works at the intersection of several pressing issues: communication rights; the defence of territories threatened by oil and mining; and gender-based rights including reproductive rights, cyberfeminism, and community feminism. Co-founder Ana Acosta explains the local, Andean significance of El Churo and how it encompasses its practices and concerns:

> The churo is a shell that emits a sound; it is an instrument of communication. In indigenous uprisings here in Ecuador this instrument announces the march and leads the way. It is also an instrument that begins the fiesta, the Inti Raymi celebration. It was a traditional means of communication used mainly in the Sierra although it is a seashell. We took its name because it signifies collectivity and calls people to work together and organize. It is also a potent symbol visually and philosophically. It has the shape of a spiral, of a dialectic process, and as a feminine symbol it has a lot to do with fertility. (Anita Acosta, personal communication, 2014)

Like Ojo al Sancocho, El Churo had recently celebrated its tenth anniversary.[5] However, the youth collective came of age in 2005 during citizen uprisings that led to the democratic ouster of Lucio Gutierrez (the third president in the span of a decade to be deposed in popular uprisings against neoliberal governments). The radio station where they had a youth program, Radio La Luna, was one of the main protagonists of this particular rebellion; it kept citizens informed while mainstream media remained silently complicit with the government. When they left Radio La Luna due to its adult-centric attitudes towards them, they founded El Churo Comunicación. They focused on youth activism, politics and culture. A decade later, while the founders are now in their early thirties, their commitment to young people is evident, by their ongoing efforts to recruit younger people to work with them. One of their most important projects is Wambra Radio (wambra means youth in Kichwa, an Indigenous language), an online community radio program that trains, hosts, and enables dozens of community groups to produce radio shows. Though they have been advocating for a radio frequency for years for them and other organisations, Wambra has been an important online space. It has recently undergone an expansion to a digital platform that brings all of Churo's activities together under one virtual space (radio, community filmmaking, research, journalism, and many special projects).

Another pivotal moment for El Churo Comunicación began in 2007, during Latin America's and Ecuador's left turn, when Rafael Correa became Ecuador's president. El Churo formed part of a cohort of advocates that organised support for a progressive communications framework, which included the division of the broadcast spectrum (allocating 34% to community media and 33% each to public and private media). The 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution reflects such efforts. However, it soon became apparent that the government intended to build its own media empire while suppressing the communication rights of community and private media (Coryat, 2015). El Churo has remained at the forefront of a struggle to hold the government accountable to its pledges to provide radio and television frequencies to community media

[5] Both groups have been engaged in community media work since 2005, though under different names.

groups. El Churo has also worked with CONAIE and human rights groups to contest the criminalisation of social movements.[6]

Community radio and social movement actors have grown frustrated with the government's repressive practices, and their inability to obtain radio frequencies. They have increasingly felt the need to communicate by other means that do not involve government bureaucracies. El Churo turned its attention to procuring the knowledge, skills and equipment to become community filmmakers. It then started an itinerant community film school, Ojo Semilla (Eye-Seed). Ojo Semilla works mainly with indigenous youth, community leaders and women that are defending their territories to make community films. In September 2018 they produced an all-women residency that brought together diverse feminists and women defending their territories.

Distinct national contexts

As the first few sections of this article suggest, El Churo and Ojo al Sancocho have innovated on their base activities and have achieved a substantive level of recognition in the field of community media over the past decade, and still counting. This article proposes that these successes have been forged at the intersection of their relationships and practices. Before exploring some of their commonalities, I will return to the distinct contexts that have shaped their practices and relationships.

While part of the mission of Ojo al Sancocho is to make visible the incredible people and dynamic communities that inhabit Ciudad Bolíivar, one of the key factors that has indelibly shaped the organisation has been operating within a context of armed conflict. Furthermore, the conflict is acutely felt in Ciudad Bolívar, more so than in many other parts of Bogotá and other cities. In this regard, safety is a huge concern and shapes practices and relationships, from where and how to run workshops, and the need to build trust in the communities in which they work, to the cultivation of strong allies and community leaders.

On the flip side of this, funders, community leaders and other allies all recognise that community media is an important strategy and practice that can help to repair the social fabric that has been torn apart. There is an infrastructure for supporting groups like Ojo al Sancocho, and support in general for culture and film within Colombia. As Daniel Bejarano recounts, when they produced their first festival there were 10–15 film festivals in Colombia, and now there are more than 90. Such recognition of the value of arts and culture, and the related infrastructure that supports it, has also helped to foster exchanges between festivals and community media actors across Colombia and beyond. Many other community media organisations regularly attend Ojo al Sancocho and have learned how to produce their own festivals. Ojo al Sancocho has played the role of mentor for a few of them. Within this array of events, community media festivals are collaborative, in that they seek to establish a schedule that allows them to visit each other's festivals and to also take advantage of international invitees.

[6] One of the campaigns, *Resistir es mi derecho* (Resistance is my right) was a web-based project that 'sought to visibilize the stories, faces, and voices of indigenous, women, farmers, young people, students and defenders of human rights during the mobilization of the uprising and national strike in August 2015' (resistiresmiderecho.org).

El Churo, on the other hand, does not face the same degree of conflict as their Colombian counterparts. However, questions of safety, security and trust-building are tantamount, particularly as the communities with whom El Churo works actively need to defend their territories against resource extraction. Since 2008, El Churo has operated within a context of mistrust between social movements and the state, and even among social organisations.[7] The concerted effort on the part of the Correa administration to delegitimise and criminalise social organisations, and its efforts to shut down organisations that openly opposed its policies, have also put El Churo at risk. With respect to the perceived value of what El Churo contributes, unlike in Colombia, where film, arts and cultural work constitute activities that are recognised and supported, Ecuador's film and community media sectors are nascent. The government has barely moved forward on its promise to develop community radio and television initiatives. Additionally, the fledgling film sector prioritises films that are poised to garner international recognition in the international film festival circuit, while community filmmakers fight for recognition and funding opportunities.

Commonalities in creative practice and relationship-building

Across their different national contexts, their work is driven by a measure of urgency because they collaborate with historically marginalised communities. Their work with diverse communities has led to some common creative practices, although particularities exist given each one's needs and contexts. This section analyses those practices. Certainly, *practices* and *relationships* are intrinsically bound together. A few brief examples help to ground the categories.

1. Alternative, interdisciplinary, transnational and collaborative praxis

Both organisations' methodologies and educational philosophies are grounded in popular education. In brief, popular education is a critical educational practice, with deep roots in Latin America (Freire, 1970, among others), that starts with the premise that education can and should be a democratic, non-oppressive, liberatory practice. It assumes that each person, whether a 'student' or 'teacher', has knowledge, skills and perspectives to contribute to the group. Popular education practices also point towards dialogic and playful methodologies that seek to engage participants in developing their voice, creative thinking and collaborative work. It is crucial to note, and cannot be overstated, that a key quality of both Ojo al Sancocho and El Churo is that they go about their work with an impressive amount of joy and love for what they do, and for the communities with whom they work.

Their practice is interdisciplinary, in that they are sociologists, anthropologists, social workers and media makers. Also, both put community communication front and centre, not media. Communicative practices involve many forms of media making, such as fiction, animation and documentary forms, but also include storytelling, dialogue, poetry, dance, music, performance, and cultural work of all kinds. Technologically, each organisation uses, mixes and incorporates a diversity of tools, formats and approaches. This leads to open, flexible pedagogies, often based on the strengths and skills of the facilitators. Though this

[7] A topic not covered in this article is the cooptation and fragmentation of social movements that, while they began before Correa became president in 2007, were exacerbated under his administration.

is a strength most of the time, it also makes it difficult to perfect one genre or to develop systematic approaches to the work.

In Ojo al Sancocho's case, the community-based nature of the festival, including its location in a marginalised district, its international scope, as well as its popular education principles, are just some of the elements that shape festival practices. For example, festival invitees are not housed in hotels, rather they live with local families. In the interest of building community together across the cities, regions and nations that are represented at the festival, invitees are expected to stay for most of the eight days of the festival, to live, eat family-style with the community, and work together. They are also expected to collaborate on making the festival happen by leading workshops, acting as jurors, introducing films, speaking with the press, and so on. Regarding the relationship between invitees and community members, their equal standing in the eyes of the festival organisers is always emphasized.

The second day of the festival is always spent travelling around the territory, *La Ruta del Sancocho* (The Sancocho tour). It is a full day dedicated to bringing all the invitees to different sites around Ciudad Bolivar where communities are organising territories they have settled. In 2017 the group visited Estancia de los Altos, a rural territory that was populated in the 1990s. It met with community leaders, youth and women, and got to see their communal vegetable gardens, agricultural and cultural projects. This day is crucial to the festival, an opportunity to understand the complex community dynamics and struggles up close. This festival pedagogy has lent itself to the building of a community media network, which is discussed later in this article.

El Churo Comunicación's pedagogical practice originated in radio. Radio practice, combined with a focus on urban youth, and cultural organising around the need for community radio, led it to produce large music events for several years. At the same time, it has adapted practices rooted in Andean and Amazonian traditions. The name of the organisation, as described earlier, symbolically acknowledges this. Though most founding members are working class urban mestizos (as are founders of Ojo al Sancocho), their close collaboration with ancestral Indigenous communities and the social movement, CONAIE, has led them to incorporate an Indigenous understanding of the concepts of Community and Nature. The relationships they have built with Indigenous communities have led them to extend their work to rural communities and the diversity of *pueblos* and *nacionalidades* within Ecuador:

> El Churo is a communication organisation of the left, but within the left there are many tendencies and meanings. We are not dogmatic. Actually, we see ourselves as learning about what is popular and community communication. Our intent is to strengthen all spaces from a communicational framework. We are attached to Andean philosophy, the ancestral *pueblos*, and communities. And in those spaces, *lo comunitario*, is a political posture. *Lo comunitario* gives life. And we assume this as our life work. (Jorge Cano, El Churo, personal communication).

With regard to their continual innovation, El Churo has recently incorporated community filmmaking into their practices and hosts an itinerant film school for defenders of ancestral territories. A relatively new practice brings together gender and technology. The filmmaking component focuses on community feminisms while the Internet-based practice has brought together cyberfeminists from across Latin America to share and exchange how their feminist practices shape their Internet-based work.

Ojo al Sancocho has also expanded its focus on gender. For example, it now works with women in Ciudad Bolívar to make films. Several of their videos were shown at the 2017 festival, with the participants present to discuss the impact the project has had on their lives. Both organisations have also increased their work with LGBTQ communities. Such openness, flexibility and fluidity, anchored by solid missions, are key features of each organisation. They undoubtedly keep their work vibrant and focus on the needs and contexts that also change over time.

These practices lend themselves to an emphasis on collaboration rather than competition, which is another practice and posture of both organisations. One of the most interesting, ongoing instances of transnational collaboration has been the collective founding of the *Red de Cine Comunitario de América Latina y El Caribe* (the Network of Community Cinema of Latin America and the Caribbean). Given Ojo al Sancocho's Festival as an annual meeting place for community media makers and organisations, over the past several years the Network has used the space that the festival affords to theorise their practice and to plan collaborative work. After three years of discussion, in 2014, over 100 local and international participants worked together for several days to discuss the practice and theory of cine comunitario (community filmmaking). They came up with a core definition that unites a wide spectrum of organisations, and the Network was officially launched:

> The Network of community filmmaking of Latin America and the Caribbean conceptualizes community filmmaking as:
>
> - A practice in which the same community appropriates audiovisual tools to self-represent and make visible its realities;
> - A mode of horizontal and collective production that generates and values local knowledges and identities;
> - An integral audiovisual process of coordination (*gestión)*, production, exhibition, circulation and consumption that actively includes the community in each of these stages.
>
> Therefore, community filmmaking is a process that permits change, transformation, social and political incidence, in the context of production, for the well-being of the community and its audiovisual sovereignty.
>
> A cinema that connects being and doing, a living and lively cinema. (La Red de Cine Comunitario de América Latina y El Caribe).

While the Network remains a loosely organised transnational assemblage of a few dozen organisations, it is committed to continuing to meet and collaborate on diverse projects over time. Several of the founding organisations involved (including El Churo, Ojo al Sancocho, Cine en Movimiento (Argentina), FESDA (Cali, Colombia) and Grupo Chasqui (Lima, Peru)) regularly invite members to attend its festivals and events. Organisations have also hosted individuals from other organisations to encourage pedagogical exchanges. There are several individuals involved in the Network that have travelled widely to work in each of these and other organisations across Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru. In this way, a cross-fertilisation of ideas and actions occurs. El Churo and Ojo al Sancocho have visited each other on numerous occasions, made possible by mutual interest as well as the

relative proximity of their cities by bus or plane. There are several WhatsApp groups that keep the Network in touch on a weekly basis. This is a highly mobile, technologically savvy (but not media-centric) heterogeneous group of practitioners whose work is shaped by popular communication traditions, multiple kinds of media and technology, open software and an array of social movements.

Several members of the Network have also been or are currently enrolled in post-graduate programs that have provided them with the space to document and theorise their practices. Indeed, this new generation of community filmmakers are aware of the histories and shoulders they stand on, and are highly motivated to adapt historical work to contemporary practice (see Molfetta, 2017 for recent work on cine comunitario in Argentina).

2. Collective study, self-education and mentorship

Both organisations have had to actively seek out the skills they wanted to learn. When they started, few if any members had attended college and none had studied media or filmmaking. In interviews, members of each organisation recount how they had to find individuals and organisations that would teach them what they wanted to learn, whether that was scriptwriting, camera work, digital photography, editing, and Internet skills for online radio broadcasting. This search for knowledge and skills has led each organisation to focus on continuous training for themselves and their communities as a core activity. Both emphasise the building of skills and knowledge of younger members of their organisation, ensuring that they have ample opportunities to be mentored, to attend classes, and to travel to events nationally and internationally to learn and represent their organisation. This focus inward also extends outwards, as each shares practice and theorising about the work among other organisations. This general approach has led to rich intra-organisational exchanges, innovations in practice and collective theory-building.

While each organisation is youth-driven, they seek out intergenerational relationships. Each has identified mentors in their midst. For example, El Churo has worked closely with legendary community radio producers such as Jose Ignacio López Vigil, transnational community media organisations like ALER (Asociación Latinoamericana de Educación Radiofónica, the Latin American Association of Radiophonic Education), social movement-allied filmmakers such as Pocho Alvarez and important indigenous leaders such as Domingo Ankwash (Shuar). For Ojo al Sancocho, its festival is its greatest laboratory, attracting makers and thinkers from across the globe. Locally, it has interacted with some of Colombia's theorists such as Jesus Martin-Barbero and Clemencia Rodríguez, among others. It has also worked with Stefan Kaspar, founder of Chasqui Comunicación in Peru, before his untimely death. Importantly, the relationships forged through collaborative work and common interests have tended to be long term. The community leaders present at both organisations' annual events have been allies for years. Finally, given ongoing exchanges of ideas, methodologies and experiences, both groups are also sites of continual reflection.

3. Connecting practice to public policy

Both organisations integrate policy advocacy initiatives, projects and activities into their organisational work. El Churo has been one of the main social actors in Ecuador involved

in advocating for communication rights and the democratisation of media. Specifically, they have fought for radio frequencies for community radio—not just for their own frequency but also for hundreds of community groups and indigenous organisations. The 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution pledged to equitably divide the broadcast spectrum, with 34% going to community radio, and they have tirelessly fought for that dream to come about, though the government has lacked the will to fulfil this pledge. Now, it is also one of the recognised leaders in *cine comunitario* and works with other community and Indigenous media actors to get the film sector to recognise and fund the work. Ojo al Sancocho's core vision is to affect public policy related to education, audiovisual culture and the democratisation of media. It uses its annual festival as a platform to visibilize community filmmaking. Like El Churo, it proactively invites the media and policymakers to its events in order to engage them in dialogue about communication rights and the value of community media.

Another arena in which both groups seek to make an impact is related to ecological awareness and resistance to extractivism. This a growing crisis in Latin America and these groups, and the communities they work with, are facing unparalleled ecological devastation and territorial eviction, such as urban mining projects, deforestation, oil drilling and monocultural agroindustries. While Ojo al Sancocho regularly features in its festival the work of community-based audiovisual projects that are defending their territories, El Churo trains communities to use audiovisual tools to communicate what is happening in their regions, and reports on anti-extractivist social movement activity.

Challenges going forward

There are many challenges that Ojo al Sancocho and El Churo confront as they move through their second decade. This section foregrounds just a few issues that they face as organisations that have not only survived many obstacles but have grown and thrived.

Tensions between individual and group needs

One of the ongoing challenges that these and similar organisations confront is self-care and relatedly, maintaining healthy group dynamics. Because of a demanding schedule that includes numerous projects, frequent invitations to present their work nationally and internationally, and the urgency of the work itself, founding members and other long-term staff enjoy little down time. This pertains to daily schedules, as well as periodically making room for each individual's projects and passions. At El Churo, staff members have collectively sought to ameliorate the issue by attempting to leave the office in the early evenings instead of staying late into the night, though as an organisation that runs an online digital platform this is not always possible. With regard to negotiating time for other pursuits, one of the ways that both organisations have dealt with this issue has been to build in a measure of flexibility to accommodate the needs of each member to pursue full-time study, travel, or engage in other projects. Probably because of this flexibility, founding members and long-term staff members have remained active in each organization. Of course, there is an implicit tension between the demands of the collective work and the needs of each individual.

Tensions between sustainability and growth

Even though both organisations have increased in size and scope, they still operate as lean, tight-knit groups. This is positive in that they have been able to stay afloat financially, while remaining responsive to shifts in political contexts and community needs. However, success brings growth and the need to incorporate new members. Given the kind of work they carry out, each new member should possess the passion, commitment, energy, and multiple skills and competencies needed to work in these complex, dynamic environments. These positions go to young people mainly in their twenties, who, due to the precarity of many of their and their families' lives, or due to their own creative needs to explore other geographies, cannot always commit to the organisation on a long-term basis. Expansion is also a funding issue; it is not always possible to procure the funds for adding additional members, beyond what their budgets already support. That being said, both groups have been successful in incorporating and retaining core members that have committed to the organisations for several years. However, it is certainly an ongoing challenge and tension to expand beyond the core group in a sustained fashion.

Tensions between building a legacy and planning for the future

While both El Churo and Ojo al Sancocho have written and produced audio and video documentation of their events and projects, it is vital that each one engages in deeper reflection about their histories, methodologies and experiences so they can share their accumulated wisdom, which is considerable. At the same time, they need to spend time to engage in visioning and strategic planning for the future. All of these activities require dedicated time and energy, which is exceedingly difficult to carve out, given the demands on each organisation. But they are essential for building their own legacies while sharing knowledge; for integrating new members; and also to prepare for possible transitions. Indeed, in 2018 and 2019, both organisations have engaged in these activities.[8] While there are no changes in the immediate future, the viability and strength of an organisation rests on how well it is prepared for possible transitions. Of course, most collectives and small organisations in Latin America that I am familiar with have remained founder-led, so this is not an inevitable event. It is quite impressive how the founders and long-term staff members of each organisation have remained committed through multiple personal and political life transitions, throughout their twenties and now into their thirties. While each began as a small, fledgling collective that did not know what the future would bring, they are now vitally important organisations.

Concluding thoughts

Community media practitioners and scholars that came of age in the 20th century often wondered what new media technologies would signify for the field. At the same time, they

[8] Ojo al Sancocho/Sueños Films has published *Sueños, Cámera, Acción* (Dreams, Camera, Action), a collectively written document about the history of their Escuela Popular de Cine Comunitario de Ciudad Bolívar, and how the work has contributed to a culture of peace, and peacebuilding efforts (2019). El Churo has published *Compartir la Palabra* (Share the Word), a manual about their pedagogy of community communication for defending social rights.

knew that the best, most relevant organisations would continue to keep the communities with whom they work at the front and centre of their mission.

A new generation of community media makers and organisations have come of age at a highly complex time in Latin America and globally. Whether they have had to deal with the difficulties of peacebuilding in a context of armed conflict, rapacious neo-extractivism, or both, there is greater inequality and precarity in their communities. The organisations discussed in this article have become part of the legacy of past generations of Latin American community communication pioneers and traditions, while they freely create, adapt, mix and share transmedia pedagogies and technologies. While they are tech-savvy, they are not media-centric. They each use an array of educational and media strategies to engage their peers, collaborators and audiences.

This article utilised ethnographically-based description and analysis to capture a few moments in each organisation's practice. These moments hopefully communicate what makes them special, unique and vital. The text then sought to examine each organisation's context, history, trajectory, goals and ultimately, the qualities and practices that helped them to sustain their work over the long term. It explored the characteristics that each possesses that make them relevant to their communities and help them not just survive, but thrive. It then searched for commonalities, and found that the interconnected, dual pillars of creative practice and relationship-building were key ingredients. In studying these elements, they elicited three broad categories: the alternative, interdisciplinary and collaborative praxis that is forged out of practice; their mutual dedication to collective study, education and mentorship; and their goal to move beyond their own experiences, to affect social change on a greater scale, through ongoing advocacy. In each of these arenas, both organisations have fostered long-term relationships with a wide array of communities, allies, political actors and cultural organisers. In this way, they have sustained their work as they continued to grow.

While this article has emphasised practices that have led to vibrant longevity, it has also indicated some of the challenges and tensions implicit in the work. They include self-care; balancing individual and group needs; and recruiting new members that can bring their passions and skills to the demanding work. These issues have arisen for the most part as the initial years of high-intensity and experimentation transformed them into established leaders in the field. Through it all, both organisations continue to innovate their practice, privilege community-building, and forge much-needed dialogic spaces. These have provided the essential ingredients to sustainability.

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CHAPTER 55

Community Media Makers and the Mediation of Difference: Claiming Citizenship and Belongingness

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Introduction

> When you are looking at SALTO, as a TV channel, you actually become a sort of shop window of the city. And the city is so multifaceted—from your own position it's difficult to relate to everything that is going on. All those ethnicities, all those different social groups. At SALTO, you actually see a sort of carousel of diversity pass by. And what you get, then, is that people also in this contemporary moment can get to know other people's bubble. That is where the inspiration lies.
>
> —Willem (SALTO)

SALTO is Amsterdam's community media organization. It enables the city's communities to broadcast their material on local TV, radio and online channels to Amsterdam audiences. SALTO's programming aims to establish new connections between different urban groups, illustrating how cultural difference is "always-already mediated, that is, constructed (re)presented, and experienced through the media of communication" (Siapera 5). However,

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in emergent discussions on the growing cultural and political polarization in Netherlands, Europe and beyond, there is much attention for how contemporary media platforms and social media may function as filter bubbles, as they allow users to connect only with like-minded people and encounter perspectives that confirm their own worldviews. As community media philosophies commonly reflect commitments to public participation, civic engagement, accountability and the promotion of a plurality of social, cultural and religious ideas (Buckley) there is particular urgency to uncover the potential of community media to promote audiences to move outside of their bubbles. The question therefore arises: how do community media mediate difference and inclusive citizenship? In aiming to provide community-oriented alternatives, are they inherently inclusionary, or do community media also prioritize, ignore or exclude particular experiences?

From SALTO's approach to community media, it appears a key imperative is establishing a "discursive space" for diverse communities, on the basis of the twin principles of "participation" and "access" to accommodate "those voices, interests, and perspectives . . . typically marginalized in mainstream media discourse" (Howley 818). Furthermore, in seeking to allow marginalized voices to be heard, community media foster alternative formations of citizenship from below.

Unlike community formation, the workings of citizenship are dominantly understood from top-down, institutional and legal perspectives that emphasize one-directional and relatively passive processes like paying taxes and voting. From this perspective, a small group of elites decides about the rights and obligations of a majority. When shifting the focus from the "institution of citizenship" towards performative "acts of citizenship", "that is, collective or individual deeds that rupture social-historical patterns" (Isin and Nielsen 2), we can create awareness about the wide variety of civic engagement practices communities engage in and the role of media in sustaining these practices. The struggle for socio-cultural recognition (Honneth and Anderson) of minority communities—besides legal recognition—is fundamental for striving towards just and inclusive societies. Moreover, to be able to attend to citizenship claims it is important to understand how communities see themselves and how they see themselves as part of wider societies. Community media are important actors in acknowledging, enabling and amplifying such claims from below. Although policies, NGOs, the World Bank and scholars' historical conceptions of community media predominantly originate from the Global North, community media in the West are understudied. As Bart Cammaerts diagnoses, community media "discourses, theories and policies are oriented towards developing countries and emerging democracies", while paradoxically community media "in the West are often forced to operate in the margins" (635) as a result of neoliberal policies and budget-cuts.

This chapter sheds light on the mediatedness of citizenship and difference, by focusing on a case study of two groups of community media makers in the Netherlands: local public broadcasters and feminist podcasters. Each of these community media makers is distinctly situated and functions according to a specific logic of mediation and understanding of difference and citizenship. While now commonly institutionalized and subsidized, local public broadcasting emerged during an era of analogue media shaped by a pirate-broadcasting ethos. Feminist podcast makers are grassroots and cherish the medium-specific affordances that have emerged in the recent digital era. Both share a commitment towards increased access

to information and strive towards a more inclusive representation of different voices and communities. As community media, both disrupt the common binary opposition between amateur and canonized professional media practice, and call into being non-mainstream counterpublics (Felski; Fraser). Challenging the view from the national center, local public broadcasters orient themselves to their local audiences and their concerns, while feminist podcast makers construct publics around their topical focus and ideological commitment. Both offer spaces of community withdrawal, differential identification and mediated belonging, but they also have to relate to the mainstream public sphere and remain aware of their distinct status (Warner). In mediating community voices, community media thus navigate between hegemony and counter-hegemony, inclusion and exclusion as "the power asymmetries of mediation map onto the pre-existing and deeply seated asymmetries" (Madianou 6) of for example race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class.

Field and focus

Community media mediate citizenship claims and co-shape difference; in their mediation they "produce and subsequently control a certain version of it. However, this very mediation simultaneously undermines such efforts by inserting a degree of instability, thereby keeping open the process of mediation" (Siapera 6). In this chapter, we focus on the practices of fifteen community media makers for mediating difference and citizenship. Interviewees represent local public broadcasters and feminist podcasters (see Table 2.1). [1]

Following dominant patterns emerging from our analysis of interview narratives, in this chapter, we discuss three dimensions of mediation (Martin-Barbero): institutionality, technicity and sociality. We highlight therefore community media's institutional context, their technological infrastructure and their contribution to community formation and claiming citizenship.

Legally, public broadcasters have the task to perform independent journalism that gives audiences access to information, education and culture, via all available channels, including TV, radio and online. The role of local public broadcasters is described in the 2008 Article 2 of the Mediawet (Dutch national media legislation), which requires a balanced and multi-perspectival offering of high journalistic quality, targeting both a general audience as well as specialized ages and societal groups, autonomous from commercial or governmental influences and which is "accessible to all" ("voor iedereen toegankelijk"). Local public broadcasters are expected to offer a Locally Sufficient Media Offering (Article 2.170b) through broadcasting. In contrast, podcasts narrowcast and publish audio files that listeners can access digitally via their digital device or computer. The feminist podcasts included here address questions of (*in*)equality, processes of inclusion and exclusion, and discrimination, thereby explicitly or implicitly working to contribute to the dismantlement of Dutch imperialist, white-supremacist, capitalist and patriarchical norms.

[1] The empirical analysis draws from two periods of fieldwork: in winter 2018–2019, in-depth interviews with five representatives of institutionalized local public broadcasters have been conducted as part of a Council of Europe study on community media, COMMIT *das Community Medien Institut fiir Weiterbildung, Forschung und Beratung* (*Across Generations*, forthcoming). In spring-summer 2018, eleven independent feminist media makers that represent six feminist podcasts have been interviewed as part of fieldwork conducted for a gender studies master thesis (De Koning).

Table 2.1 Overview of interviewees and media oulets they represent

Local public broadcaster	**Focus**	**Podcast**	**Focus**
NLPO	"The Dutch Local Public Broadcasting Foundation (NLPO) is the cooperation and coordination body for local public broadcasting in the Netherlands. The foundation supports local public broadcasters in various fields to further professionalize the sector and to improve the quality of the productions of local broadcasters, so that they can meet the legal requirements of a Local Adequate Media Offering" (NLPO, 2019).	Bloed aan de Muur (Blood on the Wall)	"A podcast with anarcha-feminist touch. With recommendations, current events, good books, stories, poems and all those things that you do not necessarily want to hear" (Bloed aan de Muur, 2019).
REGIO8	"REGIO8 is a multimedia platform with a professional news editorial office of young and ambitious journalists and program makers. The news editorial team wants to inform Achterhoekers and involve them in current events in society. REGIO8, however, does not only focus on reporting regional news in a journalistic way, but also offers scope for positive developments in the Achterhoek" (REGIO 8, 2019).	Dipsaus (Dip)	"DIPSAUS is the bi-weekly podcast by and for women of color and anyone interested in a different sound" (Dipsaus 2019)
Salto	"The Netherlands is the country of opinions. And Amsterdam is its capital. This is where most opinions come together. Where you can you say what you want. We are proud of that. Put those elements together and you get what SALTO stands for: everyone's proud and free opinions" (Salto 2019).	De Schemerzone (The Twilight Zone)	"In De Schemerzone Elias Mazian and Emma van Meyeren enter the border between the night and the day. They have a conversation twice a month about everything that has to do with nightlife with the people they love sharing the dance floor with" (De Schemerzone, 2019).
OOG (EYE)	"Omroep Organisatie Groningen is the local public multimedia institution for all residents of the municipality of Groningen. OOG stands for its journalistic principles, but also wants to be opinionated and non-conformist. OOG wants to inform citizens about everything that happens in the city" (OOG 2019).	Vuile Lakens (Dirty Sheets)	"Vuile Lakens (Dirty Sheets) is a podcast about sex, body and everything you dare not talk about in delicate company. Gender expert Anaïs Van Ertvelde and writer Heleen Debruyne venture into wet areas." (Vuile Lakens 2019).

DUIC	De Utrechtse Internet Courant, (The Utrecht Internet Newspaper) is "Utrecht's own, innovative news platform with daily general, cultural and municipal news from the city of Utrecht. By and for people in Utrecht" (DUIC 2019).	De Oppas en ik; Iets doen, hoe doe je dat; Liefs van Woord; Het Mannenprobleem (The Babysitter and I; Doing Something, how do you do that?; Love, Word; The Men Problem)	Variety of radio documentaries, covering topics like masculinity, activism, sexual harassment, gender, and love.

Institutionality

Community media function in a media landscape dominated by powerful gatekeeping institutions that co-shape mechanisms of in- and exclusion, thereby ensuring that mediated participation in the public sphere is generally reserved for elites, commonly middle-class, white, European men. Against this inaccessible dominant public, community media position themselves as counterpublics, "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinate groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser 67). However, in this arena, bottom-up and grassroots community media initiatives also operate as media makers, albeit from the fringes, thus occupying a position of power and having a particular responsibility and answerability towards their audiences. When engaging with community media practices and their mediations of difference, the institutional context in which they operate must be taken into account. Institutions mediate different opposite modes of "civility", meaning state-run communication media as a "public service" and "freedom expression" mediated through free trade (Martin-Barbero 288). These lines are increasingly blurred and impact "production processes and cultural matrices, i.e. practices and conventions, to produce social structures" (Lievrouw 228).

Both groups of community makers explicitly present themselves as offering a platform for unheard voices and covering under-represented experiences within and against a media landscape characterized by exclusion, gatekeeping and increased commercialization. Local broadcasters offer platforms to seek recognition for people and local struggles not commonly covered on the national news or mainstream talk shows, while feminist podcasts draw attention to people who cannot or do not want to relate to mainstream normative frameworks of gender, race and sexuality, as they commonly want to maintain their own niche and establish their own feminist, anti-racist and queer reference points. As such, they highlight what differentiates them from norm-setting mainstream media.

Local public broadcasters claim awareness of the lived experiences of those living in close proximity. Marc (NLPO) notes that "everyone pretends to be in the capillaries of society, the regional broadcasters increasingly use that term and even the national public television. But I think that with a local broadcaster that really is the case". Evert (OOG) emphasizes this sense of proximity: "We are also a social institute, which I think is equally important [. . .] It's not comparable to the national level. It's more fundamental, it's closer to people". In contrast to feminist podcasts, which are generally more grassroots initiatives, local broadcasters work

within dominant institutions, albeit in the margins, and are recognized as such. As such, acts of locally engaged citizenship are performed within institutionally recognized frameworks, rather than outside them.

Local broadcasters, which with national and provincial broadcasters make up the public broadcasting services, receive significantly less financial support than broadcasting services on the provincial or national level. Here we observe a catch-22 situation: local public broadcasters are expected to professionalize in order to survive in the current media landscape, but the required investments to do so are missing for a substantial number of organizations. As Joost (REGIO8) explains, this lack of recognition and support threatens ambitions for professionalization:

> Every municipality has its own local broadcaster, gives a little subsidy to it and in principle it is hobby-financing of the people who like to be involved. That certainly has its function. It creates a certain bond with your municipality, with your region, you hear people you know from the street, you hear them on the radio. But, the substantive side got a bit of lost. The journalistic goal of the local, government-subsidized broadcaster has watered down.

The impetus of professionalization emerged from a new commitment to maintaining journalism standards necessary for safeguarding local democratic processes and standards. In order to sustain their broadcasting services financially, local broadcasters must reconsider their practices and their position in the media landscape. Professionalization is key, as well as the journalistic answerability broadcasting services have towards their communities. For some local broadcasters, moving towards professionalization means working increasingly with professional journalists and other media makers, using predominantly established journalistic practices (Joost, REGIO8). In contrast, Willem (SALTO) acknowledges the (financial) necessity of professionalization, but emphasizes that it is not his goal in itself. A movement towards professionalization can impede the sense of belongingness community media offer communities. As local broadcasters are able to provide a platform for various communities, they mediate difference and constitute community members as citizens who are "beings with claims" (Isin and Nielsen 8). Sustaining local broadcasting is therefore increasingly important, not just in order to allow media makers to continue to do their work, but specifically because of the ways their work mediates difference and performs community-driven acts of citizenship. As community media, local broadcasters offer local communities recognition, connection and belonging.

According to Marc (NLPO), there is a "democratic hiatus" looming. Decisions about funding are made at the local level of municipalities. Municipalities receive state funding and are themselves in charge of allocating funding to specific services, local public broadcasting media being one of them, alongside road repair, schools etc. This is worrisome, given how journalism in the Netherlands is under threat. According to Leen D'Haenens et al., "what was once a tight network of local 'watchdogs' was slowly but surely being replaced by an accumulating number of 'blind spots' and 'missing links' in municipalities no longer covered by a professional journalistic presence" ("The Missing Link" 142). This development occurs in tandem with a recent decentralization of policy and governmental mandates. Thus, local municipalities have increasing power, but the local journalism that is supposed to control municipalities is waning. Representatives of community media have arrived at a crucial crossroads: either the

law has to be changed so that the journalistic requirement of local public broadcasters would be removed, which means local public broadcasters would enter the domain of social work, or the infrastructure will have to be professionalized in order for community media to remain democratic safeguards at the local level. As an antidote, NLPO lobbies for extra subsidies on the basis of securing a future-proof community-driven perspective. Marc (NLPO) notes, "We said, let us start not from the administrative lines that exist, but from the perception of citizens. This we have sought to capture in the [notion of the] natural habitat. What is the natural habitat of people?" The question arises how an awareness of the local situatedness of audiences will suffice to ensure community media can continue their roles as "watchdogs" or whether observed decline of attention for citizen's voices and participation will further exacerbate the local "democratic deficit" (Moore).

While volunteers and paid professionals work for local public broadcasters, the political economy and institutional position of podcasts differs, as they are mostly the result of unpaid labor. The topics podcasts center on often cannot find their way into the dominant public sphere. As a result, podcasters create content that attracts a small, but heavily invested audience. For independent podcasters, their desire to create content for an underserved, niche audience is an important motivation to start and continue their work (Markman). When connected to feminist podcasts, this motivation is more politicized: feminist podcasters "take up sonic space" by discussing topics that are often excluded from and/or misrepresented in mainstream media, and thereby challenge the processes of in- and exclusion of dominant publics (Tiffe and Hoffman 116). Moreover, to claim this sonic space is a particularly radical act for those whose voices are considered too nice, specific, loud or angry to be included in mainstream media. As Nikki ('Mijn babysitter en ik' i.a.) illustratively notes: "Simply by letting so many women speak you can see it as an intervention, [by] letting people with a different experience be heard". Seeking to challenge structures of inequality with their work, feminist podcasters include multiple (often underrepresented) voices and perspectives from (recurring) guests. This multivocal representation allows feminist podcasts to be a platform from which to enact, express and explore different acts of citizenship. The mediation of difference is key here: with the deliberate inclusion of perspectives different than their own, feminist podcasters present difference as a key motivation for creating and sustaining the podcast. As Floor (ZOUT.) summarizes:

> [We invite] people who then bring in perspectives that we simply do not know, because they experience the world in a totally different way because they have a slightly different background. [. . .] They then have stories that we do not know yet, and then we come to new conclusions again.

By making other opinions heard and building in space for critical reflection and answerability, podcasts connect mediated, political, ethical and aesthetic acts of citizenship.

Conceptualizing podcasters' practices in terms of counterpublics is particularly apt, as a counterpublic characteristically fundamentally maintains "at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status. The cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public but a dominant one" (Warner 119). Moreover, the lack of inclusion and representation in mainstream media can be an impetus for podcasters (and community media makers in general) to initiate alternatives to this dominant public sphere. As Anaïs (Vuile Lakens) notes:

> We actually started with the podcast because we noticed that we had created our very own vocabulary, or our own manners of speaking about sexuality and about our bodies, but [that we say] that reflected very little in mainstream media. [. . .] We thought: maybe we need to do something with this, maybe there are even more people interested.

For Vuile Lakens, the ultimate goal of the podcast is to provide a space for this new vocabulary and to thereby attempt to push the boundaries of the ways in which sexuality, gender and bodies are discussed in the public sphere.

Importantly, podcasting allows community media makers to work independently, to work and create content on their own terms and thereby to circumvent the exclusivity of mainstream, institutionalized media platforms. In reference to discussing the podcast and its core topics in more mainstream, mass-audience outlets, Ana's (Vuile Lakens) describes:

> With a podcast, you can perfectly bring what you want to say. [. . .] But on the other hand [in mainstream media] you often encounter a sort of simplified version of yourself [. . .] and part of the revolutionary potential of what you're sharing gets lost. Because it does get incorporated really easily into the interpretative framework that was already in place. While actually what you want to do is to break through that framework, and make it more diverse, or more fragmented, and that is really difficult.

The "revolutionary potential" that the articulation of a new vocabulary in podcasts offers, therefore, gets lost as its message is enveloped in the already-existing interpretative framework. By being situated on the edges of the Dutch mainstream media landscape, feminist podcasters are able to articulate a different vocabulary with which to create new, critical narratives that can transform these structures or, in Ana"s' words, "at the very least pull a little or something, to break [norms] open slightly" (Vuile Lakens). Moreover, rather than being under- or misrepresented in mainstream media, feminist podcasters create their own platforms and infrastructures within which to articulate difference and citizenship.

Feminist podcasters do not only aim to provide an inclusive platform where their ideas and voices can take up (sonic) space, but also expect receptive and engaged audiences. As Mariam (Dipsaus) explained: "What I like best, or what we really wanted, is that after such an episode you start thinking for yourself. So that something is triggered that makes you think". As community media, both local broadcasting services and feminist podcasters provide a platform from which to address topics and issues that in mainstream media would be considered too "niche" or radical. While local broadcasting services do so within a state-subsidized institutionalized context, both examples of community media follow from the idea that there might be an "untapped or underserved audience 'out there', waiting for the kind of content [community media] could deliver" (Markman 556).

Feminist podcasters highlight the opportunity grassroots community media have to push back against the boundaries of the public sphere and the distinct potential for transformative mediations. Moreover, as they develop, feminist podcasters become increasingly more visible as media platforms in the public sphere. While most feminist podcasts are not institutionalized in the same ways local broadcasters are, they do operate as media makers and as such have the power and responsibility that come with that position. This, in turn, affects their practices. As Mariam (Dipsaus) explained:

> We are media now. [. . .] We have our blind spots, and we have to think about that and we have to be strict with that and see to that. [. . .] You have [blind spots] when you yourself are not in that posi-

> tion. [. . .] The funny thing is: we know that. That's why it's called a blind spot: before you know it, you're doing it.

Recognizing and remedying such blind spots is a key practice both local broadcasters and feminist podcasters strive to employ to guarantee the inclusivity of their platforms. It highlights the power community media have as institutions: even in a public sphere dominated by bigger, more exclusionary media institutions, community media too occupy a position of power. By using this power to circumvent and challenge media conventions, community media establish a discursive space from which marginalized communities can perform acts of citizenship. As such, community media give audiences and media makers a platform that gives space to the "revolutionary potential" of transformative mediations of difference and acts of citizenship.

Technicity

As community media, local broadcasters and podcasters use technologies to build connections among and within communities and can function as spaces for cohesion for both local and transnational diasporic communities. The technologies used impact upon the particular ways in which citizenship is mediated within the fringes of the media landscape and the forms of connectedness and belonging this mediation provides audiences. Community media operate in a media landscape characterized by socio-technical "disruption" as a result of media convergence, participation and interaction (Deuze and Prenger), which results in a "lively and contentious cycle of capture, co-optation, and subversion of [. . .] system architecture" that both shapes the dominant mainstream and expands the fringes of media culture (Lievrouw 2). The concept of technicity "mediates between production and industrial 'formats', generating new techniques and methods" (Lievrouw 228) and thus "refers more to the design of new practices than to technological devices" only (Martin-Barbero 289).

There are distinct media-specific differences between local broadcasting services and podcasts. Local broadcasting services are institutionally recognized media platforms that must conform to the Dutch 'Mediawet', providing a balanced, diverse offering that simultaneously targets general audiences and specialized communities. Many local broadcasting services are simultaneously accessible via television, radio, digital platforms or even hard-copy newspapers. Through cross-platform-programming they strive to be "accessible to all". As Joost (REGIO8) summarizes:

> Yes, definitely, you 100% have to present everywhere. And you have to distinguish yourself in that and build an identity for the region. And show that everywhere, in order for the region to also feel connected to you. So you can achieve a sense of trust.

Accessibility generates connectedness on a local level: audiences and community media makers share a sense of belonging and recognition by being both physically present and visibly/audibly present in the region. For REGIO8, for example, Joost states:

> After four years I know almost all roads in the entire Achterhoek, and I think that's important. This way, you come everywhere and we try to make a connection with all the people from those places, who also know these streets, and we try to foreground that.

Moreover, as Willem (SALTO) describes, the local connectedness among community members has outgrown its geographical limits and has developed into an example of transnational community media:

> The community aspect has outgrown the territorial aspect. So the fact that this is the only channel which is so Surinamese, has a stronger attraction than the fact that it is an Amsterdam-based channel. I think the same holds for the Ghanaian television.

Communities abroad tuning in to local broadcasting services engage in transnational citizenship formation and allow for the formation of diaspora belongingness (Georgiou, "Diaspora in the Digital Era").

Connections among and within audiences are facilitated in part by the technological infrastructure local broadcasters use: by combining various technological formats and uniting them under the umbrella of one local broadcasting service, broadcasters are able to create new production formats that highlight accessibility and community participation. Local broadcasters can build in room for participation by allowing and encouraging community members to create their own programs, giving them time, space and resources to "speak in their own voice", thereby "simultaneously constructing and expressing one's cultural identity through idiom and style" (Fraser 69). The technologies used offer both community media makers and audiences an opportunity to disrupt and subvert dominant technological infrastructures. This distinguishes local broadcasting services greatly from national or provincial broadcasters, as it means that those who make media are not necessarily always professional and experienced journalists, but often community members with ideas and a desire to express and share them.

With this significant difference from provincial and national broadcasters, local broadcasting must be regarded through a different lens. As Willem (SALTO) argues:

> If you create community media, do not critique those people as if they are a [mainstream] radio- or television channel. So do not judge them on the quality of the program. The quality does not lie in the objective quality of the images or whatever. The quality lies in the participation. In diversity. So in being present in the system in the first place. That is a quality.

SALTO works to ensure this quality by offering an open access media platform to various communities who want to broadcast their media, which, for Willem, "also means that if you open the gate to everyone, then you shouldn't start worrying about quality". Community media must therefore be considered on its own terms, rather than by constant comparison to professional or corporate mainstream broadcasting services.

Similarly, podcasting pushes against the boundaries of what are considered to be "good" audio productions. Notably, early studies on podcasts and podcasting emphasized the medium's relation to radio, examining in what ways podcasts are drawing on and/or re-shaping the conventions and practices of traditional radio (Berry). However, given the continuous growth and increased popularity of the medium, podcasting must now be considered on its own terms in order to articulate a sense of "podcastness" that incorporates its medium-specific allowances, limits and transformative potential (Berry 29). Similar to local broadcasting services, podcasts are characterized by, and often described in terms of, accessibility: by creating a podcast, media makers are able to circumvent the restrictions and gatekeepers of dominant media institutions. Podcast listeners create their own libraries of podcasts they want to listen to, voices they want to hear and topics they are interested in. As podcasts are delivered regu-

larly into a listener's podcast library, a sense of connection and belonging is created: listening to another person's voice becomes a ritual that is "hyper-intimate", and where "listeners can feel deeply engaged with both the process of listening and the material to which they listen" (Berry 20). For podcasters, the ritualized intimacy of podcast listening ideally results in the start of a conversation, the articulation of ideas or that, as Mariam (Dipsaus) states, "you start thinking for yourself". A key aspect of that process is representation and recognition, which Johanna (ZOUT.) explains, is one of the main goals of the podcast: "If we can at least help one person, or that a person sees themselves represented, or that a person maybe learns something, then we have actually achieved our goal and was it worth it".

Community recognition and inclusivity is practiced structurally and by virtue of community media's technological infrastructures. Willem (SALTO) conceptualizes this practice on SALTO's open access platform as "acknowledgement through recognition". For example, the Arabic community was initially underrepresented in SALTO's programming compared to the community's numerical presence in Amsterdam. In SALTO's philosophy, it is expected that when communities structurally feel acknowledged they are more inclined to feel at home. In order to attract media producers from the Arabic community, SALTO made sure to add more Arabic music to their programming. This policy has proven successful and resulted in an increased volume of Arabic media producers at SALTO. Such mediating practices allow both local broadcasters and feminist podcasters to establish a ritual connection with their audiences. The establishment of regular patterns—of inclusive programming, of producing content, of sparking debate and dialogue—results from intersections between technological and industrial formats and audiences' ability to receive and access these media and encounter other communities. This results in an inclusive accessibility that allows community media makers to disrupt the existing frameworks of mediation and to construct citizenship on a community level. Through co-opting and re-imagining technological possibilities, community media create new possibilities which affect how acts of citizenship may be performed. In the use of accessible technologies and increasingly open-access platforms, local broadcasters and feminist podcasters can disrupt social-historical patterns of exclusion.

Sociality

In combination with institutionality and technicity, the mediation of citizenship is shaped by sociality. In the notion of sociality people's competences, preferences and cultural interests "on which they base the primary processes of articulation and constitution of social subjects and identities" (Martin-Barbero) are combined. As such, community media's sociality connects the ways in which community media create a sense of belonging for marginalized communities via a specific and strategically disruptive use of technologies and highlights how these practices contribute to the formation of communities through mediations of difference. While the local broadcasting sector mainly focuses on creating content tailored towards a specific geographical area (D'Haenens et al.), the target audience is mostly community-driven. Joost (REGIO8) argues:

> We strive to represent a good balance between all societal layers of society. We do not only have an eye for politics, we also look out for what else is going on. Whether it's covering the local summer school or talking about a migrant issue.

Within this conceptualization, the mediating properties of community media focus on fostering connections through updating people about local affairs. Circulating local, community-specific cultural expressions potentially acts as a social glue for local communities, as D'Haenens et al. confirm:

> Through consuming audio, video and web content, audience members may imagine themselves as part of a larger local audience. They play a significant role, because when a community loses its local news media, it also loses an institutional memory needed to maintain or raise the profile of the community, to inform citizens and to campaign on issues of local relevance. (144)

In recognizing audiences as members of distinct communities, community media makers create belongingness that moves beyond formal and institutional forms of citizenship. As Willem (SALTO) describes:

> The first step is acknowledgement through recognition. In times of bubblification, when everyone finds their own news channels and their own sources, at SALTO you encounter these different connections which offers a source of inspiration . . . That is where introductions lie. That is where all those buzzwords politics are looking for lie to keep society afloat. Interest in the other. Connection between different bubbles.

Local broadcasters like SALTO Amsterdam actively mediate difference in response to communities who are increasingly speaking to themselves in parallel echo chambers. They respond to the "bubblification" of communities by connecting different audiences in their programming. Because the city and its potential audiences are multi-faceted, they feel this needs to be reflected in their programming. Local broadcasting stations can serve an important role as the physical and symbolic space where different communities and generations of broadcasters come together. Inclusive and democratic programming can introduce audiences to content and perspectives they might not encounter otherwise. Notably, this is different for feminist podcasters. Rather than audiences 'automatically' being exposed to difference, podcast listeners choose to download and listen to a podcast. For feminist podcasters, a key practice is therefore including a multiplicity of perspectives within their programs, in order for listeners to simultaneously recognize themselves and be exposed to and challenged by different voices.

While most local broadcasters strive to be inclusive organizations, practicing this inclusivity remains difficult. Institutionalization and a focus on professionalization and quality have the potential to serve as an exclusionary mechanism to various groups of media producers and consequently to various audiences. It is important for media makers to question what kind of audiences they imagine they cater to and if their programming reflects those audiences. Ethnic diversity is one of the key ways in which in- and exclusion are addressed by broadcasters within their programming. The following target groups were highlighted among local public broadcasters: the white expat and international student community, the Surinamese, Caribbean, Somali, Arabic, Bhagwan and migrant communities. However, local broadcasters generally fail to approach diversity as an intersectional practice by disproportionately emphasizing race and ethnicity. In local broadcasts the voices within different programs do not often join within a single show (unlike in feminist podcasts where multivocal representation is a key practice within each program). In times of increased digital mediatization, a diversification of platforms creates opportunities for different voices to perform acts of citizenship. Yet,

struggles for power also take place within those particularistic media environments. Thus, particularistic media alone are not enough for addressing issues associated with inclusion and participation in the media: "voice does not guarantee recognition" (Georgiou, "Does the subaltern speak?" 45). In the case of local broadcaster SALTO, a remarkable percentage of 2.5% of visitors originate from Paramaribo (SALTO 2019). The same holds for Osho, which addresses the transnational Bhagwan community: from audience statistics SALTO knows this is one of their most popular internet channels. The channel is viewed from various geographical locations including Italy, Egypt and India, illustrating again the potential of diasporic groups to claim community across national borders.

This contrasts sharply with the audiences of other local broadcasters, mostly originating from the local or bordering municipalities. For example, while OOG includes programming in English to cater to the international student community, it previously also featured Somali-language programming which has recently been abandoned, to avoid alienating Dutch speaking audiences. The inclusivity broadcasters present is therefore inherently limited: diversity is often limited to catering to ethnic, social or religious groups as separate categories. An intersectional approach that addresses multiple axes of identity is not reflected in their programming. In opposition to the local broadcasting networks, podcasting seems to be a format through which intersectional feminist identities are able to represent themselves. We see this tension reflected in community media makers' self-definitions. SALTO's slogan *verbind Amsterdam* ("connect Amsterdam") explicitly focuses on the social and connective bridge they seek to establish between communities. Feminist podcasts like Dipsaus *voor en door vrouwen van kleur* (for and by women of color) specifically position themselves towards their audiences based on specific interests or intersectional identities.

Both feminist podcasters and local broadcasters seek to answer to demands from communities they serve. Nevertheless, their inclusivity is limited. As all acts of citizenship, community media "emerge from the paradox between universal inclusion in the language of rights and cosmopolitanism, on the one hand, and the inevitable exclusion in the language of community and particularity on the other" (Isin and Nielsen 11). Community media are not able to recognize and address every member of their community, but through mediating difference and performing intersectionality as practice, they can open up the parameters of who is and is not included in the public sphere. In order to fulfil their connective potential, community media must continue to re-evaluate their imagined audience and the audiences they truly manage to reach. Key practices that community media can and must deploy are therefore not only open and democratic programming and "acknowledgement through recognition", but also an awareness of potential representational blind spots and an openness to create space for underrepresented community members. Through this ongoing process, community media can become and remain open and inclusive and allow citizenship claims to come forth in the mediation of difference.

Conclusions

In providing a community-based platform for unheard voices, community media are able to circumvent the traditional conventions of institutionalized mainstream media practices. In the Netherlands, both local broadcasters and feminist podcasters—two distinct community

media under study in this chapter—perceive a representational void in mainstream media and seek to fill this on their own terms. As community media, they are invested in providing accessible platforms for marginalized communities, where community members can present themselves on their own terms and recognize themselves in others. In pursuing a more inclusive politics of representation, community media provide communities with opportunities for actively claiming citizenship and belonging from below. Community media's practices highlight the levels of institutionality, technicity and sociality that co-shape the mediation of difference. From an institutional perspective, community media challenge and transform the mainstream public sphere and current media landscape, while remaining aware of their position of power as media makers within that landscape. Through co-opting disruptive technologies and rethinking the technological architecture through which the mediation of difference occurs, community media strive towards inclusivity, accessibility and a new appreciation of the particular aesthetic, ethical and political qualities comxmunity media offer in performing acts of citizenship. In the notion of sociality, institutionality and technicity are brought together: via democratic programming and an openness to inclusive participation and representation, community media build and sustain marginalized communities and their acts of citizenship.

Community media's mediations of difference, we argue, are acts of citizenship that contrast with both the gatekeeping institutions dominating the current media landscape and the common conceptualization of citizenship from a top-down rather than a community-driven perspective. Local public broadcasters and feminist podcasts demonstrate how the mediation of difference is a multi-layered and contested terrain as it offers the possibility for transformation within and outside of institutions. Both groups of media makers position themselves outside of and as alternatives to the mainstream public sphere. The community media makers discussed how they mediate difference by representing difference and how they use various strategies to do so. Examples of such strategies are "acknowledgement through recognition", a multimedia approach to broad- or narrowcasting, and actively working to define and remedy media makers' representational "blind spots". Our alternative interpretive and evaluative framework of community media champions a multiplicity of voices and bridges diverse communities, which is pivotal in our contemporary increasingly bubblified, scattered media landscape where filter bubbles proliferate. In practicing "acknowledgement through recognition" community media create space for an exchange of perspectives. Mediating differences among and within communities demonstrates how community media enable active acts of citizenship, which demands greater scrutiny alongside the legal and ontological dimensions of both institutionalized citizenship and recognition.

Through drawing on alternative theoretical understandings of citizenship, this chapter explored community media as examples of doing citizenship from below as an active practice. We have analyzed how these media makers mediate difference and strive for the recognition and inclusion of a multiplicity of voices in the hierarchical media landscape. While community media have always been around in a wide variety of forms, their position in an increasingly fragmented and digitized landscape is changing. Moreover, given the current "democratic hiatus" media find themselves in, and to counter the bubblification of fragmented communities, the future potential of community media to maintain stronger inclusion and recognition of different voices should be warmly embraced.

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CHAPTER 56

Frailties at the Borders: Stalled Activist Media Projects in East Africa

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Abstract

This article considers two activist projects involving attempts to export communication technologies. Groups of technologists based in the United States and Europe designed a radio station and an "oral wiki" for use in Tanzania and Rwanda, respectively. Both projects stalled before they could be fully implemented. But they did not languish because of user ambivalence or disregard; indeed, in both cases activists and local grassroots actors alike hailed the technologies as uniquely suited to the local conditions in which they were to be deployed. Drawing on social studies of technology, I argue that the Tanzanian radio station and Rwandan oral wiki cases illustrate that it matters where actors draw lines around where "technology" starts and ends. To distinguish between "the artifact" and "the social" is an act of boundary-drawing, with important consequences for media activism and technology transfer projects. [1]

Keywords

media activism, design, technology transfer, failure, Global North, Global South

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This article considers two activist attempts to export communication technologies designed in the Global North for use in the Global South. The article first presents a group of U.S.-based activists who promote FM radio as a technology especially suited to boosting community autonomy, and considers the consequences that arose when the activist organization built a radio station at a community center in Tanzania in 2005. More than three years after the station had been built and was technically operational, it remained off the air because of complications regarding licensing and, in particular, the lack of a niche for community media (i.e., media that were neither state-controlled nor for profit, both of which were more established radio models in Tanzania; see Howley, 2005; Javuru, 2011); 10 years on, this suspended state seemed decisively permanent. The second case is an "oral wiki," networked using mobile phones. Developed by U.S. designers at a European design institute in dialogue with Rwandan *abunzi* (informal adjudicators), it was meant to support an archive of informal justice decisions (e.g., land disputes) in Rwanda. After building its prototype in 2009, designers stalled on building a larger archive because of a number of factors, including government ambivalence toward the project.

Unlike "technology transfer" projects that fail because designers value or interpret technologies along different lines than would-be users (Akrich, 1994; cf. de Laet & Mol, 2000), these projects did not languish because of user ambivalence or disregard per se. In both cases, both activists and potential users hailed the technologies as uniquely suited to the local conditions in which they were to be deployed. Drawing on social studies of technology, I argue that these cases present an opportunity to scrutinize the boundaries of technologies (Woolgar, 1991). It matters a good deal how we designate what the technology is "itself" and what are "other factors" involved in technology's success or failure. In other words, what is designated as the technology might not be as straightforward as it is often made out to be.

For instance, to say that "the radio station is working" means more than its transmitter can be turned on and produce appropriate electronic signals (although it does also mean that). This statement means other things too, such as listeners can hear the station, the station has programmers and producers of content, and the station is on the air in an expected and reliable manner. Even so, it is usual to synecdochally reduce a working system of social and technical elements to the *technology* and to speak of whether a radio station "works" largely as a question of whether its electronic, artifactual components are operational. For example, the radio activists wrote in 2010 that they had "built radio stations in places like . . . Tanzania,"[2] implying that the station not only existed in a material sense but was operational.

This is more than an issue of semantics or public relations. In this article, I show that bounding technologies too narrowly leaves activists (and potentially scholars) unprepared to explain the inability of technology projects to achieve implementation and use in their local target contexts. And the failures of these projects may seem especially puzzling because these particular artifacts had been selected (by activists *and* users) precisely for their osten-

[2] Prometheus Radio Project, "Snatch Those Waves: Prometheus Radio Project and the Fight for Popular Communications" talk abstract for 2010 HOPE Conference, *2600* website, http://store.2600.com/snthwaprraan.html. The oral wiki designers presented their project on their website in conditional language ("The Oral Wiki could be used to facilitate discussion around best practice and to establish an archive of decisions"). It acknowledged that "[informal justice system actors] and the formal justice system would each need to play a vital role in the database," but this seems to be meant rather literally, as they also refer to the oral wiki as a "proposed *technological* solution" [emphasis added] (http://www.agamanolis.com/distancelab/projects/oral-wiki).

sible portability and ease of use; indeed, the technical features of the oral wiki and the radio station were what made them ideal to operate in the local settings. Put differently, although the artifacts worked, the artifacts at the same time failed to work; thus, these sites raise the question of whether characteristics *reside in* objects, as opposed to being *attributed* to objects (Woolgar, 1991, p. 65). In these cases, although certain expectations were attributed to the objects—which seemed reasonable enough—the objects failed to meet expectations. Thus, it is worth considering drawing the boundaries around technology differently to include not only these artifacts, but also the points of contact between artifacts and the social actors and institutions responsible for providing the conditions for the success or failure of the radio station or the oral wiki. These conclusions have import for not only scholars of community media technologies but for activists focused on technical projects.

Although this exercise in boundary consideration is useful as a heuristic, by itself it is insufficient to draw out the forces that led to these projects' languishment. The wider social and political contexts of these projects are relevant as well, so I sketch a speculative political economy. Initiated by Global North technologists, the oral wiki and the radio station were conceived in partnership with local grassroots actors in postcolonial states. In both cases, although technologists and grassroots actors were abundantly able to identify meaningful uses for the technologies, they lacked influence with state actors and institutions whose imprimatur would potentially validate the projects and lead to their full implementation. Neither Global North technologists nor local grassroots actors were close enough to state power to move the projects forward. [3]

Indeed, it is a mistake to assume that civil society participation typically facilitates a pluralistic, local agenda, or "balances" state power (Mahajan, 2008, p. 17). As Paula Chakravartty (2007) has argued, the category of "civil society" is rife with contradiction (p. 305). The oral wiki and radio station cases represent civil society amalgams of local grassroots actors working in partnership with Global North technologists. Both projects invert "top-down" technological intervention (but they were not strictly local or grassroots, either). Crucially, grassroots efforts contained within the rubric of civil society are often not embraced by the state. By contrast, many other civil society projects serve to advance state, corporate, or international nongovernmental organization (NGO) bodies' agendas. In particular, many "technology for development" projects are top-down, starting with governments, policymakers, or NGOs. [4]

In this article, I argue that what constitutes "technology" is always contingent. Even though the radio station and oral wiki "worked" for users, failure to engage actors and institutions beyond the grassroots meant that, in the end, these technological interventions did not "work." Yet, when an artifact does not work, we can see more clearly what it was built for and what local and intermediate conditions are required for its functioning; put differently, contingency becomes noticeable. Cases of technological "failure" thus provide great

[3] James Ferguson (1994) argues that "failed" projects in postcolonial nations may still accomplish quite a lot. The oral wiki and radio station were at the far end of the spectrum from the projects Ferguson discusses; they were very small and were initiated in dialogue with grassroots actors. But following Ferguson, we might ask what these failed technology projects accomplished. In a certain sense, the answer is "very little." But "very little" was perhaps a desirable outcome as far as the states were concerned. In neither case did the state intervene to shut down the projects, but state indifference was a factor in the projects' stalling.

[4] Nicholas Negroponte's One Laptop Per Child project, for which Rwanda was a recipient country, would be a prime example (Andersson & Norrmalm, 2010).

analytical yield: They expose expectations that "success" may obscure, as well as fragility more generally (see Jackson, 2014). Here, boundaries of technology come into focus when implementation proceeds in unexpected ways; the full concatenation of artifacts and social relations that allow an artifact to be understood as working are rendered invisible when the object and social relations in question enmesh properly.

Theorizing Technology: Its Boundaries, Its Mediators

Working within the tradition of social studies of technology, scholars have theoretically and empirically challenged the idea that technology develops autonomously, and studiously attended to the politics of technology (Bijker, 2006; Bijker & Pinch, 1987; see also Winner, 1988). They have argued that the material features of an artifact do not simply and straightforwardly account for its success or failure; to the contrary, "the success [or failure] of an artifact is precisely what needs to be explained" (Bijker & Pinch, 1987, p. 24; Winston, 1996). A common mode of tracing out development of technologies in the social construction of technology (SCOT) analytical model involves uncovering the "interpretive flexibility" of an artifact: Which uses and meanings does a given social group attach to it? Do these deviate from or match with the interpretation assigned by other social groups? Through agreement, does the artifact's meaning stabilize and do attendant use patterns crystallize? (Or through disagreement, does it remain undefined and thus fail, suffering from the lack of critical mass of common meaning needed to guide its implementation?) SCOT accounts have focused on work by system architects to establish meaning (Hughes, 1987), efforts of users to shape meaning and appropriate technologies (Eglash, Croissant, Di Chiro, & Fouché, 2004; Oudshoorn & Pinch, 2003; see also Wamala, 2010), and mediators as a group between users and producers that also play a considerable role in shaping interpretations of technologies (Dunbar-Hester, 2014; Kline, 1997). Interpretive flexibility and then a subsequent move toward stabilization of meaning (so-called "closure") are common aspects of the sociotechnical trajectories that these accounts offer.

Bruno Latour and other theorists of the emergence and stabilization of facts and artifacts have attempted to account for these issues through an alternative framework: actor-network theory (Akrich & Latour, 1994; Callon, 1987; Latour, 1994). They do not understand sociotechnical change as a human-driven affair; instead, they examine how disparate sociotechnical elements align to form networks (or fail to do so). They conceptually conjoin elements that analysts had tended to treat as distinct and disparate. As Latour (2005) explains, "There is no empirical case where the existence of *two* coherent and homogeneous aggregates, for instance technology 'and' society, could make any sense" (p. 76). In this article, I borrow from these insights while still resting primarily on the SCOT framework. In other words, I do not take the boundaries of technologies to be unproblematic, and argue for attention by analysts and activists to where this boundary is drawn.

I argue that these two cases of technology transfer in East Africa present challenges to our understanding of technological adoption precisely because the failures in these cases did not flow from a lack of common understanding of the artifacts in question. Indeed, as will be demonstrated in the discussion of each case, understandings of the technologies by would-be users and by designers/activists were largely (which is not to say perfectly) aligned. However,

the negotiation and calibration of meaning across these groups of actors did not result in the successful deployment of the technologies in their target domains. One possible explanation is that the users and especially the activists/designers were conceiving of what constituted the technology too narrowly, accounting for the technology only in its immediate circumstances of use, but not in its wider institutional and sociolegal contexts.

In conceiving of these "failures," it is important to scrutinize the positions of the radio activists and the oral wiki designers. Following the turn to studying "users" in social studies of technology (Oudshoorn & Pinch, 2003), I theorize these actors as "mediators" of technologies. Situated between "upstream" producers or regulators and "downstream" end-users, mediators are significant analytically because of their role in promoting and advocating for technologies. Their translational work shapes how technologies are interpreted and used.

Research Method

This article combines firsthand ethnographic research on radio activism, conducted by the author from 2003 to 2007, with documentary and interview research on the Rwandan oral wiki project conducted in 2010–2011. I do not name actors or sites in either case, but I have not made a strong effort to cloud identities beyond all recognition, and identifying details can be found in citations. Indeed, some details are both unique and analytically relevant, so achieving strong anonymity would be all but impossible.

Unlike much ethnographic research, the emphasis here is less on "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) and more on describing the contours of the two projects in a way that enables a comparison; the data and analysis are by necessity drawn with broader brushstrokes. The sites are also not treated symmetrically, as the ethnographic data on the radio case are richer, whereas the oral wiki case receives a rather more superficial treatment; however, this asymmetry does not present a difficulty for the analysis because it is general contours rather than specific particularities that are of interest. What this approach loses in granularity is offset by the benefits of a comparative approach, as discussed by Karin Knorr-Cetina (1999), who writes that

> Using a comparative optics as a framework for seeing, one may look at one [site] through the lens of another. This "visibilizes" the invisible; each pattern detailed in one [site] serves as a sensor for identifying and mapping (equivalent, analog, conflicting) patterns in the other. A comparative optics brings out not the essential features of each field but differences between the fields. (p. 4)

Here, the comparison of the two cases highlights key similarities that are of analytical value to scholars and activists.

I also have not striven for symmetry with regard to whose voices are prominent in this account. The Global North technologists garner the most attention, although in the radio case, I am able to include leaders of the Tanzanian community center. The radio case is more fully fleshed out because the data is drawn from a larger ethnographic study of radio activsm; inclusion of the oral wiki case was possible because of essentially opportunistic research when I casually learned of the project from a designer and realized that it warranted comparison with the radio station case. Notably absent are voices of government officials or policymakers, and it is unlikely that they would speak to me frankly. These considerations inform the

presentation of the research as a narrower argument about how activist technologists bound technological intervention, framed by political economy factors.

Two Cases: Exporting Technologies to East Africa From the United States and Europe

Radio Station, Tanzania

In 2005, Philadelphia-based activists planned a trip to a community center near Arusha, Tanzania. These activists were members of a tiny NGO that had been founded as an unlicensed broadcasting collective in the 1990s. Later that decade, their station was raided and shut down by the U.S. government. They subsequently refocused their efforts toward advocacy for licensed, legal, low-power broadcasting in the United States, as well as building new radio stations. In the U.S. context, they built only licensed stations; this stance was made possible by a change in U.S. telecommunications policy in 2000, in which community groups desiring access to the airwaves for local broadcasting were permitted to apply for licenses for the first time since 1978. Over the course of the 2010s, the group had built approximately 10–12 stations in the United States, and had assisted countless more with the process of applying for licenses and putting new stations on the air.

The radio activists often cited radio as appealing for being inexpensive to transmit and receive, easy to use technically, and not requiring literacy. These attributes were all contrasted to computers and Internet-based technologies; although the radio activists were not entirely dismissive of Internet-based technologies, they were adamant that low-power radio had unique qualities that made it especially appropriate for local use (Dunbar-Hester, 2014). The group focused primarily on domestic broadcasting in the United States. At the same time, radio activists firmly believed that many of the reasons that radio was a useful and "appropriate"[5] technology in the United States were even more apposite in other contexts, Global South and "developing" nations in particular.

As noted above, the group's work was mainly organized around building radio stations and advocating for policy that would strengthen and expand low-power broadcasting in the United States. Yet the radio activists also had an international mission, largely conducted on an ad hoc basis; when they traveled internationally for other purposes, such as attending the World Social Forum,[6] they would conduct workshops and bring electronics including transmitter boards, leaving behind radio equipment for other groups to use. In these contexts, they were willing to work in grayer areas legally, leaving local groups to make decisions about whether to apply for broadcast licenses if that was an available option, or to instead broadcast without obtaining permission from authorities. For the U.S. activists, these decisions were best adjudicated by the local groups, which, they felt, could best ascertain whether the likelihood of having a licensed (and thus potentially more sustainable) station was high, or if not,

[5] This use of the term *appropriate technology* both does and does not invoke the appropriate technology movement of the United States of the 1960–1980s (Pursell, 1993). This term has crept into activist and NGO vocabulary, and my use of it here is more an artifact of this wider usage than a direct reference to the movement. On the other hand, its wider use is arguably a legacy of the movement.

[6] An annual gathering for to resist neoliberalism and hegemonic globalization.

whether they would be subject to enforcement efforts including prosecution, whether this was a risk they wished to take, and so forth.

The trip the U.S. radio activists planned in 2005 deviated from this pattern in that they planned the trip from the outset as an opportunity to hold a dedicated "barnraising" with a community center in Tanzania. "Barnraisings" are what the activists called their station-building events for new low-power stations in the United States. The term, self-consciously borrowed from the Amish, emphasizes community interdependence and cooperation to complete a project too ambitious for a few people to complete alone. Radio barnraisings featured "work tracks," in which activists and volunteers worked continuously on building the station, running alongside workshops on everything from station governance to interviewing and mixing audio (see Figure 1). They were designed to level technical expertise through the cultivation of technical affinity in novices, although in practice this was quite challenging.



Figure 1. Volunteers practicing audio recording at a "barnraising," Arumeru District, Tanzania, 2005.

Activists planned the trip to Tanzania to somewhat formalize their international mission, dedicating a trip to building a new station instead of tacking on these activities to already-scheduled travel. However, this undertaking required of the activists additional reflection on the politics of their work: As a mostly White group in the Global North, they were extremely wary of enacting a colonizing agenda, even inadvertently (cf. Headrick, 1988). They were careful to frame their activities as self-consciously antiracist work promoting cultural exchange, as opposed to a group of (mostly) White activists providing a commodity or service to a less-privileged "other." One activist discussed their international work, which in addition to the Tanzania project had involved building stations in Guatemala and Nepal:

> Historically the U.S. has been seen as a patronizing force, NGOs come in [from outside] . . . But we're learning from [community groups] in other countries—we're resource-rich materially, but how are they organizing? We're not "giving" to them, because in the U.S., the organizing strategies and ability is in its infancy [and so we also learn from these encounters]. (Fieldnotes, March 16, 2005)

(This is in no way to claim that these activists successfully evaded paternalism, only to point out their self-conscious efforts to avoid it.) To prepare for the trip, the organization made an effort to get to know the Tanzanian host organization through their mutual contact, a schoolteacher, and raised funds to bring along additional volunteers, two African American filmmakers with an interest in African media and politics, and one South African activist who had founded an unlicensed radio station in Johannesburg.

The host organization in Tanzania was founded in the 1980s by two expatriate Black Panthers, political revolutionaries who left the United States in the early 1970s and spent time with a group exiled Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver founded in Algeria before settling in Tanzania. Their community center was located in the mountains near Arusha, in the northeastern part of the country. The organization conducted many activities geared toward the community in which it was located: arts and music classes; sexuality workshops, including HIV awareness and education; computer training; film screenings and discussions; indigenous knowledge classes; lectures by visitors and elders on a variety of topics; and other community knowledge trainings. Its classes were in high demand in the surrounding villages. Although its founders had not considered broadcasting before the opportunity presented itself, one reason the founders were keen to have a radio station was to create a greater reach for the center's activities, potentially easing problems they had with their physical space being inadequate to meet the community interest in their classes and facilities; they wrote on their website,

> Because we do not have enough space for the literally hundreds of people who apply for a chance to participate in our classes each year, many of the programs to be aired on [Community Center Radio Station] will be an effective means to reach those who are not able to actually study at [our Community Center]. ("UAACC and Prometheus Radio," 2005)

The community center founders and radio activists agreed that FM radio was a well-suited technology for their environs. It could accommodate a variety of languages, including English, Kiswahili, and tribal languages spoken in the district. The community center was located in the foothills of larger mountains; this elevation gave the station's signal the capacity to travel fairly far when not blocked by other hills (FM transmission range is line of sight, so elevation is a significant factor in reach; see Figure 2). The youth and adults of the community center attained the knowledge required to operate computers and studio equipment used to produce radio broadcasts. Radio receivers were common in village homes and could easily operate on batteries. The station could also interact with listeners, who often had mobile phones and could text message or call into the station during broadcasts.

In addition to these technical considerations, during the workshops to put the station on the air, much enthusiasm was generated for producing programming guided by the community center's mission. The reporter from Johannesburg shared his experiences with the community station he helped operate. He recommended that the new Tanzanian station seek a wide range of volunteers; in an explicit critique of mainstream media, he said, "This as about getting as many people as possible involved in creating knowledge and sharing information"



Figure 2. Raising the FM antenna on the roof of a thatched hut, Arumeru District, Tanzania, 2005.

(Fieldnotes, August 17, 2005). He and the other volunteers planned some potential programs, including a hip-hop[7] program, a program for primary-school-age children to get help with schoolwork, and a program to interview community elders about various topics, tentatively titled "What's up, *Wazee* [elders]?" (Fieldnotes, August 17, 2005). The Tanzanian community center members also produced a list of rules for operation of their station. They included the following:

> NO SEXISM. This means that [we] will not play music that promotes the degradation, exploitation, or oppression of women. Songs whose theme is pimping women, have extreme references to physical or sexual abuse, or which generally promote sexist attitudes will not be played by any DJ.
>
> NO RACISM. [We are] about promoting community development and upliftment, specifically within the African context. We will not air any programming which promotes a racist ideology. This includes any song, show, or commentary that degrades African culture, aesthetic, and traditions. This does not apply to critical discussion, but is meant to prevent the promotion of values and standards that place all things African in an inferior position.
>
> PROMOTE COMMUNITY. [This station] is the voice of [our] Community Center. At all times the programming should reflect the goals and objectives of the [Center], namely "Sharing Knowledge for

[7] The station's launch coincided with Black August, a political hip-hop festival held each year in which American political hip-hop artists tour Africa, a celebration of "hip-hop and freedom fighters." It had origins in the 1970s Black militant community in the California prison system. During the Black August observance, observers wore black armbands, fasted during daylight, read revolutionary works, including those of George Jackson, and, interestingly, did not watch television or listen to the radio (Black August Hip-Hop Project, 2006).

> Community Development." This rule is meant to discourage programming that is individualistic and materialistic in nature. We should at all times promote the principles of *kujitegemea* [self-reliance], *kujichagulia* [self-determination], and *ujamaa* [cooperative economics, fellowship]. [8]

This lengthy quote illustrates the extent to which the Tanzanian community center members thoughtfully considered the radio station's use and content. It is evident that radio was hailed as an appropriate technology for incorporation into their mission. The U.S. radio activists in tandem with the Tanzanian hosts got the station up and running technically; by the time the U.S. activists departed a month after their arrival, the station was fully operational with working equipment and trained and enthusiastic would-be programmers, reporters, and deejays (see Figure 3).

However, the operational status of the station did not result in a smooth transition to broadcasting. The Tanzanian community center broadcasted for a couple of months later that fall, on an explicitly experimental basis. Its members then voluntarily went off the air, not wishing to court conflict with authorities from whom they sought a broadcast license.

The issues they next encountered were somewhat foreshadowed during the barnraising. One concern was that, unlike the U.S. context to which the radio activists were accustomed, the station would not have the freedom to discuss openly issues such as political campaigns



Figure 3. Volunteers in the radio studio, Arumeru District, Tanzania, 2005. Courtesy of Erik Hoversten.

and candidates because of government intolerance. The community center members de-

[8] [Community Center Radio Station] Rules, August 2005. This document was posted in English and Swahili in the studio.

cided that the station would seek a license and legal status, giving it a greater likelihood of longevity. This also meant that to keep in good standing with the government, it would be preferable to avoid explicit coverage of potentially controversial topics such as elections.[9] Thus, a number of workshops on programming discussed "how to be political without being overtly political." Community center leaders were extremely cautious about how to proceed with the radio station; they felt that as an independent, nonstate media outlet, they would potentially be under intense scrutiny (see Javuru, 2011).

Not only that, the ambitions of the U.S. activists and Tanzanian community center ran afoul of Tanzanian broadcasting policy, which essentially did not support community media. Tanzanian broadcast media had long been controlled by the state; although the situation was changing somewhat, the major emerging template for nonstate media was commercial media. According to the community center leaders, there was one extant radio station that fit neither of these models, a station operated for and by Maasai people (an ethnic group located along northern Tanzania and southern Kenya). The community center members took hope from the Maasai station that government approval for a community station would be possible to receive (Fieldnotes, January 9, 2007).

As noted, the Tanzanian government was not necessarily strictly opposed to community broadcasting, although there was little precedent for it. Rather than rejection or opposition, the community center's application was met with government hesitation. The first application was returned within six months with a request that they constitute a more diverse board, which was to include a range of village elders and not privilege the community center's founders, thus orienting the station toward a wider range of constituents and diversifying its governance (Fieldnotes, January 9, 2007). Their first financial projection also caused a holdup; as one person explained to me, their application was too ambitious and made the government wary that the application was for a commercial station in disguise (Fieldnotes, January 9, 2007). The community center leaders gamely acceded to these requests and resubmitted their application. Yet, after meeting requests for more information by the authorities, their application withered on the vine and they did not hear back for some time.

The Tanzanian community center leaders thus faced a protracted application process. Three years after the station was operational, it languished pending government approval. The community center leaders appeared to wrestle with conflicting sentiments. On the one hand, after 18 months, they insisted that their momentum since building the station during the U.S. activists' visit had only grown. They also expressed hope and credulousness that the station would be approved "any week now" (Fieldnotes, January 9, 2007). On the other hand, they were somewhat grasping at straws in their speculations about what was causing the holdup in obtaining the license. In a twist foreseen by no one at the time of the station building, community center leaders claimed that one of the issues was the government viewing the station as a potential "crown jewel" in the region. Precisely because community broadcasting was a rarity and a respected Tanzanian station would receive much notice, they claimed the

[9] Tanzanian broadcasting policy allowed freedom of expression in principle, but the language set out in the policies makes vague recommendations that stations promote national unity and national security (Article 19: Global Campaign for Free Expression, 2004, p. 11). In practice, broadcasters shied away from criticizing the government too explicitly, and particularly in the semi-autonomous Zanzibar archipelago, there have been repeated instances of harassment and detainment of journalists.

government was experiencing a seemingly contradictory urge to stall on licensing because of its ambivalence about relinquishing control over the station to community members. [10]

Oral Wiki Project, Rwanda

The second case presented here is a telephone-based oral wiki. In 2008–2009, an American software developer at a digital media and design research group in the United Kingdom considered applying the principles of blogs, wikis, and other "user-generated" or "participatory" platforms in settings where Internet infrastructure lagged or literacy hindered their deployment. With design partners, she traveled to Rwanda and met with informal justice actors known as *abunzi*, who play an important role as community mediators, adjudicating disputes between neighbors. These informal justice actors are widely respected and used in their communities for a variety of reasons including lack of access to formal (state) justice systems, cost, and simplicity of proceedings and rulings compared with formal justice systems (Agamanolis & Jeffers, 2009, p. 7). *Abunzi* process about 70% of the civil cases in the country (Agamanolis & Jeffers, 2009, p. 2), and land disputes are a majority of those.

Especially given the specter of Rwanda's violent civil unrest, consensus and reconciliation are preferred results for disputes between neighbors. Informal justice systems are valued by citizens because

> they are highly participatory[,] giving the victim, the offender, and the community as a whole, a real voice in finding a hopefully lasting solution to the conflict. Furthermore, they assist in educating all members of the community as to the rules to be followed, the circumstances which may lead to them being broken, and how ensuing conflict may be peacefully resolved. (Penal Reform International, quoted in Agamanolis & Jeffers, 2009, p. 2)

Thus, the designers zeroed in on supporting the work of the *abunzi.*

In consultation with *abunzi*, the designers developed the idea of the oral wiki. Acknowledging the factors of cost, accessibility, and literacy, the designers focused on the idea of a lightweight technical intervention that could mesh well with orality. The oral wiki would allow *abunzi* to record, archive, listen to, and rate or respond to resolutions issued by other *abunzi.* Over time, the design would allow the archive to grow, increase transparency of *abunzi* decisions, and provide a comparative basis for rulings that would be useful to *abunzi* and to disputants. Accessible to citizens, *abunzi*, and government actors, the designers' goal was to build capacity and faith in the informal justice system already in place.

Abunzi and other actors claimed to be enthusiastic about the promise of the oral wiki. Some *abunzi* felt that such a system would promote responsibility and accountability within the *abunzi* profession; they also felt that the system would potentially validate the work performed by members of their profession. One *abunzi* said, "If you never leave your village

[10] To underscore how unusual and contingent the circumstances under which their license was being considered were, a community center founder told me that when the station had been broadcasting experimentally, its range was farther than expected, with reports that its transmissions had been received just across the Kenyan border. Arusha, the nearest city, would be well within range. Arusha itself had seen much growth since being selected in 1994 as the site for the United Nations tribunal on the Rwandan genocide. Furthermore, Arusha was a proposed capital of the proposed East African Federation, a political union of five states (Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi) into one, with the federation scheduled to occur in 2012 or later. Thus, the center leaders' claims that the station was being given special scrutiny by the government seem warranted.

you think your ideas are the best ones" (quoted in Agamanolis & Jeffers, 2009, p. 1). Another asserted that this system would allow "*abunzi* [to] correct errors in the community with this tool" (quoted in Agamanolis & Jeffers, 2009, p. 8). Many people cited the benefit to citizens, who would potentially see faster resolution of disputes, which would mean that families

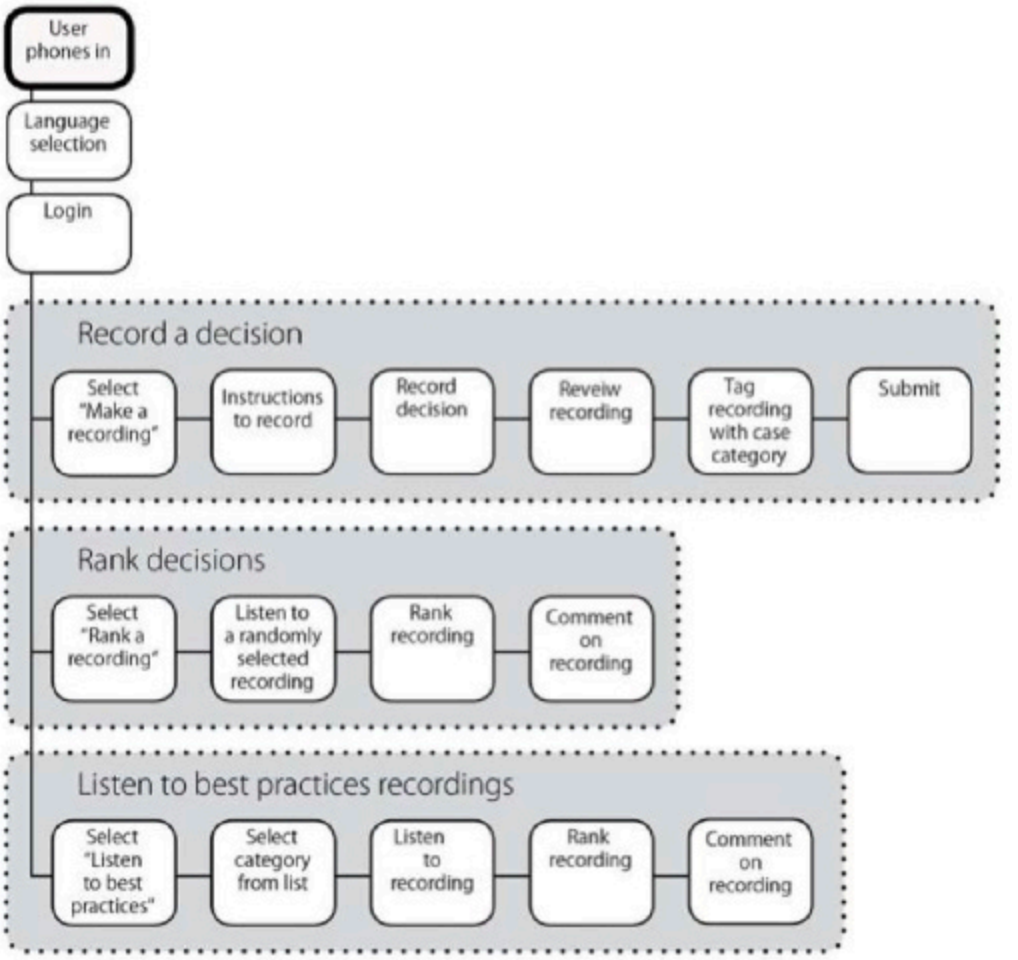


Figure 4. Oral wiki design. © Agamanolis & Jeffers.Description: oral wiki use

would spend less time in limbo with their livelihoods up in the air (e.g., where to farm, who should collect profits from farming a given parcel of land). Heeding enthusiastic feedback, the designers were committed to developing the idea for the oral wiki into a working technology (see Figure 4).

The other main task was to develop functionality. To design for the local context, the designers had to work within the existing parameters of *abunzi* understandings of their work practices and Rwandan infrastructure. They learned that although *abunzi* typically kept handwritten records of their own cases, they lacked access to adjudication decisions of similar disputes. *Abunzi* felt that a network that provided both transparency of resolution decisions and knowledge of other cases would lead to trust, accountability, and an accrual of knowledge about best practices. Although the Rwandan government was heavily invested in moving the country from an agricultural economy to a "knowledge economy" (Murenzi

& Hughes, 2008; see also Pascal, 2004[11]), there were no state plans to provide Internet access for the abunzi justice systems. Overall, less than 1% of Rwandans used the Internet,[12] approximately 65% were literate, and access to electricity was low, approximately 6% (Agamanolis & Jeffers, 2009, p. 3).

Telephony was much more widely accessible, and did not require literacy, computer access, or computer literacy. Although village phone use was higher (at 30%) than mobile phone use, mobile phone use was growing more quickly than village phone use (Agamanolis & Jeffers, 2009, p. 3). Thus, the designers settled on a design interface in which users could interact with the oral wiki by either phone or Internet (the latter, they presumed, would be more valuable to government actors, who had disproportionate access to the Internet versus citizens and *abunzi*; see Figure 5).

The designers then built a working prototype of the oral wiki. They also submitted a proposal to build out the prototype including a pilot program and providing mobile phone access to pilot participants. After implementing the pilot and studying the oral wiki in practice, the designers were hopeful about scaling the project to implementation in many villages.

Yet, the project faltered after the prototype. The pilot implementation was never initiated. One American designer returned to the United States and found other work. She remained committed to the project and enthusiastic about its implementation, and even worked to further build up and debug the prototype. However, over time, she became skeptical that the oral wiki would move toward implementation, and as of this writing, her fear had been borne out.

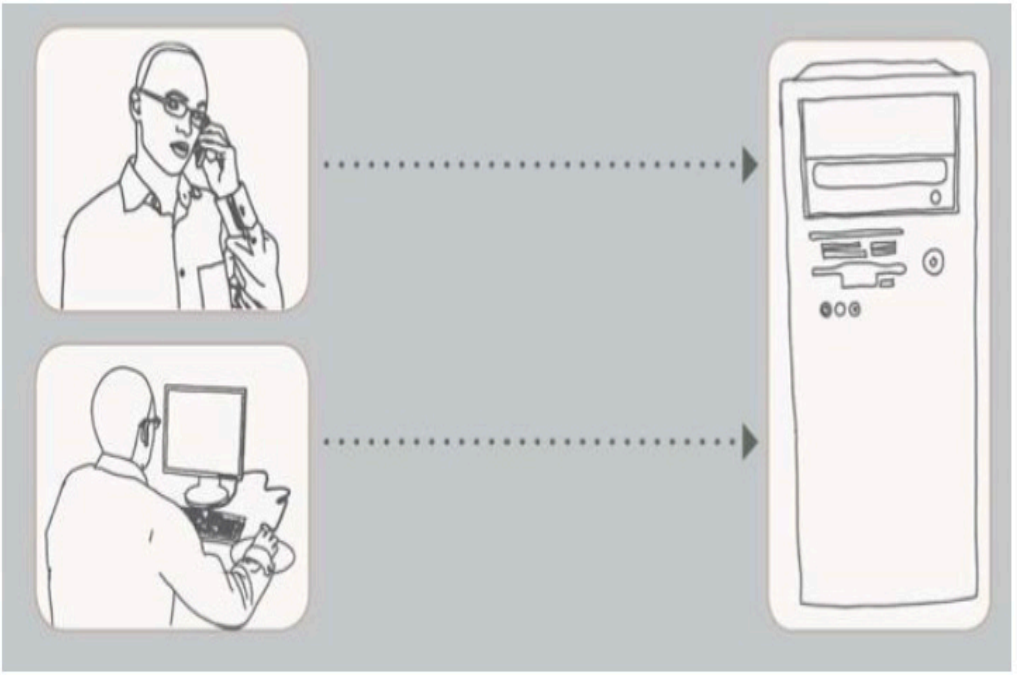


Figure 5. Oral wiki, accessible to users by networked computer or mobile phone.
© Agamanolis & Jeffers.

[11] Although the smallest one, the African ICT market is regarded as the most rapidly growing.

[12] See Sally Wyatt (2003) for a critique of the progressive assumption that all nonusers have been "left out."

One main reason that the project stalled appeared to be government ambivalence. Some Rwandan government actors were eager to rationalize *abunzi* decision making. One district-level government official said, "the *Abunzi* have a hectic schedule and the technology will ease their way of work. . . . *Abunzi* do a great job. The database . . . would provide for a great exchange of ideas" (Agamanolis & Jeffers, 2009, p. 8). Other government actors, especially at the level of the central government, were especially keen for the oral wiki to bring abunzi informal justice into view of the state (one function of the oral wiki's archive feature; see Akrich, 1994). There was even potential for the formal justice system to make laws based on a full knowledge of the nature of cases faced by *abunzi*, which would in theory bind local justice systems to the central government and legitimate and rationalize the justice system of the nation as a whole (Agamanolis & Jeffers, 2009, pp. 8–9).

Yet, the central government failed to approve the plans to move forward with the oral wiki pilot. Although she could not be certain, the designer speculated that this reflected more than just "ordinary" bureaucratic foot-dragging and red tape. In spite of the enthusiasm expressed by some government actors, the designer thought that central government actors may have perceived that the project potentially represented a risk to the government (Interview, February 2011). In ratifying the *abunzi* justice system, the government might be concerned that it was ceding some of its own authority. Although the formal justice system was reliant on the efficacious working of the informal justice system, too much empowerment of a community-adjudicated justice system could tip the balance of power away from central authority, raising a specter of fear about the effects of citizen empowerment (see Straus, 2007). It is impossible to know for certain the range of contingencies that contributed to the stalling of the project, but this matrix of factors bears consideration, especially in the historical context of Rwanda.

Conclusion: Appropriate Boundaries, Appropriate Technologies?

These two cases of "failed" technology export are instructive. In fact, the paradox of both cases is that they are successes as well as failures. In both cases, the radio activists and software developers averted common pitfalls of technology design or technology transfer: They made serious efforts to plan for the local conditions in which the technologies would be used. In envisioning the use of these artifacts, these technological mediators also attempted to account for what would-be users needed to find these technologies useful (see Oudshoorn, Rommes, & Stienstra, 2004).[13]

Both the Tanzanian community center members and the Rwandan *abunzi* appeared to be more or less in agreement with the bearers of technologies in their respective circumstances. The interpretations of the uses and meanings of radio and of the oral wiki were stable across the social groups that brought the technologies and the social groups that intended to use them, and were constructed in dialogue between users and designers/activists.[14] This differs

[13] An alternative rendering of these encounters might hold that these technological interventions foundered because would-be users found them neither useful nor needed; it is certainly possible that the activists/designers were in fact deaf to the social realities of the would-be users, who, as soon as resources and attention from outside were withdrawn, returned their focus to their more pressing concerns, including everyday survival. However, this account is less charitable to the activists/designers and less analytically interesting, in part because such occurrences are all too common. Thanks to Caroline Wamala for discussion on this point.

[14] Here I rely on what the Tanzanians told me and what the Rwandan *abunzi* told the American designer (and

from other cases of African users of technologies who fall so far outside the intended market that Western designers do not account for them (Burrell, 2011, pp. 141–142). It also contrasts with cases of Western designers who simply do not recognize the existing parameters of infrastructure when they supply technologies to Global South contexts (Akrich, 1994).

Indeed, activists selected the Tanzanian radio station and the Rwandan oral wiki in part for their material features, which they and potential users understood to mesh particularly well with local exigencies. The U.S. radio activists advocated for radio in part because they understood it to be highly portable and usable. The oral wiki designers explicitly conceived of the oral wiki as a lightweight and impermanent technology intended to bridge between Rwandans' current ICT-impoverished landscape and a more wired future. The wiki operated on a familiar platform: telephony. In terms of technical functionality, these mediators were not wrong; the radio station and oral wiki were largely adaptable to local circumstances and appeared to be embraced by would-be users (see de Laet & Mol, 2000).

The understandings of the radio station held by both the U.S. activists and the Tanzanian community center members were closely aligned. This was largely true for the *abunzi* and the oral wiki designers as well. The government actors' interpretations of these technologies are harder to uncover, but in both cases, there are grounds for speculation, if not evidence, that the government actors' interpretations of the meanings and uses of these technologies also did not differ significantly from the designers' or users' interpretations.

Instead, the government actors may have wished to block the implementation of these projects precisely because they understood the technologies in the same terms as the mediators and would-be users, but they simply did not wish to promote these uses. If true, this indicates a potential problem with analysts of sociotechnical assemblages treating the "problem" of technological success or failure as being reducible to the actors' interpretations of technologies themselves. The need for users, designers, and other relevant social groups to hold commensurate interpretations of technology remains paramount. Yet this agreement, while necessary, is not sufficient for the success of the technology.

Rather, this case points to the need to interrogate what is meant when "a technology" is said to "work." Clearly, whether a technology in a given setting works is not restricted to a narrowly bounded artifact and its material properties; when we expect a technology to work, we are also assuming its successful enmeshment into certain social relations that also account for its working (see Akrich, 1994; Callon, 1987; Latour, 1994). However, the requirement for social relations that also work is often obscured; it is common to synecdochally reduce these arrangements to the technology itself, as the radio activists did. These relations may be very hard to see under ordinary circumstances when a given arrangement is in working order, but one benefit to an analysis of the cases discussed in this article is that failures bring these relations to the surface (see Garfinkel, 1967). As the radio station and oral wiki cases demonstrate, these dynamics are of special interest not only in design, but also in the promotion of familiar technologies in novel settings (Marvin, 1988).

Although these technologies succeeded in (micro-meso) negotiations between users and designers/activists to construct meaning, they failed elsewhere. Specifically, they failed at the

she relayed to me). Of course, my and the designer's positions vis-à-vis those of the East African informants (or vice versa) are relevant, and we cannot know with absolute certainty that East African informants were not withholding critique or skepticism.

level of a wider sociolegal context. Although ratified by would-be users and mediators, they were not legitimated at (meso-macro) institutional or state levels (see Wyatt & Balmer, 2007). We might say that activists/designers and would-be users succeeded in how they negotiated the respective meanings of these technologies in the particular contexts where use would occur, but they failed to successfully navigate the outer reaches of the artifacts, where they "touched" the law, broadcast policy, and the state.

Given that proponents intended to export technologies that worked, these cases point to the need for a serious analytical parsing of the boundary of what is encompassed by "technology." Steve Woolgar (1991) argues that the question of whether characteristics *reside in* entities, or whether they are *attributed to* entities is, in practice, not nearly as straightforward to answer as it might seem, nor is it a neutral undertaking (p. 65). He writes, "Any existing complex of relationships between entities [is a consequence of] the moral order of representation, . . ." that is, moral and social work is required to attribute a given characteristic or action to a machine, versus to its user, versus to a web of social relations in which artifact and user are entangled (p. 65).

To distinguish between "the artifact" and "the social" is an act of boundary-drawing and an implicit ordering of the rights and responsibilities associated with each entity and the distribution among them (Woolgar, 1991, p. 66). The Tanzanian radio station and Rwandan oral wiki cases illustrate that it matters where actors draw the line of where the technology starts and ends. The paradox between the ostensible portability and ease of use of these technologies and their in situ failures can in part be explained by considering the boundaries of the technologies to be wider than a narrowly artifact-centered approach allows.

In other words, we cannot predict whether a technology will "work" in a given setting by reciting its material properties. In placing the responsibility for "working" on the radio station and the oral wiki's artifactual properties, the mediators here shifted responsibility away from themselves and implicitly onto the technology itself. This approach, however, failed in both cases, and responsibility shifted once again, leaving regulators or would-be users to make the artifacts work, and leading to the stagnation of both projects. These outcomes are ironic given the mediators' intent to fully anticipate local contexts and provide appropriate technological interventions. Drawing narrow boundaries around what a technology "is" is insufficient to account for the articulations between the (narrowly construed) artifact and the institutional, cultural, and sociolegal contexts its successful deployment must incorporate. Rewriting communicative power requires careful attention to how these boundaries are drawn, by whom, and with what effect.

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CHAPTER 57

Wireless Mesh Networks as Community Hubs: Analysis of Small-Scale Wireless Mesh Networks and Community-Centered Technology Training

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Abstract

This paper addresses two policy questions. Firstly, how might evolving technologies associated with broadband networks enhance or hinder marginalized or underserved population groups' effective use and access to information resources? Secondly, how can we foster public hybrid broadband, situating broadband networks within existing communities, as a means to promote digital self-determination? This study finds that wireless mesh technology initiatives can create and foster community engagement through infrastructure deployment, maintenance and use; combat myths regarding marginalized demographics and technology, and provide marginalized communities with an opportunity to become decision-makers regarding communications technology infrastructure development.

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Keywords

mesh-networks, community training, Telecommunications, wireless internet, community technology

As the world becomes increasingly more digital, it has become apparent that online access, speed, and cost-of-service are playing a crucial role in our everyday lives.[1] Underpinning these requirements, however, is the infrastructure that determines each of these attributes. Academics, government institutions, and the public have become increasingly more aware of the need to develop solutions in order to provide digital infrastructure to underserved communities.[2]

With 10 percent of all Americans and 39 percent of rural Americans lacking access to 25 Mbps/3 Mbps service,[3] those involved in improving access to robust service are exploring innovative options not just to provide infrastructure but also to include local communities in decision-making processes as well as in the design, implementation, and adoption stages.[4]

During a 2-day workshop, organized by The Institute for Information Policy at Penn State University in June 2016, with the goal of identifying a "national broadband research agenda," experts from academia and government produced a report titled "broadband 2021."[5] Included in this report were various avenues for future research exploration and questions that would help influence the understanding of the broadband landscape going forward. One of the themes that emerged from this workshop, and subsequent report, was that of emerging technologies and their ability to engage with traditionally marginalized or underserved communities. This study takes that theme and applies it to the implementation of small-scale wireless mesh networks and the integration of community-based technology training initiatives. Specifically, it focuses on how community-based technology training aims to affect commonly held narratives regarding marginalized or underserved communities and technology.

Many community networks around the world[6] are utilizing a decentralized, cooperative approach to broadband infrastructure. According to these organizations, this use of community leadership and expertise, as well as new approaches to integrating digital technology into communities, is helping to foster both community engagements as well as encouraging community members to become involved in their infrastructure choices. Community-based training initiatives have been shown to improve marginalized communities' relationships with communication technology, as in the study by Hendry et al. (2011), which analyzes the integration of digital communications technology into a homeless youth drop-in center,[7] as well as to counter myths or false narratives regarding certain demographics and their relationship to technology, as shown by Saunder's 2012 examination of the effects of digital technology on indigenous teacher training and classroom relationships.[8]

[1] DiMaggio et al.

[2] Kenner.

[3] Federal Communication Commission.

[4] Ashmore, Farrington, and Skerratt.

[5] Broadband 2021.

[6] See guifi.net (Catalonia)/Freifunk (Germany)/Wireless Belgie (Belgium) and AWMN (Athens, Greece).

[7] Hendry et al.

[8] Saunders.

This study analyzes community-centered training programs provided by the Detroit Community Technology Project [9] (DCTP) by examining data, in the form of organizational documents as well as interviews with staff/community members, to identify core programmatic themes. DCTP integrates wireless mesh-network training into its community technology training. Analyzing technological choices as well as community partnerships and training methods, this study aims to provide answers to two of the key questions that emerged from the Broadband 2021 report. This examination of community-centered training and the integration of wireless mesh-network solutions can help aid policymakers and organizations in developing community-centered communication technology initiatives.

Research Questions

RQ1: Looking to the future, how might evolving technologies or interfaces or platforms associated with broadband networks enhance or hinder certain population groups' effective use and access to information resources?
RQ2: How can we foster public hybrid broadband, focusing not only on the technological infrastructure of the network but also situating broadband networks within existing communities as a means to promote digital self-determination for marginalized [10] and other disadvantaged groups?

Mesh Networks and Local Communities

Traditionally fixed wired broadband has been the most commonly implemented form of high-speed network infrastructure. [11] In 2017, fiber broadband, with a 43.2 percent global market share, surpassed DSL as the most common fixed broadband platform. Fiber network deployment grew 55.6 percent worldwide year over year in 2016. According to research firm Kagan, a unit of S&P Global Intelligence, fixed fiber broadband connections are on track to reach one billion subscriber lines by year-end 2021. China and the United States, respectively, represent the two largest fixed broadband markets with a combined worldwide market share of 46.9 percent.

Despite the dominance of fixed fiber broadband, wireless networking solutions have been utilized in areas where fixed line deployment is challenged by geography or cost-of-service. The emergence of wireless [12] technology, specifically in developing nations, enables infrastructure developers to bypass the cost and geographic issues associated with fixed line deployment. Wireless mesh networks have emerged as a low-cost and resilient method of delivering community-based high-speed Internet deployment. [13]

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[9] https://www.alliedmedia.org/dctp. Accessed October 31, 2017.

[10] For the purpose of this study "marginalized or disadvantaged communities" are defined as: Socially excluded groups of people for different reasons, such as age, physical or mental dis- abilities, economic status, access to education, or live in isolated places or depressed areas. See Passarelli, Straubhaar, and Cuevas-Cerveró.

[11] "Global Fiber Broadband Penetration Surpasses DSL, On Track for 1 Billion Connections." Accessed October 31, 2017. http://www.telecompetitor.com/research-global-fiber-broadband- penetration-surpasses-dsl-on-track-for-1billionconnections/.

[12] Qadir et al.

[13] Canali et al.

Wireless mesh networks, as opposed to other types of wireless multi-hop networks, are composed of two types of nodes: wireless access points (routers) and mobile wireless clients.[14] Routers connect with each other through wireless links, and act as wireless access infrastructure to wireless clients. The initial service access points are usually fixed wired links and act as gateways for the other routers and for the clients. The difference between mesh networks and other kinds of networks is that mesh networks use a particular kind of protocol, called dynamic routing, for moving information from one place to another.[15] This protocol involves each device on the network communicating with the others to determine what to do with received data; to keep it or to pass it on.[16] A mesh network is built by installing an open-source mesh software package on wireless-enabled devices and then connecting them

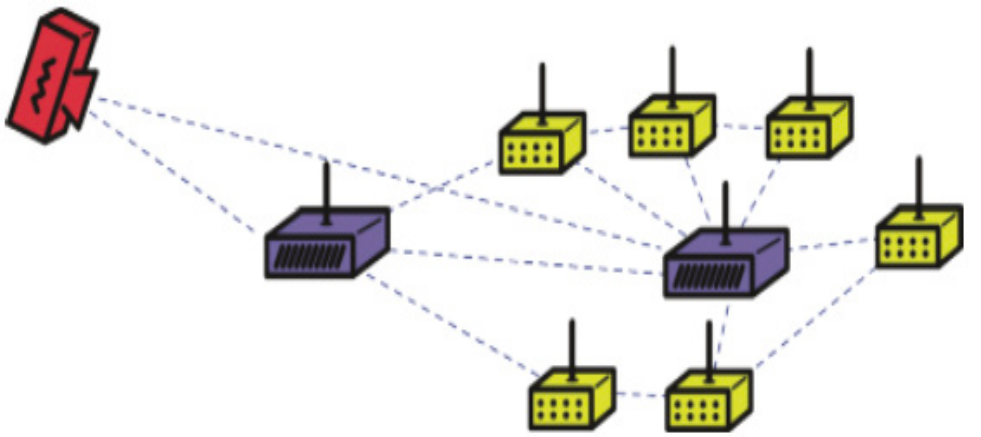


Figure 1: Mesh-Network Diagram.

to other nearby meshing devices. The more the devices that are part of the mesh network, the more flexible the network becomes. Any mesh device can be the hub or central point in the network—or the network can have no central point. A dynamic mesh network, unlike a more "static" traditional network, constantly adapts to new conditions.[17] It automatically adjusts its pathways to integrate new nodes that join the network and has the flexibility to reroute information when a node leaves the network.

Ultimately, the benefit of this network arrangement is that the network functions autonomously. If the network is cut off from an outside source, it still functions as an internal communication system and in order for the network to stop functioning every node must be taken offline. It is therefore extremely resilient to external infrastructure damage as well as being able to provide communities with digital communication regardless of access to a wider network. For those cash-poor communities where access to a private or public Inter-

[14] Lee, Chansu Yu, and Suh.

[15] See *Tips in Designing Network on Hub-and-Spoke, Full-Mesh, or Partially-Mesh setup*. Accessed October 31, 2017. http://www.dslreports.com/faq/14349; and *(Re)Building Technology Build-it-ourselves Community Networks*. Accessed October 31, 2017. http://communitytechnology. github.io/.

[16] Peng et al.

[17] Majumder and Roy.

net provider may be unaffordable, community-based mesh networks can still provide basic infrastructure connectivity.[18]

Mesh networking enables innovative community applications, including those used in projects, such as guifi[19] and Red Hook Wifi,[20] in which users in a community (neighborhood, city, rural area, etc.) can choose to share their communication facilities (wireless access points) and form a wireless multi-hop network to be used by other community members. This allows communities to share the cost of network deployment and use as well as the ability to share community-related resources. These shared resources distributed over the mesh network can come in the form of community radio, community-designed applications or even the posting/listing of community events.[21]

Red Hook WiFi

The Red Hook Digital Stewards are young adult residents of the New York City Housing Authority's Red Hook Houses.[22] The Red Hook Initiative (RHI) centered around a training program where community technology "Stewards" have built and maintain a resilient community network that serves the geographically separated low-lying Brooklyn community of Red Hook, prone to flooding and vulnerable to communication breakdowns. When Hurricane Sandy hit the Eastern Seaboard of the United States in 2012 and the neighborhood flooded, the network kept running as a lifeline to volunteer and donation response efforts,[23] and also for a time served as a platform for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's operations in the area.

guifi.net

Catalonia's guifi.net, one of the world's largest community wireless networks (CWNs) with approximately 60,000 users and 25,000 nodes, operates on a community foundation-based ownership model. Subscribers do not pay for bandwidth, but rather donate on a voluntary basis to the Guifi foundation. The network started about 15 years ago in an outlying exurb of Barcelona that lacked broadband service options. Though the area now has commercial offerings, the network continues to grow, even into major cities, and is now expanding to other parts of the world, including a partnership with the Free Network Foundation in Kansas City, Missouri.[24] Guifi incorporates a range of different hardware and firmware and technology options, allowing different localities to adapt a system design to meet their needs and available resources. Local businesses, ranging from tech companies to TV repair shops and satellite dish installers, learn how to set up network nodes, harness the foundation's bandwidth, and set up service contracts with local users, then pay a percentage of their earnings back to the foundation. Local governments occasionally help to kick-start the process by donating space on a hilltop for a big bandwidth pipeline to serve the area, or with a bit of start-up funding.

[18] Pedraza, Ruiz, and Ballesteros.

[19] http://guifi.net/. Accessed October 31, 2017.

[20] http://rhicenter.org/programs/community-building/red-hook-wifi/. Accessed October 31, 2017.

[21] Antoniadis et al.

[22] Free Network Foundation.

[23] *Red Hook's Cutting-Edge*.

[24] Free Network Foundation.

Money does not flow to a big telecom conglomerate, but to local entrepreneurs and start-ups who do maintenance, troubleshooting, and computer help for local users, including local schools and community groups.

Freifunk

Germany's Freifunk network started in Berlin and continues to grow there; there are also now Freifunk networks in several cities and towns throughout the country.[25] Participants get involved via the meetup model, learning about the network through outreach efforts like YouTube videos and engaging in hands-on skills sharing. Freifunk's participants are mostly from technologically well-resourced communities, and have been able to produce much useful documentation of the process of setting up "mesh" routing protocols. Whereas many of the larger community networks use hybrid technologies to build easy-to-join systems, the Freifunk networks use a dynamic routing protocol, which is fully decentralized and resilient (it can route around node failures). The mesh protocol is an embodiment of the network's principles of openness, as the Freifunk router firmware allows all users to anonymously join and share bandwidth if they wish.

Wireless België

Wireless België is one of the largest community networks in Europe and is currently focused on developing resilient mobile communications systems for deployment at large public events.[26] Belgium is home to a series of large music festivals; in 2011, 60,000 people attended a gathering near Brussels where a sudden storm hit, killing five concertgoers and causing chaos and panic.[27] Resilient communication systems at festival sites could save lives in the future, enabling organizers to put out emergency bulletins and evacuate if necessary. Wireless Belgium is exploring ways to adapt its network as a resilient, decentralized platform which could be installed quickly at festival sites and would keep running even if major centralized networks experience congestion or failure.

Athens Wireless Metropolitan Network

The Athens Wireless Metropolitan Network was one of the first decentralized community networks to operate at scale.[28] Originally started as an alternative to expensive and unreliable commercial offerings, the network now covers most of the Greek peninsula and several islands, with new offshoots starting in many underserved rural areas. The new Sarantaporo.gr village network is documenting its process of building broadband infrastructure as a method of supporting local economic development. According to local organizers, villagers had not intended to create a network initially, but found that in order to build a community website they first had to ensure that locals could get online. With the new wireless network, young people are returning to the village and helping farmers and other local groups build cooperatives for sharing skills, processing goods, and bringing them to market. With the Greek national

[25] See wiki.p2pfoundation.net/Athens_Wireless_Metropolitan_Network. Accessed January 22, 2018.

[26] See https://www.alliedmedia.org. Accessed October 31, 2017.

[27] *Pukkelpop Storm*.

[28] See https://www.alliedmedia.org/tracks-practice-spaces-network-gatherings. Accessed October 31, 2017.

economy experiencing a series of shocks over the last decade, local groups are increasingly interested in using technology to take economic development into their own hands.

Prior Research

Research in the area of community-based wireless networks has been varied. Some researchers have examined the topic from a Digital Divide Perspective.[29] Research in this area analyzes whether or not CWNs are effective at closing the divide between those who have digital access and those who do not. Scholars in this area apply various theoretical frameworks, such as social informatics,[30] critical theory,[31] actor network theory,[32] as well as others, in order to assess the impact of community-owned wireless networks on the digital divide.

Others have examined CWNs and their connection to community-based technology organizations through resource mobilization theory.[33] This theory posits that organizations, primarily in the social movement area, seek to utilize resources such as public infrastructure in order to advance their agendas. Research in this area attempts to identify how resources, in this case CWNs, are used by social movement organizations and in what way they are used to promote the organization's aims and purposes.[34]

Rationale and Purpose

This study, instead of focusing on CWNs through a theoretical lens, aims to identify, through examination of a community technology training program in Detroit, how evolving technologies, in this case wireless mesh networks, when embedded into a community-based technology initiative may enhance or hinder certain population groups' effective use and access to information resources. Furthermore, this study hopes to identify how DCTP's Digital Steward's program, as a community situated initiative, promotes digital self-determination for indigenous and other disadvantaged groups.

DCTP: Background (Community Wireless and Digital Stewards Program)

The DCTP originated in 2008 with Allied Media Project's (AMP) "media lab" and "how-to track."[35] In 2009, "how-to track" evolved into "DIY technology track," a space that was used to help explain various media production technologies to community members and provide hands-on opportunities to discover how these technologies work.

In 2012, AMP launched the Digital Stewards Program in partnership with the Open Technology Institute (OTI). This community-based technology training program focused on delivering community wireless mesh-network installation and use training to low-income and marginalized communities in Detroit. DCTP emerged from the Digital Stewards Pro-

[29] See Ortiz and Tapia, "The Digital Divide Discourse"; Tapia, Stone, and Maitland; Tapia and Ortiz, "Municipal Responses"; Tapia, Maitland, and Stone; Tapia, Maldonado, and Ortiz; and Servon.

[30] Tapia and Ortiz, "Deploying for Deliverance."

[31] Feenberg.

[32] Van Oost, Verhaegh, and Oudshoorn.

[33] Jenkins.

[34] Shaffer.

[35] See https://www.alliedmedia.org. Accessed October 31, 2017.

gram and networks cultivated at the "media lab" as a way to organize the deployment of communications technology programs and initiatives in Detroit. It was officially formed in 2014 to encompass broader community technology education and organizing work and share best practices and has gone on to deploy its programs and initiatives, specifically the Digital Stewards Program, in multiple regions in the United States and around the world. These best practices have also been adopted by other community-based organizations as a means to deliver community-based technology training and solutions to lack of adequate Internet access and adoption.

Table 1: DCTP's Accomplishments

Codeveloped the Digital Stewards Curriculum
Codeveloped the Community Technology Field Guide[a]
Partnered with OTI to launch and operate the Digital Stewards Program[b]
Facilitated the vision and goal development of Code for Detroit
Consulted on agenda development for community technology gatherings in San Francisco, Chicago, and Detroit
Presented work and best practices to national and international audiences, including the 2014 Code for America Summit, the 2013 International Summit for Community Wireless, and the 2015 Rights Con in the Philippines
Influenced the development of the Allied Media Conference "practice-space" model[c] and the DiscoTech[d] model through our community-based educational approach
Convened the international Community Technology Network Gathering[e] at the 2015
Allied Media Conference
Developed the How-To DiscoTech guide[e]
Developed and managed Detroit Future Media[e]
Codeveloped the International Seed Grants Program, supporting 11 international community wireless projects[e]
Developed the Opening Data Zine[e]
Codeveloped the (re) building technology zines and github resource portal
Launched the Data Justice Campaign[f]
Led the development of the Teaching Community Technology Handbook Consulted in the implementation of Digital Stewards in New America Foundation's RISE NYC project

[a] See https://www.alliedmedia.org/detroit-future. Accessed October 31, 2017.
[b] Phillips and Hardy.
[c] Merriam.
[d] Community member: Document analysis.
[e] DCTP Staff member: Study interview.
[f] Community member: Document analysis.

Table 2: Locations That Have Adopted DCTP Principles

Sáo Paulo, Brazil
Jose de la Quintana, Argentina
Eenhana, Namibia
Bangalore, India

Minsk, Belarus
Itatiaia, Brazil
East Timor
Nigeria
Nicaragua
Dominican Republic of the Congo
Tunisia
Myanmar

So far, six CWNs have been deployed, or prototyped, in five Detroit neighborhoods.

DCTP: Digital Stewards

AMP partnered with the OTI,[36] a global leader in using wireless technology for human rights, to launch the Detroit Digital Stewards Program. AMP and OTI produced a pilot version of the program in the fall of 2012, then designed a 20-week version which was integrated into

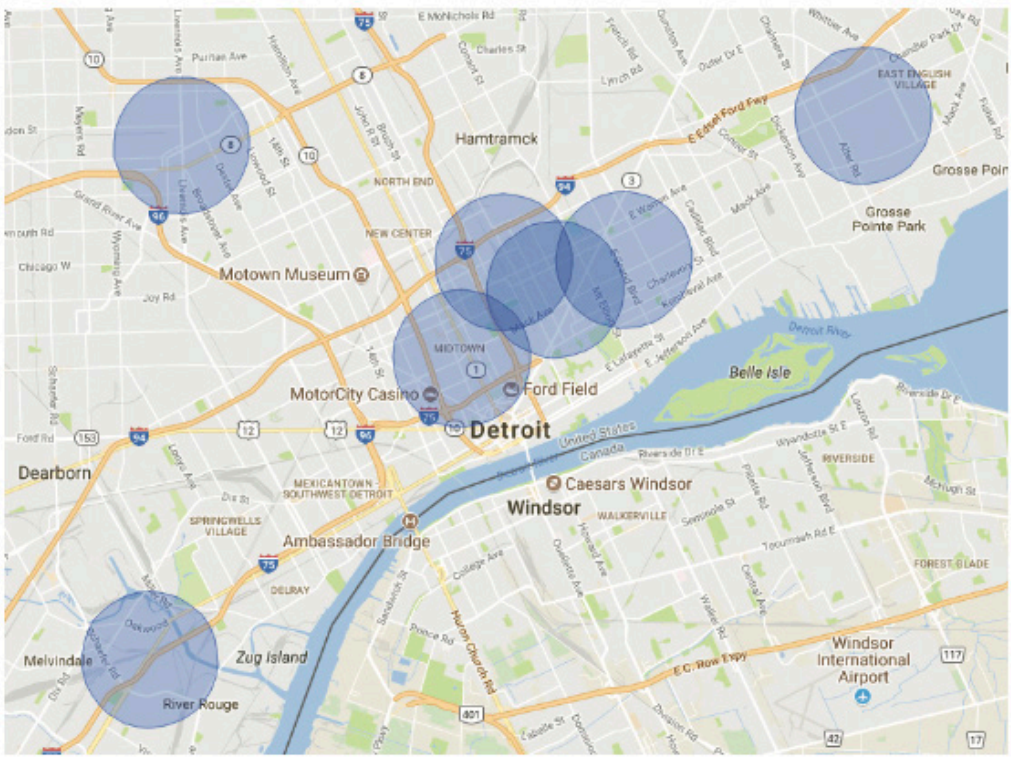


Figure 2: Location of DCTP Wireless Mesh Networks.

the Detroit Future Media training program.[37]

[36] See http://www.newamerica.org/oti/. Accessed October 31, 2017.

[37] See https://www.alliedmedia.org/detroit-future. Accessed October 31, 2017.

This training prepares teams of community organizers, people with construction skills, and tech-savvy individuals to design and deploy communications infrastructure with a commitment to the "Detroit Digital Justice Principles." [38]

Table 3: Detroit Digital Justice Principles

Access
Digital justice ensures that all members of our community have equal access to media and technology, as producers as well as consumers.
Digital justice provides multiple layers of communications infrastructure in order to ensure that every member of the community has access to life-saving emergency information.
Digital justice values all different languages, dialects, and forms of communication.
Participation
Digital justice prioritizes the participation of people who have been traditionally excluded from and attacked by media and technology.
Digital justice advances our ability to tell our own stories, as individuals and as communities.
Digital justice values nondigital forms of communication and fosters knowledge sharing across generations.
Digital justice demystifies technology to the point where we can not only use it, but create our own technologies and participate in the decisions that will shape communications infrastructure.
Common Ownership
Digital justice fuels the creation of knowledge, tools, and technologies that are free and shared openly with the public.
Digital justice promotes diverse business models for the control and distribution of information, including: cooperative business models and municipal ownership.
Healthy Communities
Digital justice provides spaces through which people can investigate community problems, generate solutions, create media, and organize together.
Digital justice promotes alternative energy, recycling and salvaging technology, and using technology to promote environmental solutions.
Digital justice advances community-based economic development by expanding technology access for small businesses, independent artists, and other entrepreneurs.

- *Digital justice integrates media and technology into education in order to transform teaching and learning, to value multiple learning styles and to expand the process of learning beyond the classroom and across the lifespan.*

The Digital Stewards learn about mesh wireless technology then train neighbors to form their own local network and share an Internet connection. As a result of the inaugural Digital Stewards program, five Detroit neighborhoods are now equipped to build and maintain their own wireless communications infrastructure or mesh networks. The Detroit Digital Stewards program has been initiated in Detroit, District of Colombia, Brooklyn, Sayada (Tunisia), and Dharamshala (India).

According to DCTP, the Digital Stewards are, "technologists, organizers, Detroiters, activists, and elders exploring and learning new technologies with the goal of supporting

[38] See https://www.alliedmedia.org/ddjc/principles. Accessed October 31, 2017

community-owned wireless infrastructure (Wi-Fi networks)." Their meetings include planning, building, and organizing CWNs in Detroit neighborhoods and are open to anyone interested in learning about and participating in community technology projects.

In Detroit, the program has trained over 25 neighborhood leaders to build their own CWNs and have implemented CWNs in the Morningside, Poletown, Field St., the Boggs School, and Ewald Circle areas of Detroit. In Southwest Detroit, it has also helped to construct, and currently maintains, the CassCo mesh network in Detroit's Cass Corridor.

DCTP: CassCo Community Wireless Internet

The CassCo Community Wireless Internet network can both distribute Internet connections as well as act as a local network or "Intranet." On the Intranet, neighbors can communicate and share information without the Internet, using the mesh network to house community radio apps, an offline searchable version of Wikipedia, store music and movies for people to share, have a local chat and phone service.

DCTP has been training community technologists to build and maintain the CassCo CWN, as well as imagine ways in which this network can be used to connect people with each other. The first application to be launched on the CassCo network was the Detroit Music Box. This application is used as a neighborhood radio station to broadcast stories and media from people living in the Cass Corridor. According to DCTP, community members involved in this project ranged in ages from young to old and across demographic ranges. Although no specific demographic statistics were collected. The shows combine music from the neighborhood, audio from the streets, and interviews with neighbors to make a feature track that, "asserts an identity and vision for Detroit." The Cass Corridor is the area bounded by Warren to the north, Woodward to the east, Mack Ave. or Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard to the south, and the Lodge to the west.

DCTP: Narratives and Themes

Methods

Data were gathered for this study in the form of transcribed interviews and organization provided documents. Seven members of DCTP's staff, including leadership team members and technology trainers, were interviewed over the course of 2 days at the Highlander Research and Education Center in Jefferson County, Tennessee, in September 2017. The interviews with these staff members included both unstructured individual interviews as well as group discussions. These interviews and discussions centered around the topics of organization purpose, aims, and impacts. These interviews and discussions were recorded and transcribed for further analysis. Documents provided by DCTP were training and organization documents including Digital Steward and community member testimonies gathered via the organization's Github site. These documents contained data collected by the organization regarding their community members and Digital Stewards thoughts on the organizations purpose, aims, and community impacts. After gathering data from these interviews, as well as the documents provided by DCTP, the analytic process is comprised of three stages. A

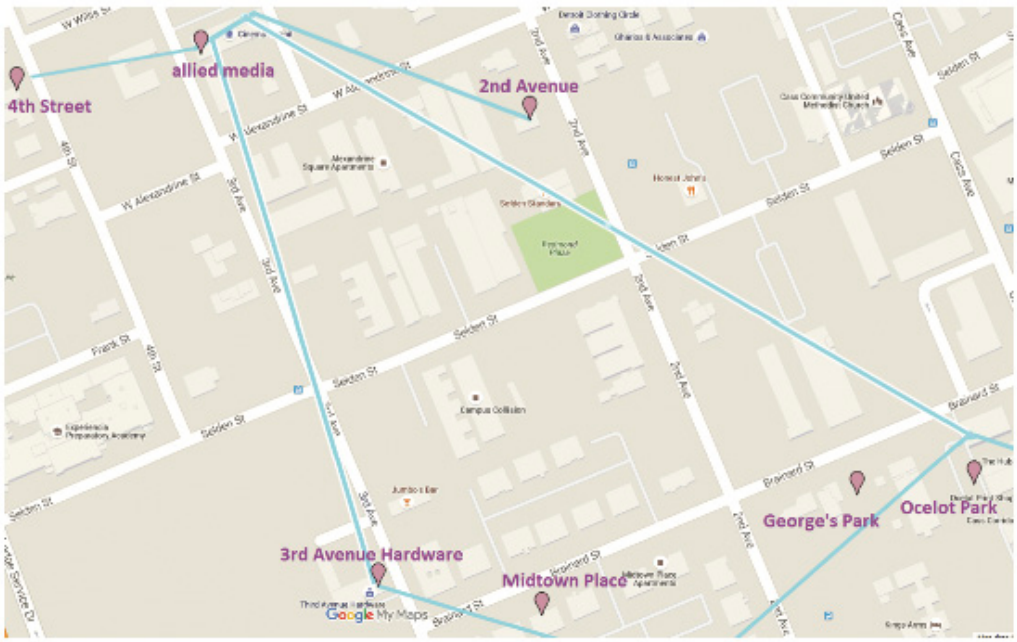


Figure 3: CassCo Community Wireless Internet Service Area.

systematic thematic content analysis was conducted to reveal the structure and main themes. Content analysis, in this form, is helpful as it involves as process of forming and consolidating thematic categories and can be used to analyze large volumes of data.[39] The thematic content analysis was conducted according to the principles of qualitative content analysis laid out by Sharan B. Merriam in 1998.[40] During the first stage, initial reading, data were read through until research personnel were familiar with the general contents of the data. The next stage, first coding round, involved identifying general themes that would be consolidated in the third stage. During this second stage, the general themes of "narrative disruption" and "organization aims/purpose" were identified. "Narrative disruption" was identified as a repeated theme throughout DCTP data. This theme represents the organizations primary philosophy regarding countering commonly held myths regarding certain demographics and technology. The second theme related more generally to the organizations' overall aims and purpose. At this stage, data, reflecting each of these themes, were assigned to either of the categories. During the third coding round, data within each of the themes were consolidated into thematic categories.

"Narrative Disruption" categories

- Economic and social benefits of technology
- Safety and privacy
- Cost and quality
- Technology and age

[39] Phillips and Hardy.

[40] Merriam.

- Technology and gender
- Technology and education

"Aims and Purpose" categories

- "Cultivating a healthy digital ecology" versus "closing the digital divide"
- Design technological solutions for "everyone" not just "anyone"
- Understand communities as "producers of tech" not just "consumers of tech"
- Design Digital Literacy Programs that thrive through/as a result of intergenerational relationships within the classroom
- Understand and utilize the talent and expertise within communities
- Apply the "Concept of the Commons" to tech and communications infrastructure and airwaves
- Understand that lives are at stake when it comes to policies around data communications and plan, accordingly

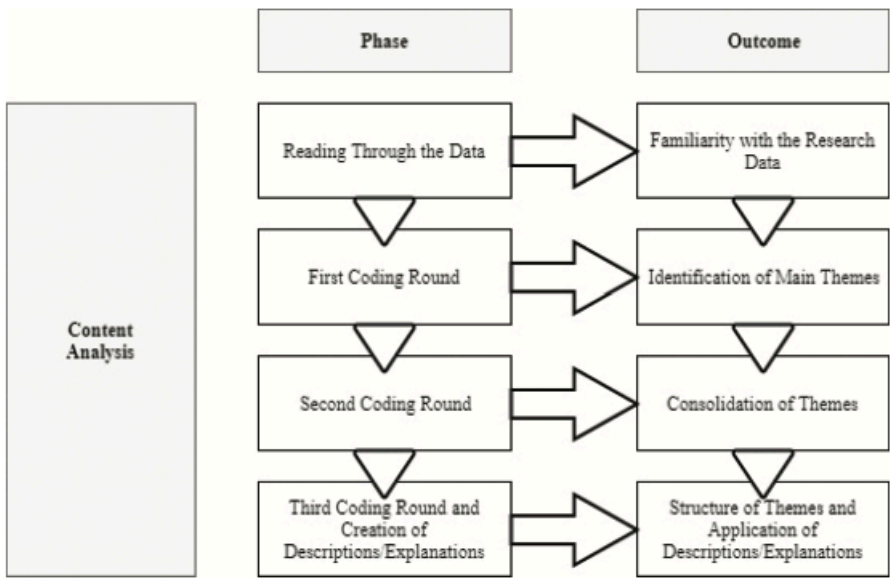


Figure 4: Stages of Thematic Content Analysis.

Results

Disrupting Dominant Narratives

Analysis of data regarding DCTP identified that one of the primary aims of this community training program was to attempt to disrupt or counter commonly held narratives (or "myths") regarding marginalized communities and technology. These narratives are perceived by community members and DCTP staff to be commonly held by policymakers and are incorrect. After identification of these narratives community members and DCTP staff hope to counter them through community outreach/training as well as advocacy campaigns.

Economic and Social Benefits of Technology

A myth encountered by DCTP staff and community members, when addressing the issue of technology as a community benefit, is the narrative that technology, isolated from other forms of social change, will provide an immediate fix for youth in low socioeconomic status (SES) Detroit communities. Community members referred to the idea that, "Technology education will save our youth."[41] This included the belief among policymakers, encountered by staff and community members that teaching coding skills, self-directed learning, and so on, will "automatically solve youth-related issues."[42] DCTP staff stated that the issues encountered by low-SES youth go beyond those that can be fixed "purely by teaching technology-based skills."[43] The issues of "drug addiction, criminal history, and social isolation,"[44] as examples, can all be contributing factors that need to be addressed in addition to providing low-SES youth with practical technological skills.

When discussing the idea of Detroit becoming a hub for technology companies, staff and community members expressed apprehension in terms of the impact this will have on low-SES areas of Detroit. These staff and community members did not believe that the narrative that "the economic and social benefits of the tech industry will trickle down"[45] was something that would occur in Detroit without the involvement and inclusion of disadvantaged community members. Staff members, in particular, stated that economically disadvantaged communities and neighborhoods will benefit from tech sector growth only if these communities and neighborhoods are "integrated into the implementation of tech sector growth."[46] DCTP staff and community members cited the examples of Comcast, Rocket Fiber, and WOW as broadband providers who had specifically targeted high-SES areas of Detroit for fiber broadband expansion, specifically, business districts. Staff and community members stated that this kind of tech sector investment would only lead to "further segregation of low-SES communities."[47]

When discussing tech sector investment another narrative that DCTP staff and community members/stewards stated they felt was incorrect was that "internet access will solve the problems of unemployment and poverty."[48] They stated that there was a belief among policymakers that the economic disadvantages within low-SES communities in Detroit either "exist primarily due to lack of adequate internet service"[49] or "can be fixed by expanding high-speed internet service."[50] DCTP staff and community members stated that while lack of Internet access is a factor affecting disadvantaged communities it exists alongside "multiple other socio-economic factors that also need to be addressed."[51]

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[41] Community member: Document analysis.

[42] DCTP staff member: Study interview.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Community member: Document analysis.

[48] DCTP staff member: Study interview.

[49] Community member: Document analysis.

[50] Ibid.

[51] DCTP staff member: Study interview.

Other topics related to the idea that technology would create social and economic benefits for low-SES Detroit communities were the narratives that "private technology companies can replace public services and people" [52] and "an app will fix it." [53] On the topic of private technology companies and public services/people, DCTP staff and community members stated that the removal of public services, such as public transportation, and their replacement with examples such as Uber or other car-sharing Internet-based services would "negatively affect communities that both rely on these services and cannot financially, or are not prepared socially, to transition to the private alternative." [54] DCTP staff and community members also stated that they do not believe that social problems, such as lack of access to a doctor, can be fixed merely by creating an app. They stated that there will inevitably be demographics of people who "will not be reached by a technology-only centered solution to lack of social services." [55]

Safety and Privacy

DCTP staff and Digital Stewards identified a myth among policymakers that "Surveillance technologies will make us safe." [56] They stated that there appeared to be a belief, particularly among those involved in law- enforcement policy, that "if you are not doing anything wrong you are not being surveilled and you have nothing to fear or worry about." [57] Apprehension toward this narrative by DCTP staff and stewards centered on their worry that immigrant members of their community could be targeted as a result of increased technology use and surveillance. They discussed how this meant they had to alter their plans in terms of mesh-network implementation to ensure that they would not be subject to data-gathering requests that could be used to target these community members. In terms of their recommendations to communities seeking to employ community-based Internet systems, DCTP staff and stewards recommended that community members be aware that, while it is true that "the same standards of privacy established in the real-world cannot be expected in an online environment," [58] they can integrate into their system measures to avoid data capture, such as not hosting files on a community server, in order to secure the privacy of their residents.

Cost and Quality

It is the belief of DCTP staff and community members that residents in their communities should not accept "lower quality communications because of their economic disadvantage" [59] or that they "aren't paying full price." [60] For DCTP staff, one of the founding principles of community-based technology is that "technology should be built and priced for all not just for some." [61] This means creating shared resources and systems that can be utilized by all com-

[52] Community member: Document analysis.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] DCTP staff member: Study interview.

[56] Community member: Document analysis.

[57] Ibid.

[58] DCTP staff member: Study interview.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Community member: Document analysis.

[61] DCTP staff member: Study interview.

munity members regardless of SES. Another narrative that ties into this philosophy, and that they aim to contradict is that "upgrading is necessary and old tech is obsolete."[62] DCTP staff members aim to utilize existing infrastructure and technology where available. This could mean "installing new firmware on old routers instead of buying unnecessary new ones"[63] or "utilizing the infrastructure around us, such as buildings, rather than building towers or other new infrastructure."[64]

Technology and Age

Some of the trainers in the DCTP staff stated that there was a belief among technology educators, in "traditional learning environments," that "if you give the economically disadvantaged youth internet access, time, and resources—they will just waste time and take advantage of the opportunities."[65] When discussing traditional classroom environments, DCTP staff believed that a lack of classroom interaction meant that technology can be "situated but not integrated effectively."[66] In their learning environments, such as the Data Discos, DCTP trainers aim to set up the learning environment to be interactive and allow users to identify which technology suits their need. This "exploratory learning" they stated initiates "dynamic learning" instead of "passive use."[67]

In terms of other age-related technology myths, some community members felt that they had been stigmatized by the narrative that "the Internet is too complicated for older people."[68] For older community members, this had included being "spoken down to"[69] while trying to gain technology knowledge as well as "sensing quickly that technology learning environments were designed to cater to younger learners."[70] The DCTP technology trainers mentioned that they specifically "flip" their classroom so that demographics "traditionally left behind, such as older learners or those who require longer learning processes, are the ones that lead the pace of the learning environment."[71]

DCTP staff and community members also stated that gender stereotypes, such as "women are not as good with Tech"[72] or "because the tech sector is dominated by men this means that women either do not understand tech as well or do not have the desire to work in the field,"[73] were something they looked to overcome. For DCTP staff, this meant a commitment to promoting female technologists into leadership roles and "focusing on developing female

[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Community member: Document analysis.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] DCTP staff member: Study interview.
[72] Community member: Document analysis.
[73] DCTP staff member: Study interview.

technology creators and leaders within our communities in order to promote and empower women and nongender-binary folk as technologists."[74]

Technology and Education

Many of the Digital Stewards and DCTP trainers who had come from a background in technology education, such as higher education degrees in fields like IT and Computer Science, had experienced a belief that "it takes certain education levels to understand or fix technology."[75] They stated that one of their primary aims, in dispelling this myth, was to show that "many technology related subjects can be taught in a way that the ordinary community member can understand."[76] They felt that often people in the technology sector state that "technology is fragile and not serviceable by the general public."[77] DCTP staff and Digital Stewards stated that this was a narrative used mainly to sell new products or to convince people that in order to fix technology you have to "pay a specialist to do it."[78] Through their training materials, DCTP aim to show that community technology can be understood and learned by community members rather than specially trained external individuals and that "the general public can understand as well as control the production of technology."[79]

Organization/Community Aims

In addition to attempting to disrupt or counter the earlier narratives, DCTP staff, Digital Stewards, and community members also expressed the following specific aims:

"Cultivating a healthy digital ecology" versus "closing the digital divide"

For many of the DCTP staff and community members, the "issues of connectivity in Detroit" are "not just connected to one type of inequality."[80] Therefore, they stated that the "inequalities of digital access and digital literacy" can't be addressed "in isolation from other types of inequality," such as "the education system, local and global economies, governance and other infrastructure systems."[81]

DCTP staff expressed their belief that "broadband should be looked at in all the ways it is connected to community members lives."[82] Staff members and Digital Stewards used the metaphor of "the ecosystem" because they stated it, "captures the resilience and interconnectedness of parts that make a healthy and living whole."[83]

In describing how DCTP aimed to implement this strategy, a member of DCTP's leadership team stated that, "to scale this work, it requires the efforts of all those involved in the

[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Community member: Document analysis.
[81] Ibid.
[82] DCTP staff member: Study interview.
[83] Ibid.

Digital Ecosystem, which includes government, business and emerging entrepreneurs, the education system and community organizations doing community organizing."[84]

Design technological solutions for "Everyone" not just "Anyone"

DCTP staff members referred to the concept that "technology designed for 'anyone' without consideration of the barriers and experiences of marginalized peoples' will be primarily used by the technologically privileged."[85] They expressed the concept of "technological privilege" as being technology designed without consideration of the "resources, both financial and social, required to adopt and use that technology."[86] In their design and testing phases, DCTP integrates "participatory design throughout the process, not just the user testing phase."[87] This means including community members in every stage of technology "integration, implementation, adoption, and continued use."[88] Community members stated that they "often felt abandoned by technology companies"[89] who "sell products to the community but then offer little in terms of continued support."[90] The Digital Stewards program was designed specifically to "integrate technologists into communities and of communities so that there would be a constant support mechanism when required."[91]

Understand communities as "producers of tech" not just "consumers of tech"

DCTP staff and Digital Stewards stated that they had witnessed community technology production as having both "self-transformative" and "community transformative" effects. Specifically, they referred to this occurring during the "process of making media & tech."[92] DCTP staff and community members expressed their belief that "communities are more than capable of ownership and governance of technology"[93] given their experience with neighborhoods in Detroit. This was based on their experience with "talent residing in each and every neighborhood"[94] and their belief that "neighborhoods have the expertise of what solutions are needed for the problems they face."[95]

Design Digital Literacy Programs that thrive through/as a result of intergenerational relationships within the classroom.

Through DCTP's educational experience, they have learned that there are "discrepancies based on age, and sometimes learning levels."[96] This may lead to "segregated classrooms and, create

[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Community member: Document analysis.
[90] Ibid.
[91] DCTP staff member: Study interview.
[92] DCTP staff member: Study interview.
[93] Community member: Document analysis.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] DCTP staff member: Study interview.

hierarchies" of "those that are 'smart' and those that are 'slow'." [97] DCTP staff members support "intergenerational and multi learning level classrooms that reflect the 'real world'." [98] DCTP Digital Stewards believe that "teaching and learning as a diverse community" prepares communities to thrive in a world that does not function as a "school of fish." [99] A DCTP technology trainer expressed this approach as, "Understanding the different ways people perceive and process information and taking into account the different physical and emotional needs of learners are key to setting up a positive and fruitful relationships." [100] DCTP works to "solve problems, with community member involvement, collectively using media and technology." [101] In this process, "community members are producing new knowledge and resources, restoring relationships across generations, and healing neighborhoods." [102]

Understand and utilize the talent and expertise within communities

A DCTP staff member stated that, "We are the leaders we've been waiting for." [103] This was reflected through community groups like the Digital Stewards and the Detroit Digital Justice Coalition. Through these initiatives, DCTP has "utilized expertise that comes directly from the community." [104] According to DCTP technology trainers and Digital Stewards, "neighborhood technologists bring their skills to the table in various ways" such as "open sourcing their curricula" as well as "application building skills and digital and tech knowledge through intergenerational learning opportunities." [105] They cited the example of "Data DiscoTechs" as a "prime example of how these community lessons are organized." [106] These events "through a community tech science fair atmosphere" gather stewards and community members together with other members of the community to "share their know-how on everything from wireless mesh set-up to how to build a mobile app." [107] These free and accessible "neighborhood specific" fairs bring "technology to the community, by the community members who will benefit the most from them." [108] By the end of 2018, DCTP hopes that "every neighborhood district in Detroit will have organized at least one Data DiscoTech." One DCTP leadership team member described this as a "significant grassroots, ground up display of the talent that resides in the heart of Detroit neighborhoods." [109]

[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.

Apply the "Concept of the Commons" to tech and communications infrastructure and airwaves.

DCTP staff members as well as those in the community noted that "digital environments support life as crucially as food and water do."[110] DCTP want policymaker's to "expand thinking about environmental awareness from solely about clean air, clean water, and land use and into, and including, airwaves and an open internet" which "directly affects health and environments."[111] Staff members stated that "the digital age has shown us the flexibility of the 'commons'."[112] They explained that the concept of "the commons" is the "cultural and natural resources accessible to all members of a society, including natural materials such as air, water, and a habitable earth."[113] These resources are "held in common, not owned privately."[114] DCTP wants the concept of the commons to "include the infrastructure that contains the immense collective pool of information the internet holds" because "the ways in which we communicate to each other directly affect our environment."[115]

Understand that lives are at stake when it comes to policies around data and communications and plan accordingly.

A DCTP leadership team member stated that, "In a city that is over 80 percent black, with high concentrations of poverty, including more than 39 percent of the black population living below the poverty line as well as the largest population of foreign-born residents in the country, our staff members and Digital Stewards have come to believe that surveillance and profiling is a very real threat."[116] They elaborated that, "Considering that 40% of households in Detroit lack a persistent connection to the Internet" this has left many community members "without the ability to interface with essential government services."[117] In "marginalized and vulnerable communities," DCTP staff members and Digital Stewards have "witnessed an increase in lighting and cameras around businesses within those communities while street lights have been extinguished in many underserved neighborhoods."[118] They stated that impact of this "coupled with water shutoffs" and "school closings on those who are already disenfranchised" may lead to "communities finding themselves in dire situations, leading to crime, violence, and ultimately the destruction of their own neighborhoods."[119] Community members noted that these conditions "much like those in many urban areas" may lead to "profiling, surveillance and precrime." DCTP staff members cited examples in Chicago where data "has been used to profile and target marginalized and immigrant communities"[120] and were "aware of the need to create community based infrastructure that protects privacy."[121]

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[110] Community member: Document analysis.

[111] DCTP staff member: Study interview.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid.

Further aims of DCTP staff members, Digital Stewards, and community members

- "Tech must be considered in urban planning." [122]
- "Tech isn't always the solution." [123]
- "Communities are capable of ownership and governance of tech." [124]
- "Communities still need public infrastructure and human involvement." [125]
- "Algorithms/data sets aren't enough to solve the complex problems faced by marginalized or underserved communities." [126]
- "Tech language needs to be de-mystified." [127]
- "Create stories that offer humanizing, relatable scenarios so that people can understand these narratives." [128]

Discussion and Analysis of Research Questions

RQ1: Looking to the future, how might other evolving technologies or interfaces or platforms associated with broadband networks enhance or hinder certain population groups' effective use and access to information resources?

From analysis of the interviews with DCTP staff members as well as documents including Digital Steward and community member testimonies, it became apparent that a consistent belief among those involved with DCTP's projects is that the integration of wireless mesh technology as a community-based infrastructure solution can create and foster community engagement through infrastructure deployment, maintenance, and use.

Susan Morse Moomaw argued in 2016 that community member involvement, specifically promoting public involvement in local decision-making, not only improves the results of community development but also lets community members know that their knowledge and experience is valued and will be listened to. [129] Moomaw cites Clay Spinuzzi's methodology of participatory design [130] as an example of the positive results of integrating community member knowledge into the community design process. She also refers to Randolf T. Hester's study on a neighborhood playground where he noted that community design often fails when the product is given more emphasis than the process of fostering community development. [131]

In terms of broadband's specific role in community engagement and development, Dorothy Kidd's analysis of grassroots organization's campaign for digital access in the San Francisco Bay area concludes that digital democratization, or the move away from a corporately controlled digital infrastructure and toward community participation, requires community members

[122] DCTP staff: Document Analysis.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Moomaw.

[130] Spinuzzi.

[131] Hester.

to take ownership over infrastructure deployment and use.[132] Hintz and Milan argue, when analyzing community-based technology organizations, that community member engagement and involvement is an important factor in democratizing broadband policy development and increases community member participation in technology implementation and expansion.[133]

Through their interaction with people that have been "marginalized" in Detroit through poverty, age, social status, or gender, DCTP staff members have witnessed community member's willingness to not only access but also have some form of control over information resources in the form of wireless mesh networks.

For this organization, mesh technology, in this capacity, serves both a functional and an organic purpose. It is both a tool and a service. In terms of its use as a tool, it can provide small-scale networked communication to those cutoff from larger networks through lack of access as a result of financial resources. Thus impoverished communities are given the ability to have some form of digital networking capability. In terms of an "organic service," we see from analysis of DCTP that they aim to use it as a method of community engagement. A theme emerged that depicted marginalized populations, who may feel disenfranchised from day-to-day community governance and infrastructure decision-making, as being engaged through DCTP's initiatives in the creation and maintenance of mesh networks thus bypassing the regular power gap and placing decision-making in the hands of the community members themselves. For DCTP engaging with community members in this way also fosters community interaction on technology-based issues. For DCTP's technology trainers and Digital Stewards, their educational methods introduce technology at a community-centered level, taking into account distinctions in age-based and other demographically focused learning needs, thus transforming it from an expert topic to one that is understandable and usable for those at whom the technology is aimed.

> *RQ2: How can we foster public hybrid broadband, focusing not only on the technological infrastructure of the network but also situating broadband networks within existing communities as a means to promote digital self-determination for indigenous and other disadvantaged groups?*

Wireless mesh networks, while functioning independently, are ultimately integrated into the wider digital ecosystem. These wireless networks have arisen in response to specific needs and operate as highly specialized solutions to localized issues. They are also, according to DCTP, a means of community ownership that promotes digital self-determination. The themes identified by this study show that a primary focus of both DCTP staff and community members is that of taking ownership not only of technology but of the narratives surrounding that technology and marginalized populations. DCTP hopes that a system of community owned and operated systems existing within the larger public and private Internet eco-system can not only drive community ownership of technology but also will act as a means to create new narratives regarding these communities and technology. Indeed, a large part of the work of DCTP staff, Digital Stewards, and community members involves dispelling myths they believe describe underserved or marginalized communities as lacking the capacity to take on the challenge of technological adoption. One of the challenges of "digital self-determination," from

[132] Kidd.

[133] Milan, "At the Margins of Internet Governance."

a policy perspective, is allowing communities to determine for themselves the best practices for technological deployment and adoption. An overarching theme associated with the work of DCTP is the view that it should be the community members who are not only listened to but also involved in the implementation process instead of being dictated to in terms of "what is best for them." DCTP has developed a model that combines community engagement, training, as well as access to funding mechanisms that they believe can effectively inspire community members to adopt ownership of community-based communication technology solutions. This method places emphasis on community-based digital self-determination and moves decision-making from an external source and into the community itself.

Conclusion, Limitations of Study, and Recommendations

First, it must be stated that this study focused on one organization operating in one location in the United States. As such, even though the organization's practices and principles have been deployed in multiple locations throughout the world, this study is limited in terms of generalizability. Where it may be possible to infer results of this study onto similar organizations, or to propose public policy, in response to these findings, further research in this area, focusing on other organizations working in similar areas, is necessary to further expand this area of research. Second, given the nature of qualitative research and analysis, it is accepted that the results of this study are affected by research subjectivity. The choices made during research construction and analysis will have affected the outcomes of this study. Other researchers with differing philosophical reasoning or operating under different research criteria may have discovered alternative outcomes. Despite these limitations, however, the findings of this study do have implications for organizations working in this sector, policymakers, as well as future research.

Implications for Organizations

One of the primary findings from this study was DCTP's understanding and use of community members' skills and knowledge. DCTP's aim, through its Digital Stewards program, is to train community members to be the point-of-contact for technology education. In this way, the organization at some point will no longer be needed by a community technology project as they will have their own community members trained and ready to provide support and further training. DCTP leadership emphasized that it is important to identify within communities those members who are willing to serve as Stewards and to utilize existing knowledge within a community to build projects around.

When referring to the Digital Ecosystem, DCTP staff emphasized the need to work with all institutions of a community when developing technology projects. This involves taking a holistic approach to community technology research prior to project design. DCTP staff and community members aim to understand how multiple areas of a community may be both impacted by a technology project but also may be utilized to improve implementation. For example, DCTP has worked with schools and community anchor institutions to host events and with local businesses and residencies to construct or host infrastructure. In this way, it is necessary for organizations to have "project buy-in" from multiple community partners in order to effectively implement a community technology project.

For organizations planning tech education, this study identified several techniques, or philosophies, that they believe are necessary when interacting with marginalized groups. First, DCTP technology trainers emphasized that exploratory learning had been useful in not only engaging community members with unfamiliar technology but also allowing community members to self-identify their strengths and unique interests. DCTP's "Data Discos" and other workshops utilize an open-space interactive environment. In this environment, multiple stations are set up where community members can interact and learn about different technologies at their own pace and making their own choices regarding which stations to visit. DCTP trainers believe that this open and exploratory learning environment gives community members "agency" over their learning choices as well as allowing trainers to identify which skills community members are naturally drawn to. Second, in terms of more structured workshops, DCTP highlighted their attempts to create "intergenerational" and "disadvantaged demographic focused" classrooms. DCTP and their Digital Stewards have committed to having their learning environments be led by demographics that are traditionally not dominant in the tech sector, such as older individuals or female and nongender binary community members. This structure, they believe, will promote disadvantaged or marginalized groups as both leaders and educators in community wireless technology projects.

Implications for Policymakers

The very existence of community-based wireless networks can be viewed as a symptom of lack of adequate access to affordable, reliable high-speed Internet, specifically for individuals marginalized by poverty or other disadvantaged demographics. Even in urban areas, such as Detroit, there appears to be a need, based on the existence of five wireless networks established by DCTP, for community members to deploy their own networking solutions. A study of FCC form 477 data in 2017 by the Institute of Local Self-Reliance showed that even in areas covered by high-speed Internet more than 129 million US households are limited to only a single provider (based on the FCC's current benchmarks of 25 Mbps download and 2 Mbps upload).[134] This lack of options has inevitably led to some communities turning to community created and owned solutions.

As well as being a symptom of lack of access CWN's also act as a challenge to incumbent private providers. Sofia Milan[135] describes CWN's, and their associated activist organizations, as acting as social movement "beyonders." According to Milan, these organizations, instead of focusing on pressuring policymakers to implement change, build self-organized, decentralized, and citizen-owned networks as a means of displaying an alternative to the status quo. In this way, organizations such as DCTP hope to show, by example, new methods of infrastructure deployment in order to present an alternative to traditional institutions and methods.

Much can be taken by policymakers from this study's analysis of DCTP's mesh-network projects and community training initiatives; promoting underrepresented demographics in the tech sector, planning technology policy with a consideration for interconnected policy areas, utilizing community members in policy planning and implementation, considering

[134] See https://ilsr.org/repealing-net-neutrality-puts-177-million-americans-at-risk/.

[135] Milan, *Social Movements and Their Technologies*.

digital technology as a part of environmental policy, and considering the effects of digital privacy policy on marginalized communities.

When considering diversity in the tech sector, demographic intersectionality is an important element to consider. While the tech sector has attempted to diversify, its workforce results have shown that tech companies when focusing on recruiting women, for example, has resulted in increased numbers of predominantly white women. [136] Research on tech sector recruitment shows that women of color, for example, usually only make up around 3 percent of the average workforce in Silicon Valley. In order to combat this, policymakers can use the example set by DCTP of providing avenues for underrepresented, particularly ethnic minority or older aged individuals, to not only have access to technology training initiatives but to be given leadership roles within these initiatives. This could come in the form of technology leadership programs specifically funded to identify underrepresented tech sector demographics.

DCTP staff member's spoke of the need to view all the policy areas in a community as an interconnected ecosystem. For DCTP staff members, this meant considering how education, health, social services, and other areas of policy, are not only affected by technology but could have an effect on technology. In the United States, communications infrastructure deployment and adoption have mostly been left to private incumbent providers. A policy model that isolates one area of infrastructure in this way leaves little room for policymakers to connect telecommunications policy to other areas. DCTP staff and leadership emphasized the need to policymakers to view telecommunications policy as interconnected to other areas of public policy. When considering telecommunications, infrastructure deployment policymakers should build into their models multiple policy areas and identify where areas overlap and are interconnected. For example, health and education policy are affected by digital access, especially in remote areas, therefore, digital telecommunications policy needs to be guided not only by telecommunications decision-makers but through input and collaboration with these other policy institutions. In terms of environmental policy, DCTP staff and community members expressed their desire for policy-makers to view digital infrastructure as part of a community's environment and thus take into account the environmental impact of digital infrastructure and also how that infrastructure could be used to improve environmental policy.

As previous studies have shown community design and the policy process can be improved by the integration and utilization of local knowledge and community members. All of DCTP's projects are founded on the basis that successful project completion will see community members adopt and take ownership of the final project. For policymakers, identifying and integrating community members into technology policy implementation would not only make use of local knowledge, thus saving time on external research, but also will provide communities with opportunities to interact with local policy in a positive way.

Privacy policy and the Internet will become ever more important as the Internet continues to be a vital part of our everyday lives. Research into Internet privacy and marginalized communities requires its own area of study and will not be advanced to any significant degree by this study. Through their interaction with marginalized, specifically immigrant, communities in Detroit DCTP staff expressed their desire that digital privacy policy be considered in

[136] See https://gizmodo.com/the-alarming-downsides-to-tech-industry-diversity-repor-1789797486. Accessed February 9, 2018.

light of these populations. This has led DCTP to adopt in their digital infrastructure projects processes that protect data for marginalized populations. DCTP hopes that in future any consideration of data gathering and storage policy will take into account the safety and privacy of groups, such as immigrant communities or other targeted groups, who may be put in danger by abuse of data privacy.

Future Research

As stated earlier, an area of future research that requires further exploration is that of data privacy and marginalized communities. Specifically, how can data privacy policy be improved in order to protect marginalized populations from data intrusion? In terms of CWNs and organizations such as DCTP, there are further research questions that need to be explored in the light of these findings:

- Are the Detroit Digital Justice Principles unique to Detroit and does US digital policy address the access needs of communities?
- What effect do CWN's have on promoting underrepresented demographics in the tech sector?
- How effectively do communities maintain CWN's once organizations, such as DCTP, have finalized passing project ownership over to communities?
- How sustainable are CWN's when faced with increased provider competition?
- What cost models do CWN's adopt?
- How have resilient networks been deployed in the wake of natural disasters and loss of communications through war or government intervention
- What funding mechanisms are available to organizations such as DCTP and how can similar organizations access these funds?
- How can technology training initiatives, such as the Digital Stewards program, be implemented on a larger scale?

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CHAPTER 58

‘Neither Silent Nor Invisible’: Anti-poverty Communication in the San Francisco Bay Area

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Abstract

The communication practices of three US anti-poverty groups in the San Francisco Bay Area—Coalition on Homelessness, Poor News Network, and Media Alliance—are discussed whose communication strategies work for the recognition and rights of low-income and homeless people, and for policies to better redistribute economic and communications resources. In the wake of media closures in the local public sphere, and major restructuring of social welfare programmes, these groups’ creative and engaged communication strategies empower poor people and support the building of counter-public spheres working in interaction with, and as alternatives to, dominant media spheres.

Keywords

Civil society, Governance and public policy, Social sector, Rights, North America

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> *I just want to say that although we are at the lowest link of our economy and our society, we still have the right to be informed. Even though we don't make enough money with our meager jobs to pay the Internet fees and the costs of computers, our truth should still be heard; and our truth is asking the scientists and all the righteous people of this world, why it is that poor people exist? Our answers are not what the books tell us, but the truth that we publish at POOR Magazine. We are working people who are contributing to the economic prosperity of this country and we have a right to be heard!* (Gloria Esteva 2008)

In 2003, the Bellagio Symposium on Media, Freedom, and Poverty in Developing Countries highlighted the link between media and poverty reduction (Deane 2005: 190–192). The final declaration stated, in part, that people living in poverty face numerous 'obstacles to achieving freedom of expression and access to the media', which if not remedied can 'undermine the capacity of the poor to participate in democratic processes ... and lead to disaffection with the political process resulting in apathy or violence'. The participating social advocates reached consensus on 15 action points, among which were the support for more participatory media access for the 'disadvantaged', training of journalists in poverty-related issues, encouragement of community media and public-service broadcasting mandates addressing poverty, and more research on the implications of current media trends for poverty reduction. The Bellagio Declaration, according to James Deane, one of the conference conveners, was part of a much-needed process to 'reverse the remorseless erosion of the public sphere caused by the growing disinterest of the media in public interest issues' .[1]

The Bellagio conference's focus on the importance of media and communications in eradicating poverty, and its goal of developing strategies to encourage better public communication by and about poor people, are the topics of this paper. In particular, we discuss how anti-poverty advocates in the San Francisco Bay Area are developing communication and media practices that advocate for the recognition and rights of low-income and homeless people. We describe and analyse the communication practices of a small network of grassroots groups—the Coalition on Homelessness, The Poor News Network, and Media Alliance[2] —that have been involved in anti-poverty communication and media work for several years, asking whether and how their autonomous communication practices have improved poor peoples' public voice (the politics of recognition) or impacted urban poverty policies (the politics of redistribution).[3]

The erosion of the public sphere, noted by Deane (2005), is very evident in the USA, and in the San Francisco Bay Area where we live and work. An increasingly conglomerated and profit driven news industry has reduced coverage of social issues, decreased the diversity of view points in the news, and cut local news staff, replacing community news with syndicated national content (Bagdikian 2004; Kidd 2005; McChesney 2004). However, it is critical to note

[1] According to Deane (2005: 182-185), the decline in the media's facilitation of the public debate necessary for democratic decision making and poverty reduction is due to a number of global factors, such as the increase in corporate media concentration and advertising-driven media, the continuing dominance of 'Northern-based' news providers, and media censorship in the wake of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on 9 September 2001.

[2] Dorothy Kidd has participated as a member of Media Alliance since 1999, and currently serves on the Board of Directors.

[3] This paper is part of a larger research project investigating the communication strategies of social justice groups that intervene in the public sphere, tracking the outcome of their communications in media representation and policy (see Barker-Plummer and Kidd 2009, forthcoming).

that this erosion of the commercial public sphere exists alongside, and is being countered by, the strategic communication and media practices of social-change groups. Indeed, some of the solutions proposed by the Bellagio conference—such as training poverty journalists and increasing autonomous communication—are already emergent in the anti-poverty groups that we have studied. These few groups cannot fully represent all others, of course, and the San Francisco Bay Area has its own unique political culture, but by analysing the experiences of these groups, we hope to illuminate some important issues in anti-poverty communication more generally.

Communication, public sphere(s), and social change

The importance of communication practices to social-change movements is both obvious and complex. From the collective articulation of new identities by emergent social groups, to the publicising of political interests and claims through commercial and alternative media, to the creation of shared 'public' issues and agendas, interpersonal, group, and mass communication processes intersect with and sustain (or undermine) social change (Barker-Plummer 1995). But how do specific communication practices play out in any particular social mobilisation? And which kinds of communication practices are most associated with particular goals or outcomes? For example, what kinds of communication strategies are most likely to succeed in producing recognition for poor peoples' perspectives and rights? What kinds of strategies are effective in impacting poverty policies and the treatment of poor people?

Habermas (1989) has provided the concept of the public sphere to conceptualise the 'civic' space in democratic societies in which people come together to discuss public issues, ideally in a context free from market or state pressures. Though Habermas's conception of the 'ideal' public sphere has been roundly criticised, and his ideal sphere does not exist anywhere, the utility of the concept remains in its tying together of *citizen* communicative practices with healthy democratic life. Unless there is wide access to public debate, notes Habermas, in which all kinds of groups are able to articulate and make claims on behalf of their interests, then democracy will fail.

Fraser (1993) has offered an especially useful intervention in public-sphere debates by insisting that the Habermasian concept of 'the' public sphere must give way to a more multiple perspective of overlapping and contentious spheres, some of which are associated with dominant representative power (policy making and resource distribution) and others which play a different, alternative democratic role. In this project, we particularly draw on Fraser's conceptualisation of *subaltern counter-public spheres* in which 'members of subordinated groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs' (Fraser 1993: 14). Fraser's model of multiple spheres not only usefully complicates the idea of a single public sphere, but it also allows for (and ties together) two sometimes opposing concepts of justice—the 'politics of recognition' (or identity politics), in which groups come together to create shared identity, articulate group interests, and demand recognition, and the 'politics of redistribution', in which claims to resources are made (Fraser and Honneth 2003: 1–5). These two political frameworks, one of which centres on identity factors and the other on resources, have often been separated in political analysis. In Fraser's conceptualisation of public spheres (also elaborated

by others, such as Williams 2000 and Sreberny 2005), the politics of recognition and voice are inseparable from, and a step towards, resource claims. Annabelle Sreberny (2005: 246–247) has added the 'politics of rights' to the repertoire of alternative communication practices.

The concept of counter-public spheres is an especially useful one when engaging with the political activities of marginalised or under-represented groups. For these groups, such as poor, homeless people, or immigrants, for whom easy access to the dominant public spheres (commercial media, local government meetings, academia, and so on) is difficult, the ability to come together and create alternative spaces is extremely important. Whether these alternative (counter-public) spheres exist as a precursor to engagement with dominant spheres (as Fraser suggests) or they have meaning and value in and of themselves (Sreberny 2005), the communicative practices that create and sustain these alternative spheres—for example, non-formal education, autonomous newspapers and websites, networks, media strategies—are critical components in understanding social change processes. As our case studies demonstrate, for anti-poverty groups, and especially for homeless people, who have been marginalised and labelled as deviant, the ability to come together and create a shared (and humane) identity and to articulate group interests and rights is a critical step in making redistributive claims in the dominant public spheres.

The Bay Area media context: commercial and community media

The commercial media sphere, in which these anti-poverty groups are working, has noticeably contracted in recent years. The majority of 'local' newspapers, broadcast radio, television, cable, and web services are now owned by national chains, or by transnational conglomerates. This has profoundly affected local programming, cutting off local news media's historical connection to local communities. Most content is now much more market driven, with an increase in entertainment, sports, and lifestyle news, packaged for evermore specific niches of consumers. This closure of space for community politics has affected the ability of many local groups to be heard at all, and for others it has increased the cost and time to produce news access (Barker-Plummer and Kidd 2009, forthcoming). In particular, groups working to reduce poverty, or groups representing 'people of colour'[4] or non-English speakers have found their (always limited) access to commercial media even more restricted as stations serving these communities have been bought out and reformatted as part of the drive to increase profit. For example, Clear Channel Radio's purchase of African-American and Spanish language owned and operated radio stations eliminated much of the local news, public affairs, and music designed and produced by and for these communities. When NBC-TV purchased Telemundo, the second-largest Spanish language television service, they cut news production entirely at KSTS-TV in San Jose, replacing it with a newscast from Fort Worth, Texas.

Cuts in local news staffing have limited news coverage of these communities even more. Mujeres Unidas, for example, a grassroots organisation of Latina immigrant women, reports that the situation is worse than ever, that reporters 'never come around' any more. Instead, reports about marginalised groups consistently misrepresent them. The Youth Media Council, for example, found an over-reportage of stories linking 'youth of colour'[4] to crime, and an absence of any attention to social issues defined by the youth themselves or responsive to

[4] 'People of colour' is a term used in California, where there is no longer any one group in the majority.

their perspectives (Youth Media Council 2002). Anti-poverty groups, which directly challenge commercial media logic, encounter additional constraints. By advocating for affordable housing, for example, the Coalition on Homelessness and the San Francisco Tenants Union face the additional, political hurdle of engaging with media whose advertising revenues are under written each week by the real-estate industry, which has very different interests in Bay Area housing policies.

Besides commercial media, the San Francisco Bay Area has a rich mix of alternative community-based media, which have often served as a resource for community politics. The Pacifica Radio flagship, KPFA-FM (begun in Berkeley in the late 1940s), several other community radio stations, and four Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) television stations serve the region, as does the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, one of the oldest independent weekly newspapers in the USA. Since 2001, the Indy Media Center (IMC) has operated two open-publishing news sites, and a small but significant set of locally-oriented 'zines' and blogs has emerged more recently. Despite cuts to Latino- and African-American-owned commercial media, there are still a handful of 'locally-oriented' media outlets serving these sizable communities, as well as the Asian-American and lesbian, gay, and transgender communities. As access to commercial outlets shrinks, social-change groups tum more to these independent media sources.

The policy context: housing and anti-poverty policy

Although San Francisco is one of the wealthiest cities in the USA, when living costs are factored in, only New York City and Washington, DC have a higher percentage of people living in poverty. An estimated 8,000–15,000 people are living without permanent homes; rental housing is costly, and home ownership is outside the reach of all but the wealthiest. Much of the problem is embedded in recent history. As part of the neo-liberal turn of the 1980s, the Reagan Administration radically restructured the national government, making major cuts to national social programmes, including affordable housing, healthcare, and education; and simultaneously introduced an ideological paradigm that shifted the responsibility for poverty reduction away from the national government towards state and municipal governments, private providers, and individual families. The Clinton Administration continued this policy, ending a decades-long policy of national entitlement to welfare (Schram 2005: 5).

Although the City of San Francisco has often bucked the national trend by supporting more liberal social policies in principle, most mayors have encouraged gentrification. The rapid increase in upscale commercial, residential, and recreational developments, with corresponding decreases in affordable housing, reached its zenith in the late 1990s, when the influx of wealthy professionals from nearby Silicon Valley helped inflate rent and property prices. Thousands of working- and middle-class people, and dozens of social and cultural organisations, and NGOs, including Media Alliance, were forced to leave the city to find cheaper accommodation. Latino and African-American communities were affected the most; for example, between 1995 and 2000, San Francisco lost more of its black population than 18 other major US cities (Schulz 2008: 15). The latest financial crisis in the global housing market has only exacerbated the housing affordability crisis.

Over time, the city's social-welfare policies have also begun to reflect the national neo-liberal discourse. Defined in the 1960s and 1970s as conditions that could and should be eradicated through national intervention, poverty and homelessness are now more often described as the consequences of bad individual choices. The changing meaning given to 'quality oflife' reflects this paradigm shift. Initially identified with the national programme of civic renewal established after the urban riots of the late 1960s, Mayor Giuliani of New York reframed the concept in the 1980s in the interests of business- and professional-class people, and the New York City Police stepped up prosecution of low-level crimes, such as camping in public parks, public intoxication, graffiti, and panhandling ('aggressive' begging). Justified by the 'broken windows' theory, which argued that minor signs of urban decay would lead to bigger crimes, San Francisco Police adopted this same approach soon after. During the 1990s, as affordable housing stocks were reduced, successive civic administrations twinned the development of permanent 'shelters' or 'homeless services' with the criminalisation of homeless people through the prosecution of so-called 'quality of life' crimes, small misdemeanours such as panhandling, public urination, and graffiti. By 2006, for example, 31,230 'quality of life' citations had been issued in a two-and-a-half-year period. Although 80 per cent of the citations were dismissed, the effect was to further marginalise very poor people, and make it difficult for anyone convicted to ever find permanent housing (Shaw 2008).

Coalition on Homelessness

A group of homeless people and social-service workers formed the Coalition on Homelessness (CoH) in 1987, in response to the Reagan Government's first round of social service cuts and criminalisation of homeless people. The Coalition's website outlines the complexity of their mission: to 'foster the active participation of homeless and low-income San Francisco residents and front-line staff in the struggle for economic and social justice; ... to defend homeless and low-income people from attacks on their rights and their persons, while advocating for permanent solutions to homelessness that take into account not only poverty's devastating effects, but also its root causes' (Coalition on Homelessness 2008). CoH combines what Fraser and other theorists call the *politics of recognition* and of *redistribution*, common to counter-public spheres: needing to defend their interests and identities from attack by the dominant media, and governmental institutions, the Coalition created social spaces to regroup, share common experiences, formulate analyses of the problems confronting them, and strategise about ways to mobilise. The Coalition also utilises the discourse of human *rights* to protect homeless people against police harassment, against hate crimes committed against them, and more recently, for greater services for undocumented immigrants.

Communications are key to CoH's politics, and the Coalition combines horizontal communication among homeless and low-income people, social-service workers, and other allies, with vertical communication with City Hall administrators and politicians, and the media. They constantly provide homeless people and allies with updated information about housing, welfare, and policing services. Coalition staff also devote significant amounts of staff time and resources to strategic communications with the mainstream media. According to Chance Martin, once homeless himself, and a long-time editor of the CoH newspaper, the *Streetsheet*, the Coalition's objective is to establish itself as the 'authority on homelessness' (Martin 2004).

They train poor people to act as media spokespersons, including how to pitch and frame stories for the mainstream media; and have forged some good relationships with individual media workers in one or two commercial radio and TV outlets, the Spanish language news media, and the alternative and independent media.

However, the Coalition has had a particularly difficult time getting positive coverage in the last surviving major daily newspaper, the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Martin suggests that the *Chronicle* uses a formulaic frame, in which homeless people are discounted, either as migrants taking advantage of San Francisco's largesse, or as criminals. When the homeless are inter viewed, they are usually presented in such a way that they confirm the frame, and are seldom consulted for their insights. The Coalition is often quoted, but usually featured as the 'dissident voice'. A national study by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) confirms Martin's observations (deMause and Rendall 2007). FAIR found that poor people are seldom consulted for their expertise on the causes of or solutions to poverty in national network news; instead, those who are represented tend to reinforce a frame that clearly separates those who are 'deserving' from those who are not.

Martin argues that the *Chronicle*'s financial ties to real-estate advertising limits its capacity to operate as a neutral sphere. This led to CoH's creation of its own newspaper, the Streetsheet:

> *You're not going to have a critical discussion of local, state or federal housing policy in the* Chronicle*, because the* Chronicle *isn't making money selling newspapers to the public; the* Chronicle *is making their money by delivering an advertising audience. Their number one source of advertising revenue is the real-estate industry. You're not going to get an impartial examination of anything there ... that really led us to push the* Streetsheet *to the forefront of our public education efforts because we couldn't get our message in tra ditional media without it being messed up.* (Martin 2004)

Streetsheet is a monthly tabloid, with news about issues of affordable housing, living wage employment, accessible healthcare, and educational opportunities, plus updates on public events and political demonstrations, as well as commentary, photos, and poetry. One of the first members of the North American Street Newspaper Association (NASNA), an organisation founded in 1996, it has since joined the International Network of Street Papers (INSP). As part of these two networks, *Streetsheet* identifies poverty as a global social problem, in which poor people's solidarity is central. In common with all street papers, *Streetsheet*' s revenue funds services for homeless people and poor communities, and low-income people make a little money selling the paper. But *Streetsheet* is much more than an income-generating scheme; it is a 'political and social tool for marginalized people to gain power in society by claiming a space to be heard' (Mailloux-Béïque 2005: 91 92).

Streetsheet provides a regular meeting space for homeless and poor people to establish mutual *recognition*, develop and share their own forms of knowledge, and *represent themselves* by contributing articles, stories, and photos. The vendors, who sell primarily to downtown professionals and political allies, 'occupy visible social spaces ... making the paper accessible and linked to the social actors who have produced it', challenging their stigmatisation and exclusion (Mailloux-Béïque 2005: 97). Further, the newspaper counters the power of experts to monopolise definitions of problems and remedies, giving poor people's voices deserved legitimacy and authority (Mailloux-Béïque 2005; Williams 2000).

As high housing costs have forced many tenants, artists, and social-justice organisations out of San Francisco, and the base of the Coalition's support has narrowed, it has become

more vulnerable to marginalisation by the commercial media and City Hall (Clarke 2008; Shaw 2008). Their decision to operate for and with poor people, and especially to refuse government funding, has meant a constant balancing act. Martin has noted a 'real polarisation around homeless issues' in recent years, leading to drop-offs in funding, and forcing the Coalition to drastically cut staff and services.

The Coalition, however, remains an important counter-public sphere, with a significant impact on public policy. Using grassroots organising based on the participation of homeless people and frontline staff, and developing coalitions with other anti-poverty groups, tenants' organisations, and faith-based social-justice groups, they have helped defeat many public measures against poor people and tenants in San Francisco and the state of California. And, by insisting on framing housing as a systemic and national problem, housing as a *collective* need, and homelessness as a *human-rights* abuse, CoH continues to represent an alternative discursive frame to the prevailing neo-liberal arguments. The Coalition has also initiated human-rights-styled campaigns, taking up the legal defences of those prosecuted for 'quality of life' crimes, pressurising the City to investigate assaults against poor people as hate crimes, lobbying for improvements in the housing shelters, as well as language services and support of immigrants. This commitment to universal values and inclusion of all reflects a respect for individual differences among life experiences, while fundamentally challenging the daily stigmatisation of homeless people and the 'structured differentiation which renders some groups unequal and/or excluded' (Williams 2000: 350).

Raising Our Voices-Media Alliance

Media Alliance is one of the oldest membership-based media activist organisations in the USA. Started by radical journalists in 1976, their initial goal was 'system change from within the media field—reforming corporate journalism, through defending media workers' rights, critiquing "bad" journalism and celebrating the "good", and training aspiring journalists' (Hackett and Carroll 2006: 108). In the late 1990s, Media Alliance shifted its remit, as its membership widened to include alternative media makers and social-justice groups who were creating their own media as part of counter-public spheres. As part of this new direction, Media Alliance began to train social-justice advocates to garner better representation in both alternative and mainstream media, and develop social-justice-oriented media (Hackett and Carrol 2006: 106).

In 2000, partly inspired by the first Seattle Indymedia Center *(IMC)*, Media Alliance convened a meeting of social advocacy and alternative media makers interested in collaboratively using the Internet to organise, educate, and intervene more effectively in public debates. However, rather than follow the IMC event-based model, which was directed principally by young media makers, the Alliance decided to focus on the most pressing issues facing social advocacy groups in the Bay Area. They selected housing as the Number 1 social crisis, an issue that affected every organisation and individual in the room. Using their own content and media expertise, they produced a website and other materials on the theme of the worst public and private landlords in the Bay Area. The project brought together activists from the Coalition on Homelessness, the San Francisco Tenants Union, Poor News Network, alterna-

tive media journalists, and trainees from the Media Alliance programme called Raising Our Voices (ROV).

ROV's purpose was to influence the public debate by providing trained journalists, photographers, and designers who could contribute to corporate, alternative, and social-justice media. According to Ben Jesse Clarke, they wanted

> *to take people who had the experience of being homeless, who knew intimately the neighbourhoods and the problems of poverty, and train them to interview and articulate the broader problems in their community.* (Clarke 2008)

Several people have graduated from the programme and gone on to contribute to Bay Area media, including Chance Martin, one-time editor of *Streetsheet.* Not unlike the IMC, and the contemporary movement of citizen journalists, ROV did not separate journalism and advocacy. 'First off, advocacy journalism was taught as the core of the curriculum. There wasn't any notion of teaching people corporate journalism. It was to teach them how to advocate for their communities using the media' (Clarke 2008). In addition, some students also became better advocates in other forums, as public speakers 'who could elaborate all the ways that federal housing policy is destroying their communities, in an articulate and intelligent manner, and then also write an article' (Clarke 2008).

In many ways, ROV operated like a temporary counter-public sphere. The organisers took great care to build a social space for groups to gather together, identify and share experiences:

> *The reality of broken communities like the Tenderloin ... was that social fragmentation and isolation were leading causes of people's addictions and inabilities to access the resources that they would need to make things work better. So we had pizza every night so people could eat together. We had social activities and then we developed a poetry and performance track of the classes. We had performance and gatherings and speak outs that were basically places where people were living their lives, and they weren't necessarily trying to reach a bigger audience, they were celebrating their own lives and their own communities. And then when we built up the steam, we built up a little road show that we tried to get to larger venues where a bigger audience could actually experi ence the fruits of people's labour.* (Clarke 2008)

These occasions were examples of the politics of *recognition*, in which previously excluded groups/identities 'reject the systematic disrespect or misrecognition' of their 'culture or way of life, [and] the dignity of their status as persons' (Williams 2000: 340).

Raising our Voices participants and staff also intervened in the wider public sphere around issues of *redistribution* of public resources. Their curriculum of community analysis, community practice, and grassroots expression helped forge a 'critical mass that could communicate, could do information sharing and education, and write stories about political issues', such as housing and welfare policy (Clarke 2008). The teachers, students, and Media Alliance staff and members also actively supported the campaigns and initiatives of anti-poverty organisations, such as the Coalition for Homelessness and Poor News. They also helped challenge the lack of representation of poorer and historically marginalised communities by San Francisco Bay media outlets; speaking out, for example, against Clear Channel's closure of a public-affairs programme for youth, and against the further reduction of public space in the media resulting from more corporate concentration of ownership (Kidd 2005).

Raising Our Voices ran from the late 1990s to 2004, when Media Alliance was no longer able to secure funding for the project. Some of the graduates and the trainers continue to

support Media Alliance in their work with anti-poverty journalists and media; in 2007, the organisation held a benefit for staff of one of the papers and initiated content analysis of the representation of poor people in the commercial media. In 2008, they ran Raising Our Voices III, a digital media training programme for immigrant women involved in community organisations, as well as mobilising immigrant and poor people's organisations to participate in public planning about local, state, and national communication policy.

Poor News Network

If the first two anti-poverty media projects came out of other concerns, first with homelessness, and then with media, Poor News Network is a standalone media project directed by poor people. Tiny Grey-Garcia and her mother Dee, two women who had been homeless, started their group in 1999, as part of a larger mobilisation against the housing crisis. During that period, the rising class of computer professionals from the boom in the computer and web industries of nearby Silicon Valley put added pressure on the inadequate housing stock in the city. Tenants, anti-poverty organisations, artists, non-profit organisations, and civic politicians mobilised against evictions and displacements, and against municipal zoning and other policy changes which would reduce affordable housing. The initial Poor News publication reflected the city's popular traditions of art in the service of politics. Designed as the first glossy literary magazine from poor people,

> *the idea was that it sits on a shelf in some yuppy enclave and people actually pick it up and read about someone who is dealing with poverty in the Third World, and the first world.* (Grey-Garcia 2005)

Since then, Poor News has grown to embrace some of the same goals as the Coalition on Homelessness and Raising Our Voices. They train people living in poverty to become journalists and media professionals, provide a communications space for their expression, and tactically use media to change social and political policy affecting poor people. Although critical of Clinton-era welfare retrenchment, their first training programme was funded through a welfare-to-work grant. Rather than equip poor people to fit into the waged labour market, or the existing commercial media system, they intended to produce a new kind of media, from the perspective of 'poverty scholars'. As Grey-Garcia said, 'other investigations do not give ownership, or power, or agency, to the people dealing with the stuff' (Grey-Garcia 2005).

Hampered by lack of long-term funding, Poor News nevertheless still provides training, which includes media studies, poverty studies, media literacy, Internet research and digital production, investigative journalism and production, and poetry and creative writing. Participating students have come from a variety of backgrounds: from low- and no-income to more privileged college students, youth who had been incarcerated, and recent immigrants. More recently, they initiated a training programme called 'Voces de Inmigrantes en Resistencia' (Voices of Immigrants in Resistance).

Like the other groups in our study, Poor News was seriously affected by the restructuring of corporate media in the Bay Area. Their once regular access to the daily press was lost when Hearst sold the *San Francisco Examiner,* bought the *Chronicle* and San Francisco became a one-newspaper town. With only occasional articles in the commercial media, they decided instead to develop their own network of media-oriented programmes. They no longer publish

the glossy magazine, but produce other print publications, DVDs, a website, a regular radio programme on Pacifica's KPFA, as well as supporting a performance troupe called the Welfare Queens. For a short time, they collaborated on a Community Newsroom Project, and now support and write for several community-operated independent news media.

The Poor News counter-public sphere, like the Coalition on Homelessness and Media Alliance's Raising Our Voices programme, combines the politics and practices of *representation, recognition, redistribution*, and *rights*. Their complex of media provides the expressive space to question their representation in dominant media, and public institutions develop, assemble, and share alternative 'scholarship' about the causes, experience, and necessary remedies for poverty; and in this active process, claim their voice and new forms of individual and social identity and political agency (Williams 2000: 346–349). Their representational work supports campaigns to defend the civil rights of poor people, including incarcerated youth, and most recently, undocumented immigrants; as well as larger mobilisations to redistribute resources. They also work with commercial media and other alternative media to circulate their creative work, and their ideas.

This linkage between dimensions is crucial for Grey-Garcia, for whom 'media organising', means using the media as the root of a political campaign. She notes, 'Media can be so harmful to low- and no-income communities, and it is therefore so vital to keep our truths out there ... We're not an island unto ourselves'.

Poor News also uses media tactically, creating short-term artistic media events to defend tenants and homeless people, and intervene in municipal debates about development in San Francisco and the neighbouring city of Oakland. For example, when the City of San Francisco announced a programme designed to move homeless people away from the periphery of the civic square, by limiting their use of shopping carts, Poor News created a set of 'Art Carts'. They then contacted all the English- and Spanish-language television channels to cover their demonstration. The next day, the Mayor cancelled the plan. As Grey-Garcia said, 'it was that whole notion of harnessing the corporate media, and throwing it back in their face'.

Recognising the structural problems with commercial media, and experiencing the local shut out of their views, Poor News (as our other anti-poverty groups) has become involved in the larger media democracy movement. This 'movement of movements' seeks to change media practices by engaging with and changing national and international media and information policies, as well as by creating and supporting alternative media structures (Hackett and Carroll 2006; Stein *et al.* forthcoming). As part of this policy focus, in April 2008, Gloria Esteva, a Poor News staff writer and member of Voces de Inmigrantes en Resistencia, spoke at the Federal Communications Commission Hearing on Internet Network Management at Stanford University. Her intervention, part of which is quoted at the beginning of this article, and those of other Poor News journalists, underscored the importance of representing the expert knowledge of low-income and poor people in any process of planning for new information and communications infrastructure.

The future of anti-poverty communications and media

These anti-poverty groups face great challenges and obstacles. Corporate media consolidation and restructuring has resulted in a lack of attention to local community politics, affecting

especially the representation and voice of poor people in the dominant sphere. At the same time, US social policies have shifted the emphasis from national entitlement to workfare pro grammes, reframing poverty as individual failure, and further marginalising the growing number of poor people. In this context, anti-poverty groups like the ones we have studied have had to become much more defensive. Nonetheless, they continue to work to create spaces for poor and homeless people to come together and create dignified identities and to articulate their rights as citizens.

In addition to trying to wedge space in the existing and increasingly closed commercial media, these groups have turned their attention to producing their own media where narratives and frames for poverty are very different. They have trained poor and homeless people as media scholars and producers to represent themselves in commercial and alternative media, and they often go on to create their own media. These autonomous communications spheres foster recognition, including both the individual self-recognition of participants and the collective struggle of this emerging social movement (Williams 2000: 346). Importantly, they also include conventional modes of rational discourse alongside other expressive genres such as poetry, performance, and photography.

This infrastructural work creating *counter-public spheres* not only has an empowerment effect for those immediately involved, it can also affect the representation and power of poor people in the dominant public sphere. For example, the campaigns by Coalition on Homelessness and Poor News Network to reframe poor and homeless people as individuals with rights and expertise, have impacted public policies and perceptions in the city of San Francisco, stopping legislation criminalising the use of shopping carts, and undermining the general legitimacy of 'quality of life' convictions, many of which are routinely dismissed. As part of larger coalitions, the groups have also held back several new laws and regulations aimed at further reducing public support of social, health, educational, and housing programmes. In all of their work, these groups have combined representational strategies, which recognise a plurality of different lived experiences, with the overall intent of challenging the inequities of material distribution for everyone, regardless of income, race/ethnicity, gender, or national status. While the scope of most of their work is local, each of the organisations also links with national and international initiatives, sharing lessons about housing and other social-welfare policies, which are increasingly decided at the national and international levels.

The communications activities of these and other grassroots groups in the Bay Area have widened the public conversation around homelessness and poverty. At a time when the dominant media are abandoning their public responsibilities, these grassroots groups are trying to create public visibility and voice in other ways. It remains to be seen, of course, whether these under-resourced voices will be able to sustain themselves and continue to communicate by and for poor people. However, it is critical that, even as we recognise the deficits caused by the retreat of commercial media from communities, we also recognise the creative struggle that is going on in these communities to create their own public spheres and public voices.

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CHAPTER 59

Core Dimensions of Community Radio in Action: The Case of Ghana

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Abstract

The present article seeks to serve as a 'how-to' text. Based on the relatively more matured experiences of some community radio (CR) stations in Ghana, the authors hope it could be a guide to CR stations in Africa and beyond on how to attain what we term the 'core dimensions' of CR that underpin its operations. The study reviews the literature on community radio and highlights some selected data on a survey by Diedong & Naaikuur (2012) to show how effective the implementation of relevant dimensions of CR in Ghana enables people in communities communicate within themselves and with the people making the decisions that affect them. The cases presented point to significant changes that the stations are inducing in various sectors of the lives of their communities across the country through innovative programming strategies. However, despite the significant impact that the CR sector in Ghana is making, there are challenges that need to be addressed to unleash its full potential. Notably, the study is based mainly on earlier studies and the personal experiences of the authors who have had some years of experience working with CR in Ghana.

Keywords

community radio, core dimensions, innovative programming strategies, cases, personal experiences

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Introduction

For more than fifty years, radio has been the most appealing tool for participatory communication and development. It is without doubt the communication medium most widely spread throughout the world and has always been the ideal medium for change (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001). Community radio (CR) has been acclaimed as the most appropriate medium for communicating for social change in grass-root communities, with the result that CR stations have multiplied by the thousands all over the world during the past five decades.

In Africa, with the repudiation of one-party and dictatorial governments, within the past decade, and as monopoly over the media breaks down, small organizations and communities now lift antennas over villages. CR stations and CR networks are active in the media scene in many African countries.

In Ghana for example, there are twelve full-fledged community radio stations and several community-type or grass-root radio stations on air. In addition, many applications are awaiting approval for the allocation of broadcast licenses to start similar stations in the near future. Most of these stations belong to the Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN), an umbrella body whose main role has been to build a strong participatory ethos for CR (Diedong & Naaikuur, 2012).

The main objective of the present article which draws on some key works on CR in general (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001; Fraser & Estrada, 2001; Alumuku, 2007; Shama, 2011) and some data on CR in Ghana, especially a survey by Diedong & Naaikuur 2012, is to show how CR in Ghana is serving as a communication tool enabling people in communities to communicate within themselves and with the people making the decisions that affect them. Particularly, it discusses the following core dimensions in the operations of CR: (a) facilitating a process of involvement of various sectors of the community in a participatory discussion to define problems and find solutions,(b) providing a selected flow of news information from national,regional, and international sources,(c) mobilizing communities to demand accountability from local government authorities, d) reinforcing local cultural identity and promoting local talents, e) introducing dialogue for peace-building and conflict resolution, f) introducing discussions to address felt injustices, g) promoting indigenous creative practices peculiar to the local communities, h) educating people regarding democratic procedures in elections for avoiding corruption, etc.

It also shows that even though CR in Ghana still grapples with some challenges in terms of following faithfully the principles of good CR with full participation and involvement of the people of the community, it is relatively more successful than its counterparts in other jurisdictions. For instance, based on personal visits to successful CRs in Africa and data from some fifteen or twenty studies of community radio in Tanzania, East Africa and other parts of Africa over the last ten years or so, White (2011) asserts that CR in East Africa is much less successful than in Ghana.

Involvement of All Community Sectors in Defining Problems and Finding Solutions

When societies are affected by huge inequalities in gaining access to resources, power, and decision making concerning social coordination, the changing processes required to facilitate an integral, participatory, and inclusive development can be met with some resistance. In particular, because of their marginal position, rural communities in the developing world, often experience right violations when activities that affect their lives negatively are undertaken by external agents without the communities' participation. Unsure of the best way to show their resentments, such situations can develop into violent conflicts. When community radio (CR) comes in, it plays a mediatory role in initiating a dialogue by involving all sectors of the communities to engage with the external actors in search of a solution to the problem. This process involves community mobilization for collective action for problem-solving and social change.

One remarkable strength of CR stations in Ghana has been their ability to mobilize community people and external actors to resolve differences in a win-win spirit. *Royal FM* in the Brong-Ahafo region undertook a community mobilization drive to solve an environmental problem, which communities within its broadcast areas had been grappling with (Diedong & Naaikuur, 2012). The communities are located in a forest belt where illegal timber-logging activities were rampant. Over a long period, illegal timber contractors, known as chain-saw operators, invaded the forest areas with their timber-logging activities. These activities, carried out in an indiscriminate manner, had negative impact on the ecology and other livelihoods of the communities. The communities often met the contractors with violent reactions occasionally leading to death or physical injuries.

Through a project known as Community Participation in Natural Resource Management (CPNRM), *Royal FM* embarked on educating the community on the their rights to protect their natural resources and the need for timber contractors to be responsible in their activities. The programmes also touched upon the role of the local government authorities to step in to streamline the operations of timber-logging in the Ghanaian communities in general.

The project was done with two communities, namely *Agubie* and *Tromiso*. The strategy was to record the voices of the communities—men, women, youth, opinion and traditional leaders—expressing their strong emotions about what was happening to their livelihoods. When the community voices were aired, they triggered the reaction of timber contractors who insisted on a right to respond. The contractors would even pay for airtime to speak into the microphone. Now, both the communities and contractors pointed fingers at some local authorizes of the District Assembly who allegedly were bribed into granting concessions for illegal timber-logging activities and closing their eyes to the inimical consequences of such activities. These accusations inevitably brought the District Assembly to the studios to respond. In the end, the three sides (communities, timber contractors and the District Assembly staff) felt the need to have a face-to-face dialogue to discuss the issues raised on air. The meeting was animated by the *Royal FM* staff.

The process led to some fruitful results. Communities made a very strong point that they were not against timber-logging per se. What they wanted was that the activities should be undertaken in demarcated areas and with sensitivity to their rights. The District Assembly

strengthened by-laws on the management of forest resources to ensure that timber contractors would restrict their activities to demarcated areas. In addition, the contractors would in the future compensate the communities for acts which were detrimental to their interests.

A Selected Flow of News Information from Regional, National and International Sources

A main communication problem in Africa is that information is not getting to the rural marginalized and lower status populations. The health, agriculture and education sectors do not provide intelligible and relevant information that will be useful to communities. Mainstream media (radio, television and newspapers) are not helping either in this case. Such media are not concerned with issues that interest poor people, e.g. agrarian conflicts, corrupt traditional rulers and the violations of the rights of women and children.

CR can, and should, play an important role in its capacity to present interesting and relevant news to meet the information needs of marginalized communities. Writing on the importance of news on CR, A. J. Graham (1995) says that in principle stations have a mandate and owes it as a duty to the community to present them with comprehensive news. The role that CR can play well is that of presenting news that is truly relevant to the listeners within its broadcast range. Being the voice of the "poor," which in many rural contexts means everyone, the key way CR can present relevant news is that the radio station looks at the news in the way the poor and illiterate look at it. The kind of story that would be of interest to, for example, the rural farmer would be one on when government subsidized fertilizer would be available to support his farming activities. In addition, the farmer would be interested in hearing which markets offer good prices for his farm produce. In a similar way, women would be interested in news that would motivate them to form successful cooperatives to enhance their livelihoods in order to be able to pay their children's school fees.

CR reporters have an advantage over their counterparts in the mainstream media in terms of reporting news that has the potential of having positive impacts on their communities. As Birgitte Jallov (2012) notes, unlike journalists in the mainstream media who work on the basis of distance from and neutrality towards their stories, CR workers are broadcasting from within. As they identify, research, and report on issues that affect their communities, they report on issues that also have an impact on themselves and their lives.

Rural people also want to be part of the national, regional, and even international communication processes going on. Meeting such needs would involve providing a selected flow of news information from regional, national and international sources. Access to such varied information would enable community leaders to take advantage of programmes that are of use to the community to defend their interests.

In trying to meet the news information needs of their communities, CR stations in Ghana adopt various approaches to produce and present news. In general, most CR stations, apart from their own reporters, rely on various sources including newspapers, the Ghana News Agency, and other radio stations for stories that are interesting and are of relevance to local situations. Each news bulletin offers a careful mix of national, regional, and global items which are translated and presented in the respective local languages. The sources of the local stories become resource persons for the daily current affair programmes.

Since CR usually does not have a large team of professional reporters, the best way to produce sufficient community news is by developing a network of volunteer village correspondents. The approach of *Radio Progress* in news production is an interesting case. The station has a network of village volunteer news reporters and producers called Community Communication Teams (CCTs). These volunteers spend time in the villages identifying program themes and producing and evaluating previous programs with the listeners. They also record news on significant local events and on the activities of community-based organizations such as women and youth groups as well as those of local authorities. On weekly basis, the recordings are sent to the station for editing and broadcast. Depending on the availability of telephone services, a volunteer can call the station to give a live report. From time to time, the volunteers will be brought together to share their experiences among themselves, give feedback to the station and make suggestions for improvement in their role and the work of the station as a whole.

Moreover, *Radio Progress* has developed a collaborative relationship with other news outlets in the Upper West Region including the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC). This enables *Radio Progress* to have regular access to news from a variety of sources. The relationship with the GBC has gone beyond the sharing of news to co-utilization of technical facilities, joint training and exchange of programmes. Since each of them is limited in a way in relation to the others, the exchange of news and programmes among the stations will spread their services to as many people as possible in the region. An important lesson to be learnt from the collaborative relationship between *Radio Progress* and the GBC is reflected in the statement by Alumuku when he said, "CR is not necessarily opposed to national broadcasting. On the contrary, it could actually complement it" (Alumuku, 2007, p. 22).

Mobilizing Communities to Demand Accountability from Local Government Authorities

Critics and analysts of decentralized local governance in developing countries argue that efforts of most countries to de-centralize government decision making, so that government will be more responsive to local needs, has not improved services because there is poor flow of communication between local governments and communities (Santi, 2012, on Ghana for example). White (2008), for instance, notes that generally local communities and districts do not have a communication structure to articulate the needs at the local level, bring this to the local government, and monitor and put pressure on it to respond to community needs. It is further observed that the well-known watch-dog role of the media in promoting governance is weak at the local levels in most African countries (White, 2008). The national media operating in the national metropolitan city are making central governance more accountable through investigative reporting and continuous reporting on the efficiency of government response to problems. However, this kind of media pressure generally does not exist at the district and regional level.

According to these views, what is needed is a communication system which can allow citizens to have a say in how they are governed by the local authorities and how they want their communities to move forward. The communication system should also empower local communities to hold their leaders accountable and put pressure on them to provide their

needs. All major works on communication and local governance have pointed to community media, especially the radio, for their potential for involving rural and urban poor populations in the struggles against and the search for solutions to the socio-economic development challenges of their communities (Fraser & Estrada, 2001; The World Bank, 2003; Alumuku, 2007; Santi, 2011; Jallov, 20012; Shama, 2011; Orengo & Harford, 2013).

In general terms, CR, as the World Bank (2003) notes, can act as a tool to promote social alternatives in a number of ways. As a voice of the local people, the radio can influence local governments to adopt policies that respond to their needs. As a public watchdog, the radio can keep a critical eye on government performance and can check on the misuse of power, incompetence and corruption. It can make governments more responsive to criticism of their policies and service delivery. Furthermore, CR stations can be critical enablers of information, voice, and capacities for dialogue and negotiation with public authorities. The existence of a wide network of CR stations—broadcasting sound development content, disseminating information, and providing a space for dialogue about public issues—is an effective means of civic engagement of poor people, especially the illiterate poor. It allows for interaction, dialogue, and direct community voice, as well as access to decision meetings and events.

A few empirical studies have given evidence of how some CR stations have used various strategies to improve local governance in Africa. Shama (2011), for instance, recounts how CR in Zambia made possible for ordinary people to have powers to summon their leaders and make them accountable. Similarly, Orengo & Harford (2013) report that, through a project dubbed Village Voices for Development (VVD), which aimed at using radio to promote good governance in Madagascar, the voices of ordinary villagers were strengthened through radio programmes in which they participated in regional and village debates with decision makers, thereby making local authorities more responsive to their development needs and more accountable for local services.

In the case of Ghana, some CR stations have championed the course of their communities in many ways including giving meaning to decentralization and local governance. For example, a study conducted by Al-Hassan *et al.* (2011) gave evidence on how *Simli Radio*, in the Northern Region, used various strategies to initiate interactions between duty bearers and right holders in two operational districts of the radio. The study recounts that a woman leader, Asheitu, explained that through the radio, "We now know that our MPs are there for development. They can no more cheat and have to bring development to our communities." The study concluded that the interactive sessions provided by the station for local authorities, including members of Parliament (MPs) to explain government policies and programmes, led to the promotion of a culture of accountability and transparency.

There is evidence that local authorities do respond to the pressure put on them by the communities through their CRs. Alumuku (2007) narrates how an environmental sanitation programme on *Radio Ada* concentrating on local government's negligence got the authorities to act. Following a series of programmes on rubbish dumps in the markets, the local government felt constrained to take action. A bulldozer and a tipper were dispatched along with a number of labourers to work on the site.

Reinforcing Local Cultural Identity and Promoting Local Talents

In many African countries, CR has made a concerted attempt to promote the local language and artistic linguistic expression, for example, in storytelling, the local music, the local dance, the local drama and, in general, the local historical memory. State radio has generally militated against such promotion of the indigenous culture. The commercial radio stations, even when they use the vernacular language, tend to highlight the music and drama of the national and transnational entertainment industries.

This implies that before the advent of CR in Ghana, and indeed in most African countries, many tribal and minority groups were unhappy about the fact that their identities were missing from the mainstream radio and television services. The lack of media content that reflected traditional cultures, coupled with modernity, contributed to the fast declining interests in traditional storytelling and communal entertainments among the youth. Therefore, CR stations have become welcome tools for reinvigorating these forms of traditional entertainments that held African communities together (Fraser & Estrada, 2001; Alumuku, 2007).

So strong is the aim to use community radio for the promotion of community cultural values that many CR stations have a strong policy to encourage the exclusive use of local languages and songs in their broadcasting. Another important role CR stations play in the culture of their communities is to use programmes that can highlight and encourage positive values andto also dissuade negative cultural trends. In Ghana, all the CR stations have weekly programmes in which elders, who are viewed, as repositories of wisdom will, give advice to the younger generations. The programmes, among other intentions, seek to reinforce traditional moral and community values. On the other hand, the stations have used the programmes to challenge many of the negative customs in the Ghanaian community, denouncing cultural practices like female genital mutilation, obnoxious widowhood rights, and the abuse of the dowry system.

A major area of African culture that many CR stations devote attention to promote is the local musical talents. Radio is above all a music medium and most radio programming is music. These stations give priority to locally produced music and promote the best of local talent. In most communities of Ghana, as in other African countries, there are often dozens of local music groups. All churches, schools and community organizations have their choirs and soloists, many of them are of excellent quality. Much of this music is composed by local people about local events. All community events, from graduations to weddings and funerals, are family and community celebrations with music and dancing. In some communities, there are persons of unusual musical talent that are willing to perform even regularly for the community. CR gives a chance for young people to try out their talents as a means of starting, hopefully, their own careers. CR is able to discover an amazing range of local talents.

Writing on how some CR stations in parts of Africa promote local music (White, 2011) recalls that a CR station in Southern Zambia has an annual festival in which hundreds of music groups come from all over the country to compete. The festival always attracts some of the top talent in the country which are, of course, prize winning. This contest furnishes some of the best music played on that CR station for a good part of the year. He concludes, "I will never forget discovering in a visit to one CR that a local person had a hobby of col-

lecting jazz records and regularly putting the records on a weekly programme playing and explaining the music of famous jazz stars!" (White, 2011, p. 7)

In many CR stations in Ghana, drama programmes are another standard type of radio programmes through which the stations promote artistic talents. One may not think that lower-status groups have much capacity for producing radio drama. In fact, there are many amateur drama groups and comedy groups in rural and urban communities in Africa in general. White (2011) again recalls that in a visit to Radio Ada in Ghana, in one studio, a young Ada-speaking student of drama in the University of Ghana was training a group of volunteers from the community to produce a radio drama that the group itself had produced. Through the drama programmes, the Ghanaian creativity is demonstrated in the easy way communities can spontaneously dramatize situations. In general, the genre of social drama as a participatory one involves inviting people from various sections or villages to spontaneously dramatize problems, which are recorded and broadcast on the radio. There are two approaches to making this successful. One will be to ask the people in the villages to select themes and prepare a very simple dramatization. On the day this is presented in the community, the mobile team of the station goes out to record it with comments about the significance of this drama for their community. This is broadcast, and comments from other communities are also invited and broadcast. The second approach is that the radio station selects a theme, which is dramatized, say at the beginning of the week. Next, recordings of the programs are taken to the villages by animators who record people's reactions. Finally, an edited version of the program is re-broadcast over the latter days of the week, gradually incorporating more comments and letters from the listeners and discussing what action can be taken. This method will have an extra appeal in communicating issues for social change because it contains elements of multi-media as it combines radio with interpersonal and group interaction techniques.

The impact of radio drama is illustrated in the following short testimony. In an earlier study on CR in Ghana, the authors of this article were interacting with women in *Dalon*, the base community of Simli Radio in the Northern Region (Diedong & Naaikuur, 2012). Thirty-four year old Amina Seidu, who had been hiding her face in silence, suddenly burst into laughter and disappeared behind a mango tree. Her laughter was prompted by a question on which programmes the women liked most on their CR station. When the woman was encouraged to explain her laughter, she whispered in Dagbani, the language of the station's broadcast "kperigu" meaning drama. She further explained "My husband had been in the habit of beating me up on the least provocation. One day, he listened to a radio drama on domestic violence in which a man who had physically assaulted his wife was arrested by the police. The man ended up in a prison to serve for two years. My husband was scared by the drama episode and vowed not to beat me again." Most of the women in the group attested to the popularity of radio drama. Those whose homes did not have radio sets claimed they would abandon whatever activity they were carrying out in their homes to go to a neighbour's compound to listen to a drama programme.

Introducing Dialogue for Peace-Building and Conflict Resolution

The international media has always been accused of creating a haunting image for Africa as a place replete with wars and conflicts, among other malaise. However, the reality is that, many African communities are experiencing an increasing amount of violence and insecurity which grows out of struggle for land and other resources. Overall, socio-economic advancement of the conflict is the sufferer.

Africans had always relied on traditional conflict resolution mechanisms such as dialogue circles to resolve conflicts and to maintain peace. CR has proven to be a strong new platform for dialogue and conflict resolution in some African communities (cf. Alumuku, 2007; Jallov, 2012). For instance, the organization Search for Common Ground (SFCG) has identified the important effects of a programme run in Liberia since 2007 and in Sierra Leon since 2000 which SFCG had supported with public information, dialogue, community outreach, and capacity building through radio projects like news shows, soap operas, and community outreach projects. As a result, SFCG's evaluation concluded that overall CR continued to play a strong role in local peace-building. Specifically, programming that directly addressed issues related to community inclusiveness and non-violent conflict resolution had meaningful impact across locations. CR stations were also noted as active agents in defusing local conflict and preventing backsliding into violence (SFCG 2009, as cited in Jallov, 2012).

In Ghana, CR is proving to be one of the major instruments for peace because of the method of inviting people of different points of view to find consensus on how to solve common problems. *Radio Peace* began in a region of tribal conflict, violent gangs, and struggle over land and a host of other disputes. The station began by bringing together the chiefs of the area to make a pledge of peace, and they return to make progress reports. The station promotes work with unemployed youth that are prone to violence. A community festival every year, with all the different clans and ethnic groups, celebrates their unity in diversity. The station finds ways of helping the poor and often desperate marginalized and has become a focal point for the socio-economic development of the region (Alumuku, 2007).

Radio Peace has an early warning system to report any illegal activity or violence so that this can be settled. Management of the station recounted that one day a young man came from a village known as Apam claiming that the chief of the village had sold a piece of land belonging to the community for eight thousand Ghana Cedis, about twelve thousand one hundred and sixty US dollars. He did not want to tell the story through the radio but indicated that out of anger he wanted to bomb the village. The station quickly informed the security agencies who conducted an intensive investigation to the allegation. The move forestalled the likely creation of a communal conflict (Diedong & Naaikuur, 2012).

CR in Ghana has also been involved in promoting dialogue among religions. Radio Progress is well known for the promotion of religious understanding among various Christian denominations and between Christians and Muslims in the Upper Wes t Region. Even though the origins of the station can be traced to the Catholic Church, the station has maintained an open door policy on religious broadcasting. Equal opportunity is given to all religious groups to broadcast religious programmes reflecting their faiths. Muslims in particular are overtly appreciative for being allowed to freely use the radio every Friday for their worship programme. "Muslims have always wondered aloud about the generosity of the Catholic

Church and question whether their Muslim norms would allow the same generosity if they had been granted the license themselves" (Alumuku, 2007, p. 205). This "evangelization mission" of Radio Progress has contributed to the reputation of the Upper West Region as the most peaceful in Ghana.

Introducing Discussions to Address Felt Injustices and Abuse of Human Rights

One of the most felt areas of injustice in Africa is the abuse of the fundamental rights of the more vulnerable parts of the population, such as children, women, the elderly, people living with disabilities, the sick and the otherwise weakened. Often in cases of abuse and where the powers-that-be misuse their power, reference is made to culture and tradition as an explanation and justification. However, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees the rights of everyone: strong or weak, famous or marginalized, educated or uneducated, young or old, including all ethnic groups, both sexes, all religions and sexual behaviours.

Human rights are most often among the fundamental issues of development that form the framework for a regular editorial group of CR stations. Most CR stations have human rights as one of their regular thematic programme areas, and some CR stations in particularly vulnerable environments and areas have right-related issues as their main focus (Jallov, 2012). While the level of immediate threat and abuse is very different from community to community, human rights will always be central to the issues of CR for development, opening the microphone to issues and to groups within the community who have not previously had a forum or active voice. A CR must always focus on identifying and addressing rights as well as the lack of rights for the more vulnerable parts of the population.

There are examples of how human rights programming in CR is improving respect of human rights and addressing injustice in some African countries. Drawing from impact assessment report on a human rights programme dubbed 'Human Rights Is the Mother of All Community Change' in Radio KKCR in Western Uganda, Jallov (2012) relates two of a wide range of human rights related impact stories as follows:

> In this community the police used to behave as if they were completely above the law. If they wanted to extort money from you all they did was to arrest you and put you in detention without any charge or with very flimsy charges. We never thought even for a moment that there was a law which protected us as citizens. Since the programmes on radio started, now everyone knows that you cannot be detained for over a certain number of hours (28 hours) without being charged. The most interesting thing for us now is that KKCR brings the top police officers to explain to us on radio what they do, how they do it and why they do it… (p. 122)

The media in Ghana have been credited with many socio-cultural changes the country is experiencing. One of their main contributions that deserve special mention is the advocacy role for the recognition of and respect for the human rights of the marginalized in society. CR stations in particular have put it high on their agenda to champion the causes of women, children, the aged and particularly the physically challenged. A case in point is the disability programme on *Radio Progress*. Since 1997 when the station started, the Upper West Branch of the Association of the Disabled in Ghana was granted a free weekly slot. The aim of the disability programme was two-fold: to fight the stigma attached to disability and to ensure

that all their rights enshrined in the 1992 Constitution were accorded them. Notable in the latter regard is the fact that the Constitution has stipulated that two per cent of the District Assembly Common Funds be dedicated to the support of the activities of the country's disabled people. However, most district assemblies were reluctant in releasing the disability funds. The disabilityprogramme on Radio Progress challenged the assemblies and put pressure on them resulting in some districts in the Upper West Region regularly releasing the money due to the disabled. The use of such funds has undoubtedly enhanced the living conditions of persons with disabilities in the area.

The disability programmes have also challenged the injustices and stigmatization against people with disability shown by the community. At the end of each broadcast, the host of the programme would vow that the disabled people would not stop speaking against any actions and tendencies that tended to undermine their rights and dignity as human beings. Two significant results of the programmes include:

1. An increased recognition of the rights of disabled children in general, and particularly those of the blind and deaf to have access to education. Many blind, deaf and dumb children from across the region have been enrolled at the Wa Schools for the Blind and Deaf.
2. A general change of social attitude towards people with disability. For instance, a beautiful blind lady who regularly spoke on the programmes attracted men, many of whom pressed suits for marriage until one of them succeeded in marrying her.

Promoting Indigenous Creative Practices Peculiar to the Local Communities

In the light of the inadequate opportunities for knowledge development for entrepreneurial skills and those needed for the improvement of other sectors of rural economies, it is pertinently important to promote indigenous knowledge in the areas of agriculture, health, and conflict resolution of Africa in particular. Unfortunately, due to a lingering misconception about "modern development," the indigenous knowledge base of the African populations is often frowned upon as being inferior to western scientific knowledge. However, in reality, for the majority of the people who live in rural areas their indigenous knowledge systems provide the frame for them to make meaning of their world and development.

Therefore, if the call for peoples' participation in development will make any impact, a stronger call should be made for the recognition of the continuous relevance of the indigenous knowledge systems of rural communities who only perceive the realities of their world, their everyday realities and their challenges of development in the framework of their cultural heritage. A fundamental step in this direction is to have a strong belief in the development process of African communities that rural and urban lower status people have a wealth of knowledge and problem-solving ideas that they can share among themselves and with local authorities. For example, a five hectare farm plot of a so-called "peasant farmer" is, in fact, a tremendously complicated farming system. When one begins to talk to rural people, one finds that the farmer with a plot of maize, a few chickens and cattle is constantly trying out new ways to improve his production—very conservatively, of course, because if he makes

one mistake, he starves. The lady selling vegetables in the market is constantly trying out new methods of sales improvement. Every carpenter and bicycle repairman is trying out new ideas.

One of the crucial roles of CR is the promotion of creative practices which still have the potential to provide solutions to the complex mix of problems confronting their communities. By the orientation of CR as an educational radio, as opposed to the old form of education from "experts" to supposed knowledge-less illiterate peasants, CR can help sustain the rich indigenous knowledge base of the African rural populations. For instance, professionals—agricultural extension agents, community nurses and doctors, small industry guides—are invited into programs, but are presented as sharing ideas and solutions with farmers, pregnant mothers, and market ladies. Particularly attractive are field demonstrations out in rural communities or urban neighborhoods. This gives a farmer and the people of a village the chance to show off what they have accomplished and to share it with others in the radius of the radio station. CR puts all these people into dialogue bringing out their little success stories and best ideas.

In general, the media in Ghana have been at the forefront in the promotion of indigenous creative practices. For instance, herbal medical practitioners who claim to have found some cures to illnesses have used the media, especially radio, to make their claims. Newspapers have also devoted spaces to highlighting creative works of artisans. In the same way, the Ghanaian media have also acted as watchdogs exposing charlatan claims in traditional medical practices aimed at instilling sanity in traditional medical practice in the country.

In this regard, CR stations in Ghana have championed the cause of promoting creative practices in local communities particularly in the health and agricultural sectors. In the health sector, *Simli Radio* in the Northern Region broadcasts regular programmes that highlight the potential of herbal medicines in treating common ailments like fevers and diarrhea (Al-Hassan *et al.*, 2011). The programmes also become platforms for renowned traditional healers in the local communities not only to expose their curative prowess but also to educate people on traditional measures of preventing illnesses. Testimonies by cured clients of these herbalists are also encouraged. In a similar way, *Radio Progress* in its weekly health education programmes also involves traditional birth attendants who are the first line people to attend to pregnant and women in labour in communities that are far away from any health facilities. The programme gives these "village doctors" the opportunity to showcase their role in the health delivery system in rural areas, the frustrations they face, and above all the need for their knowledge and expertise to be accorded due recognition and be integrated into mainstream medical practice.

On the agricultural front, some of the CR stations in Ghana have adopted creative programming strategies to facilitate the sharing of indigenous and environmentally sustainable farming practices to other farmers in the form of oral testimonies. In an interaction with the manager of *Radio FREED*, Mr. RuphiionKuupiel, in Nandom in the Upper West Region of Ghana, he recounted an experience when a farmer in the community of Gozir was invited to the studios to explain how he managed to have good crop harvest even during a year that generally saw poor harvests due mainly to drought. The farmer narrated that his secret lay in the use of animal manure. The radio producer challenged him that many farmers in the area also used manure; however, the farmer said that he preserved his manure in such a manner that it was protected from direct heat and other weather conditions that could make the

manure lose its potency. The Radio Manager concluded that many farmers attested to the fact that the testimony had changed their perception towards animal manure.

Educating People regarding Democratic Procedures in Elections and Avoiding Corruption

There is quite a considerable amount of literature which point to the potential role of CR in promoting democratic culture. For instance, Fraser and Estrada (2001) have discussed that CR can enhance democratic culture from the local to the national levels by introducing a system of community building through communication by connecting people with other people's organizations, and people with officials and government functionaries. Steins (2002) adds that Community radio introduces 'democratic talk' by creating a platform on which active citizens in the community, who recognize common interests and goals, can deliberate and debate. Fraser and Estrada (2001) further underscore the fact that this function of CR is in keeping with the decentralization process now being implemented in many countries, the purpose of which is to bring democratic decision-making closer to the people concerned. Public debates aired by the community radio will certainly be heard by locally based staff of government and private institutions and the radio's content should be relayed by them to their superiors. This will lay the foundation for development initiatives that are responsive to the community's felt needs.

No doubt that CR has contributed to the development of the budding democratic culture in many African countries over the past two decades. The importance of their involvement in the different kinds of civic education before and during elections is obvious. During elections, CR stations get preliminary results based on the first, local count of votes out to the community immediately after the disclosure of the polling stations. This has the potential to curb some of the blatant, and frequent, cases of electoral fraud where votes are manipulated (suppression and ballot stuffing) before arriving at their final provincial or national destination. The case below highlights this potential role of CR around elections:

During Mozambique's 2003 and 2004 elections, the Community Radios and Community Multimedia Centres worked hard to demystify the election process by informing listeners of their rights, explaining relevant legal frameworks and the importance and implications of elections in a budding democracy like Mozambique…As a result more people participated in the elections, which also took place in a much more peaceful and orderly atmosphere, according to observers with much less political and ethnic tension. Due to the large corps of well-trained volunteer radio producers, Radio Dondo was present at all polling stations, and was first to communicate election results. No other local, provincial or national media had a comparative coverage. (Hughes and Pringle 2003, as cited in Jallov 2012, p. 105)

CR stations have made significant contributions to the democratic dispensation of Ghana since 2000. Before the advent of CR in the country, rural people had inadequate access to information during electioneering campaigns. Mainstream media were used by politicians for propaganda and because they mostly used official national languages understood by the few literates, the majority had little chance of getting to know their political candidates. This situation rendered them very susceptible to manipulation and vote buying by politicians.

The presence of CR, therefore, has changed this situation dramatically and presented opportunities for rural folks to make politically informed choices. The main role CR has played in the 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012 general elections has been to do intensive voter education to enable rural people make informed choices in voting for presidential and parliamentary candidates. The 2000 general elections, which saw a change of government from the then ruling National Democratic Council (NDC) to the National Patriotic Party (NPP) is a strong testimony of the power of CR in building sound sense of political judgment among ordinary people. CR stations, which were mobilized and supported by the Media Foundation for West Africa, undertook intensive political education at the grass-root levels and this definitely helped to overturn the usual trends of elections in the country. The fact that an incumbent party lost the elections to a leading opponent, according to political analysts, was a new phenomenon and marked a strong watershed. In fact, it is on record that, the new President of Ghana, John AgyekumKuffuor, in his victory speech acknowledged the role of private media, and particularly CR in the country,in helping his party to win the elections (Naaikuur, 2003).

The most significant episode involving CR in electioneering activities was in the 2008 elections (Diedong& Naaikuur, 2012). In the presidential elections, the Ghana Electoral Commission refused to declare a winner in the nation's run-off saying it would have to rerun the elections in the Tain Constituency in the Brong Ahafo Region in early January 2009. Tension mounted in the country, especially in the Brong Ahafo Region, because the nation turned total attention towards the outcome of the elections. Former Presidents J.J. Rawlings, of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), and J.A. Kuffuor, of the New Patriotic Party (NNP), were expected to be part of the decisive voting at Tain. *Royals FM*, by then the only CR in the area, played a crucial role. The people depended on the station to tell them what to do. The radio boldly informed the people not to fear or panic but to vote freely. More importantly and to the surprise of observers of the heavily polarized media scene during the election period, the station resisted attempts by the parties to influence it with money to broadcast messages to influence the voters. The station acted professionally by granting equal airtime to the two political parties for their campaign messages. The outcome was peaceful though the NPP boycotted the elections.

As has been shown above, election times can hold excellent opportunities for CR stations to shine and serve the community. At the same time, election periods are usually times of much political tension, and in contexts where the legislation is not very detailed clearly about the role and space of CR, a lot of pressure can be exerted on the radio stations. In this situation, as Jallov (2012) notes, politicians at central level may worry about information-sharing in languages they do not understand, in locations they do not have access to, and local politicians can be tempted to exert a lot of pressure on CR stations to influence, if not to dominate, the messages passed. However, as *Royals FM* showed, and as many CR stations in Ghana would have known through experiences, it is absolutely crucial during election periods to maintain an open, unbiased approach, where all voices and attitudes of the community have a legitimate space. As the community's own voice and meeting point, facilitating the development debate among all of the communities within the overall community, the radio station depends on the full confidence of all.

In the 2012 elections, the CR stations stepped up their role in political education in a more radical way. With support from an NGO, Strengthening Transparency, Accountability and

Responsiveness in Ghana, known as STAR-GHANA, the Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN) mobilized its members under a project dubbed 'Community Participation in 2012 Elections.' The main goal of the project was for "stations to broadcast programmes for wider dialogue and consensus among their listening communities for a development-driven Election 2012" (Ghana Community Radio Network, 2012, p. 1). A manifesto dubbed 'People's Manifesto' was derived from participatory community research by the 12 CR stations to guide the programmes. An excerpt of the Manifesto states:

For those seeking our vote in Election 2012, therefore, our People's Manifesto also asks a big, fundamental question: WHO WILL MAKE DECENTRALIZATION WORK FOR US, FINALLY? Who can explain, soberly and lucidly, in the respective local languages that our communities speak and understand, why Decentralization has not delivered to date? Who will own up to their part in not making Decentralization work? Who will, concretely, facilitate vigorous, meaningful Community Participation? Who will, concretely, give voice to and empower Women? Youths? PWDs? Who will take affirmative action for genuine Community Radio? WHO WILL OFFER CONCRETE, REALISTIC, CREDIBLE STEPS TO MAKE DECENTRALIZATION WORK? (Ghana Community Radio Network 2012, p. 1)

The main activities of the Community Participation in the 2012 Elections Project could be summed up as follows:

1. Broadcast of a series of locally produced programmes following guidelines from the GCRN which sought to develop consciousness of local communities to critically examine the campaign manifestos of the various parties seeking their mandate in the 2012 elections.
2. To empower communities to challenge and commit parliamentary candidates to community-driven development agendas once they received their mandates.
3. Providing live election coverage through deploying their radio staff and volunteers at polling stations.

Overall, it can be asserted that the involvement of CR has contributed significantly to the enhancement of election outcomes in Ghana aΩnd to the image of the country as a beacon of democracy in the African continent.

Education of the Public regarding Better Cultural Practices

African societies are beginning to interrogate some elements of their cultural heritage, which have been considered outdated and inimical to their socio-economic advancements. Ghana is not an exception in this process of cultural re-evaluation. Obnoxious cultural practices, which have engaged public attention, include female genital mutilation, widowhood rites and ostentations spending on funerals. Leaders from most religious and political divides, civil society organizations, NGOs and the media have stressed the need for the total abolition or review of these practices to allow development to take place.

CR stations, in line with their social change mandates, have added creditable voices to the process of cultural reevaluation by the communities. In this regard, episodes of positive change have occurred across communities where CR stations have championed causes to

change specific cultural norms and practices. A case in point involves the CR station in the Dormaa District of the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana. The *Dormaa F.M.*, following a report by the District Director of Education on a steady fall in the standards of education in the area, generated community debate around the issue of education. The debates established that a major cause of the state of affairs was the lack of parental care for children. This, in turn, was caused by too much time and money being spent on funerals. In response to the radio campaign, the Dormaa Traditional Council intervened by ordering that all funerals should be held on the last week of the month against the weekly celebrations in the traditional area. In addition, the extravagant manifestations in funerals like serving of alcoholic drinks and wearing of expensive clothes were banned. The overall effect is saving of time and money that used to be spent on funerals.

Another example of an induced social change through CR in Ghana is on female children education in the Upper West Region. Alumuku (2007) notes that for cultural reasons female children did not have equal access to formal education as their male counterparts in the past. *Radio Progress*, in line with its core objective to promote holistic and integral human development, initiated a programme to educate the community on the importance of educating female children. The report concludes that as a result of the radio's constant appeals on the issue, female children education in the area has witnessed a significant boost.

Challenges of Operating Truly Community-Based Radio

The CR movement in Ghana has been able to make some remarkable progress, but there are some challenges confronting its operation. One of the major challenges is how to enlist the effective participation of their core listening communities in their operations and to create a sense of community ownership. According to the World Association of Community Radios (AMARC), a community radio's main communication strategy is participation. This type of participation is not limited to sending messages to the public; it is an agent for social change, cultural development and democratisation (Price-Davies &Tacchi, 2001). This implies for every community broadcaster a democratic dimensionand popular participation in the management of the station and in the production of programs. There are some general principles or characteristics which several experts agree are fundamental to the operation of good and successful community radio (Fraiser & Estrada, 2001). These include community ownership and democratic management of radio stations.

As compared to the actual situation on the ground in implementing the principles outlined above, the biggest challenge demonstrated by the study is how to effectively put into practice the involvement of community members in the management of the station and the creation of a sense of community ownership. In terms of grasping the real concept of CR, there is a wide gap in understanding between the management of CR and community members in whose interest the stations are established. If CR is set up for a particular community, it means that the radio station is one that is owned by the people it serves. This principle implies in fundamental terms that the communities whose members, motivated by community consciousness and willingness to pool resources, agree that they want their own radio station in order to advance their community should initiate the radio. In this case, "the facilities of a community radio are almost invariably owned by the community through a trust, foundation, coopera-

tive, or some similar vehicle" (Fraser & Estrada, 2001, p. 17). When a community radio comes into existence through this process, there is a genuine sense of community ownership which would, in turn, influence most aspects of the operations of the station.

Often, however, community radio stations are established in a way that prevents them from being truly owned by community members. Such stations tend to be too closely associated with individuals who can be the founders. These 'proprietors' feel at liberty to do what they like with the radio and are often not prepared to involve other key players in the community in the project. Worst of all, "depending on how the process is handled, the result is sometimes one of bitterness and sadness from people who want to be part and parcel of the radio but feel excluded" (AMECEA-IMBISA, 1999). In this context, democracy involves first and foremost the "transparent exercise of power within a structure that guarantees the broadest possible form of public accountability" (Fairchild, 2001, p. 93). This implies that at the minimum level, the community should elect the board of management of community radio periodically and that there should not be monopoly over the positions or portfolios. This is another principle which is proving to be an ideal as it is difficult to be implemented in practice by CR in Ghana. In almost all the stations that have been studied, there has not been any change in the Board of Directors and most community members do not even know the members of the boards who have been hand-picked by the founders of CR.

Whereas the management of CR are quick in noting that first and foremost giving voice to the voiceless is the raison d'être of their operations, a deep analysis of the processes, which are essential to carrying out that objective, seems muddied in the political economy of running CR. More than ninety percent of the interviewees understood democratic management and ownership of CR as the capacity of the radio station to give them information on issues relating to agriculture, education, health, culture, and politics and serving as a channel for them to make important social and public announcements. Some community members who clearly understand the concept of CR have expressed misgivings about its ownership and management.

The point worth noting is that when community ownership is questionable it can affect other aspects of the operation of community radio, especially democratic operation and community participatory processes which are fundamental to the viability and sustainability of CR. In a community in which people fully understand the concept of CR, it is not difficult to find volunteers who would like to offer their skills and talents to the radio station. This implies that creating the necessary environment for people to understand the philosophy and functions of CR and their participation in its operation can facilitate relevant dimensions of CR such as the role of dedicated, energetic, talented and volunteer producers of integrity in ensuring good programming. Though the volunteer producers interviewed indicated that they came to work at the stations because they loved their communities and wanted to serve them, when deeper level questions were raised about how they could reconcile their disappointments with the low allowances given them and their spirit of voluntarism they seemed to be at a loss as to what to say.

However, what emerged as a possible way of addressing the challenge of how to engage, maintain and motivate a corps of volunteer producers as well as how to enhance volunteer staff's understanding of the principle of employment in CR was that the management of CR should have a policy to regularly offer in-service training programmes and other external

training opportunities for them to upgrade their skills and knowledge in CR broadcasting. Heavy reliance on non-professional staff can compromise quality. It was observed that funding was a challenge to CR. Since the majority of listeners of CR in Ghana are the poor illiterate segment of the population, they find it difficult to contribute money to support the running of the station, even if they were to fully understand that such financial support was expected of them as owners of the CR. Despite their poverty, these communities are nevertheless often willing to volunteer labour when called upon.

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CHAPTER 60

Communicative Sovereignty in Latin America: The Case of Radio Mundo Real

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Abstract [1]

Communicative sovereignty is emerging as an anchoring concept for community and alternative media in Latin America. The usage of the term is often unclear, however, especially as it relates to the current historical juncture. This article therefore presents a detailed analysis of the work of RadioMundoReal.fm (RMR), a regional alternative news production and distribution service that supplies content to local community media outlets. Findings show that RMR makes national struggles and regional events more visible, but users feel it should support the construction of alternative ways of living and communicating. This suggests that the concept of communicative sovereignty, as it is evolving in Latin America, reflects shifting approaches to both expressions of authority and alternative media work. The challenge is to develop media strategies that support emerging goals.

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Keywords

Communicative sovereignty, constituent power, regionalisation, Latin America, UNASUR, ALBA

Introduction

Sovereignty has emerged as a significant concept for social movement actors in Latin America over recent years, especially as the region has confronted the global power shifts and geopolitical upheaval of the past decade. Popular movements are seeking energy sovereignty, (Perreault and Valdivia, 2010), for example, while food sovereignty has become a central concept for campesino movements (Wittman, 2011). The idea of communicative sovereignty also circulates in alternative and community media discourses in Latin America; however, very little scholarly work has addressed the concept, and its meaning or intention is often unclear in the declarations of social movement actors. This creates an opportunity to investigate the historically and contextually specific meaning of communicative sovereignty in contemporary Latin America; we can come to know communicative sovereignty as an artefact of contemporary efforts to reshape community in the region.

To this end, this study presents a case study of www.RadioMundoReal.fm (Radio Real World, or RMR). RMR is an alternative news production and distribution service located in Montevideo, Uruguay. It was established in 2003 by Friends of the Earth International (FoEI) to support social movement protests against the World Trade Organization's Fifth Ministerial Conference, which was held in Cancun, Mexico. RMR's beginnings were propitious: not only was the Ministerial considered a failure because of its inability to address developing country demands, but it also offered a taste of the then emerging policies of Latin America's wave of left-leaning 'Pink Tide' governments. Today, RMR produces and distributes content to alternative media outlets, primarily in Latin America, and also translates its coverage into multiple languages with the aim of achieving broader circulation. Working with a regional network of FoEI offices, as well as a broad range of regional social movements, the RMR team produces stories about local issues as well as special coverage of regional events. It then makes those stories available on its website in a variety of formats (print, video, audio) for free and open use by local media outlets. In addition, it offers capacity-building and mentorship guidance to journalists, alternative media producers and local media outlets.

RMR's international connections, regional character and grassroots activism make it an interesting case for a study about communicative sovereignty. Data from RMR's website was analysed using Google Analytics in order to identify the 50 stories with the most unique visits during 2013, and a specialised approach was developed to study the circulation of these stories in the region. In addition, NVivo was used to analyse the content of the stories. The results of this work were analysed against the experiences and desires of RMR's main collaborators and users. This analysis provides answers to a central question: How is RMR contributing to or constitutive of communicative sovereignty? Answers to this question reveal how media activists and practitioners are thinking about and enacting communicative sovereignty in Latin America at this time, as well as the kinds of work that could be done to bring alternative communications activities more in line with the vision of those who desire greater communicative sovereignty in the region.

Defining communicative sovereignty

Communicative sovereignty is a not a new concept, but it has taken on special meaning in relation to contemporary political efforts to reshape Latin America. This section discusses three clusters of ideas that illuminate the meaning of communicative sovereignty in the region today. The first deals with the relationship between communicational or cultural autonomy and the expression of meaningful democracy within nation states. The second considers the relationship between communications activities and struggles over the locus of authority in Latin America. There has been a gradual increase in popular sovereignty in the region; however, it runs up against the geopolitically sensitive resource-exploitation strategies of national executive powers and regional political bodies. Finally, the third addresses radical counter-hegemonic projects that search for alternatives beyond the sovereign state system and its particular epistemological heritage.

The idea of communicative sovereignty was given new life in contemporary Latin America with the rise of twenty-first-century socialism and the election of the Pink Tide governments. When Chávez came to power in Venezuela in 1999, he adopted the theses of Heinz Dieterich, who emphasised popular democracy as a foundation for a socialist economic transition. Setting this new model in motion required autonomy from external economic influences. For example, Chávez (2012) needed to take on the entrenched power of transnational capital and its domestic oligarchic partners in key sectors, such as hydrocarbon production. In order to do this, Chávez needed to limit the power of Venezuela's media conglomerates, which he did by reforming national media laws in 2000 and 2004 (Castillo, 2003).

Throughout the region, these types of processes are discussed in terms of sovereignty—hydrocarbon sovereignty, food sovereignty, communicative sovereignty and so on—to denote the search for autonomy from external constraints on decision-making about 'the national patrimony'. With this in mind, communications projects that increase domestic autonomy and capacity are also portrayed as bids for communicative sovereignty. Examples include the launch of communications satellites by Venezuela, Bolivia [2] and Argentina [3] in recent years, and projects that aim to fortify endogenous development, such as efforts to repatriate scientific capacity (Pigna, 2014) or build domestic media capacity.

These changes can be read as the fulfilment of the New World Information and Communication Order's argument that cultural and communicative sovereignty is a necessary prerequisite for meaningful democracy (Hackett and Carroll, 2006: 95). Indeed, the vision of communicative sovereignty associated with twenty-first-century socialism is closely tied to domestic media reforms that are meant to improve the quality of democracy. In Venezuela, new legal frameworks and financial supports allowed for new expressions of community media (Migliorelli and McNulty, 2009). This new approach influenced media reforms across Latin America, which shifted authority away from market players and towards popular sectors by reallocating media spectrum among a wider range of media producers (Hall, 2012).

Communicative sovereignty as democracy can take on different meanings. For example, it is sometimes presented in terms of basic communications rights:

[2] Available at: http://abpnoticias.org/index.php/bolivia/368-bolivia-hacia-la-soberania- comunicacional-lanzamiento-del-satelite-tupac-katari.

[3] Available at: http://posdataweb.com.ar/arsat-2-un-paso-mas-hacia-la-soberania- comunicacional.

> The COMMUNICATIVE SOVEREIGNTY of the 21stC guarantees: 1) the right of everyone who lives in Venezuela to be informed in a timely, sufficient and truthful manner, 2) the establishment of legal barriers against the unilateral management of information by managers of technologies or media, 3) the opportunity for the majority to freely express themselves by way of diverse and novel communications and social media, and 4) the right to administer social media. (Marin, 2007 (trans.); see also Fernandez, 2015).

But other formulations go further, echoing Habermas's ideas about the foundations of political community. Marback (2012: 12) captures Habermasian communicative sovereignty in this passage: 'through uses of rhetoric—through expressing the desire for inclusion and exercising communicative sovereignty—democratic citizens come to share the burden and risk of belonging'. We see this type of thinking in the following statement by Cynthia Ottaviano, Argentina's Public Defender of Audiovisual Communications Services:

> a society that doesn't have the human right to communication does not live in a true democracy. We live in a mediatized society where we need information to make decisions, and if this information is biased or responds to the interests of a privileged few, evidently, we have a manipulated reality rather than a mediated one. And this has very serious consequences for any society. There is no viable country if it does not have communicative sovereignty. (in Abelleira, 2015 (trans.); see also Villafañe in Sierra, 2010)

These democratic process conceptions of communicative sovereignty open the door, in turn, to discussions about the cultural foundations of national identity and nationalism—that is, 'a common culture based in a standardised language and cultural institutions in making a common people' (Schlesinger, 2001: 29). For example, in discussing representations of Argentina on television during periods of both dictatorship and democracy, television writer Ana Montes (in El Tiempo Argentino, 2015 (trans.)) argues that 'we need to construct a communicative sovereignty in order to recuperate the screen'. She states that this is a 'defense of our rights and our identity'.

But this, of course, is a complicated proposition. As Kronert and Hepp (2011: 102) point out, for some actors (in this case, religious groups), engaging the media can come at the expense of their own communicative sovereignty. Also, the 'always on' media, and the breakdown of the division between the public and private spheres, destabilise our experience of communicative sovereignty at the individual level (Laermans, 2010).

Ultimately, discussions about the domestic foundations of communicative sovereignty culminate in the problem of organising media in ways that contribute to the creation of meaningful community, which raises the question of how authority is rendered in the constitution of a sovereign body. This is not an easy question to resolve. Critics of populism often accuse left-leaning regimes of pursuing sovereignty in the media at the cost of constituent voice-power (see, for example, Moyo, 2004: 27)—an accusation that has certainly been levelled at the Chávez regime (Human Rights Watch, 2013; Munoz 2014), among others in the region (Peruzzotti, 2013; Weyland, 2013). Agamban scholars, meanwhile, worry that—whether through populism or liberalism—the public opinions expressed in the public sphere are 'banal, empty and impotent', and as a result the public sphere functions to mask the pre-constituted nature of power (Zartaloudis, 2010: 123). This creates the conditions necessary for the exceptionality of state power—for states to put themselves beyond and outside of the law, and to use the law to deprive individuals of their citizenship even as they continue to have a voice.

This problem of how constituents are incorporated into spaces of authority is fundamental for a second cluster of ideas, which has to do with ongoing struggles over the redefinition of the locus of authority in the region—particularly in South America. Of course, globalisation (resulting from structural adjustment in the case of Latin America) has created new expressions of transnationalism that challenge the authority of states. In particular, global information and communications networks, together with transnational media industries, pose a threat to communicative sovereignty (Coleman, 2015: 378). But at the same time, recent decades have seen an upsurge in popular sovereignty in Latin America, and this force has exceeded state boundaries in significant ways (Roniger and Sznajder, 2013). The growth of popular sovereignty in the region can be explained in large part because of the rise of the internet (León, Burch and Tamayo, 2005) and its contributions to activist spaces such as the World Social Forum (Patomaki and Teivainen, 2004). It is also a result of the national media reforms discussed above, which aim to support community and alternative media (Gómez García, 2013). For example, in a clause about legal and just social democracy, Chávez's June 2012 electoral platform pledged to 'strengthen communicative sovereignty by disseminating our cultural patrimony … with a view to strengthening processes of Latin American and Caribbean integration and unity', implemented through support for the communicative efforts of *nuestros pueblos* (our communities) (Chávez, 2012: clause 2.5.7.1 (trans.)).

As a result, much of contemporary Latin American political life can be read as a struggle to establish new loci of political authority that leverage or assert control over newly emerged transnational forces. Most prominently, over the past decade, Latin American states have pursued a series of regionalisation processes, including the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our Americas (ALBA), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). A significant debate has emerged over whether these processes have created new sovereignty regimes that shift the locus of authority upwards, or merely extend the reach of executive authority beyond the reach of local politics (Legler, 2013: 342). In either case, regionalisation can be read as an effort to better control capitalist insertion in a post-neoliberal or post-hegemonic era, but at stake in this debate is the nature of capitalist insertion, as well as the ability of constituents to hold their leaders accountable in the design and implementation of economic policy. This is important, given the region's shift towards extraction-led growth, which has significant environmental and social impacts.

In this context, communicative sovereignty refers to regional infrastructure and media projects that reduce reliance on transnational data cables (Coca, 2014; Equipo Editorial APC, 2012; Zibechi, 2012) or transnational cultural influences (Burch, 2007). The relationship of this new regional communicative sovereignty with popular sovereignty is especially unclear. Regional communications infrastructure projects, such as the regional fibre optic ring being pursued by the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), can help to lower data pricing, which could support communicative activities that help citizens hold executives to account. However, the benefits of these projects have not yet arrived, and meanwhile there is the very real possibility that communications infrastructure will support further integration into global production circuits, against the immediate interests of significant groups of citizens (Reilly, 2015). Meanwhile, regional media initiatives such as ALBA's Telesur network aim to generate regional cultural integration and sovereignty. Venezuela and/or ALBA also provide

funding for regional community media organisations, including RMR, and regional civil society summits, at which RMR is a frequent participant. These groups have moved away from the dispersed and carnivalesque communications strategies of the World Social Forums, and towards a more coordinated and targeted approach, which was formally negotiated at the Cumbre de los Pueblos (Community Summit) in Santiago de Chile in January 2013 (Cirio, 2013) and further coordinated at the Forum on Communication for the Integration of Our America, organised by the Agencia Latinoamericana de Información (Latin American Information Agency, or ALAI) and the Asociación Latinoamericana de Educación Radiofónica (Latin American Association for Radio Education, or ALER) in Quito in November 2013. The objective of these initiatives is to coordinate regional mediation of popular sovereignty so that local voices can be transmitted to regional political bodies. This work is coordinated through a web portal located at http://www.integracion-lac.info.

Many social movement groups worry about being co-opted by these processes, however, particularly where they constrain local abilities to protest projects supported by executive powers, including resource development initiatives that can result in environmental damage and community displacement. These groups recognise that national community media programs can represent an effort to repatriate popular sovereignty, while regional community media efforts can constrain spaces for political manoeuvre (Chaguaceda, Códova Jaimes and León Alvarez, 2013; Prevost, Campos and Vanden 2010; Waisbord, 2011). It is true that the authority of political community is a two-way street—officials who are more connected to constituents are also more beholden to their interests. However, the relationship between domestic interests and foreign policy is not necessarily one to one, especially if regionalism happens through the extension of executive authority beyond the remit of local politics. As a result, many citizen groups have remained wary of the potential for co-optation by state interests through newly created community media programs.

With this in mind, we arrive at a third cluster of ideas. Some groups look upon the nation-state strategically as just one of many possible tools in a larger battle against the power of transnational production regimes. As McMichael (2008: 28) explains, the bigger goal is to gain 'control over the means of reproduction and representation in an integrated world'. This vision of 'multiple sovereignties' recognises that while people around the world experience power and transnational production regimes in similar ways, their responses will necessarily be localised. Communicative sovereignty in this case implies respect for cognitive justice and epistemological diversity (Santos, 2007). Hernandez and Garabito (2012: n.p. (trans.)) argue, for example, that 'community media should continually reconstruct and reformulate identities given the contradictions and antagonisms of collective representations … Local actors will be, in this way, those who conduct their own future, which will be, to be sure, different and in many cases, contradictory.' This approach is particularly popular within transnational networks of localised civil society or social movement organisations, in particular indigenous communities in Latin America, which have a contentious relationship with the hegemonic European concept of sovereignty, and which, coincidentally, often find themselves in the path of environmentally destructive development projects.

Multiple sovereignties radically challenge unitary or meshed forms of legal community. For McMichael (2008: 29), multiple sovereignties are cosmopolitan in nature, in that they work to localise universal human rights frameworks—a practice to which he refers as 'engaged

universals'. As he explains, 'contemporary networks of sovereignty movements represent a tactical intervention on the path toward global citizenship, marking the deepening of trans-boundary issues' (2008: 29). Some might argue that his approach shuts down the potential for fundamental alternatives to currently existing practices. Whether or not one agrees with his position will depend on the boundaries placed on the expression of cognitive justice. Thus, for Gies (2014: 106), communicative sovereignty is the more radical project of imagining meaningful alternatives to state-centricity and territoriality, and new ways of organising social, political and economic relations. Similarly, the Argentinean blog Soberanía Comunicacional talks about the concept in this way:

> The deepening of the Regional Political process is intimately related to the capacity to reconstruct the common sentiment, to dispute the meaning of words. The battle for Communicative Sovereignty … is the battle for hegemony, *for the re-signification* of history, for the present and the future that we envision. (2012 (trans.), emphasis added)

In all, the term 'communicative sovereignty' captures a moment of change in Latin America, but the goal of its work is not always clear. Detailed examination of one regional alternative media producer and distributor, RMR, offers an opportunity to reflect on how these issues manifest in the work of alternative media actors in the region.

Method

Analysis of RMR's activities was carried out in consultation with the organisation using a mixed methods approach. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out in Spring 2014. A list of known collaborators was provided by RMR, and additional interviewees were identified from Google Analytics data (see below). These individuals were approached via email, resulting in a reply rate of approximately one in three. The resulting 12 interviews were carried out via Skype. Interviewees were broadly representative of both the region and a variety of large and small organisations, including regional networks, nodes within networks and local community radio stations.

Privacy was not promised as part of the informed consent process for these interviews, given that interviewees were public figures and the subject of the interview was low risk. Interview responses were used to develop frameworks for the evaluation of RMR's activities to ensure that the research responded to the categories and concerns of people engaged in practice—Santos (2011) refers to this as 'rearguard theorizing'. The results of this analysis were published as a Spanish-language report, which was circulated to interviewees for verification and comment (Reilly and Febres Cordero, 2015). This report was also published prominently on the RMR website, and discussed during one of its radio programs.

RMR facilitated analysis of its communications activities by providing access to the Google Analytics dashboard of its website. This made it possible to identify the 50 stories produced or distributed by RMR in 2013 that received the most unique website visits. The content of these stories was analysed using NVivo, and this analysis was complemented, deepened and verified through the use of manual techniques including visual analysis, word searches and web searches. In particular, findings about the alternative content produced by RMR were

compared with mainstream content produced by the top five mainstream newspapers in Latin America with regional distribution.[4]

In addition, a special approach was developed to study the circulation of the 50 most visited stories from 2013. RMR does not track users or usage by asking its audience to open an account before downloading material, since this would introduce barriers to use. Meanwhile, asking often-clandestine or resource-strapped community radio stations whether they have broadcast or reprinted RMR's open content would be arduous, and the accuracy of this kind of survey would be difficult to guarantee. This made it impossible to know the extent to which audio content was being downloaded from RMR's site, and who was doing the downloading.

However, since RMR publishes print versions of its audio material, and audio content can be downloaded from the page on which its text version is posted, the number of hits on a print version of a story offers an approximation of audio uptake. With this in mind, we tracked the circulation of print stories using commercial plagiarism software; this software is normally used by bloggers to track reprints of their work, and by content buyers to ensure the originality of their purchases. In this case, Copyscape (http://www.copyscape.com) was used—not to track plagiarism, since RMR's contents are openly published, but rather to discover who was publishing content similar to that being produced by RMR, as well as the degree of similarity in their content, and also the degree of circulation of popular stories. While far from perfect, this approach offered an approximation of RMR's linkages and influence. This analysis was done in January 2014.[5]

Evaluating Radiomundoreal.fm's activities

RMR has three main lines of work. First and foremost, it produces and distributes audiovisual and written articles, reports, interviews, testimonials and chronicles through its web platform, http://www.radiomundoreal.fm. The works, written from an alternative point of view, address issues related to water, neoliberalism, forests and biodiversity, human rights, gender, extractive industries, climate and energy justice, and food sovereignty. RMR also produces special coverage of regional congresses, summits, marches and events that are of broad interest to social movement audiences in Latin America and beyond. Its materials are translated into English, Spanish and Portuguese, and they are made available in both audio and print format. Through these activities, RMR aspires to generate connections between different constituencies within the region, including local communities, social movement actors, users of different types of media and speakers of different languages.

RMR also considers it important to develop the capacity of the local media producers and distributors with whom it works. It collaborates with alternative media and social movement actors locally, regionally and internationally. These include FoEI's network of country-level partners throughout Latina America, which collaborate with RMR to identify local stories and produce content, as well as other alternative media networks such as ALER, and other

[4] According to Top 100 Newspapers in Latin America (2006–13). *4International Media & Newspapers.* Available at http://www.4imn.com.

[5] Full study details, including data, are available at: http://radiomundoreal.fm/get.php?file=IMG/pdf/radio_mundo_real_reporte_final.pdf&ty pe=application/pdf

social movement networks like Via Campesina. Finally, it also offers capacity-building support to local media producers and distributors.

Interviewees recognised RMR's many contributions to social movement activities in the region. They highlighted RMR's efforts to provide coverage of regional social movement events, and to provide access to news about local struggles and abuses not covered in the mainstream press. They also highlighted the importance of this kind of work in creating linkages between social movements by making local groups and movements aware of what is happening elsewhere in the region—in particular, by translating news for Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking Latin Americans. In short, users felt that the most important work of RMR was to (1) produce alternative content, (2) circulate that content at a regional level, and (3) create linkages between groups and movements. Thus interviewee opinions about RMR's current activities approximate what Western scholarship variously calls 'social movement media' (Stein, 2009), 'communication in movement' (Della Porta, 2011) or 'global media activism' (de Jong, Shaw and Stammers, 2005).

Our analysis demonstrated the extent to which RMR's work corresponded with the categories suggested by its users. RMR does indeed produce alternative media content, which can be divided into two broad categories: news items and areas of special coverage. The most popular and circulated news items of 2013 addressed megaprojects in Guatemala (with seven stories among the top 50) and the criminalisation of the Consejo de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras (COPINH) (six stories among the top 50). Both of these were recurring issues that received ongoing coverage from RMR, and neither received coverage in mainstream press with regional circulation. Discursively, these stories emphasised resistencia (resistance) and community struggle against corporations and projects. These articles also denounced injustices or human rights abuses against communities, or against the social movements fighting against abuses. Finally, they called for solidarity and participation in efforts to create change, and offered links to the organisations directly involved in the conflict.

Of the 16 items given special coverage by RMR in 2013, only six appeared in the top 50 list (see Table 1). These articles served either to promote upcoming regional events or to inform people about events as they unfolded, often through interviews with participants or reports about key speakers. Again, none of these events was covered by the mainstream press with regional circulation in Latin America, despite the fact that many of these events were of regional importance.

The issues covered by RMR circulated widely throughout the region. Again, it is important to note the inherent difficulty in studying the circulation of alternative media content. Alternative media outlets republish each other's open web-based content in an effort to increase circulation, especially when trying to spread the word about a significant issue throughout dispersed social networks. Using Copyscape, however, it was possible to see which of the top 50 articles published by RMR in 2013 were circulating the most, and also which domains were active in republishing similar content.

The results demonstrate the number of articles found on web pages or web-based blogs with similar content, and the degree of similarity in that content. So, for example, the content of a 24 May 2013 article titled 'Se estructuró la articulación de movimientos sociales hacia el ALBA' (Social movement articulation is being structured around ALBA) was 80 per cent similar to 104 other websites in January 2014. This particular article includes the Declaration that

was issued at the closing of the First Continental Assembly of Social Movements for ALBA, so it is not unexpected that other websites would share this content. On the other hand, the content of an article from 19 September 2013 titled 'Matan a integrante de Movimientos Ríos Vivos en Colombia: entrevista a una de sus compañeras' (Member of the Rios Vivos Movement in Colombia killed: Interview with one of her colleagues) was 38 per cent similar to 87 other web pages in January 2014.[6] This suggests that these stories are circulating widely in the region, but not necessarily that RMR is *causing* them to circulate, or that RMR's version of the story is in circulation. We do know from this, however, that RMR is circulating stories that are being widely written about and observed in the region, and that in this way RMR is contributing to an active discussion about these issues.

Table 1: Special Coverage by RMR in 2013

Special coverage among the top 50 articles of 2013 (no. stories)	**Special coverage not included in top 50 articles of 2013**
Community Summit in Santiago de Chile (5)	Hugo Chávez Thinking and Doing Meeting
National Peace Summit in Colombia (2)	Venezuelan Elections 2013
Founding Assembly of ALBA Movements ALBA (2)	Sixth *Via Compesina* International Conference
5th Festival of Local Seeds (2)	Southern Cone Seminar on Transgenic Crops
9th International Meeting of the World March of Women (2)	Southern Cone Seminar on Agrotoxins
Fifth Meeting of the Latin American Network Against Dams (REDLAR) (1)	Assembly of the Food Sovereignty Alliance of Latin America and the Caribbean
	National Meeting of People Affected by Dams ATI Solidarity Mission in Palestine
	Legal Seminar on Seeds
	International Seminar on Water, Sustenance and Energy

It is also possible to demonstrate that this circulation reflects both thematic and real linkages between social movements and alternative media outlets in the region. Using Copyscape, it is possible to identify domains that publish material similar to RMR, and the degree to which the material they publish is similar. RMR shares coverage with regional news production and distribution agencies such as ALAI, ALER and Púlsar News Agency, regional movements like the Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones Campesinas (CLOC), regional meeting spaces such as the Commuwnity Summit in Santiago de Chile, national-level alternative media actors such as Radio Temblor and Radio Kabudari, local social movements and alternative bloggers. In other words, RMR finds itself in certain company in the region, and there is evidence to suggest that its 'partner' organisations are making use of RMR's content in their work. Of special interest in these findings, in 2013 http://www.albatv.org included 60 domains that were 97 per cent similar to RMR content. Albatv is a platform that gathers

[6] Note that the header, footer and side-bar content of any given website will ensure that the similarity score is never 100 per cent between two different web pages.

community radio and social movement content from across the region with the objective of creating a regional community media 'channel' on the internet.

These findings are in line with what interviewees told us about the work of RMR. For example, Olmedo Carraquilla of Radio Temblor said:

> Latin America is in struggle, and communities strengthen themselves through the voices of the resistances of others. Therefore, for us, RMR is a library of information that helps us to puzzle out proposals, resistances, new forms of life.

Hugo Ramírez of ALER said:

> We have crossed paths with RMR in different spaces and we've realized collaborations… It's not just a case of sharing information, we also share a political project … This is work en minga (as a community bee) where there's no agreement saying how things will be, but we know that there is agreement in our goals, which makes RMR's information similar to ours, and vice versa.

And Carlos Vicente of BiodiversidadLA said:

> We feel that convergence in media is absolutely fundamental to articulate, join forces, for the same objective, even more so considering the limitations we face. The totality of our media is tiny compared with the dominant media, so convergence helps us to multiply our strength.

Interviewees were also asked how they defined communication in resistance, what they thought the role of alternative media platforms such as RMR should be and how RMR needed to change to accommodate the shifting global and Latin American political climate. Answers to these questions began to uncover a gap between the activities RMR was carrying out and the work that it could be doing, given the desires of its partners and users, and the changing regional context.

When asked how they defined communication in resistance, interviewees offered three different types of answers. Communication was variously characterized as (1) an instrument of resistance and visibilisation, (2) a vector for social change through the creation and practice of alternatives, or (3) an expression of communicative sovereignty. Bruno Pilón of the Movimiento de Pequeños Agricultores (MPA) of Brazil offered a particularly interesting answer, saying that communication in resistance is precisely, 'sovereignty in communication. When we speak of sovereignty we speak of the condition of communities that are autonomous from capital interference' and 'it means that we can produce what is necessary to support our own abilities, sustenance, music, culture.'

Questions about the shifting geopolitical reality of Latin America were interpreted in terms of the neo-developmentalist policies of Latin America's contemporary governments, and how spaces of regionalisation such as UNASUR serve to advance extractivism and natural resource exploitation. For example, Deo Carrizo, a representative of the Movimiento Nacional Campesino Indígena (MNCI) of Argentina and a local representative of the CLOC, said:

> There is a new geopolitical context of regionalization and it is being promoted as part of the economic agenda of the governments. We should intervene in these processes to represent the interests of communities.

Similarly, Carlos Vicente from BiodiversidadLA said:

> The theme of integration is quite complicated because while we are in agreement with integration … it is happening through government adherence to the extractivist model. While we believe that Latin America needs to be united, government's consensus about this mode of operation produces problems for processes of integration.

Taking the above two conversations together, when asked how RMR should adjust its activities to accommodate the shifting geopolitics of the region, interviewees said that RMR should do more than simply inform people about regional events or local issues; rather, it should interpret and analyse the shifting regional context to help build a critical consciousness among citizens. It should help people understand what is happening in the region, and give local actors a voice within regional spaces of decision-making. And RMR should strengthen the search for alternatives among communities.

In sum, while interviewees recognised that alternative media is advantageously mobilized as an instrument of visibilisation and resistance, in the current geopolitical context they saw a need to mobilise communications from the grassroots as a vector for the construction of alternatives, and as an expression of constituent or constitutive power. This alone is a significant finding, because it suggests that community and alternative media actors seek to create alternative spaces and expressions of power, and not the consummation of liberal politics and its public spheres at either the national or global levels.

Interviewees also offered guidance on how this work should be done. They felt that RMR could do more to help local groups contextualise their experience in the regional setting, and increase their knowledge of the initiatives and struggles of local groups in other parts of the region. They said that RMR should accompany local movements instead of reporting about their activities, and that RMR needed to develop a political project around the act of doing communications work. They also suggested that this type of work should provide a space for people to communicate and express themselves through their own eyes, their own language and their own ways of understanding the world, in ways that give rise to alternative discourses. These discourses should provide the basis for alternative ways of communicating and living. These contributions bring to mind, for example, the Andean concept of *sumak kawsay* (good living) (Balch, 2013), which orients media towards community well-being in balance with the natural environment (Contreras Baspineiro, 2014).

Overall, interviewees felt that RMR should (1) contextualise local news within the regional setting as a way of empowering local groups, (2) give local groups a voice at the regional level by being accompanied by regionalism from below, and (3) help in the construction, strengthening and circulation of alternative ways of life and alternative ways of communicating. The gaps identified by interviewees are consistent with findings from this study.

Analysis showed that RMR does indeed use communication primarily as an instrument for visibilisation and resistance, rather than as a vector for social construction or an expression of constitutive power. This is apparent in the many examples presented above. The discourses represented in RMR's news articles, plus the way in which materials circulate in the region, illustrate how RMR uses its media platform as a tool to make visible the struggles of communities in the face of forces that are impinging on their rights. This is likely a product of RMR's efforts to distinguish itself from the mainstream media in Latin America. None of the 16 topics that RMR selected for special coverage in 2013 was covered by mainstream newspapers with regional reach. Despite the fact that many of these events were large, of

regional importance, organised by significant and internationally recognised organisations, brought together people from across the region and had political import, they received no coverage from mainstream media organisations with regional distribution.

Among news articles, there were a few exceptions, such as a story about Evo Morales being retained in Europe at the request of the US government. Usually, however, issues covered by RMR appeared in the mainstream press only when the story was sensationalist (as in the case of an apparent assassination), and then only in national-distribution newspapers. In this handful of cases, the tone of the coverage was very different; mainstream papers focused on events, while RMR's coverage focused on injustices and included a call for solidarity. Also, mainstream papers discussed incidents as isolated cases within a particular country context, while RMR's coverage situated national incidents in patterns of international injustice.

The tendency to make reference to *national* and *international* contexts is strong in RMR's writing, and this also raises questions about its contributions to the construction of alternative narratives or alternative realities. NVivo was used to produce word clusters within the top 50 stories in 2013 *(Figure 1)*. The examples presented in Figure 1 are clusters of words that appear around three stories: the struggle of the Intibucá community and of activist Berta Cáceres of COPINH to stop the construction of the Agua Zarca dam over the Rio Blanco river in Honduras; stories about megaprojects in Guatemala that were produced as part of a November 2012 'Solidarity Tour' to communities affected by mining megaprojects in Central America; and the Peace Congress in Colombia. In each case we see a word related to struggle (examples include resistance, defence or front), a reference to a political or economic force (government, company or project) and a geo-location (Honduras, Colombia).

NVivo can also be used to produce a list of words used in RMR articles rank-ordered by number of uses. Interestingly, the fourth most used word in the 50 most visited articles in 2013 was 'country'. This is not even counting references to specific countries in those same stories, such as Guatemala, Honduras or Colombia. This was followed by the use of the words 'community' (9), 'national' (10) and 'international' (19). In other words, RMR continues to

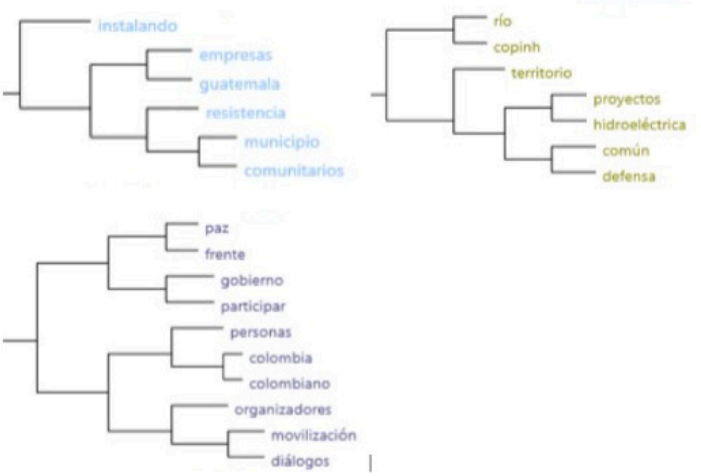


Figure 1: Word clusters in the 50 most visited RMR stories from 2013

use geo-political descriptors that reinforce a particular way of thinking about and relating to the locus of authority in Latin America, as well as its bearing on, or responsibility towards community. The word '*Latinoamérica*' ranked 41st, while 'region' ranked 57th. This would seem to suggest that in 2013, RMR's coverage was not focused on contextualising local issues in the regional setting, but rather portrayed local issues with regard to either international forces or national sovereignties.

Finally, on the subject of accompanying regionalism from below, and supporting the work of local communities to develop alternatives, it is important to recall that RMR does work directly with local groups. Indeed, Oscar Gálvez of the National Maya Convergence Waquib'Kej spoke highly of a solidarity tour during which RMR reporters visited his community:

> RMR didn't just come to document and take photos, do a pair of interviews, and that's it. Rather, they have a closer relationship to the communities. These kinds of services are huge for us because not just any media outlet makes itself available for this. It's difficult to get an international media outlet of the calibre of RMR to come to Guatemala to hear, from the community's own voice, what they are suffering and what they are recommending.

This is well-deserved praise; however, it is important to pay careful attention to the target of the accolades. Gálvez is confirming the role of RMR in making visible realities that are otherwise ignored by the mainstream media. This is different from the expressed desire of interviewees to move away from a centrally run networked news *platform* and towards a program of communicative action from below that converges in alternatives forms of expressing community.

Overall, this analysis shows that RMR makes the struggles of local communities and the activities of regional actors visible to interested actors throughout the region. It does this work in networked collaboration with other social movement and alternative media actors, and in this way helps to build awareness and strengthen connections. However, there is a call among social movement actors to leverage or transcend this kind of networked alternative media activism in ways that do not just create awareness, but also work to bring new realities into being. Inherent in these expressed desires are questions about how regional alternative media activities work with community or alternative media to enact particular kinds of regionalisms, and how they constitute expressions of authority. In reflecting on these issues, we can arrive at new thinking about the meaning of communicative sovereignty in Latin America today.

Conclusions: Locating communicative sovereignty

In her research about community radio in Ecuador, Febres-Cordero (2015) argues that the job of community media is not to give voice to the voiceless; rather, community media accompany people in the process of enacting community—something that communities are doing continuously. The question is how community media can do this work in Latin America, given both changing technologies and the shifting geopolitical context of the region. In conversation with José Miguel Jaramillo, the Ecuadoran representative to ALER, on 29 July 2014, I learned that communities and their radio stations face unique challenges from the changes currently sweeping through Latin America. Under conditions of resource-driven development and extractivist geopolitics, nation-states work to incorporate local leaders

into national and regional development agendas, a project that often leaves communities divided and disempowered, so that regional or transnational initiatives can be implemented. Jaramillo argues that community media must locate new 'hooks' to draw communities in, and new ways to accompany communities in their continual processes of enactment, so that they can *constitute* themselves as a proactive force in the management of development processes.

Realising this work requires reflection on the relationship between grassroots education (such as the Feria Pedagógica (learning fair) described by Mein, 2009), citizens' media (Rodriguez, 2010a) and transnational social movement media initiatives (Downing, 2005). With this in mind, the research suggests existing community or alternative frameworks have a lot to learn from performative perspectives. For Rodriguez (2010b), this approach is particularly important to *reclaiming* public space because it helps people to experience mediation, which in turn creates more peaceable relations between individuals who live in a conflict zone. In this, she is drawing on the self-reflective qualities of performance studies. I am more interested in the emphasis that these theories place on self-actualisation (Reilly, 2014), which I view as fundamental to resituating constituent power in communities, such that public spheres can be transformed into new expressions of authority. This, in turn, prompts us to reflect on the objectives of transnational social movement media, which, as has been shown in this article, builds connections and awareness. But how can these networks help to facilitate local knowledge production in ways that reshape local experiences of authority?

Ultimately, this is what is at stake with the vision of communicative sovereignty that circulates through alternative and community media discourses in Latin America. Local media want sufficient freedom, capacity and support to be able to insert themselves into cultural, economic and political circuits in ways that allow them to 'reproduce and represent' community proactively. It is only in this way that community can support the production of constituents that can enter productively into the work of constituting the multiple and overlapping loci of authority that make up the Latin American region. This includes the loci of authority that are mediated by regional communications platforms, including those that are produced by alternative media, such as the RMR platform. We are left with an urgent question: How can regional alternative news production and distribution platforms move from building networks, by informing a region about what is being done to a locality, to producing a region that becomes a platform?

The mediation that happens through alternative news-distribution networks needs to be conscious of how it incorporates people into regional spaces. It is clear from this study that community media understand the need to enact local community both *within* and also *through* these regional spaces. It is also clear that this means something much, much more than being subject to, included in or victimised by forces that exist on a different plain of power. It is easy to write about the sensational failure of states to protect local citizens from transnational capital-power. Much more difficult is the project of using the power of stories to help that community stay intact as it navigates the various sovereignties that determine its ecological, economic, cultural, political and familial fate. For alternative news-distribution platforms, working out how to tackle this challenge requires careful reflection on how to tell the story of local experiences with issues like mining or climate change, and also whether these stories are being mobilised in an ethical manner when they are leveraged to construct larger mediated spaces, both regionally and internationally.

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CHAPTER 61

Combatting Cultural 'Nerve Gas': Maintaining Traditional Media and Culture through Local Media Production in Australia, Canada and Mexico

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Abstract

In Australia in the 1980s, large numbers of remote Indigenous radio stations were established due to a perception that the introduction of 'mainstream' satellite programming in remote areas would act as a form of cultural 'nerve gas' (Remedio, 2012: 295) that would threaten 'the very isolation that had helped to preserve what remained of traditional language and culture' (Guster, 2010: 9). There are parallels here with the development of remote media in Mexico and Canada, where local radio networks focusing on cultural content production were established in response to impending development and imposed sources of mass media. In each

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country, broadcasters in remote communities have, in recent years, been producing increasing amounts of hyper-local cultural and language-based content. This article examines the role played by Indigenous media in remote areas of Australia, Canada and Mexico in creating an alternative cultural voice for traditional communities and maintaining language and culture.

Keywords

Aboriginal, culture, Indigenous, language, radio, remote

Introduction

The establishment and ongoing evolution of remote Indigenous radio in Australia, Mexico and Canada have followed similar paths over the past three decades. In each country, the motivation for the establishment of these radio networks has focused strongly around an attempt to preserve Indigenous languages and cultures in the face of the encroachment of mainstream media sources. In all three locations, however, initial media structures have failed to fully support and recognise local cultures and languages, with a range of financial, political and structural constraints leading to a homogeneity of content that has not adequately reflected the diversity of remote Indigenous communities. This has resulted in long periods where centralised media structures have provided remote communities with content delivered from sources outside of their local region, with little regard for their own culture and language. In recent years, though, remote Indigenous communities in each location have gained more local ownership and direct control of content, with the resulting local media networks focusing strongly on the preservation of local language and culture.

The development of remote Indigenous media in Australia, Canada and Mexico

In Australia, remote Indigenous radio was established with a clear mandate to recognise and preserve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. A large-scale remote media infrastructure was established as the result of the development of the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) in 1984. This followed publication of a report by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs recommending that basic satellite receiving and retransmission equipment be installed into 80 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2009). As Guster (2010: 9) notes, these stations were established on the basis of a perception that the introduction of 'mainstream' satellite programming in remote areas of Australia would threaten 'the very isolation that had helped to preserve what remained of traditional language and culture'. Indigenous media pioneer James Remedio (2012: 295) notes that:

> Aboriginal people were concerned and considered this type of broadcasting service to be like 'Nerve Gas' being beamed in on the community, and bringing in the worst influences of Western culture and would debase the culture people had managed to retain.

This focus on developing media that supported Indigenous voices, language and culture in Australia in the 1980s was part of a broader global concern over the growing power of

communications and its impacts on marginalised or developing communities. At the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the early 1980s, the 'defining debate concerned the New World Information and Communication Order, otherwise known as NWICO', with representatives of developing nations calling for major changes in communications media, 'labelling the existing order both "neo-colonial" and characterized by "cultural imperialism"' (Buchanan, 2014: 391). Indigenous radio in Mexico was established within a similar timeframe to its counterpart in Australia, and with similar motivations. The fear of a loss of language and culture that led to the development of remote radio in Australia was also one of the central tenets of the early developmental stage of Indigenous radio in Mexico. Early experiments in using radio as a tool to assist with Indigenous development in Mexico began in 1979, supported by the National Indigenous Institute (INI), the branch of the government in charge of Indigenous affairs. Over the next decade, INI started up other stations throughout Mexico, forming a radio network that broadcast in a range of Indigenous languages (Castells-Talens, 2004: 3).

In Canada, despite a much longer history of Indigenous radio in remote communities, a concerted effort by government to promote local ownership of stations and content by First Nations people did not begin in earnest until the 1980s (Smith and Brigham, 1992: 183), mirroring the efforts of the Australian and Mexican governments around this time to preserve cultures and languages under threat from increasingly available mainstream media. While the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) began to provide broadcasting services to remote areas through the establishment of northern stations as early as the 1950s (Hudson, 1977: 131), most of these early services provided 'no local programming and no effort was made to meet the specific needs of Natives' (Smith and Brigham, 1992: 183). In 1983, Canada's federal government announced the adoption of the Northern Broadcasting Policy, which aimed to maintain and develop Native languages and cultures by ensuring First Nations communities received relevant broadcast programming, including locally produced content (Smith and Brigham, 1992: 186). This new policy established the Northern Native Broadcast Access Program (NNBAP) to underwrite the production costs of regional radio broadcasts in Indigenous languages.

In all three countries, these initial efforts to establish a remote Indigenous media infrastructure that was able to broadcast in, preserve and celebrate Indigenous culture and languages met with limited success. Ongoing issues with a lack of training, ongoing government support, funding and maintenance of infrastructure led to low levels of actual local production of Indigenous cultural content. In the Mexican context, Rodríguez and Castells-Talens (2010: 86) point to a fundamental underlying problem in the language policies of INI, which aimed to both foster Indigenous languages and to turn Spanish into the language of common use, to the eventual detriment of Indigenous language use. In Australia, a lack of ongoing government support for remote broadcasters led to an increasing 'homogeneity' of content, with few local stations producing their own language and cultural content, and most relying on satellite content produced in English and outside their communities. In 2001, Molnar and Meadows noted that the amount of material being produced by remote Indigenous radio operators in each community varied greatly, depending on the resources that were available and the motivation of local community members to broadcast their own content (2001: 42). A 2001 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) survey revealed only

about 50 out of the 101 existing remote Indigenous stations were producing some form of local content (Meadows and Molnar, 2002: 16). Despite the diversity of local languages and cultures across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, these stations increasingly were serviced by national and regional satellite networks broadcasting predominantly in English. As Alia (2010: 56) notes, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups working in community radio across Australia represent 'an enormously heterogeneous group, servicing communities that speak more than 350 languages' (see also Meadows, 2001). The larger retransmission services producing content for these communities throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s did not 'provide adequately for cultural preservation and growth, as well as positive self-image' (Remedio, 2012: 296). This model of larger retransmission services was repeated in Canada, with lean funding for stations covering large geographic areas and multiple language groups resulting in low levels of production of localised cultural content.

In all three countries, a revitalisation of the Indigenous radio sector began in the early part of the new millennium. In Mexico, the National Indigenous Institute was reformed in 2003 as the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI), which now oversees the operation of a network of 20 local AM and four FM stations located in regions with high populations of Indigenous people. The coverage of these radio stations 'has the potential to reach half of the total Indian population, broadcasting in more than 30 languages' (Ramos Rodríguez, 2005: 157). However, the future of this government-supported network has been impacted by significant budget cuts to the CDI program, which may threaten their financial viability; these cuts have resulted in the loss of large numbers of local staff, producers and broadcasters (Locht, 2016; Mandujano, 2016). In addition to this network of government-supported stations, and unlike Australia and Canada, Mexico is also home to Indigenous radio stations that are funded through local Indigenous cooperatives or NGOs (Castells-Talens, Ramos Rodríguez and Chan Concha, 2009: 531).

In Australia, there has been a strong focus in the past decade on addressing the lack of locally developed media content in remote Indigenous radio stations. Remote Indigenous Media Organisations (RIMOs) were established by the Australian Government following a review of the Australian Government Indigenous Broadcasting Program in 2006. Eight RIMOs now provide the nation's 81 remote Indigenous stations with training and support to enable them to operate effectively in the remote communities they serve. The result, in recent years, has been a marked increase in the number of local voices on remote Indigenous radio in Australia, as well as in the amount of programming produced locally and reflecting local languages, culture and audience input. Indigenous radio is now the largest sub-sector of community broadcasting in Australia, with 109 radio stations regularly broadcasting Indigenous content (including 22 dedicated Indigenous community radio stations), as well as 81 stations operating in remote Indigenous communities (Community Broadcasting Foundation, 2015). The most recent estimate shows that stations are producing 1392 hours of Indigenous programming each week (Community Broadcasting Foundation, 2015). In Canada, a range of regional Indigenous broadcasting networks have developed new funding sources in the past decade, allowing them to explore options for extending their broadcasting footprint to more remote First Nations communities, as well as to incorporate more local input from community members with regard to producing programs in local languages and celebrating local cultural practices (Leader, 2015).

While the core infrastructure for Indigenous radio in remote communities has been in place for over 30 years in Australia, Mexico and Canada, the past decade has seen a marked increase in the production of local language and cultural content. As Indigenous communities have successfully overcome economic and political barriers and established more robust and well-staffed radio stations and networks, greater focus is now being placed on working directly with communities to develop localised programming. Traditional broadcasters in these remote communities are adapting both existing media infrastructure and new media technologies to their needs, producing increasing amounts of hyper-local cultural and language-based content. The research project discussed in this article examines the role played by these Indigenous radio stations in remote areas of Australia, Canada and Mexico in creating an alternative cultural voice for traditional communities. It examines the role of remote Indigenous media producers in maintaining language and culture through hands-on local production that involves direct community input.

Research methodology

Research designed to gain a greater insight into the impacts of local broadcasting and cultural content production in remote Indigenous communities in Australia, Canada and Mexico included a combination of participant observation and semi-structured interviews with remote broadcasters. This research focused strongly on gaining insights into the role played by these radio stations in maintaining, sharing and celebrating language and culture, as well as the ways in which stations engage with community members and encourage a participatory approach to cultural media production.

Research into remote Indigenous media is not without problems, and requires critical analysis of the research methodologies we have employed in the past to examine the roles of remote Indigenous media. Smith (2012: 180) notes that research in postcolonial settings can be problematic due to dominant Westernised assumptions behind the research focus of the translation of research into text. As Ezeh (2003: 203) notes, a researcher who visits a different cultural group with expectations informed by an extraneous normative system is likely to be disappointed. Delaney (1998: 298) flags the importance here of conducting and analysing research in a way that does not simply reduce difference to banal universals, or merely celebrate difference. Research carried out in remote communities must therefore begin with the formation of partnerships where ownership rests more clearly with communities than with research institutions and researchers. As Gorman and Toombs (2009: 6) note, 'a collaborative approach between researchers and Aboriginal communities is pivotal to developing a research project consistent with Indigenous cultural values'. This involves relinquishing some of the power and authority that has often rested with the researcher (Swadener and Mutua, 2008: 41) and recognising the role of community members as 'sources and local experts in their own right' (Tomaselli, Dyll and Francis, 2008: 269). Consultation with community and a participatory approach to research enable researchers to avoid 'boxing and labelling' Indigenous community members, and their motivations and behaviours, according to categories that do not fit (Smith, 2012: 154).

To ensure that this research project was based strongly on the knowledges and experiences of Indigenous broadcasters and community members themselves, a strong focus was placed

on use of participant observation. A number of researchers have highlighted the importance of decolonising research methodologies through developing appropriate methodologies that reflect cooperative and participatory Indigenous community practices (Braun et al., 2014; Delaney, 1998; Ezeh, 2003; Gorman and Toombs, 2009; Stanton, 2014; Swadener and Mutua, 2008) and recognising the role of community members as 'sources and local experts in their own right' (Tomaselli, Dyll and Francis, 2008). As Kawulich (2005: 2) notes, participant observation can be defined as 'the process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities'. This form of participatory research is an effective and decolonising methodology in that it aims to ensure that the voices of all community members are heard by engaging people 'in all aspects of the research process' (Clark et al., 2009: 346) and is concerned with 'placing them at the centre of knowledge production' (Richardson et al, 2013: 18).

Participant observation was used to examine the role played by local announcers in developing cultural content in partnership with community members in three remote Indigenous radio stations in Australia, four in Mexico and three in Canada. This form of observation is 'a very effective way of finding out what people do in particular contexts, the routines and interactional patterns of their everyday lives' (Darlington and Scott, 2002: 74). By observing the interactions of announcers with members of their local communities, it was possible to gain some insight into the way in which the audience/producer relationship worked in these remote communities (see also Alia, 2010). This observation method enables researchers, assisted by local Indigenous research assistants, to document and understand the context within which activities and events occur (Clark et al., 2009: 348). As Yin (2011: 122) points out, this way of observing people in a research context 'emphasises close, intimate, and active involvement', allowing the researcher to gain specific understandings of how they construct their daily working and social lives. The use of participant observation in this context allowed for a breaking down of the barriers between 'insider and outsider research' (see Smith, 2012), resulting in a fuller exploration of the role of Indigenous broadcasters without the use of methodologies that may have caused them to feel uncomfortable or disempowered.

Participant observation was then followed up by semi-structured interviews with radio workers and producers in each location. As Holstein and Gubrium (2002: 120) note, this form of interviewing is an especially useful mode of inquiry because it can result in the production of meanings that address issues relating to particular research concepts. Interviewing local announcers, who are themselves community members, about the role played by their local radio station provides 'considerable flexibility to the data collection process, both in terms of areas explored and the direction of the discussion' (Darlington and Scott, 2002: 47). Interviewees were identified based on recommendations from a local research assistant, and 'chance meeting' interviews were used wherever possible, reflecting the informal community setting of the research and the successful use of this form of interview by previous researchers in remote Indigenous settings (Meadows, 2002: 261).

All interviews were transcribed and then analysed, along with field notes from participant observation, using NVivo software based on themes and application of codes to data (Rapley, 2004: 27). NVivo allows researchers to analyse transcripts and field notes based on a thematic approach, identifying commonly occurring ideas, phrases and concepts that enable the researcher to discover patterns in data (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003: 26), resulting in

the development of theory and identification of particular themes or frames in the context of communication (Jensen, 2002: 247). Sorting of these themes allowed for an examination of the related features of these groups (Yin, 2011: 187) to gain insights into the key features of Indigenous media production in remote communities in Australia, Mexico and Canada.

Table 1 provides a summary of the interviews conducted.

Table 1: Interviews Conducted

Radio station	Location	Interviews
NPA Radio	Cape York, Australia	2
Hopevale Radio	Cape York, Australia	3
Wujal Wujal Radio	Cape York, Australia	2
Radio XHFCE, Huayacocotla	Veracruz, Mexico	6
Radio XETCZ, Cuetzalan	Puebla, Mexico	3
Radio Tosepan, Cuetzlana	Puebla, Mexico	1
Radio Tzinaca, San Miguel Tzinacapan	Puebla, Mexico	2
CFWE-FM	Alberta, Canada	5
CHON-FM	Yukon, Canada	4
CFNR-FM	British Columbia, Canada	4

The three radio stations investigated in Australia service remote communities in the Cape York region of Far North Queensland. The communities in which these stations operate are classified as 'remote' or 'very remote' by the Australian Standard Geographic Classification (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006), indicating the problematic nature of providing government and other essential services because of their extreme isolation from major metropolitan areas. They are part of a network of stations provided with administrative and training support by Queensland Remote Aboriginal Media (QRAM), an Aboriginal-controlled and government-funded organisation. Prior to 2011, these stations received a mix of Indigenous and non-Indigenous programming from a range of media networks in other parts of the country. All of these stations received substantial technical upgrades to their studio equipment in 2012 and 2013, and are part of a network known as 'Black Star', which provides them with locally produced content 24 hours a day, to which they can contribute community-specific news and information. The radio stations in Wujal Wujal and Hopevale broadcast specifically to their local communities, while NPA Radio services five communities at the very northern tip of Cape York that are geographically close, but have diverse histories and cultures, including a mix of traditional communities, communities that were moved there forcibly by the government in the second half of the twentieth century and communities with populations mainly comprising Torres Strait Islander people who have settled on the mainland.

The four Mexican radio stations investigated broadcast in the states of Pubela and Veracruz. Radio XHFCE in Huayacocotla, known as 'The Voice of the Peasants', is operated with the support of the Jesuit church. It broadcasts 12 hours a day in Náhuatl, Tepehua, Otomí and Spanish, reaching a large number of remote communities across the Sierra Norte region of Veracruz. Radio XECTZ, known as 'The Voice of the Sierra Norte', broadcasts from Cuetzalan, and is part of the Cultural and Indigenous Radio Stations System of the National

Commission for the Development of the Indigenous Peoples (CDI). It broadcasts 13 hours a day, reaching about 55 towns in the Sierra Norte region of Puebla and 18 towns in Veracruz. The station's programming consists of around 80 per cent in the Náhuatl and Totonac languages, with the rest in Spanish. Radio Tosepan is a small independent radio station also based in Cuetzalan and funded by a local Indigenous cooperative. Run by one or two volunteers, with other colleagues on the air sporadically in their spare time, the station aims to support the work of the Tosepan cooperative, and to strengthen local community values and the language. Content is broadcast in Náhuatl, reaching around 20 nearby Indigenous communities. Radio Tzinaca 104.9 FM is a new local station that began broadcasting in November 2012. It broadcasts primarily in Náhuatl with occasional segments aired in Totonac, servicing the small local community and areas surrounding San Miguel Tzinacapan, which is located 5 kilometres from Cuetzalan.

The three Canadian radio stations investigated broadcast to large numbers of remote Indigenous communities in the Yukon, Northern Alberta and Northern British Columbia. CFWE-FM began broadcasting in 1987 in the north Alberta community of Lac La Biche, and now has its main studio in Edmonton. It broadcasts to 85 remote communities, with its own news service and a format that includes 'between 25 and 30 per cent Aboriginal content' (Leader, 2014) and 16 hours of broadcasting in community languages, mainly Cree and Dene. CHON-FM is based in Whitehorse in the Yukon, and began broadcasting in 1984. It broadcasts to the traditional communities of 14 Yukon First Nations, as well as their satellite communities, and broadcasts community and public service announcements in languages including Gwich'in, Hän, Kaska, Northern Tutchone and Southern Tutchone. The station operates its own news service, producing regular bulletins and at least two to three unique local news stories a day. CFNR-FM is based in Terrace in northern British Columbia, and was established in 1985. It broadcasts through 50 transmitters that cover most of the remote First Nations communities throughout northern British Columbia. The station has its own news department, and produces specific informational programming that provides news to First Nations audiences, including a one-hour weekly documentary show focused on regional and national Indigenous issues and a regular local program that focuses on local community.

Preservation and sharing of language and culture

Indigenous radio has emerged in Australia, Mexico and Canada as a key way of preserving cultural traditions and languages. In each location, Indigenous people speaking a multitude of local languages have, until recently, only heard English, Spanish or French spoken on radio stations. In Australia, several researchers have highlighted the important role played by Indigenous radio in maintaining language and culture. Meadows and Morris (1998: 75) highlight the importance of local control over media production and the results of this local control in maintaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and language. Meadows and van Vuuren's (1998: 104) research into the role of Indigenous radio station 4AAA found a strong local feeling of connection with, or 'ownership' of, the station among listeners, with audience members expressing what was defined as a sense of the station's 'cultural accountability'. The role of Indigenous community broadcasting in maintaining languages and culture and promoting cross-cultural dialogues, as well as supporting local forms of music and

dance, has also been noted by other Australian researchers (Forde, Foxwell and Meadows, 2009; Watson, 2013).

In Latin America, as Castells-Talens, Rodríguez and Concha (2013: 525) note, radio has played a similar role in providing a medium where 'Indigenous languages that had been marginalised, if not persecuted, for centuries' are now part of the airwaves. Mexico has the largest number of Indigenous language speakers in Latin America (Castells-Talens, Rodríguez and Concha, 2013: 526) and the eighth largest Indigenous population in the world—approximately 12 million people. This represents 'more than a tenth of the total population of Mexico, which comprises nearly 60 ethnic groups each with their own distinct language and culture' (Ramos Rodríguez, 2005: 156). These language groups increasingly are serviced by specific local radio stations, with formats that focus on using and maintaining local languages and dialects.

Remote First Nations radio in Canada has also played a key role in maintaining local culture and languages. Fairchild (1998: 164) notes that the strategies for cultural survival on the part of Aboriginals living in Canada 'have increasingly included media in recent years'. The development of community radio in remote communities in Canada was—as was the case in Australia and Mexico—largely driven by the perception of a cultural threat from mainstream media sources (Minore and Hill, 1991: 112). Canadian researchers (Fraser, 1994; Valaskakis, 1988) have noted the perceived threat to Inuit languages and traditions by a satellite-driven 'invasion' of southern Canadian and American television. As a result, remote Indigenous radio in Canada was typified from its earliest stages by a heavy emphasis on native language use (Hudson, 1977: 132). Minore and Hill (1991: 111) note that through the development of an Indigenous broadcasting network in Canada, First Nations people were given control of 'weapons with which to fight the erosion of their languages and culture'.

In Australia, Mexico and Canada, use of Indigenous languages by local radio announcers has been essential in creating content relevant to local audiences. All three countries have a multitude of Indigenous languages, and it is only through local Indigenous radio that specific local and regional languages are heard on the airwaves. This style of hyper-local broadcasting recognises the importance of local languages for people who may understand limited amounts of English, Spanish or French, and for whom specific issues and cultural concepts can only be expressed in Indigenous languages. An announcer at Radio Huayacocotla in Mexico summarised the importance of using local language in broadcasting to the station's remote radio audiences:

> In Náhuatl, there are some ideas you can't translate it to Spanish. Even though there's a word in Spanish with similar meaning, the essence of the idea is different. The fact that the radio speaks our languages, it makes the radio station closer to us, closer to the audience.

Australia has some strong parallels with this observation, as pointed out by an announcer from the Northern Peninsula Area of Australia:

> That's where local language becomes important—you can relate to it because you speak the language. It won't work if you have an outside broadcaster telling the people—unless they have that country's peoples' sayings or are giving out the information in the language form.

In all three countries, there is also a strong understanding among radio workers that they are working to preserve languages that may otherwise be lost, especially in the younger generations. An interviewee in Edmonton, Canada noted that many of the First Nations languages

in northern Alberta are close to being lost. There are close parallels here with the observation by an announcer in San Miguel Tzinacapan in Mexico that:

> We're living in a world where cultures and traditions are being lost and we want to rescue part of them: the language and the way of thinking of each and every native, because it's something completely different to that of people in the city.

The goal of protecting language and culture through broadcasting has been central to the formation of many of the stations that are part of this research project. An announcer in Terrace, Canada noted that:

> We started off to protect our culture, our heritage, our language. Communities have their own language, and through radio they can talk in their own language, tell stories, and honour the chiefs, or even recognize a chief that has passed on.

This concept of using radio as a medium for promoting the importance of culture and language was reinforced by an announcer at Radio XECTZ in Cuetzalan, Mexico:

> While transmitting, people really like to hear about words that are no longer used. Due to the new media, young people have strongly grown apart from our roots. Everything the market offers, the products they sell, and TV, for example, teach us to forget what is ours and to lean towards something that doesn't belong to us, that doesn't have anything to do with our culture. So what people like is that we always speak in Nahuatl and, above all, they like it to be as pure as possible. What for? Well, for the younger ones that listen to us to learn, to value again what the language is.

In all three countries, local languages are included throughout the daily broadcasts and regular on-air programming. In Canada, language broadcasting includes a wide variety of languages and dialects, with an announcer in Terrace noting that, broadcasting in northern British Columbia, Terrace covers a footprint that includes 'about 23 different dialects'. An announcer in Whitehorse observed that 'language is usually woven through the day, through broadcasting, public service announcement, language lessons, cultural lessons'. In the Yukon, broadcasting in languages reaches First Nations audiences living in very isolated parts of the country:

> They would be listening to it in their communities, they would be listening to it on the trap lines. And they would be able to hear about our culture and hear our language. This radio station has become a part of who we are.

In Australia, Mexico and Canada, radio stations are playing a key role in promoting, sharing and often organising cultural events. Announcers at NPA Radio in Australia actively promote key cultural events such as tombstone openings,[1] weddings and NAIDOC[2] events. They also regularly feature interviews with representatives of the cultural centres, as well as playing local music, promoting local bands, and recording and broadcasting traditional 'choral' or 'chorus' music. In Hopevale and Wujal Wujal in Australia, announcers play a similar role in promoting local culture and cultural events, and are active in recording local cultural content such as traditional music and the stories of community members.

[1] Tombstone openings are ceremonies held by people of Torres Strait Islander heritage to unveil the headstone of a dead relative (usually three years after the person passed away).

[2] NAIDOC Week celebrations are held across Australia each July to celebrate the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In Canada, radio stations produce a range of programs that focus strongly on celebrating First Nations culture and community life. The station in Edmonton, for example, produces a program throughout northern Alberta called *One People, Many Lives*, which focuses on 'Aboriginal people doing things that change their community or their family—things that kind of broaden their horizons and bring focus to our culture'. They also produce a program called *Footprints*, focusing on the legacy left by Aboriginal people who have passed on, and another called *Heartbeat of Nations*, which 'focuses on traditional pow-wow round-dance music, kind of keeping our Aboriginal traditional music alive'.

In the Mexican Indigenous radio stations investigated, there is perhaps even stronger evidence of the important role played by remote radio workers in promoting and broadcasting cultural events. An announcer from Radio Tzinaca noted that the station broadcasts a range of programs where local people talk about the history of the community and how it developed, as well as an oral tradition workshop hosted by community elders. An announcer in Cuetzalan noted that:

> People like a lot to speak about customs, so that they don't die out: preparing an altar for the Day of the Dead, how it is celebrated, what is done on November the 1stt and the 2nd and why is it done … When the radio appeared, all of that started to sprout again, including all of the music that was already dying out.

Common to the Mexican stations that are part of this research project is the role announcers play in embedding themselves in all aspects of organisation and recording of cultural events. The radio station in Huayacocotla, for example, is intimately involved in the planning of key community festivals, and provides economic and organisational support to local communities to ensure the success of these important cultural events. Observing the role of station workers in the 2013 Santa Cecilia festivities in the remote towns of the Sierra Norte region, it was possible to see that they were regarded as both key organisers of the event and also as community members. Announcers played key roles in recording and broadcasting the event, including hosting musical performances associated with the festival, yet at the same time they interacted with community members and joined in the celebrations themselves. This embedded involvement of community broadcasters was outlined by an announcer in Huayacocotla:

> We go to a meeting previous to the festivity. The radio organises part of it and … for example, the invitation from the authorities, the invitation from the women, we broadcast it days, even weeks before for the celebrations for example. And it also participates in organising it with logistics for that day. Two or three days before the festival, I gather with the women to ask them what else they need, what help they need. Probably not economic help, but to promote, from the radio station, that a patronage festival will be held and that it is important that people join it as well.

Observation of announcers in remote areas of both Australia, Mexico and Canada revealed a style of broadcasting that reflects local cultural norms, language use and shared community understandings. The key to this is the local cultural understanding that announcers bring to their roles as broadcasters and producers, which is evident in the way they present information to their community when on air. This important role of local producers as a culturally embedded part of their community was summarised by an announcer in Hopevale, Australia:

> This is a unique community. Our issues here are very different from those in other communities, just because of our history, our location—everything. So I think having someone who understands

> local community issues, and can pass on the information we need, is really important. And it allows community members to feel valued—like when the kids get to hear their own voices, or they make their own music and their families and friends and the whole community can hear that.

This role of announcers as local conduits for community cultural content was reinforced by an announcer at Cuetzalan in Mexico, who believes that 'radio can strengthen the language, the identity, because all of our vision, our relationship with the moon, the sun, the sown land, our way of seeing life, death, birth, the way we work the fields, it's all in our language'.

The cultural understanding that local Indigenous announcers bring to their roles also includes the use of local slang, storytelling, gossip and humour, as noted by this announcer in Edmonton, Canada:

> Our audience likes the laughter. One of the things about Aboriginal people is the humour, so they capture that. There's a lot of laughing if you listen to our morning show with Wally and Angela. There's a lot of laughing, a lot of humour, and sometimes its Indian humour, which only Indian people understand, and they'll laugh at it.

Conclusion

To some degree, remote Indigenous radio stations in Australia, Canada and Mexico adhere to what are 'almost universally understood practices' (Browne, 1998: 7) in producing and broadcasting on-air content, especially with the production of news and information where styles of announcing are similar to many other sectors of community broadcasting. But in delivering cultural content to their local audiences, all the stations involved in this research project use a style of announcing that closely reflects local cultural norms. In all three countries, local announcers producing cultural content often speak in a non-formal and relaxed manner, with long pauses, and typically use a mix of local languages and dialects. Often these are languages that have not been heard on local radio before—indeed, they are examples of 'languages that had once stayed in the family and in private environments' and that have 'now become present in the public sphere' (Rodriguez, 2001: 3). By providing local community members with access to the airwaves, remote radio stations are 'taking away the timidity of a shy language and opening the microphones to the people who speak it' (Castells-Talens, Rodríguez and Concha, 2009: 525).

Broadcasters in each country are highly aware of the important role they are playing in producing language and cultural content that meets community needs and responds to community understandings and priorities. The style of content production in these communities is what Guster (2010: 14) refers to when she speaks of 'program formats that meet the needs of their Indigenous audiences'. Broadcasting in these communities is typified by the ways in which the announcers value local cultures and organic processes (Paranjape, 2007: 468). Through this understanding of local culture and language, they are able to fulfil an important role in maintaining social and cultural networks (Forde, Foxwell and Meadows, 2009: 157). As Australian Indigenous broadcaster James Remedio noted in an interview with the Productivity Commission in 1999, 'the Indigenous broadcasting sector has an essential role to play in maintenance of Indigenous language and culture. It has an essential role to play in providing information, entertainment, to these remote communities.'

This research project shows that the provision of local cultural and language-based content is resulting in a sense of identity and empowerment among Indigenous communities and their members. In remote communities in Mexico, Canada and Australia, empowerment is in a very real sense both a process and an outcome (Singleton et al., 2009: 405). Through providing local audiences with content that reflects and celebrates their specific cultural practices, community members involved in these stations are gaining control over their lives through active participation in the life of their community (Bergsma, 2004: 154). Simply by opening the airwaves to active local participation in cultural content from community members, these radio stations are contributing to what Tabing (2006: 151) describes as 'democratic communication and empowerment in a real sense'.

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PART 10

Networks and Social Media

CHAPTER 62

Activist Networks

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This chapter explores:

1. The concepts of network and activist network as well as global and local levels of activist networks.
2. The external approach to the study of activist networks, in which textual analysis leads to an understanding of the interconnections between nodes.
3. The internal approach to activist networks, which puts researchers in the midst of a network, working directly with the activists involved.

In the most basic sense, networks are nodes that are connected together in some way. Although these nodes can be interconnected in a variety of different ways (e.g., trade and exchange of goods), contemporary researchers view the connections between nodes as modes of communication and communicative action (e.g., Eriksson 2005; Huesca 2001; Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013; Van Dijck 2013). Manuel Castells (1996) explains that networks are open structures that expand and develop through communication; integration into a network depends on whether or not a node shares the necessary codes for communication with other nodes. As noted in chapter 1, most research has focused on networks that take one of three shapes: the line, the star, and the all-channel (Evan 1972). The primary variable that influences the shape of a network are the different routes or connections that nodes have to others; the direction of the connection (i.e., one way or two way) also influences the shape. In the case of the line network, the communication is strictly one way, from one node to the next. The star network can entail one-way communication from the hub to all of the other nodes, or

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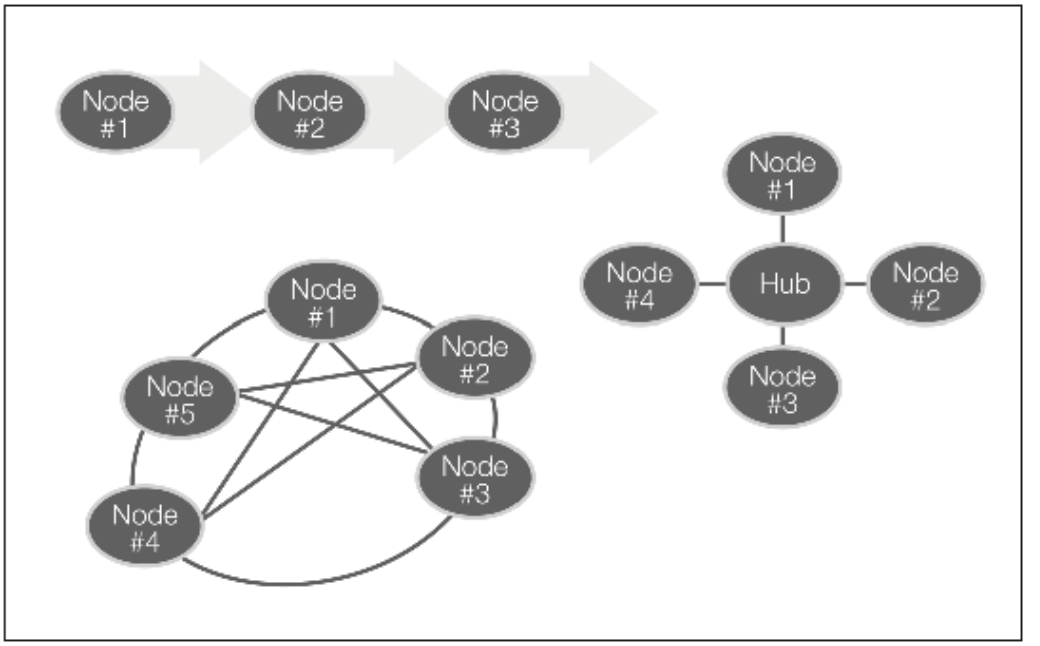


Figure 5-1: The basic network shapes described by Evan.

two-way communication between nodes and hub; in either case, the hub has control over the flow of communication between nodes. Finally, the all-channel network entails two-way communication between all nodes (see Figure 5-1).

In addition, Evan situates these nodes as predominately organizations, although some researchers take the view of individual people as nodes within networks (e.g., Harlow 2011). According to Evan—as well as Arquilla and Ronsfeldt (2001), Best (2005), and Stengrim (2005) among others—networks are collections of organizations that are interconnected through the ways in which they communicate. Castells (2000) further developed the concept of networks by showing how they are not so much hierarchical or structured organizations, but rather interconnections grounded in one important dichotomous rationale: inclusion or exclusion; essentially, groups or nodes are either in or out. Being a member of a network entails an identity of sorts that is maintained through the threat of expulsion. The advent of interactive media platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube, has made the concept of individual people as nodes in networks more prominent in recent years (e.g., Van Dijck 2013).

What are activist networks?

Activist networks are comprised of organizations or individual activists that constitute nodes, interconnected by communication and communicative action. Essentially, such communication and action includes the transmission of information, the construction of relationships, the mobilization of resources and bodies, and even the implementation of action in online environments (e.g., Bennett 2003; Castells 1996; 2000). In each of these cases, communication is not the by-product of the network, but rather the driving force that gives rise to mobilization and relationships. These networks can take different shapes, unite individuals and local communities, and often span the entire globe. Such networks can also be grounded in

a variety of different forms of communication. Although more recent research has focused almost exclusively on the communication between nodes via the Internet and interactive media platforms, face-to-face communication can be vital to the connections between nodes. In my own experience researching activists, face-to-face communication and relationship building within the physical sites often proves to be just as invaluable (perhaps even more so) as social media and interactive media technologies.

As with the organizations described in chapter 4, there are three primary logistical categories that are integral to the conceptualization of activist networks, regardless of whether the discussion focuses on networks of individuals or organizations: (1) reach, (2) connective media, and (3) levels. The concept of reach is a reference to the number of relationships fostered between nodes within a particular network, as well as connections to other networks. This concept has emerged from studies concerning the ways in which nodes (whether individuals or organizations) come together, build relationships, and see those relationships shaped through strains between nodes. Although there is no "typical" or "ideal" scenario in which nodes reach outward and build relationships with others, studies by Best (2005) and Pickard (2006b) provides good examples of reach and how it functions. Best's (2005) research concerning the construction of "temporary protest communities" lays out the ways in which some nodes can initially make contact, come together, and become shaped by agonisms between activists. Best demonstrates that an initial organization (or group of activists) puts out a call for some kind of action; this call is usually framed within a narrative or story. According to Pickard (2006b), the narratives typically circulated by activists are quite nebulous; that is, they can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Radical and reformist activists alike can see this call and find that it aligns with their critical worldviews. This enables other activists or organizations to heed the call to action and contact the initial node. At this point, a temporary protest community is established (e.g., Occupy Wall Street, or a protest against a corporation or free trade policy) and expands as those activists or groups pass on the call and build new relationships with others. Best calls this process of groups and activists coming together around a nebulous, common cause "mesomobilization." This emergent community is not yet a network, as the different people and groups are rallied together for a short-term goal or purpose. The community is shaped, however, by competing worldviews of activists. Many of the groups or organizations that heeded the original call for action embedded within a nebulous narrative will splinter away from the others because of agonistic differences about tactics. Long-term relationships will remain as long as serious conflicts between these people and groups are avoided; the nodes may engage in future dialogue after the dissolution of the temporary protest community, as long as the agonisms do not become antagonisms. At this point, these groups and people constitute a network, connected by communication codes (Castells 1996). Regardless of whether or not a network came into being through the process of mesomobilization, the reach of the network depends on how far communication from an initial node or set of nodes expanded, the number of relationships built through that communication, and whether relationships remained after the rise of any emergent agonisms between nodes. Relationships between groups will remain as long as the nodes share certain communication codes, such as narratives, ideology, goals, or political affliations. As other groups or people who share these communication codes come into contact, the reach of the

network expands. Whenever any nodes make significant changes to these communication codes, they face the possibility of expulsion from the network (Castells 2000).

The second logistical category involves the media that connect the different nodes of a network: What are the means of communication used by the nodes in order to convey information, build relationships, and mobilize resources? How do the nodes engage in the co-creation of communication and meaning? Researchers have focused on face-to-face communication (e.g., Nadel 1957), as well as connections through Internet tools such as weblogs, listservs, and e-mail (e.g., Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001; Hiltz and Turoff 1978; Wellman 1988). These earlier lines of research highlight the ways in which nodes sent messages back and forth among themselves and other networks, which reflects the transmission model of communication (see Berlo 1960). This is significant, as network connections were conceptualized in terms of "stickiness," as described by Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green (2013). Stickiness is the notion that transmitted messages that are interesting to audiences (or nodes) stick to them; the passive audience receives the message, and it sticks to them if it applies to them in any way. The concept of stickiness used to be particularly attractive in the days of one-way broadcast communication (e.g., television and radio) and at the forefront of early Internet research (e.g., Hiltz and Turoff 1978).

The connections between nodes via media have become much more complicated in the last decade, however, with the advent of social media that allow for more interactivity and intercreativity than previous Internet platforms. Such platforms do not adhere to the transmission model or concept of "stickiness" like older forms of communication; active users of interactive media move information about networks. Van Dijck (2013, 5) discusses how media such as Facebook and YouTube complicate things: "Until the turn of the millennium, networked media were mostly generic services that you could join or actively utilize to build group, but the service itself would not automatically connect you to others. With the advent of Web 2.0, shortly after the turn of the millennium, online services shifted from offering channels for networked communication to becoming interactive, two-way for networked sociality." Van Dijck notes that different types of interactive media platforms have emerged in recent years; most notably, social media have been used in public debates and the mobilization of public opinion. Such social media include platforms for social networking such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, as well as platforms for sharing media content such as YouTube or Flickr. The emergence of social media and networks based in these two types of platforms has given rise to what Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) call "spreadable media." Essentially, interactive media platforms, such as Facebook or YouTube, do not transmit media content that "sticks" to audiences, as in many of the dominant conceptualizations of media (e.g., Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorelli 1980). Instead, these platforms enable users to spread ideas, narratives, or images throughout their networks. When people post content to their Facebook profiles or YouTube accounts, the content is visible to all of the other nodes within the network without the initial user "transmitting" it to anyone; ideas that are appealing to others in the network will be reposted or "liked" for other nodes to see both across the network and within other networks. Ideas or images that gain popularity or notoriety are spread; users actively read through and select materials within the network for "liking" or reposting.

The notion of spreadable media is particularly important for the current discussion of activist networks, as contemporary activists increasingly use social media platforms in their endeavors. These platforms have become one of the dominant ways in which individual activists and activist organizations interact and build connections to one another. This is not to say, however, that other modes of interconnection are irrelevant, or that the transmission model that dominated earlier network research should be discounted. Much of the research that focused on face-to-face connections (e.g., Evan 1972; Nadel 1957; Wellman 1988) demonstrated that local networks do utilize (and, indeed, rely upon) face-to-face communication for connections between nodes. My own experiences have helped me to understand the importance of face-to-face communication in modern networks. The key to my early research concerning activism was my ability to gain access to activist organizations, particularly peace and antiwar organizations during the Iraq War era. My access to those organizations proved to be invaluable for recruiting interview participants and engaging in ethnography. Of particular importance was a group that I call Peace Alliance (for purposes of anonymity and confidentiality). The Peace Alliance proved to be exceptional in that the organization operated out of a store called the Peace and Justice Cubbyhole (again, a pseudonym); the Cubbyhole was mostly a book store, but also sold organic foods and fair-labor clothing. Hanging out in the Cubbyhole enabled me to meet people and become noticed by members of the organization in ways that would not have been possible if the group had no such site. In addition, activists affiliated with other organizations in town regularly shopped at the Cubbyhole, thus giving rise to interconnections between different groups that probably wouldn't have happened either. Essentially, the different organizations in that area constituted a local network of activism; the different organizations were nodes through which activists could become involved. The physical site of the Peace and Justice Cubbyhole was an integral part of that network, in that it allowed for the Peace Alliance to become an effective hub for the network. Through the physical site, activists from widely different organizations and critical worldviews were able to meet up and interact; such interactions gave rise to feelings of trust among the activists in the network.

Much of the research concerning contemporary global networks, however, has demonstrated that the interconnections are primarily Internet-based platforms (e.g., Huesca 2001; Van Dijk 2012; Van Dijck 2013). This is not to say that local networks are heavily reliant on face-to-face communication and global networks are entirely online; local networks often rely on listservs and e-mail, while many global networks hold annual conventions or retreats in which activists can meet. However, proximity within a community provides many more opportunities for face-to-face contact between activists, which is not a luxury for those activists within global networks. Overall, most contemporary activist networks, whether local or global, are at least partially online; the question for the researcher is how many of the network interconnections are the result of online platforms and how many occur through face-to-face interactions.

The discussion about media connections provides a nice transition into the final logistical category: level. The concept of level denotes whether an activist network exists within a single localized community or is connected to a higher global network that spans multiple communities; the concept of level also addresses whether the network is online, offline, or partially online. This logistical category has emerged from research that demonstrates that

interconnected organizations can exist at multiple levels (e.g., Atkinson 2010; Huesca 2001; Pickard 2006a; 2006b). I have often observed networks that exist purely within local communities, as well as networks that extend beyond local communities and span the globe. Essentially, there are two levels that best describe a network: The network can be solely local, that is, the network is a collection of organizations or activists within a single community with no expansion beyond that point; or the network can exist at the global level, in which case the network is comprised of several nodes linked around the world. Such global networks are typically interconnected with local networks, as the nodes of the former will make connections with local activists and activist organizations in their immediate vicinity.

Note that the following discussion concerning the two levels of networks focuses primarily on organizations as nodes. This is not to say that individual activists are discounted here or do not exist as nodes within these networks. Individuals do exist within these networks, passing information and narratives to and from the larger organizational nodes. Activists as nodes often serve as citizen journalists contributing news and stories to large organizational websites, and they act as liaisons between the global and local levels as they post information from various organizations onto social media platforms. In many ways, the individual activists as nodes play the crucial role of "spreading" information, narratives, and images across networks; the organizations put those materials out into the network, and the individual activists pick up anything that they find to be relevant. Nevertheless, these networks are typically built from multiple grassroots or international organizations.

Recap 5-1. Logistical Categories of Networks	
Category	**Type**
Reach	The number of relationships fostered between nodes within a particular network, as well as the connections to other networks.
Media	Face-to-face communication. Unidirectional media (e.g., newspaper, radio, television). Interactive (spreadable) media.
Levels	Local networks. Global networks.

Global activist networks

Global activist networks are comprised of national and international nodes that have connections into local activist communities. Amnesty International, Indymedia.org, Tea Party Express, and Focus on the Family are organizations that have built connections to other similar global organizations and have established local chapters within communities around the world. The local chapters of these different organizations typically build connections to other organizations (or individual activists as nodes) that share similar worldviews. Because vast distances typically separate nodes in global networks from one another, there is heavy reliance on interactive media platforms; such reliance has led to the all-channel shape (Arquilla and Ronsfeldt 2001; Evan 1972). In other words, global networks include organizations that are often connected to all of the other organizations within the network. If the nodes are not all connected to one another, then there is at least no central hub that controls the intercon-

nected lines of communication; information within these networks is typically free flowing and available to all. Take, for instance, the Tea Party Express, a conservative activist organization that was established in the early days of the presidency of Barack Obama to counter what the activists perceived to be too much government spending. The activists affiliated with the organization described their work in the following way on the Tea Party Express website (www.teapartyexpress.org/contact): "The Tea Party Express came into existence as the tea party movement was awakened by the famous Rick Santelli rant that swept across the country in February of 2009. This power and influence could not be ignored by the political establishment as the grassroots movement exploded onto the scene. Now, after eight national bus tours and several regional tours that housed over 400 rallies, the Tea Party Express has become nationally recognized for making a difference in critical elections."

The organization established connections with other prominent national Tea Party groups, such as Tea Party Patriots, and launched local chapters around the United States. The connection between the Tea Party Express and its local chapters, as well as with other national groups such as the Tea Party Patriots, represented a global activist network. Essentially, there was not an established hierarchy in which one organization controlled the flow of information within the network. As one organization made declarations or endorsed political candidates, the information was picked up by all of the other nodes in the network. Any node, whether a "parent" organization, or one of the local chapters, was able to put information into the network that had the potential to "spread" to other nodes. This is not to say that the groups in the network were without their differences, as there were reports about tensions between the Tea Party Express and the Tea Party Patriots. For instance, David Weigel (2009) reported in the *Washington Independent* that Amy Kremer, one of the chief organizers for the Tea Party Express, originally worked with the Tea Party Patriots; according to Weigel, Kremer was forced out of the Patriots because she helped work with the Express on one of their rallies. Essentially, the two organizations disagreed on the level of support for the Republican Party; Tea Party Express worked to help Republicans (even those they disagreed with), while the Tea Party Patriots wanted to challenge any Republicans who did not adhere to a strict conservative vision. These kinds of agonisms are what ultimately keep organizations within a network from merging into a single unit. Such disagreements cannot become too overwhelming, however, or the network will become dysfunctional and dissolve altogether.

Also of note is that global networks sometimes entail particular sets of rules: manifest rules and latent rules. In many ways, global networks are similar to the organizations mentioned in chapter 4; organizations have surface and deep structures. However, the rules within global networks are much more informal as they do not structure the day-to-day routines of activists in the same way as surface and deep structures of organizations; these rules do not establish leadership or perceptions of right and wrong behavior. Because of agonisms that arise between organizations full mergers rarely happen; the rules never become the powerful surface and deep structures noted in chapter 4. For the most part, these rules are grounded in the binary logic of inclusion and expulsion described by Castells (2000). Essentially, if nodes violate the understood communication codes that bring the network together (e.g., ideology, narratives, political affiliations) they will face the strict penalty of being expelled from the network. As global networks tend to be informal, the emergent rules are merely guidelines that help nodes to navigate any problematic agonisms (or even antagonisms). Nevertheless, these rules can often

play an important role in some networks. Both rules have best been demonstrated effectively through Pickard's (2006a; 2006b) research on the Indymedia network. Some of the rules that govern the larger Indymedia global network are manifest, while others are latent. Manifest rules are loose sets of regulations that might be established in the early days of the network. These rules essentially lay out the general guidelines, or codes, for how the different nodes will interact and get along with one another. For instance, Pickard (2006b) demonstrates how the Indymedia network uses rules that dictate a consensus decision-making model, in which all of the nodes in the network have to be in agreement concerning important decisions that need to be made. As noted in chapter 2, when the Ford Foundation offered the network a grant of fifty thousand dollars, a consensus had to be reached among the networks about accepting that money. As one organization had ideological problems with accepting the grant, the network ultimately rejected it. Conversely, latent rules are those unspoken rules, or codes, that develop within a network; these are similar to the deep structures of organization discussed in chapter 4. In another study on the Indymedia network, Pickard (2006a) reveals such latent rules at work in respect to the publishing of activist news through the Indymedia websites. Pickard found that there are different "tyrannies" that affect the publishing of news on the main Indymedia website: rigid ideologies of activists, elites masked by the lack of structure of the network, and tensions associated with vague editorial policies featured on the main website. These tyrannies mirror the problems of the lack of structure discovered by Jo Freeman (1972) in her examination of radical feminist organizations. These tyrannies serve as latent, or unseen, rules within the network that effectively regulate the content ultimately put onto the main Indymedia news site. Unlike deep structures these latent rules did not motivate the actions of activists, but rather influenced the flow of information through the network.

Local activist networks

Local activist networks emerge from the interconnections of individual activists or organizations within a limited geographical region; this region is typically comprised of no more than a single metropolitan area, or a few small cities. Essentially, due to physical proximity and overlapping memberships held by activists across multiple organizations within a region, local networks emerge more organically than those at the global level; familiarity and personal relationships give rise to the interconnections. Unlike global networks that are typically all-channel in form, local networks are usually star shaped. This is due in large part to the connective media that bind the nodes, as many local networks rely heavily on more linear forms of communication; nodes within local networks often utilize face-to-face communication and broadcast forms of media such as community radio, newspapers, and listservs. This is not to say that local networks do not use interactive media platforms, as many activists routinely use social media to keep in contact with other activists in the region. Local networks, however, rely on more than just those interactive media. These star-shaped networks involve a hub connected to several surrounding nodes; the surrounding nodes may have connections to other nearby nodes as well as the hub, but do not usually have connections to all other points in the network. Within this particular form, the hub organization controls much of the information that flows through the network. Most of the information moves one way—from the hub to all of the connected organizations. If peripheral organizations desire to

make information available to the rest of the nodes in the network, the information typically must first pass through the hub; the concept of information transmission and "stickiness" has some relevance at this level.

Of note about local activist networks is the interrelationship between the narrative capacity of the network and the perceived distance between the organizations that are experienced by activists within the network. Both of these concepts emerged from research conducted by myself (Atkinson 2009; 2010) and in collaboration with Laura Cooley (Atkinson and Cooley 2010). Narrative capacity refers to the ability of the network to effectively circulate narratives and information to different nodes. Typically, local networks rely on one or two media that are widely recognized and used by most activists in the region in order to distribute information between nodes, in addition to personal relationships and face-to-face contact; the hub at the center of the star network often manages and maintains these media. Integral to narrative capacity is whether the other nodes within the network actually know how to use and read the media managed by the hub: Do activists fully understand how the media is accessed? Do they understand how to make use of that media? Are they aware of all of the different media that the hub organization uses? These may seem to be simple questions, but if there is any confusion or misunderstanding on the part of peripheral nodes of the network, there can be negative consequences for cooperation and coordinated resistance, such as protests or demonstrations. If all of the different nodes thoroughly understand how to access and use media managed by the hub, then the network has a high degree of narrative capacity; the different nodes work together and engage in actions effectively. If there is confusion among the different nodes about the media managed by the hub, then there can be drastic breakdowns in trust across the network.

One of my past research projects focuses on two local networks and shows the differences regarding narrative capacity: (a) the Peace Alliance mentioned earlier—which operated out of a store, the "Peace and Justice Cubbyhole," where many of the activists met and interacted face to face—and (b) the Olive Branch Association (OBA), which I researched later in a different part of the country. The OBA activists did not exhibit the same feelings of trust for other organizations in the local area. In part, such distrust arose because of the hub organization of the network: the OBA did not have a physical site that was open to outsiders. The OBA had an office in a building that was located in one of the harder-to-reach parts of the city; no one from other organizations ever visited that site. Hence, there was very little interaction between the activists from different organizations; each organization felt that they had to fend for themselves in the world. In addition, both networks utilized a one-way listserv managed by the hub, which could only be used by the leaders of those organizations. I found that in the first network all of the activists affiliated with the different nodes understood that the listserv worked this way, and thus the different activists worked well with the Peace Alliance. In the other network, activists mistakenly thought that all could use the listserv; when people could not put information onto the listserv, there was distrust of the OBA. The first network had high narrative capacity, whereas the second demonstrated low narrative capacity.

Narrative capacity ultimately impacts activists' perceptions of closeness or distance from the hub (Atkinson and Cooley 2010). In our collaborative research, Cooley and I found that high narrative capacity allows for narratives and information to pass efficiently through the network. This ensures that vital information about proposed demonstrations, protests, and

other such activist events is spread throughout the network. In addition to such information, narratives about what happened at various activist events, as well as news stories from global activist sources (e.g., Amnesty International) can be passed along through the network. We discovered that the effective circulation of information and narratives helps to produce a perception among activists in the network that they are physically "close" to the hub, which stems from feelings of trust among the nodes. That is to say, there is a perception of closeness to the hub of the network when narrative capacity is high. Conversely, low narrative capacity can lead to a perception among the nodes of greater "distance" from the hub. When activists in the network do not fully understand how to access or use any media that is used to circulate information and narratives, distrust or frustration with the hub can emerge. Such feelings can create a gulf between the peripheral nodes and the hub, which is perceived as a physical distance. This is particularly problematic as those peripheral nodes rely on the hub for their connection to all of the other nodes in the network.

Effective narrative capacity and perceived closeness to any hub organization are essentially the glue that holds a local network together. Without high narrative capacity, activists affiliated with different nodes within the network feel distant from the hub; they may distrust the hub or view any leadership associated with a hub as unreliable. Ultimately, all of this can be problematic for the mesomobilization described by Best (2005), as well as the co-performance of resistance illustrated by my own research (Atkinson 2010). Whenever there is distrust or frustration with the hub, activists have little incentive to become involved in protests or actions that are called for by the hub. In the network with high narrative capacity that Cooley and I investigated, all of the activists across the entire network respected the Peace Alliance, even if they held different worldviews than the leadership of the organization. Whenever information was put out into the network by that hub organization, activists affiliated with different nodes trusted the information. Whenever the hub called for protests or demonstrations, the other nodes in the network quickly answered the call in the affirmative. In the local network with low narrative capacity, however, we found "fractures" that hindered the emergence of coordinated resistance by the different nodes in the region. Whenever the OBA called for protests or actions, many activists questioned the motivations for such a call. In many cases, nodes ignored the calls for action altogether.

Activist networks are comprised of their reach, levels, and connective media. These three logistical categories are intertwined, as the type of media can often influence the reach; the reach of the network, in turn, can influence the levels at which the network exists. The reach of the network entails the number of nodes and the interconnections between those nodes. The broader the reach of the network, the more likely it is that the network exists at multiple levels. In addition, the logistical concepts of organizations noted in chapter 2 (worldview of activists, organizational structure) are integral for the conceptualization of those networks that are comprised of organizations as the primary nodes. Those organizations in the network that have strong surface structures are more likely to build connections to other organizations and thus become part of wide-spanning networks. Organizations that have little in the way of surface structure, such as the Church of Stop Shopping, cannot effectively build connections—not because they do not fit within a network, but because they may not be able to build connections to many other organizations. Such organizations become nodes within networks that are narrow in terms of reach and do not effectively connect at the global level.

Overall, global and local networks are important sites in which activism can be observed and studied. Much of the research within this site has focused on, and been constrained by, the different logistical categories noted earlier. The question for the qualitative researcher is how to approach the research site? In many ways, the study of networks is similar to the cross-section approach to the study of organizations discussed in chapter 4, as networks are often comprised of a multitude of nodes (whether individual activists or organizations). With that in mind, researchers can approach the network from the outside, or they may explore it from within. The external approach to the study of networks has typically been accomplished by researchers through the use of qualitative content analysis of media texts such as zines, newspapers, listservs, Facebook profiles, and YouTube videos to name just a few. Research of activist networks from within has been accomplished with the help of interviews and focus groups, ethnographic fieldwork, as well as qualitative content analysis. Many of the issues described in chapter 4—such as recruitment e-mails and interview questions used by DeTurk (2011)—also pertain to the internal approach whenever researchers are exploring organizations that are nodes of an activist networks; there is significant overlap between these research sites. The following sections explore the ways in which specific qualitative methods have been carried out and highlight good practices for researchers as they engage in their own qualitative investigations of activist networks.

The external approach to activist networks

Researchers who have engaged in the external approach to networks have typically relied on qualitative content analysis as the primary means to accomplish their goals. When using this approach, researchers are essentially on the outside looking inward at the communication and communicative actions of activists within their network; such communication within a network constitutes a text ripe for examination and analysis. It makes sense that researchers rely on textual analysis rather than interview data or observations from participant observation; on the outside, the opportunities to recruit and interact with activists do not exist. Texts become the means by which researchers can effectively gauge issues such as reach, connective media, or levels. There are definite limitations to this approach, as researchers rely solely on their own reading and observations of the texts under analysis; without interviews or fieldwork it can be difficult to verify or corroborate data. However, the external approach enables researchers to quickly and efficiently scour an entire network within a relatively short period of time; in fact, it is quite possible for researchers to examine multiple intertwining and overlapping activist networks. In contrast, the internal approach, discussed shortly, does not allow for such a broad scope within a similarly constrained time period.

Research by Russell (2005), Liesbet Van Zoonen, Farida Vis, and Sabina Mihelj (2010), Melissa Loudon (2010), and Harlow (2011) provides good examples of the external approach to the study of singular networks, or networks with a single hub. David Zimbra, Hsinchun Chen, and Ahmed Abassi (2010) expand on these projects and demonstrate ways in which researchers can observe and explore multiple networks or where network hubs intersect. Russell's research explores the ways in which different websites and online media helped to structure relationships within the Zapatista network (see chapter 4). Ultimately, the analysis of these texts helped to demonstrate different myths that were circulated by nodes in the

network: the noble savage, a romanticized vision of Subcomandante Marcos, and neoliberalism as an evil beast. Taken together, these myths structured the ways in which different nodes interacted and thus held important implications for the formation of identity within the network. Van Zoonen, Vis, and Mihelj look at activist vlogging networks on YouTube that emerged after the release of the anti-Islamic film *Fitna* in 2008. Produced by Geert Wilders, a member of the Dutch Parliament, the film intertwines verses of the Quran with footage of terrorist acts to portray Islam as violent and fanatical. Responses to the film quickly emerged on YouTube; many activists decried the negative portrayal, while others voiced their support. The emergent network stood as a clash between different nodes. When analyzing the YouTube vlog posts, the researchers noted different performances of citizenship: apologies to Muslims for the work of Wilder, deconstruction of the anti-Islamic message, parodies and satire, and testimonials about the peaceful or violent nature of Islam. Loudon's research explored the activist network that emerged from the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in South Africa; the campaign was focused primarily on raising awareness about HIV/AIDS, as well as providing medical aid to afflicted people. The network was comprised of a hub organization that served as the national headquarters, along with several branch organizations around the country. Essentially, Loudon's analysis of texts enabled her to demonstrate the role of different ICTs in accomplishing different goals for the network. Specifically, her research shows that interactive media platforms and mobile phones were an integral component of mobilization in the network, while Internet tools such as e-mail and mailing lists were essential for expanding the reach of the network and connecting the global to the local. Harlow explores the role of Facebook in the construction of an activist network in Guatemala and across Central America and focuses on activists' efforts following the murder of Guatemalan lawyer Rodrigo Rosenberg, who blamed his demise on the president of Guatemala in a posthumously released video. The content of the video angered many in the region and led to the creation of Facebook profiles, fan pages, and groups that featured Rosenberg; the platform was essentially used by these activists to call for investigations into the lawyer's death, as well as the resignation of the president. Through her analysis of Facebook sites, Harlow demonstrates that the commentaries posted by readers on profiles were framed in such a way to prompt other activists to "like" the effort so that word concerning this issue would spread; "liking" the comments allowed for the reach of the network to expand.

These three projects provide insight into two vital steps for carrying out qualitative content analysis in the external approach: the generation of representative samples and modes of analysis. The research conducted by Van Zoonen, Vis, and Mihelj addresses the first of these steps: the qualitative content analysis of videos uploaded to YouTube from February to May 2008 and their corresponding vlogs. The researchers were able to effectively generate a representative sample of these vlogs that was both large and manageable. This is particularly important as nodes within networks (organizations and individuals alike) can often generate thousands of observable texts through commentaries, blog posts, websites, and images. Their initial keyword search concerning the film *Fitna* on YouTube returned 6,000 results; this number was far too large for an efficient analysis. Part of the problem was due to the fact that many videos uploaded by YouTube users are actually "double-counts," or videos that are uploaded by multiple users; hence, a single video appears in a keyword search several times. To counter this problem, the researchers used multiple keywords to conduct

the search, such as "Fitna Wilders" or "Fitna Muslim." This cut the number of returns to 1,400; a smaller number, but still not manageable. Van Zoonen, Vis, and Mihelj solved the problem with the aid of Mike Thelwall of the Statistical Cybermetrics Research Group in the United Kingdom. Working with Thelwall the researchers developed an e-research tool called Webometric Analyst, which is free and available for download through the Statistical Cybermetrics Research Group website (http://lexiurl.wlv.ac.uk). This e-research tool prevented double-counts by coding all of the data that emerged for country of origin, date of upload, and other factors that were registered by the person who uploaded a video; the program focuses on users as well as other factors such as keywords or how frequently a site is accessed. In a separate research proceeding in which Webometric Analyst was used, Mike Thelwall, Pardeep Sud, and Farida Vis (2011, 6) note the following about this approach to searching for web content: "This method produces lists of users rather than lists of videos, however, and is very resource-intensive because it needs to cover a high proportion of the network of users to avoid biases caused by the snowball-type method used . . . it produces unknown proportions of popular and unpopular videos and so matches neither the videos viewed by users nor the videos posted by users." This is not to say that the researchers were not searching for keywords by using this program, but rather expanding the parameters of the search so as to filter double-counted videos. In addition to user-oriented parameters associated with the Webometrics program, the researchers also used time parameters in their keyword search; they searched only for those keyword combinations within the months of February, March, April, and May 2008, which were the months following the release of the film on YouTube. The search for keyword combinations within these time parameters, along with the use of Webometrics, generated 776 videos for analysis, which was considerably more manageable than the 6,000 videos from the initial search.

Russell in her work on the Zapatista network identity uses an inductive qualitative content analysis of a variety of online media, while Loudon's uses deductive analysis in her research concerning TAC websites. Russell examined seven subscriber listservs that were used to circulate information about the Zapatistas, as well as "thousands" of websites dedicated to covering the Zapatista movement and autonomous communities; the nodes in this network were individuals acting independently, as well as organizations dedicated to aiding the Zapatistas. The listservs that she examined were: Chiapas-L, Chiapas95, EZLN-info, Jovenes and Jovenes-d, Peacenet, Zap e-mail, and Zapatismo. The messages disseminated from these six listservs provided links and references to all of the other "thousands" of websites that were also included in Russell's analysis. Essentially, the listservs and websites stood as the lines of communication that interconnected the different nodes of this all-channel global network. The qualitative content analysis was inductive in nature, as Russell let categories emerge from the texts under examination. In her research, she utilized Barthes's (1972; 1977) concept of myth and its relation to narrative, as well as different narrative components (e.g., characters, settings), to guide her close reading of the texts and construct categories. Russell moved through listserv postings and websites noting different narrative components within each. She was then able to take all of the different narrative components that had been identified and compare them to one another. As she sorted through the different narrative components, recording similarities and differences among them, three categorical myths began to emerge; the different ways in which the narrative components were utilized across the various texts

gave rise to these categories. These myths were the dominant portrayals of the Zapatistas and their community circulated among the nodes of the network. In contrast, Loudon engaged in a deductive qualitative content analysis, in which concepts were utilized as a framework for the study of texts. In her research, Loudon examined the TAC websites, as well as documents produced by the national organization and local chapters. Once she had collected all of the texts produced by those nodes for her research, she employed the comparative framework of social movement theories (see McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996) as a lens through which she examined each in turn. The concept of comparative framework of social movements states that there are three theoretical perspectives for understanding social movement media: the mobilization of resources (i.e., gaining monetary contributions), opportunity structures (i.e., connections to political systems), and the framing of processes (i.e., shaping an understanding of the world). Loudon used this concept as she read through the texts; she identified key information that passed through the network and determined whether the information fit into one of the three predetermined categories noted above. This enabled her to identify the media platforms utilized to relay different kinds of information (mobilization of resources, opportunity structures, or framing) within the network of TAC organizations. The key difference between the work of Russell and Loudon is that the first used theory to guide the reading and allowed categories to emerge directly from the text, while the second applied three categories to the text and sorted elements out into them.

Harlow's qualitative content analysis of activists' Facebook profiles in support of Rodrigo Rosenberg was more elaborate than the analyses conducted by Russell and Loudon. In this case, Harlow engaged in multiple deductive analyses of all of the texts and also utilized an inductive analysis. In order to conduct each of these analyses, she enlisted the aid of four bilingual coders who engaged in readings of the texts with her. The group read through the texts and compared their categorization of different comments posted on the profiles; such comparison allowed for the establishment of intercoder reliability. In terms of the deductive analysis, the group applied the concept of collective action frames (see Gerhards and Rucht 1992), as well as thematic frames (see Matthes 2009; Noakes and Johnston 2005) to guide their readings of the texts; both of these concepts had been established in past literature concerning activist media. In the first deductive application, Harlow and the coders searched through comments that had been posted on Facebook profiles and placed them into one of three collective action frames that had been developed in past research: "diagnostic (How did the comment define the problem?), prognostic (What solutions were suggested?) or motivational (Was the comment a call to arms or motivating?)" (Harlow 2012, 232). As they combed through the texts, they read each comment on the Facebook profiles and determined the action that they seemed to convey; comments were categorized according to one of the collective action frames. For the second deductive application, the group reexamined the texts in order to place activists' commentary within different thematic frames: "An agency frame (related to participating or inciting action), a values frame (related to high-level abstraction of ideals of justice, democracy, national security, patriotism, familial safety, or good of the community), an adversarial frame (portraying the movement as good versus evil, or specifying heroes and villains), a reflective frame (related to discussions of antecedents, consequences, or media coverage), or other" (ibid.).

The process in this second deductive analysis progressed in the same manner as the first. That is, the concept of thematic frames was used as a lens to read and examine the text. The group categorized each profile commentary related to Rodrigo Rosenberg as one of the four thematic frames. Once Harlow and the coders had completed the coding, comparisons were made concerning the categorization of Facebook comments; Holsti's formula was calculated, which revealed an intercoder reliability of 90 percent. Both of these deductive analyses allowed for Harlow to pinpoint the ways in which the activists made use of Facebook within this network. In addition to the deductive analysis, they also engaged in inductive analysis of the postings. Essentially, she used one of the guiding research questions for the study as a frame for searching through the texts once more: what kind of material ultimately emerged from the Facebook postings by activists? This approach called for the researcher to compare and contrast different postings, ultimately building categories that defined what meanings and topics were embedded within. In this way, Harlow was able to demonstrate eight categories that emerged from her analysis of the comments posted on the Facebook profiles by activists: protest-related material, antipresident and antigovernment comments, requests to sign petitions, discussions about media coverage, calls for justice, calls for solidarity with Guatemala, and materials related to Facebook among other types of comments. Overall, the multiple qualitative content analyses in the project provided Harlow with a comprehensive view of how activists made use of Facebook within this network. In addition, the external approach to the study of activist networks can also help scholars to explore hub-to-hub interconnections, or intersections between different activist networks. In their research concerning websites and interconnected activist groups, Zimbra, Chen, and Abassi (2010) developed a form of network analysis that can aid in mapping networks and observing where network hubs intersect; they termed this method "cyber-archaeology." This method for content analysis was demonstrated in their research concerning violent anti-Western activism in the Middle East; specifically, they explored websites used by activists to disseminate information about the construction of improvised exploding devices (IEDs). The research not only illustrated a large network of websites for the circulation of technical information about the construction of IEDs, but also found three separate hubs that were interconnected by different websites. Essentially, they noted that there were three stages involved in this process of cyber-archaeology: social movement research design, collection and classification of artifacts, and visualization and analysis of the network. The first stage involves intensive research concerning a particular social movement and identification of key groups. In addition, this stage requires that the researcher identify important online texts that are utilized by these groups. The second stage of cyber-archaeology requires that the researcher pull together a body of texts from the key groups and classify them. Researchers can use preexisting theories or categories to code the texts, or they may develop categories that are specific to their research. Essentially, these first two stages are similar to the processes of qualitative content analysis described earlier in this chapter.

The third stage of cyber-archaeology involves both building a map of all of the different artifacts (typically websites or other web materials) and then illustrating the links between them. During the first part of this stage, the researcher looks at the intensity of communication associated with different classifications of artifacts. Intensity can entail looking at the number of times the artifact was accessed, the frequency of commentary, or the scope of artifacts. In

their research, Zimbra, Chen, and Abassi (2010, 64) looked at the number of pages for websites about IEDs in order to help establish intensity: "These site maps are indicative of the communication patterns of the participants, showing where within their virtual community these issues are being discussed and specific IED-related resources mobilized." Essentially, this provides insight into which artifacts interest activists more, or shows those artifacts that are used more often. In order to accomplish this task, the researcher can build one map with all of the artifacts laid out. Color-coding or numbers can be used to indicate classification of the artifacts and intensity; such was the case in Zimbra, Chen, and Abassi's research, as they color-coded websites according to classifications and used numbers to indicate intensity of those sites. The next part of this stage entails demonstrating the connections between artifacts and effectively making a network (and interconnections between networks) visible. Zimbra, Chen, and Abassi looked at the hyperlinks on websites to determine if there were connections between sites; in their map they drew lines between different nodes so as to represent connections between different IED-related websites. In addition to links to websites, researchers can also look for common references or citations in order to demonstrate connections that exist between artifacts. Adding these lines to the classified artifacts helps to illustrate interconnections between nodes and demonstrates what types of resources are shared. These lines also help to demonstrate how resources move from one network to another.

Ultimately, qualitative content analysis has proven integral in the external approach to the study of activist networks. The examples reviewed here provide insight about the generation of representative samples from enormous bodies of texts, as well as ways in which deductive and inductive analysis can be used to uncover meanings and topics within texts. In reference to the first, Van Zoonen, Vis, and Mihelj's research is important as it provides some ideas about how to collect representative samples when dealing with interactive media platforms (e.g., YouTube, Facebook, Twitter), which can spawn enormous amounts of texts produced by a multitude of users in short amounts of time. The research of Russell, Loudon, and Harlow provides insight about how to actually conduct analysis of texts whenever they are finally identified and collected. This is not to say that other methods are not useful; indeed, multiple methods can help to supplement the qualitative content analysis and offset the limitations noted earlier in this section. Harlow engaged in survey interviews with four creators of the Facebook profiles that addressed the murder of Rodrigo Rosenberg; the interviews enabled her to build a better understanding of the types of activists who were engaged in this networking activity. In addition, Loudon was able to engage in participant observations regarding the connections between TAC and a group called Cell-Life, an organization to which she had some connections; her observation of encounters between Cell-Life and the TAC network enabled her to see ICTs in action. However, these methods were supplemental, at best, as they did not provide additional insight into the networks, but rather helped to corroborate findings from the textual analysis. In short, supplemental qualitative methods can (and even should) be used as a means for verifying findings that emerge from the primary content analysis of websites, videos, social networking profiles, and other interconnections within networks.

Recap 5-2. External Approach to the Study of Activist Networks
•Is useful for examinations of interconnections across large networks, as well as interconnections between networks.
• Uses qualitative content analysis as the primary method.
• Cyber- archaeology can be used to provide insight into interconnections between multiple activist networks.

The internal approach to activist networks

Research that takes the approach of exploring activist networks from within has typically relied heavily on interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic practices such as participant observation. This internal approach enables researchers to explore and examine networks in the same way that they might study organizations (see chapter 4); essentially, researchers can perform a focused or cross-section examination. In cases of a focused examination, researchers typically employ the use of participant observation or other forms of fieldwork in order to thoroughly explore and describe one or two nodes within a network. While closely observing (or working with) one or two nodes, researchers can fully discern interconnections to other nodes by way of reach and level. Conversely, researchers can also examine a cross-section of nodes within a network; such a mode of research does not garner as much detailed information about specific nodes, but it provides insight about reach and level across an entire network. Overall, the first mode of research provides rich detail about a few nodes, while the latter allows for expansive information about an entire network (or multiple networks).

Projects by Theresa Petray (2011), Natalie Fenton and Veronica Barassi (2011), Clarissa David (2013), and Cooley and myself (Atkinson and Cooley 2010) all serve as solid examples of this approach to activist networks. My work with Cooley explores the ways in which activist interactions and alternative media affected the shape of local networks. We examined two diferent networks in different parts of the United States and assessed the communication between activists, as well as the modes of communication between different organizations in the communities. Essentially, we demonstrate that both networks relied heavily on some alternative media (in the form of listservs within both sites) to coordinate all of the different organizational nodes; the organization that maintained the mediated platform in each case was considered to be the hub of the network. In one network, all of the activists fully understood how to operate and take part in using the platform, so they perceived the hub to be fair; the network took on the shape of a symmetrical star. In the other network, there was a lot of confusion about how the mediated platform was operated, so the hub was perceived as deceptive; the network took on an elongated star shape as many nodes described a sense of distance from the hub. Petray's research explored the use of Internet-based platforms, such as e-mail and Facebook, in a local aboriginal rights network in Townsville, Queensland, in Australia; in particular, Petray worked closely with the Townsville Indigenous Human Rights Group (TIHRG). The activists in Townsville worked to raise awareness about the stark gaps between aboriginal people in Australia and the dominant white population; aborigines suffer from lower life expectancies, education, and incomes. Activists had worked to address these issues for decades, but had most recently adopted Internet-based platforms to aid in

their endeavors. Petray demonstrates that such interactive media allowed for more expansive networks, as well as opportunities for those networks to make their case to state agencies and the general public. However, the use of Internet-based platforms as a primary form of networking within a local community also held negative implications, as attendance at demonstrations and marches declined significantly; the online networking stood in for actions in physical sites. Fenton and Barassi's research also explores Internet-based platforms, but focuses on a global network that spanned Great Britain. Specifically, they explored the role of Facebook and Twitter by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign (CSC), an organization strongly aligned with labor organizations around the United Kingdom. Essentially, the CSC works to build bridges between Cuban workers and trade unions, as well as labor activists, across the British Isles. In recent years, the group established a Facebook profile and Twitter feed so that they could circulate information more efficiently, as well as expand their network as activists joined or "liked" the group. Fenton and Barassi noted, however, that this mode of networking was somewhat problematic for CSC, as much of the information that was contributed by activists through these platforms was self-centered and self-promotion. That is, activists who made use of the CSC Facebook and Twitter feed did not contribute important information or narratives about Cuba or trade unions, but rather info about themselves to bolster their own reputation or image. In contrast, David's research explores the ways in which interactive media platforms have helped activists to become more politically engaged. David examined the use of ICTs by young people in the Philippines; she did not focus on a specific set of activist groups that made up this particular network, nor a network that addressed any particular issues. Instead, she looked at Filipino youth who had maintained some form of activism, online or off, over time. This enabled her to examine the ways in which ICTs, such as social networking sites and mobile phones, allowed for the emergence of politically engaged networks among youth. The research ultimately demonstrated that the use of such interactive media gave rise to more connections between activists and subsequently lead to increased political activity and digital forms of political engagement.

The research projects noted in this section are important as they provide insights into both the focused exploration of specific nodes and cross-section examination of nodes across entire networks. Fenton and Barassi's research, as well as Petray's, are examples of the focused exploration of specific nodes, as these projects explore one single organization (and its local chapters spread out throughout the country) within a larger network. In both of these instances, the researchers relied heavily on participant observations that were supplemented by additional qualitative methods. In the case of Fenton and Barassi, the researchers explored a set of related nodes and their interconnections with trade unions and political parties across the United Kingdom; their focused examination provides detailed insight into the reach, level, and media of CSC organizations. To achieve their goals, Fenton and Barassi underwent an all-encompassing yearlong ethnography that entailed participant observation, informal interviews with CSC activists, and qualitative content analysis of media prepared by the CSC. The participant observation was most important, as it put the researchers in the middle of events that connected the CSC to other organizations: "The 1-year-long ethnographic project involved volunteering on a daily basis in the national office of the CSC, participating in trade union conferences and events, and following CSC members and organizations to social gatherings and activities in a variety of different ethnographic spaces" (Fenton and Barassi

2011, 184). This enabled Fenton and Barassi to witness and experience the interactions and relationships that constituted the reach of the CSC to local chapters, as well as other global organizations and nodes. The participant observation allowed them to witness events and face-to-face interactions between CSC members and activists from trade unions and political parties, as well as take part in those interactions. More importantly, they had access to the Facebook profile and Twitter feed and were able to witness the activists use the information circulated by those platforms in offline face-to-face interactions. As they worked with the interactive media of the organization, they were in an excellent position to receive feedback from activists concerning messages and formatting of interactive platforms, as well as observe how people discussed those items at meetings or in less formal conversations. Overall, the participant observation allowed for a deep, rich understanding of different media used to establish and maintain the reach of the node into the network at multiple levels.

The other aspects of Fenton and Barassi's ethnography, informal interviews and qualitative content analysis, were utilized to supplement the information that the researchers gleaned from their work among the CSC activists and observations of the organization; this approach enabled them to uncover elements related to reach, level, and media that were not easily observable or involved in the Internet-based interactions and organizational events in which they took part. The participant observations allowed for informal interviews to emerge organically. The frequency of their attendance at organizational events and social gatherings enabled them to build a rapport with CSC activists at the national headquarters and local chapters, as well as with some members of the trade unions with which the CSC was connected. Overall, thirty-seven activists engaged in the interviews, which were postmodern in nature. The questions that Fenton and Barassi asked during the course of these interviews typically focused on the participants' history of activism and life within the CSC. The information from these informal interviews helped the researchers to understand the context of many of the interactions that they observed taking place throughout the network, as well as the use of the Facebook profile and Twitter feed by activists. Their qualitative content analysis explored media produced by the CSC national organization, as well as the local chapters. Essentially, Fenton and Barassi examined the magazine published by the organization (CubaSí), websites developed by the main organization and local chapters, e-mail listservs, and the newly launched Facebook profile and Twitter feed. Their analysis is inductive in nature, as the researchers worked through the texts in close readings searching for themes and concepts that helped them to address their guiding research questions. In this way, themes within the different forms of media emerged that provided additional insight into the use of social media and other interactive media platforms in the reach of the network.

In the case of Petray's research, the focus was on one organization within a local network and its connection to other organizations. The research was accomplished through the use of participant observation. In this case, Petray engaged in participatory activism (see chapter 4); essentially, she worked alongside the activists of TIHRG to raise awareness about the plight of many of the aboriginal people of Australia and advocated on their behalf. In this particular case, Petray attended meetings and events that were organized by TIHRG between 2007 and 2009; the meetings were a safe space in which activists from different organizations, as well as concerned citizens, came together to discuss problems and solutions in the region. In addition, Petray also traveled to different communities close to Townsville and visited organizations

that were similar to TIHRG (e.g., Palm Island, Ingram). Her involvement in TIHRGmeetings and events (as well as her visits to nearby communities and organizations) allowed her to observe activists interacting; it also gave rise to informal interviews that emerged organically from her proximity to the group. Such interviews followed a postmodern format and focused on networking, the use of different media, and each activist's involvement in protests and other actions. As in the case of Fenton and Barassi, the observations and informal interviews with activists provided Petray with insight into the interconnections between TIHRG and other nodes in this local network. Overall, the focused examination of the one node allowed for a thorough understanding about how Internet-based platforms affected participation of activists within their own corner of the network.

In the case of David and my own research alongside Cooley, the researchers engaged in cross-section examinations of nodes across one or more networks. These projects employed interviews and focus groups in order to collect data about multiple nodes. I engaged in postmodern interviews with activists across two local networks in the United States. Essentially, these networks were comprised of organizations that were dedicated to peace and justice and staged several protests against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; these networks were interconnected by different alternative media platforms, such as listservs and activist-produced newspapers. In each site, I engaged in snowball sampling to recruit activists for postmodern interviews; I asked each participant whether they knew other activists in the region who they thought would be willing to engage in the one-hour interview process, regardless of organizational affiliation or the focus of their activism. This enabled Cooley and I to collect a significant cross-section of each network; twenty-seven activists were identified and interviewed in one site, twenty in the other. Overall, these activists were affiliated with numerous nodes across both local networks; the interviews addressed a variety of topics:

> The interviews allowed the activists in the research to describe their opinions about social justice and corporations (e.g., Has enough been done by the local government to reform corporations?), their opinions about new social movement networks (e.g., Do you see any collaborative efforts between social justice organizations? If so, provide e xamples), their role in new social movement networks (e.g., Tell me about the social justice organizations of which you are a member), their interactions with other activists (e.g., Do you ever interact with alternative media producers in Erie City?), and their use of alternative media (e.g., Do you use any alternative media sources? If so, what are the titles of those sources?). (Atkinson and Cooley 2010, 327)

The questions that were asked of the different activists were general enough to allow for the weaving of narratives about two particular things: the nodes of the network and the media that was used to interconnect nodes. Overall, these questions provided insight about the reach of the network, as well as the connective media used to bind the networks.

David's research similarly recruited a wide array of activists across a network of Filipino youth activists. The activists were contacted via e-mail and social networking sites and in face-to-face discussions. Rather than relying on interviews, as in the case noted earlier, David also engaged in focus groups with some of the participants. Essentially, she collected two different types of participants for the research: activists who were heavily involved in politics and nonactivists who had described their political engagement as "normal." In the case of the first, she approached political bloggers, members of regional activist organizations, and university-based political organizations. Overall, twenty-nine activists engaged

in survey interviews in which they were asked about their use of ICTs to communicate with other activists and collect news, as well as information about their participation in activist and political events. The nonactivists were recruited from university classes and asked to take part in a study that involved discussion about political activities. The students who offered to take part in the research were split into eight focus groups, with a total of eighty-seven participants overall; the focus groups utilized the same survey questions that were asked of activists in the interviews. The use of interviews coupled with focus groups illustrates the different types of media and news information that were used or consumed by the different participants in the study. More importantly, these methods of research allowed for the collection of perspectives and knowledge grounded in different distinct positions, which provided additional insight into the reach, levels, and media related to the network. The interviews enabled David to thoroughly illustrate the use of media by the activists and to gain insight into the reach and connective media within these networks. The focus groups enabled her to collect broad data about individuals who were not politically motivated or involved in the same ways as the activists; data from both sets provided an excellent opportunity to compare and contrast activists and nonactivists.

Overall, the internal approach to the study of activist networks connects to many of the lessons conveyed in chapter 4. Essentially, researchers may engage in a focused examination of a few nodes within a network, or look at a cross-section of an entire network. Many of the pros and cons, benefits, and limitations covered in the previous chapter for both approaches easily apply here as well. The focused examination of one or two nodes within a network can tell much about how those nodes establish and maintain reach, but less about the concept of reach across the entire network (or across multiple levels). The cross-section examination within a network can illustrate much about the expanse of a network and how the nodes are interconnected, but provide less insight about activists' work maintaining such interactions. Despite these limitations, the internal approach provides a first-hand view into activist networks, which accounts for a more accurate picture of reach, level, and connective media than what can come from the external approach. Researchers can tap into the knowledge and experience of activists who are deeply involved in the flow of information and communication between nodes; researchers may even experience this flow for themselves.

Recap 5-3. Internal Approach to the Study of Activist Networks
•Makes it possible to engage in a focused or cross-section examination from within the network:
- Focused research reveals establishment and maintenance of reach by specific nodes.
- Cross-section research demonstrates the interconnection of notes.
•Relies on ethnographic methods and interviews.

Summary

This chapter defines the research site of activist networks in terms of three key logistical categories that have emerged in past research: reach, connective media, and level. These three categories are not the only characteristics that are associated with activist networks.

Lateral rules, narrative capacity, and the perceptions of physical closeness or distance can all arise as important components as well. The key logistical categories are present within all networks, however, and are intricately intertwined. Without reach or connective media, networks simply do not exist at any level. As qualitative researchers formulate their research questions and research design, they will need to take into account these three categories, as well as the other concepts mentioned here.

The chapter also explores different qualitative methods that have typically been employed in the study of activist networks. Essentially, there are two approaches that can be taken in order to conduct research within this site: the external and internal approaches. The external approach can be more efficient of the two, particularly when time is a significant constraint for the researcher. In this approach, the researcher can engage in qualitative content analysis of documents produced by different nodes in a network in order to get a basic understanding of the reach, connective media, and extent to different levels. The internal approach to the study of activist networks can prove to be much more time consuming and typically does not allow for as broad a view of a network as the external approach. Nevertheless, qualitative researchers who have used participatory observation, interviews, and focus groups have had success in creating rich detailed descriptions of specific nodes within activist networks.

Ultimately, any of the methods covered in chapter 3 can be used to explore activist networks. Rhetorical criticism could be used to accomplish the external approach, and ethnographic narrative excavation could be used for the internal approach (within certain parameters). The methods noted in this chapter have been used most often in qualitative inquiries concerning activist networks and have proven to be useful in gathering data and building on literature. Researchers have had considerable success using the methods detailed in this chapter to make significant contributions to the literature concerning activism.

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CHAPTER 63

Why Diverse Zines Matter: A Case Study of the People of Color Zines Project

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Abstract

Historically, zines have been an alternative outlet for niche topics, or writers and writing, that are ignored by mainstream media. Zines are significant because they offer the opportunity for connection, community, and networking between those interested in these diverse topics. The developments in digital technology have enabled zines to extend into the online sphere: this increased access has resulted in increased participation (by readers and writers). This paper will focus on (digital) zines that are created by people of colour (POC). In recent years, there has been much discussion and media coverage about the lack of diversity in cultural output, and various campaigns, to promote diverse writing have followed. Through a case study of the POC Zines Project—a community-building project that promotes zines by POC—this paper will look at how creators of zines are experimenting with digital formats and social platforms, and will consider what mainstream publishers can learn from this. As Radway (in: Anouk (ed) From codex to hypertext. University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2012) outlines "zine-ing is a *social* phenomenon, a form of social action driven by desires for new forms of sociability and new ways of being in the world" (p. 140): this paper will highlight the important of social collaboration and production on opening up the creative process and offering a response to the under-represented in traditional publishing.

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Keywords

Zines, Alternative publishing, Authorship, Authors, Diversity, Community

Introduction

The contraction of the book publishing industry, through various mergers and acquisitions, has increased in recent years, and the contemporary book publishing industry is now dominated by five, global, conglomerates: Hachette, HarperCollins, Macmillan Publishers, Penguin Random House, and Simon and Schuster. There are, therefore, fewer gatekeepers to an industry that currently focuses on bestsellers: this means that non-mainstream/non-commercial, and/or experimental, topics, what Bourdieu called the field of restrictive production, can be overlooked and their authors often have to find alternative routes for their writing [7]. For example, in recent years, there has been much discussion and media coverage about the lack of diversity in cultural output, and various campaigns, to promote diverse writing have followed. Consequently, alternative media streams are increasingly important, particularly, as Atton argues, for "offering the means for democratic communication to people who are normally excluded from media production" [5, p. 4].

Historically, zines have been an alternative outlet for niche topics, or writers and writing, that are ignored by mainstream media. Zines are significant because they offer the opportunity for connection, community, and networking between those interested in these diverse topics. Despite this, there has been many criticisms that diversity in race, class, and age are under-represented in the zine community. The developments in digital technology have enabled zines to extend into the online sphere: this increased access has resulted in increased participation (by readers and writers). This paper will focus on zines that are created by people of colour (POC). Through a case study of the POC Zines Project (an online community-building project that promotes zines by POC)—specifically the zines they feature—this paper will look at what POC zinesters are creating and how they are connecting to communities, and will consider what mainstream publishers can learn from this. As Radway [49] outlines, "zine-ing is a social phenomenon, a form of social action driven by desires for new forms of sociability and new ways of being in the world" (p. 140): this paper will highlight the important of social collaboration and production on opening up the creative process and offering a response to the under-represented in traditional publishing.

From Conglomeration to Participatory Culture

Although some publishing historians, such as Schiffrin, Epstein, and Greco, castigate the conglomeration of the publishing industry, linking it to the homogenisation of cultural output, others argue that new technologies and business models actual open up the production process to include a wealth of new and niche products [1, 22, 27, 42, 54, 67]. Technology developments have lowered the barriers for cultural production, what Shirky describes as the "mass amateurisation of publishing": digital folk culture has grown considerably over the decades [58, p. 60]. The Internet, in particular, has increased the possibilities for affordable cultural production, without the aid of gatekeepers, which can reach a global audience [4, 6, 13, 34,

38, 66]. Community media projects, that support and serve a range of different communities, enable amateur creators to engage in the different processes of cultural production [14, 23, 37, 43]. Mathieu et al. describe how such, small, community publishing endeavours engender the publication of "underrepresented voices", including "people of color, women, working-class radicals, gay and lesbian groups, and homeless advocates, among others" [46, p. 4].

According to Couldry, the participatory nature of alternative media democratizes and progresses the consumption and production of cultural content. Alternative media challenges the corporate realities and agendas [that the mainstream media portrays] by allowing the broader public to create their own versions of reality [13]. Additionally, participation in citizen media can encourage participation in activism [52]. Servaes argues that participatory and alternative methods of communication are "an agent for social change, culture development and democratization" [57, p. 269]. For example, a digital civil rights movement, enabled and shaped by social technology, is currently underway in the USA. The #BlackLivesMatter campaign, which followed the acquittal of a white police officer who shot and killed Trayvon Martin, an unarmed African-American teenager, [and against racism and police brutality in against African-Americans in general] demonstrates that there are important conversations, particularly from black voices, that are missing from mainstream discourse. Couldry argues that participatory media can challenge the dominance of mainstream media [13]. In the case of #BlackLivesMatter, the movement confronts and discredits the vilification of African-Americans (particularly young men) by some of the right-leaning mainstream media [3, 62]. Such media reinforces stereotypes and leads to the development and extension of inequality: "The media can impose their own logic on assembled materials in a number of ways, including emphasizing behaviors and people and stereotyping" [60, p. 33].

Although alternative media cannot change the corporate structures of the contemporary media/publishing industry: it can empower the public by giving them a space and a voice [8, 15, 25, 37, 52]. However, Sandoval and Fuchs stressed the importance of connected communities, lest individual projects lead to the fragmentation of the public sphere [30, 53, p. 143]:

> Self-sufficient alternative media projects that do not engage in wider political projects will become individualistic spaces of withdrawal, whereas networks of alternative media that develop political visions and practices and act together to form a larger political counter-public sphere have the potential to support larger-scale political change processes.

Della Porta and Diani [16] also argue that collective action is enabled by collective identity. However, it is clear that some alternative projects are so marginal, and reject all corporate structures (for example, marketing/advertising), that they are not visible at all. It is for this reason that this paper will focus on the POC Project. The POC Project, supported by the zine community, collates and showcases these marginal zines in one digital platform. This helps to raise the visibility of the zines, their creators, and their content, to create "a joint counter-public sphere" [53, p. 143]. This *counter public sphere* makes challenging the dominant conversations, spread by mainstream media, more efficient and effective. Of course, not all zinesters/alternative media producers aim to reach a broad audience, as this research shows [15, 52].

The Diverse Nature of Zines

Alternative forms of written production, such as pamphlets, have been in existence for centuries: the issue of commerce versus culture is one that is weaved through the history of cultural production [18, 48]. As outlined earlier, in the book publishing industry, large, global companies dominate the market so alternative outlets in the sphere of "parallel and unbound literatures", such as zines, play a key role in representing possibilities for counter-hegemonic transformation [17, p. 192].

Zine comes from the term fanzine, a type of publication first published in the 1930s [65]. Zine publishing has become an increasingly common practice, particularly in the USA, since the advent of these science fiction fanzines. This established into something more developed with the popularity of punk fanzines in the 1970 s, and the rise of feminist and queer zines the 1990s [1] [18]. The term fanzine gradually evolved to become zine by the late 1980s. This is a result of zines expanding to include zinesters (people who create zines) that, instead of belonging to a fan culture (such as the sci-fi zinesters), produced zines because they felt misrepresented by mainstream media [18]. Zines are a way for people to come together to build a community, and to share interests and information [12, 28]. [2]

In his 1997 study, Duncombe described 'zines as "noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves" [18, p. 6]. Zines have evolved over the decades, particularly with the developments in technology, and now include different types of content, such as literary zines, personal reflections, special interests, and political zines, in addition to fanzines. What unifies all zines is the fact that they are independently produced, written, and designed, and that they exist outside, or on the fringes of, the mainstream. Thus, they often cover issues that are often ignored, or overlooked, by mainstream media [64]. Zines are independent from commercial considerations and, as such, serve a very small audience (usually of like-minded individuals); therefore, zines are typically considered to be a safe space for self-expression [55]. One of the key functions of zines is to be the primary source of information and collective meaning for different subcultures. However, some underground culture, as promoted through different zines, has been appropriated and commercialized by mainstream media e.g. the commodification of Feminism [18, 51]. Schmidt argues that the blurred boundaries between underground and mainstream cultures acted as a catalyst to the evolution, and proliferation, of zines (particularly personal zine/perzines)[56].

Zines and DIY/self publishing have helped to change the way that consumers engage with content: turning passive consumers into active cultural producers [38, 58]. Many scholars have focused on the grrrl zine [3] scene to explore the effects of DIY cultural production in female consumers/creators: namely giving them a public voice and a space to discuss related issues and interests [11, 12, 26, 29, 33, 41, 45, 50, 55]. Making and consuming zines allow female consumers to explore information, and make decisions, outwith traditional hegemonic spaces

[1] In his 1997 study, Duncombe estimated that the circulation of zines was at an all time high in the mid- 1990s: approximately 10,000 different zines were in publication, read by 500,000-750,000 people.

[2] One of the main reasons that fanzines were created, and proliferated, was because they connected geographically-dispersed fandoms.

[3] This term comes from the, much researched, zine *Riot Grrrl*.

[11, 55, 64]. However, as Kearney observes, "the gender deviance displayed by riot grrrls is a privilege to which only middle-class white girls have access" (p. 65). Duncombe [18, 19] argued that marginalised people used zines to reclaim their identities; however, racial identity is not covered in-depth in his analysis. Consequently, POC zines are often missed out from histories of zine-ing (and from zine archives [4]), despite the wealth of POC being published. There have, however, been several key studies that have appeared in the last decade, which have criticized the lack of race, class, and age diversity in zine production. For example Nguyen's analysis of race in the zine community is one of the most important and influential studies within scholarly discourse [47]. This, lack of diverse voices, is a reflection on mainstream media (especially the book publishing industry): where white male authors, supported by cultural gatekeepers and tastemakers, dominate the marketplace [21, 59].

Hall's [31] study of inferential racism is particularly pertinent in contemporary discourse about the cultural industries where there have been conversations about diverse voices, and faces, being underrepresented and/or omitted [31, 40, 59]. Two recent examples of this are the #WeNeedDiverseBooks and the #OscarsSoWhite [social media] campaigns. The #WeNeedDiverseBooks campaign started in 2014 in response to the lack of diverse—covering POC, LGBTQIA+ , gender diversity, people with disabilities, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities—children's books. A 2014 study, by the Cooperative Children's Book Center School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison, found that representations of ethnic diversity in children's books had decreased from 1985 to 1995 [9]. A 2004 study found that the UK publishing industry was predominantly "white and middle class" and that the underrepresentation of BAME employees and authors on the United Kingdom had adverse effects on cultural expression [39]. A follow up report, published a decade later, revealed that the "old mono-culture still prevails" [40, 59]. Additionally, many authors (of colour) felt tokenished, fetishized, and a spokesperson for their specific ethnic background [40]. Such issues also occur in other cultural and creative industries. The #OscarsSoWhite campaign was in response to only white actors and actresses being nominated for the top four awards in 2016, for the second year in a row. A study by the Institute for Diversity and Empowerment at Annenberg (IDEA) found that the entertainment industry, in the USA, was "a straight, white boys' club" and, as such, POC, women, and LGBTQIA+ were underrepresented [61]. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the [Oscars] academy is primarily comprised of white males [36]. It is, therefore, important to study the culture of POC zine-ing to explore the issues, and creative work, produced by this underrepresented community.

A Case Study of the POC Zines Project

This case study of POC Zine Project, and the zines showcased on this digital platform, will give a snapshot of contemporary POC zines, and how they fit within Duncombe's taxonomy of zines (see below), particularly in the context of the #BlackLivesMatter campaign and various other anti-discrimination campaigns [19]. The POC Zine Project (POCZP) was established in 2010 in response to the limited availability of zines by POC. Their mission is to make "ALL

[4] Barnard Zine Library partnered with the POCZP and Mimi Thi Nguyen in 2012 to start a collection of zines by POC.

zines by POC (People of Color) easy to find, distribute and share".[5] Fundamentally, POCZP is a community building space and a curation project but it has also developed into a platform for advocacy (partnering with universities, educators, activist networks etc.) This paper will concentrate on the 59 zines on the POCZP zine spotlight: chosen by both the POCZP and members of their community. The showcase promoted, mostly North American, zines published between 2012 and 2015: this was during some of the more recent race-related issues in the USA (i.e. #BlackLivesMatter).

Traditionally, print zines have been characterized by simple, hand-made, production values and aesthetics. However, the Internet, and the development of publishing technologies has mean that a spate of digital zines have been appearing in recent years. Some subcultural communities, particularly those surrounding fan culture, have proliferated and found a natural home online. The zine community, was once a "relatively closed underground culture" with limited circulation [and access] and thus small audiences is now more open, and accessible, than ever before [18, p. 230]. The significance of digital zines is that the subcultural issues and themes, that are often ignored by mainstream media become more accessible; thus the possibility for connection, networking, and community building increases. As Eisenstein surmised, "without access there can be no participation" [20, p. 32].

Despite POCZP being an online project, and the eminence of digital and social technologies, only 12% of the showcased zines were solely in digital format. The materiality of zines extends into the digital age: 44% of the showcased zines were solely print, and 44% were available in both digital and print. The digital medium makes it easier for the reader to connect to the zinester through social media or via email. This can cause problems when the zinester is writing about some of the more transgressive issues: this could be why the popularity of print zines continues. The POCZP, however, has made many of the zines accessible through ISSUU, which has widened access and visibility.

Genres, Sub-genres, and Crossover Zines

Duncombe [19] categorized the different types of zines as: fanzines; sci-fi zines, music zines, sports zines, television and film zines, political zines; personal zines; scene zines; network zines; fringe culture zines; religious zines; vocational zines; health zines; sex zines; travel zines; comixs; literary zines; art zines and 'the rest' (pp. 15–17). The category is extended, for this paper, to add *social zine*: a hybrid zine, an extension of Duncombe's network zine, that provides a space for likeminded voices to come together through collaborate work. The majority of the zines in the POCZP showcase extend across these different categories and only a few fall under one particular category. For example, there were only two purely literary zines: *The Greatest Most Traveling Circus* (2014) by Jonas. This is a crowd-funded anthology of sci-fi and fantasy short stories, which is available to buy at $6; and *ANANSASEM* by Aida Amoako/KidisAlright: a small print zine, made for Black History Month (UK), featuring two short Ghanaian folk tales.

As outlined earlier, there have been many calls for more BAME literary voices, so zineing can be an incubation hub for POC, a potential stepping stone to more mainstream forms of publishing. The oldest zine/literary magazine in the collection, *FIRE!! Devoted To Younger*

[5] See: http://poczineproject.tumblr.com.

Negro Artists (1926). This was a literary/political/ network/social publication that used creative writing to express the experiences of African-American during the Harlem Renaissance. It covered controversial topics, for the time, such as homosexuality, sexual freedom, and prejudice. *FIRE!!* published the art and writing of many central artist figures in the Harlem Renaissance, such as authors Zora Neale Hurston, Wallace Henry Thurman, and Gwendolyn Bennett, poets Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, and artist Aaron Douglas.[6]

The most popular types of zines, in this list, were: political zines (30); literary zines (21); network/social zines (20); personal zines/perzines (16); and art zines (13). The remaining zines were a mixture of health zines, fanzines, travel zines, music zines, scene zines, comixs, and vocational zines. Over half of all of the zines had a clear political, with both a lowercase and uppercase p, message. Some could be segmented into traditional categories, such as Anarchist, Libertarian, Feminist, and Queer etc. but the majority were political and/or cultural critiques through a variety of formats e.g. autobiographical accounts, creative writing, artwork etc.

This research found that POC, particularly women (cis and trans-), used zines to share their experiences of, but not limited to, racism, sexism, contemporary culture, and other issues of marginalization with interconnected communities: 45 zines (76%) explicitly discussed racism or issues of race; 40 zines (68%) explicitly discussed Feminism or issues of sexism; and 33 (56%) explicitly discussed issues of sexuality and/or gender identity. Women created over half (35 out of 59) of the zines and 30 of the zines had multiple contributors, forming interconnected textual communities. This confirms that, "zines are a community-building tool of meaning making that can inform coalitional work" [44, p. 60]. With many marginalized communities and groups still facing discrimination and underrepresentation in 2016: these textual communities are more important than ever.

Political and Cultural Issues: Racism and Race, Sexism and Feminism, and Sexuality and Gender Identity

As discussed earlier, a digital civil rights movement is currently underway in the USA in response to police brutality against the black community. Swaine et al. [63] found that African American men (between the ages of 15–34) were nine times more likely to be killed by the police than any other demographic in the USA. There have also been a number of high profile cases of police brutality against black women in recent years, which has resulted in the #SayHerName movement [35]. It comes as no surprise, then, that so many (76%) of the zines on the POCZP deal explicitly with issues of race and racism. For example, political zine, *Black Women Matter: the Zine Edition, Vol. 1* (2014) details the stories of 11 black women who have been killed by law enforcement in the USA. While perzines, such as *Watermelon...and other things that make me uncomfortable as a black person* (2011) by Whit Taylor and network/social/literary zines such as *Ra(i)ze* by "a collection of radical Asians at UNC",[7] deal with racial stereotypes and cultural assumptions. On a more positive note, *Mocha Chocolata Momma Zine: COLLECTION* (2014), by Marya Erinn Jones, is a fanzine series dedicated to the lives of black American women, real or imagined. For example, the Bessie Coleman edition gives the history of the first black female pilot. There are a number of other literary zines, such as

[6] See: https://issuu.com/poczineproject/docs/poczp_fire_1926_readview.

[7] See: https://issuu.com/raize/docs/zinelayout.

literary/art/ political/social/network zine *BDGRMMR* (2014) by Yulan Grant, Justin Allen, and Brandon Owens, that showcase the literary and artists works of emerging creators.

As outlined above, a number of scholars have looked the emergence of feminist zine culture, starting with the Riot Grrrl movement, and its impact of feminism and female cultural production. However, as discussed earlier, the experiences and practices of women of colour (WOC) are missing from many of these major studies. Feminism and sexism are clearly important issues for the majority of the POC zinesters: 68% of all the zines explicitly discussed these issues. Several of the zines deal with issues such as misogyny and the fetishization of WOC. For example, political/literary/social/network zine, *BROS FALL BACK* (2013) by The Secret Society of Femmes is a cultural critique of patriarchal oppression and identity, particularly within the bro/fraternity subculture. While *Ra(i)ze* (details above) and *Not Straight Not White Male* (details below) both subvert the submissive Asian women stereotype while providing experience of being sexualised and fetishized by, largely older, men.

Gender and sexual identity was a topic explored by 56% of the POCZP zines. Despite the rise in LGBTQIA+ stories in the last few years: there is a distant lack of trans protagonists, particularly those written by trans authors [32]. Additionally, LGBTQIA+ people still face discrimination across the world. In 2016, the state of North Carolina passed an anti-discriminatory law against LGBTQIA+ people, stripping them of many of their rights. The law, which has been protested against by numerous key figures including authors, demonstrates that LGBTQIA+ voices and experiences are not being recognized everywhere and it is, thus, more important than ever that they are heard [24].

For example, *Hidden Expressions Vol .1*[8] (2013) and *Freeing Ourselves: A Guide to Health and Self Love for Brown Bois* (2011) both collated stories and personal narratives about gender identity. *Hidden Expressions Vol .1* is a political/social/network/literary, collaborate, annual zine with contributions from incarcerated transgender and gender non-conforming people. Supported by the Transformative Justice Law Project of Illinois (TJLP), an advocacy group that supports transgender people, the aims of the zine are to connect the contributing prisoners to friends, family, and likeminded people, help with feelings of isolation, and provide a space for self-representation. *Freeing Ourselves: A Guide to Health and Self Love for Brown Bois* is a multi-genre health guide by the Brown Boi Project, a community and leadership project working across race and gender to promote gender transformative learning for POC. Like, *Hidden Expressions Vol .1* the zine aims to connect people and to help give them a voice; however, it is focused on developing leadership skills for a young, mostly teenage, audience.

Sexuality, particularly in less liberal communities and countries, was also discussed in several zines: perzine *Korea: The Queer Edition* (2013) by, mixed- media artist, Estella Miyuki Baker documents her experience of attending various LGBTQ demonstrations and rallies in South Korea; *Vănguard: Issue #1* (2014) by Aiden Nguyễn and Thanh Mai, a literary/art/social/network zine, provides a space for self-expression for the LGBTQ community in Vietnam; Gaysi Zine (2011), a literary/political/social/network zine, by Gaysi, also providing a space for LBGTQ in the Desi community in India; and *Totally Radical Muslim Zine* (2014), a literary/ political/social/network, zine with contributions from multiple authors deals with Islamophobia and homophobia.

[8] See: http://tjlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Hidden-Expressions-volume-1.pdf.

All of these zines, and many of the others in the POCZP, aim to empower their contributors and readers by giving them control of their stories. Zines, and self-publishing in general, allow creators to control how they represented because the content is not created to serve the interest of others: zinesters do not have to bend to, or tap into, market trends and pressures. This is especially pertinent for marginalized people and groups [33].

Perzines and Network Zines

Over a quarter of the zines in the POC Zine showcase were perzines (but often with political, literary, or artistic slant). Perzines, personal zines, are "diaries open to the public; shared notes on the day-to-day life, thoughts, and experiences of the writer" [18, p. 11]. This type of autobiographical zine gives an insight into the subcultural identity construction of POC (both individually and as a collective). Perzines are a popular genre of zines. According to Schmidt, approximately two thirds of all zines published in the USA are perzines: a higher percentage than the number of perzines in the POCZP showcase [56].

Chidgey [10] argues that perzines "provide valuable qualitative data documenting the micro-histories and situated knowledges of lived experiences" and they should, subsequently, "take their place among other sources such as letters, diaries, oral history interviews, as offering a unique narrative demonstrating the *effects* of history, as experienced by its living participants". Zine-ing, and self-publishing in general, removes the barriers to self-expression and enables these, traditionally private formats, to become semi-public (printed) and public (digital). Although many of the POCZP zines had a political context, this was usually based on identity rather than ideology: the phrase *the personal is political* is particularly relevant to many of the perzines in this collection.

For example, the political perzine, *Light Skinned Tears* (2014) by Lena F-G-M is an autobiographical essay that looks at issues faced by people of dual ethnicities in what she calls, "our white supremacist culture"[9] In her description of the zine, the creator explicitly writes, "Please pass it on to other folks that are interested in talking about mixed race identity! Please don't pass it on to people with the intent to derail conversations about other, related struggles against white supremacy!" Another example is, perzine, *Not Straight Not White Male* (2012) by Rosi: an autobiographical zine that deals with gender, sexual, and ethnic identity. Rosi writes, "I wrote this zine because there is a lack of media that I can really, truly relate to. It is glaringly obvious that this radical scene is comprised mostly of heteros, of whites, and of males. I am Asian, I am hella gay, and I am female." *The First 7-inch Was Better: How I Became an Ex-Punk* (2008), a political perzine, by Nia King was also created in response to the lack of inclusion of POC, women and LGBTQIA+ people in some subcultures, primarily the anarcho-punk. All of these zines have a strong political message, and despite Rosi writing, "I wrote this for me a lot more than I wrote it for you", it is clear that they are intended to contribute to ongoing discussions about identity and racism.

Network zines, according to Duncombe, help to publicize underground culture. The community aspects of zines is a safe space for POC and/or LGBTQIA+ people to come to come together to share their stories. The aforementioned, *Vănguard: Issue #1*, *Ra(i)ze*, *Gaysi*

[9] See: http://issuu.com/flyoverdistro/docs/lst_web_version/21?e=11861756/10052942.

Zine, and *Totally Radical Muslim Zine* were created specifically for this purpose, as a place for a place for "participation among equals" [18, p. 12]. In fact *Vănguard*'s mission statement is:

> We hope to establish a safe platform where LGBTQ individuals can freely express themselves and have their voices heard. Lastly, we aim to foster solidarity and unite the LGBTQ community through art, literature and activism. [10]

The participatory nature of these collaborative zines allows communities to come together and form a strong, collective identity. For example, there were several zines that concentrated on reproductive health and justice: *Muchacha Issue 8: Nuestros Cuerpos/Our Bodies* (2013) and *RAIX Zine (Vol. 1, issue 2.)* (2015) are both health/political/social/network/literary a multi-author, multi-genre zines, which focus on reproductive activism in the Americas. While *The Radical Doula Guide: A Political Primer for Full-Spectrum Pregnancy and Childbirth Support* (2012) by Miriam Zoila Pérez is a health/political/vocational zine that tackles issues such as class, race, gender, and identity within the contexts of this vocation.

Conclusion

This research found that there is a diverse and thriving POC zine culture, as showcased by the POCZP. Political zines, particularly those focused on issues of racism and race, feminism and sexism, and gender and sexual identity, dominated the POCZP showcase. Network zines were also popular, more so than perzines, which, in previous studies, were the most popular type of zine. This shows that POC zinesters, as spotlighted by POCZP, were more concerned with connecting with others and showcasing the work of likeminded people than writing individual, autobiographical narratives. These larger networks form a *counter public sphere* that allows POC zinesters to self-represent, as a collective, outwith the confines of mainstream media. This reemphasizes the social nature of zine-ing, as described by Radway [49].

The question remains, what can mainstream media, particularly the publishing industry, learn from this? While there have been some initiatives to support emerging authors and to open up the publishing process—for example, independent publishers are increasingly turning to crowdfunding to fund more risky projects and to build to establish reading communities—Unbound are one of the only publishers to do this on a regular basis (and only two of their fully-funded projects deal explicitly with issues surrounding racism and race). [11] This is where zines fit into the publishing ecosystem and how they can help shape diversity in publishing: they can be indicators of new genres, subgenres, developing markets, and audiences; they can provide a space for these areas to enroot; and they can allow authentic, and diverse, voices to develop. As outlined above, zines (and self-publishing) enable zinesters to create content that is not covered by mainstream media and to express themselves freely without the constraints of cultural gatekeepers and market demands. As marginalized communities congregate around shared experiences and identities, non-mainstream and or difficult topics grow in popularity and become integrated into mainstream culture. This means that zines are often the first space, to support and promote, areas of culture that are emerging. A recent example of where these emerging topics, as written about on the POCZP, have entered the

[10] See: http://www.vanguardzine.com/#!about/cazn.

[11] See: https://unbound.co.uk.

mainstream is the spate of Young Adult novels that explore race and police brutality being published by major publishing companies (e.g. THE HATE U GIVE by Angie Thomas, published by HarperCollins: this book was inspired by the #BlackLivesMatter movement) [2].

Duncombe argued, twenty years ago, that zines could be used as "a model of participatory cultural production and organization": they have, at least, the potential to make the cultural industries more democratic [18, p. 129]. It is clear that zinesters, and those reading zines, have redefined and are redefining the way we produce, exchange, and consume cultural products. It is relatively easy to start zine-ing, particularly with the advancements in digital technologies, and anyone—no matter what their background or skill—can create their own their own zines and thus participate in literary culture. This more collaborative, participatory, approach to cultural production is changing the way that people, especially marginalized communities, see themselves situated within wider social contexts. Zinesters are creating their own narratives, which subvert and challenge mainstream viewpoints and realities: this counters the hegemonic stronghold of cultural production and expression.

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CHAPTER 64

FCJ-193 Harbouring Dissent: Greek Independent and Social Media and the Antifascist Movement

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Abstract

This article examines Greek activists' use of a range of communication technologies, including social media, blogs, citizen journalism sites, Web radio, and anonymous networks. Drawing on Anna Tsing's theoretical model, the article examines key frictions around digital technologies that emerged within a case study of the antifascist movement in Athens, focusing on the period around the 2013 shutdown of Athens Indymedia. Drawing on interviews with activists and analysis of online communications, including issue networks and social media activity, we find that the antifascist movement itself is created and recreated through a process of productive friction, as different groups and individuals with varying ideologies and experiences work together.

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Introduction

Activists' uses of digital technologies are complex, and technologies are not only shaping the available possibilities for social change but are also being changed themselves through activists' work. In this article we look at Greek activists' use of a range of communication technologies, including social media like Twitter and Facebook, blogs, citizen journalism sites, Web radio, anonymous networks, and email. We use Anna Tsing's (2005) model of *friction* to understand how frictions might productively influence or slow the use of particular digital technologies, examining the intersections between human and non-human actors, ideologies and experiences, in influencing the choices made by activists.

Our analysis focuses on the Greek antifascist movement, primarily in Athens, noting that 'the antifascist movement' is largely a constructed object. We see Greek anarchist and anti-authoritarian organising as a key element of this movement, and note that E. Dimitris Kitis (2015: 2) has suggested that this be seen as a *chóros* (which translates to 'space', but is more accurately a 'scene' or 'milieu'), which 'replaces the notion of a specific social movement or subculture with one of a more fluid assortment of people and ideas, including one that is not even constant in nature and time'. However, we continue to use the term 'movement' here to emphasise (in line with Croeser, 2012; 2014) that no movements are as cohesive or as unitary as they are often depicted in social movement studies. Many of those we interviewed would also reject the label 'activist', and so while we use the words 'activist' and 'movement,' in doing so we attempt to problematise them. These terms are 'zones of awkward engagement, where words mean something different across a divide even as people agree to speak' (Tsing, 2005: xi). Anarchist and autonomous activists, immigrants trying to protect their communities, journalists, and others create unexpected and temporary alliances, even as differences continue to be important and, frequently, divisive. To the extent that there is such a thing as a Greek antifascist movement, it is not a pre-existing phenomenon which then uses social media in particular ways: rather, it is created and constantly recreated in new and slightly different ways through particular spaces and events, including through social media.

With these caveats in mind, we discuss this movement focusing specifically on its activities in April and May 2013, a period that saw the enforced shutdown of three independent media channels, including the Athens Indymedia site. This discussion must be put in the context of several interrelated trends affecting Greece. The economic crisis that was beginning to manifest in 2008 was accompanied by a shift towards austerity politics, leading to cuts to social support services and to the public sector, including media. At the same time, government control of public space and spaces of dissent was tightening, prompted in part by pressure from private interests and a strong relationship with private media. The economic crisis, bolstered by right-wing rhetoric from mainstream politics parties (particularly *Nea Democratia* or New Democracy) and Greek private television, exacerbated the xenophobia which had been rising in Greece since the 1990s (Psarras, 2013). These trends facilitated the growth of *Chrysi Avgi*, Golden Dawn, a neo-Nazi organisation officially founded in 1980 (Psarras, 2013: 6). The group, which had been largely irrelevant in previous decades, entered the Greek national parliament in 2012. Antifascist activists were therefore operating in a context where: Greek society had very high levels of racism; an openly fascist party had gained enough support to be represented in parliament; mainstream political parties were

stoking the fires of xenophobia; attacks on independent media were increasing (as we discuss in more detail below); and there were signs of significant support for Golden Dawn among Greek police (Margaronis, 2012).

Pantelis Vatikiotis (2011: 172) has noted that prior to the 2008 protests (discussed below) little attention had been brought to bear on sub-cultures and social movements in the margins in Greece, and in particular there was limited work 'on grassroots media practices in Greece that have diachronically promoted the inclusion of marginalised social domains, heterogeneous discourses, and diverse social actors in public and political life.' Since 2008, work in this area has increased significantly, with extensive literature examining the 2008 protests (Karamichas, 2009; Sotiris 2010; Vradis and Dalakoglou, 2011; Kornetis, 2010; Chatzidakis, 2013; Kalyvas, 2010), and/or Greek activists' media practices (Milioni, 2009; Milioni and Panos, 2011). However, this literature has rarely examined the frictions in activists' use of different technologies—that is, the ongoing sparks and reorientations created by and through the relationships between activists' ideologies, the embedded affordances of technologies, and other actors.

The intersections between social movements and digital technologies, and the way these are changing over time, have been the subject of extensive international research across platforms and activist communities, from the Zapatista movement in Mexico in the 1990s to Occupy Wall Street and its offshoots (see, among others, Meikle, 2002; Papacharissi, 2015; Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). Tsing's model of frictions offers an opportunity to deepen this work by inviting us to consider 'the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference' (2005: 4). Although Tsing explores the model primarily in reference to the relationships between individuals and groups, friction can be extended as a useful metaphor for understanding our relationships with technology: activists' use of digital technologies involves similarly awkward, unstable, and creative connections across difference, both interpersonal and between human and non-human actors.

Leaving Exarcheia—the growth of the Athenian antifascist media ecology since 2008

The Greek media environment has undergone significant changes since 2008, and has been profoundly affected by austerity politics and the accompanying extension of mechanisms of social control. Early signs of the Greek impacts of the global capitalist crisis were seen in 2008, when negative growth rates in the economy were accompanied by increasing unemployment, and huge growth in poverty, social exclusion, and homelessness. The Greek government, in line with loan conditions imposed by the IMF, responded by slashing the social welfare net and cutting social services, including health services (Kondilis et al., 2013: e1). At the same time, the policing of public spaces and reports of police violence intensified (Occupied London Collective, 2011: 329; Sotiris, 2010). This combination of economic pressures and growing social controls set the scene for the events of December 2008.

Many commentators see the 2008 protests as creating a fundamental change in the Greek political landscape, and Giovanopolous and Dalakoglou have argued that, 'any attempt to return to the pre-December 2008 political normalities is impossible at any level and for any actor in Greek political life' (2011: 112). The catalyst for 2008's massive protests was the

murder of Alexandros Grigoropoulos, a 15-year old, by two policemen. Grigoropoulos was shot on 6 December in Exarcheia, a neighbourhood particularly associated with the anarchist movement or, as Makrygianni and Tsavdaroglou (2011: 40) describe it, 'ground occupied by the antagonistic movement'. The response was swift, with mobilisation happening immediately through phone calls and the Indymedia site. One interviewee, Antonis Broumis, spoke of receiving a call from his brother, telling him about the murder, and about the failure of the mainstream media to provide useful information:

> …because the mainstream media came out with a story, "we don't know who shot, maybe he still lives", when riots started everywhere the whole thing collapsed, because people knew through the Indymedia, not through the mainstream media.

The Indymedia Athens website was visited over ten million times in the days following Grigoropoulos' murder (Dalakoglou and Vradis, 2011: 18). As protests gathered force over the following days, communications over Indymedia and mobile phone networks continued to play a key role.

Distrust of the mainstream media was exacerbated by the perceived misrepresentation of the Greek anti-austerity protests, centred on the occupation of Syntagma Square in Athens, in 2011 and 2012. Theocharis et al. argue that this was a central complaint amongst Greek protesters, and led to 'the Greek movement's explicit hostility towards mass media and to a turn towards alternative avenues for information' (2014: 210). Several interviewees noted that during the Syntagma Square protests, independent media played a key role. For example, an anonymous participant noted the importance of Radio Entasi's presence at the site of the occupation, 'between the teargas and the riot police', while another, IrateGreek, talked about the significance of the Syntagma protests in increasing use of the #rbnews hashtag which has become central to RadioBubble's reporting (and indeed to much of the Greek news media ecology). As independent media sources expanded, they have contributed to the ongoing research and coverage of the relationship between the mainstream media and business elites (see for example, Inflammatory, 2013), many of whom have also been charged with fraud or linked to government corruption, reinforcing the distrust of mainstream media.

Both the Greek state and far-right groups have begun to respond to the growth of independent media and critical perspectives. Greek activists and commentators point to a number of moves by the Greek government that, they argue, aim to shut down dissent. IrateGreek argued that there is a pattern emerging in which the most marginalised spaces face repression first—as seen in the violent police closure of squatted social centre Villa Amalias described by Dalakoglou (2013)—with other spaces of dissent following. The shutdown and "reorganisation" of the national broadcasting station, ERT, in June of 2013 can also be seen in this light: journalists from the ERT, unions, and press freedom organisations framed this as an attack on democracy with chilling effects on media freedom (Lowen, 2013). It is frequently assumed that state attacks on spaces of dissent are closely tied to the interests of economic elites: for example, in an interview with Giorgos Kyritsis, a journalist from Avgi—a more mainstream left news publication which nevertheless sees its work as being aligned with the antifascist movement—he said, 'we have been sued many times, not from the government, from others, who happen to be friends with the government'. At the same time, Golden Dawn has been playing an active role in attacks on dissenting spaces, ranging from asking pointed questions

about the location of Indymedia servers as early as 2009 (IMC, 2009) to engaging in what seem to be coordinated efforts to shut down Greek antifascist accounts on Facebook (Siapera, 2014; Ματθαίος, 2013). Formal mechanisms of state repression combine in complex ways with other forms of control to put pressure on the growth of independent media.

The shutdown of Indymedia, Radio Entasi and 98FM needs to be understood in this context; while this is a relatively minor event in the history of the antifascist movement, it does highlight many of the broader trends affecting activists' use of digital technologies in Greece. The shutdown happened when servers hosting independent media sites were turned off on the order of the Dean of the National Technical University in Athens (NTUA) on 11 April 2013, but many commentators saw this as a result of pressure from the government, referencing a tweet from New Democracy MP Adonis Georgiadis (Γεωργιάδης, 2013) as evidence (Baboulias, 2013). As well as citing government pressure as a motivation, several interviewees noted ongoing questions from Golden Dawn in parliament and potential attempts by mining companies to undermine resistance to the Skouries mine in Ierissos. As this shutdown demonstrates, activists clearly understand attacks on their communications and media as extending significantly beyond a model of state-based censorship, encompassing deeper concerns with the relationship between capitalism, state power, and communicative technologies.

Research design and methodology

This article forms part of our wider Mapping Movements project, which studies the intersections between social movements and technologies, taking in case studies from around the world: our research so far has also included fieldwork and online analysis of Occupy Oakland in the US (Croeser and Highfield, 2014) and the 2013 World Social Forum held in Tunisia. For the Greek case study, we use a mixed-methods approach combining fieldwork and interviews with activists in Athens with digital methods, drawing on hyperlink networks and Twitter data. This approach allows us to garner a more nuanced view of the movement and its relationship with online platforms than would be apparent from social media activity alone (see also approaches used by, for example, Gerbaudo, 2012). The methodology is designed as a means of overcoming some of the limitations found in social movement research, particularly around social media analysis. Our methods also respond to ethical concerns and challenges, which may be well documented by previous literature on social movements, but which have not yet received a consistent response in the case of social media studies.

We used IssueCrawler software to follow hyperlinks from a seed list of websites related to the movement (including blogs) to identify additional sites to which they are connected. The results of the crawls allow the identification of issue and solidarity networks, associated in some way with the movement (see, for example, Marres and Rogers, 2005; Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). The depth of the crawl also allows for examining whether a movement has connections to other issues and movements, at the local and international levels, or if it combines multiple issue networks (or indeed moves from a single-issue network to a wider, thematically-consistent network within which the single-issue networks are located). The value of identifying online issue networks is seen by how they highlight the resources, organisations, media, and other websites (including social media platforms) that are connected,

cited, or invoked through hyperlinks from sites discussing a given issue. This is particularly important when considering how social movements might employ different platforms and sources over the course of a protest or campaign.

For our case study, we drew on seed lists of websites set up around the antifascist movement, and also sites covering and created in response to the specific event of the Athens Indymedia shutdown on 11 April 2013. Although Indymedia is not an antifascist-specific platform, the two contexts are linked, especially in the use of independent media by activists and the importance of these channels to movements covering a range of issues. Kriditis' (2014: 80) discussion of the anarchist movement in Greece, for example, positions the establishment of Indymedia Athens in 2001 in the context of the broader history of opposition to fascism that existed in Greece even before WWII and the military junta of 1967. These examinations of the social movement's online connections then demonstrate the positioning of antifascist communication within a wider media ecology, at the local and international levels. The issue networks are not without their limitations: the purpose of this step is not to create a definitive overview of the antifascist movement's (public) connections, but to identify links between different groups, locally and internationally, which can be examined further through qualitative means through fieldwork and additional digital analysis. This research is supplemented by studying tweets and websites identified from the crawls and related hashtags, such as #rbnews and #free_indymedia, to highlight additional practices and frictions, and to further develop our analysis of the intersections between social movements and digital media.

Fieldwork and interviews for the project were carried out by Croeser and took place over five weeks in April and May 2013. This period serendipitously overlapped with events which, while by no means the most central event in the movement's history, offer a prism through which to view some of the frictions in Greek antifascist activists' use of different communicative technologies: the temporary shutdown of Athens Indymedia, Radio Entasi, and 98FM on 11 April 2013. This allowed access to debates taking place within the movement about which communicative technologies to use, how to approach and shape these technologies, and around long-term strategies for communication within the movement and with outside audiences. Fieldwork involved attendance at several meetings dealing with potential responses to the shutdown; protests around the shutdown ranging from small events (with approximately 30 participants) to a larger march (attended by approximately 4,000 people); and participation in a range of movement spaces, including radio stations and social centres. This provided valuable insights into discussions around activists' use of different technologies.

In addition to this, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 34 people associated with the movement, with attempts made to gather a range of perspectives. Snowball sampling with multiple starting points was an important factor in selecting participants, both as a way of triangulating participants considered to have useful insight into the movement and because personal introductions played an important role in convincing activists experiencing significant repression and surveillance to participate. Interviewees included those deeply involved in the antifascist movement who saw their involvement in independent media as part of this work; journalists working within mainstream media covering the rise of the far-right and nationalist political party Golden Dawn; people leading or working within immigrant groups; and those who saw themselves primarily as citizen or independent journalists. Together, these interviews allowed us to build a multi-layered perspective the

movement, sharing commonalities with Tsing's use of a methodology that explores multiple viewpoints and is, 'variously ethnographic, journalistic, and archival … formed in discrete patches' (2005: x). Like Tsing, we are interested in 'odd connections rather than seamless generalizations, inclusive tables, or comparative grids.' (2005: xi).

Participants chose whether to be anonymous, or be identified by their legal names or a pseudonym. While offering all participants the option of anonymity is vital to ethical research, it is also important to recognise that some participants have compelling reasons to prefer being identified by name, or by a well-known pseudonym. One participant, IrateGreek, spoke of the protective value of visibility, knowing that the state would leave her alone because she has an international audience on Twitter. If we are to take seriously the injunctions to treat activists as those with the most valuable perspective on their own lives and work (Chesters, 2012: 145), we also need to respect their evaluations of the value and risk of public identification. Similarly, we have chosen our focus with care, particularly given that during the period of writing and research Greek media—both mainstream and independent—were increasingly under pressure from a range of directions; attacks on press freedoms in Greece were beginning to raise international concern well before our research was carried out (Borger, 2012). Like Tsing (2005: xii), we 'made choices about the kinds of research topics that seem appropriate, and, indeed, useful' based on our collaboration with activists. These, and other ethical issues related to our research methodology, are discussed in more detail in Croeser and Highfield (2015).

Frictions that slow, frictions that spark: activists' values and technological affordances

The particular form of the Greek antifascist media ecology is shaped in part by the frictions that exist between activists' values and the embedded affordances of existing digital technologies. While, as we note above, the movement contains a wide range of politics, we have focused particularly on the work of anarchist and autonomist activists, who have been at the forefront of antifascist activism throughout recent Greek history (Kriditis, 2014; Kitis, 2015). The politics of these activists mean that they tend to value creating change on the ground rather than appealing to the government or other actors to change policy; autonomy and decentralisation; and an opposition to capitalism. These values shape, through friction, how different media are used. In particular, they lead to a significant presence for highly-localised websites linked to particular spaces within Athens (especially *stekia* * - *'hangouts' or social centres), and extensive use of postering, which should be considered part of the media ecology in the same way that Twitter, Facebook, and Web radio are.

In addition to this, recent changes to antifascist communication practices are strongly tied to the shift away from Exarcheia, the anarchist and autonomous neighbourhood which has been the focal point for much of the Greek resistance to the right wing for decades. Now, some activists are working to decentralise the movement, shifting from Exarcheia towards neighbourhood assemblies, squats, and *stekia* around Athens. Squats, where local, disused spaces are occupied by activists, remain limited as a result of police repression and the dangers of attacks from fascist groups; this friction between activists and the state means that *stekia*, which are rented or otherwise legally acquired, play an important role in local organising.

An activist from a social centre in the Zografou neighbourhood, Alex P, said in an interview, 'even us who were already involved in radical politics saw a lot of other chances to originate struggles, to create radical communities in neighbourhoods … a lot of great things started happening in the neighbourhoods of Athens', which has been bringing new people to the movement. He said that, 'as the scene grew bigger the need for more communication and coordination was also getting bigger'. However, the choice of technologies for communication and organising is not always clear-cut.

The various digital platforms adopted by activists, and used for related topical coverage and political groups, form a digital media ecology of overlapping practices and local and international intersections. We used issue crawls to provide overviews of activist media networks originating from Greek sites, with one such network featured in Figure 1, arising from the seed list of antifascist websites. Here, independent media (including Athens Indymedia) and blogs receive links, as do social media and content-sharing platforms (Twitter, YouTube). What is also highlighted by the visualised networks are the connections between local and international groups and issues, with Figure 1, for instance, also featuring online resources dedicated to campaigns and themes around immigration elsewhere in Europe (such as the Calais Migrant Solidarity blog). Additional crawls, not depicted here, further emphasised the importance of location for online media, with blogs and online radio stations centred on specific parts of Athens being notable resources within the issue networks.

Figure 1, like the other issue networks identified for this project, is not witout its limits; the crawls are not descriptive of the entire set of resources which are used by Greek activists, especially since not all activists are online, and communication also makes use of private channels. Rather, the issue networks provide a visual aid for noting connections between sites and topics, which can be explored in further analysis using digital methods and through fieldwork. In Figure 1, for instance, among blogs hosted on Blogger and Wordpress, there are also topical resources featured on local, deliberately independent platforms like espivblogs. These crawls were carried out in April and May 2013; returning to the activist media ecology after the crawls also highlights the continued move towards independent and non-commercial spaces for activism online. The blog of the activist ACTION newspaper (efimeridadrasi.blogspot.com) featured to the left of Figure 1, for example, was moved from Blogger in late 2013 to a new site hosted through espiv.net (efimeridadrasi.espiv.net), as part of Greek activists' ongoing resistance towards corporate and commercial platforms.

Indeed, although blogs allow activists to maintain some control over content, form, and presentation, as opposed to social media platforms like Twitter or Facebook, even here concerns remain about censorship and surveillance, particularly for commercial services such as Blogger and Wordpress. Two activists who run a blog covering antifascist issues noted in an interview that they had specifically avoided using Blogger because of concerns with blogspot.gr being covered by Greek law, and had chosen Wordpress instead. However, they had been experiencing significant issues in the period after the Indymedia shutdown when traffic to their Wordpress site increased significantly: they were considering shifting the site and trying to find a new host service, preferably based outside of Europe and the US. Another anonymous participant argued that the online tools used by the movement:

> …are structures for the movement, have been built by people from the movement, independent servers, and in a way, actually they are protecting data, and this is important for people who use those media, because other structures like Google and Wordpress are easily controlled by authorities.

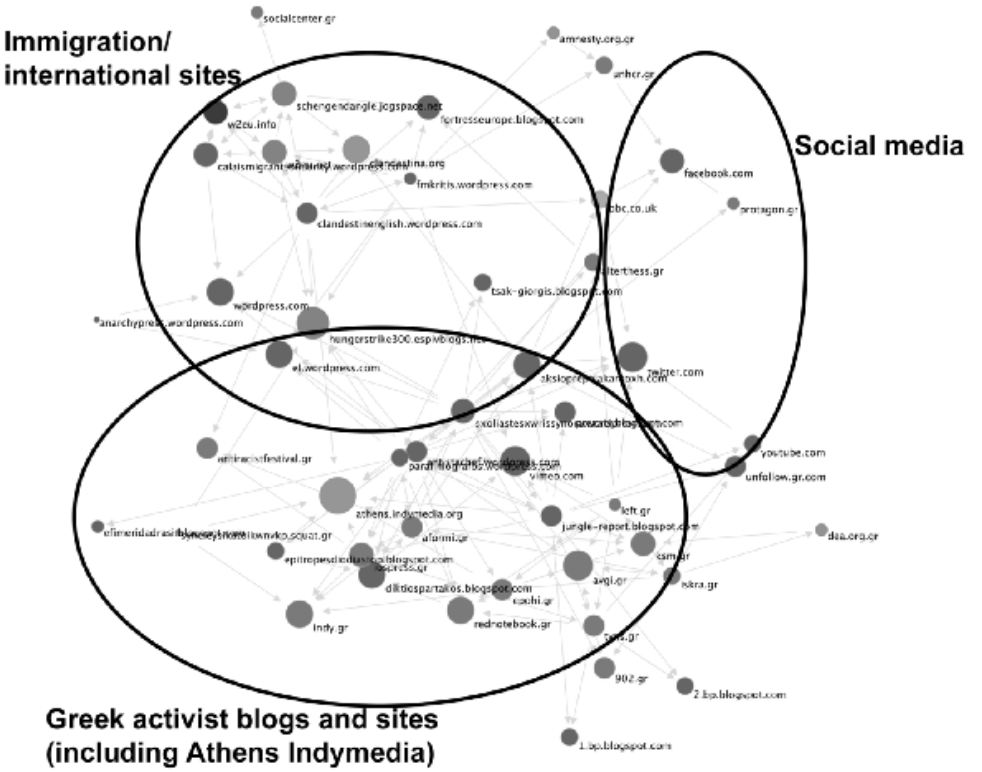


Figure 1: Antifascist issue network (crawl depth '2'), identified using IssueCrawler. IssueCrawler colours nodes based on the source domain, distinguishing between, for instance, .com and .gr addresses. This colouring is not necessarily helpful for our analysis, though, given the use of blogging platforms at the .com and .net level as well as .gr. Node size is based on in-degree, with sites receiving more links from others in the network appearing larger in the visualisation. The annotations provided here are loose topical descriptions and not representative of all sites within the corresponding sections of the network.

Citizen-led platforms and initiatives, such as open radio and citizen journalism, give activists channels for their voices to be distinct and autonomous, particularly in response to distrust of the mainstream media. They also allow for these voices to potentially spread further, through sites such as RadioBubble where content is uploaded and shared.These platforms do not operate in isolation, but are closely interlinked, as seen in the physical connections (including using the same university space prior to the shutdown) and digital links between Athens Indymedia and 98FM. While the issue network visualisations do not in themselves explain why there are connections between sites, they do demonstrate the mix of commercial and independent platforms, and topical and geographic variations present around an initial thematic context such as the antifascist movement. These are in a state of flux, though: while commercial platforms like Twitter and Facebook offer a large-scale audience and centralised

mechanisms for publicly sharing material, for instance, the risks and shortcomings around surveillance, privacy, and control of data and content, mean that movements are negotiating using these spaces while also promoting more independent options.

However, much of the existing literature takes it for granted that digital technologies mirror activists' values and priorities rather than questioning this process of negotiation. As a typical example, Kostis Kornetis (2010: 185) writes in his analysis of the 2008 protests that, 'Technology not only served as a vehicle of communication and co-ordination but also as the embodiment of the very political and organizational goals of the activists', combining discussion of independent and commercial media. Our research emphasises, in contrast, that activists' use of commercial and independent media is shaped by different frictions, some of which slow the use of particular technologies, while others lead to productive efforts to build alternatives.

Commercial platforms help in spreading information, promoting campaigns, and building the movement. Two activists interviewed noted that as well as hosting their site on a commercial blogging platform, many of their readers found them on Facebook, Twitter, and, somewhat surprisingly, Pinterest. Another, Persefoni, spoke about how Twitter has become a space in which people show support for and develop an identification with her local antifascist group:

> …there was this guy who was saying, even though he has never showed up at our meetings, he said "ok, I am a member of anti-fascist group of [this neighbourhood], you have to go there," even though he wasn't a part of or joining our meetings, he felt he was a citizen of [the neighbourhood], but, you know, he felt that with his action, retweeting and tweeting, he would be a part of it … he felt that he was contributing in a way.

This is in line with the significant body of literature which emphasises the value of Facebook, Twitter, and other commercial media to activists, while acknowledging the contestations and provocations within social media discussions (see, for example, Costanza-Chock, 2012; Tufekci and Wilson, 2012; Tufekci, 2013; Loza, 2014; Bonilla and Rosa, 2015).

At the same time, activists remain hesitant about these platforms. There is a broad recognition within the literature on activists' use of online communications that censorship and surveillance create friction, slowing or completely stopping the use of particular technologies (for more on this, see Croeser, 2012; Croeser and Highfield, 2014). The suspicions towards Twitter were reinforced in the fieldwork carried out for this study, and one of the results of authorities following social media activity in previous protests is that Greek activists are less willing to use popular commercial social media. One anonymous participant said:

> …social media are not actually a free place, you know about this. Even authorities are checking what is published there, but they can be used in a radicalway sometimes, and this happened in Libya, it's happened in Egypt, it's happened a lot, but in Greece it hasn't happened since [the 2008 protests].

While platforms such as Twitter can be used as tools for information dissemination and organisation by social movements, and attract attention from international audiences, Greek activists have proved resistant to fully adopting these popular social media, combining the use of these platforms with more independent sites. These practices highlight the negotiation of the need for public information-sharing and intra-movement communication and a desire to not be surveilled or monitored, leading to a productive friction concerning the types of technologies and their scopes for the movement.

However, there are also other frictions that emerge from activists' use of social media, including an ideological discomfort with the embedded values of commercial platforms. As Tsamou, involved in a group providing webmail and hosting services to activists, said, 'in Greece, people are very, let's say, hardcore for some things … We don't want companies, we don't want sponsors or anything, we want our own infrastructure', relating this to the DIY trend in music which Kitis (2015) has cited as a key part of Greek anarchist and anti-authoritarian chóros. Censorship and surveillance of online spaces create friction that slows activists' use of particular platforms, but the commercial nature of these platforms is, perhaps, a greater source of friction for many antifascist activists who see capitalism and fascism as intertwined. While this kind of anti-capitalist resistance to using popular social media has received some attention in the literature (this is explicitly addressed in Neumayer and Valtysson, 2013:15 and implicit in much of the work on independent Web media, including Dunbar-Hester, 2009; 2012; 2014), more work is required to understand how activists negotiate the frictions between their own values and those embedded in social media.

The commitment to a DIY approach means that the Greek movement makes extensive use of older means of communicating online, with blogs, particularly independently-hosted blogs, and citizen journalism platforms enabling longer-form posting and more control over content, and Web radio all part of its communications. The popularity of blogs may in part have been encouraged by the actions of 2008, and the widespread critique of mainstream media associated with that period of protest: Mike Mowbray's (2010: 6) examinations of the 2008 Greek protests noted that 'it seems that each protest occupation in Greece had its own blog'. Blogs have remained vital and useful for Greek activists, especially given the comparatively more distributed nature of blogs as a preferred option over singular, corporate-run social media platforms like Twitter. This pattern is reflected in the issue networks identified for this project, where blogs were represented from a variety of hosting services and personal domains, using the major US services like Wordpress and Blogger but also Greek independent options like espivblogs.

These negotiations among Greek activists highlight how friction becomes a motivation for the adoption of new technologies (which create their own friction). The Indymedia shutdown encouraged activists to use increasingly independent and private channels for operating the site. In the immediate aftermath of the shutdown, the anonymity-focused network Tor, and its associated browser, were used to run and access Athens Indymedia. Tor's infrastructure involves the distribution and encrypted routing of web traffic to avoid surveillance and monitoring, concealing user information. However, the additional knowledge required to access Tor, and websites operated through it, made the transition less straightforward than simply changing social media or blog platforms. To this end, the indymedia.squat.gr site acted not as a mirror for the original Indymedia site, but as a how-to for activists (and other visitors) in the use of Tor to access Athens Indymedia. This information was also promoted on Twitter and on blogs, linking to the indymedia.squat.gr site and providing public details about how to access the less-public Indymedia. Providing clear, visible instructions may appear counter-intuitive, especially since the same opponents to activists might also make use of this information—although simply accessing the site through Tor is a very different proposition to attempting to shut down the Tor version. The squat website also confirmed that this approach was a very necessary and worthy step taken, as a means of continuing to

support freedom of expression, counter-information, and collective self-defence in response to state-led repression towards social movements (mammeloukos, 2013). Friction, in this case, was not simply the result of external oppression, but was also used creatively by activists.

This is also seen in the movement's responses to attacks on its physical infrastructure. The movement's communications and promotional strategies combine elements of the physical and the digital, but they also move between these different forms when others are unavailable. For example, activists are increasingly shifting their servers off university property since 2011, which saw the end of the asylum laws protecting Greek campuses from police incursions. Attacks on physical infrastructure (such as computers from squats being seized in police raids) are increasing attention to where servers are, and to the fundamental structures underlying communication networks. The work of activists in Athens has the potential to lead other movements to more autonomous communication practices: by demonstrating both how to successfully develop their own infrastructure, and the limitations and issues of popular, hosted services (including social media), activists may be persuaded to adopt more forms of alternative and independent media.

However, activists do not always choose to route around the damage caused by censorship. The Indymedia shutdown demonstrates that friction can become a way of making broader political structures visible and sparking action. Many of those interviewed said that there were multiple options available which would keep Indymedia up and running at its original address, including raising funds to host the site elsewhere and shifting to a mirror (as they did after some time). The decision to let the main site go down, to contest the shutdown, was a way of making visible the attack on universities as a space for dissent. In choosing not to take the path of least resistance, some activists saw themselves as recommitting to the idea of the university as an asylum and more broadly refusing to cede the idea of key spaces as public.

The loss of friction also becomes undesirable for some activists when the shift to independent media corresponds to a loss of the productive 'interconnection across distance' that Tsing cites as a key aspect of activism. Dimitra Milioni and Dionysus Panos (2011: 238) note that as 'the majority of the population shapes its understanding of the world through mass-mediated texts, especially during situations represented as *crises*, the communicative power of oppositional voices is limited within the partial online spheres, reaching only audiences that look for them'. Shifting away from Facebook, Twitter, or other mainstream commercial platforms also means giving up the potential to use these spaces to resist right-wing discourse or to engage with non-activist audiences. One person we interviewed talked about taking part in an ongoing 'war with fascists' on Facebook, and Twitter also serves as a public platform for debate. Theocharis et al. (2014) argue that the perception of 'very high levels of flaming and trolling in the Greek Twitter sphere' may have dissuaded many from use of the platform, leaving it to more engaged users. Indeed, Theocharis et al. found that Greek activists were not supportive of the platform 'being used predominantly for political mobilization and coordination' (2014: 208). However, during this case study, activists on Twitter using the #free_indymedia hashtag were doing so in part to combat fascist comments made by public figures such as New Democracy MP Adonis Georgiadis (who is an active Twitter user); here, tweets were not just supporting Indymedia, but actively campaigning against (and trying to get Twitter to ban) intolerant and antagonistic views put forward by a member of the government. Online spaces outside of activist-run media have become important for

those wishing to disrupt or contest Golden Dawn's narrative (Angouri and Wodak, 2014), as the Internet is a vector for Golden Dawn's growth (Koronaiu and Sakellariou, 2013: 332). Activists frequently seek out, rather than evade, points of friction.

Similarly, there was an effort to create friction in the life of the city in the march protesting the shut down; as one activist explained:

> There is an effort from people who organise demonstrations, for the demonstrations not to be separated from the city, which can happen very easily, if the demo takes part in an empty road, or in a time when there is no actual traffic. Monastiraki is … a place that if you gather you know that at least they will know that you gathered somewhere.

Online forms of communication and media are complemented with a strong focus on physical presence, which also offers its own forms of friction. The physical and the online are closely interlinked, as we also found in our study of Occupy Oakland (Croeser and Highfield, 2014): digital media can stand in for physical places when access is prevented, and serve coordinating and organisational roles for physical demonstrations, for example. Websites, blogs, and Web radio within the Greek context were also strongly connected to the physical locations in which they were located, specific to particular parts of Athens—and, as shown by the Indymedia shutdown, dependent on these locations and their physical infrastructure. At the same time, the digital is not the only communication approach for activists;** **postering, for example, plays a very significant role in the antifascist movement as a way to claim space and build a neighbourhood antifascist presence.*

Conclusion

The practices surrounding digital technologies, and responses to specific platforms and challenges, within the context of Greek activism highlight the various perspectives and aims influencing the choices made by activists. Drawing on Tsing's (2005) model of friction allows us to build a more complex understanding of activists' use of digital technologies. Through our case study, we identified two key aspects in which activism and social movements are shaped, maintained, and recreated by productive friction. First, our analysis demonstrates that friction is created in multiple ways through the 'creative connection across difference'. This is apparent not only between activists, but also between activists and technology. Within the Greek context, the apprehension directed towards commercial social media platforms, for instance, as controlled and surveilled spaces is also accompanied by an acknowledgement of their importance for sharing information and connecting groups in solidarity.

Second, the case study found that communicative practices which are *(relatively)* friction-free are also frequently unproductive. Despite the promotion of the independence of activist platforms, for example, shifting entirely to independent media was not necessarily the most useful choice for the movement. Friction is not always unhelpful for social movements: it can offer a creative spark, inspiring change within—and beyond—the movement. Using independent digital platforms to communicate and host sites can provide a means of combating surveillance or censorship, but this can also be seen as a possible abandoning of commercial spaces to opposing voices: fascist and extremist groups make use of popular social media too, and the antifascist movement's negotiations towards using commercial and indepen-

dent platforms includes the need to engage in order to resist and campaign against publicly inflammatory voices.

The antifascist movement itself is created (and continually recreated) through a process of productive friction, as different groups and individuals with varying (and sometimes clashing) ideologies and experiences work together. Digital technologies become important sites for this friction, as well as for friction between activists, the state, and capital. While there may be paths of less resistance, they are not always the most desirable for activists, and there are no entirely frictionless strategies for using digital technologies, whether they are independent or commercial. Activists at times respond to friction by attempting to shift to a smoother pathway, but at other times friction is used as a creative spark for change within the movement, or in society more broadly.

Athens Indymedia helps to illustrate our argument about the place and role of friction within social movements. The uses of digital technologies by the activists studied here links back to Tsing's exploration of connections across difference, between human and non-human actors as well as at the interpersonal level. The movement is not solely the work of activists, but is shaped by the choices of technologies and strategies, of issues and responses. These frictions and negotiations will continue to be critical for studies of social movements and social media: the balance between public and private, independent and commercial, and ongoing debates around data retention, surveillance, and profiling, will provide further sparks for activists in their uses—or non-uses—of digital technologies as tools of communication, organisation, and dissent.

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CHAPTER 65

The Case for Alternative Social Media

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Abstract

What are "alternative social media"? How can we distinguish alternative social media from mainstream social media? Why are social media alternatives important? How do they work? Why do people make them? What do they tell us about contemporary corporate social media and its related phenomena: surveillance, privacy, power, self-expression, and sociality? This essay answers these questions by theorizing alternative social media. The empirical data for this alternative social media theory are drawn from previous work on alternative sites such as Diaspora, rstat.us, Twister, GNU social, and the Dark Web Social Network. These cases are used to build a generalized conceptual framework. However, this article does not solely theorize from these examples, but rather seeks to contextualize and historicize alternative social media theory within larger bodies of work. In addition to generalization from examples, the theory is informed by two threads. The first thread is the work of alternative media scholars such as Nick Couldry, Chris Atton, and Clemencia Rodriguez, who have done the historical and theoretical work to define alternative media. The second thread is a synthesis of works exploring the technical side of contemporary media, coming from new fields such as software studies. The threads and empirical analyses of sites such as Diaspora, Quitter, and rstat.us are combined into a theoretical matrix that can account for the processes and technical infrastructures that comprise social media alternatives and explain why they are distinct from sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google, as well as why they are important.

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Keywords

alternative social media, corporate social media, alternative media, media theory, software studies

For the past 5 years, a vibrant media format (Siles, 2011) has been developing on the Internet: alternative social media (ASM). Sites such as Lorea, GNU social, and Diaspora have appeared on federated servers across the World Wide Web. The Dark Web—networks only accessible via special software such as Tor or i2p—includes networking sites ID3NT, Galaxy2, and Visibility. And peer-to-peer microblogs such as Twister and SOUP are being developed and installed on phones and computers around the world (see Appendix for a list of ASM sites and URLs). These services allow users to engage in social media activities such as sharing and commenting on digital content, creating personas and profiles, socializing (by following or "friending" one another), and quickly communicating across networks of strong and weak social ties. Of course, all of these activities are possible with Twitter, Facebook, and Google (specifically, Google+). So why speak of ASM?

This essay makes a case for the study of ASM. I first briefly lay out alternative media theory as it existed prior to the dominance of Facebook, Google, and Twitter. Alternative media theory was built to respond to older mass media, considering how media power accrued to large, conglomerated broadcast media companies at the expense of broader democratic communication and sense-making.

I next consider the ways in which alternative media theory thinks about mainstream social media. I argue that those working in the alternative media tradition have an ambivalent relationship to social media. On one hand, they are eager to see social media as the answer to their longstanding calls for broader participation in media production and distribution. On the other hand, there is no denying that the dominant sites—Facebook, Google, and Twitter—have retained or even intensified some of the problems of mass media power and anti-democratic communication that traditional alternative media theorists have described. This leaves alternative media theory in a double-bind: social media allow for people to be producers, certainly more so than traditional media, but they are owned by for-profit firms who can be hostile to alternative ideas, discourses, and organizing—especially when those practices challenge corporate hegemony. Indeed, I suggest we call these sites corporate social media (CSM).

In contrast to CSM, I suggest we focus on the emergence of ASM as better implementing these imperatives. I draw on interviews with 10 ASM site makers and users, 2 years of participant observation in 11 ASM sites, close reading of site interfaces and policies, and the S-MAP, an archive of ASM screenshots located at http://www.socialmediaalternatives.org/archive. I will echo the alternative media theory literature's repeated call for scholars to pay attention to media processes over content, arguing that ASM can be seen as a critical response to CSM that not only allows for users to share content and connect with one another but also denies the commercialization of speech, allows users more access to shape the underlying technical infrastructure, and radically experiments with surveillance regimes. If alternative media theory is correct in orienting us to production—the how of media, rather than the what—ASM, not CSM, offer a more fitting suite of tools for people to both make media and shape media distribution infrastructures. In other words, this essay hopes to get us beyond the

"damned if you do, damned if you don't" perspective that alternative media theory has about CSM while furthering the calls for "do it yourself" media production (Ratto & Boler, 2014).

Alternative Media Theory Before Social Media

Drawing on Walter Benjamin's (1970) important essay "The Author as Producer," Chris Atton (2002) argues that alternative media "are crucially about offering the means for democratic communication to people who are normally excluded from media production" (p. 4). That is to say, alternative media are defined as much by their content (i.e., radical, progressive, socialist, anarchist, feminist, queer, or anti-racist) as by the contours and practices of their underlying conditions of production, which are meant to allow democratic participation in making media. Alternative media theory is thus closely tied to theories of radical democracy: the equalization of power hierarchies, the correction of structural inequalities across institutions, and the challenge to proprietary logic (Pickard, 2006). This radical democratic theory can be seen in Clemencia Rodriguez's (2001) concept of "citizens' media," media that turn "participants into active citizens. In other words, citizens' media is a concept that accounts for the processes of empowerment, conscientization, and fragmentation of power that result when men, women, and children gain access to and claim their own media" (Rodriguez, 2003, p. 190). In this sense, it isn't the medium that is the message as McLuhan (1994) famously states; rather *the process of producing media* is the message as Benjamin (1970; See also Waltz, 2005) argued, whether the media in question be print, radio, TV, or online.

Alternative media are a challenge to what Nick Couldry (2003a) calls "media power": the "overwhelming concentration of most, if not all, of societies' symbolic resources in the separate institutional sphere we call 'the media'" (p. 39). In other words, we have long endured mass media without mass access to the means of media production. This is an unabashedly political economic perspective: as scholars such as Nicholas Garnham, Vincent Mosco, and Robert McChesney have shown, highly consolidated ownership of media results in a particular vision of the world that is amenable to corporate capitalism, consumerism over citizenship, and political conservatism. Following this, as Deepa Fernandes notes, it is best to refer to such media as "corporate media"—that is, media owned and controlled by transnational corporations (quoted in Boler, 2008, p. 37).

Thus, as Couldry and Curran (2003) define it, "alternative media" are found in "media production that challenges, at least implicitly, actual concentrations of media power, whatever form those concentrations may take in different locations" (p. 7). That is to say, by offering access to decentralized, democratic methods of media production, alternative media challenge media power both at the level of organization (i.e., ordinary people can control production) and at the level of messages (if ordinary people make media, then their concerns will be privileged, rather than those of capitalists, politicians, or cultural elites). Drawing on these definitions, then, alternative media have a long history and take many forms, from print to broadcast to Internet. As Mitzi Waltz (2005) and Atton (2002) have shown, "alternative media" have always existed alongside hegemonic media. Religious reformers used printing presses to move power away from the Catholic clergy by distributing the Bible. Editors combined the emerging form of newspapers and government postal services to help rural people have access to the same news as urban elites (Starr, 2004). Liberation theologists used radio stations to give voice to

citizens and to challenge state power (Rodriguez, 2003). Marginalized populations, such as those with autism, used Web sites to challenge dominant media portrayals of autism (Waltz, 2005). Thus, dissenting views and practices have existed alongside hegemonic ones, reassembling media systems and production to challenge mainstream views. Conversely, of course, alternative practices can be appropriated by the mainstream. "Alternative," then, is not only a contested term; it is a historically contextual one (Waltz, 2005). But as this admittedly brief sketch shows, whenever media are organized to flatten the producer/consumer hierarchy and thus challenge "media power" in whatever form it takes, such media are "alternative."

Contradictions of Participation in CSM

Interestingly for our purposes here, all of this—the collapse of producer and consumer, the direct challenge to media power, and the search for new processes by which media could be made, distributed, and read—reappeared in theories of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005), sites that are now more often called social media. Just over a decade ago, Web 2.0 promised an end to gatekeepers—that is, centralized, concentrated arbiters of what is to be presented in the media and what is not. Anyone with a computer and a network connection can contribute to social media sites such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. Web 2.0, the "read/write Web," was famously marked by *Time* magazine's "You" as person of the year in 2006 (Grossman, 2006). With social media, people could shift from being passive mass media consumers to active, participatory consumers by selecting content, rating it, and publicly demonstrating preferences through sharing (Jenkins, 2006). Social media users produce a bewildering array of mash-ups, memes, home videos, songs, photos, and blog posts. This is a new way for people to cross the "ordinary/ media boundary" (Couldry, 2003b, p. 120) and become media producers. This did not have to be apolitical: journalists hailed various social movements as "Twitter Revolutions," supported by Twitter founder Biz Stone's famous promise to "keep the Tweets flowing" (Stone, 2011) in support of free speech. In the years between 2004 and 2012, many media critics proclaimed a promising new mediascape of democratic production and thus democratic organization (Benkler, 2006; Bruns, 2008; Shirky, 2009)—precisely what alternative media theorists had been calling for in previous decades.

However, the rise of these new participatory media not only attracted those who sought democratic media systems; it also attracted the attention of capitalists who recognized a new market to exploit. In the span of a few years, Web 2.0 sites were absorbed into the Silicon Valley logic of the start-up, the initial public offering (IPO), and the buyout, mixed with the advent of surveillance-based capitalism in support of increasingly targeted marketing messages (Gehl, 2014b). Within this larger context, Facebook, Google (YouTube, Google+, Blogger), and Twitter have grown from small projects mocked up on sketchbooks and developed in college dorms to global networks of billions, garnering attention from venture capitalists who invested in pursuit of growth in revenues and profits and ultimately public offerings of stock. Facebook, Google, and Twitter are thus articulated into a particular political economy of the Internet, one dependent on surveillance of user activities, the construction of user data profiles, and the sale of user attention to an increasingly sophisticated Internet marketing industry (Langlois, McKelvey, Elmer, & Werbin, 2009). In this economy, the users do the

work of profiling themselves by liking and tweeting, while the site owners sell the resulting user-generated data to marketers and advertisers.

Moreover, the growth of Facebook, Twitter, and especially Google has resulted in a dominant network topology: a star topology where users are increasingly and permanently connected to a core of fewer and fewer media corporations (Gehl, 2012). In other words, the Web as a collection of heterogeneous sites has largely given way to a small number of sites with near-monopolistic control of authentication, search, and content distribution. Facebook allows users to sign in, authenticate, and identify themselves on a range of Web sites, feeding our data to Facebook as we move across the Web. Twitter has become a required service for media organizations large and small, and news production is being slowly reconfigured around its technical conventions such as 140-character limits, hashtags, and the emphasis on "real-timeness" (Weltevrede, Helmond, & Gerlitz, 2014). Perhaps above all, Google is the epitome of networked enclosure and centralization (Andrejevic, 2007). A contemporary site or app can be collaboratively planned on Google Docs, have Google Fonts, be found through Google's domain name system (DNS) servers and Google search, have content culled from YouTube or Google+, enhanced with Google Javascript libraries, analyzed via Google Analytics, monetized with Google AdSense, and be served to Google Chrome on an Android phone via Google fiber—and all the resulting data produced through these acts are stored on Google servers. Admittedly, none of these sites contain the entire Internet, but their dominance and ability to draw increasing amounts of traffic cannot be denied.

Finally, over time, the cost of doing global media business has begun to outweigh the idealism of "The Tweets Must Flow": censoring and algorithmic manipulation of messages replaced unfettered social streams (Poell, 2014). Twitter rescinded their promise to let all Tweets flow in 2012, noting that the company would censor Tweets by country in order to comply with local censorship laws (Tweets still must flow, 2012). Facebook removes or hobbles activist pages if they target corporations who advertise on that social network (Mathews, 2013). In order to satisfy shareholders, Facebook, Google, and Twitter continually seek to increase attention to marketing messages, even at the expense of "ordinary" user content, and they do so through experiments in linking users to brands (Peterson, 2013; Sengupta, 2012) and new ways to push paid content into users' social streams, a practice referred to as "native advertising" (Smith, 2014).

The result of all of this is that social media's potential challenge to corporate media was absorbed by informational capitalism; Facebook, Twitter, and Google have become CSM (Langlois, 2014). Perhaps the best indication of the rise of CSM came in the form of *Time*'s 2010 Person of the Year: founder and young billionaire Mark Zuckerberg (Grossman, 2010), a person made rich by the very productivity of You, the 2006 Person of the Year.

Alternative Media Theory and CSM

However, despite all these problems with CSM, a sober analysis reveals that they do move us closer to the ideals laid out in the past 30 years by theorists of alternative media. The initial promise of Web 2.0—that gatekeepers have their power reduced and that "ordinary" users can make media—is still true, even for for-profit firms such as Facebook and Twitter. We have to recognize that prior to Web 2.0 and social media, "the media" often connoted "mass

media," broadcast from the few to the many. To think about media being arranged otherwise was difficult; as Rodriguez put it in her 2003 exploration of citizens' radio in Chile,

> the only model of communication and media known by the communities involves commercial media and information transmission. A different model in which media are tools for cultural awareness, dialogue, and critical thinking has the texture of an intangible, fantastic utopia. (p. 183)

Certainly, there were moments of possibility when media could have been something other than one-way, centralized mass media (the struggle over the shape of radio being one example; see Douglas, 2004; McChesney, 1993; Pickard, 2015), and there have been traditions of techno-utopianism that have sought to use new media technologies to undermine mass media (Stevenson, 2014; Turner, 2008). But by and large, the model that has dominated the 20th century has been the mass media model. Thus, the affordances and popularity of CSM have provided a new way to think about media. CSM's rise in the mid-2000s reflected what Geert Lovink identified in 2008 as "the desire to create new forms of social networks" (Lovink & Boler, 2008, p. 134), a desire that transcends content, gatekeepers, or vertically integrated broadcast empires and is *seemingly* satisfied with Twitter and Facebook. Perhaps then people (such as the publishers of *Time*) who proclaimed that CSM could fulfill the promises of media democracy were right; CSM are different from mass media, after all.

Moreover, crude monikers like "Twitter Revolution" have a grain of truth: social media have been useful to activists organizing protests and getting their messages out. For example, Greg Elmer and Andy Opel (2014), having noted that protesters have shifted tactics from holding signs to holding cameras, constructed their documentary film *Preempting Dissent* almost entirely from Creative Commons-licensed, crowdsourced footage of police brutality at protests, solicited on a variety of platforms (YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, among others). In this sense, the film assembled the products of countless protests (raw video footage, commentary) after they appeared in their original contexts in CSM into a coherent, progressive message opposed to new police tactics used against peaceful protesters.

Thus, given the contradictions of participatory CSM, it is perhaps not surprising that alternative media theory has had an ambivalent relationship to CSM. For example, in a 2007 interview with alternative media scholar Megan Boler, McChesney notes that the media reform movement has used "new media—podcasting, blogging, YouTube, MySpace—to popularize the issues and to bypass the traditional media" (McChesney & Boler, 2008, p. 62). Yet in that same interview, McChesney also notes that market-based media on the Internet will never challenge the power of corporate media. Boler (2008) herself expresses ambivalence about CSM, noting that these media allow for new, alternative narratives that challenge traditional media while also being readily absorbed by mainstream media; that is, to participate in them is to "contribute" in the sense Jodi Dean (2010) speaks of. Similarly, Ratto and Boler (2014) note the tension between using CSM to distribute ideas while having to hew to the self-promotional, marketing logic that those sites privilege. Alternative media scholars saw potentials in social media but were justifiably leery of their for-profit nature.

Ultimately, then, Web 2.0 and social media illustrate well Des Freedman's assertion that the best approach to studying power in media is to consider contradictions between corporate media's desire for hegemony and narrow consensus and those moments when radical practices and alternative ideas emerge into mainstream discourses (Freedman, 2014, p. 13; see also

Hesmondhalgh, 2002). We can read the history of CSM in this way; they provide new ways to think about who can make and distribute media, but they also intensify media centralization, control, and commercialization. In response to these contradictions, one approach scholars can take is to focus on content and seriously study how activists and ordinary citizens are using CSM to politicize and organize despite the problems of centralization, censorship, surveillance, and the bending of interaction toward consumer messages. Indeed, this is what many contemporary alternative media scholars are doing (Penney, 2014; e.g., Poell & Borra, 2012; Porter & Hellsten, 2014; Terranova & Donovan, 2013). Another approach is to take seriously the affordances and limitations of CSM's interfaces and architectures and to see how activists and coders are reverse engineering (Gehl, 2014b) ideas from CSM to produce a new alternative media: ASM. This is what I will do here.

Toward a Theory of ASM

In order to explore ASM, I first take up the call from alternative media theorists such as Atton (2008), Rodriguez (2001), and Pickard (2006) to pay attention to the underlying organizational dimensions of such media and to see how those structures may encourage or discourage democratic media production. In the case of ASM, organizational structures are intimately overdetermined by their technical architectures. As Geert Lovink argues, "activists really need to understand the limits and the possibilities of software and network architecture" (Lovink & Boler, 2008, p. 129). For him, software and network architectures provide infrastructures of possibility. In other words, interfaces, database structures, mechanisms of connection all shape social activities, including activism and the organization of media production. ASM bring to the fore technical aspects such as digital network topologies, links, cryptography, interfaces, and databases.

To understand this, we can turn to the emerging field of software studies. Software studies focuses on a range of artifacts, including network topologies, interfaces, operating systems, algorithms, lines of code, machine languages, the software/hardware relationship, and, in some cases, the hardware platform itself. Software studies disentangles these layers of abstraction while articulating them into others, including social relations, spaces, politics, organizational forms, conditions of production and consumption, and semiotics. This field has already been taken up to study the contours of CSM (Bucher, 2014; Gehl, 2014b; Langlois et al., 2009; Weltevrede et al., 2014). I will borrow from it here to study ASM.

Mixing traditional alternative media theory with the sociotechnical emphasis of software studies brings forward three key features of ASM: their anti-advertising stances, their pedagogies of network topology and code, and their particular deployment of surveillance practices.

Alternative Like Economies

A key feature of most ASM is a refusal to participate in the dominant political economy of the corporate Internet, a refusal that is most clearly marked by the lack of advertisements on sites such as GNU social, Galaxy2, Diaspora, and Lorea.

This is a content issue, to be sure. Refusing advertising is refusing to privilege moneyed speech. The increasing equation of money with speech—that is, those with the most money

can be the loudest and most persistent voices in contemporary media—is denied when advertising is refused. As an admin of the dark Web site Galaxy2 argued, advertising

> allows those with money to make more noise, or to have more impact that those without money . . . I don't want a system where if you have money, you have more influences/right/privileges than those who either choose not to pay, or those who cannot afford it.

Instead, ASM operate on the principle that each user has an equal chance to speak (assuming, of course, said users have access to the site and the skills to use it, a point I have to set aside here). Paying for privileged positions, either in sidebars in the interface or in "native advertising" in the social stream, is actively denied.

But perhaps more important than a content issue, refusing advertising in ASM is also both a *technical* and an *organizational* issue. First, putting an ad on a modern Web site is not simply a matter of adding a hyperlinked <img> tag to the site's HTML; it is an extremely technical achievement, mixing together first-party content with third-party ads from multiple servers (Turow, 2011). Moreover, advertising online is largely based on user behaviors, which depends on extensive data collection. By monitoring users across the Web, advertising sales networks build profiles of users and then sell their attention to marketers in nanosecond-scale auctions as pages load. In order for all this to work—in order for this to be profitable, in other words—a complex system of surveillance, standardized ad exchanges and formats, and standardized Web site appearance have to be in place (Gehl, 2014b). CSM sites such as Facebook, Google, and Twitter are a large part of this logic, both because of their power to monitor users across the Web and because user's attention paid to these sites is a valuable commodity to be sold to marketers.

This is reflected in CSM organizations, as practices such as engineering, marketing, data analysis, and sales become intimately intertwined.[1] Indeed, one could argue that the networking imagined by CSM is less networking between peers and more networking between consumers and brands; as Facebook Director of Ads Engineering Adam Bosworth (2014) puts it, the goal is "meaningful connections between people and businesses." By denying this logic, by denying advertisers access to their users, ASM refuse the entire technical and organizational infrastructure of online behavioral advertising.

ASM site admins and creators talk about their anti-advertising stances often. For example, an admin of a dark web social network[2] told me, "ads are not here because I gain flexibility . . . if I had ads I would have to listen to advertisers." When asked what made his site different from other social networks, the admin of Galaxy2 replied, "[this site] doesn't datamine to collect personal data to sell to third parties. There's no ads." Both of these admins hint at the powerful influence marketers can have over sites. Carol Nichols of the Twitter alternative rstat.us makes this explicit: Twitter is "actively ignoring the needs of their users in order to serve the needs of their advertisers and shareholders." In contrast, she argues that rstat.us is more concerned with user expression. Similarly, Hannes Mannerheim of Quitter notes that

[1] For example, consider Facebook's use of the phrase "Ads Engineering"; see https://www.facebook.com/business/news/Facebook-ads-engineering-perspective

[2] Due to an agreement I made with members of these sites, I will refrain from naming dark web social networking sites by name or revealing pseudonyms of the admins I quote here unless I have explicit permission to do so.

> A social network that has the users' interests in mind would look completely different than today's Twitter and Facebook. It would be designed to help you with your social interactions, quickly and efficiently, not trying to make you spend maximum amount of minutes on the site. Facebook, and increasingly Twitter (as their owners have started demanding profits), are doing the opposite. They . . . steal your time, make you do pointless stuff, filter in advertising in your news feeds, delete pages and users organising protests etc, mine their "big data" to find the best ways to use our weaknesses for pointless click-bait . . .

Here, all of these ASM site developers note the outsize influence of marketing over contemporary CSM, whose designs are implemented in order to support marketing efforts. In contrast, the developers argue that their alternatives are designed for mediated acts of socializing—indeed, the very socializing we ideally associate with Facebook and Twitter—while not being concerned with bending the arc of that socializing toward connections between people and brands.

This is illustrated by considering ASM appropriation of CSM conventions, including those that were originally designed to intensify attention to marketing messages. One key example is the Like Button. Gerlitz and Helmond (2013) note that Facebook's dominance online has resulted in a "Like Economy," that is, an economy built around the binary signal of liking digital artifacts, where a user's collection of likes becomes a proxy for that user's desires and socioeconomic status. Through the Like button—which is now installed on a huge range of Web sites—"User activities are of economic value because they produce valuable user data that can enter multiple relations of exchange and are set up to multiply themselves" (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013, p. 13). These data are collected by Facebook and sold to marketers who seek access to users' attention; with more data, their advertising messages can be more precise, and the Likes serve as further feedback on how specific appeals resonated with users (Lipsman, Mud, Rich, & Bruich, 2012).

However, as Gerlitz and Helmond (2013) point out, this Like Economy is not all about marketing: Liking is also positive, affective, and spontaneous, a signal and social counter of approval and affection. As one member of a dark web social network put it, "Incoming likes support your ego in thinking that some things need to be said, while outgoing likes are an instrument to show your support to other people's activity." We might then see in ASM an *alternative like economy*, one that centers on affective exchanges between users as opposed to user-to-brand exchanges that are privileged in CSM. Indeed, most ASM have binary affirmative signals despite not selling that attention to advertisers. When ASM use Like buttons yet refuse advertising—and thus the technical logic that advertising carries with it, including collecting user data, targeting advertisements, and giving moneyed voices more volume—they allow their users to engage in affirmations of one another without tying these affirmations to a profit motive.

Thus, ASM designers present their sites as spaces in which users can engage in the format of social media (by friending, liking, following, and sharing) but without serving those users to marketers nor building out the highly complex technical and organizational infrastructure needed to serve ads. As an admin of a dark web social network told me,

> I . . . don't want [advertisements] . . . because this can limit the freedom I have to do whatever I feel [is] needed to do. I don't want to guide my actions based on what advertisers would appreciate more,

> rather I prefer to be 100% independent and take actions I believe are better for the ideals our project represents . . . [this site] is about refusal, it's about principles.

To be certain, developers' narratives about CSM being entirely beholden to marketers might be overstated, and their own anti-advertising narratives might simply be means by which they can lay claim to their sites being "alternative" and thus attract a particular user base. Their motivations might be altruistic, idealistic, or simply self-serving, but regardless, their refusal of advertising does have consequences: their sites do not give in to the technical, infrastructural, or organizational demands that marketers would make upon them.

Network and Code Pedagogies

Whereas ASM's refusal of advertising and its attendant technical and organizational logics are obvious, less so are their specific practices regarding the relationship between users and the underlying technical structures of the sites. ASM have a radically different understanding of networks and code than do CSM: they are built in order to allow users access to more than just interfaces. ASM seek to guide users beyond filling in profiles, sharing, friending, and liking to practices such as coding, administering, and organizing the very systems that allow for those interface-level activities.

This desire to allow users access to and control over underlying technical infrastructures can take different forms. First, ASM sites are often (although not always) distributed or federated. "Distribution" refers to peer-to-peer technology, wherein there are no central servers. Twister, a microblogging service built on top of Bitcoin and BitTorrent protocols, is one notable example; users can install Twister on their phones and connect with one another without any central mediator (Freitas, 2014). Federation, on the other hand, is the practice of installing social media software on Web servers, linking them together, and connecting to them with clients (i.e., browsers). GNU social, rstat.us, Lorea (Cabello, Franco, & Haché, 2013), and Diaspora (Sevignani, 2013) are key examples here. In either case, the goal is to allow users to install ASM "closer to home," either on their own devices or on Web servers they trust. This decentralized approach is in response to the highly centralized structures of Facebook, Twitter, and Google, quintessential "cloud" companies with data centers that are "material hubs for global information and communication traffic" (Mosco, 2014). Such data centers are far away and alien to the vast majority of Internet users, even as they reach out and enclose the devices we are so intimate with (Andrejevic, 2007). Peer-to-peer or federated software brings ASM closer in geographic terms.

However, such decentralization does not necessarily lead to more user control of ASM. In addition to decentralization, ASM offer access to their underlying technologies because they are built with free or open source software. GNU social founder Matt Lee explains,

> Free software is software that can be controlled by the users of the software, rather than the developers. Users of a free program can run, copy and modify the program to suit their own uses, and share copies with friends and colleagues. GNU social is a little different in that it is primarily used in a web browser, so we used a special free software license that extends these freedoms to users in a browser.

The federated rstat.us is open source because, as rstat.us developer David Wilkinson notes,

> It is important that rstat.us is, albeit not technically the case by law alone, controlled by the community and not by us . . . Basically we are pro-people vs being simply anti-corporate . . . We would rather build a simpler project that people can extend and use in a variety of ways without consulting us.

Indeed, rstat.us takes this idea even further: not only is its code in the public domain (licensed as Creative Commons 0—No Rights Reserved), its design and logos are as well. This means that users build new systems from it and use or alter rstat.us' design and logos. In essence, rstat.us provides users, coders, and culture jammers with raw material to work with; this is in addition to rstat.us' affordances for microblogging.

ASM architectures and practices are not homogeneous. The distinction between distribution and federation, as well as between free software and open source software, foregrounds the fact that ASM approaches differ quite a bit and reflect different politics. As Lonneke van der Velden (2013) notes in his comparative study of Diaspora and Lorea,

> These two social networks could be analyzed in terms of their push of different (political) agendas: Diaspora being closer to a liberal notion of the individual subject and manifesting a legal understanding of how to organize human rights within the social networking world, and [Lorea] expressing a more rhizomatic point of view of the world in which various experimental nodes can be productively interconnected and in which the status of the individual and the law is less explicitly defined. (p. 317)

However, although their approaches are different, one thing ASM have in common is their emphasis on *network and code pedagogies*: that is, trying to help users become coders and technicians, "sociologists of software," to draw on Simondon (2010), who are far more able to shape ASM to meet their needs. Thus, developers of ASM do more than just make media systems; they teach others how to use them and modify them. As Matt Lee of GNU social argues,

> it is vitally important to me that anyone can set up a GNU social server on virtually any web hosting. I also want to make it as easy as possible to set up and install. To that end, I will personally help anyone who wants to get set up.

Lorea's developers have a similar ideal. As Cabello et al. (2013) note, Lorea developers offer

> a high number of workshops . . . to activists for free. This clearly takes into account the need to develop a dynamics based on inclusion, and the understanding that people who do free software development and system administration (sysadmin) work for a community. (p. 344)

This is not simply technical instruction—this is an organizational choice made by ASM developers. This is precisely what alternative media theory calls for: media technologies, organizations, and practices that value critical inquiry, pedagogy, and citizenship (Rodriguez, 2003). Admittedly, teaching billions of Internet users these skills is extremely difficult. But the overarching ideal here is to move users past simply using social media to being active contributors to the design, development, administration, and implementation of social media. This is not possible with Facebook, Twitter, or Google, which are far more closed in terms of code and tend to rely on aggregated, interface-level actions as signals for potential technical changes. ASM offer radically different forms of network and code pedagogies.

Surveillance Democracy

Given Barrett Brown and Anonymous' revelations about corporate spying in 2010 and Edward Snowden's revelations about government spying in 2013, as well as the general backdrop of Google, Facebook, and Twitter's monitoring of user activities, we might conclude that ASM must be anti-surveillance. Twister's homepage, twister.net.co, for example, promises "no spying" and "no IP [Internet Protocol] recording." Diaspora (diasporafoundation.org) promises, "with diaspora*, your friends, your habits, and your content is your business . . . not ours!" The dark web social networks Galaxy2 and Visibility, which exist as Tor hidden services and on the i2p network, respectively, are at first glance anti-surveillance because IP addresses of both clients and servers in these systems are obfuscated.

All of this might lead to the impression that ASM must be dedicated to anonymity. This is not the case. To "do" social media is to publicly perform for invisible audiences by posting images and links and commenting on other people's posts. Being social in social media means accumulating accolades: likes, comments, and above all, friends or followers. All of this involves the mediated construction of a coherent identity, articulated through the formatted conventions of social media. This is as true of ASM as it is of CSM.

Thus, a central tension in ASM is one between surveillance and public performance. What I suggest here is that ASM are experiments that mix together practices of surveillance, privacy, and identity in different ways. These experiments are meant to go beyond and against the hegemonic CSM model, a model that commoditizes the products of its own surveillance and, in a bid to keep doing business in various contexts, accedes to state surveillance.

For example, we can consider the contrast between ASM, which allows users to have pseudonyms, and Facebook, which demands users sign up with their real names. Since they are not invested in producing users-as-profiles which can be targeted by marketers, ASM allow far more play with identity than in a site such as Facebook. As one dark web social networking site user told me,

> I could be an engineer, a business mogul, an artisan. I could be a novelist or a teacher. I could be a teenager who's blowing smoke about being an "old fart," or I could be pushing fifty. I take care to type "recognise" one day and "recognize" another. I'm equally familiar with Washington and London. For the record, I'm American, but am I even in America?

For this ASM user, such identity-play is not antithetical to the main act of social media, socializing. The user even argues that pseudonyms beget deeper social interactions:

> when the mask goes on, many of our daily masks come off. We tend to shed layers of societal convention and become closer to who we really are. Humans are social creatures. Apsychologically well-adjusted person will seek out others of his peer group . . . coming to know the individuals behind the masks, names or no names, was the most important. My life is richer for having "met" them.

In contrast to such pseudonymous social networking, Facebook is notable for its longstanding emphasis on real identities and social connections. This emphasis has made the site extremely attractive to marketers who seek to target ads as granularly as possible. Facebook's refusal to allow for pseudonyms—most notably among trans and genderqueer users (Carroll & Holpuch, 2015)—reinforces "real" identities as the ideal in CSM. ASM do not enforce real world identity policies and thus allow for the sort of experimentation the dark web user described above.

Beyond experimentation with pseudonyms, ASM administrators negotiate their surveillance practices with their users. On the Dark Web Social Network (Gehl, 2014a), a user and admin co-wrote the privacy policy publicly, with users and other admins debating its content before agreeing on a final policy. During this process, admins received many pointed questions about the social network's data retention and monitoring practices. This is part of the larger open source ethos; software codes and social codes are equally seen as objects to publicly debate. Contrast this with the policies of Facebook, Google, or Twitter, which appear to be written more in consultation with marketers and law enforcement. In a sense, then, administrators enroll their users' concerns about surveillance and try to turn those concerns into "sousveillence" (Mann, 2004) or the skeptical monitoring of administrative action.

Conversely, while ASM administrators accept the need to have their actions and decisions questioned, they also encourage users to hide their activities from administrative oversight. On Galaxy2, a Tor-based social network, the founder posted a guide that teaches users how to easily encrypt their communications with one another. As he argues, "of course I don't read private messages, but why should members trust me?" In doing so, the admin is eliminating his ability to read private user messages (assuming users follow his guide). Distributed and federated systems like Twister, rstat.us, GNU social, and Diaspora take this further. They are designed so users can install them on whatever server they please; doing so reduces the makers of these systems to *users* rather than powerful administrators. In other words, if I install Twister on my own computer, even the program's creator cannot access it unless I allow it, and those who I allow are subject to my administrative oversight. This is the heart of the decentralized model: the power to watch others is disaggregated from the centralized, star topology of Facebook and Google and is redistributed back to individual servers, client devices, and users-cum-administrators.

What all of this reveals is that ASM are not simply anti-surveillance; the practices of social media necessarily involve surveillance. Surveillance, watching, and performing are always part of any social networking site—or indeed, any social activity. What matters is the specific technical and social configuration of surveillance practices and privacy, how information flows and gazes are put to work to produce a culture, and how power relations are configured—or fragmented, to use Rodriguez's (2003) term—to mitigate against abuses. In this sense, what is happening on ASM is experimentation with surveillance power and anonymous freedom. This is precisely what Christian Fuchs (2012) calls a "socialist conception of privacy": power relations through watching are inescapable, so ASM involve new structures of power relations by experimenting with alternative acts of looking and hiding, all directed toward dissolving surveillance capitalism (Foster & McChesney, 2014). This is a form of "participatory surveillance" (Albrechtslund, 2008), one that is not amenable to surveillance capitalism but is instead amenable to what might be called *surveillance democracy*: a wider negotiation of flows of vision and obfuscation than is allowed in CSM.

Conclusion: Future ASM Work

As an admin from a dark web social network told me,

> Facebook, Google, and Twitter have terrible privacy policies, we're built around the idea of anonymity. They tend to monetize your experience (or eventually find a way to inject some form into it), we

> will never. They troll for data, we don't, we try and protect it. You get the idea, we're basically the antithesis of the likes of Facebook and Google.

Certainly, ASM are heterogeneous; there are many "antitheses" to Facebook, Google, and Twitter to be found among them. Just as what counts as "alternative media" is a matter of historical and local contexts, the same is true of ASM. Not all ASM will implement features such as refusing advertising, teaching users how to modify underlying software, or experimenting with flows of vision in the same way. There are competing ways to engage with complex sociotechnical practices such as mediated identity formation, social interactions, software interfaces, and network topologies. Moreover, ASM may never reach the sheer size of the CSM they seek to challenge.

However, despite the challenges of exploring these heterogeneous systems, and despite the fact that ASM are not as popular as CSM, ASM are worthy of scholarly attention because they give us new ways to think about media, media infrastructures, and mediated social interactions. Alternative media theory is primed to explore these new ways of thinking and being. The important scholarship of Rodriguez, Atton, Boler, Pickard, Downing, and Couldry (among many others) has paved the way for considering how the infrastructural and organizational elements of ASM diverge from those of CSM. In particular, alternative media theory provides normative lenses to consider issues such as site administration and design, specifically how those elements encourage or discourage users from being more involved in both media content production and site construction.

Here, I suggest that to further explore the articulations between alternative media, radical democracy, and software, alternative media theory would be wise to draw on new fields of scholarship, such as software studies, which have developed approaches to software- and network-mediated systems such as social media. Indeed, this work has already begun; Geert Lovink and Miriam Rasch's (2013) collection *Unlike Us Reader: Understanding Social Media Monopolies and Their Alternatives* is a key work in this area.

Moreover, critical social media scholars should also pay attention to ASM. Like any alternative media, ASM are not ideal, and each specific system has specific power relations, cultures, and practices in need of critique. The critical concepts and techniques derived from years of analysis of sites such as Facebook can be taken up and applied to ASM. However, the difference between critiquing ASM and CSM may well be that ASM administrators will listen to critical social media scholars to try to improve their systems, while Facebook, Google, and Twitter will likely only listen to major shareholders and advertising networks.

Mixing these fields will advance scholarship on ASM. Indeed, this article only scratches the surface of this area of study. More work needs to be done to refine normative ideals and to test specific ASM sites against them.

Finally, I would also suggest that alternative media practitioners would benefit from ASM. CSM provide channels for messages, no doubt about it, and alternative media content producers use them all the time. But for alternative media practitioners and activists, the underlying technical and organizational problems of CSM should outweigh their reach. In the absence of alternatives, activists would simply have to accept the negatives of CSM while trying to take advantage of them. But alternatives exist and are thriving. So, how might activists use ASM to achieve their goals of political organizing, advocacy, or persuasion? What if *Democ-*

racy Now recommended to its listeners and viewers that they talk about stories and debates on Diaspora instead of Facebook? What if The Yes Men's *Action Switchboard* offered links to Lorea? What if *Truthout* shared stories via Quitter? What if protest groups coordinate with Twister? The combined network effects of alternative media content producers, scholars, activists, and ASM systems would present a far more viable challenge to CSM—and indeed, more broadly, corporate mediated thinking—than any of them would alone.

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Appendix

Alternative Social Media URLs

WWW sites

GNU social: http://gnu.io/

- This is the codebase for a large range of federated microblogging sites.

Independent Microblogging Service: https://indy.im/

- This is an example installation of GNU social.

Quitter: https://quitter.se, https://quitter.es, and https://quitter.is

- Quitter is a specific version of the GNU social software, meant to closely mimic the interface of Twitter.

Twister: http://twister.net.co/

Lorea: https://n-1.cc/g/lorea

Diaspora: https://diasporafoundation.org/

- Like GNU social, Diaspora is a federated system. It is installed on a range of servers around the world.

rstat.us: https://rstat.us

- rstat.us is also a federated system.

Eepsites

These sites are only accessible with the i2prouter installed. Learn more about this software at https://geti2p.net/en/

ID3NT: id3nt.i2p

Visibility: visibility.i2p

Onion sites

These sites can be accessed using Tor. Research for this article was drawn from interviews with several Tor hidden service-based social networking site users and administrators. With one exception, these interviews were conducted on condition that I do not publicize these sites.

Galaxy2: http://w363zoq3ylux5rf5.onion/

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CHAPTER 66

The Opium of the Paquete: State Censorship, Private Self-Censorship, and the Content-Distribution Strategies of Cuba's Emergent, Independent Digital-Media Start-Ups

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Abstract

Cuba's famed *paquete* has been celebrated in recent years for effectively undermining the Cuban government's historic media monopoly as it erupted in an offline digital response to the rising demand for more diverse and less ideologically charged media content. However, the *paquete*'s different compilers and distributors have also systematically practiced self-censorship in exchange for continued state tolerance of their growing *alegal* media enterprise by refusing to distribute political content, especially if it is critical of the government and/or produced by any of the independent digital media start-ups operating on the island today. This article analyzes this phenomenon by comparing the *paquete* to its two offline digital competi-

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tors: the government-sanctioned Mi Mochila, distributed via its network of Joven Clubs de Computación y Electrónica (JCCEs), and the clandestine, politically charged, "sneakernet" complement to the *paquete*, known as the *paketito*. The article concludes by highlighting the various ways the founding directors of a number of Cuba's leading independent digital media outlets solve the problem of the *paquete*'s self-censorship by developing an array of content-distribution strategies to fit Cuba's hybrid online-offline digital media environment.

Resumen

El famoso "paquete semanal" de Cuba se ha celebrado en los últimos años por socavar de manera efectiva el histórico monopolio mediático del gobierno cubano al irrumpir en una respuesta digital *offline* a la creciente demanda de contenido multimedia más diversa y menos cargada ideológicamente. Sin embargo, los diferentes compiladores y distribuidores del llamado paquete también han practicado sistemáticamente la autocensura a cambio de la continua tolerancia estatal de su creciente empresa de medios "alegal" al negarse a distribuir contenido político, especialmente si está crítico con el gobierno y/o producido por cualquiera de los nuevos *start-ups* de medios digitales independientes que operan en la Isla hoy. Este artículo analiza este fenómeno al comparar el paquete con sus dos competidores digitales *offline*: Mi Mochila, sancionada por el gobierno y distribuida a través de su red de Joven Clubs de Computación y Electrónica (JCCE), y el clandestino y políticamente cargado complemento al paquete, un "sneakernet" conocido como "el paketito." El artículo concluye destacando las diversas formas en que los directores fundadores de varios de los principales medios de comunicación digitales independientes de Cuba resuelven el problema de la autocensura del paquete al desarrollar una serie de estrategias de distribución de contenido únicas para adaptarse al entorno híbrido de medios digitales *online-offline* de Cuba.

> The Cuban government clearly tolerates *el paquete*. Even if officials are not being paid off, it satisfies many consumers, making them less likely to press for open Internet access. Had he been writing today, Karl Marx would have said "*el paquete* is the opium of the masses."
>
> —Larry Press, *The Internet in Cuba* (blog), September 14, 2015

Cuba's home-grown "sneakernet," colloquially known as *el paquete semanal*, or the weekly package, is an offline, islandwide digital data distribution network that rides on the back of hundreds of thousands of tiny flash drives and external hard drives.[1] The *paquete* has been rightly credited with (and often celebrated for) fundamentally undermining the Cuban government's long-standing monopoly over the mass media available to the Cuban public on

[1] The term *sneakernet* connotes bothe fact that this network — like its cousins in various developing and authoritarian countries around the world — circulates offline and is powered by human feet in proverbial "sneakers," and the fact that the existence of such networks, even when tolerated by the authorities, often includes a generous dollop of cloak-and-dagger clandestineness, that is, sneaking around at the margins of legality. Thus, although the *paquete* is not legal, neither is it clearly illegal. Cubans often describe it with the ironic term *alegal*, or "unlegal." While the *paquete* has benefited from this in-between legal status in the form of a begrudging government tolerance, this is predicated on a kind of sword-of-Damocles observance of unwritten rules on content. And unlike defensible legal rights, official tolerance can be extended or revoked arbitrarily.

the island. However, while the *paquete*'s various *paqueteros* or distributors (working in tandem with one of the island's four main *casas matrices* or compilation houses) have indeed successfully won over a Cuban public hungry for a more diverse, higher-quality, and less ideologically charged selection of commercial, technological, and especially entertainment-oriented content, they have also systematically refused to include in their offerings any programming they deem even remotely "political." This is especially the case if that content is critical of the Cuban government, its policies, or its leaders, and even more so if it is produced by the emergent crop of independent digital media outlets operating on the island today.[2]

This self-censorship—what might be called an internal blockade against independent locally produced political news (deployed not by state censors but also by Cuba's private, "alegal" *paqueteros* and *casas matrices* no less)—has especially affected the offline availability of the content of the more critical-minded digital media start-ups that practice investigative, watchdog, or adversarial journalism. These include *El Toque*, *El Estornudo*, and *14ymedio*, each of which has been forced to develop multifaceted content-distribution strategies that attempt to go far beyond *el paquete*. In contrast, Cuba's *paqueteros* have extended much different treatment to the handful of independent digital lifestyle, cultural, sports, and entertainment magazines that have appeared on the island in recent years. As a rule, almost all of these have paid for, depended on, and even been built around an offline, "direct-to-*paquete*" digital-distribution model. These include the sports magazine *Play-Off*, the fashion magazine *Garbos*, the start-up business magazine *Negolution*, and most prominently, Cuba's premier and pioneering independent entertainment, cultural, and celebrity lifestyle magazine *Vistar*.

Given this complex, contradictory, and dynamic state of affairs, this article begins with a brief description of the history and development of *el paquete*, linking its initial appearance and eventual shift toward self-censorship of political news to the emergence of its two main sneakernet competitors: the low-cost, government-produced Mi Mochila, a compendium of digital content distributed exclusively via its network of Joven Clubs de Computación y Electrónica (JCCEs) and the clandestine *paketito* (sometimes referred to as *el paketiko* or *el paketico*), a free weekly cache of digital content compiled and distributed by anonymous activists working to make publicly available the very thing that both the government media and mainstream *paqueteros* censor: independent, critical-minded journalism, some of which is produced by digital media start-ups operating in Cuba today. The concluding section of the article critically compares the various content-distribution strategies of some of these independent digital-media start-ups. Based on a questionnaire circulated among these start-ups' founding directors, the analysis centers on how they seek to solve the problem of the *paquete*'s self-censorship by developing an array of content-distribution strategies to fit Cuba's hybrid online-offline digital media environment.[3]

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[2] The *paquete* assiduously avoids politics and focuses mainly on entertainment, lifestyle, technology, and culture (broadly defined), but it does regularly contain digital versions of daily newspapers and magazines published by the Cuban Communist Party or Cuba's official mass organizations (virtually the only legally sanctioned publishers of printed material on the island). These include *Granma*, *Juventud Rebelde*, *Orbe*, and *Trabajadores*. Also, some of the independent magazines included in the *paquete* occasionally publish individual articles and even entire special editions of a political, pro-regime bent. *Vistar*'s December 1, 2016, special edition honoring Fidel Castro's legacy is perhaps the most notable example (see https://vistarmagazine.com/vistar-magazine-edicion-especial/).

[3] The author circulated a questionnaire among the founding directors of more than a dozen independent digital media start-ups, nearly all of which were launched in Cuba between 2014 and 2019, and nearly all of whom

Three-Way Sneakernet Throwdown: The Taming (and Contaminating) of *El Paquete*

While many foreign journalists have placed the emergence of the *paquete* around the year 2014, this offline digital combo clearly existed in various forms much earlier to that. We know this because it was in 2014 that the Cuban government—and especially its cultural officials—began to publicly confront the implications of the emergence and wide popular adoption of the paquete for its hallowed revolutionary *política cultural* (cultural policy) and its long-standing, but now clearly eroding, monopoly over Cuban mass media. It was also in mid-2014 that the government launched its first, abortive effort to produce an institutional response to the *paquete* in the form of the competing digital compilation known as Mi Mochila, addressed in greater detail here. Aimed at sounding out a wide group of writers and intellectuals who work in various state cultural institutions (the Cuban Writers' and Artists' Union, or UNEAC; the Hermanos Saíz Association, or AHS; and the Cuban Film Institute, or ICAIC), the government's cultural apparatus organized "Forum of Cultural Consumption in Cuba: Art, Culture, Education, and Technology," the weekend of October 31–November 1, 2014, at Pabellón Cuba in Havana's central La Rampa district. Headlined by former minister of culture Abel Prieto, then a special adviser to President Raúl Castro, the event was an opportunity for participants to reflect on "the impact the technological revolution has" on the changing "habits of cultural production and consumption," according to the state newspaper *Juventud Rebelde* (Bedevia 2014; *Diario de Cuba* 2014a).

In their remarks, Prieto and other high-placed government officials shared their growing alarm over the negative impacts of both violent video games and the spate of shallow, consumerist entertainment that dominates the *paquete* on the revolutionary values of Cuba's youth. "We cannot exhort our youth to develop a criminal instinct," Prieto insisted in relation to the growing craze among Cuban youth to play competitive multiplayer video games: "Some are inoffensive, but others are essentially violent and have converted into an addiction." In specific reference to the *paquete*, Prieto argued that it slyly gives its users the false "impression that one is choosing what to consume," when in fact it is the *paquete*'s compilers who have already curated a set of options that it "imposes on them," offering the compilation disingenuously as a portal of digital freedom (*Diario de Cuba* 2014a). "Democracy and diversity are hidden under a trick of the hegemonic agenda of entertainment," declared Prieto (Bedevia 2014), seemingly blind to the cynicism of such as statement—however on target it might be

responded. The questionnaire included eight questions related to strategies of distribution for reaching the on-island Cuban public; measurement and demography of the audience; attempts to place content in *el paquete* and/or *el paketito*; opinions about the quality and credibility of the content of the *el paquete*, *el paketito*, and *Mi Mochila*; and assessments of the future of offline data-distribution networks such as *el paquete* as the number, variety, speed, and quality of paid public online access points increases.

Those who responded on the record or on background (not for attribution) to all or part of the questionnaire include José Jasán Nieves Cárdenas of *El Toque* (2013), Yoani Sánchez of *14ymedio* (2014), Elaine Díaz of *Periodismo de Barrio* (2015), Abraham Jiménez Enoa of *El Estornudo* (2016), Maykel González of *Tremenda Nota* (2017), Bárbara Maseda of *Inventario* (2018), Robin Pedraja of *Visitar* Magazine (2014), Pedro Enrique Rodríguez Uz of *Play-Off* magazine (2015), Rebeca Alderete of *Garbos* magazine (2015), an editor at *Negolution* magazine (2016), an editor at *Hypermedia* magazine (2016), Carlos Alberto Pérez of the blog *La Chiringa de Cuba* (2010), and the independent filmmaker and former organizer of the *Paquete Semanal Autónomo* (PaSA, 2014) Yaima Pardo. One final respondent, who is active in the creation and distribution of el paketito and who is identified with the pseudonym "Juliana" here, wished to remain anonymous.

about the motivations driving the Western capitalist entertainment industry—coming from a representative of a government that has systematically—indeed, hegemonically—controlled the content available to the Cuban public through television, film, radio, and the press for decades, to say nothing of its monopolization of access to the internet on the island (*Diario de Cuba* 2014a).

Shifting the discussion to a potential institutional response to this cultural "crisis," Prieto obliquely suggested that attendees think of strategies whereby "a more diverse and inclusive *paquete* could be developed" (Bedevia 2014). "Up to what point should public spaces have some kind of regulation regarding what [media] is included," Prieto asked rhetorically, reminding his listeners that the government was not about to cede its hard-won control over Cuba's cultural policy to the private sector. The island is overflowing with initiatives, warned Prieto, "that have nothing to do with what we ourselves are aiming at" (*Diario de Cuba* 2014a). This line of argument led to a wide-ranging discussion by various attendees about ways the *paquete* could be "contaminated," "intervened," or successfully "invaded" with other, richer content, given the fact evident to all attendees that it certainly could not, and perhaps should not, be eliminated.

Indeed, Helmo Hernández, the longtime president of Cuba's Fundación Ludwig (FLC), which promotes the appreciation of Cuban art and culture, openly declared that, like it or not, the *paquete* is "the clearest expression of contemporary Cuban culture. It's what the people in the country like [to consume]." Given this fact, he argued that it was pointless to rail against the *paquete* or try to beat it at its own offline game. Instead, he suggested that government cultural institutions look for ways to add their own content to the *paquete* as a way of "contaminating" it with content of greater aesthetic value—something he said FLC had already started to do on an experimental basis (*Diario de Cuba* 2014b).[4]

The state-led regulatory reaction to the proliferation of the *paquete*, however, is only one side of the story. Additionally, as the *paquete* gradually became more lucrative for its compilers, entrenched in Cuban life, and won greater tolerance from the state for its increasingly systematic self-censorship of critical political content, some of its users began to revolt against its evermore "domesticated" and "cowardly" character. In fact, the independent journalist Luz Escobar published an article in *14ymedio* based on interviews with longtime consumers of the *paquete* during the month following Fidel Castro's death in late November 2016. Entitled "'The *paquete*' between two fires," the article reports that although *paquete* compilers had to exercise extreme caution regarding their content selection during this period so as not to inadvertently insult the memory of the deceased leader and provoke a state backlash, they simultaneously came under attack from users who were discontinuing their subscriptions given that the more controversial, interesting, and hard-hitting material they had once counted on was no longer there. Indeed, one couple interviewed by Escobar said they had decided to give up on the *paquete* and install an illegal satellite dish on their roof so they could regularly see Miami's Spanish-language news shows and television programs, which were no longer

[4] According to Isbel Díaz Torres, this "contamination" strategy has also been employed by many Cuban artists who have sought to use the *paquete* as a way to call attention to their work, whether painting, film, music, or art criticism. Díaz Torres notes that this strategy was particularly common during Havana's 2017 Bienal (personal communication, July 17, 2019). Also see Michael Levine's contribution to this dossier for an in-depth study of how controversial *reggaetoneros* use the paquete to distribute their music.

included in the *paquete*. It has "become annoying," they told her. "It has become as controlled as the [state run] Cubavisión channel" (Escobar 2016).

In an interview conducted in June 2019 via Facebook Messenger with an anonymous source in Cuba who has long been involved in compiling and distributing the more clandestine alternative to the *paquete* known as the *paketito*, "Juliana" (a pseudonym) outlined a clear, if gradual, shift in the content available to the public via the *paquete*. Hard news focused on Cuba and even satire of a politically critical nature gave way to light entertainment as a result of stepped-up pressure from state security on the *paquete*'s various *casas matrices*.

> The *paquete* initially emerged as a great compendium of digital data aimed primarily at entertainment, but which also included humorous programs that criticized the Cuban government and also news from Cuba and the world that was obtained by foreign media. However, when the weekly "package" became more popular than Cuban television, the political police began to exert psychological pressure on the main people in charge of forming the *paquete*, so that they eliminated critical content that mocked the revolution and its leaders. From that moment, the creators and distributors of the weekly package began to practice self-censorship. [5]

Juliana went on to specify that this "tipping point" became most evident in the summer of 2016, perhaps as a result of the biting political satire of Miami-based Cuban humorists like Carlos Otero and Alexis Valdés, who were especially adept at skewering Cuba's newfound fascination with the "miracle plant" moringa, which had been enthusiastically celebrated by Fidel Castro himself in recent memory. However, Juliana insists that there was no single show or critical article included in the *paquete* that set Cuba's censors off. Instead, she attributes the shift to the cumulative effect of the *paquete*'s growing popularity at the expense of the formerly hegemonic state media and the occasional appearance of critical material on the *paquete* that made a mockery of the Cuban regime and its leaders.

Mi Mochila: If You Can't Beat 'Em . . .

Going a step beyond the suggestion that state institutions should try to "contaminate" the *paquete* with material of a higher cultural, intellectual, or aesthetic order, in fits and starts between July 2014 and December 2016 the government made what turned out to be an initial abortive attempt to launch its own institutional version of the *paquete* (Arcos Fernández-Britto 2014). Called Mi Mochila, this digital compendium would be distributed via a pilot project that initially included just thirty-five of the UJC's network of more than six hundred JCCEs (Bosch Taquechel 2015). A large, perhaps unwieldy group of state institutes, associations, and foundations participated in the production and/or selection of Mi Mochila's weekly contents, including the Cuban Book Institute, the ICRT (Cuban Radio and Television Institute), ICAIC (Cuban Film Institute), Fundación Ludwig, the Cuban Music Institute, and the National Library (Palma 2015). Mi Mochila would also differ from the *paquete* in its decidedly more didactic and

[5] This quote is from the author's interview with Juliana conducted via Facebook Messenger during June 2019. Original Spanish: "El paquete, inicialmente surgió como un gran compendio de información dirigida al entretenimiento pero incluía programas humorísticos que criticaban al gobierno cubano y también noticias de Cuba y el mundo que era obtenida por medios de comunicación extranjeros. Cuando 'el paquete' semanal se hizo mas popular que la televisión cubana, entonces la policía política ejerció presiones psicológicas sobre los principales encargados de con- formar dicho paquete, para que eliminaran de dicho paquete los contenidos de crítica o burla a la revolución y a sus lideres. Desde ese momento los creadores y distribuidores del paquete semanal se auto censuran."

proudly "revolutionary" content and its (free) price. However, during its pilot phase between 2014 and 2016, Mi Mochila was normally far smaller than the *paquete* (300 to 350 gigabytes versus 900 gigabytes to 1 terabyte), less reliable as a weekly compendium (there were only fifteen "weekly" editions during its first year of existence), and much less popular (one JCCE reported just sixty-seven downloads during Mi Mochila's first six months of availability), characteristics that earned it the nickname *el anti-paquete* and *el paquete oficialista* at the time (Palma 2015). In other words, this was *not* a Cuban version of PBS or the BBC!

One of the key goals of the Mi Mochila project has been to prioritize "Cuban" cultural content over the foreign entertainment that predominates in the *paquete*—making it "bien cubana" (very Cuban) in the words of a 2017 issue of *Pionero*, a state-run magazine for Cuban adolescents. There has also been a strong emphasis on what might be called "family and revolutionary values" in Mi Mochila's digital content, given the criticisms lodged against the *paquete*'s supposedly "banal" and "vulgar" (chabacanería) offerings (Labacena Romero 2014). Indeed, the official page describing Mi Mochila at Ecured, Cuba's government-controlled Wikipedia clone, describes the project's objectives in three brief bullet points:

- "To satisfy the tastes and interests of different Cuban publics,
- [To distribute materials] that correspond with the principles and values promoted by the Cuban State, [and]
- To divulge Cuban culture and secure our national identity."[6] (*Ecured* 2019)

The project's initial logo was a simple backpack with the word *mochila* underneath it. Under that, in smaller type, are the words "para la familia" (for the family). Later, when the project was relaunched in December 2016 after a faulty start, it had a much more attractive graphic interface featuring a photo of a young Afro-Cuban mother smiling in the right foreground while pointing across her chest to the thirteen color-coded and graphically distinct categories of folders included in the compendium. This richly colorful design is augmented by a subtle but powerful image of two smiling Afro-Cuban children in the background who are not readily evident at first glance, because their images have been washed out so they fade into the graphic's deep purple foundation (Figure 1).

During the first two to three years of its five-year existence, the JCCE's Mi Mochila project had no distribution strategy other than allowing interested users to stop in to their local youth club and download all or part of the latest edition of the Mochila onto their personal flash drive. Similarly, during this period there was no publicity other than signs hung outside some of the clubs announcing the project's availability at that site (González 2014; Palma 2015; Bosch Taquechel 2015). This lethargy seemed to change in the early months of 2017, after the project was rebooted in December 2016 following the death of Fidel Castro. On December 30 of that year, a special issue of Mi Mochila dedicated to the life and legacy of the deceased leader was released (Ecured 2019; Martínez Hernández 2016; *14ymedio* 2016). Then, starting in 2017 it became possible to theoretically access and download the contents of Mi Mochila online via Cuba's intranet (though reports have noted that limited bandwidth

[6] Original Spanish: "*satisfagan los gustos e intereses de los diferentes públicos cubanos,*se correspondan con los principios y valores que promueve el Estado Cubano, *divulgue la cultura cubana y afiance nuestra identidad nacional."

and spotty and expensive internet access have made this option difficult to take advantage of) (Valdés González 2018).[7] Later, in April 2018, the JCCEs announced they were implementing a content-delivery service for the first time (perhaps in an effort to match the *paquete*'s



FIGURE 1. 'Mochila . . . for the family,' screenshot of Mi Mochila graphic interface, circa December 2016

popular home hand-delivery distribution method). However, using this service would cost users 10 Cuban pesos per delivery (*D-Cuba.com* 2018; *CiberCuba* 2018).

The Ecured page dedicated to the project repeatedly describes Mi Mochila as an "alternative of audiovisual entertainment," but never directly states the obvious—that it is intended to be an alternative to the much more popular and widespread *paquete* (Press 2015b). Given that much of its content comes from the same state cultural institutions that Cubans already have access to, the project cannot be meant as an alternative to that. Indeed, in a frank, if strangely worded, post on the University of Camagüey blog in September 2015, Alexei Nápoles celebrates the availability of the Mochila digital compilation to the university community because it "gives greater emphasis to topics of national interest" and features "cultural products of national provenance" serving "as a response to the *paquete semanal*, a ghost that separates us from our values and ideology but that exists and also reduces our boredom due to the lack of variety on National Television" (Nápoles 2015; *CiberCuba* 2018).

Expanding substantially on the three-point objective list above, the Mi Mochila Ecured page goes on to lay out a seven-point declaration of principles, including entertainment, versatility,

[7] Mi Mochila promoters also began to systematically present the digital compendium on popular Cuban TV shows like *La púpila asombrada*, on other shows aimed at teenagers and young people, on news programs such as *Buenos días*, and even on family TV shows like *De tarde en casa* (Isbel Díaz Torres, personal communication, July 17, 2019).

weekly distribution, flexibility, and feedback. However, the final two principles, "fidelity to the values that Cuban society promotes" and "moderation" are worth unpacking a bit more thoroughly. The principle of fidelity is glossed as having an undeniably political meaning: "attachment to the ethical and moral principles and values that underpin the revolutionary process." The principle of "moderation" is justified as a way to "avoid the reproduction of cultural and social stereotypes imposed by other media, alien to our values and aspirations; and that glorify and praise violence, alcoholism, the consumption of legal and illegal drugs, nudity and erotic-sexual scenes, among others" (Ecured 2019). The Cuban Communist Party never sounded more like the Family Research Council, the American fundamentalist Christian activist group.

In terms of specific content, the Mochila includes thirteen file categories, including video games, mobile and PC apps, continuing education materials, *De mi terruño* (a compendium of digital products originating in Cuba's provinces), *Estanquillo* (a digital newsstand that includes books and audiobooks, laws and other legal documents, dictionaries and encyclopedias, and copies of Cuba's principal state-run newspapers and magazines), *Me dicen Cuba* (a variety of audiovisual materials produced in Cuba including novels, TV shows, sprits, film, music, humor, children's shows, documentaries, and radio shows), and *Somos el mundo* (virtually the same variety of AV material as available in *Me dicen Cuba* but of international provenance). While the Cuba-centered character of the digital selection is to be expected, it is striking that no international Spanish-language newspapers or magazines are included in *Somos el mundo* to compliment the domestic, official-press-oriented *Estanquillo*.

When a number of the directors of Cuba's leading independent digital media start-ups were questioned about their take on the government strategy behind Mi Mochila and asked to compare the content of the Mochila to that of the *paquete* (Press 2015b), there was virtual unanimity that it was motivated by a wrongheaded and ideologically charged didactic strategy that would never appeal to more than a handful of users leading to a failed and arrogant effort to "elevate the level of aesthetic taste of the public" (Rodríguez Ramírez 2017). While Elaine Díaz, the founder of *Periodismo de Barrio*, was unable to respond to this question directly, she did post a meme on Facebook a few years ago making her assessment of the *Mochila* versus the *paquete* abundantly clear: "I don't want your *Mochila*. I want my *paquete*" (Figure 2).

El Paketito: Autonomous, Clandestine, and Unknown

People like Juliana, the clandestine compiler-distributor of *el paketito* introduced earlier, face a classic catch-22 in their effort to spread censored material as far and wide as possible within Cuba while also doing so discretely and only among a limited group of trusted friends so as to avoid government censure. Luz Escobar, the first Cuban journalist to publish a report on the *paketito*, recognized this dilemma. "The secrecy with which the *paketito* is put together," she observed, "affects the reach of its distribution, which has been restricted to clients as transgressive as its creators" (Escobar 2017).[8] The instinct to fiercely protect one's anonymity is certainly understandable in a context where strict laws intended to protect "state security"

[8] Original Spanish: "La clandestinidad con que se confecciona el paketito afecta la ampliación de su distribución, que se ha visto restringida a clientes tan transgresores como sus creadores."



FIGURE 1. 'Mochila . . . for the family,' screenshot of Mi Mochila graphic interface, circa December 2016.

can easily be used to arbitrarily target free speech activists. Indeed, in our very last exchange via Facebook Messenger about the *paketito*, Juliana reminded me:

> I believe that people like me who share these kinds of [censored] information "packages" must do so secretly, clandestinely, because in publishing about the [existence of] the *paketito* and showing our

> identity, we run the risk that the political police will accuse us of "spreading enemy propaganda," a crime against the security of the state [here in Cuba].[9]

While Juliana is confident that the *paketito* is more popular and widespread among the Cuban public than *Mi Mochila* (a project she considers to be nothing more than digital "brainwashing"), perhaps as a result of her need to keep a low profile and circulate the compendium only among a tight, trusted circle of friends, very few of the directors of the twelve to fifteen independent digital-media start-ups interviewed for this article had ever actively consumed or even heard of *el paketito*. In contrast, they had all heard of Mi Mochila, with many having sampled its contents at least once—which they universally found of little interest. Thus, while Elaine Díaz's humorous meme "I don't want your Mochila. I want my *paquete*" is intended as a backhanded retort to the government's launch of Mi Mochila as a didactic tool of political propaganda, an even more stinging meme could capture the dilemma faced by the *paketito*'s compliers: *No sé nada de tu paketito. Quiero mi paquete* (I've never even heard of your *paketito*. I want my *paquete).*

When asked to compare the distribution strategy and contents of the *paquete* to those of the *paketito*, *14ymedio* director Yoani Sánchez noted that each one suffered from drawbacks inherent to its public or clandestine character. "In the case of the *paquete*, there is very little news or informative coverage of Cuba," she notes. "The *paquete* is basically for fun, film debuts, soap operas, TV series, and software." She continued: "While it circulates among a much larger audience than the *paketito*, unlike this [clandestine] channel, the *paquete* avoids covering thorny topics because its distribution is very public and visible which also means that it can be very quickly censored. The *paketito* has a greater variety of materials about Cuba but still suffers from a lack of a stable regularity and an attractive assortment [of material]."[10]

Although the first public mention in print of *el paketito*'s existence as an organized information distribution project dates from May 5, 2017 (Escobar 2017), the goal of what has been called "breaking the Cuban government's information blockade" by engaging in the independent production and distribution of news and information is perhaps as old as the Cuban Revolution itself (Carey 2016). This is perhaps even more true of the independent circulation of data in the digital age since the ease of copying, concealing, and sharing such data have drastically increased as the cost has dropped to almost zero. It was with this awareness that Cuban television director and independent filmmaker Yaima Pardo dreamed up her own "Autonomous Weekly Package" project (*Paquete Semanal Autónomo*) in 2014. Known during its brief life by its Spanish acronym, *PaSA* (a play on the word *pass* or *pass along*), Pardo's idea arose quite independently of what would later emerge as the so-called *paketito* even though she would later regularly collaborate with the *paketito*'s compilers by providing them with a

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[9] Original Spanish: "Creo que las personas que compartimos este tipo de paquetes de información debemos hacerlo de forma secreta, clandestina pues de publicar sobre el paketito y mostrar nuestra identidad corremos el riesgo de que la policía política nos acuse del delito contra la seguridad del estado 'difundir propaganda enemiga.'"

[10] This quote is from Sánchez's response to the author's questionnaire, received from her on June 13, 2019. Original Spanish: "En el caso del Paquete hay muy pocas noticias o temas informativos sobre Cuba. [. . .] El Paquete es básicamente divertimento, películas de estreno, telenovelas, series y software . . . Llega a una audiencia mucho mayor que el Paketiko pero, a diferencia de este último, evita tocar temas espinosos porque su distribución es bastante pública y visible por lo que puede ser rápidamente censurada. El Paketiko tiene una mayor variedad de materiales sobre Cuba pero todavía adolece de una periodicidad estable y un surtido atractivo."

digital copy of each of her many documentary shorts to distribute freely to their subscribers (Risco 2014; Press 2014a):

> Yes, I've heard of the *paketito*. I think it's interesting to create an alternative to the self-censorship suffered by the *paquete semanal*. But in turn, I think that the *paketico* needs a structure. A network of people who share it systematically is essential to defend this initiative. I personally shared all my work with the *paketico* manager, but that kind of enterprise cannot be the responsibility of a single person.[11]

As a longtime subscriber to the *paquete*, over time Pardo had become acutely aware of the bitterly ironic fact that although the renegade sneakernet network had originally emerged as a way to circumvent state censorship, already by 2014 the *paquete*'s main distributors were beginning to filter out critical political content. As a creator of independent digital content herself, Pardo saw that others—especially those independent journalists who were doing pioneering investigative reporting in Cuba and about vital Cuban issues—were having their websites blocked by the government online while their digital content was being blocked offline by the *paquete*'s own censors. Aiming to disrupt this state of affairs, Pardo and her partners envisioned operating PaSA as a kind of "citizen's journalism report [where] people produce their own content with social objectives." Given that the *paquete* as it then existed satisfied neither her political curiosity nor her avant-garde artistic sensibility, she intended *PaSA* to be an offline grassroots digital community, "the kind of Internet we could create ourselves" if we had regular Internet access. She also faced the question of offline political censorship squarely, insisting that *PaSA* would include critical material considered taboo by the mainstream paquete, such as the independent digital newspaper *14ymedio*, which was launched only a few months prior to *PaSA* (Risco 2014). In the end, however, the *PaSA* project never got off the ground and Pardo ultimately immigrated to the United States where she currently lives.[12]

According to Escobar's 2017 article in *14ymedio*, "The '*paketito*,' a clandestine rival for the '*paquete*,'" began informally in early 2014 among a small group of friends who sought to fill the information gaps left by the more commercial, entertainment-oriented *paquete*. The weekly package had become far too comfortable and tame for their tastes, so they began to share archives and files among themselves with an emphasis on censored materials, documentaries, and news. Additionally, the compilers occasionally include old Cuban publications that had been forgotten or suppressed when what they originally reported in their pages later became politically inconvenient or embarrassing for the government. A case in point is a digital edition of the Cuban magazine *Bohemia* from 1959 in which Fidel Castro denies being a communist. During the *paketito*'s first few years of existence its producers often found it impossible to update their material with regularity, but they overcame this obstacle by early 2017, after which time the clandestine compendium became truly a weekly standard (Escobar 2017; San Martín and Cabrera 2017).

[11] This quote is from Pardo's response to the author's questionnaire, received from her on June 19, 2019. Original Spanish: "Sí, he escuchado del paketito. Creo que es interesante crear un alternativa a la autocensura que sufre el paquete semanal. Pero a su vez considero que al "Paketico" le hace falta una estructura, una red de personas que lo compartan sistemáticamente es imprescindible para defender esta iniciativa. Yo personalmente le compartí todos mis trabajos al gestor del Paketico pero esa empresa no puede ser responsabilidad de una sola persona."

[12] Since immigrating, Pardo has become involved in the independent news site ADNCuba (Cuba DNA), launched in 2017 and blocked by the government in 2019.

The materials that are included in the always-free compilation are usually downloaded from YouTube or other popular social media sites by activists while traveling abroad. In years past, the total size of the *paketito* was usually no larger than five gigabytes; however, more recently the compendium has grown to between twelve and fifteen gigabytes of new material each week. Some materials come from those who have privileged access to high-speed internet access at certain state-sector jobs. A unique feature of the *paketito* relative to both the *paquete* and Mi Mochila is that it is easily "contaminated"; that is, the compilation is originally created with specific content, but its users often freely enrich it as it circulates from person to person. According to the independent journalist Joan Manuel Núñez Díaz (2017), the general rule dictating the content included in the *paketito* is exactly the inverse of the one that guides the *paquete*: "Although it's true that the authorities have managed to get the *paquete* to leave out the material they consider 'politically incorrect,' . . . the *paketito* has been conceived of to include exactly that."

Therefore, each week the compilation includes a file labeled "prensa escrita prohibida" (prohibited print media), which typically features recent articles from the Spain-based *Diario de Cuba*, Havana's *14ymedio*, and Miami's *Cubanet*. The musical selection also highlights groups known for political protest music that have been banned from stores and state media and are often prevented from performing live, such as the hip-hop duo Los Aldeanos and the punk rock group Porno para Ricardo. Finally, there is a recurring weekly section in the *paketito* reserved for news about Venezuela and another labeled "represión" in which videos and other news and information about human rights abuses in Cuba can be found (Escobar 2017). This quick inventory reveals that the *paketito* is indeed awash in political news and information either about Cuba or about Latin America, the very thing *paquete* compilers assiduously avoid.

While Juliana wished to remain anonymous, she did share the general profile of the various kinds of people involved in compiling and distributing the *paketito*. "Mainly, they are politically curious Cubans who avidly consume information," she explained. While the core group includes dissidents, activists, and independent journalists and artists, Juliana said that the *paketito*'s distributors and consumers also include *cuentapropista*s, college students, college professors, and practicing doctors. Juliana indicated that a typical week might include material from the nightly news broadcasts of Miami's *Radio y Televisión Martí* and Colombia's *NTN24*, as well as news clips or mini-documentaries from Spanish TV, Euronews, CNN, BBC Mundo, and the *Unreported World* program produced by Channel 4 in the United Kingdom. There is also typically print and video journalism from *Diario de Cuba*, *Cubanet*, and *Cibercuba*, a section of recent Spanish-language interviews with world leaders and Latin American newsmakers, the most recent videos from popular Cuban YouTubers like Liu Santiesteban, Alex Otaola, and Juan Juan Almeida, and digital copies of the popular talk shows hosted in Miami by Andrés Oppenheimer, Oscar Haza, and Jaime Bayly.

To provide greater insight into the *paketito*'s content, Juliana also provided a digital copy of the file structure and titles of all the video clips and news articles included in the June 20–25, 2019, edition of the *paketito*. In this particular compendium, there are 20 separate file folders with a total of 260 files, clocking in at 15.35 gigabytes of data. Perhaps the most striking thing about the collection is that all but 12 of the 260 files are MP4 videos. That is, the *paketito* is essentially a curated collection of television political news, opinion, and analysis downloaded each week from YouTube, where anyone with a fast-enough internet connec-

tion could locate and view the same content. The twelve text files are PDFs of print articles published by *Cubanet* (six), *Diario de Cuba* (five), and *14ymedio* (one). Thus, while part of the raison d'être of the *paketito* was supposedly to serve as a channel to domestically distribute journalism independently produced by Cubans who live in Cuba, the vast majority of its content is produced abroad and mostly not by Cubans.

Particularly striking were the twenty-one highly produced, deeply critical, and unapologetically obnoxious video rants from the Miami-based Cuban YouTuber Alex Otaola, who gleefully skewers a series of Cuban officials and cultural commissars. There are also file folders dedicated to documentaries and documentary series with the week's fare including the acclaimed HBO docudrama *Chernobyl* and an assortment of short docs produced by Deutsche Welle, including "How European Immigrants Populated the United States," "Rwanda: 25 Years Later," and "Climate Refugees: The Real Cost of Global Warming." The interview section includes face-to-faces with former Chilean president Michelle Bachelet (who recently visited strife-torn Venezuela); the director of Human Rights Watch Americas, José Miguel Vivanco; and a first-of-its-kind sit-down between Telemundo anchor José Díaz-Balart and President Donald Trump (subtitled in Spanish). There are also files containing sports videos (twenty-three), humor (four), animated political satire about Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro (one), and the latest two episodes of a multipart video course on the cultural history of Cuba produced by Miami-Dade College and hosted by Professor Mercedes Cros Sandoval.

Distribution Strategies of Cuba's Independent Digital Media: "Tú no sales en 'el paquete'"

Just five days before launching *14ymedio*, her own long-anticipated independent digital daily newspaper on May 21, 2014, Cuba's best-known blogger Yoani Sánchez (2014a) published one of her classic day-in-the-life posts on her widely read blog *Generación Y*. With the eye-catching title, "Ah . . . tú no sales en 'el paquete'" (Ah . . . you've been left out of "the package"), her four-paragraph post chronicles a recent, overheated ride she took in one of Cuba's private collective taxis. Pressed in on all sides by sweaty bodies at high noon as the car lurched down the street with little success at avoiding its numerous potholes, she readied herself to endure the cabbie's inevitable choice of what she considered yet another misogynist reggaeton played at deafening volume. However, instead of disgust at the song's sexist lyrics, she found herself drawn to the apt sociological lesson embedded in its simple but penetrating refrain: "tú no sales en 'el paquete.'"

"The singer was mocking someone else," Sánchez explains, "and spit out the words 'Ah . . . you've been left out of 'the package,'" confident that such a hyperlocal, technological reference of recent vintage would be understood by all listeners as the hippest and most devastating of put-downs. The vocalist's barb was likely aimed at a rival musician whose music had not made the curator's cut and was thus not available to the mass national audience that had by then begun to use the *paquete* as a popular alternative to the far less raw and much more ideologically saturated programming found on state radio and television stations. To be "left out of the *paquete*," Sánchez notes, had already entered the popular Cuban lexicon as the equivalent of "uncool." "If a certain video, documentary, or film is left out of these compilations," she observes, "that's a sign it has little notoriety."

For Sánchez, this explains why state television programs such as the arch-official and über-square *Mesa Redonda* (roundtable) news analysis series was never included in these privately circulated digital combos at the time. They are the epitome of uncool. "The voice of the Cuban Communist Party," she concludes her post triumphantly, "has been left out of the '*paquete*' . . . for being boring, bland, repetitive . . . and for its lack of credibility" (Sánchez 2014a). The great irony, of course, is that—despite being one of its very earliest chroniclers, most enthusiastic boosters, regular users, and even an accidental contributor[13]—¡*Yoani tampoco sale en el paquete!* (Yoani isn't included in the package either!).[14]

Indeed, there are numerous reports even at this early date of its existence in 2014 that as *el paquete* became more formalized, centralized, and institutionalized into a structure of four national compilation houses (*casas matrices*), each presumably with its own growing financial interests and government oversight (if not direct control), its top-level compliers began to self-interestedly self-censor, wisely steering clear of politics, pornography, and religion (Díaz Torres 2014a, 2014b; Blumenthal and Wise 2015).[15] And while perhaps in 2014 the *paquete* would have been the last place you could find government news or propaganda, in later years its compilers have been quick to systematically include a file folder containing official Cuban magazines and daily newspapers—including *Granma*, "the voice of the Cuban Communist Party."

That the *paquete* not only blocks critical independent "political" voices like hers but also has come to regularly include (a small amount of) state propaganda in the form of official newspapers and magazines is not lost on Sánchez. It would have been impossible to distribute

[13] Although she did not use the term *paquete* at the time, Sánchez was among the first observers to write about the clandestine distribution of terabyte-sized caches of digital data in a *Huffington Post* blog post in October 2012. Sánchez has also chronicled how she and everyone who swaps digital files in Cuba becomes a potential contributor to the content of the *paquete*, because what they share can be shared by others innumerable times or even taken up by top-level compilers as part of the *paquete* itself (see Sánchez 2014b).

[14] This is not a dilemma faced only by notorious regime critics like Sánchez. Indeed, Harold Cárdenas (personal communication, July 18, 2019) one of the three founders of the critical- minded, independent, yet proudly revolutionary blog portal *La Joven Cuba* (*LJC*) noted that his publication experienced an unpredictable, uneven reception from the paquete's different *casas matrice*s. "*La Joven Cuba* for several years included successfully its PDF Magazine (https:// jovencuba.com/revista/) in one of [the *matrices*] and was rejected in others. Apparently, the perception of what is 'allowed' changes in time and *matrices*. We just started including recent magazines and received a warning from one of the organizers of *El Paquete* explaining that despite their own intentions, 'inappropriate content' is blocked, so we can only hope to be 'appropriate.'" More telling still was the follow-up message Cárdenas sent two weeks later on August 5: "Hi Ted, Things changed, I thought you might be interested," followed by a link to an article published at *LJC* two days earlier. The article, written by Dolores Ibárruri and facetiously entitled, "*LJC* in the Porn Industry," chronicles the magazine's unsuccessful attempt to break back into the *paquete* after having been included in it for a time, followed by a brief period where publication was suspended due to a lack of resources and content. Ibárruri had previously been told by a compiler friend after asking him what his content guidelines were: "Look, dear, except pornography and counterrevolutionary stuff, I include everything. I don't want any trouble. Don't you realize if I add any of that they'll shut down my business? I don't want any problems with anyone. I just quietly do my thing." However, in summer 2019, when Ibárruri returned to that same compiler to help facilitate *LJC*'s reentry, he sang quite a different tune. "Look, don't even mention those people," he declared. "I have instructions not to include anything from that magazine." Ibárruri protested, "Why? What's the problem?" Her *paquetero* friend responded emphatically: "I have no idea. But my answer is no. Some officials came to warn me about that and they told me not to do it." Frustrated with this cryptic, negative response to the inclusion of content from a source she considered to be anything but counterrevolutionary, Ibárruri sardonically concluded her article with the words, "I wish the people behind LJC much success in the X-rated film industry" (Ibárruri 2019).

[15] While some observers have claimed that *paquete* compliers assiduously steer clear of politics, porn, *and* religion, religion is in fact a very important part of *el paquete*'s offerings in some *matrices*, in particular the "Christian section" (Ibárruri 2019).

14ymedio via the *paquete* at the time she wrote, "Ah . . . tú no sales en 'el paquete,'" because the digital daily first appeared five days later. Still, eight months later, on February 9, 2015, she wrote admiringly on her blog about how the very use of the independent medium of the *paquete*—even if writing about topics like popular dance music, celebrity, or entrepreneurship that Cuba's cultural commissars may tolerate but also consider "banal" or "vulgar"—allows "readers to already imagine a different country Politics is not spoken of in any of their articles and nevertheless each text published is a negation of the ideology in power." [16] This is her celebratory assessment of the what we might call the "*paquete* effect" on its consumers, despite the fact that its compilers must—like the underground operators of Havana's various SNETs, or "street nets"—remain silent about politics and porn "as the rules of the game as a matter of survival": [17]

> Among its dozens of files filled with TV series and films, there's a handful of news stories and magazines. However, just one click is enough to show that few want to get in trouble with the government for distributing critical materials. Thus, the distributors . . . pay their toll by including copies of *Granma*, official news broadcasts, and offline versions of provincial papers. Still as they say in the movies, "hidden among the leaves, there are nuggets of gold." (Sánchez 2015) [18]

Hacks, Bypasses, and Work-Arounds [19]

Given the substantial political, economic, and logistical obstacles to Internet access in Cuba, a visitor to the island today might be surprised to find that most Cubans are not strangers to the worldwide digital revolution. This quote is from a Hypermedia editor's response to the author's questionnaire, received on June 6, 2019. Original Spanish: "La decisión parte del acceso limitado de los usuarios cubanos a Internet y a los servicios de mensajería telefónica. Estas limitaciones han convertido el e-mail en una de las vías de comunicación de mayor uso en la isla.". Far from it. Instead, they have invented multiple ways to get around government censorship and gain access to the vast digital content on the web without always having direct access to the web itself. Foreign journalists—especially those writing for US tech or business magazines who have visited Cuba in recent years to take the measure of the island's peculiar offline-online digital reality—have created a veritable cottage industry, writing pieces aimed at making sense of Cuba's upside-down Internet for their astonished, "always on" readers back home.

Perhaps the most eye-catching headline in this minigenre is Will Fulton's (2016) amusing piece in *Thrillist* entitled "Cuba's Internet is F*cking Insane: And the Ways Cubans Use It Are

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[16] Original Spanish: "[A]l leerlas ya está imaginando un país diferente. [. . .] No se habla de política en ninguno de sus artículos y sin embargo cada texto publicado es una negación de la ideología en el poder."

[17] Original Spanish: "aceptan tales pautas como una cuestión de sobrevivencia."

[18] Original Spanish: "Entre sus decenas de carpetas cargadas de series y películas, se cuelan algunas noticias y revistas. Un clic bastará para comprobar que pocos quieren meterse en problemas con el Gobierno por distribuir materiales críticos. De manera que los repartidores [. . .] pagan el peaje incluyendo copias del diario *Granma*, materiales del noticiero televisivo y salvaguardas de sitios digitales pertenecientes a periódicos provinciales. Pero . . . al decir de un personaje cinematográfico, 'entre la hojarasca brillan pepitas de oro.'"

[19] The strategies described here are reminiscent of the early days of the Internet in the United States when users connected to the internet using dial-up modems. Usenet News provided asynchronous, international threaded discussions of all sorts of technical, cultural, and political topics, and using e-mail to retrieve documents was common. For an early Cuban example of this, see Press (2014b).

Genius." There's also the provocatively titled burb from *Barrons*, "Popular Piracy: Cuba's New TV Network" (Blumenthal and Wice 2015), and the deep dives from *Forbes*, "No Internet? No Problem: Inside Cuba's Tech Revolution" (Helft 2015); *Wired*, "Inside Cuba's D. I. Y. Internet Revolution" (García Martínez 2017); and *PC Magazine*, "Black Markets and Secret Thumb Drives: How Cuban's Get Online" (Fenton 2016). What these digital snapshots of Cuba have in common is a collective amazement at the ingenious, home-grown hacks, bypasses, and work-arounds that Cubans have come up with to live—albeit often vicariously—in the digital age. Fenton's 2016 piece for *PC Magazine* captures this spirit with the words, "In my eight days on the island, I saw firsthand how ordinary Cubans jailbreak the World Wide Web using a combination of hacked apps, Wi-Fi extenders, and cached websites traded on hard drives. This is how Cuba gets online."

One popular work-around is using one's email account or SMS service as a proxy for web access by subscribing to e-mailed digests or feeds of news and information regularly sent out by popular websites like *14ymedio* and *Hypermedia Magazine*. This strategy allows users to use e-mail and text messages as proxies for fuller web access, a practical solution for Cuba given that e-mail access has long been far cheaper and thus more common and convenient for Cubans than access to the World Wide Web itself. An editor at *Hypermedia*, an independent digital Cuban art and culture magazine and book publisher based in Spain, explained that the magazine's recent decision to revamp its distribution strategy through sending out e-mail digests "arises from the limited access Cuban users have to the Internet and phone messaging services." According to him, "These limitations have converted e-mail into one of the most popular communication channels on the island."[20] Additionally, since at least 2014, Cubans with a Nauta e-mail address issued by the state telecom monopoly Etecsa have been able to configure their mobile phones so that they can receive messages sent to their addresses ending in "@nauta.cu" without having to have mobile Internet service, which did not become commercially available to the public until December 2018.

Another common strategy is to access blocked websites by using proxies or by subscribing to the weekly PDF digests that many Cuban media projects distribute to interested parties using flash drives passed from hand to hand. The rolling proxy strategy was used by Cuba's most popular classifieds site *Revolico* until it was unblocked in 2016 after eight years of playing cat-and-mouse with state censors (Fenton 2016; *CiberCuba* 2016). The indie digital media start-up *14ymedio*—which continues to be blocked by the government—systematically uses proxies to reach Cubans on the island, whom the publication considers its primary public. Indeed, *14ymedio*'s strategies of diffusion include a wide variety of platforms such as Telegram, WhatsApp, a weekly PDF news digest, and an e-mail bulletin similar to the one described by the *Hypermedia* editor. They also employ special digital tools such as virtual private networks (VPNs) and anonymous proxies (that hide the country of origin of the user from detection). Collectively, these work-around distribution strategies can be summed up with these words

[20] This quote is from a Hypermedia editor's response to the author's questionnaire, received on June 6, 2019. Original Spanish: "La decisión parte del acceso limitado de los usuarios cubanos a Internet y a los servicios de mensajería telefónica. Estas limitaciones han convertido el e-mail en una de las vías de comunicación de mayor uso en la isla."

from Sánchez: "[We aim to] make sure that our content is available to the largest number of readers on the island because the residents of Cuba are our principal reading public." [21]

El Estornudo, an independent digital publication started in March 2016 that specializes in long-form, narrative journalism, chronicles, opinion, and analysis has recently been forced to revamp its own distribution strategy given that it was blocked from online island access by the government starting in late-February 2018 (Álvarez 2018, 2019). "Access to the magazine, from the national territory, is impossible," explained Abraham Jiménez Enoa, one of the start-up's founding editors. "The government's decision to veto its access has forced us to rethink our distribution strategy and we decided to upload our content to the *Medium* platform too (which is not blocked), as well as to strengthen our presence on social networks." [22]

Additionally, many of Cuba's independent digital media start-ups have created their own pages or feeds on popular social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and more recently Telegram, allowing readers in Cuba to follow them without their having to go directly to their websites, some of which are blocked from access on the island. For example, given that it has long been blocked from online island access, *14ymedio* has pioneered the distribution of its content via a WhatsApp subscription feed (thus circumventing the online-offline divide), and its director Yoani Sánchez records and uploads a ten-to twelve-minute daily "morning news show" available via both Facebook Live and YouTube called *Ventana 14*. The show began on December 10, 2018, the International Day of Human Rights, with the purpose of reviewing the coming day's news as covered in the virtual pages of *14ymedio*. Sánchez describes her "café informativo" as being like "a quick sip of coffee; intense and sometimes bitter, but necessary" (Sánchez 2018). Transforming YouTube into a podcasting platform is particularly ingenious because the government does not block that popular site even though access to the *14ymedio* site itself is blocked. Furthermore, the podcast is purposely set up on YouTube in an audio-only format so it can more easily be accessed by a bandwidth-poor island audience.

Others like *El Toque*, whose website is not blocked from access in Cuba but that is nonetheless censored by two of Havana's three main offline *paquete* compilation houses, have even recently designed their own apps that can function and be updated with new content offline via e-mail or text message without a connection to the web. José Jasán Nieves Cárdenas, *El Toque*'s director, explained his offline distribution strategy to reach the Cuban public on the island this way:

> We developed a mobile app that has the option of being updated *without* the need of having Internet, with a Nauta e-mail address, an Infomed e-mail address, or even a Gmail address if users prefer, [the app] can be updated [that way]. This means that using institutional networks, using Nauta, users can send us an e-mail and they will receive an [automatic] response from the application showing them our articles. [23]

[21] Original Spanish: "'lograr que nuestro contenido llegue a la mayor cantidad de lectores dentro de la Isla,' porque los residentes en Cuba son nuestro principal público lector."

[22] This quote is from Jiménez Enoa's response to the author's questionnaire, received from him on May 27, 2019. Original Spanish: "El acceso a la revista, desde territorio nacional, es imposible, pues el gobierno decidió vetar su acceso. Eso nos hizo replantearnos nuestra estrategia de difusión. Y decidimos subir nuestros contenidos también a la plataforma Medium (que no está bloqueada), además de fortalecer el trabajo en las redes sociales."

[23] This quote is from Nieves Cárdenas's response to the author's questionnaire, received from him on June 14, 2019. Original Spanish: "Nosotros desarrollamos una aplicación móvil que tiene la opción de actualizarse

Some innovative Cuban techies have even figured out ways to extend the reach of Etecsa's Wi-Fi hotspots using a "Nano" receptor or by piggybacking on gamers' local area networks (popularly known as the SNET) so that they and their friends can connect to hot-spot signals directly from their homes or offices (Press 2016). There are also a host of popular smartphone apps that allow for easy person-to-person sharing or quick downloading of digital content. One such app is Zapya, which uses smartphones' Bluetooth function to allow users to share data among a small, contiguous group of people. Then there are the apps Feedly and Pocket, which work in tandem, with the first set up to automatically download the news feeds of various preselected websites, and the second to allow users to save selected articles for later reading offline. These two apps are especially useful in Cuba's costly Wi-Fi hot-spot environment, as they allow users to maximize their bandwidth while minimizing their time (and thus money) spent online.

Finally, it is important to note that while the now-famous offline *paquete* sneakernet has become Cuba's default mass media, it was not the island's first offline distribution phenomenon, nor is it currently the only one. Indeed, there are many other informal ways of sharing digital information or channels of digital circulation and distribution of content that predate, go beyond, or in the words of Nieves Cárdenas "bypass" the *paquete*—especially when the news content is of high quality or particularly important or noteworthy, and when the *paquete* compilers won't touch it. Indeed, this was the case for what to date has likely been Cuba's most widely watched and perhaps first truly "viral" (and almost exclusively offline) video phenomenon: the University of Computer Science student Eliécer Ávila's biting, impertinent public questioning of the then president of Cuba's National Assembly Ricardo Alarcón, followed by Alarcón's widely mocked and patronizing answers (Press 2013). Although this episode took place on February 6, 2008, well before the formalization of the distribution networks that would eventually become known as *el paquete*, the video spread across Cuba like wildfire, quickly making Ávila a minor celebrity. Moreover, had the *paquete* existed at the time, such an overtly political video would never have passed the self-censorship test routinely applied today by the *paquete*'s compilers. But that does not mean it would have remained unknown. 24

Nieves Cárdenas points out that a similar "virality" occurred after the August 2017 leaking of a closed-door speech given by Cuban first vice president Miguel Díaz-Canel to Communist Party cadres in which he condemns a number of independent media start-ups and think tanks by name and justifies their censorship and closure.[25] "The leaked video of Díaz-Canel," notes Nieves Cárdenas, "that type of content has *never* been included in the *paquete*. The *paquete*

sin necesidad de tener Internet, con correos electrónicos de Nauta, correos de Infomed o correos incluso de G-mail si el usuario quisiera, se puede actualizar. Esto quiere decir que usando las redes institucionales, usando Nauta un usuario puede mandar un correo y recibirá un correo de vuelta que la aplicación le mostrará nuestros artículos."

[24] The various versions of this video available on YouTube have together received well over a million views as of June 2019. See here for one short clip: https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=vgj3gPbLE4g. "Cuba: preguntas difíciles al gobierno, difíciles respuestas," February 6, 2008, posted by PepitosGroup, 4:14). Of course, the number of offline views is impossible to know, yet far more important in the Cuban context — especially at that even more disconnected time. In personal communication with the author, Eliécer Ávila described multiple instances of strangers recognizing and thanking him for his brave words as he traveled in small towns and far-flung provinces across Cuba.

[25] A version of this leaked video is available at Nora Gámez Torres, "Miguel Díaz-Canel: 'Cuba no tiene que dar nada a cambio' a EEUU," *El Nuevo Herald*, August 21, 2017, https://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/america-latina/cuba-es/article168492522.html.

censors that kind of thing. But it spreads across practically the entire country, and one way or the other, Cubans found out about it." As the publisher of an independent digital media start-up, Nieves Cárdenas sees a key lesson here that directly affects his distribution strategy:

> What did that tell us? That when the quality of the product is sufficient, it manages to bypass the barriers that censorship itself and even the self-censorship of the *paquete* create. In our case, it has happened especially with videos. Although *El Toque* is blocked in some parts of the *paquet*e, our videos . . . have bypassed that censorship. . . . They were simply distributed . . . from memory to memory, following a virality highly specific to the Cuban context. [Going] from USB to USB, from flash drive to hard drive, or also from phone to phone. Two phones do "Zapya" and content is shared. This has been our first experience, that is: "Betting on quality content guarantees that the content manages to bypass censorship by itself because people understand that the content is very interesting and so share it with other people." [26]

Conclusion: ¿Dentro de la revolución digital?

Ever since Fidel Castro gave his infamous 1961 speech "Words to the Intellectuals," establishing the cryptic but still officially enforced *política cultural* of the Cuban Revolution—"Within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing"—Cuba's creative classes have had to proceed with extreme trepidation in their work, never knowing for sure what was clearly within, without, or against the revolution. As a result of this long-standing and perhaps purposely enigmatic "cultural policy," Cuban culture has long been doubly mediated by fear. To paraphrase Cuban writer Antonio Benítez-Rojo: first, there is the state's fear of the artist, that leads to censorship; and then there's the artist's fear of the state results in self-censorship (Benítez Rojo 1990).

This game of fear, censorship, and self-censorship has led to the development of a deep seated *doble moral* (duplicitousness) in Cuban culture, negatively affecting the artistic, intellectual, and journalistic production of those working in Cuba's state-controlled economic and institutional sector. However, it has also cast a shadow over the activities of those—like the digital journalists profiled in this article—who have sought to work independently of (if not necessarily in opposition to) the Cuban state. Indeed, with a few important caveats, the same pair of unwritten rules summarized here can be said to govern the operation, content, and distribution of *el paquete*, forcing independent, investigative journalists working on the island to bypass it to reach Cuban readers. For example, Yoani Sánchez, the founding director of *14ymedio*, explained how what was hoped by many independent Cuban journalists to be a new direct-to-*paquete* distribution strategy, has turned out in practice to be another form of censorship: "All our attempts to appear in *el paquete* have been fruitless based on the premise

[26] Original Spanish: "¿Que nos dijo eso? Que cuando la calidad del producto es suficiente, pues logra hacerle *bypass* a las barreras que cree la propia censura incluso la auto-censura del paquete. En nuestro caso, nos ha pasado especialmente con videos. Aunque la marca del Toque está bloqueada en algunos aspectos del paquete los videos [. . .] han hecho bypass de esa censura. [. . .] Sencillamente, se distribuyó por . . . de memoria en memoria, siguiendo un comportamiento de viralidad muy específica en el contexto cubano. [. . .] de USB en USB, de flash drive a disco duro, o también de teléfono a teléfono. Los teléfonos hacen Zapya y se comparte un contenido. Esta ha sido nuestra experiencia primero, o sea: "Apostar por contenido de calidad garantiza que el contenido logre hacer por si mismo bypass de la censura porque la gente entiende que es muy interesante y se lo comparte a otras personas."

that [the distributors] can protect themselves more if they refuse to include material that would bother officialdom. They prefer amusement to reflection on current Cuban issues."[27]

This frustration is shared by José Jasán Nieves Cárdenas, the founding director of *El Toque*, who echoes Sánchez's assessment of the unfortunate content and scope of the *paquete*: "[There is] a lot of material [in *el paquete*] that seeks to entertain, a lot of commercial material aimed at selling products, and very little serious and rigorous journalism from Cuba and for Cuba with an understanding of the informational needs of the Cuban audience."[28]

As has been chronicled here, easily the best known and most widely used example of the Cuban digital *invento* (inventiveness) that characterizes digital life on the island is *el paquete*, a highly efficient, islandwide data-distribution system that has been called Cuba's "largest private employer" by some (Rodríguez 2015; Press 2015a), a "jailbreak [of] the World Wide Web" by others (Fenton 2016), and a "DIY Internet revolution" by still others (García Martínez 2017).[29] To put it more simply, for the vast majority of Cubans, even in the post-3G environment that started in Cuba in December 2018, the *paquete* is the internet (Cobo 2018). While the *paquete* has become Cuba's most popular and easily accessible offline alternative for accessing music, movies, TV series, mobile-phone apps, magazines, and classifieds (San Pedro 2015; Rodríguez 2015; Kessler 2015), the routine self-censorship practiced by its compilers against the content of a host of independent digital media start-ups that practice independent investigative journalism has forced these emergent media outlets to develop multiple, alternative, online and offline content distribution strategies to reach Cuban readers on the island.

The *paquete* has been portrayed in the international media as something rebellious and subversive, a tool of "liberation technology" perhaps (Harris 2015; Kwong 2016). However, the Cuban government is well aware of its existence and has long deployed an unofficial policy of strategic toleration, given that its compilers engage in a policy of strict self-censorship of political—especially dissident or so-called counterrevolutionary—content. Indeed, the state likely appreciates its existence, as the famed sneakernet satisfies its consumers' entertainment needs in ways that the state media system is either unwilling or unable to do. Thus satisfied, Cubans will presumably be "less likely to press for open Internet access," in the assessment of Larry Press. "Had he been writing today in Cuba," Press (2015a) facetiously continues, "Karl Marx would have said that not religion, but '*el paquete* is the opium of the masses.'"

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[27] Despite the vast difference in editorial content between *14ymedio* and *La Joven Cuba*, this is exactly the same dilemma pointed out to me by Harold Cárdenas and highlighted in the article by Dolores Ibárruri. Original Spanish: "Todos los intentos de aparecer en el Paquete han resultado infructuosos bajo la premisa de que se preservan mucho de no difundir contenido que moleste al oficialismo. Prefieren el divertimento a la reflexión sobre temas actuales cubanos."

[28] Original Spanish: "[Hay] mucha información puesta en función de entretenimiento, mucha información comercial en función de la venta de productos y muy poca información de periodismo serio y riguroso hecho desde Cuba para Cuba y entendiendo necedades informativas de la audiencia cubana."

[29] Díaz Torres notes the *paquete*'s growing economic dimension given that "it has become a significant source of informal employment for thousands of people who work in the distribution of the hard drives or in final sales to consumers." He also notes that in recent years (2017–2019) commercial ads for all kinds of digital products (software, apps, and updates) have begun to appear in the *paquete*. According to him, an inventive payment system has developed for these *alegal* transactions whereby the buyer sends a cell-phone credit equal to the agreed-on price to the seller's phone. Upon receipt of the credit, the seller then sends the buyer a text message containing the necessary password to unlock the digital product, thus finalizing the transaction (personal communication).

Between 2014 and 2019, Cuba witnessed the appearance of more than a dozen nonstate, "independent" or "alternative" digital media platforms covering a broad, diverse spectrum of themes from a variety of professional and political viewpoints. This grassroots, citizen-led "indie media" phenomenon deepened and broadened during these years reaching an ever-greater portion of the Cuban public on the island, despite a continued government policy of severe restrictions on—and indeed routine repression of—any media outlets not controlled by the Communist Party (Freedom House 2018). While the government still holds a monopoly on the mass media—especially printed matter and television—it has lost that position in the digital sphere thanks to both the *paquete* and the many, diverse digital projects and their innovative content distribution strategies.

Now that more and more Cubans are going online, they are increasingly able to access many of these sites, which makes the sites' impact even greater. This recent surge in the number of independent digital media sites has developed together with an increase in their reliability, credibility, and professionalism—qualities that have in turn forced state-controlled media to make internal changes to try to compete. Not all independent digital outlets consider themselves dissident operations, but most struggle to survive between the government's open repression of independent journalists and the lack of a legal framework that would protect them. A notable characteristic of many of these emergent sites is that they are staffed not by political dissidents (as was the case of Cuba's independent media for many years) but by young graduates from the various journalism programs at Cuban universities who refuse to work for the official media but work as professional journalists at these newly founded independent sites. In sum, Cuba's independent digital journalism sites have been both innovative and impactful, covering issues omitted in the official press, experimenting with new genres and formats, and diversifying content distribution strategies to function in Cuba's peculiar hybrid online-offline digital context (Díaz 2018).

Notes

Samuel Farber, Harold Cárdenas, Larry Press, Isbel Díaz Torres, Armando Chaguaceda, and an anonymous reviewer each provided valuable feedback on an earlier version of this article. Additionally, writing this article would have been impossible without the collaboration of the founding editors of many of Cuba's indie start-up digital media sites, most of whom are named in this article.

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CHAPTER 67

Bridging the Open Web and APIs: Alternative Social Media Alongside the Corporate Web

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Abstract

Concentrations of power over the internet among a small number of corporate platforms have motivated attempts to build alternative social media. Using the contemporary internet routinely involves relying on a small number of dominant corporate platforms. In reaction against this centralization of power, there are many attempts to build alternative Web technologies that reconfigure the internet's power structures and enact their own values. However, given the entrenchment of large corporate platforms, this typically involves co-existing with rather than replacing them, at least in the present. Accordingly, it is important to investigate challenges arising when alternative social media operate alongside and even within the systems to which they propose an alternative. We investigate this through an empirical study of the IndieWeb, a community of personal websites with social networking features including syndication to and from corporate platforms. Using GitHub data, we study the development of a tool for this syndication called Bridgy, focusing on its relationship with the Facebook API. By identifying breakdowns in this relationship, we identify the following challenges: translating differing logics between the open Web and APIs, occasional ambiguity in Facebook's presentation of

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privacy settings, and ongoing precarity due to API updates. Our analysis illustrates the reality of maintaining alternative technical systems as part of present-day infrastructures and generates insights for building socially empowering technologies for the future.

Keywords

alternative social media, platforms, application programming interfaces, Facebook

Introduction

Recent concerns about the dominance of social media giants highlight a need to consider alternative ways of engaging with the social Web (Gehl, 2015; Halpin, 2018). In large part, objections to corporate social media have advocated opting-out, as demonstrated by hashtag campaigns like *#deletefacebook* and efforts to build alternatives to large corporate platforms such as Mastodon, Secure Scuttlebutt, Diaspora*, and others. These projects' designs are generally motivated by commitments to social values, which are typically in conflict with the values articulated in existing systems (Kahle, 2015). While there are a variety of motivations for people to leave corporate social media (e.g., Zannettou et al., 2018), attracting users away from ubiquitous corporate platforms is a significant challenge. In light of this, some technologists have pursued a more moderate approach, attempting to reconfigure rather than abandon relationships with corporate social media. This raises a question about how designers can pursue their goals while navigating infrastructures characterized by competing values.

Significantly, these approaches confront the messy social and political-economic structures of present internet technologies. Bell and Dourish (2007) observe that the tendency to view technologies as part of a "proximate future" allows technologists to "absolve themselves for responsibilities for the present" and to "assume that certain problems will simply disappear of their own accord" (p. 134). The reality is far messier. For example, cryptocurrencies that offer a radically decentralized vision of future financial systems are presently subject to governmental pressures (Yu & Koh Ping, 2021), traded by major wall-street firms (Leising, 2021), and have significant environmental impacts (Stoll et al., 2019). Similarly, new Web technologies are always embedded in complex and heterogeneous sociotechnical infrastructures that project power relationships onto the work of building them. Understanding the reality of building in the present is crucial for achieving realistic possibilities for the future, and so accounting for these power relationships is one of our core motivations.

This article investigates frictions and compromises that arise when alternative social media operate alongside and even within the infrastructures to which they claim to provide an alternative. To understand this phenomenon, we study the IndieWeb, a "people focused alternative to the 'corporate web'" in which individuals create and operate personal Web sites that function as their primary online identity (2020). IndieWeb has developed standards, software, and practices that support peer-to-peer communication among personal Web sites while optionally maintaining connections with large platforms. These connections are achieved through a model called *POSSE* (Publish on Own Site, Syndicate Elsewhere) in which content from personal Web sites is cross-posted to Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms, and then comments, likes, and other responses are retrieved back. This involves interaction between IndieWeb sites and corporate platforms through their Application Programming

Interfaces (APIs), which clearly demonstrates the type of relationship with which this study is concerned. Moreover, open-source code and rigorous documentation of problem-solving are significant features of IndieWeb's culture. This makes it possible to observe development and maintenance over time, including how developers respond to emergent obstacles.

We leverage GitHub data to identify points of friction and breakdown in the relationship between IndieWeb and corporate APIs. In this study, we particularly focus on "Bridgy," a prominent IndieWeb software for POSSE syndication, and Facebook. We use logged GitHub issues to identify bugs, breakdowns, and other challenges, and supplemented this analysis with an interview with Bridgy's lead developer. Our analysis is structured around the following questions: (1) How might IndieWeb's goals be challenged by its reliance on corporate APIs? (2) If problems arise, how are they addressed? We identify three major recurring challenges: competing logics for mapping objects (e.g., posts, comments, likes) between IndieWeb sites and Facebook's API; occasional ambiguity about privacy on Facebook; and ongoing precarity due to API updates. We highlight the use of heuristics, workarounds, and ongoing infrastructuring work to navigate these challenges.

This study contributes to research about building technologies to serve social and ethical outcomes related to designers' values. Prior research has investigated how design decisions impact social and ethical outcomes of technologies (Friedman & Hendry, 2019; Shilton et al., 2013). Much of this research has focused on early stages of design, although recently, there is growing attention to values in later stages of development and maintenance (e.g., Houston et al., 2016; Whittle, 2019). We contribute to this emerging body of research with particular attention to power relationships between new Web technologies and established corporate platforms, especially how these relationships impact the work of building and maintaining alternatives. In addition, researchers have used GitHub data to study social structures in software development (Cheng & Guo, 2019; Strzalkowski et al., 2019), and GitHub issues in particular to understand community governance around codes of conduct (Li et al., 2021). However, to our knowledge, ours is the first study to use GitHub issues to examine how interoperability among software can challenge the ongoing achievement of desired social and ethical outcomes.

Given the ubiquity of large corporate internet platforms, emerging alternatives are likely to operate alongside rather than replacing them, at least for the time being. Accordingly, it is important to consider how co-existence with mainstream technologies shapes the conditions in which alternatives are built. Studying this sort of intervention illuminates the heterogeneous and messy present context in which alternative Web technologies are built. Our analysis reveals power dynamics, competing logics, and potential ways forward for alternative Web technologies that must contend with and extend from present-day infrastructures. The findings of this study will benefit designers of alternative systems, as well as app-developers, researchers, and others who rely on corporate platform APIs. Particularly, by mapping obstacles on a longitudinal basis, this research contributes to knowledge about planning for challenges that may emerge in later stages of developing and maintaining Web technologies.

Background

Social Media as Alternative Media

Concepts about "alternative media" provide vital scaffolding for this analysis. Couldry and Curran (2003) define alternative media as "media production that challenges, at least implicitly, actual concentrations of media power, whatever form those concentrations may take in different locations" (p. 7). Atton (2002) similarly explains that alternative media are "crucially about offering the means for democratic communication to people who are normally excluded from media production" (p. 4). By these definitions, alternative media are not defined only by their content, but more significantly by the processes of their production and distribution, and particularly how these reshape social and power relations around media.

When contrasted with previous forms of corporate media (e.g., broadcast and print media), Web 2.0 appears to match Atton's definition by providing tools for everyday people to engage in online media production and distribution. And yet, Gehl (2015) observed,

> This leaves alternative media theory in a double-bind: social media allow for people to be producers, certainly more so than traditional media, but they are owned by for-profit firms who can be hostile to alternative ideas, discourses, and organizing—especially when those practices challenge corporate hegemony. (p. 1)

Alternative social media and Web technologies, such as Mastodon, IndieWeb, Disapora*, Secure Scuttlebutt and others, demonstrate yet new arrangements of media power, challenging the hegemony of corporate social media. Gehl (2015) argues that these emerging technologies merit scholarly attention "because they give us new ways to think about media, media infrastructures, and mediated social interactions" (p. 8). This motivates our decision to study alternative social media with consideration for power relationships. Specifically, we align this work with Cohen's (2012) argument that "if we follow Atton in understanding alternative media through organizational processes and resulting social relations, we need to consider labour" (p. 208). To that end, we focus on the work involved in building and maintaining alternative social media technologies, including the extent to which relationships with existing platforms influence what is possible and how much work it takes to achieve.

Values, Infrastructures, and Platforms

Commitments to social values are a significant feature of alternative social media (Gehl, 2015) and of emerging decentralized Web technologies more generally. For example, internet Archive founder Brewster Kahle called for builders of decentralized Web technologies to "bake our values into the code" (Kahle, 2015). Research about values and design can help us understand how this could be meaningfully pursued.

There has been substantial research in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and related fields about addressing values during design processes, such as Value-Sensitive Design (VSD) (Friedman & Hendry, 2019), reflective design (Sengers et al., 2005), and values at play (Flanagan et al., 2005). These approaches are focused on building technologies that enhance "human well-being, human dignity, justice, welfare, and human rights" (Friedman & Kahn, 2003, p. 1186). One lesson from this research is that "baking" values into a design should not be interpreted as somehow fixing them as mandatory outcomes of a technology. Most values

and design research adopts an interactional perspective, affirming that "whereas the features or properties that people design into technologies more readily support certain values and hinder others, the technology's actual use depends on the goals of the people interacting with it" (Friedman & Kahn, 2003, p. 1179). In addition, some values may be latent except in specific circumstances, when they shift from potential to performed values (Shilton et al., 2013). Although the majority of values and design research focuses on early stages of design, recent work has begun extending these theories to "more technical stages of development" involved in software engineering (Whittle, 2019). Focusing on values in these stages can identify moments where values are shaped by interactions among various software, standards, developers, documentation resources, dependencies, and other entities. This is especially pertinent for understanding large socio-technical systems such as the Web, where an abundance of such relationships leads to instability and breakdowns. To account for this, we draw from scholarship about social and ethical features of internet infrastructures and platforms.

Internet infrastructures are defined by complexity, involving "a baffling network of relationships producing significant outcomes that no single actor seems particularly able to foresee" (Sandvig, 2013, p. 89). Understanding these relationships is made more difficult by the fact that infrastructures tend to recede into the background when they are operating smoothly (Star, 1999). Breakdowns—moments where a system fails or is unsuitable to meet particular needs—create opportunities for infrastructural inversions (Star, 1999), figure/ground shifts that draw attention to background infrastructures. Scholars can capitalize on infrastructural inversions to uncover tacit "infrastructuring" labor, which involves "in-situ design work of tailoring and configuring the infrastructure" to accommodate whatever activities are stifled by the breakdown (Pipek & Wulf, 2009, p. 458). During these moments, a technology's values may be reinterpreted or reshaped, and thus maintenance, use, and later stages of development are important to address when studying values and design.

As well as infrastructure studies, we draw from related work about platforms (e.g., Helmond, 2015). Similar to infrastructure studies, platform studies follow a material-technical approach to investigate "the connection between technical specifics and culture" (Bogost & Montfort, 2009, p. 5). These approaches differ in that infrastructure studies emphasizes "ubiquity, reliability, invisibility, gateways, and breakdown" while platform studies highlight "programmability, affordances and constraints, connection of heterogeneous actors, and accessibility of data and logic through application programming interfaces (APIs)" (Plantin et al., 2016, p. 2). Given that corporate platforms are the mainstream against which alternative Web technologies cast themselves, the particulars of platforms are a vital consideration for this research. Notably, platform business models are based on occupying an intermediary position, bringing together users, content producers, advertisers, and other parties (Gillespie, 2010). The reliance of third-party developers upon platforms as part of this arrangement is a major focus of this research. Thus, a platform perspective helps unpack power relationships, such as how platform APIs support and constrain flows of data to serve platform goals.

IndieWeb

Our research is focused on the nexus of the IndieWeb and platform APIs, which it uses as a distribution mechanism. IndieWeb's website describes it as "a community of individual personal websites, connected by simple standards, based on the principles of owning your

domain, using it as your primary identity, to publish on your own site (optionally syndicate elsewhere), and own your data" (IndieWeb.org, 2021). IndieWeb's core motivations are to increase individual's autonomy and empowerment online (Çelik, 2016). Individuals are to be empowered by both owning and controlling their Web content, rather than relying on platforms for hosting, as well as by connecting to "all services, not just one" (IndieWeb.org, 2020). IndieWeb community members commonly post first to their personal website, and then syndicate to a variety of other platforms.

IndieWeb's community has produced several standards for adding social features to personal websites. Two of the most salient for this paper are "Microformats 2" (MF2) and "Webmention." MF2 is a semantic markup standard with which one can add machine-readable context to HTML, such as by specifying the title, author, publication date, type of post (e.g., article, like, reply, photo), or other properties of some Web content. Webmention is a standard for notifying when one webpage links to another.

In combination, these standards allow interactions such as replies, likes, shares, and other familiar social media actions to be communicated among individual websites. As described in the Webmention spec (Parecki, 2017), if Bob uses his website to write a reply to Alice, he can send a Webmention with the following content:

source = http://www.bob.example/post-by-bob

target= http://www.alice.example/post-by-alice

"Source" indicates the URL sending a Webmention and "target" indicates the recipient. If Alice chooses, her site may display Bob's reply, in which case it will parse the content from the source URL. For example, if Bob has added MF2 markup indicating the post is a "like," Alice's site could display, "Bob liked this post." Webmention and MF2 are designed to be generalizable, so Bob and Alice's websites can communicate even even if they have different structures or use different software. These standards are core mechanisms for communication among IndieWeb sites, and form an important part of IndieWeb's systems for syndicating to and from corporate platforms, discussed presently.

Syndicating to Platforms With Bridgy

One of IndieWeb's defining features is its emphasis on maintaining connections to platforms through an approach called POSSE (Publish on Own Site, Syndicate Elsewhere). Although IndieWeb's premise is that people use their own websites as their main online presence, they do not necessarily avoid corporate social media altogether. IndieWeb users often syndicate from their personal Web sites to Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms, and then retrieve comments, likes, and other responses back to the original post. IndieWeb co-founder Tantek Çelik described two advantages to this approach: (1) It allows one to keep in touch with friends or family across social media, (2) by aggregating interactions from many platforms in one place, one "has an experience on his site that's better than any silo" [i.e., corporate Web platform] (Çelik, 2014).

The most popular tool for POSSE is a Web service called Bridgy, which "pulls comments, likes, and reshares on social networks back to your Web site. You can also use it to post to



Figure 1. After syndicating content from one's website to various social media platforms, Bridgy can be used to "backfeed" likes, retweets, and other responses. This is typically used to display responses from across social media alongside the original post.

social networks—or comment, like, reshare, or even RSVP—from your own web site" (Bridgy, 2020). Figure 1 shows an example of how responses from social media platforms can be displayed on the original post. Like many IndieWeb tools, Bridgy is free and generates no revenue. Bridgy works by translating between popular platform APIs and IndieWeb sites that support Webmentions and MF2. In contrast to IndieWeb's generalizable standards, APIs vary across platforms, each allowing access to different types of data and requiring distinct methods to facilitate that access. Thus, when Bridgy connects to various platforms, its features vary according to the constraints of individual APIs. Figure 2 represents the overall data flow when syndicating content from an IndieWeb site to a platform such as Facebook, and then "backfeeding" likes, comments, and other responses from the platform to the original post. Importantly, communication between the IndieWeb site and Bridgy uses Webmentions, which require the "source" content to be posted at a publicly accessible URL.[1] Thus, Bridgy does not support syndication of private content.

Bridgy is one of the most widely used pieces of IndieWeb software. To put Bridgy's scope in context, when IndieWeb celebrated that one million Webmentions had been sent in the wild, 960,778 had been sent using Bridgy (Barrett, 2018a). Moreover, Bridgy has been recognized as influential for opening up IndieWeb beyond its early adopters, since it was the first broadly accessible tool for connecting IndieWeb to corporate social media. Accordingly, Bridgy is a valuable site through which to investigate IndieWeb's relationship with corporate platforms and therein to map out considerations for co-existence among alternative and mainstream Web technologies.

[1] A small number of IndieWeb sites have implemented an extension to the Webmention spec, which allows private posts. However, private Webmentions are currently not used widely and are not supported by Bridgy.

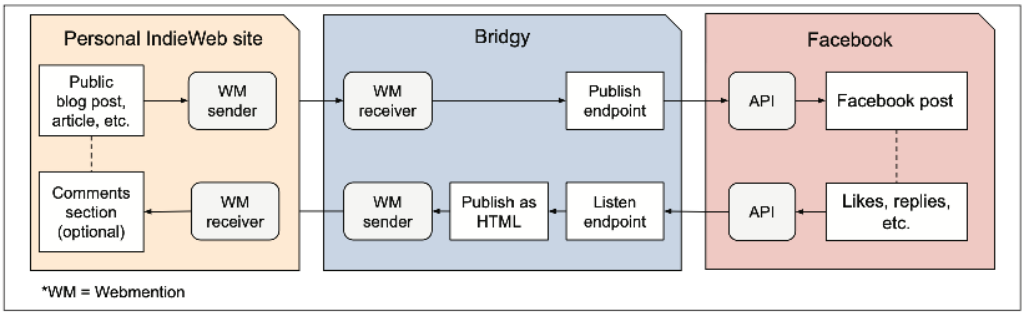


Figure 2. Data flow between IndieWeb site, Bridgy, and Facebook. Top row: Syndicating from an IndieWeb site to Facebook. Bottom row: "Backfeeding" responses from Facebook to an IndieWeb site.

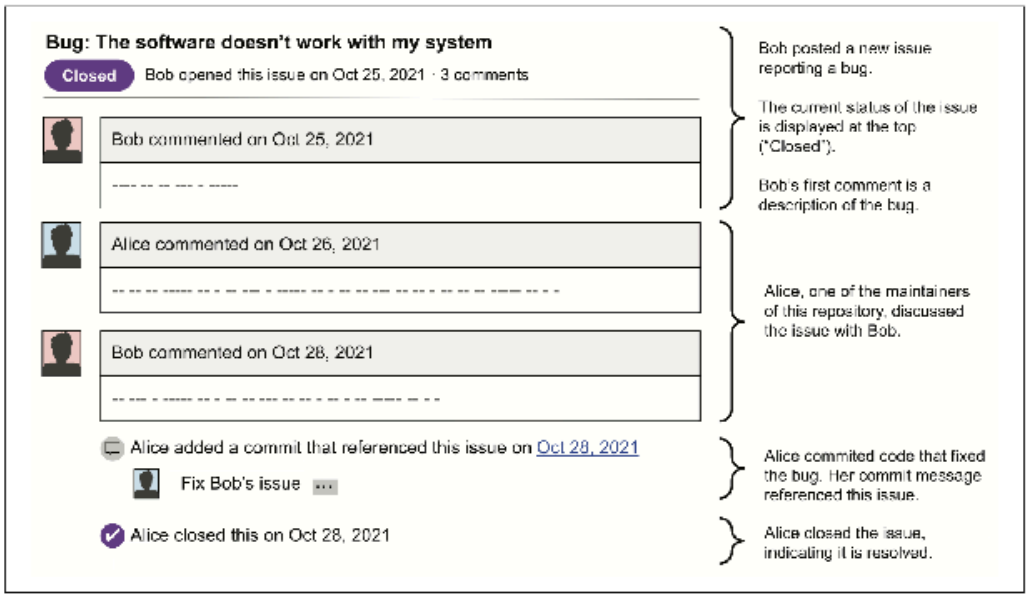


Figure 3. Basic structure of a GitHub issue. Issues are discussion threads about software bugs or features, which can contain references to specific code commits.

Method

Like most IndieWeb projects, Bridgy is open source and hosted on GitHub, a platform for software code and other version-controlled repositories. GitHub repositories include a detailed history of revisions to source code and other documents, making it possible to identify how a project has changed over time. Individual changes are published as "commits" and discussion threads about new features and bugs are archived as "issues." Any GitHub user can post an issue to a repository or participate in discussions about existing issues. When people commit code to the repository, they can reference the issue in a "commit message," in which case the issue thread will include a link to that commit. Figure 3 shows a rudimentary example of how issues are structured.

Issues provide an apt entry-point for investigating Bridgy's connections to other systems. First, they highlight breakdowns, since most literally describe errors, bugs, and other problems.

Second, they present traces of the work that was conducted to resolve these breakdowns. In many cases, these discussions reference specific commits in which an issue was addressed or resolved, making it possible to observe deliberation and troubleshooting in developer discussions, and then to identify ways that issues were addressed through code.

We downloaded copies of Bridgy's issues for analysis. Between the earliest item (4 January 2014) and the time of downloading (5 March 2018), there were 799 issues. We then performed a keyword search to get a general sense of how many issues pertained to each platform, with the following results: Twitter (N = 316), Facebook (N = 278), Google (N = 165), Instagram (N = 99), Flickr (N = 50), and Blogger (N = 32).[2] This is not an exact measure because the presence of a keyword does not guarantee that the issue actually pertains to that platform, and some keywords are ambiguous ("Google" could indicate the search engine, Google+, or the company generally). Nonetheless, this preliminary query contributes a rough sketch of where Bridgy has had the most issues in relation to corporate platforms.

We focused on issues involving Facebook for two reasons. First, they represent a significant proportion of Bridgy's total issues. Second, Facebook's large scope means these issues demonstrate many different types of interactions and potential problems. In an interview, Bridgy's creator remarked that, "Any feature in any silo, Facebook has it too. And then they also have ten or a hundred thousand features that silo doesn't. There aren't many concerns that you don't see in Facebook."

A first pass reading of the 278 issues that included the term "Facebook" revealed that 147 of them described some sort of problem or feature request related to Facebook's API. We then used open coding to organize the issues into categories describing types of problems that were most prominent. Where possible, we followed links to code commits that were referenced in the issue discussions, which assisted in identifying how Bridgy's developers responded to different types of challenges.

While studying GitHub data, we were mindful for potential pitfalls presented by Kalliamvakou et al. (2016), two of which are relevant for this study. First, like many projects, Bridgy is not contained wholly within a single repository, instead relying on pieces from other repositories to perform some functions. Studying a single repository without considering its dependencies can lead to an incomplete understanding. A benefit of our approach is that issues posted to the main Bridgy repository often reference commits to its dependencies. Therefore, it was possible to start with Bridgy and expand outward to its dependencies, avoiding a potential blind spot.

Second, GitHub projects almost always involve development and discussion occurring outside of the GitHub platform. Accordingly, this study is supplemented by ongoing participant-observation of IndieWeb's developer community and a semi-structured interview with Bridgy's creator and lead developer, Ryan Barrett. This interview served to verify our assessment of the technical challenges and approaches as discovered through analysis of its GitHub repository, as well as to develop a richer understanding of how the challenges were addressed.

[2] At the time of this study, Bridgy had recently added compatibility for syndicating to and from GitHub. This feature was excluded from this study because it was new and lacked issues for analysis.

Findings

Like most IndieWeb projects, Bridgy is largely built by one person. At the time of analysis, approximately 92% (N = 2401) of Bridgy's 2606 commits were made by Bridgy's creator and lead developer, Ryan Barrett. However, Bridgy brings together a variety of IndieWeb community members. Eleven people have made commits to Bridgy's code, and 123 people have posted or commented on issues. Three types of problems emerged as the most substantial and recurring causes of breakdowns described in Bridgy issues: Mapping between URLs and API IDs, occasionally ambiguous privacy statuses, and ongoing precarity due to API updates. We summarize these problems here as well as developers' responses.

Mapping Between URLs and API IDs

When syndicating between personal Web sites and Facebook, Bridgy spans a threshold between the open Web and platform APIs. The most prominent challenge in Bridgy's development has been translating between different ways of addressing an object across this boundary. Objects on the open Web are addressed using URLs, such as *http://facebook.com/{user-id}/{object-id}*, whereas the same object could be identified within Facebook's API using an ID in a format such as *{user-id}_{object-id}*.

In some instances, it is straightforward to translate between these formats. In the example above, one can map between these identifiers using *{user-id} and {object-id}*. However, this mapping is often quite difficult for a variety of reasons. Notably, Facebook IDs come in multiple formats, represented in Table 1.[3] Bridgy's developers struggled to predict which format is required in different cases, and Bridgy's code resorts to trial and error to find the correct format.

Mapping between URLs and API IDs became more difficult in 2014, when Facebook released version 2.0 of its API. This update limited the amount of data third-party developers could access. In 2018, when Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg (2018) testified before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce about Cambridge Analytica's collection of Facebook users' data, he asserted that this update "makes it so a developer today can't do what Kogan [the developer who shared data with Cambridge Analytica] did years ago." One of the changes was the introduction of app-scoped user IDs, which mean that each third-party app is given a different ID for the same user. This improves Facebook users' privacy and security by frustrating efforts to combine data collected by multiple apps. However, this also complicates Bridgy's efforts to map between a URL on Facebook.com and the corresponding object in Facebook's API.

Table 1. Types of Formats for Facebook IDs. Adapted Content from Bridgy's Code.

Format	Example
"Simple number, usually a user or post"	12
"Two numbers with underscore, usually POST_COMMENT or USER_POST"	12_34

[3] Table 1 is adapted from lines 1594–1614 at https://github.com/ snarfed/granary/blob/1e2568698de6f93ce383db2631cdfddfec d9634e/granary/facebook.py

Format	Example
"Simple number, usually a user or post"	12
"Two numbers with underscore, usually POST_COMMENT or USER_POST" 12_34 "Three numbers with underscores, USER_POST_COMMENT"	12_34_56
"Three numbers with colons, USER:POST:SHARD"	12:34:63
"Two numbers with colon, POST:SHARD"	12:34
"Four numbers with colons/underscore, USER:POST:SHARD_COMMENT"	12:34:56_56
"Five numbers with colons/underscore, USER:EVENT: UNKNOWN_UNKNOWN. Not currently supported!"	111599105530674:195181727490727:10102446236688861:10205257726909910_195198790822354

This led a notable reduction in Bridgy's capabilities. Previously, Bridgy could be used to like a Facebook post from one's own website, following the process in Figure 4. This is no longer possible because URLs to view a Facebook post in one's browser refer to users by a "global" numerical ID or by their username (which Bridgy can use to find their global ID). By design, it is not possible to map a global ID to an app-scoped ID, which is required to send or access data in Facebook's API. As a result, the switch to app-scoped IDs resulted in Bridgy dropping this feature.

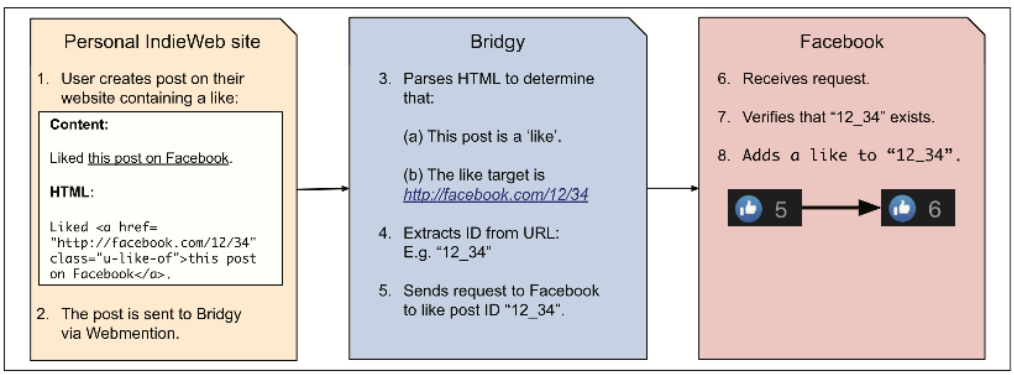


Figure 4. Basic process of posting a like from one's personal website using Bridgy, which is no longer possible since the release of Facebook's API version 2.0.

In most other cases, Bridgy has been successful at mapping between URLs and API IDs, albeit with considerable effort. From Facebook's perspective, IDs are to be taken as opaque objects, and Bridgy's attempts to decode them are not supported. Facebook support has advised Bridgy's developers, "Please treat IDs as unique strings, they are not meant to be broken down and used" (Facebook for Developers, 2015b). However, it is only when broken down and used that these IDs can be translated in URLs:

> There's no consistent way, either through the API or through an algorithm you implement yourself, to say, "Here is a Facebook post, what is its permalink on Facebook.com?" We have to guess at that with a surprising number of heuristics. Not ideal. So that mapping back and forth between the Web and data inside Facebook has been the single biggest question. (Interview with Ryan Barrett)

Bridging the open Web with Facebook's API necessitates reconciling differences across both sides. Ultimately, IDs used to reference Facebook content act as boundary objects, allowing different groups to work together in the absence of consensus by "tacking" back and forth between an object's general form, which is meaningful across communities, and specific forms of the object tailored to meet local needs (Star, 2010). Bridgy and Facebook share a general understanding of IDs as a means of referring to objects, but differ in their local expectations of how IDs should be used. As a result, Bridgy uses heuristics, trial and error, and similar methods to fit the shared general understanding of IDs with its local requirements.

Privacy From Front-End to Back-End

There are two main mechanisms for users to control who accesses their data on Facebook. First, Facebook's privacy settings can specify an audience that can view their content using Facebook's website or app. Options include "Public," "Friends," "Friends except [...]," "Specific friends," and "Only me." Second, whenever a third-party app such as Bridgy wants to access Facebook data, users must grant it permission. For example, to access posts and photos, a third-party app will display a notice that the app will receive "your timeline posts and photos"—If the user agrees, the app is granted the *user_posts* and *user_photos* permissions to access that data in Facebook's API.

These two privacy mechanisms are independent, and there is no way to grant a third-party developer access to public photos, but not to photos intended for friends only. As a result, it has been up to third-party developers to manage their treatment of posts with different audiences.

As shown in Figure 1, the data flow when 'backfeeding' responses from Facebook to an IndieWeb site involves publishing the response as a publicly accessible HTML page Consequently, when accessing content in Facebook's API, Bridgy checks its privacy status and ignores any content not marked explicitly as 'public.' Barrett commented on this process:

> That is non-trivial to determine for a given object in the Facebook API, is it public? Usually, 90% of the time, it's straightforward. Another 9% it takes some work, but you can figure it out, again depending on the type. It's like 1% or maybe 0.1% where you actually can't tell [. . .] If you go look at the [User Interface] in Facebook, you can usually tell. But programmatically you can't. When that happens, I have to err on the side of not doing anything with it. (Interview with Ryan Barrett)

The most striking example of this difficulty can occur with photos. In Facebook's API, photos themselves do not possess a privacy status. Instead, each photo is part of a parent post and/or album, which contains a privacy field indicating the intended audience, as shown in Figure 5. Therefore, determining the privacy status for a photo in Facebook's requires one to check this parent.

When someone posts multiple photos to their Facebook timeline in a short period of time, Facebook creates a parent post representing them as a group even if the individual photos have distinct privacy settings. However, in Facebook's API, the parent post object may have a privacy status of "CUSTOM." In a GitHub issue, Barrett explained that Facebook's documentation "[does not] say anything about what CUSTOM with no details means."[4] As a result,

[4] See https://github.com/snarfed/bridgy/issues/611/#issuecomm ent-174315265

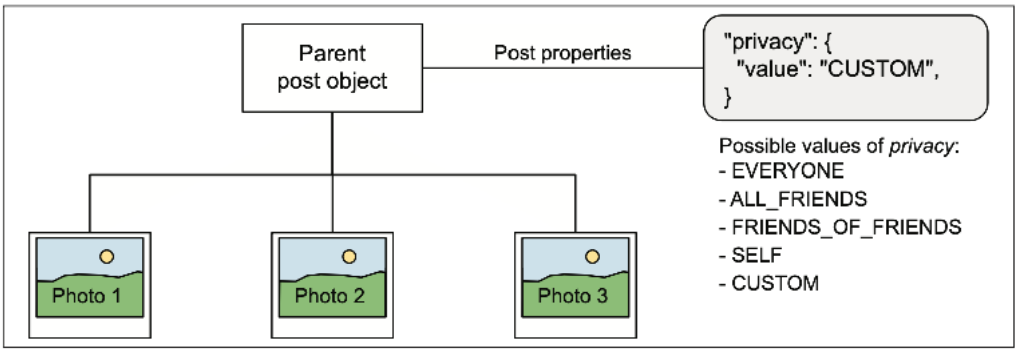


Figure 5. In Facebook's API, photo objects themselves do not have a privacy field, so Bridgy checks the privacy field of their parent post.

there are rare cases where it is not possible for Bridgy to determine the privacy status of an object in the API, even if it would be apparent through Facebook's user interface.

When this was reported as a potential bug to Facebook's developer support, the response indicated that Bridgy's method of constructing the photo object's ID resulted in accessing the photo through an unusual path where the privacy status could be unidentifiable. Specifically, following the structures in Table 1, Bridgy's navigation of Facebook's API included parsing an ID string like "USER_POST_ COMMENT" into its three parts, then reassembling those parts to access related API objects. However, the support representative indicated that one should *never have to* construct object IDs in this way (Facebook for Developers, 2015a). This demonstrates that Bridgy's usage was beyond Facebook's expectations and highlights how unconventional efforts to repurpose platforms can surface hidden features or limitations of their systems.

The decision to ignore data that is not explicitly marked as public has led to cases where Bridgy fails to process content that is intended to be public if the privacy setting in Facebook's API is unclear. This has been interpreted by multiple users as a bug on Bridgy's part, since the data is marked as public in Facebook's user interface and yet was ignored by Bridgy.

This example helps position the importance of privacy in Bridgy's design. IndieWeb is generally less concerned with privacy than some other alternative social media, evidenced by its practice of syndicating content to corporate platforms and the fact that IndieWeb sites are almost always publicly accessible. However, even though Bridgy does little to enhance individuals' privacy, when a threat emerged to existing privacy expectations (that a private Facebook photo should not be made public), addressing it took priority over other aspects of Bridgy's design.

Precarity and API Updates

APIs can change quickly and unpredictably. During this study, Facebook issued security and privacy API updates in light of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, which removed the ability for third-party apps to publish content to one's Facebook account (Archibong, 2018) and to retrieve data from anyone who had not directly authorized the app to access their account. This meant Bridgy could no longer access responses from people who were not also Bridgy users, which constituted "probably 98–99%" of interactions Bridgy had been backfeeding

from Facebook (R. Barrett, personal communication, January 31, 2019). Since this closed off the vast majority of Bridgy's Facebook's functionality, Bridgy dropped support for Facebook altogether (Barrett, 2018b).

During our interview, Barrett was quick to assert that problems he encountered with Facebook's API were not a result of malice. Rather, "in many ways what Bridgy is doing is not at all what Facebook expects the average Facebook app to do." Furthermore, he asserted that an app like Bridgy is simply too small to be a concern for Facebook, citing his past experiences as a senior engineer at Google:

> I have seen some it at the inside of Google. For things that aren't security breaches—for apps that are just doing funny things that may or may not be against your TOS [terms of service]—if they're small enough you don't care.

Thus, it is unlikely that anyone at Facebook was specifically motivated to restrict services like Bridgy. Instead, Facebook's attitude toward Bridgy could be characterized as indifference.

This indifference creates opportunities for experimentation and innovation, but as demonstrated by Facebook's API updates in 2018, also cultivates substantial risk. Another IndieWeb developer who created a commercial service with similar syndication features as Bridgy has written that reliance on platform APIs was an obstacle, especially from a business perspective, "Investors would ask about the supplier risk of being so heavily dependent on third-party APIs to provide a lot of the core value. They were right" *(Werdmüller, 2018)*.

Although Bridgy was, for a time, successful at navigating its relationship with Facebook, the pressure of the Cambridge Analytica scandal prompted a set of restrictions in Facebook's API that Bridgy could not accommodate. While the circumstances surrounding Facebook's API restrictions were dramatic, they represent a precarity that extends to all similar dependence on platforms. Nonetheless, the purpose of POSSE in the first place is to reduce dependence upon platforms by encouraging people to post to their personal website first, rather than allowing the only copy of one's content to be on a platform. In this respect, the outcome when Bridgy has lost access to platforms demonstrates resilience of this overall approach. Specifically, losing access to Facebook's API did not result in any loss of data for users, since their posts and responses pulled from Facebook were stored on their personal websites.

Furthermore, while Facebook's API shutdown led to an overnight decrease in Bridgy accounts (Barrett, 2020), other platforms with which Bridgy supports POSSE remain functional and new platforms have been added, including Meetup, Reddit, and Mastodon. And almost 3 years after Bridgy lost support for Facebook, it returned in the form of a browser plugin (Barrett, 2021). Thus, although API changes thwart long-term stability, there are still opportunities to meaningfully repurpose and extend corporate platforms beyond their intended uses, albeit with considerable effort and tolerance for setbacks.

Discussion

Our research questions were (1) *How might IndieWeb's goals be challenged by its reliance on corporate APIs?* (2) *If problems arise, how are they addressed?* The results have highlighted the need for ongoing infrastructuring work, and a related danger of emergent ethical dilemmas

(in this case, concerning privacy). Alongside this, there was persistent precarity due to the potential for API changes that modify or remove access to data.

IndieWeb's POSSE model for syndicating data between personal websites and corporate platforms is fundamentally about *artful integration*. Specifically, this model is about "the collective achievement of new, more productive interactions among devices, and more powerful integrations across devices and between devices and the settings of their use" (Suchman, 2002, p. 99). This does not indicate that Bridgy exemplifies a special and unusual type of design that relies on networks of relations, but rather that it explicates the role of these relations, which are mutually generative for all objects. This perspective of design as existing within networks of mediation is a counter to the stance of "design from nowhere," which "is closely tied to the goal of construing technical systems as commodities that can be stabilized and cut loose from the sites of their production long enough to be exported en masse to the sites of their use" (Suchman, 2002, p. 101). When Bridgy's use of Facebook's API achieved stabilization, it was a mutual accomplishment based on interactions between both actors. Yet, since Facebook was essentially indifferent to Bridgy, the burden of maintaining that accomplishment fell to Bridgy's developers, while Facebook's API changes and other inconsistencies regularly caused destabilization.

Consequently, Bridgy can never be cut loose from the site of its production. Given the extent to which it diverges from Facebook's expected use-case, Bridgy demonstrates surprising resilience. However, platform APIs are ultimately gatekeepers, and the capacity to use them in unexpected and unintended ways is hard won. Since Web platforms generally follow a model of constant iterative development (O'Reilly, 2007), third-party developers are required to do the same. This means constantly updating their software to maintain compatibility where possible and dealing with the fallout of incompatibility where necessary. This limits the potential for building long-lasting third-party software, since this requires that developers remain active over several years of maintenance.

Earlier we defined alternative media in terms of their capacity to include people who have been marginalized from mainstream media. This makes it important to acknowledge that in the case of unpaid software development such as Bridgy's, ongoing maintenance is only possible for developers who are sufficiently committed and privileged to balance this labor against professional, family, and other obligations. This increases burdens for many groups, including women, who generally take on a greater share of unpaid social productive labor such as child care and housework (Sayer, 2005).

Researchers who rely on social media data have experienced similar challenges and offer insights that extend to our analysis. In both contexts—social media research and Bridgy's repurposing of platforms as distribution—even dramatic API restrictions can be navigated to some extent. Bruns (2019) identified four paths forward for social media researchers, which are also useful for thinking about the future of alternative Web technologies that use platform APIs.

1. *Walk away*: Bruns notes that some will stop conducting research using platform APIs. Bridgy's loss of Facebook support parallels this. Just as researchers who walk away from platform data may still work in other areas, software developers who abandon one platform may devote their

time to engaging with others, as was the case with Bridgy, or to working on alternatives that do not interoperate with corporate platforms.

2. *Lobby for change*: Developers of emerging Web technologies are less likely than academics to be lobbyists for regulatory changes. Nonetheless, their work is affected by regulation. For example, Europe's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) includes a data portability provision that is especially relevant for software such as Bridgy, since it can be interpreted as facilitating "user-centric platforms of interrelated services"; however, other interpretations are possible (De Hert et al., 2018 p. 203) On the other hand, IndieWeb community members have debated about whether backfeeding comments from social media could itself violate the GDPR(Goldsmith, 2018; Greger, 2018). Ultimately, regulations are likely to simultaneously support and constrain emerging alternative technologies, which are often too small to warrant specific attention in regulatory design.
3. *Accommodate and acquiesce*: Bruns (2019) offers several ways in which researchers may maximize the value of increasingly restricted API data, such as by combining "disparate, incomplete, imperfect datasets" (p. 1559). Our analysis of Bridgy has highlighted the extent to which all longitudinal access to API data is likely to involve at least some accommodation of this sort. Ingenuity can push the boundaries what is possible; however, the work of maintaining applications that diverge from expected API use-cases is onerous. Reflecting on his decision to stop working on NetVizz, a research software for working with Facebook data, Rieder (2018) argued that this labor requires "substantial support from organizations capable of investing resources that may not lead to immediate deliverables." Thus, we should pay close attention to organizational and economic structures that can support alternative technologies. Recent work about community-oriented funding for alternative platforms is particularly valuable to that end (e.g., Schneider & Mannan, 2021; Scholz & Schneider, 2016).
4. *Break the rules*: The final path Bruns presents is to break the rules, such as by Web scraping HTML from platform websites. Putting aside legal and ethical questions about such an approach, the precarity-related challenges identified in this paper would be amplified when Web scraping, since platforms' HTML is easily and routinely obfuscated to frustrate machine-readability.

Bruns (2019) concludes that, at least in the short term, all of these paths will be followed by researchers. The same is true of developers who rely on platform APIs, and there are many complements among the interests of both groups.

Beyond the question of maintaining functionality at all, the ethical dilemma we observed about ambiguous privacy statuses merits special consideration. Shilton et al.'s (2013) socio-technical dimensions of values provide language for describing the place of privacy in Bridgy's design: Salience (peripheral to central), intention (accidental to purposive), and enactment (potential to performed). The decision to only process public data reflects a performed commitment to privacy, however one that literally pushes it to the periphery. However, privacy became a vital and *central* value for resolving a situation that had not been foreseen by either Facebook's or Bridgy's developers—From Facebook's perspective, Bridgy's unconventional way of mapping objects in Facebook's API, and from Bridgy's perspective, Facebook's ambiguous documentation of privacy status when accessed through that route.

Many instances of values-oriented design take a critical approach based on challenging the status quo (e.g., Flanagan et al., 2005). In fact, this is the basis of IndieWeb's (and Bridgy's) overall effort to build alternative Web technologies that *enhance* individual autonomy. Yet, when it comes to privacy, Bridgy does not attempt to enhance individuals' privacy, but rather to avoid deteriorating Facebook's existing privacy features. We posit that design strategies for *preserving* values are particularly difficult to articulate in advance of use, since some threats to values may only emerge as a result of unforeseen relationships.

Addressing unanticipated threats to values can be served by Houston et al.'s (2016) proposed agenda to move away from a notion of values as universal properties and toward an understanding of *valuation* as "contingent, ongoing processes through which things are rendered valuable in a wider social and material context" (p. 1412). One of the consequences of this shift is an awareness that "what values are materialized and how they are made visible are deeply intertwined issues" (Houston et al., 2016, p. 1412). And thus, while some values are defined and prioritized in advance of material engagements, others may be taken for granted or otherwise invisible until a situation emerges that demands attention to a particular value. Preserving values, therefore, is less likely to involve stabilizing a design toward a particular direction, but rather identifying and responding to emergent destabilizations. To that end, research that pursues infrastructural inversions at sites of ongoing maintenance will be fruitful for extending our knowledge about the sustainability of alternative technologies, especially those that interoperate with corporate Web platforms.

Conclusion

This study has investigated the work of maintaining a system for POSSE syndication between IndieWeb sites and Facebook. Given the extent of platformization, many new systems and tools must co-exist with corporate platforms to some extent, even as they attempt to provide an alternative. Our analysis has illustrated the extent to which infrastructuring work is necessary to maintain the stabilization of such arrangements. Furthermore, we have shown that emergent situations can necessitate design interventions to preserve values that had previously been taken for granted. These are important considerations for IndieWeb's efforts to provide an alternative that operates alongside and in collaboration with corporate platforms while remaining independent of them.

In addition, this study has demonstrated that GitHub issues can be a rich analytic resource for infrastructural inversions. Norms and conventions for issues vary among different projects, but issues have several features that make them invaluable for finding connections between design goals, sociotechnical obstacles, and specific technical decisions. Scholars engaged in the long-standing and yet unfulfilled effort to bridge social and technical research will benefit by adding this sort of analysis to their toolkit.

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CHAPTER 68

Building Wi-Fi Networks for Communities: Three Canadian Cases

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Abstract

This paper explores three Canadian wireless network projects that demonstrate that Wi-Fi technologies, like landline telephones, radio, and hydro, can be used to bring services to local communities. It is our position that despite the strengths and weaknesses of Fredericton's eZone, Montréal's Île Sans Fil, and the Lac Seul network in Northern Ontario, these three highlighted Wi-Fi networks demonstrate that a public information utilities model is still a useful lens through which to understand the development and implementation of telecommunications in Canada. Through our case studies, we have observed that in order for municipally based and community Wi-Fi networks to successfully take root in a community, it is advantageous to build on existing technological infrastructure. Moreover, municipal and community needs must be considered in the project. Finally, a cohort of interested advocates from the region is needed.

Keywords

Wi-Fi Networks, Wireless Technologies, Community Wireless, Municipalities, K-Net, Fredericton eZone, and Île Sans Fil

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Résumé

Cet article explore trois projets canadiens de réseau sans fil qui démontrent qu'on peut utiliser les technologies Wi-Fi à la manière du téléphone traditionnel, de la radio ou du système hydraulique pour servir les communautés. Selon nous, les réseaux Wi-Fi eZone de Frédéricton, Île sans fil de Montréal et Lac Seul du nord de l'Ontario, quels que soient leurs qualités et défauts, démontrent que le modèle d'un service d'information au public demeure utile pour comprendre le développement et l'établissement des télécommunications au Canada. Au moyen de nos études de cas, nous avons remarqué qu'il est avantageux de se fonder sur l'infrastructure technologique existante pour établir avec succès des réseaux Wi-Fi municipaux et communautaires. Par surcroît, il faut tenir compte des besoins municipaux et communautaires dans un projet. En outre, il est nécessaire d'avoir une cohorte de défenseurs provenant de la région impliquée.

Mots clés

Réseaux Wi-Fi; Technologies sans fil; Sans fil communautaire; Municipalités; K-Net; eZone de Frédéricton; Île sans fil

Introduction

In the past 10 years, there has been a growing interest in sponsoring the development of public wireless communication networks that allow users to have immediate access to the Internet via their own personal computer or hand-held device in a variety of locations. Community groups in San Francisco (Bay Area Wireless User Group, 2000); Seattle (SeattleWireless, 2008); British Columbia (BC Wireless Network, 2002); Champaign-Urbana, Illinois (Champaign-Urbana Wireless Project, 2002); New York (NYCWireless, 2001); and London (Priest, 2004) were among the first to use wireless technologies (e.g., the IEEE 802.11b standard known as Wi-Fi) to "build community owned and operated networks and collaborative user spaces" (FreeNetworks, 2001), providing local citizens with free access to the Internet and to local information. Cities such as Taipei, Taiwan (Ho, 2005); Tallinn, Estonia (WiFi.ee, 2003); Albuquerque, New Mexico (City of Albuquerque, 2004); and Fredericton, New Brunswick (Richard, 2004) were among the early municipal leaders in developing Wi-Fi infrastructures to provide citizens with broadband Internet access in public places.

Much has been written about the development of municipal wireless networks in the U.S. (see, for example, the 2006 special issue of *Government Information Quarterly* focusing on wireless broadband networks: Strover & Mun, 2006), but less attention has been paid to the Canadian experience. Powell and Shade (2006) provide an overview of community and municipal wireless projects in Canada, Cho (2008) offers insights into the developers of the Wireless Toronto network, and Wong (2008) discusses the Toronto co-op wireless provider, Wireless Nomad. With a focus on three Canadian wireless network projects—the Fredericton eZone ("Fred-eZone"), Montréal's Île Sans Fil (ISF), and the Lac Seul network in Northern Ontario—this article supplements previous work and adds to an understanding of community and municipal wireless networking initiatives in Canada. It highlights the accomplishments of these projects, drawing on an historical perspective on the development

of information utilities (Sackman & Nie, 1970) to highlight the unique aspects of each case. While each of the networks provides real benefits and services within its community, there are potential benefits that remain unrealized and potential users who are not served by the current network deployments.

The cases discussed in this paper indicate how unlicensed or licence-exempt spectrum can be deployed by communities and municipalities to develop fairly robust Wi-Fi networks that support a variety of communications purposes in a local region. However, simply having the funds to build the technical infrastructure for a Wi-Fi network is not enough. In each case, Wi-Fi is perceived as a fundamental service for the community, but the conceptualizations of Wi-Fi, technological strategies, and servicing of the Wi-Fi networks are fundamentally different. For the municipally driven service (eZone), Wi-Fi is viewed as part of the municipality's economic development strategy, with the Wi-Fi network considered city infrastructure much like sidewalks and sewers. The city takes responsibility for providing Wi-Fi connectivity, but it does not guarantee quality of service. As an organization, Île Sans Fil is interested not only in providing a Wi-Fi network, but also in "promoting interaction between users, showing new media art, and providing geographically and community-relevant information" (Île Sans Fil, 2008a). To attend to this, Île Sans Fil has developed its own open source software tools for managing community hotspots and is working to make explicit the social relevance of Wi-Fi. The Lac Seul network is supported by K-Net, which relies on numerous local, provincial, and federal funding bodies to provide a telecommunications infrastructure to Aboriginal communities in Northern Canada in the most challenging physical environment of all our case studies. K-Net's focus has been on developing and implementing a digital infrastructure for and by First Nations people.

Wireless networking

The wireless networks of interest in this paper are *public* wireless networks. Developed with the public interest in mind and/or to serve a public need, public wireless networks are distinct from for-profit wireless offerings (from companies such as Boingo, http://www.boingo.com; T-Mobile, http://hotspot.t-mobile.com; The Cloud, http://www.thecloud.net/About-us; and other broadband providers). As noted above, these public wireless networks are usually developed by community groups or municipalities (see Fuentes-Bautista & Inagaki, 2006, and Middleton, Longford, Clement, Potter, & Crow, 2006, for more detailed discussions of public wireless networks). Many provide free or low-cost network access to anyone within defined service areas, and they may facilitate access to local community content. Some networks provide connectivity to support the delivery of municipal services.

The first and most widespread type of public wireless network is the municipal network, found in cities around the world. These Wi-Fi infrastructures provide citizens with broadband Internet access in public places (e.g., parks, community centres, government offices) and in some cases serve individuals in their homes. Municipal networks can also be used to support municipal operations (e.g., meter reading, mobile access to municipal data, and remote monitoring), with the City of Westminster (in central London, see Smith, 2003) and Corpus Christi, Texas (Tropos Networks, 2007), among the early adopters. By 2005, the "municipal wireless" movement was in full swing, with one report showing almost 100 networks planned

or deployed in the U.S. and 65 international projects already in operation (Vos, 2005). Ambitious plans for citywide Wi-Fi networks were developed for Boston (Wireless Task Force, 2006), Philadelphia (Wireless Philadelphia Executive Committee, 2005), San Francisco (City and County of San Francisco, 2005), and many other locations. By 2007, there were 200 operational wireless networks in cities and counties around the U.S., with an additional 215 in the planning stages (Vos, 2007).

Despite the focus on providing public infrastructure, it was common for municipal projects in the U.S. to adopt a private-consortium approach to develop their wireless networks (Civitium, 2005). Companies such as EarthLink offered municipalities free or low-cost broadband access for certain groups (e.g., government employees, low-income citizens)—thereby creating the public-infrastructure component of the network—in exchange for access to city-owned infrastructure on which to deploy their wireless networks. The agreement would allow the private-sector provider to profit from deals with "anchor tenants" to purchase network access (see Jain, Mandviwalla, & Banker, 2007, for a description of this approach in the City of Philadelphia), and through the sale of wireless Internet access to residents in the communities the provider served (in competition with other Internet service providers). But by the summer of 2007, it became clear that this model was not viable in many instances (Weinschenk, 2007). Subscriber rates were low (likely because of the availability of better options for broadband connectivity in many locations), municipalities were not interested in being "anchor tenants" on the terms providers wanted, and it became evident that providers could not get a good return on their investments in municipal wireless infrastructures. By mid-2008, EarthLink and MetroFi (a provider operating networks in the Silicon Valley and Portland, Oregon) had announced plans to withdraw completely from the municipal wireless sector and to sell or shut down their networks (Cheng, 2008; LaVallee, 2008; Urbina, 2008).

The decline of the municipal wireless marketplace in the U.S. is outlined in detail in Civitium's report on the future of municipal broadband (Civitium, 2008), which effectively concludes that there is no future for the private-consortium approach to providing municipal wireless networks. However, a review of recent industry news coverage at MuniWireless (http://www.muniwireless.com) shows that many projects are still going ahead, but with different business models and a reduced focus on providing wireless Internet access to residents in areas that are already well served with broadband connectivity.

The second type of public wireless network is the community wireless network. The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) ratified the 802.11b (Wi-Fi) standard in 1999 ("A brief history of Wi-Fi," 2004), enabling technically minded individuals to use the Wi-Fi platform to share their personal Internet connections. Soon there were community efforts to build and/or share Internet connections to meet the needs of local communities in cities all over the world (Cha, 2000; Forlano, 2008; Nielsen, 2007; Powell & Shade, 2006). These volunteer-led community wireless networking groups worked independently of municipalities to develop wireless broadband networks for use within their own communities, often with an explicit agenda of developing community-based alternatives to commercial Internet service provision (Sandvig, 2004) and/or challenging regulatory policies and practices that favoured the commercial sector (Meinrath, 2005).

Community Wi-Fi developers pride themselves on sharing applications, strategies, and software for delivering bandwidth in unlicensed spectrum (e.g., at the International Summit

for Community Wireless Networks; see http://www.wirelesssummit.org), making it easy and cost-effective for local groups to build and administer their own networks. These networks have been developed and delivered largely by groups of volunteers who are either self-taught or have existing professional knowledge of computer coding and software applications (Powell & Shade, 2006). From a community perspective, the benefits of developing wireless networks include fostering a sense of community and encouraging civic engagement, as well as facilitating innovation. It is noted that the community wireless movement has been influenced by earlier instances of community media-building, including rural co-operative phones (Winseck, 1995) and ham radios (Coe, 1996; Radio Amateurs of Canada, 2008). A variety of community wireless initiatives are discussed in a recent special issue of the Journal of Community Informatics (see Powell & Meinrath, 2008).

Wireless networks as information utilities

The concept of an "information utility" has been a topic of interest to researchers and policy-makers since at least the late 1960s (Sackman & Nie, 1970). This "utility" was understood as some sort of appliance or device that would allow people in their homes to access information from a remote source, using some kind of communication network. Today, computers connected to the Internet and telephones provide this functionality, but for many years it was unclear how the goal of providing citizens with information access could be achieved and what the impacts would be. Early discussions examined technical questions of how to reach citizens in their homes (with Dunlop, 1970, among others, suggesting that the cable television network offered the most viable option) and attempted to articulate the social implications of developing an information utility (Bengelsdorf, 1970; Licklider, 1970). One topic of particular interest was the democratizing potential of the information utility, which was (and continues to be) seen as a way to open up the political process to a much wider group of participants (Dahlberg, 2001; Parker, 1972).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed history of the evolution of information utilities over the past four decades (see Dutton, Blumler, & Kraemer, 1987, for an overview of developments up to the mid-1980s). However, an understanding of some aspects of the journey from the imagined information utility of the late 1960s and early 1970s to today's reality of home and mobile Internet access is relevant here, as current community and municipal initiatives for developing wireless Internet infrastructures have some roots in these earlier projects. Wi-Fi networks can be seen as part of a set of long-term initiatives by citizens and some levels of government and industry to provide people with basic telecommunications infrastructure and information services. While the advent of wireless and mobile technologies has allowed access to occur in public spaces outside the home, as well as inside, the basic goals of providing infrastructure and enabling access to information remain unchanged. As such, it is instructive to review the motivations for developing information utilities over the past decades, as a means of understanding and assessing the outcomes of current wireless network deployments.

Private enterprise has been interested in developing ways to provide consumers with information access in their homes. In the United States and Canada, cable companies were the leaders on the commercial side, running trials of what became known as "interactive" cable

systems, which offered upgraded cable infrastructure to provide selected consumers with a choice of programming and on-demand access to information (Davidge, 1987; Mundorf, Kolbe, & Brenner, 1997). Although interactive cable was popular with some consumers and advanced the concept of an information utility, the trials were not commercial successes (Becker, 1987; Blahut, Nichols, Schell, Story, & Szurkowski, 1995; Carey, 1997). The trials were discontinued by the mid-1990s, as it became evident that the Internet, rather than closed, proprietary systems, could become a mechanism for providing citizens with access to information in their homes. Cable and telephone companies then quickly established themselves as commercial Internet service providers (Shelanski, 1999).

Community and municipal wireless networks are not operated on a commercial basis. Rather, they are much closer to what Guthrie & Dutton (1992) described as "public information utilities." These were "designed to facilitate access to community information and dialogue" (p. 574) and sought to achieve civic goals (Sullivan, Borgida, Jackson, Riedel, Oxendine, & Gangl, 2002), with an explicit focus on "electronically connect[ing] individuals who also share common geographic space" (Virnoche, 1998, p. 85). Predating widespread citizen use of the Internet, community networks such as Santa Monica, California's Public Electronic Network (PEN) aimed to assist in the delivery of city services, enable communication among citizens, familiarize residents with electronic communication technologies, and help ensure access to electronic resources for the socioeconomically disadvantaged (Guthrie, Schmitz, Ryu, Harris, Rogers, & Dutton, 1990; Rogers, Collins-Jarvis, & Schmitz, 1994). Residents could access PEN through public access terminals or their own home computers, but the project did not develop the access infrastructure.

While community networks such as PEN focused on developing information services, others, including the Blacksburg Electronic Village (BEV) in Virginia (Blacksburg Electronic Village, 2001; 2008) and "freenets" such as Ottawa's National Capital FreeNet (Patrick, 1997) and the Cleveland Freenet (2008), also addressed infrastructure needs by assisting residents in connecting to networks from their homes. Moll and Shade (2001) emphasize that community networks were distinct from other services because of their clear focus on local issues, their commitment to providing free or affordable network access, and a belief that community networking could foster social change and community development. But over time, it became clear that the communications infrastructure of choice for citizens who wanted to connect themselves with each other and with their communities would be the Internet. As it became easier for citizens to get Internet connections on their own, community networks became less actively involved in developing infrastructure, and freenets disappeared (Featherly, 2003).

Community groups were not the only ones developing communications infrastructure. In the U.S. (and to a lesser degree in Canada), many municipalities became broadband service providers. The expertise of municipal utilities in delivering services, their access to municipally owned infrastructure on which to install equipment, and their existing relationships with community members positioned them well to develop broadband networks (Carlson, 1999; Feld, Rose, Cooper, & Scott, 2005; Gillett, Lehr, & Osorio, 2004). Some municipalities first developed broadband infrastructure for their own use and later made access available to local businesses and citizens (Gillett, Lehr, & Osorio, 2004). Municipal broadband networks that offer residential services typically provide high-quality Internet access at affordable prices, and they may also offer telephone and cable service (Kelley, 2003; Mitchell, 2007).

Municipal objectives for developing broadband infrastructure include fostering economic development, improving the efficiency of government services, and providing service to citizens and businesses that are not well served by commercial providers. But prior to the deployment of wireless broadband, the number of municipalities actually providing Internet connectivity to residents was quite low (Gillett, Lehr, & Osorio, 2004).

To summarize the evolution of the "information utility" over the past few decades, it is noted that commercial entities, communities, and municipalities have all been involved in developing the information services and communications infrastructures that allow citizens to connect with communities, governments, businesses, and each other, initially using various local networks and more recently through the Internet. In the context of the wireless broadband initiatives of interest in this paper, it is the community and municipal efforts that are most relevant. Central to the "information services" component of the community networking movement was the desire to connect local citizens with local information sources and to provide access to informational content generated by local governments as well as by other citizens within the same geographic location. Community networks could also foster democracy and social change, for example, by encouraging local residents to participate in online discussion forums. With respect to the "infrastructure provision" aspect of the information utility, as the Internet became established, community groups withdrew from infrastructure provision. Municipalities built on existing expertise to develop broadband infrastructures, motivated by prospects of fostering economic development, providing service to underserved groups, and capitalizing on efficiencies in service provision.

As noted above, in the past decade, *wireless* networks have been used by community groups and municipalities to develop new broadband infrastructure and to provide a platform to encourage community networking. As Gillett (2006) observes, "Wireless technology is unique in its low barriers to entry. Little public disruption is required (generally, streets do not have to be dug up), and, when unlicensed spectrum is available, the transmission medium is free" (p. 592). Although developing robust, reliable wireless infrastructure is not as simple as Gillett's comments might imply, the relative ease of deployment and lack of entry barriers (such as acquisition of spectrum) have encouraged many municipalities and communities to take a role in providing information infrastructure. But as the case studies below show, some current deployments of wireless networks do not provide the full set of benefits and services that earlier iterations of public information utilities have aimed to deliver.

Public wireless networks in Canada: Methodology and case studies

For many decades, a number of researchers on the Community Wireless Infrastructure Research Project (CWIRP, http://www.cwirp.ca), of which we are members, have been involved with social movements and digital technologies.1 We were aware of a number of Wi-Fi developments from our activist and research practices and from reviewing the literature on Wi-Fi networks. In 2005, as part of the development of CWIRP, we identified four Wi-Fi networks in Canada that had each been in operation for a minimum of one year and served a local community in a unique way. These networks were the municipally funded and governed Wi-Fi network in Fredericton, New Brunswick (Fred-eZone); the Lac Seul First Nation wireless network, affiliated with the Keewaytinook Okimakanak Nation; Wireless Nomad,

a volunteer-run co-operative offering free Wi-Fi and a pay-for-service network in Toronto; and finally, Île Sans Fil, a community wireless network in Montréal. We sought explicitly to develop working relations and partnerships with these organizations, providing funding for partner research, seeking their input on interviews and survey materials, and convening a workshop to share experiences across organizations. We had wanted to work closely with Toronto Hydro Telecom to learn more about the One Zone project (http://www.onezone.ca—a for-profit network serving downtown Toronto), but they declined to participate.

The primary researchers visited all of the sites in 2006. This provided each of us with an opportunity to meet the individuals responsible for the networks, to see the infrastructure, and to gain material experience of each location. After each site visit, the researchers made notes and recorded initial impressions of each site. We then used these impressions to shape further data collection to facilitate our understanding of how these networks operated. One principal researcher, with a number of graduate students, was then responsible for each individual site. Each researcher conducted interviews with constituents such as policymakers, developers, and users at each site and reviewed local newspaper coverage, policy documents, and academic articles pertaining to the development and implementation of each Wi-Fi network.

The following research questions guided our investigation of each of the sites: When was the project started? Who initiated the project? Why was the project initiated? Who were the key players in establishing this project? Are they still involved? If not, who are the key players now? What were the challenges in getting the project established? Was there resistance to establishing this infrastructure? What are the major ambitions for this project? How have they changed over its course? What do you consider to be your most notable accomplishments so far? What are the most significant setbacks or disappointments so far? In order to enhance and nuance an understanding of each site's history, we then asked a series of questions pertaining to users, economics, technologies, ownership, content and services of network, and policy. These results were then mapped, and we created detailed case studies available at http://www.cwirp.ca. Wireless Nomad is not discussed in this paper, but a description of its efforts to enable citizens to share their Wi-Fi networks is provided by Wong (2008).

In the next section, we provide a brief description of each network and the context in which it was developed. We outline challenges inherent in developing each network and identify each organization's successes. The descriptions are followed by a synthesis of the benefits and services provided by each network, using a framework derived from the literature on public information utilities discussed earlier.

Fredericton eZone

Fredericton is the capital city of New Brunswick, with a population of about 85,000 (census agglomeration, Statistics Canada, 2006a). There are two universities in the city, and major employers include the government and institutional sectors, as well as knowledge industries (information technologies, life sciences, consulting engineering, and e-learning) (Team Fredericton, 2008a). Access to good-quality information and communications technology infrastructure is essential to the citizens and businesses of Fredericton, and the municipal government has played a major role in developing this infrastructure for Fredericton.

In 1999, to promote and support economic development through innovation, and in response to concerns about the high costs of Internet access for local businesses, the city

established E-Novations, a city-owned company that created and manages the Fredericton Community Network. Much effort was needed to gain the support of municipal politicians and to overcome the resistance of the largest telecommunications carrier in the province, but E-Novations persevered and created a fibre optic network that provides bandwidth to local businesses on a wholesale basis, as well as serving the needs of local government. This co-operative model of infrastructure development reduced the costs of Internet access significantly and also resulted in increased competition in Internet provision in Fredericton. As of 2007, the community broadband network managed 60 km of fibre and served 35 "tenants," who each saved up to $600 per month on the cost of broadband connectivity (Powell, 2008).

In 2003, with the support of the city council, E-Novations created the Fred- eZone, the city's public wireless network. The eZone Wi-Fi network was not originally part of the city's telecommunications infrastructure plan, but it was possible to provide this peripheral communications service once the fibre was in place. The Fred-eZone is owned by the City of Fredericton and supported by public funding (with each proposed expansion approved by the city council). It uses surplus capacity from the community broadband network to provide bandwidth for anyone within the network's range to connect to the Internet using Wi-Fi. Fred-eZone currently offers over 100 access points, with most concentrated in the downtown core and available at municipally funded institutions such as the public library. The eZone also serves the shopping mall, the truck stop on the highway near town, and the airport, and it offers online access to webcams providing various views of the city (http://www.fred-ezone.com/webcams) as the city is not interested in being an Internet service provider (recognizing that being an ISP requires a commitment to a certain level of service), the network is not designed to provide service to individual residences.

E-Novations manages the network, using a mix of licensed and unlicensed spectrum for "backhaul" connection to the community fibre network. The network uses Motorola and Cisco equipment, and Cisco has used the Fred-eZone to promote its products (Team Fredericton, 2008b, 2008c). Given Fredericton's relatively small size and its location, what is most important regarding the choice of technology vendors is that local support is available. The eZone is not afraid to reject technologies and solutions that do not work in Fredericton, and it is happy to promote the ones that do.

Fredericton established itself as the first municipality in Canada to offer Wi- Fi to its residents, and the Fred-eZone represents one of Canada's Wi-Fi success stories. The efforts of Maurice Gallant (E-Novations CEO and CIO of the City of Fredericton), Mike Richard (E-Novations VP Operations and City of Fredericton IT Manager), and Don Fitzgerald (Executive Director of Team Fredericton) have been central to the success of the community network and the Fred-eZone, and they continue to share the Fredericton broadband story with audiences around the world. Their work earned the city an economic innovation award in 2004 (Canadian Information Productivity Awards, 2004). Promotion for the eZone emphasizes the role that broadband infrastructure plays in economic development and in encouraging industry to come to their city, although such effects are difficult to assess.

The innovators and players behind eZone view their Wi-Fi network as public infrastructure akin to sidewalks. They have significantly reduced the telecommunication costs for business and government agencies in their city, they have brought national and international attention to the city, and they have generously shared their process with countless municipalities.

Interestingly, the eZone approach has not been replicated widely. Few other municipalities have the combination of success factors present in Fredericton: strong local champions, support for development of a locally owned fibre network, favourable city finances, and a supportive local council.

Île Sans Fil

Montréal is the second-largest city in Canada, with a population of about 3.6 million (census metropolitan area, Statistics Canada, 2006b). It is a culturally rich, bilingual city with the highest number of cultural producers in the country. Montréal has the highest average earnings of artists as a percentage of average local labour force earnings and the second-highest population of artists after the City of Toronto (Hill Strategies, 2006). Montréal's cultural richness, as well as its long history of engagement with sustainability issues and national independence, have influenced the development of the Île Sans Fil community Wi-Fi network.

While eZone advocates were municipal employees, ISF is a group made up of about 20 core volunteers, with more than 500 additional volunteers keeping up with the project through their mailing list. As a non-profit group, ISF is committed to providing free public wireless Internet access in public spaces in Montréal. The high number of artists and self-employed individuals in Montréal has partially sustained a strong public café culture, providing an ideal environment for deployment of wireless hotspots. ISF implemented its first free hotspot in July 2003 at Café Laika—centrally located in what is considered to be a funky and hip neighbourhood, the Plateau. The Café serves as a beacon site and is one of ISF's most frequented and longstanding free hotspots.

Run by volunteers who describe themselves as "computer hackers (the geeky-but-cool kind), system administrators, 'hands-on' academics, web designers, idealists, engineers and more" (Île Sans Fil, 2008b), ISF has implemented about 160 free hotspots in cafés and other public places (e.g., parks, local businesses) and has registered 30,000 users. Two individuals, Michael Lenczner (one of the few Anglophones in the group) and Benoit Grégoire, were key to the technological development and implementation of the network. Its approach is a simple one. ISF enables local businesses and community organizations to extend their existing Internet connections by creating hotspots on their premises. The hotspot "host" pays a small fee to ISF and in return gets the hardware necessary to create a hotspot, some technical support, and a listing in ISF's directory (Île Sans Fil, 2008a). As one of its founders commented, "[I]t's more the importance of having decentralizing players offering access; offering it wirelessly, not getting stopped by regulations or other non-business obstacles" (Benoit Grégoire, Île Sans Fil, Montréal, interview, June 7, 2006).

Who offers Wi-Fi and how it is offered has been critical to ISF, given its commitment to open source software and politics. In late 2005, there was some discussion that various levels of government and telecommunication companies might be interested in developing a citywide municipal network in Montréal. As a result, ISF made a concerted effort to increase its number of hotspots. ISF felt that this increased presence could play a role in opening up discussions about public and free networks. To date, neither government- nor telecommunication company-owned Wi-Fi networks have materialized. However, the municipal governments in both Montréal and Québec City are now offering a small, but sustaining, budget for ISF

and ZAP Québec (another community wireless network and spin-off from ISF) to increase their community networks to cover public parks and city-core areas (Péloquin, 2007).

What makes Île Sans Fil unique in the larger international context of community Wi-Fi networks is its commitment to making the network not only seamless and transparent (for example, through use of open source software), but also a site for community engagement and interaction:

> We believe that technology can be used to bring people together and foster a sense of community. In pursuit of that goal, Île Sans Fil uses its free public access points to promote interaction between users, show new media art, and provide geographically- and community-relevant information. (Île Sans Fil, 2008a), ISF's founding members have been committed to free public wireless and initially privileged the technical delivery of Wi-Fi. "[Our] main goal to start off with . . . was free public wireless, free wireless in public spaces, and using the technology to create and support local community" (Michael Lenczner, Île Sans Fil, Montréal, interview, June 7, 2006).

However, they soon realized that the maxim "Build it and they will come" did not work and that their own political agendas were not evident to those who used their services.

It is important to acknowledge that different groups have different ways of engaging with Wi-Fi. As other community wireless groups were fledging, such as LondonWireless and NYC-wireless, ISF wanted to take up its own place and context more specifically. To do this, the team developed an application called "Wifidog" (an alternative to "NoCatAuth"—see http://nocat.net) to manage user access to ISF hotspots and to establish meaningful contact with cultural producers in Montréal to provide community content at each hotspot. Wifidog is both "a gateway per hotspot running a client process and a Web-based central server" (Lenczner, 2005, p. 8). As a captive portal, all users are required to log in and are taken to an ISF Web page (or redirected to a portal page where the site is located). This application allows hotspot "hosts" to create and manage their own location-specific content. ISF also developed extended features that allow users to upload and download text, images, and sound through HAL (Hubs des Artistes Locaux, http://www.ilesansfil.org/tiki-index.php?page=HAL&bl=y), (Charest, Lenczner, & Marceau, 2007), although these are not currently active. A user profile section allows users to see who is online, where users may be located, and information (disclosed solely by the user) about particular users currently online. To date, this application has been taken up in four continents and by over 30 groups, and Île Sans Fil has made usage data collected through Wifidog available to the international research community at the CRAWDAD archive (Community Resource for Archiving Wireless Data at Dartmouth, 2007). Finally, ISF has also collaborated with the artists working with the Mobile Digital Commons Network (MDCN) and other local artists to display their work (Powell, 2006).

ISF has been one of the most successful community Wi-Fi networks in Canada. Montréal's long history of community activism and advocacy for communication networks (Powell & Shade, 2006) and the place of the café in street culture in Montréal are significant factors in sustaining an environment for Wi-Fi. Most recently, ISF has entered into an agreement with the City of Montréal to cover the downtown core with ISF's network. ISF's network was built by a community of largely young, White, and highly skilled Francophones to provide themselves with Internet access outside of their places of residence. These young men, largely employed as freelance workers, wanted to be able to connect with others in a community.

Many ISF users confirmed this important use as well, wanting to get out of their residences and be "part of something."

Relying entirely upon volunteers, ISF has been able to implement a large number of hotspots, has enjoyed significant positive media coverage, and has partnered with numerous academic and community projects to provide initial and sustaining funds (Powell, in press). ISF has developed software not just to deliver network use, but also to apprise users of various community, artistic, and political local events. However, ISF also faces the challenge of how to mentor and sustain its volunteer network. Many of the initial core volunteers have become less interested in the network as it has become more self-sustaining. As well, at some level, the network reflects its designers. While many people can appreciate free access to the Internet in cafés, fewer women, communities of colour, and people with disabilities have the same leisure time, equipment, skill set, and/or mobility to avail themselves of and/or maintain these services. In conclusion, despite the network reflecting its designers' overt needs, ISF has been a tremendous success in the development and deployment of community Wi-Fi. The group has set new standards for user integration through its social software applications and has been generous in transferring skills and knowledge to other community Wi-Fi groups around the world.

Keewaytinook Okimakanak K-Net

The Kuh-ke-nah Network (K-Net) is an initiative of Keewaytinook Okimakanak (KO), a non-profit tribal council in Northwestern Ontario. K-Net is one of the first Aboriginal networks created, developed, and maintained mostly by First Nations peoples in Canada (Beaton, 2004; Ramírez, Aitkin, Jamieson, & Richardson, 2004). Established in 1994, K-Net operates and manages a community broadband network, providing services and applications (e.g., teleconferencing, telehealth, education, community e-centres, and economic development) to the Nishnawbe Aski First Nations (see http://smart.knet.ca/fednor_video_ list.html for more info on K-Net). K-Net is "a regional network of more than 60 aboriginal communities and related points of presence, clustered around Northern Ontario and Québec. Its primary constituents are remote and sparsely populated First Nations communities that inhabit the Sioux Lookout district, an area of Northwestern Ontario that spans 385,000 square kilometres. There are 25 First Nations communities in the district, and only one has fulltime road access" (Fiser, Clement, & Walmark, 2005, p. 3). It also serves as the Regional Management Organization for First Nations Schoolnet programs across Ontario and operates telemedicine services in 24 communities. K-Net servers now host over 30,000 Web pages and 70,000 email accounts, and they receive over 80 million hits per month.

CWIRP's relationship with this community was built on a pre-existing one through the Canadian Research Alliance for Community Innovation and Networking (CRACIN; http://www.cracin.ca). Andrew Clement and Adam Fiser had been working with this community and asked whether they could bring the interests of CWIRP to the community as well. Of particular relevance to CWIRP was the wireless network deployed by the Lac Seul First Nation to bring connectivity to three small remote communities. This network infrastructure is owned by the Lac Seul First Nation with K-Net Services (http://knet.ca/info/knet) acting as its Internet service provider as well as providing for applications such as video conferencing and telehealth.

Of the three cases profiled in this paper, K-Net operates in the most rural and most challenging physical landscape. The deployment of the Lac Seul Wi-Fi network was difficult, given the need to attend to the climate, user uptake, technical training, and sustainability. Although these particular Nations have been very successful in seeking out and managing a number of provincial and federal grants to build and develop their network (Fiser, 2007), the grants have also dictated the priority they need to give to certain broadband and Wi-Fi activities and deliverables. K-Net has had to be strategic in terms of delivering on grant promises and determining how to best serve its wide-ranging communities. Like Fredericton's eZone and ISF, the Lac Seul network was also enabled through the hard work and persistence of local supporters, including K-Net's Brian Beaton and the Chief and Band Council of the Lac Seul First Nation.

The Lac Seul First Nation is a 90-minute drive from the closest town (population of 5,000), followed by a boat ride for those who live on the lake. In the wintertime when the ice is thick enough, residents use skidoos to access the main road to town. Children are schooled in the local community until grade eight, when they are sent to an Aboriginal school with boarding facilities. On our first visit to the Lac Seul region, we were shown the wireless network connecting three First Nations communities: Frenchman's Head (population 425), Kejick Bay (population 426), and Whitefish Bay (population 98). Some of the initial funding for the project (e.g., for the communication tower and equipment) was provided directly by the band council. The network provides the connectivity to the communities, as no fibre optic link was in place. It consists of smartBridges Wi-Fi radios for public wireless access, with Aperto transceivers (operating on licensed spectrum) providing a backhaul connection to Sioux Lookout and enabling quality of service (QoS) applications such as telehealth and video conferencing.

Using licensed spectrum to guarantee QoS, the Lac Seul wireless network serves band offices and community centres, local nursing stations and health clinics, and local police. Residents can access the free Wi-Fi network in their homes if they have a computer with a network card and line-of-sight access to the network, and if the network is operational. Access is also provided at the community centres, where people can connect to the Internet and view local community information on the K-Net website and "MyKnet" personal homepages. Although the advent of Facebook has decreased its popularity recently, MyKnet.org gets more than 20,000 daily visits (though these are not all from the Lac Seul community, they show the popularity of this network across the K- Net community).

On the day we arrived at Kejick Bay, the wireless tower was not working and the community had been without service for over a week due to a recent thunderstorm, a common occurrence in the region. As a result of various agreements between service providers and the Lac Seul Band Council, there were several misunderstandings about who owned the equipment and who was supposed to service it. As the receiving dish was on a telecommunications tower, only network technicians from certified "tower crews" were allowed to replace the broken receiver. There can be a significant wait for these trained climbers, as they must be brought in from either Winnipeg (almost 800 km) or Thunder Bay (over 400 km) (Fiser, 2007). Hence, it may be that the communities have problems finding and keeping technical staff as a result of these kinds of situations and perceived lack of support. As well, the computer technician the Band had hired to maintain and service the broadband and Wi-Fi network argued that

he was not being paid enough to manage the Internet services for these communities and resigned from his position.

On one hand, K-Net has been tremendously successful in the development and provision of broadband network services by and for Aboriginal peoples. To date, there have been few other Aboriginal communities that have attempted to build their own infrastructure. Millions of dollars have been raised and spent to develop and maintain this telecommunications infrastructure (see Fiser, 2007, for a detailed analysis of the expenditures for the Lac Seul network). On the other hand, efforts to develop the wireless network to extend service into the remote Lac Seul community resulted in a number of challenges. These included unpredictable climate conditions, a mixed infrastructure of stakeholders and technologies, and limited technical support.

Concluding Remarks

These three case studies illustrate a range of diffusion and adoption of Wi-Fi in Canadian communities. Each of these sites has mobilized a range of different players to supply and service Wi-Fi access for communities, providing benefits through infrastructure provision and encouraging the development of local communities. Each of them reveals the importance of public network access, and collectively, the cases show a range of ways to provide such networks at the local level.

In returning to the literature on information utilities, we are reminded of the benefits they sought to deliver. From the perspective of providing information services, these earlier projects aimed to link local citizens to local community information. The focus of the public information utilities was on enabling community within specific geographic locations, rather than on extending community beyond local boundaries.

In our case studies, ISF has done this well, although the individuals who have developed and implemented the network applications could limit their definition of community—i.e., the ISF network was largely designed to provide network access for a certain group of people (young, White, freelance, males). Fredericton has done very little to explicitly develop community and has significant potential to do more, while K-Net has strongly encouraged community development and has explicitly linked its network with political autonomy. The Lac Seul wireless network, combined with K-Net's content and infrastructure, does the best job of delivering services and benefits to its community. The combination of infrastructure provision in Lac Seul and information content developed elsewhere in the community does support attempts to bridge the digital divide and to foster community and economic development. However, K-Net is unique among First Nations communities and to date their extensive accomplishments in providing reliable infrastructure and community support to a large remote area have not been replicated.

Hence, what is missing from the public information utilities literature, and seen in our case studies, is a desire to build community beyond the local (i.e., people in all locations using the Internet to reach beyond local community to other communities of interest, friends, and family). As well, there was little recognition in the utilities literature that networks could be used for non-utilitarian purposes. For example, building on the utilities model, both ISF

and K-Net have developed, facilitated, and provided important and rich value to users and citizens through their applications and mandates to enhance community.

The eZone case is a fascinating story about three individuals who saw an opportunity to provide telecommunications access at a lower rate than an incumbent telecommunications company. What makes this situation unique is that the municipality owns and manages the network and that these three individuals continue to play a key role in advocating and developing the Wi-Fi network. Fredericton is not reliant on other levels of government funding and/or telecommunications companies to provide it with legitimate autonomy in how to pursue and use its network. The Wi-Fi network was a "no-brainer" for the city. Given the buildings that the city owned, it was straightforward to put up antennae and enable the network. While eZone has an FAQ page on how to set up a network and is working hard to provide coverage to the whole of the city, the network is viewed largely as infrastructure. Little consideration has been given to other ways this network could facilitate more civic and user engagement in the city and whether the eZone could bring in other "advocates" to develop this realm of the network.

ISF has been very influential in the community wireless space, providing technical information, consulting with other organizations developing their own networks, and sharing their software. ISF's commitment to providing applications such as "Wifidog" and "HAL" has made it easier for other groups to enable community representation on portal sites. These applications are an attempt to bring meaning to virtual communities and link them back to the place where users live and work.

However, ISF is a volunteer organization, and its growth and sustainability is limited by its reliance upon volunteers. Fielding numerous requests for assistance setting up community Wi-Fi networks, building and maintaining its own network, and developing user/community applications have been very demanding for this organization. ISF has had to turn down requests for assistance in the implementation of other networks. Providing software solutions to make it easier to start up networks has not been enough to generate similar networks—manuals are needed; people are needed to build, share, set up, and manage the networks; and knowledge about local infrastructure and municipal bylaws is helpful to setting up community networks. However, the passion generated by the ISF volunteers to implement something they needed is equally important. Presently, ISF is trying to reflect on and consider more long-term implications of their technical and community work.

Finally, K-Net builds on other autonomous media practices of First Nations communities such as Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) and First Nations Broadcasting radio (Roth, 2005). This particular region has deftly managed numerous funding agencies and project-driven grants to provide broadband networks to support telehealth and video conferencing capabilities. The rural landscape and its wilderness have presented significant physical challenges to Wi-Fi networks that do not present remedies as easily as urban spaces. As well, the region does not have the same population of amateur and professional computer scientists and engineers to support, maintain, and champion Wi-Fi initiatives.

In all of these models, key factors that have not been made central to the networks are sustainability and user integration. While each of these sites has had a small group of individuals serving as advocates for the Wi-Fi networks, ultimately, it has been quite astounding to see the incredible good will, time, and energy that these small groups of individuals have put into

play to develop and maintain these networks. One of the challenges will now be to mentor other individuals to keep this work going as well as to diversify the group of people doing it. At present, it is mainly men who are involved in developing these networks. While this is understandable in terms of the demographics of computer science and engineering students in Canada (see Canadian Women in Computing, 2008; Galpin, 2002), their commitment to transferring these skills, particularly at ISF, can play a role in changing the power dynamics and also influence the types of content and future users for these networks. (For example, see some of the exciting work being done by Studio XX in Montréal: http://www.studioxx.org.)

Finally, in terms of the policy context, the 2006 Telecommunications Policy Review Report awaits parliamentary review and implementation. The recommendations of this report state quite clearly that markets should determine development of telecommunications and that federal governments should be committed to facilitating rural access to telecommunications (Telecommunications Policy Review Panel, 2006). These case studies not only defy the recommendations of the report and demonstrate ways in which local communities can provide public information utilities outside of market forces, but also make a case for the continued importance and need for public information utilities.

These cases demonstrate that municipalities and communities can make use of licence-exempt spectrum to provide useful infrastructure and content to local residents. However, they are also a patchwork of broadband delivery and access and are not always duplicated easily. What we do know is that individual champions, technical expertise, and opportunities are important ingredients. The latest challenges for these networks are how this technology will work with other mobile devices, the fate of unlicensed spectrum, and quality assurance for services available to users.

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PART 11

Activism and Resistance

CHAPTER 69

Punks' Jungle: São Paulo

Rodrigo Lopes de Barros

In *Distortion and Subversion: Punk Rock Music and the Protests for Free Public Transportation in Brazil (1996–2011)*, 229–68. Liverpool University Press, 2022. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv3029s28.9.

I looked at the distant city down there . . . I did start to think that neither I nor anybody else would ever manage to understand all that because it was perhaps impossible to feel what that city was, because the city was precisely made so that nobody managed to understand what it was, because it was exactly that, a bunch of things without a beginning and without an end.

The punk narrator from the novel *Fliperama sem creme* by Teixeira Coelho, describing São Paulo, 1984.[1]

After the Crossroads, the Network

São Paulo undoubtedly stands as the most important city in Brazil. Just over an hour's flying time from Florianópolis lies the largest metropolis in the Southern Hemisphere. Its chaotic agglomeration of buildings extends beyond the horizon. At night, the multitude of lights eclipses the brightness of the stars, and on a dry day, the smoke emitted by factories and cars seems to be transmuted into a massive gray cloud. One cannot compare the scale of these two places. Florianópolis has been portrayed as an idyllic island forgotten in the Atlantic, while São Paulo signifies a "forest of concrete and steel," as stated in a rap song by Racionais MC's, or "an urban inferno," in the words of historian Nicolau Sevcenko.[2] São Paulo exists as a hellish jungle of social and physical human-made structures (if one combines both). In the same vein, the punk band B.U.S.H. released an album named after the city in 2007, and the cover art of the LP displays the skyscrapers of São Paulo. The yellow and blue layer situated

[1] Teixeira Coelho, *Fliperama sem creme* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1984), 76–77 (emphasis in original).

[2] Racionais MC's, "Negro Drama," disc 1, track 5 on *Nada como um dia após o outro dia* (São Paulo: Cosa Nostra, 2002), CD; Nicolau Sevcenko cited in Alexandra Perloff- Giles, "Brazil's Public Intellectual," Harvard Gazette, Oct. 21, 2010, https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2010/10/brazils-public-intellectual/; see also: Steinmacher, *Sons de uma ilha subterrânea, 33.*

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under the image of edifices reveals that the metropolis is, at the same time, psychedelic and full of surprises. Among the published songs is one titled "Andando pelas ruas" ("Roaming the Streets"); the lyrics depict the contradictory feelings of São Paulo's inhabitants. They want to flee but, at the same time, they nourish love for their city. The punks and the bandits—and not the famous singer Caetano Veloso, as he portrays in "Sampa"—are the ones who walk through the crossroads of Ipiranga and São João avenues.[3] Punks are *flâneurs* observing the effervescence of the urban space. They also announce that the economic heart of the country still pulses at night. São Paulo is a tough environment where virtually all imaginable possibilities live.

Relação de amor e ódio com esse lugar
Já tentei fugir daqui, sem-
pre acabo por voltar
Medo, corrupção e violência
Mais uma noite chega pra te convidar
Já passa de meia noite, o metrô vai fechar
Um punk atravessa a Ipiranga
O rolê vai começar
Muitos vão pra Augusta, procurar diversão
Enquanto os delinquentes
apavoram na Avenida São João

A love-hate relationship with this place
I've already tried to escape, I al-
ways keep coming back
Fear, corruption, and violence
Another night arrives to invite you along
It's past midnight, subways closing soon
A punk crosses Ipiranga Ave.
The night out's going to start
Many go to Augusta St. looking for fun
While the delinquents
raise hell at São João Ave.

[2X]
Não há gratidão, nem piedade
pelas ruas dessa cidade
No cair da madrugada, o centro vai ferver
Não fecharei os olhos um minuto sequer
Respiro, vivo, sigo...
Respiro, vivo, sigo...

[2X]
There's no gratitude, no piety
on the streets of this city
In the small hours, downtown is gonna burn
Won't close my eyes, even for a blink
I breathe, live, move forward...
I breathe, live, move forward...

[2X]
Andando pelas ruas de São Paulo
Andando pelas ruas!!!
Andando pelas ruas de São Paulo
Andando pelas ruas!!!... de São Paulo

[2X]
Roaming the streets of São Paulo
Roaming the streets!!!
Roaming the streets of São Paulo
Roaming the streets!!!... of São Paulo[4]

Everything in Brazil happens first in São Paulo. However, this axiom was shattered at least once: here, in this text, São Paulo is no longer the ultramodern city that must always

[3] Caetano Veloso, "Sampa," track B2 on *Muito (Dentro Da Estrela Azulada)* (Rio de Janeiro: Phonogram/Philips, 1978), vinyl.

[4] B.U.S.H., "Andando pelas ruas," trans. by the band, track A2 on *São Paulo* (Recorded in São Paulo: Rocha Studios, 2007; Published in Germany: Thrashbastard: 2007), Vinyl (lyrics and the band's own translation changed according to the recording and for punctuation, spelling, grammar, and capitalization).

inaugurate trends, where the models are interminably forged to be reproduced elsewhere, and where everyone hopes exclusively to find inspiration. What occurred in São Paulo regarding the struggle for free public transportation is understood in large part also as a consequence of the events that took place in the much smaller city of Florianópolis. To be fair, it is possible to talk about an intellectual and militant partnership between the cities. If one looks for a sole avant-garde, though, it can be difficult to find one. Sometimes it is São Paulo, and other times it is the little capital-island of the state of Santa Catarina that sets the standard to be followed, that provides the example to be admired, that teaches the new truths: if young people are organized and disciplined around a specific claim, such as the free fare, they can, in fact, succeed. They will succeed. Thus, to start the discussion and to introduce the main thesis of this chapter, I must now say: in a similar fashion to the city of Florianópolis, in São Paulo there was also a connection between the hardcore and punk rock scene, the youth-driven protests for free public transportation, and the new digital media outlets at the turn of the twenty-first century.

One of the events that united these three phenomena (music, politics, and the early commercial Internet) was a collective endeavor called Verdurada. The expression "verdurada" can be creatively translated as "vegetable roast" (roast in the sense of a Brazilian barbecue, but without meat, a play on words employed by hardcore straight-edge punks with the Portuguese term *churrascada*).[5] Born as a festival to showcase hardcore music, vegetarianism, and veganism in the 1990s, Verdurada was basically one of the main entities responsible for systematically presenting the discussion about meat avoidance in Brazilian contemporary society.[6] However, its organizers did not restrict themselves only to this subject matter. The event would grow throughout the years and would address a variety of social causes that were incorporated through lectures and debates held alongside the music shows. In 2002, the cultural *and* political event was being defined by the people behind it as follows:

> Verdurada is a bimonthly [event] initially organized by São Paulo's straight-edge community since 1996. There, mostly hardcore bands perform, and the public attends lectures about political issues and participates in workshops, debates, video and art exhibitions with a political or divergent content. In the end, they receive a totally vegetarian dinner included in the price of entry. Within the do-it-yourself spirit that characterizes hardcore punk, the event's organization is totally undertaken by the very hardcore-punk straight-edge community of São Paulo. They are responsible for the contact with bands and speakers, as well as for renting the venue, hiring the sound crews, and promoting the event. The event basically aims at two objectives: to show that it is possible to successfully organize events without the sponsorship of big companies and without paid promotion in the media, and to bring to the public both the music created by the enraged youth and the thoughts and opinions of divergent thinkers and activists. And those objectives have been reached: the regularity of the event and the attending public (around 800 people from Brazil and abroad) confirm that there is a will amongst the youth to realize that they can accomplish what they want, without conforming to the one and only way of thinking that is imposed on them.[7]

[5] Freitas, "Do It Yourcast #45"; *Verdurada: a face sóbria do punk*, dir. Guilherme Frimm, Paulo Henrique Marçaioli, and Rafael Takano (São Paulo: Faculdade Casper Líbero, 2007), video, https://youtu.be/K688paVX6nA.

[6] Calíli Alves Cavalheiro, Fabiane Cortez Verdu, and Juliana Marangoni Amarante, "Difusão do vegetarianismo e veganismo no Brasil a partir de uma perspectiva de transnacionalização," *Revista Eletrônica Ciências da Administração e Turismo*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Jan.–Jul. 2018): 56–57, http://incubadora.periodicos.ifsc.edu.br/index.php/ReCAT/article/view/384.

[7] Coletivo Verdurada, "Release," Verdurada, archived Dec. 12, 2002, https://web.archive.org/web/20021212223346/http://www.verdurada.org/release.htm.

Verdurada is a total experience. The people identifying themselves as straight-edge punks can become engaged in the first planning steps or they may simply participate in the shows as part of the audience. In between those poles, there are debates and announcements of the latest activist news, other forms of artistic expression, the provision of plant-based food, the support of social movements, and the preparation for more political action. The time and place of events are decided taking into account access to the venue through public transportation.[8] Music becomes culture, and it is not restricted only to sound: it incorporates all aspects of life. Verdurada turned out to be so successful in reaching its goals that, beyond international attention, it caught the interest of the repressive state apparatuses. The connections that Verdurada created between hardcore music and activism caused the event to be closely monitored by the police.[9]

Being contemporaneous with the so-called anti-globalization struggles, Verdurada incorporated in its hosted lectures many themes appreciated by the protesters involved in the latter. One of the main participants in the planning of Verdurada was André Mesquita, who today is an art curator. Talking more specifically about the early days of the 2000s, before the emergence of the Free Fare Movement, he explains the relationship between some actors from the beginning of the twenty-first century, actors who would eventually help to pave the way for the creation of a social movement related to public transportation. As discussed earlier, the anti-capitalist protests of the turn of the millennium (closely associated with the birth of São Paulo's Independent Media Center) would later provide important militants to the Free Fare Movement. Verdurada was notably involved in the helping of those early protests:

> This period, this matter about the street protests, about a global call for us to occupy the streets . . . and to make a demonstration against summits, against those transnational organizations, a little of that history passed through Verdurada, because *some folks who were part of the Verdurada Collective were also part of the Independent Media Center* We organized the Verdurada and invited the bands to play and, in the middle of the show, there was a lecture. In that period, I remember us organizing the lectures . . . inviting someone to explain what the anti-globalization movement was, what the anti-capitalist movement is, . . . what Peoples' Global Action is, or what consensus-based decisions are, or to say: "Hey, next week, there will be direct-action training here in some place, . . . how a group has/can behave during a demonstration, . . . how you get organized. . . ." Punk is not actually a monolithic thing, you know, like only to make shows, play music, and get together. No, it indeed had a political purpose . . . of occupying the streets.[10]

Important people behind Verdurada then had links to the collective operation of São Paulo's Independent Media Center. They actually helped in the foundation of a branch of the Independent Media Center in the South American country.[11] The Independent Media Center would be the cybernetic army of the protests against increases in the bus fare that would take Brazil by storm (it was so in Salvador, Florianópolis, and Vitória, and it would be so in São Paulo until at least 2011). The Brazilian version of the website was founded around December 23, 2000: "Everything began with the coverage of the 'Buy Nothing Day,' a demonstration carried out . . . in a shopping mall in the city of Belo Horizonte. At this

[8] *Verdurada*, dir. Frimm, Marçaioli, and Takano; Felipe Madureira, in conversation with the author, January 2022; Reia, *Straightedge no século XXI*, 3 and 125.

[9] See: Vinicius, *Antes de junho*, 253–254.

[10] Mesquita, "Do It Yourcast #09" (my emphasis).

[11] Pereira Fernandes, *Straight edge*, 228; Reia, Straightedge no século XXI, 127–128.

time, [Brazil's] Independent Media Center counted on a few volunteers, and it was only after a protest against the Free Trade Area of the Americas occurred on April 20, 2001, in São Paulo, that the site started to be widely used."[12] As a genuine anti-capitalist project, one of the characteristics of the Independent Media Center is its radical stance against copyright. Its Brazilian chapter was created as a website on which not only could anyone publish, but almost everything that reached life there could also be shared and reproduced openly, as long as it was in a non-commercial way. Its webpages of news and multimedia files very often carried a footer explaining this principle. The note has been present there since the first report written in Portuguese that I was able to retrieve from the Independent Media Center of Brazil's files stored in and crawled by the Internet Archive. The news piece dates from January 3, 2001, and reports on a conflict between punks, an unidentified group of people, the general population, and the repressive police during a show for the celebration of the new year on Paulista Avenue in São Paulo.[13]

It makes sense that the vehicle of news and propaganda of the Free Fare Movement would stand against copyright and had punks (many of them notoriously opposed to copyright laws) as actors in what was perhaps one of its first publications. If people should circulate freely through the urban space to avail themselves of opportunities to learn and grow intellectually, the information must travel unrestrictedly so as to reach more people and change their minds. In December 2002, while hosting a show with three rock bands and one rap group (Os Excluídos [The Excluded], Intifada, Good Intentions, and the hip-hop ensemble Dígito 4 [Digit 4]), Verdurada made sure to include a "Lecture on Copyleft" by scholar and future University of São Paulo professor Pablo Ortellado.[14] Verdurada once more was positioning itself as a space for dissident and subversive ideas: from animal rights to the right of unrestricted transmission of thoughts. In an interview following the massive 2013 protests in Brazil that began in opposition to a bus fare hike in São Paulo, Ortellado is himself defined by the interviewers as a person "with a trajectory of activism *first in the punk movement* and later in the anti-globalization struggles at the turn of the twenty-first century."[15]

There are a number of paths to follow: punks had been part of the fight surrounding the transportation system in São Paulo since its beginning, when the main organization related to this issue was still called Comitê pelo Passe Livre (Committee for the Free Fare). As reported by Oliver Scarcelli: "São Paulo's Committee for the Free Fare for students was established in 2004 with the participation of militants from the Socialist Party of Unified Workers [PSTU], the Workers' Party [PT] (who came from the office of a federal representative at the time, Luiz Eduardo Greenhalgh), punks, and some students from public schools."[16] An intellectual, Ortellado, who had a history within punk culture, was invited by Verdurada to talk about copyleft. The concept, use, and dissemination of copylefted materials were intrinsic to

[12] "FAQ CMI Brasil," Indymedia Documentation Project, archived Feb. 7, 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20040207121457/http://docs.indymedia.org/view/Local/RedeCMIBrasilFAQ; see also: Santos, *A rebeldia por trás das lentes*, 150–152.

[13] O Coletivo Libertário, "Entrada do 3º milênio na Paulista," *CMI Brasil*, Jan. 3, 2001, https://web.archive.org/web/20140901195859/midiaindependente.org/pt/blue/2001/ 01/22.shtml.

[14] Coletivo Verdurada, "Release."

[15] Ortellado, "Pablo Ortellado" (my emphasis).

[16] Scarcelli, "As origens do Movimento Passe Livre," 10 (italics in the original, perhaps owing to "punk" being an English word).

the ideals of the Independent Media Center. The Independent Media Center was the river through which the ideology of the Free Fare Movement would circulate. Verdurada, which is a punk/hardcore music and political festival, was comprised of members who would engage in anti-globalization protests (also one of the embryos of the later Free Fare Movement of São Paulo) and with the Independent Media Center (the de facto media of the struggle for truly universal public transportation). One should note the many connections. It is a true network.

The Independent Media Center

The English version of the Independent Media Center's website first appeared in November 1999 with a bold statement: "The web dramatically alters the balance between multinational and activist media. With just a bit of coding and some cheap equipment, we can set up a live automated website that rivals the corporates. Prepare to be swamped by the tide of activist media makers on the ground in Seattle and around the world." [17] This proclamation, later rescued from oblivion by the work of anthropologist and activist Todd Wolfson, reverberated in the Southern Hemisphere: in Brazil, activists adopted the Independent Media Center as their home. Perhaps no other database of news about political struggles in the country was at the same time so unique and extensive. The militants would no longer be *dependent* on large corporations to tell the story of the social movements, and neither would they be restricted to the physical and political reach of traditional left-wing publications. When an occupation of a building occurred, it would no longer be called an "invasion" without this being denounced as a reactionary journalistic approach and without the activists' perspective being seriously conveyed. Police repression could be denounced. Lies about vandalism and lack of popular support could be refuted. Political events that would never be reported by the conventional press could now be recorded in history.

It is an evident truth that left-wing publications existed long before this, both in Brazil and throughout the world. The novelty of the Independent Media Center, however, is that it could challenge any mainstream newspaper thanks to its instantaneous user-based contributions, its universal reach, and the non-differentiation between activists and reporters. [18] How many newspapers or news agencies could claim in 2004 to have dedicated webpages from about 100 cities (or maybe more), all around the world, with information being fed by thousands of locals in different languages? [19] Anyone with a computer could now become a correspondent. What was being applied there for the creation of media by the anti-capitalist militants was a punk modus operandi. As explained by Leo Vinicius, mediation should be abolished, as the Independent Media Center's "basic idea was of a 'non-mediated media': the

[17] Matthew Arnison and Mansour Jacobi cited in Wolfson, *Digital Rebellion*, 71; original publication: maffew and manse [Matthew Arnison and Mansour Jacobi], "Welcome to indymedia," Seattle Indymedia Center, Nov. 24, 1999, https://web.archive.org/ web/20041102030132/http://seattle.indymedia.org/en/1999/11/2.shtml (I followed the spelling of the original).

[18] About the latter, see: Vinicius, *Antes de junho*, 241 (passage cited further into the text); see also: Santos, *A rebeldia por trás das lentes*, 155.

[19] In an archived page from 2004, the Independent Media Center claimed to be present in "all continents, in more than 90 cities" (Indymedia Documentation Project, "FAQ CMI Brasil"); Carlos André dos Santos claimed the existence of more than 170 collectives belonging to the Independent Media Center around the world until 2008 and exactly 162 in 2004 (Santos, *A rebeldia por trás das lentes*, 107, 132, and 136–137); see also: Wolfson, *Digital Rebellion*, 10, 16, 89 and 115.

protesters themselves become the journalist and editor Do-it-yourself and undo the separation between layperson and expert, producer and consumers."[20]

The principle of non-separation between "producer" and (its apparent opposite) "consumer" is present at every turn in punk practices.[21] The do-it- yourself method is part of the essence of punk, and is linked to the deeper political tendencies of the movement.[22] With the do-it-yourself concept cleverly applied to a digital information channel of social movements, the need for a huge infrastructure to construct a news outlet as powerful as the mass communication conglomerates became relatively unnecessary. This phenomenon of using the Independent Media Center as a means of expression for activists represents a mirror of what had happened within the punk music scene itself. As affirmed in Chapter 1, the fresh ways of recording and disseminating music through mp3s and personal websites transformed the musical genre in Brazil. It ceased to be exclusively or mostly an analog culture and became a hybrid between analog and digital. However, these new possibilities of digital media only fulfilled aspects already present in the good old do-it-yourself utopia, increasingly reducing the necessity of studios, presses, and professional managers for a band to achieve self-sufficiency. Beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, punk—through its do-it-yourself attitude—seems to have foreseen forms of organization that only later would reach their pinnacle in the cybernetic revolution of the 1990s. In this sense, what Jacques Attali claims as the task of music in society is confirmed:

> Music is prophecy. Its styles and economic organization are ahead of the rest of society because it explores, much faster than material reality can, the entire range of possibilities in a given code. It makes audible the new world that will gradually become visible, that will impose itself and regulate the order of things; it is not only the image of things, but the transcending of the everyday, the herald of the future. For this reason, musicians, even when officially recognized, are dangerous, disturbing, and subversive; for this reason, it is impossible to separate their history from that of repression and surveillance.[23]

If music is predictive, as claimed by Attali, punk's do-it-yourself ethos, existent since the beginnings of the movement, was a form of hope for other social configurations in a future world. Within that hope was the desire for the emergence of a radical type of media, the media without mediation. Just consider, for example, the self-published zines and albums that are character- istic of punk culture. Then, when the personal computer became financially accessible and the commercial Internet arrived, it is not a coincidence that the new methods for recording and disseminating music were naturally incorporated by punks, even in a peripheral country such as Brazil. There, punks turned out to be the very early users of the Internet, or better, they were among the first to put the Internet to use, learning and propagating ideas ranging from anarchism to vegetarianism, from anti-war thought to revolution, and, of course, about music itself. It is not a coincidence either that the medium without mediation par excellence, the Independent Media Center, was at the same time so closely connected to the punk movement. Cazé, which most likely is the nickname of Carlos André dos Santos, who among other activities studied the Independent Media Center, once

[20] Vinicius, *Antes de junho*, 241.

[21] See: Greene, *Punk and Revolution*, 190; Greene, "On Misanthropology," 42.

[22] See: O'Hara, *The Philosophy of Punk*, 166.

[23] Attali, *Noise*, 11.

left a comment on a website helping celebrate the five years of the Turnstile Revolts: "Most of the folks from the Independent Media Center who I interviewed for my research about the network in Brazil came from the punk and hardcore scene." [24]

However, the Independent Media Center is important not only in terms of the diffusion of socially relevant news. For some time, even the organization of the protests themselves could happen cooperatively through the website, before it became a surveilled space by the repressive state apparatus. In 2007, Rodrigo Ponce declared about the state of things and the brief history of that digital space:

> The Indymedia website or later the Independent Media Center [CMI] in Brazil served to spread news about demonstrations, meetings, *to exchange ideas about how to demonstrate.* It was basically like that in the beginning. After some time, I believe that people stopped organizing themselves so openly on the Independent Media Center, because today there is a lot of surveillance on the website, lots of right-wing attacks, lots of people who could use that information to destroy the demonstrations. Therefore, I believe today that there is a new context that is a challenge to the Indymedia network: to continue to be an independent media center, with an open and democratic publication platform, *which can be used for popular organization and not something turned into a stage for bickering, for reactionary ideas, or a database for repression.* [25]

The militants had to gain the awareness that the Internet could be a tool for the construction of utopia but would not necessarily be a utopian place in itself. [26] The struggle to keep the Independent Media Center out of the hands of the Right exemplifies a type of clash that even the punk culture itself occasionally had to endure. One notorious case is that of Michel Stamatopoulos (known as Sukata) from the band Garotos Podres. After a successful music career, he later became a vocal advocate of far-right politician Jair Bolsonaro. [27] Garotos Podres, created in the 1980s, stands as one of the most influential punk ensembles in Brazil; it was cited, for example, as an inspiration by S288, the Florianópolis hardcore band of the early 2000s that had links to some activities promoted by the militants for the free fare. [28] After the breakup of Garotos Podres because of fundamental political divergences, the band's vocalist, Mao, who continued to be a left-wing militant, went on to form O Satânico Dr. Mao e Os Espiões Secretos (The Satanic Dr. Mao and the Secret Spies). [29] For the release in 2013 of the first version of the song "Repressão Policial (Instrumento do Capital)," meaning "Police Repression (An Instrument of Capitalism)," Mao wrote that the lyrics were initially composed "by way of a simple tribute to these young people from the Free Fare Movement." [30]

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[24] Cazé [probably Carlos André dos Santos], comment to: "5 anos da Revolta da Catraca – o 4º debate," *Passa Palavra*, Jun. 29, 2009, https://passapalavra.info/2009/06/7159/; see, for example: Santos, *A rebeldia por trás das lentes,* 190 and 256; see also: Wolfson, *Digital Rebellion,* 198n20.

[25] Ponce and Takahashi, "Indymedia" (my emphasis).

[26] See: Corrêa, "Balanço crítico acerca da Ação Global dos Povos no Brasil."

[27] Gustavo Fioratti, "Briga de ídolos do punk de SP espelha a polarização política," *Folha de São Paulo*, Aug. 21, 2018, https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/2018/08/briga-de-idolos-do-punk-de-sp-espelha-a-polarizacao-politica.shtml.

[28] See: Chapter 2.

[29] Lincoln Secco, "O som de Junho," *Blog da Boitempo*, Oct. 10, 2014, https://blogda- boitempo.com.br/2014/10/10/o-som-de-junho/.

[30] Mao, comment to: Daniel Accioly, "Garotos Podres perde integrante e mudará de nome," *Minuto Música*, May 15, 2013, https://minutomusica.wordpress.com/2013/05/15/garotos-podres-perde-integrante-e-mudara-de-nome/.

In short, Garotos Podres had to be protected from right-wing use by means of a breakup and the later creation of a new band. If punk had to go through such challenges, precautions must have been taken by a website such as the Independent Media Center, which is derived in part from the do-it-yourself philosophy. These precautions would help guard against the media platform being transformed into a conservative or inefficient weapon by appropriation, instability, or surveillance.

This entire account of the Independent Media Center should sound quite similar to the evolution of social media and social networking websites today. These are new instruments that allow a more interactive and egalitarian interaction, a rapid and inexpensive way for the spreading of ideas and events, and the possibility of finding and connecting with like-minded people who would never associate otherwise. In sum, today's social media were a small revolution for leftists and social movements until those same spaces became invaded by state surveillance or were attacked by right-wing thought. The similarities are not a coincidence. According to Manoel Nascimento: "The Independent Media Center was a social media site before social media existed."[31] The Independent Media Center created a space in which it was possible to network with others and to discover, share, and comment on non-mainstream information. It is not only a question of simple anticipation of a historical phenomenon; the social media of today might actually have their origins in the Independent Media Center. Such a website, created in opposition to the status quo and heavily influenced by radical ideas, most likely provoked a real worldwide transformation in the possibilities of communication. Its principles subverted, reverberated, and infiltrated other areas of the digital human enterprise. Ortellado is one of those who believes that the new anti-capitalist movements that emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s had a significant and decisive influence on the development of the contemporary Internet:

> The inventor of the concept of the blog was the Independent Media Center. There were no blogs. People did not do that. They created sites. The idea of a blog, something that is easy to write on and capable of being updated quickly, did not exist. The Independent Media Center is a pre-blog thing, pre-creative commons. And it is not by chance that many of the social network companies were developed from the Independent Media Center: Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, and Craigslist This also has to do with the form of organization belonging to the US liberal left that allows passages from social movements to the market in a way that we [Brazilians] would consider bizarre—but in the US context it is not. . . . However, this is a hidden history: this history was never told because the actors are ashamed. I know several of them. They are ashamed because they are people who are still militants today. The same way I went into academia, they went to work for companies. . . . But it is important to exemplify this issue to make clear that we are not copying the networks, but, in fact, they copied us.[32]

It is still not possible to trace those connections pointed out by Ortellado without hearing the personal accounts of engineers and programmers involved in the early years of enterprises such as Twitter or YouTube. Hopefully, one day that information will be gathered and reported in detail. What we can trace, however, is that 1999 was indeed a watershed year in the digital realm concerning the creation of new tools for collaborative communication and

[31] Nascimento, in conversation with the author, August 2020; see also: Nascimento, "A 'geração Seattle' e a 'geração de acampantes.'"

[32] Ortellado, "Pablo Ortellado"; see also: Oliveira, "Entrevista com o Movimento Passe Livre"; and: Wolfson, *Digital Rebellion*, 77 (Wolfson, by citing Dorothy Kidd, reinforces a kind of opposite or complementary story, of how employees of already existent tech companies helped in the creation of the Independent Media Center).

the sharing of information. By about February 1999—the year in which the first post went online on the English-version website of the Independent Media Center—it was believed that only 23 blogs operated on the web, as reiterated in an article by Cameron Chapman: "By the middle of 2006, there were 50 million blogs according to Technorati's State of the Blogosphere report."[33] The word "blog" was coined in the first half of 1999, and the platform Blogger was initially made available in August of that year.[34]

Although it marginally followed the creation of blog platforms such as Groksoup, Pitas, and Blogger, the innovation of the Independent Media Center a few months later seemed to offer more than the possibility of getting a new web address or using an existent one and "updat[ing] [it] frequently with chronologically sorted posts . . . by submitting a form on . . . [a] web site," as explained by Blogger at the end of the twentieth century.[35] The produced material made public through Blogger was still fragmented across several digital locations and was difficult to compile, especially in those early days of modern Internet search engines. The Independent Media Center, whose use in Brazil was propelled by the anti-capitalist protests in São Paulo, consisted of a collective and open endeavor in which anyone could not only comment on the work of others but also create their own posts without the need for establishing their own web address. In sum, it connected the best of two worlds as a true social media platform. All news would be easily concentrated in one place while at the same time being generated in a decentralized fashion. Another militant from the anti-capitalist generation of the turn of the century, Felipe Corrêa, follows a similar line of thought, linking the tools of the Internet of the 2010s with the innovations caused by the Independent Media Center in 1999.

> What history shows . . . is that the tools of the Web, which today are called 2.0, were, to a great extent, a creation of this movement of the new global Left. [They were] decentralized technologies, which allowed participation, collective construction, within the spirit that characterized the movement itself. . . . Some members of the Global Independent Media Center [Network] became, for example, central members within the project of the development of Twitter. The example of the Independent Media Center of an open comments section was followed by the majority of web portals belonging to corporate media.[36]

Punks, with their do-it-yourself principle, had previously used the Xerox machine to circumvent the printing industry before the rise and popularization of the Internet.[37] At that time, the need for mediation was already beginning to be eliminated. With access to photocopiers becoming increasingly common all over the world, news and other informa-

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[33] Cameron Chapman, "A Brief History of Blogging," Webdesigner Depot (WDD), Mar. 14, 2011, https://www.webdesignerdepot.com/2011/03/a-brief-history-of-blogging/; see also: Rebecca Blood, "Weblogs: A History and Perspective," Rebecca's Pocket, Sep. 7, 2000, https://smg.media.mit.edu/library/blood2000.html.

[34] Chapman, "A Brief History of Blogging"; Peter Merholz, "Play with Your Words," Peterme.com, May 17, 2002, https://www.peterme.com/archives/00000205.html; "Camworld," Camworld, Feb. 7, 1999, https://web.archive.org/web/19990208011955/http://www.camworld.com:80/.

[35] "Blogger," Blogger, archived Oct. 12, 1999, https://web.archive.org/web/19991012022531/http://blogger.com/ cited in Amanda Zantal-Wiener, "A Brief Timeline of the History of Blogging," HubSpot, Sep. 13, 2016, https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/history-of-blogging; see also: Scott Rosenberg, *Say Everything: How Blogging Began, What It's Becoming, and Why It Matters* (New York: Crown Publishers: 2009), 113; Blood, "Weblogs"; Chapman, "A Brief History of Blogging."

[36] Corrêa, "Balanço crítico acerca da Ação Global dos Povos no Brasil."

[37] Greene, *Punk and Revolution*, 18–19 and 175.

tion about the movement and its ideology could be spread within each national context, and perhaps even international exchanges could emerge. No doubt it was an effective method, but it carried its own limitations. Monetary constraints could play a role. The distribution system for physical copies of a text or image required shipping or face-to-face sales. The very number of copies was, obviously, finite, and the networks of contact could be restricted to small circles. With the Internet, however, a radical new model of communication served punks and activists so that they could step up to a different level. They were finally a decent match for the heavy hitters in terms of reach. Now, many of those limits were instantaneously removed. Ironically, however, it was the music industry that orchestrated one of the largest attacks on Internet freedom with its anti-piracy campaigns.[38] Music dominated by capitalist interests served as the perfect excuse to regulate what people could do with the new sound, visual, and textual media types. Faced with a loss of power, the large entertainment companies attempted to act as steamrollers to squash less-conforming users of cyberspace. This led to the de facto elimination of many websites and application software. Reebee Garofalo wrote in 2003 in this regard:

> The music industry has been trying to convince consumers that there is a monster in their computers: the monster of copyright violation. It has gone variously by the name of MP3, Napster, Gnutella, Freenet, Scour, and LimeWire, and already there are others such as Morpheus and KaZaA. These technologies are part of a digital revolution that is transforming the way music is produced and consumed. The music industry is terrified that computer users sharing and downloading music tracks for free over the Internet will seriously cut into sales of compact discs, still the centerpiece of the industry's business model. In their attempts to curtail this development, the industry has adopted a two-pronged strategy of legislation and litigation, advocating for laws that extend the reach of copyright and filing lawsuits against alleged copyright infringers While Napster was subsequently crushed under the weight of music industry litigation, newer technologies such as Gnutella and Freenet and second-generation services such as Morpheus and KaZaA have taken the process further.[39]

However, as corporations in developed countries began lobbying for harsher copyright laws and resorting to aggressive legal measures, opposition to these tactics emerged as well. Many people believed that the new possibilities of the digital era should be defended, and dissent emerged even on the margins of Western capitalism. Punk resistance in Brazil was not only musical but also political. The assault on "piracy" produced a do-it-yourself response among both militants and musicians, which was (the encouragement to) the use of open-source software and free downloadable cultural artifacts. It was in 2002 that São Paulo's hardcore music festival, Verdurada, would, for example, organize the debate on copyleft featuring guest speaker Ortellado. In 2006, Belo Horizonte's hardcore and punk political event, Carnaval Revolução, would include the dissemination of free open-source software as part of its activities.[40] Additionally, it is wise to remember that most of the work published on the Independent Media Center website was instantly labeled copyright-free.

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[38] In terms of the leap forward that the Internet represented for underground musicians and members of the scene and the reactionary stance adopted by the music industry, see: Reia, *Straightedge no século* XXI, 47–48, 119–122, and 129.

[39] Reebee Garofalo, "I Want My MP3: Who Owns Internet Music?" in *Policing Pop*, ed. Martin Cloonan and Reebee Garofalo (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 30 and 31, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14bsz5b.6 (changed for capitalization).

[40] See: Chapter 4.

The punk do-it-yourself attitude was then the perfect match for movements such as the Independent Media Center or Verdurada that wanted to make the enforcement of copyrights less constraining. Additionally, freeing oneself of copyright restrictions would fit nicely with those who wanted a *free* public transportation system as well. Propelled by the new possibilities of the digital era, a growing open-source, copyleft, and free culture could connect itself with the principle that people should develop, create, and *circulate* what and where they desire without the need for resources unattainable by the non-rich individual, isolated citizens, or non-professional groups. With copyleft, not only could one do it by oneself, one could also build upon the work of others with very few restrictions and without the fear of being targeted by a lawsuit of some kind. Better still, the resulting derivative work would have to be placed in the same chain of freedom for others to use and, perhaps, to improve upon, again and again. In the end, copyleft and free public transportation are both about autonomy of movement.

Vegetarianism and the Struggle for the Free Fare

The new wave of members of the broad punk culture in Brazil in the 1990s and 2000s—more specifically, those who designated themselves as being straight edge—had a composition somewhat different from that of the early days of the punk movement in São Paulo.

The older punk culture from the late 1970s and the 1980s was characterized as originating from the poor outskirts of Brazil's largest urban area. It is a startling paradox: the tropical version of an international avant-garde phenomenon was born in the highly underprivileged regions of São Paulo, among the renegades of a city with profound misery that, at the same time, stood as an industrial leader of the Western Hemisphere.[41] Those early punks became globally known for a 1982 festival titled O Começo do Fim do Mundo (The Beginning of the End of the World). The event was described as a moment of "utopia" by Pádua, a member of the punk band Passeatas (Marches), thanks to its do-it-yourself ethos and its objective of sowing peace among several rival factions.[42] A radical leftist inclination was already being openly displayed at the festival. One of the performing bands, Inocentes, remarked from the stage: "I want to see you practicing anarchy. Long live the working class. Long live the proletarian class. Long live punks!"[43] The festival also embraced the repudiation of a decaying military dictatorship. For the participants, the termination of the world should mark the birth of a new one, characterized by the hope for less repression and more freedom, as one can understand from the following description: "The festival . . . blows up punk culture in everyone's face in the midst of an authoritarian government."[44] Linking this last sentence with the war cry of Inocentes, it is possible to say that such a rejection of the military dictatorship of that epoch had the intense characteristic of being undertaken by those at the bottom of the social stratification.

[41] Bivar, *Punk*, 102.

[42] *Botinada*, dir. Gastão Moreira.

[43] *Inocentes – 30 anos*, dir. Carol Thomé and Duca Mendes, trans. uncredited (São Paulo: 6:01 Audiovisual, 2011), video, https://youtu.be/jSUfZE5SioE (translation changed for capitalization).

[44] *O fim do mundo, enfim: o documentário*, dir. Camila Miranda, trans. uncredited (São Paulo: SESC, 2016), DVD (translation corrected for spelling).

Some of São Paulo's younger straight-edge individuals, some of whom were involved with the Verdurada Collective in the 1990s and 2000s, originated from more economically stable homes within the wealth pyramid and from a more formally democratic state. Mesquita, for example, confirmed in an interview that he is an inhabitant of a "middle-class neighborhood" and not the "outskirts" of the metropolis.[45] Frederico Freitas also comes from the central neighborhoods of São Paulo.[46] Freedom of expression, in its turn, was relatively higher in the 1990s as well, when Verdurada was established. In general, straight-edge individuals listen to hardcore-punk music but also are known for abstaining from using drugs, alcohol, and tobacco, and many of them are vegetarian or vegan.[47] They believe that the human organism and its mind must be kept clean from external harmful agents; they also seek to stop the destruction of other bodies and to refuse the ingestion of any food considered unethical. However, not all of those new punks were from the middle class, even though this seemed to be the case in a higher proportion than was found in the 1980s. Moreover, straight-edge vegetarianism and anti-drug attitude are in opposition to the social inequalities of peripheral capitalism:

> In Brazil, we were tired of seeing people from the outskirts trying to be playboys by sniffing poor-quality cocaine. Capitalism drugged itself. Should we do the same? We wanted to shock, and we shocked. We ended up being disliked by all groups: punks, non-punks, headbangers, skateboarders, junkies. Fuck them. In order to avoid annoying comments and to escape from punk gangs, we started to organize our own shows in alternative venues . . . [like] cultural centers, libraries, and even in unimaginable places such as beauty salons. These activities culminated with the creation of Verdurada, which ended up gathering more than 1,000 people in Jabaquara starting in 1996, but it had also taken place before that (1993–1994) in Guarulhos and Grajaú (in the southern zone of São Paulo).[48]

Based on these words delivered by Kiko Dinucci, it appears that the rejection of drug use by the Brazilian straight-edge punks also represented a denunciation of a society in which narcotics were linked to a life of productivity at all costs. Worse, it could be a form of alienation and fundamental inaction in the face of an alarming sociopolitical situation. This stance made straight edge a well-defined and particular subgroup within punk culture, which led them to develop their own means of expression and circulation of ideas. Verdurada was the culmination of this process. As a result of the group's opposition to alcohol and other drugs, straight-edge events and shows in Brazil are known for explicitly prohibiting the consumption of those substances inside their venues. Within a culture that praises freedom, these are behaviors that remain expressly forbidden. Such a thing led to criticism of the straight-edge community as being a conservative and even religious-like manifestation derived from (and with the aim of purifying) punk culture.[49] However, Freitas argues that "the straight edge that I tried to do, that I tried to create through Verdurada and through my band [Point of No Return] was a leftist, emancipatory, progressist, and critical political thing. . . . It was not conservative, far from that."[50] In fact, the alcohol and drug avoidance can sometimes represent

[45] Mesquita, "Do It Yourcast #09."

[46] Frederico Freitas, in conversation with the author, January 2022.

[47] Gabriel Kuhn, ed., *Sober Living for the Revolution: Hardcore Punk, Straight Edge, and Radical Politics* (Oakland: PM Press, 2010), 13.

[48] Kiko Dinucci, "Posfácio: o punk e a sua eterna reinvenção," in *Punk*, Antonio Bivar (São Paulo: Edições Barbatana, 2018), 129.

[49] Pereira Fernandes, *Straight edge*, 105–106, 263, 266, and 268.

[50] Frederico Freitas, in conversation with the author, January 2022.

an anti-establishment stance.[51] In Brazil, where the promotion of alcohol is widespread and its intake is positively depicted on television (commercials are heavily based on the figure of the *macho*), the straight-edge attitude can be seen as embodying a sign of nonconformism and a critical posture. São Paulo's band Discarga recorded in 2008 "Teor alcoólico" ("Alcohol by Volume"), in which the ensemble denounces the damage caused by excessive drinking. In the first line of the lyrics, they refer to an advertising slogan for the beer brand Skol, which repeatedly states that its product is "the beer that goes down smooth," but Discarga changed the word "beer" to "sentence." They walked away from the advertisement to arrive at punk music.

A sentença que desce redondo	*The sentence that goes down smooth*
Embriaguez é a ruína da razão	*Drunkenness is the ruin of reason*
É uma velhice prematura	*It's a premature old age*
Uma morte temporária	*A temporary death*
Jogando sujo à moda capitalista	*Playing dirty the capitalist way*
Diversão, alucinação e alienação	*Fun, hallucination, and alienation*
Vício degradante e humilhante	*Humiliating and degrading addiction*
Social, prático e legal	*A social, practical, and legal one*
Uma velhice prematura	*A premature old age*
Uma morte temporária	*A temporary death*
Deturpação de ideias	*Perversion of ideas*
Ideias deturpadas	*Perverted ideas*[52]

In addition to their class composition, condemnation of alcohol and drug use, and veganism and vegetarianism, a significant number of members of the straight-edge scene in São Paulo can be defined as White, especially more toward the beginning of the scene in the mid-1990s.[53] This is especially so if one considers Brazil's skin-color pigmentocracy and compares the composition of straight edge to other insubordinate youth cultures such as Brazilian hip-hop. It is also significant that, for a former member of the São Paulo straight-edge band Point of No Return, Frederico Freitas, the predominance of "aesthetic whiteness" was an issue that would deserve more attention from the scene.[54] In a 2008 interview, Róbson Véio, the vocalist of the band Lumpen from Salvador, where the hardcore scene included many more people of color, voiced hope after seeing more Blacks in the shows of São Paulo. His statement could mean that, several years before 2008, the shows were actually predominantly White: "For me, hardcore was always a community, and I thought it was becoming lost. Today, I am glad because there are many more Black people [in the shows in São Paulo] Because hardcore was always a street thing. And, for me, a straight-edge individual is a punk

[51] Reia, *Straightedge no século XXI*, 90.

[52] Discarga, "Teor Alcoólico," track 4 on *Música pra guerra*, recorded 2008, https://lajarex.bandcamp.com/album/m-sica-pra-guerra (lyrics changed according to the recording).

[53] According to Walisson Pereira Fernandes: "In a video of the first Verdurada [in 1996], of the show by the band Self Conviction (with the song 'Something to Stay'), one sees a crowd of people with short hair, colorful clothes, most of them white, listening to a band that sings its songs in English" (Pereira Fernandes, Straight edge, 178) (my emphasis); a predominantly White majority also seems to a characteristic of the Independent Media Center (and predecessors), at least in its US incarnation. See: Wolfson, *Digital Rebellion*, 8, 12, 22, 49, 70, 172 and 190.

[54] Freitas, "Interview with Frederico Freitas," 94.

who doesn't drink."[55] This statement is in tune with another argument by Freitas that, toward the 2000s, more people of color joined the scene.[56] Anyhow, Brazil might not have always differed from other countries in the same Western hemisphere, where the participants of the hardcore culture were primarily young White men.[57] However, one needs to consider that many times, as posited by Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay, these White young men precisely turned to punk as an "outsider identity" and even as a way "to reject one's inherited whiteness," which, on the one hand, is a positive instance that weakens racism and, on the other hand, can have paradoxical implications such as the non-acknowledgement of deeper racial issues within the scene.[58]

Even though there are characteristics that make straight edge a particular and relatively newer group within the punk scene in Brazil, the straight-edge individuals sought to learn either from the early punks or from other divisions of punk. This is illustrated not only by inviting older bands to perform at the shows, but also by the person selected to speak and teach them about copyleft at the 2002 Verdurada—the activist Ortellado.[59] Here, a connection between generations or at least between different branches of punk is established. To quote Ortellado himself, there was that first generation of Brazilian punks who emerged "in the late 1970s, which we called the 'Generation '82.'"[60] In the early 1980s and until at least the mid-1990s in São Paulo, a considerable number of members of incarnations of the punk movement worked as "office boys," doing outside errands for companies and businesses.[61] Their habitat was, in fact, the streets of the metropolis, and they belonged to the proletariat of the country's financial center. Ortellado's own generation came along a bit later after Generation '82. Still with a strong presence of office boys, it was made up of:

> Punks who got politicized in the very late 1980s. It must be the second or third generation. . . . It was the generation that met the unions. In 1987 and 1988, we tried organizing the office boys' union (I was an office boy) together with a process of refoundation of the Brazilian Workers' Confederation [Confederação Operária Brasileira], which was the 1910s Anarchist Workers' Confederation.[62]

In the 1990s and 2000s punk movement, there was important engagement with left-wing politics as well, with bands espousing various positions within the progressive political spectrum. The movement extended beyond anarchist tendencies (some ensembles were composed of Marxists) and found itself to be distinctively global, with the Brazilian scene in dialog with the scenes from other countries. Maikon Duarte, even though not living specifically in São Paulo but in Joinville, stated in an interview a sentiment that can now serve to explain a general tendency of the straight-edge community in Brazil concerning its international connections: "The hardcore and punk bands from the Netherlands, particularly the straight-edge bands (we

[55] Lumpen, "Entrevista – Lumpen."

[56] Frederico Freitas, in conversation with the author, January 2022.

[57] Kuhn, *Sober Living for the Revolution*, 2010; gender disparity was, for example, rampant in the Brazilian straight scene of the mid-1990s and continued until the 2010s (Reia, *Straightedge no século XXI*, 126 and 158).

[58] Duncombe and Tremblay, "White Riot?," 3–4 and 9.

[59] Restos de Nada, for example, is a historical punk band that would be approached to play at Verdurada in 2012 (Reia, *Straightedge no século XXI*, 136 and 176).

[60] Ortellado, "Pablo Ortellado."

[61] *Botinada*, dir. Gastão Moreira; *Punks*, dir. Yakhni and Gieco; Gomes dos Santos, *Vivo na cidade*, 55; Lopes de Sousa, *Punk*, 56–57.

[62] Ortellado, "Pablo Ortellado."

even called them 'red edge'), which were openly communists (Manliftingbanner, Mainstrike, Feeding The Fire, Seein' Red, DeadStoolPigeon) . . . [were important for] the punk, hardcore folks, who had a more political, left-wing attitude, who understood themselves as leftists."[63]

Left-wing politics strongly connected to animal rights defines much of the straight-edge punk community. As explained by Craig O'Hara: "A rational look at the wasted resources, health issues, and the acceptance of a deeper or more humane ecology has caused a growing number of punks to become vegetarians The punk philosophy tends to believe that the exploitation of animals is another step towards allowing the exploitation of people."[64] The oppression of humans by capitalism runs parallel to the relationships between humans and nature as well as humans and other animals, which are seen as slaves to the insatiable desire for profit. Discarga once more addressed a favorite theme of the straight-edge community with a 2003 song called "Sempre ganância" ("Always Greed"), in which those aspects linking the oppression of men and women to animal subjugation are condensed:

Mais um pescoço degolado	*Another decapitated being*
Outra refeição é servida	*Another meal is served*
Mais um cérebro perfurado	*Another pierced brain*
Outra pesquisa concebida	*Another research is conceived*
Exploração humana e animal	*Human and animal exploitation*
Para servir uma podre ganância	*In order to serve a rotten greed*
O funil ao contrário do capitalismo	*Capitalism's inverted funnel*
Mata, desperdiça, contamina	*It kills, wastes, contaminates*
Poluindo águas, desmatando florestas	*Polluting waters, deforesting woodlands*
Injetando venenos, não há ética	*Injecting poisons, there is no ethics*
Isso tenta se esconder	*They try to hide it*
Mas meus olhos tudo podem ver	*But my eyes can see everything*[65]

In the song, animals lose their lives through vicious exploitation, and the natural environment is ruined as well. Both the destruction of animals and of the environment are perhaps a consequence of the domination of one human being by another. The hardcore-punk singer acts as the one responsible for unveiling the situation; he stands inevitably conscious of it. Moreover, abstention from eating meat and using animal-based products represents a stance against industrialization. The factory-like raising of living creatures is attacked, as these creatures are restricted only to production and reproduction. Here, one can see another remarkable equivalence with the struggle for free public transportation for students. In the same way in which it is unacceptable to reduce animals' lives only to production, one cannot tolerate the lives of young people being restricted only to school (the preparatory institution for youths to enter the productive system). The liberation of animals becomes linked with the liberation of students, and a connection can be traced between animal rights and the right to free and unrestrained mobility. Young people must release themselves from the cage of education as

[63] Maikon Duarte, in conversation with the author, July 2020.

[64] O'Hara, *The Philosophy of Punk*, 132 and 137.

[65] Discarga, "Sempre ganância," track 9 on *Sem remorso,* recorded 2003, https://lajarex.bandcamp.com/album/sem-remorso; Discarga, "Sempre ganância," Letras, accessed Jul. 8, 2020, https://www.letras.mus.br/discarga/689186/ (lyrics changed according to the recording and for punctuation and capitalization).

their only allowed activity. They should be able to circulate through cultural spaces or even roam the city to ensure that they can understand and appreciate different realities. Bicycles appear to be a first alternative, but, ultimately, buses are the mode of transportation that enables broad circulation and roaming. Universal access to public transportation becomes the other side of a coin that has as one of its faces the fight for vegetarianism and veganism.

It is not a coincidence that, as early as 2003, a Verdurada event offered a reduction in the entrance ticket price for those arriving by bike and, hence, using an alternative, less-polluting, and more democratic means of transportation.[66] The appeal of bicycles remained strong for some of those hardcore, straight-edge punks. In November 2005, another Verdurada hosted shows featuring the bands Periferia S/A, ROT, Polara, Julgamento (Judgment), and Busscops. Together with the performances, they prepared the screening of the film *Sociedade do automóvel* (*Automobile Society)*, whose exhibition had the support of those who had participated in São Paulo's Critical Mass cycling event (Bicicletada).[67] However, nothing compares to what had happened in July of that year, 2005, when the 13th São Paulo Hardcore Festival included a discussion about nothing less than "the free fare struggle."

That São Paulo Hardcore Festival was organized by the Verdurada Collective, obviously following the ideas of the straight-edge community. It completely forbade tobacco and alcoholic beverages, and a "free vegetarian/ vegan dinner [was served] at the end of the event." According to an announcement promoting the activities, both the bands Discarga and B.U.S.H., which later would change its name to Futuro (Future), performed at the festival.[68] They shared the stage with other ensembles: Violator, D.E.R., Deeper Than That, Besta-Fera (Bestial Beast), Morte Asceta (Ascetic Death), Lobotomia (Lobotomy), Are You God?, and Thee Butchers' Orchestra. The poster bears the names of the bands, the strict rules about intoxicating substances, and information regarding the lecture on free public transportation and the free vegan food to be served at the conclusion of the activities. Additionally, it bears a drawing loosely divided into three sections. Below, there is a wall of policemen whose helmets are typical of anti-riot forces; they stand ready for repression. In the middle, the design depicts empty buses, most likely representing the ones stopped by protesters during a revolt against a fare increase. Above, young militants represent the celebration of victory. Flames in the background hint at the dimension of the conflict (Fig. 5.1)

[66] Coletivo Verdurada, "verdurada.novembro.2003," Flickr, Sep. 13, 2008, https://www.flickr.com/photos/cartazesverdurada/2853504631/in/album-72157607271244226/.

[67] Busscops, "Classic – Shows (7 of 91)," Myspace, accessed May 25, 2022, https://myspace.com/busscops/mixes/classic-shows-363753/photo/89306525; Coletivo Verdurada, "verdurada.novembro.2005," Flickr, Sep. 16, 2008, https://www.flickr.com/photos/cartazesverdurada/2864530688/in/album-72157607271244226/; "Verdurada," Last.fm, Nov. 13, 2005, https://www.last.fm/festival/57575+Verdurada; *Sociedade do Automóvel*, dir. Branca Nunes and Thiago Benicchio (São Paulo: 2005), video, https://youtu.be/4eWvSwzkidE.

[68] About the change of name from B.U.S.H. to Futuro, see: Eric Phipps, "São Paulo Punks Futuro," *Impose*, n.d., https://imposemagazine.com/bytes/new-music/so-paulo-punks-futuro; and: Reia, *Straightedge no século XXI*, 182.



Fig. 5.1: Coletivo Verdurada (Design by Felipe Madureira), 13th São Paulo Hardcore Festival, July 2005. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.[69] The São Paulo hardcore event took place just two and half weeks after the end of Florianópolis' Second Turnstile Revolt. As stated by André Mesquita, in the posters for Verdurada: "We always thought about placing some image making reference to a case of our interest."[70]

Felipe Madureira, who authored this specific poster, also stated: "We knew that much repression was going on [in Florianópolis] . . . and we were kind of in solidarity with the people who went through that. . . In this poster, there are the little buses from Sex Pistols The police are there defending private interests. Transportation, although part of it [being] public, much of it is controlled by the private sector. And we know that police protect capital." 71 Madureira is referring to the buses from Jamie Reid's design for Sex Pistols' single "Pretty Vacant." One of the most telling things about the Brazilian version is that the buses in the Sex Pistols' poster come displaying the words "nowhere" and "boredom," which were apparently substituted for "holiday" by Madureira.

The link between the Verdurada hardcore-punk event and the discussion about the democratization of transportation within the city were further strengthened throughout the

[69] Coletivo Verdurada, "festival.julho.2005," Flickr, Sep. 13, 2008, https://www.flickr.com/photos/cartazesverdurada/2853505047/.

[70] Mesquita, "Do It Yourcast #09."

[71] Felipe Madureira, in conversation with the author, January 2022.

years. According to Lucas "Legume" Oliveira, the Free Fare Movement took advantage of the shows to sell its politically oriented merchandise and even sometimes received monetary help from the Verdurada Collective.[72] As another example, at the end of January 2011, the same Verdurada Collective organized the two-day 18th São Paulo Hardcore Festival. In between the shows, there was a lecture by Pedalinas, a feminist collective engaged in making it possible for female bicyclists to pedal more safely around the city. Pedalinas shared the stage with the bands Violator, Sweet Suburbia, Jah-Hell Kick, Western Day, Homem Elefante, Confronto, Futuro, Final Round, and Against All My Friends (from Chile).[73] The anti-capitalist discourse was, undoubtedly, present throughout the performances; one has simply to look for it in the compositions of an ensemble such as Confronto. They came from Rio de Janeiro with works such as "Guerra, queda e morte" ("War, Fall, and Death"). Released as part of their 2001 album *A Insurreição (The Insurrection)*, it features a screaming voice that demands: "War against property / Down with the state / Death to the followers."[74] However, it was a thrash metal band, Violator, from the city of Brasília that had recorded a piece of extreme significance to the struggle against cars as the privileged means of transportation in the early twenty-first century. In their repertoire, there is a work called "Apocalypse Engine." Sung in English and released in 2010, its lyrics were inspired by the book Apocalipse Motorizado, the compendium of anti-car texts translated into Portuguese by one of the key figures of Florianópolis' Turnstile Revolts, Leo Vinicius:

Machine Tyranny

Anxiety for freedom

Ignoring other's pain

Becoming another prison.

Smashing. Pollution damage growing up so high.

Mass graves so that few have the privilege to oppress more.

Blood for oil

Supporting their war.

The crisis won't be felt

Inside the armored box.

[72] Lucas Oliveira (Legume), in conversation with the author, January 2022.

[73] Coletivo Verdurada, "festival.janeiro.2011," Flickr, Dec. 22, 2010, https://www.flickr.com/photos/cartazesverdurada/5325217349/in/album-72157607271244226/; Ribeiro, "A história oral da Bicicletada em SP"; "Pedalinas ajuda mulheres que querem andar de bike," *Catraca Livre*, Sep. 28, 2011, https://catracalivre.com.br/saude-bem-estar/coletivopedalinas-incentiva-e-ajuda-mulheres-que-querem-andar-de-bike/; "Pedalinas marcam presença na Verdurada!" *Pedalinas*, Feb. 5, 2011, https://pedalinas.wordpress.com/2011/02/05/pedalinas-marcam-presenca-na-verdurada.

[74] "Guerra à propriedade / Queda ao Estado / Morte aos seguidores" (Confronto, "Guerra, Queda e Morte," track 1 on *A Insurreição*, recorded 2001, mp3, https://confronto.bandcamp.com/album/a-insurrei-o; "Confronto," Deck, accessed Jun. 20, 2020, http://deckdisc.com.br/confronto/).

Smashing. Pollution damage growing up so high.

Mass graves so that few have the privilege to oppress more.

Feel the signs of rot

The Apocalypse Engine

Fuel for the end of times

The Apocalypse Engine

Will come the day, [and] it's not so far,

that the smoke will erase [us] from our mind

Lungs as black stop the pulse

until then, let the engines make noise!

Apocalypse! Engine!

Apocalypse! Engine!

Your thirst for speed,

Consents destruction

Use your belt,

In the rape of our land!

Feel the signs of rot

The Apocalypse Engine

Fuel for the end of times

The Apocalypse Engine[75]

In Violator's song "Apocalypse Engine," the car is the destroyer of the environment and not a synonym for human emancipation. It will bring the end of the world through contamination of the Earth and the wars provoked by the interests of the fuel industry. The dark sound of the electric guitar and its slow tempo during the introductory chords helps to create the

[75] Violator, "Apocalypse Engine," track 4 on Annihilation Process, recorded 2009, released 2010, mp3, https://violatorthrash.bandcamp.com/album/annihilation-process (lyrics changed for spelling and according to the record); Adriana Farias, "Com ingressos esgotados, banda Violator fará último show em SP," Veja São Paulo, Jan. 19, 2018, https://vejasp.abril.com.br/blog/musica/violator-ultimo-show-sp/.

atmosphere of catastrophe. The delay effect applied on the voice of the singer in the last word of the first and third lines of the fifth and ninth stanzas complements the prophetic nature of the song. According to Attali: "The musician, like music, is ambiguous. He plays a double game. He is simultaneously *musicus* and *cantor*, reproducer and prophet. If an outcast, he sees society in a political light. If accepted, he is its historian, the reflection of its deepest values. He speaks of society and he speaks against it."[76] Violator, a band recognized as important by Verdurada, acts as a radical historian registering the chaotic state of the human habitat as a result of our selection of the automobile as our primary means of transportation. The band also registers the new thought emerging in Brazil at the time (the song is derived from a radical, left-wing book): a growing opposition to the current condition of urban spaces where the metropolises are constructed to grant privileges to the circulation of cars. At the same time, the members of Violator are outsiders, performing thrash metal in English in a country like Brazil. Prophetically and politically, they announce that civilization will most likely collapse if it continues to follow the same path.

After January's event with the women cycling collective Pedalinas and the band Violator, another Verdurada was organized in June 2011. This time, the Free Fare Movement occupied the position of special guest, and a discussion led by Lúcio Gregori about the movement's activities enjoyed a central place.[77] A punk who attended the activities wrote the following about that day:

> The folks from the Free Fare Movement take the stage in order to conduct a very cool lecture about the struggle against the hikes of the fare and the new combat flag of the movement: mobilization for the zero fare I became very happy to know that that small spark from an ending bonfire was not an unsuccessful story of a one-day wonder, but rather the beginning of a great flame of struggles, which each person must ignite within oneself and must call upon oneself the responsibility of asserting the dissatisfaction against this rotten transportation system, totally dominated by mafia-like businessmen. The zero fare is based on the following plausible argument: if public schools and hospitals are free, why not transportation, too? The reason why one should join that struggle was thoroughly explained. [I was] amazed at the lecture and the public's attention, which asked some talkative people to shut up so that they did not disturb.[78]

The engineer Gregori, then in his 70s, was rediscovered by the young militants as a person who, two decades earlier, had attempted to implement a groundbreaking project in São Paulo regarding urban mobility, demonstrating that the struggle for free public transportation in Brazil was a long one. It stood there, before and after the Turnstile Revolts of Florianópolis. Its modern institutional consequences could be traced back to Gregori's plan for a universal zero fare when Luiza Erundina from the Workers' Party, as the mayor of São Paulo (1989–1992), selected Gregori to head the transportation division of the city's government: the universal zero fare was, in fact, partly applied in a sector of the metropolis.[79] By reading the work of

[76] Attali, *Noise*, 12.

[77] Coletivo Verdurada, "Release: Verdurada de junho," *Altsongs*, May 10, 2011, http://altsongs.blogspot.com/2011/05/release-verdurada-de-junho.html.

[78] Fernando Feio, "Verdurada – 05/06/2011 – Ego Club, centro de São Paulo," *Cena Punk SP, Jun. 13, 2011,* http://cenapunksp.blogspot.com/2011/06/verdurada-05062011-ego-club-centro-de.html (some words changed for capitalization); of course, the lectures at Verdurada had no unanimous attendance, as some people were more interested in music than in politics (see: *Verdurada*, dir. Frimm, Marçaioli, and Takano); for a general description of the environment during a lecture at Verdurada, see: Reia, *Straightedge no século XXI*, 185–188.

[79] Bispo and Frighetto, "Movimento Passe Livre nasceu em Florianópolis e tomou o Brasil."

Vinicius, one can say that the rediscovery of Gregori occurred when this historical precedent was learned by the Free Fare Movement: "The evolution of the Free Fare Movement's banner, from the student free fare to the universal free fare (the zero fare), started already in 2005, the year in which they found out about the proposal and the experience that occurred in 1990 in São Paulo."[80] In that Verdurada, together with the Free Fare Movement discussion led by Gregori, the public had, of course, the opportunity to participate in the shows of punk and hardcore bands: Cólera, Periferia S/A, Positive Youth, Ralph Macchio, and Pushmongos.[81] There was also an unscheduled appearance by the band Test.[82] Pushmongos was the punk rock band of Felipe Madureira, who designed the 2005 poster for 13th São Paulo Hardcore Festival in which the discussion about the revolts against hikes in Florianópolis took place. The members of the broader punk scene assumed several roles throughout the years: designers, musicians, organizers, activists, protesters, scholars.

What do hardcore-punk festivals holding debates on the free fare struggle together with several music shows mean in these historical contexts? It is true that the 2011 Verdurada incorporated the Free Fare Movement as a guest thanks to the protests that were happening in São Paulo.[83] However, in a somewhat unexpected way, that city cannot always be seen at the forefront of a political and cultural movement. As for the 2005 event that also had the free fare struggle as its main point of debate, the Verdurada Collective incorporated the lecture's subject matter as a consequence of the events in a peripheral state capital: Florianópolis. The drawing of the poster (Fig. 5.1) includes the same elements of the Turnstile Revolts of 2004 and 2005 opposing the bus fare hike. In a news report about São Paulo's Hardcore Festival, it was actually stated (even more clearly than in the poster) that the organizers' intention was not only to talk about the issue of the free fare in general terms, but that they specifically wished to discuss Florianópolis' Turnstile Revolts: "In the edition of July [2005], the theme [of the festival] was the struggle for the Free Fare *in Florianópolis.*"[84] The Brazilian metropolis of São Paulo, which de facto dictates most of the directions of the country's modernity, then had to catch up with the train of history to be in synchrony with its much smaller counterpart. The Free Fare Movement did not exclusively radiate from the financial center of the country, but was brought into existence largely on the margins of Brazilian capitalism. As a result of the novelty and size of the revolts, Florianópolis and its militants became the model. As a city, it had lost its air of provincialism.

São Paulo Becomes Florianópolis

After 2004 and 2005, the experiences of Florianópolis' Turnstile Revolts opposing the hikes in the bus fare were exported to and gained momentum in other parts of Brazil. The previous movements and struggles around public transportation—as well as the learning acquired in

[80] Vinicius, *Antes de junho*, 13.

[81] Coletivo Verdurada, "verdurada.junho.2011," Flickr, Apr. 21, 2011, https://www.flickr.com/photos/cartazesverdurada/5639166537/in/album-72157607271244226/.

[82] Feio, "Verdurada."

[83] Lucas Oliveira (Legume), in conversation with the author, January 2022.

[84] Mariana Albanese and Silvana Salles, "Livra-me da carne," *Revista Viração*, no. 20, Sep. 2005, 14, https://issuu.com/viracao/docs/edicao20 (my emphasis).

Brazil from the process of nationalization of the Free Fare Movement—led more and more cities to create or increase the numbers and quality of their own local social actors who were engaged with urban issues. They operated to confront and to place pressure on their respective municipal governments. Ortellado offers his perspective on the wave of events subsequent to the Turnstile Revolts: "It happened in Florianópolis twice, 2004 and 2005. Later, it happened in several cities; there should have been more than 10 transportation revolts between 2004 until now [2013], perhaps more than 20. And the political institutions were deaf to this process."[85] As with a computer software created by a hacker that spreads uncontrolled from machine to machine, the youth had the banner of the free fare decisively inserted into their own imagery: a hacker working against the operating system of public transportation in the hands of private companies. Toward the end of 2006, more than a year after the second of the revolts in Florianópolis, a series of protests against a fare increase took over São Paulo. The major newspaper in that city (and in Brazil, for that matter), *Folha de São Paulo*, reported that the demonstrations featured a vast variety of left-wing political ideologies. Among the militants, there were punks. A journalist managed to meet one of them:

> Yesterday, the new fare became official, but, in any case, about 1,200 young people from a diverse political spectrum (punks, "ninjas," college students, militants from the Socialism and Freedom Party [PSOL], the Socialist Party of Unified Workers [PSTU], and the Homeless Workers Movement [MTST], dressed-up clowns, and skateboarders) marched from the Municipal Theater to the Sé Square, returning through Líbero Badaró Street and the Chá Viaduct. . . . A "punk" called João, 19, raises the red and black flag from the Spanish National Confederation [CNT]. . . . What is punk? "Not even the sociologists were able to explain it, bro."[86]

The presence of punks at the protests for free public transportation in São Paulo in the mid-2000s cannot be considered a surprise, a coincidence, or an unusual connection. Far from such a representation, there was, in fact, a constructed alliance between those behind the urban social movement and those playing in bands and attending the punk shows of the metropolis. Part of the militant work became the organization of *both* demonstrations *and* shows. On October 22, 2006, the Free Fare Movement of São Paulo staged an event to celebrate the National Week of Struggle for the Free Fare. The chosen motto stated, "Because culture is not a commodity too!," which is a wordplay on the movement's own slogan, "Transportation is not a commodity!" Among activities that involved various types of exhibitions and workshops, there were public presentations by several bands: Violência Sonora (Sound Violence), Juventude Perdida (Lost Youth), Bacantis, Caos Alternativo (Alternative Chaos), Destroyer of Senses, and Mine.[87]

The attractions at this Cultural Free Fare Festival were not chosen arbitrarily. It is possible to recover the radicalization of the sound that emanated from music performances on that day. One of the bands, Violência Sonora, had recorded in 2005 a very primitive demo CD-R composed of eight songs. The track called "Sistema Falido" ("Failed System") helps to display the band's intense anti-capitalist sentiment, with the piece reverberating like an

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[85] Ortellado, "Pablo Ortellado."

[86] Paulo Sampaio, "No dia do reajuste, 1.200 protestam no centro," *Folha de São Paulo*, Dec. 1, 2006, C6.

[87] MPL-SP, "[mpl sp] Impressos e agenda da Semana Nacional de Luta pelo Passe Livre!" *CMI Brasil*, Oct. 12, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20061106080518/http://www.midiaindependente.org/pt/blue/2006/10/362345.shtml.

actual political manifesto. Through its direct discourse, the bourgeoisie, the state, and the economic system are condemned and repelled. The rawness of the recording gives the song an aesthetic of poverty, and, most likely, such an aural appeal was repeated when the song was played live. The working class becomes present through the distortion of sounds. For the Free Fare Movement, the alliance with bands such as Violência Sonora must have signified that its militants were combining forces with the marginality of the excluded. The song even denounces the challenges that the transportation system poses for workers. The fares are so high that sometimes the only option for the poor is to walk for several miles:

[canto]	*[singing]*
[...]	*. . .*
[discurso falado]	*[spoken words]*
Burguesia não é sinônimo de superioridade, mas aqui quem tem dinheiro é quem dá as ordens: os donos de empresas multinacionais, os governantes, os banqueiros, donos de impérios que eles conseguiram, mas às custas de quem? Daquele que acorda cedo e sem dinheiro para o ônibus vai a pé para o trabalho [...]	*Bourgeoisie is no synonym of superiority, but here he who has money gives the orders: the owners of multinational companies, the rulers, the bankers, the owners of empires that they constructed, but at the expense of whom? Of those who wake up early and without anymoney for the bus go to work by foot . . .* [88]

São Paulo's Cultural Free Fare Festival featuring the punk show by Violência Sonora occurred in October 2006, and it served as a prelude to the protests that would take place a few weeks later in the same city. However, not only punks were involved in the demonstrations of that year in São Paulo: the spirit of Florianópolis was present as well. This influence actually took written form in a November pamphlet by the Struggle Front Against the Hike (of which the Free Fare Movement was a constituent). [89] Here is one of the sentences used to call people to take to the streets: "In Florianópolis and Vitória, the population organized itself and stopped the hike." [90] Besides the Struggle Front Against the Hike, demonstrations were organized by at least one other group: the traditional student organizations. Similarly, in this second branch of the protests, the president of the National Students' Union (UNE) also hoped for powerful activities that would emulate the previous storming of two state capitals, Florianópolis and Salvador, something that would, in fact, shake the economic center of the country. [91] But it was when militants in São Paulo, during a violent confrontation with the police, were reported to be using the same methods learned in the previous years through the events of Florianópolis' Turnstile Revolts, that the relatively small city in the south of Brazil

[88] Violência Sonora, "Sistema Falido," track 8 on *Demo tape (cdr demo)*, recorded 2005, audio streaming, https://youtu.be/VVlrGaWJFy8; the transcription of the lyrics is available at Violência Sonora, "Sistema Falido," Letras, accessed Aug. 18, 2022, https://www.letras.mus.br/violencia-sonora/sistema-falido/ (lyrics changed for capitalization, punctuation, and spelling).

[89] "Semana contra o aumento das tarifas em São Paulo," *CMI Brasil*, Nov. 27, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20150427120524/midiaindependente.org/pt/blue/2006/11/366922.shtml, also reproduced at: http://vidasemcatracas.blogspot.com/2006/11/semana-contra-o-aumento-das-tarifas-em.html.

[90] Frente de Luta Contra o Aumento, "[SP] Ato contra o aumento da tarifa no dia 24/11," *CMI Brasil*, Nov. 22, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20150427213825/http://midiaindependente.org/pt/blue/2006/11/366253.shtml.

[91] "Notícia sobre a primeira manifestação contra o aumento em São Paulo," UNE, Nov. 23, 2006 [circulated via e-mail].

proved to be the archetype that was being followed. The influence appeared so strong that an urban legend even appeared in the leading newspaper of the country, *Folha de São Paulo*. It alleged that anarchists would be coming from Florianópolis for the purpose of teaching their comrades in the larger metropolis:

> The leaders from the Front that directs the struggle against the hike of the fare in São Paulo do not hide the fact that their urban mobilization tactic was copied from that which, in Florianópolis in July 2005, managed to impede a hike of 30% that the southern mayor wanted to apply to the bus fare. Nine militants from Santa Catarina transferred themselves to São Paulo in order to help the organization against the hike of the bus fare. They transmit[ted] the winning script of Florianópolis, which is to make a series of demonstrations—day after day, no rest—to force open the doors of buses and to disable turnstiles in order to gain popular support. One of those transferred militants is Guaxinim, from IML, an acronym that, in this case, means Instituto do Motim Libertário [Institute for the Anarchist Mutiny]. An anarchist, he studied contemporary art at the Federal University of Santa Catarina and is now enrolled at the University of São Paulo.[92]

This story appears to be a contribution to the creation of a myth. No reference to this Institute for the Anarchist Mutiny is contained in the many thousands of files from the Independent Media Center website stored at the Internet Archive. The only exceptions are when someone refers to this very news piece published by *Folha de São Paulo* and cited above. Most likely, the person identifying himself as Guaxinim made a joke to have some fun in case an account was later circulated by the traditional media. He could also be part of a group whose intention was to create confusion both inside and outside the movement, as a form of sabotage.[93] For example, he appeared to have posed as a leader of a leaderless movement.[94] It is still relevant, however, that this so-called Guaxinim decided to use Florianópolis as the habitat of a vanguard, from where wiser militants would come to give guidance to their counterparts in São Paulo. At least, it confirms that Florianópolis resided in the national, public imagery as the center of the struggle against bus fare hikes in particular and for free public transportation in general. Such a story sounded credible enough to the newspaper editors and the reporter. However, there was not universal approval of the way in which the movement was portrayed. An activist who participated in the protests, the artist Graziela Kunsch, formally responded to *Folha de São Paulo*. She argued that the movement had no leaders, that no group of almost 10 militants came from Florianópolis to São Paulo to become insurrection instructors, and, at the time, no degree in arts even existed at the Federal University of Santa Catarina, making it impossible to believe Guaxinim had been completely truthful. At the same time, she acknowledged that the Free Fare Movement, now nationalized with a chapter in São Paulo and born, to a great extent, from the previous events in Florianópolis, was effectively a strong force behind the demonstrations in the large metropolis.

> It is not possible for such a person called Guaxinim to be one of the leaders of the movement, because this movement is horizontal, without hierarchies. The demonstration was organized by the Struggle Front Against the Hike, which encompasses student groups from São Paulo and diverse

[92] Laura Capriglione, "Estudantes arrombam ônibus contra a tarifa," *Folha de São Paulo*, Nov. 25, 2006, C8.

[93] Inte, "[São Paulo] Frente de Luta Contra o Aumento das Passagens mostra a sua cara," *CMI Brasil*, Nov. 26, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20150503194047/midiaindependente.org/pt/blue/2006/11/366846.shtml.

[94] See: [Graziela Kunsch] Versão dos manifestantes, "Resposta à matéria da Folha de S. Paulo sobre ato contra o aumento," *CMI Brasil*, Nov. 25, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20150427221744/http://www.midiaindependente.org/pt/blue/2006/11/366626.shtml.

> social movements around a common objective: to stop the hike. The affirmation that nine leaders from a so-called Institute for the Anarchist Mutiny would have moved from Florianópolis to lead the act is so ridiculous as saying that the young man studied contemporary art at the Federal University of Santa Catarina [UFSC] (where there is no B.A. in arts). The Free Fare Movement (MPL), which is a member of São Paulo's Front and was the greatest catalyst of Florianópolis' protests, was not even mentioned in the news piece.[95]

Kunsch posted this response on the Independent Media Center website. Even though she ultimately sought to have it published by *Folha de São Paulo* or its cybernetic branch (the web portal UOL, as her letter was directed to its ombudsman), the piece was already online and accessible on the Internet without the need for external approval or any kind of intermediaries. It confirms that the activists could now counterargue the depictions of their actions by the mainstream media. If a news item or column debasing them was published, there was a vehicle through which this could be remedied, in part. Additionally, memory of the historical facts could be documented in a much more complex way. Knowledge should travel through many routes, and the dispute about what is true would become an increasingly egalitarian game.

Independent from the veracity of the account of the nine militants who allegedly transferred their activities from Florianópolis to São Paulo, there was real transportation going on between the two cities—if not of actual activist bodies, then at least of political ideas coming especially from the south. Those ideas were infiltrating the most important urban center of the country. In the view of Ortellado, Florianópolis became "the positive model," sometimes being even remembered during transnational dialogs with foreign activists.[96] According to Vinicius, the success of the militants from Florianópolis in blocking the actions of the local government would generate enthusiasm in other cities. No longer would a mayor shove down the people's throats a higher price for riding the bus without facing the possibility of strong resistance. The events in Florianópolis opened a new door for the organization of social movements. They proved that non-hierarchical structures could be as effective as (or perhaps more efficient than) rigid, vertical configurations in certain scenarios.

> Florianópolis' revolt had managed . . . to cancel the hike. The event would reverberate among young militants of other cities and would become as inspiring as [Salvador's] Bus Revolt had been [previously], mainly among the anarchist youth, because of the movement's non-partisan and autonomist character—street assemblies, direct democracy In São Paulo, we certainly find an example of that.[97]

The militants now acted from a stronger standpoint developed in and fed on the praxis of the earlier revolts and their teaching-like circumstances. However, the police also absorbed lessons from the events. The 2004 revolt in Florianópolis was met with what one can consider to be mild repression, while in 2005 the police demonstrated a change in posture, acting much more violently to control the situation. Apart from the idiosyncrasies of local politics that played a role in the adjustment of the police's attitudes, one cannot dispute that the repressive

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[95] [Graziela Kunsch] Versão dos manifestantes, "Resposta à matéria da Folha de S. Paulo sobre ato contra o aumento"; see also: Inte, "[São Paulo] Frente de Luta Contra o Aumento das Passagens mostra a sua cara."

[96] Pablo Ortellado, in conversation with the author, January 2022.

[97] Vinicius, *Antes de junho*, 295 and 311; the influence of Florianópolis' free-fare struggle on other cities is also corroborated by Legume (Lucas Oliveira [Legume], in conver- sation with the author, January 2022); and: Ikuhara Santos, *As bases e fontes de poder no Movimento Passe Livre de Florianópolis*, 58.

state apparatus had acquired more data on how to manage students in an uprising.[98] The government would not be taken by surprise if a decision were made to crush demonstrations; indeed, fierce suppression of protests became a common recurrence. In the protests that took place at the end of 2006 against the fare hike in São Paulo, it was reported that, on November 24, "several people were injured by splinters from sound grenades, rubber bullets, billy clubs, in addition to the use of pepper spray."[99] The police also arrested activists in a showcase of their power.[100] Years later, in January 2010, another round of demonstrations emerged against a fare increase in São Paulo. The protesters took to the streets to display their opposition to the state and to the cost of public transportation. Images circulated of activists being beaten and arrested by the Military Police. Dressed for the occasion, the policemen wore helmets and wielded billy clubs, tear-gas grenades, and pepper spray, putting their weaponry into use (Fig. 5.2).



Fig. 5.2: Marcelo Pereira, In the Turnstile, São Paulo, January 7, 2010. "The Military Police suppress a protest in the bus terminal Parque Dom Pedro against the bus fare hike in São Paulo Close to 200 people, mostly members of the Free Fare Movement, participated in the demonstrations; three were arrested."[101] It is documented by the press that the police arsenal, besides billy clubs, pepper spray, and stun grenades, included "tear gas," and at least one of the policemen is pictured while he openly "holds a firearm" in front of the protesters.[102]

[98] See: Chagas, "Dário pede repressão e governo acata"; Ludd [Vinicius], "A Guerra da Tarifa"; Vinicius, A Guerra da Tarifa, 54–55 and 58–59; Ikuhara Santos, *As bases e fontes de poder no Movimento Passe Livre de Florianópolis*, 62; sociologist Janice Tirelli Ponte de Sousa declared, for example, that just after the Second Turnstile Revolt: "It is even possible that state intelligence agencies, besides the Military Police, are also trying to understand what is going on [in Florianópolis]" (Sousa, "Primeiro bate e depois negocia," 18).

[99] CMI-SP, "[Busão] Repressão em ato contra o aumento da tarifa em São Paulo – I," *CMI Brasil*, Nov. 24, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20150427190548/http://www.midiaindependente.org/pt/blue/2006/11/366512.shtml.

[100] CMI-SP, "[SP] Todos os detidos do ato contra o aumento foram liberados!" *CMI Brasil*, Nov. 25, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20150427205348/http://midiaindependente.org/pt/blue/2006/11/366567.shtml.

[101] "Na Catraca," Folha de São Paulo, Jan. 8, 2010, C7; see also: "Manifestação contra aumento da tarifa de ônibus acaba em tumulto em SP," G1, Jan. 7, 2010, http://g1.globo.com/Noticias/SaoPaulo/0,,MUL1438798-5605,00.html.

[102] Protesto contra tarifa termina em confronto em SP," UOL Notícias, Jan. 7, 2010, https://noticias.uol.com.

Compared to Florianópolis, the demonstrations in São Paulo seem to have been comprised of older militants who were more likely to engage in direct action, which could have elevated tensions between the protesters and the police. For instance, anarchist flags were displayed at the 2006 protests, which is something apparently not registered in Florianópolis, if one considers the documents consulted here.[103] According to Daniel Guimarães, São Paulo's Free Fare Movement had deeper "anarchist/autonomist" tendencies compared to that of Florianópolis, which featured more links with Marxist organizations.[104] In any case, the repression by the state was unquestionably strong in the main metropolis of the country. A participant in São Paulo's 2006 demonstrations stated his perspective on the police violence: "The indignation is huge with the brutality perpetrated against us, which makes me feel really bad, and I keep asking myself: 'How do they have the nerve to do that? Why?!' This was my first demonstration that ended up like this, with such repression and brutality, and I now wonder about what a shit democracy is this one, which they who are in power are proud to say we live in."[105] One must note that such a criticism of Brazilian democracy was lodged during the left-wing presidential government of Lula, who remained in power from January 2003 through December 2010. Clearly, more radical militants and musicians did not see Lula in a positive light. The repressive stance of the police in São Paulo did not help to lead the activists to believe that a left-wing president would make things easier for them, both in terms of protesting and regarding the achievement of their goals.

In 2009, the 17th São Paulo Hardcore Festival, organized by the Verdurada Collective, hosted two lectures, the first on animal rights and the other on the Free Fare Movement. The talks were accompanied by shows by the bands Confronto, I Shot Cyrus, Red Dons, Eu Serei a Hiena (I Would Be the Hyena), Nossa Vingança (Our Vengeance), Mukeka di Rato (Rat Stew), Naifa, Avalanche, Will Champion, and Corleone.[106] One of those ensembles, Naifa, had recorded in 2008 a song containing sharp criticism of Lula, attacking him over two of his appealing characteristics: his rise from the lower classes and his history as a union leader. Titled "Presidente do povo" ("The President from the People"), the piece was published on an album split with another band called Morto pela Escola (Killed by School). The lyrics of "Presidente do povo" create a narrative of a politician who, in spite of originating in the

br/album/100107protesto_album.jhtm?abrefoto=11; Guilherme Balza, "Protesto contra aumento da passagem de ônibus termina com três detidos e feridos em SP," UOL Notícias, Jan. 7, 2010, https://noticias.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2010/01/07/ult5772u6943.jhtm, also replicated at: https://web.archive.org/ web/20160630045108/http://tarifazero.org/2010/01/page/2/.

[103] CMI-SP, "[São Paulo] Ato da Frente de Luta Contra o Aumento," *CMI Brasil*, Nov. 26, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20150427173621/http://midiaindependente.org/pt/blue/2006/11/366671.shtml; CMI-SP, "[São Paulo] Ato da Frente de Luta Contra o Aumento II," *CMI Brasil*, Nov. 26, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20150427182702/http://midiaindependente.org/pt/blue/2006/11/366692.shtml; CMI-SP, "[São Paulo] Ato da Frente de Luta Contra o Aumento V," *CMI Brasil*, Nov. 26, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20150427180656/http://www.midiaindependente.org/pt/blue/2006/11/366776.shtml.

[104] Guimarães, "Do It Yourcast #20."

[105] Sirley Alencar, "Indignação," comment to: CMI-SP, "[São Paulo] Fotos repressão em São Paulo," *CMI Brasil*, Nov. 25, 2006, https://web.archive.org/web/20150427185242/http://www.midiaindependente.org/pt/blue/2006/11/366572.shtml.

[106] Coletivo Verdurada, "festival.janeiro.2009," Flickr, Dec. 23, 2008, https://www.flickr.com/photos/cartazesverdurada/3264091558/in/album-72157607271244226/.

workers' movement, deceived his constituents and essentially abandoned the poor. Now, he sits at a table with the country's rich and powerful. Here is a fragment of the song:

[…]	. . .
O presidente do povo	*The president from the people*
Lutava com o povo	*Struggled alongside the people*
Brigava pelo povo	*Fought for the people*
Mas se esqueceu do povo	*But he forgot the people*
O presidente do povo	*The president from the people*
Prometeu para o povo	*Made promises to the people*
Mentiu para o povo	*Lied to the people*
E já não é do povo	*And no longer belongs to the people*
[...]	. . .[107]

Criticism of Lula permeates the lyrics despite his proven ability to effectively bring millions out of poverty through reformist (not revolutionary) actions. These actions also caused a set of problems that could be traced to the way in which they were carried out. As posited by Alfredo Saad Filho, social and fiscal measures promoted by Lula during his term as president of Brazil, together with his general achievements when leading the country (according to Lula's own rulebook), provided more people with the opportunity and the means to own a car, which caused the worsening of urban mobility: "Faster economic growth in the 2000s, the distribution of income, and the wider availability of credit and tax breaks to manufacturing industry triggered the explosive growth of automobile sales, while woefully insufficient investment in infrastructure and public transport led to traffic gridlock in many large cities."[108] Thus, the presence in the same hardcore/punk event of a band criticizing Lula and a lecture on the Free Fare Movement displays the spirit of the epoch, especially in a city like São Paulo. There, the streets were saturated with cars containing people fleeing the precarious and costly public transportation system, creating a snowball effect. Those who could abandon the use of buses and the subway for private solutions would do it, but the rising number of vehicles would make enormous traffic jams an ever more common occurrence in everyday life.

The chaotic condition of traffic in general, and not only public transportation in particular, might explain part of the evolution of the Free Fare Movement in São Paulo. The necessity of a better public transportation system became increasingly evident, even for people who managed to afford an automobile. They could not be directly dependent on buses, trains, or the subway, but certainly they were indirectly affected by the lack of options available to navigate the city if the population was considered as a whole. As stated by Mariana S. Mendes: "[The Free Fare Movement's] critique is therefore not only a matter of having free and better

[107] Naifa, "Presidente do povo," track 12 on *Split: Naifa & Morto pela Escola*, recorded 2007/2008, released 2008, audio streaming, https://lajarex.bandcamp.com/album/naifa-e-morto-pela-escola.

[108] Saad Filho, "The Economic Context of Social Protests in 2013."

public transport but also a plea for a more efficient system of circulation and mobility. This is a particularly pressing need in a city like São Paulo, where traffic jams rank among the worst in the world."[109] Starting with those mid-2000s protests, the rage would only grow over the years. In the militants' view, all those who could not pay (or could hardly pay) to use the public transportation system and those who had the means to use a private vehicle were doomed. More cars did not mean a solution. More buses should circulate. More subways needed to be constructed. The access to them must be universal and funded by taxes on the rich. The turnstile had to be destroyed.

Burning Turnstile

Flora Lorena Müller, a Florianópolis militant, once wrote: "The struggle against turnstiles is the struggle for the right to the city."[110] The movement had chosen an object that, unquestionably, had to be eliminated. Bus turnstiles exemplified the worst characteristics of a transportation system that was the focus of the militants' fight. Rooted in another urban context, Gregori, the pioneer who conceptualized the zero fare in the early 1990s and São Paulo's former secretary of transportation, declared that "a turnstile is not only something big and ugly. It can also be a symbol of humiliation."[111] It is humiliating especially for the poor, signifying the impossibility of coming and going through the urban space. Müller and Gregori lived in different cities, but they shared a strong opposition to the same device. Throughout the country, the "burning turnstile" would become the iconic image, the representational metaphor, of the campaign for unrestricted access to the city.[112] Within this campaign, the punk culture became particularly present in the cathartic moment of destruction of these metal barriers. Sometimes, punk existed as a soundtrack: in 2005, Camarada D. (the pen name likely being used by Daniel Guimarães) described a meeting in Florianópolis in which the protesters initiated a demonstration under the soundwaves of this music genre; the protest ended with the militants seeking to reduce two turnstiles to ashes.[113] Other times, punk made itself visible as the provider of bodies to carry out the execution of an anarchic ritual: in São Paulo, turnstiles were ignited with the support and the active vigor of people who identified with the punk movement. There, they would become the front line of the attack (Fig. 5.3).

[109] Mendes, "Brazil's popular awakening," 77.

[110] Flora Lorena [Müller], "Por uma vida sem catracas e sem machismo," in *Tarifa Zero* (Florianópolis: MPL, 2011), 11, https://mplfloripa.wordpress.com/2011/07/01/caderno-de-textos/.

[111] Lúcio Gregori, "Tarifa nos transportes coletivos urbanos: uma iniquidade," in *Tarifa Zero* (Florianópolis: MPL, 2011), 5, https://mplfloripa.wordpress.com/2011/07/01/caderno-de-textos/.

[112] *Jornal Sem Terra*, "A luta por transporte público a favor do povo."

[113] [Camarada] D., "[Floripa] Queima catraca, queima!"



Fig. 5.3 [see opposite]: Marcel Maggion Maia, Demonstration Against the Bus Fare Hike, São Paulo, January 14, 2010.[114] CC BY-NC-SA 2.0. In the background, a young man in black sports a garment from Edinburgh band The Exploited with the cover design of their 1981 album Punks not Dead, which bears a song with the lyrics: "I'm not ashamed of being a punk / And I don't care, I don't give a damn / And I don't care what you say / Cause I believe in anarchy."[115] On the back of the jacket of the protester wearing a mohawk and pouring a flammable liquid over the turnstile, one can read most of the phrase "Êra Punk" and words associated with the international punk music scene, displayed around the pierced skull, referring to the "D-beat," "rawpunk" band Disclose (1991–2007). This band was composed of Japanese members who searched for a musical expression shaped after the English group Discharge and featured anti-war discourses in the lyrics of their songs such as in the piece "Noise Not Music."[116]

As explained by researcher Walisson Pereira Fernandes: "The term 'Êra' is a salute and, at the same time, a war cry used by Brazilian punks since the 1980s. The term really gained momentum in the 1990s, with the creation of São Paulo's East Zone rawpunk movement. As anarcho-punk and hardcore grew in Brazil, several punks felt the necessity to concentrate more on punk culture than anarchist politics; from that, [São Paulo's] rawpunk emerged, created by Márcia, Jaka, and by many others . . . from Punks do Subúrbio [Punks of the Outskirts]. Because of this necessity of highlighting and preserving punk culture, elements such as mohawks, patches, sound structure (D-beat) and

[114] Marcel [Maggion] Maia, "Ato Contra o Aumento do Ônibus em São Paulo," Flickr, Jan. 14, 2010, https://www.flickr.com/photos/panopticosp/4276429774/in/album-72157623087685835/; "A Luta Continua," Rede Contra o Aumento da Tarifa, Jan. 16, 2010, https://barraroaumento.wordpress.com/2010/01/16/a-luta-continua/.

[115] The Exploited, "I Believe in Anarchy," (re)recorded 1981, track B15 on Punks not Dead (Wallingford [UK]: Let Them Eat Vinyl, reissued 2014), vinyl; song's ([re]recording) date information and lyrics cited in Bestley, "Big A Little A," 61–62; Morat, "The Exploited History," The Exploited, Jan. 2003, http://www.the-exploited.net/history.htm.

[116] "About Disclose," Disclose, accessed Apr. 18, 2019, http://disclose.likesyou.org/about.html; "7 inch Records," Disclose, accessed Apr. 18, 2019, http://disclose.likesyou.org/d7in.html; "Lyrics in Alphabetical Order," Disclose, accessed Apr. 18, 2019, http://disclose.likesyou.org/lalpha.html; Disclose and No Fucker, Noise Not Music, released on vinyl in 2004, audio streaming, https://youtu.be/pWmbMwK8uhs; for written examples in which the salute "Êra Punk" is used, see: "Manifesto ruído antifascista," Pânico em CWB, Oct. 2012, http://uniondezesseis.blogspot.com/2012/10/manifesto-ruido-antifascista.html; Mao Punk, Suicídio inconsciente: propostas e reflexões sobre o movimento punk, Jul. 2010, updated Dec. 2015, http://suicidioinconscientepunk.blogspot.com; for historical information about Discharge, see: Chris A. Smith, "Rules of the Tribe: Hardcore Punks and Hair Metal in the 1980s," Appendix, vol. 1, no. 3 (Jul. 2013), http://theappendix.net/issues/2013/7/rules-of-the-tribe-hardcore-punks-and-hair-metal-in-the-1980s; the band Discharge is also characterized by an anti-war discourse (Bestley, "Big A Little A," 63).

production of zines had a greater emphasis The most convincing theory (raised also by Jaka himself) is that ['Êra'] comes from a song called 'Êra Suburbanos' [by the band Suburbanos, 1982]; it is the consensus that this term was used because of a contraction from the word '*eira*' [threshing floor] as in '*sem eira nem beira*' [literally, without a floor or a roof]." [117]

Still, according to Pereira Fernandes, in São Paulo there was a differentiation between rawpunks, anarcho-punks (from the Anarcho-Punk Movement, also known as MAP), and the people belonging to the hardcore scene: "This does not mean that rawpunks were not anarchists, on the contrary: the majority of rawpunks that I interviewed or were part of my ethnographic work . . . are anarchists. What happens is that we had the creation of the Anarcho-Punk Movement (MAP) in the beginning of the 1990s, and MAP possessed a greater political connotation compared to punk. After some time, politics became a constant, putting aside traits of punk culture (aesthetics) and incorporating patterns with a greater social acceptance: short hair (rather than mohawks), clothes with colors (rather than the nihilistic aesthetics of black), sneakers (rather than combat boots) This is so interesting that I realized, during all those years, that the people from São Paulo's punk [scene], mainly those coming from the more poeticized scene (a.k.a. 'hardcore'), do not use the term 'Êra.' The term is used more by punks from the lower classes and predominantly by rawpunks." [118]

In this modern but tribal-like ceremony of turnstile burning carried out by punks and militants in support of free public transportation, fire—when seen as an element of transformation—carries two implications. On one hand, fire destroys the device that physically impedes São Paulo's youth and poor from enjoying and exploring in a liberated fashion their indigenous environment: the urban space. On the other hand, fire functions as a means of expressing one's rage. It represents fury and indignation against the institutions of power that are acting upon one's life: the turnstile is a mechanical obstruction through which money is collected in exchange for motorized mobility. At the same time, the turnstile represents the administrative bodies of the government as well. As a result, the attack on the turnstile becomes an attack on the state.

The burning turnstile is a mobile metaphor for the struggle for the free fare; it can be transposed to other items and institutions instead of being restricted to only one object, because, according to the social movement itself: "The turnstile repudiated by the Free Fare Movement is also a symbolic one. There are invisible turnstiles all over, not allowing full access to spaces and services. Together, we need to destroy all of them. Through our struggle, we want to build a world in which there is no sort of turnstile." [119] This political statement provided by participants of the Free Fare Movement is basically the proposition of a socialist world, which could be achieved only through the destruction or at least the radical transformation of the status quo.

[117] Walisson Pereira Fernandes, in correspondence with the author, May 2019; Suburbanos, Demo (1982), recorded 1982, audio streaming, https://youtu.be/_wmLlj38mnY; Suburbanos, "Êra Suburbanos," track B3 on the various artists' compilation, O começo do fim do mundo, recorded live at SESC Pompéia, São Paulo, Nov. 27–28, 1982 (São Paulo: Nada Nada Discos, reissued 2017), box set, vinyl, cassette tape.

[118] Pereira Fernandes, in correspondence with the author, May 2019.

[119] MPL-Florianópolis, "Apresentação," in *Tarifa Zero* (Florianópolis: MPL, 2011), 4, https://mplfloripa.wordpress.com/2011/07/01/caderno-de-textos/; fragment also reproduced at: MPL-Florianópolis, "O que é mobilidade urbana?" (Florianópolis: MPL, 2008), 1, https://web.archive.org/web/20101124214037/http://saopaulo.mpl.org.br/files/cartilha-mobilidade-urbana-versao-4p.pdf; the date of the text "O que é mobilidade urbana?" was established by: Gama, *Por uma vida sem catracas*, 177.

In a 2007 letter signed by the Florianópolis chapter of the Free Fare Movement, and retrieved by Yuri Gama through his academic work, one can understand that the burning of turnstiles—in cases where it evolves to reach its full potential of destroying all forms of access limitations to public transportation—is considered a revolutionary act by the movement: "Historically, the organization of the circulation of the poor population in cities has always been based on very clear class criteria, which impeded the lower classes from fully using the urban space and its public services. . . . This means that [the act of] freeing public transportation from turnstiles takes the shape of a historical revolutionary measure." [120] To put an end to the existence of turnstiles is among the first steps of a revolution. This reasoning can have only one logical outcome: institutions are not safe from the fire that emerges from the movement. This fury can spread from the turnstile to other impediments or state bodies that need to be destroyed through revolution. It is a trigger for much larger achievements on the path to social equality.



Fig. 5.4: Douglas, *Burn Turnstile Burn*, São Paulo, 2005. Copyleft CMI Brasil— Centro de Mídia Independente Brasil (see note for details). [121]

The "Manifesto of the National Meeting for the Free Fare," written in 2004, declared (in a way now transparent to us) that images of burning turnstiles should be just the beginning: "In the most different corners of this country, a spark is setting the hearts and minds of students on fire: it is the Campaign for the Free Fare. *This same spark threatens to set fire to*

[120] MPL-Florianópolis cited in Gama, *Por uma vida sem catracas*, 175–176.

[121] Douglas, "[São Paulo] fotos do ato do dia 27/10 pelo passe livre – parte 2," CMI Brasil, Oct. 29, 2005, https://web.archive.org/web/20150509035811/midiaindependente.org/pt/blue/2005/10/334563.shtml (copyleft http://www.midiaindependente.org: reproduction for non-commercial use is free as long as the author and the source are cited and this note is included).

buses, streets, city council buildings, and offices of mayors."[122] In the following year, this general feeling captured by that declaration became more of a reality; in fact, it was put into practice. The spirit present in the burning of turnstiles by a ritualistic congregation of protesters was momentarily transported to an attempt to burn down Florianópolis' City Council building. As Thais Ikuhara Santos writes, the 2005 Turnstile Revolt in that city reached its pinnacle with the reported number of "10,000 students . . . who blocked Paulo Fontes, Mauro Ramos, and Beira-mar avenues; they invaded and closed terminals, chained themselves to the mayor's office building, and *even set fire to the City Council building, too."*[123] In São Paulo, hundreds of miles north, every time a turnstile was set on fire then, the act should function as a warning to the politicians in charge. As it happened in Florianópolis, one day it will be the palaces of the larger metropolis that will burn. The critical issue is: were those politicians paying enough attention? Or were they deaf to the noise of protests?

[122] CPL, "A recente história da campanha pelo passe-livre em Fpolis," 28 (my emphasis).

[123] Ikuhara Santos, *As bases e fontes de poder no Movimento Passe Livre de Florianópolis*, 62 (my emphasis).

CHAPTER 70

The Lumad Struggle for Social and Environmental Justice: Alternative Media in a Socio-Environmental Movement in the Philippines

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Abstract

This study examines the role of alternative media in the socio-environmental movement for justice for the Lumad, the indigenous peoples of the southern Philippines, and the fight to protect the environment in the Philippines from extractive companies and mono-crop plantations. Using thematic textual analysis and framing analysis, the study analysed selected news articles, press releases and advocacy articles from bulatlat.com and civil society group websites posted online from September to December 2015. Anchored on Downing's theory of alternative media as social movement media and Fuchs' theory of alternative media as critical media, the study reveals four categories of alternative media: (1) as giver of voice to the oppressed Lumad; (2) as social movement media used for social mobilisation; (3) as an alternative media outfit fulfilling a complementary role with the socio-environmental

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movement; and (4) as making social movements' offline activism visible. It concluded that alternative media play a vital role in socio-environmental movements and the continuing challenge to mitigate the climate crisis.

Keywords

Alternative media, civil society, counter-hegemony, critical media, environmental justice, ethnic minorities, Indigenous peoples, neoliberalism, socio-environmental movement, social justice, social movement media

Introduction

The indigenous peoples in Mindanao, the southern part of the Philippines, are called Lumad, meaning 'born of the earth' or homegrown. Lumad is used to refer to 15 to 18 ethno-linguistic groups in Mindanao, and among those usually included as Lumad are the Subanen, B'laan, Mandaya, Higaonon, Banwaon, Talaandig, Ubo, Manobo, T'boli, Tiruray, Bagobo, Tagakaolo, Dibabawon, Manguangan and Mansaka (La Viña, 2015). More than 60 indigenous leaders in Mindanao have been killed extra-judicially by paramilitary and military groups since 2010 (Varona, 2015). The attacks, which almost always precede the entry of mining and the establishment of plantations, have displaced more than 40,000 Lumad, according to the human rights group Karapatan.

The Lumad killings are a consequence of the Philippines government's co-optation of neoliberal economics, or neoliberal globalisation. With its principle of unfettered markets as the driving force of development, neoliberalism has resulted in extravagant consumption, massive pollution, exploitation and degradation of the environment. Following the logic and mandate of neoliberal economics, the past Philippines administrations opened up investment and trade implemented with particular stress to attract TNC investment—which is utilised precisely by transnational corporations to target natural resources extraction, driving large-scale exploitation to satisfy commodities markets and the expansion of industrial production in some countries such as China.

Tujan (2008) notes that, aside from massive pollution and degradation of the environment, the other side of neoliberal economic globalisation is the marginalisation of the majority of the people who remain poor. In the words of Tujan (2008: ii):

> Communities engaged in traditional forms of livelihood depending on natural resources extraction such as forestry, indigenous communities and coastal communities face systematic marginalization as a result of privatization of the commons and large-scale development projects and become workers in large-scale extractive industries.

Indigenous peoples are denied their historical role in natural methods of conservation of the environment. Worse, these same communities face the severe impact of environmental degradation as a result of over-exploitation, such as pollution of freshwater resources due to toxic mine tailings or destructive flash floods due to over-logging. Such impacts are made even more severe by climate change, with higher rainfall more easily weakening sub-soils in over-logged areas, resulting in mudslides.

As a consequence of neoliberal economics, the Lumad face frequent attacks, and their ancestral domains are encroached upon by outsiders because many of the island's natural resources—especially minerals—are in Lumad territory. This is the case in different parts of the world, particularly in Latin American countries and South-East Asian countries like Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines. On 1 September 2015, three Lumad leaders were brutally killed by paramilitary groups at the Alternative Learning Center for Agriculture and Development (ALCADEV) in Surigao, Mindanao. The three Lumad leaders were Emerito Samarca, director of ALCADEV; Dionel Campos, leader of an indigenous peoples' organization against large-scale mining; and Bello Sinzo, a tribal leader known as a 'Datu', which means chief, or head. The brutal killings of Campos and Sinzo were carried out in front of the students and teachers of ALCADEV, while Emerito Samarca was killed in his office by slitting his throat and hacking him to death.

The death of the three Lumad leaders sparked civil society movements and actions to stop Lumad killings, render justice to the slain Lumad leaders and demand that the government respect Lumad rights, especially their right to their ancestral lands. Disinformation from the military groups was spread by saying that what happened was a result of tribal war, but alternative media revealed truths and realities not normally shown in mainstream media. Foremost in the alternative writing on the Lumad killings was the online alternative media outfit bulatlat.com, which has 'Journalism for the people' as its slogan. Civil society groups and NGO networks were also active in posting their news articles, press releases and advocacy articles calling for justice for the Lumad and the protection of their rights to their ancestral lands and self-determination.

The Philippines contains a thriving and vibrant civil society, which McCoy (2009: 515) describes as 'the most elaborate citizens' network anywhere in the developing world'. This civil society contains NGOs involved in a variety of different types of activism, such as advocacy on behalf of agrarian reform, environmental protection, indigenous peoples' rights, labour organising and the plight of the urban poor. Many of these NGOs generate stiff resistance to neoliberal policies, which constitutes a significant barrier to their implementation. The opposition of social movements to mining, for example, includes protests, litigation, administrative proceedings and the implementation of mining moratoriums by local governments.

Literature, theory and research questions

There is a very close relationship between alternative media and civil society's political actions constituting a social movement for the Lumad struggle, which this study set out to examine. For Downing (2011), radical media or alternative media are the media of social movements: non-mainstream and counterhegemonic, offering counter-information and aimed at social change. Since activists and those involved in social movements are excluded and marginalised from the mainstream press, they historically have created their own media or relied on alternative media for a non-hegemonic perspective. As Twitter and Facebook—arguably forms of online alternative media—have both played critical roles in recent revolutions and protests, understanding what forms of media activists use and trust is crucial for understanding what role alternative media play in activism (Harlow, 2013). Rodriguez (2011) builds on Downing's definition of radical or alternative media as media of social movements to prof-

fer the concept of 'citizens' media' which implies that citizens are actively contributing to the mediascape so that the communication process itself becomes empowering. Regardless of the term used, what they have in common is 'the desire to foster substantially different structures and processes of communication that make possible egalitarian, interactive, and emancipatory discourse' (Attwood, 1986: 19).

Online alternative media enable activists and other marginalised groups systematically ignored by the mainstream media to reach new and dispersed audiences not restricted by the limits of time, space, distance or even ideology, even reaching audiences with differing opinions and beliefs who otherwise might only read mainstream media (Harlow, 2013). The internet has been utilised by social movement players for networking, as it has enabled a low-cost message transmission 'where alternative communication projects located in different parts of the globe can link and enhance their knowledge exchanging experiences of struggle in their specific contexts, enabling concrete action' (Colectivo ConoSur, 2004: 91). Furthermore, 'literature shows that online tools facilitate and amplify offline activism; other studies have demonstrated that online activism translates into offline activism, and vice versa' (Harlow, 2013: 32). This study focuses on both online and offline activism of civil society groups in the Philippines for the cause of justice for the Lumad and environmental protection in the Philippines.

Empirical studies show the vital role of alternative media in social movements in shaping 'a media agenda allied to social movements and alternative communication networks to position themes and perspectives different from mainstream media' (ALAI, 2012, para. 1). The main issues presented by alternative media in Latin America's grassroots production include the promotion and defence of human rights (especially of indigenous people, women, children, workers and social activists), defence of territories (resistance against agribusiness, extractive and mining industries, transgenic corporations), and promotion of grassroots experiences (achievements in gender equality, education, climate justice and food sovereignty, among others). In Latin American grassroots integration, alternative media work with grassroots sectors as they participate and cover events, mobilisations or marches, strengthening confidence among the people they represent, transcending the traditional conception of media as an information transmitter. Alternative media actually help to organise and mediate experiences of struggle that can strengthen social movements' capacities. Parra (2015: 3695) notes the following in her article on alternative media and Latin American grassroots integration:

> Mediation between social movements and society sometimes consists in enabling media to spread the social movement's voice on their struggles and realities. The past notion of 'giving voice to the voiceless' is now seen as serving social movements, not only to distribute information, but also to make visible and articulate demands, territories, subjectivities, identities, and alternative lifestyles.

In other resource-rich countries like India, socio-environmental movements against extractive industries have also been formed. An example is Odisha, which has become an important site of resistance movements against large extractive projects. Issues of ecology and environment were part of the framework of resistance, along with social justice for the dispossessed peasantry, sharecroppers and forest-dependent groups of people. Environmental pollution and destruction of landscapes have increased to the extent where a novel synthesis between

social justice and environmental care is the rallying cry of the resistance movements against the predations of globalised capitalism.

In the absence of positive coverage in mainstream, corporate media, activists started using the internet as a medium to circulate information on the ground. Videos of police and corporate repression, and write-ups online, have helped to get messages out to the wider world. These efforts have ensured that the alternative viewpoints of the resistance movements are being presented and articulated in the public space. The dogged resistance to global capital and a neoliberal state, combined with the ability to synthesise social justice with ecological concerns, makes the movements in Odisha significant for global struggles against extractive capital.

Ruano, Pachelo and Suazo (2013) analysed the use of digital media for a socio-environmental movement in Mayan marginalised communities in Guatemala. They learned several lessons from this analysis. The organisers of the movement recognised the value of ICTs to improve membership, increase collective efficacy and strengthen networks of support. Thus the use of digital media (mobile phones, computers with internet) was strong and highly effective in the mobilisation inside the movement, but weak and curbed in its effects on policies and political decision-making processes outside the movement, as structural exclusion, ineffective political dialogue and blatant persecution against indigenous leaders hindered the movement's potential to effectively influence elites' decision-making, resulting in increasing conflict and violence. Despite these setbacks, the movement has achieved some intermediate goals, such as influencing the media agenda, changing corporate policies and some public policy modifications. For the Mayan communities, digital media served as social and environmental movement media, resisting and challenging the neoliberal policies of the state-corporation nexus.

Alternative media, whether using traditional or digital media, can be defined as 'essentially counter-hegemonic, that is challenging established, hierarchical, systems of politics, economics, and culture' (Watson and Hill, 2003: 172). The central characteristic of alternative media is their alternative political vision: 'By radical media, I refer to media, generally small-scale and in many different forms that express an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives' (Downing, 2001: v). The alternative media's alternative vision refers to the resistance to the dominating and marginalising consequences of economic or neoliberal globalisation, calling to mind alternative globalisation movements such as that shown at the World Social Forum, with its slogan 'Another world is possible'.

Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008) distinguish some approaches that define alternative media in different ways. Of these, the approaches that are relevant to this study are: (1) alternative media as alternative to mainstream media (large-scale, state-owned or commercial, hierarchical, dominant discourses vs small-scale, independent, non-hierarchical, non-dominant discourses); (2) approaches to looking at alternative media using the notion of counter-hegemonic media that are part of civil society and form a third voice between state media and commercial media; and (3) approaches that speak of rhizomatic media that are relational because they link different protest groups and movements, connect the local and the global, and establish different types of relationships with the market and/or the state.

Fuchs (2010) posits that alternative media, being counter-hegemonic in nature, are critical media. This means that, in contrast to mainstream, commercial media, they are characterised by critical form and content. Critical media contain oppositional content that provides alternatives to dominant repressive heteronomous perspectives, which reflect the rule of

capital, patriarchy, racism, sexism, nationalism and so on; such content expresses oppositional standpoints that question all forms of heteronomy and domination. In critical media content, there is counter-information and counter-hegemony that includes the voices of the excluded, the oppressed, the dominated, the enslaved, the estranged and the exploited, and that argues for the advancements of a cooperative society. Such content shows 'suppressed possibilities of existence, antagonisms of reality, potentials for change' (Fuchs, 2010). Critical media give voices to the voiceless and media power to the powerless, and transcend the filtering and censorship of information by corporate information monopolies, state monopolies or cultural monopolies in public information and communication.

As alternative media strive to give voice to the voiceless, oppressed and marginalised, this study specifically sought to find out whether the Lumad possess a critical consciousness of the root causes of their oppression; if they do, its goal was to find out what their response or attitude might be towards their oppressed condition. The study seeks to know whether and how the Lumad resist the capitalist encroachment and militarisation in their lands. In Paulo Freire's (1970) conscientisation of the oppressed, the oppressed need to understand why they are oppressed. Conscientisation—which means the ways in which individuals and communities develop a critical understanding of their social reality through reflection and action—involves examining and acting on the root causes of oppression as experienced in the here and now (Freire, 1970). Thus the study sought to find out how the Lumad act on the root causes of their oppression.

The main research question, therefore, was:

> What roles do alternative media play in the socio-environmental movement for Lumad and the environment in the Philippines and how do they fulfil these roles?

This led to a number of subsidiary research questions:

- In what ways do alternative news about the Lumad function as critical, counter-hegemonic media that give voice to the voiceless while seeking social justice and social change? How do alternative news site bulatlat.com and NGO networks frame their news, press releases and articles on the Lumad in the Philippines?
- How do social movement actors or activists use online media for social mobilisation and publicity for their campaigns and activities?
- In what ways does bulatlat.com work with civil society groups and activists in the social movement for justice for the Lumad and environmental protection in the Philippines?
- What is bulatlat.com's role with regard to the offline activism of civil society groups in advancing the cause of the Lumad and of environmental conservation and protection in the Philippines?

Methods

This study employs a purely qualitative approach using the deductive inquiry method. Following Fuchs' (2010) theorising of alternative media as critical media that may be approached in different ways, and Downing's (2011) theoretical statement that alternative media are the media of social movements and can also mean 'citizens' media', the researcher set out to download

all the relevant news on the Lumad and mining from the alternative media site bulatlat.com, press releases from the most relevant civil society groups or NGO networks posted on their websites, and a few advocacy articles most related to the struggle of the Lumad from the time of the killing of three Lumad leaders in Mindanao on 1 September 2015 to December 2015.

In this study, the small-scale, independent media being studied comprises Bulatlat.com, while the social movement media are the press releases and advocacy articles posted in the websites of civil society groups such as Rural Missionaries of the Philippines, Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment, Alyansa Tigil Mina (Alliance to Stop Mining) and 350.org. The researcher focused on the online alternative media outfit Bulatlat.com because of its promise to expose the truth, (*bulatlat* is a Filipino word meaning to dig into and to expose); its slogan 'Journalism for the people'; and its very well-written news, feature and opinion articles. It also kept articles on the plight of the Lumad and the mining issue in the Philippines up to date.

These downloaded articles were then further selected and categorised into themes using theoretical concepts on alternative media from John Downing (2011), Christian Fuchs (2010) and related literature. Four themes or categories were identified: (1) alternative media (both the alternative news from the online alternative media outfit and civil society groups' postings in their websites) as critical media that give voice to the voiceless and produce counter-hegemonic content; (2) alternative media as social movement media for social mobilisation; (3) alternative media outfits as the partner of social movement in three more functions (as monitor, articulator and network- builder); and (4) alternative media outfits as making social movements' offline activism visible.

A framing analysis of the alternative news from bulatlat.com and the press releases and advocacy articles was done for alternative media role categories 1 and 2, together with a textual analysis of each article for their critical and counter-hegemonic content. The researcher employed thematic textual analysis for the articles under alternative media role categories 3 and 4. The data discussion and summary focuses on the roles of alternative media to the social movement and the struggle of the Lumad and civil society organisations for both social justice and the mitigation of the climate crisis through environmental protection.

Alternative media as giver of voice to the exploited

As critical media that contain counter-information and counter-hegemony (Fuchs, 2010), alternative news and advocacy articles from Bulatlat.com and NGO networks' websites give voice to the excluded, the oppressed, the dominated, the enslaved, the estranged and the exploited. A framing analysis of news that gave voice to the Lumad revealed both the human rights and the climate crisis frames, and the interconnection between the two. This connection manifests in the direct quotes from the Lumad and activists supporting the Lumad.

Several human rights of the Lumad have been violated, as shown by the framing analysis of the alternative news about the Lumad, depicting their sentiments and voices regarding the extra-judicial killings, the militarisation of their communities, the disruption of their livelihood as farmers and their evacuation from their homes due to the militarisation and killing of their leaders. These rights include the right to life, liberty and security; freedom from arbitrary arrest; freedom from interference with privacy, family, home and correspon-

dence; the right to own property (their ancestral lands); the right to desirable work; the right to an adequate standard of living (as they were forced to leave their homes); and the Lumad children's right to education.

In '#StopLumadKillings: An appeal from a Lumad daughter' (23 October 2015), posted on Kalikasan.net, Michelle Campos, daughter of slain leader Dionel Campos, writes the following words that show her critical consciousness of the cause of the climate crisis, which is also the cause of fear and violence in her community:

> But in my community, large-scale mining interests are sowing fear and violence. Not only are the fossil fuel and extractive corporations driving the climate crisis, leaving us extremely vulnerable to typhoons such as Washi in 2011 and Bopha in 2012 that killed thousands of people—they are taking our land and killing our people, too. (Campos 2015)

In 'Voice of a Lumad widow: Our land, our blood', published by Bulatlat.com (30 September 2015), Jocelyn Campos, widow of Dionel Campos and mother of Michelle, speaks of her community's desire for the education of their children to prepare them for a better life and their stand to protect the environment; however, she points out that the legitimate right of the children to be educated is violated by attacks on their schools by the military and paramilitary, notably the killing of Emerito Samarca, executive director of the Alternative Learning Center for Agricultural Development. She states:

> All we want is for our children to know how to read, write and have a better life ahead of them. The Lumad took a stand to protect the environment and give our children education but they don't want us to do that. The government and the capitalists want us to remain uneducated, primitive and weak.

Jocelyn Campos also points to the Lumad defence of their lands from the entry of large-scale mining and other capitalists:

> We know that businessmen and capitalists have a huge interest in our lands. They want to pursue mining and logging but we, the Lumad don't want mining operations in our areas. We know the bad things that it will bring. Andap Valley is rich, they want us to vacate the complex and make way for the entry of large scale mining.

Datu Dulphing Ogang earlier spoke of the corporate encroachment of Lumad lands in 'Indigenous peoples call: "Carry on the struggle"' (Bulatlat.com, 9 August 2015). In an interview with Dee Ayroso, Datu Ogang describes the modern slavery brought by corporate encroachment on Lumad lands:

> Corporate encroachment has turned many indigenous peoples into modern slaves in their own lands working as plantation and mine workers. Those who resist became targets of 'brutal attacks' under the counterinsurgency program Oplan Bayanihan. Soldiers have restricted farm work to one and-a-half hours, and falsely accused villagers of being New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas, curtailing their economic, social, and civil rights (right to desirable work; right to life, liberty, and personal security; and right to adequate living standard).

Experiencing such oppressive condition, Datu Guibang Apoga, another Manobo leader, makes a stand to carry on the struggle against the oppressors of the Lumad because they had no choice but fight them: 'We refuse to give up the struggle, and they try to kill us; we give up, and they will still kill us. So, it's better to carry on the struggle.'

Alternative media as the media for social mobilisation

Aside from studying an alternative media outfit as an alternative to the mainstream media, giving voice to the voiceless, this study approaches alternative media as social movement media used for the purpose of social mobilisation by civil society groups and networks. It includes the use of social media by the social movement actors and the official websites of civil society groups where press releases, news articles and advocacy articles are posted. As such, it is counter-hegemonic and rhizomatic in nature, since websites link to other like-minded civil society groups or NGO networks. The framing analysis of these online postings showed either a placing of emphasis on the human rights of the Lumad or a dual emphasis given to the human rights and environmental protection frames, which are seen to be intertwined in certain posts.

In 'Network launched to resist plantation expansion in peasant, Lumad and Moro areas', a press release of the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (28 October 2015), the undeniable link between militarisation—which causes human rights violations—and environmental pollution and degradation—which are driven by and exacerbate climate change—is evident, thus manifesting the interlocking of the human rights and environmental degradation, leading to climate crisis frames. The news writer expressed the fact that the expansion of plantations in Mindanao poses 'serious threats to the environment and health of the people living within and working in the plantations', with the use of pesticides and other chemicals, 'which have proven to have caused skin and respiratory diseases to workers in oil palm, banana and even pineapple plantations'. The green groups and the Lumad denounced the state, military and other security forces for being 'responsible for violating the rights of the people through continued harassment, vilification and even killings to protect the interests of these corporate plantations'. They opposed the plantation expansion with empirical arguments that the alteration of the natural landscape (i.e. flattening of mountains) and denudation of natural forests to plant agri-plantation crops also had negative impact on soil erosion, biodiversity and sources of water, again showing that environmental degradation drives up climate change and is connected to human rights violation of poor communities.

To persuade people and to mobilise them to fight for Lumad land rights, self-determination and the mitigation of climate change, Zeph Repollo, writing for 350.org in 'People over profits: #StopLumadKillings' (15 October 2015), asserts that we will never win the climate fight without the indigenous peoples. She writes:

> The Indigenous People's right to land and self-determination is parallel to the preservation of our ecological frontiers that are helping mitigate the impacts of climate change. They are fighting for their ancestral domains—our survival. They are fighting for their lives—our existence. What they will lose, we will lose. What they nurture, we all benefit.

Repollo (2015) writes that the struggle of the Lumad in the Philippines is similar to the different indigenous communities' struggles in different parts of the world. Corporate interests inflict injustices and violence on communities defending their land and heritage; at the same time, they inflict devastation on the environment, feeding into the global climate crisis. Repollo draws a clear connection between the indigenous peoples' fight for their ancestral domains and the fight against the effects of climate change. The fight against large-scale mining, fossil

fuels and vast plantation corporations is a fight to save the last ecological frontiers that may help to mitigate climate change. Repollo's words proffer the counter-hegemonic ideology that what the indigenous peoples protect and nurture will benefit humanity. Thus neoliberalism, or the economic system of an unfettered market, must be resisted, opposed and transformed into a more sustainable global economic system.

The socio-environmental movement used social media for social mobilisation in its Twitter campaign #StopLumadKillings, which gained massive local and international support from different civic organisations. In these tweets and re-tweets, the human rights of the Lumad were emphasised as NGO networks called to stop Lumad killings and uphold the rights of the indigenous peoples to their ancestral lands and to self-determination. Just some of those who tweeted and re-tweeted were Action Net Philippines, a Network of German NGOs working together for human rights in the Philippines; Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Defender Network (IPHRD Network), a network serving as a platform for solidarity of co-ordination among indigenous peoples; Balitang New York (News from New York), the voice of the Filipino community in New York; International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines; Save Our Schools Network (SOS Network), a network of child-focused NGOs, church-based groups and other stakeholders advocating for children's right to education; and Land is Life, a global movement on the frontlines of safeguarding the rights of indigenous peoples to protect lands, cultures and biodiversity for all of humanity.

Aside from the Twitter campaign, civil society groups and networks posted their own press releases and advocacy articles to achieve their purpose of calling for justice for the Lumad and environmental protection. The Catholic religious group known as Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP) posted on its website about the support given by the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines, chaired by the Reverend Barry Naylor (2015), who delivered his keynote address for the Barug Katungod Mindanao Conference (Mindanao Stand for Human Rights) in Cagayan de Oro City on 11 September 2015. The human rights frame is clearly emphasised in Reverend Naylor's keynote address, which called for Global Days of Action for Mindanao from 22 November to 10 December 2015 to campaign against the intensified United States-Aquino regime's attacks on the Filipino people.

Online activism was translated to offline activism as Rev. Naylor's urgent summons was realised when representatives from the Lumad, RMP and Lumad supporters campaigned in Europe to gather support for the call to stop Lumad killings and uphold their rights. The contingent from the Philippines spoke to various groups and offices in Geneva, Rome, London, Brussels, Amsterdam and Krakow during the early leg of the #GlobalWeeksOfAction4Mindanao in Europe, which started on 22 November and ran to 10 December 2015. The main objectives of the Global Weeks of Action for Mindanao were to publicise and gain even wider international support for the struggles of the peoples of Mindanao against their systematic repression and exploitation by their own government—particularly the Save our Schools Campaign to call on the government and military to stop the attacks on Lumad schools. These global days of action gained widespread support from Europeans, Canadians and Americans, who wrote public letters to President Benigno Aquino and gave financial support to the Lumad and civil society groups supporting them.

This networked resistance to the neoliberal economic system is articulated in the press release posted by Alyansa Tigil Mina (2015) on its website on 28 November 2015. The press

release entitled 'Filipinos join the global climate march to demand climate justice' released information about 15,000 advocates representing climate-impacted communities, religious groups, youth, labour unions, anti-coal and renewable energy campaigners, and other concerned citizens who took to the streets of Manila and other major cities in the Philippines to join the Global Climate March on the weekend before the UN Conference on Climate Change in Paris. The Filipino advocates marched to call for climate justice in behalf of vulnerable nations like the Philippines, and to demand a strong, fair and ambitious global climate agreement ahead of the international UN climate talks that started on 30 November.

The demands of the Filipino marchers included those concerning the Lumad of the Philippines—such as the demand to shift to renewable energy, as this would prevent coal mining on indigenous lands, protect people's rights to food, water and the commons, guarantee the rights of all people and communities, and deliver justice and address the impacts of climate—including those particular to women and indigenous communities. The nation-wide march was intended for both the environmental and human rights of the Lumad and the larger community of people as weapons of liberation from neoliberal globalisation.

Alternative media outfits as partners of the social movement for the Lumad and the environment

Earlier, it was shown that bulatlat.com gave voice to the oppressed Lumad in its news articles. A thematic textual analysis of more alternative news from bulatlat.com reveals the other functions of this alternative news site in relation to the social movement in support of the Lumad and the environment: (1) monitoring of the programs of activities; (2) articulating the narratives and agenda; and (3) connecting groups and forging solidarity.

Bulatlat.com monitors and covers the activities of civil society groups in fighting for both social justice for the Lumad and environmental protection. An example of this is its news report '#StopLumadKillings: Groups protest "butcher mining companies" confab', which reported on the protests of Lumad and green groups outside the annual gathering of the Chamber of Mines in the Philippines (CoMP) at the Solaire Casino and Resort in Paranaque City on 15 September, citing the protesters' label for the gathering as 'a conference of militarists and polluters' (Ayroso, 2015b). According to the article, Clemente Bautista, national coordinator of the environmental NGO Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment, strongly demanded justice and accountability from the large-scale miners for the human rights violations they had been perpetrating both against the people—especially the Lumad—and the environment:

> We are resolute in demanding accountability and justice for the ongoing pollution, plunder and even genocide that these large-scale miners are perpetrating against the people and the environment. We demand immediate justice for our Lumad brothers and sisters and the pull-out of the butcher mining companies that militarized their communities.

Clemente made the strong link between human rights and the climate change issues when he identified the mining conference's top sponsors as the leading sponsors of paramilitary groups that have sown terror across the mine-affected communities—especially in Mindanao. These sponsors, continued Clemente, also have extensive track records of pollution and plunder over the past recent years.

The articulator function means that alternative media articulate counter-information not provided by mainstream media and also present an alternative vision of civil society groups calling for a sustainable development model. Bulatlat.com, for instance, posted an advocacy article entitled 'A deluge of crises: the roots of our climate vulnerability' (4 November 2015), by Leon Dulce, the campaign coordinator of Kalikasan Philippine Network for the Environment. In the article, Dulce writes about the various forms of development aggression, which he sees as the greatest drivers in the destruction in the Philippine environment. He cites the following inconvenient facts:

> Around a million hectares of our lands are currently covered by large-scale mining applications, over 177,000 hectares in timber plantations masquerading as forest management agreements, and more than 1.2 million hectares under mono-crop plantations. Meanwhile, 38,000 hectares of foreshore areas are covered by reclamation projects, and around 70 percent of our fisheries is exploited and controlled by foreign companies.

With these alarming statistics cited by Dulce (2015a) to point to the various forms of development aggression that are the root causes of the Filipinos' climate vulnerability, it is easy to understand why the green groups that are working in solidarity with the Lumad protest and resist further expansion of mono-crop plantations and the entry of destructive large-scale mining on Lumad lands, especially as these are watershed areas. It is easy to see that the Filipino communities' food and water security will be threatened, since agricultural farms and clean sources of water will be jeopardised by the toxic tailings and pesticides from the plantations, as well as drought or flooding due to climate change.

The function of connecting with other groups and forging solidarity is fulfilled in alternative news coverage of social movement networks, serving to expand the linkages and networks among the social movement actors both within and outside the country. The alternative news site serves to strengthen the link and creates potential linkages with other groups with the coverage of forged links. One example is the coverage of the members of the International League for Peoples' Struggle's visit to Manila to express their solidarity with the Lumad and the other groups supporting them. In 'Internationalists unite with Lumad for Apec protests' (Ayroso, 2015d). Meza, an American who heads the organization Chelsea Unity Against War, is quoted as saying:

> We express solidarity in the struggle against militarization in Mindanao, and against big mining corporations in the Philippines … that destroy the land and livelihood of people, to mine coal, gold, just for the profit of big corporations and the one percent wealthy of the world.

Meza points out that big mining corporations destroy the land and livelihood of people for profit, and the 1 percent wealthy of the world—which includes the wealthy capitalists in the Philippines. The Lumad struggle is thus shown to be resistance against neoliberal or corporate globalization, which results in massive inequality, environmental destruction and hardship for those who do not benefit from it, but instead are deprived of their land and livelihood—such as the Lumad.

Alternative media outfits' role in making social movements' offline activism visible

In covering social movements' offline activism, bulatlat.com fulfils its four-fold function of being the mouthpiece, monitor, articulator and network-builder, serving and partnering with civil society groups and NGO networks to advance the cause of the oppressed Lumad and the endangered Philippine environment. Bulatlat.com serves as a social movement for the Lumad and the environment by monitoring, reporting and making visible offline activism; articulating the movement's agenda, identities, aesthetics and narratives; and thus aligning online activism with offline activism. It covers cultural presentations such as songs, poems, a play re-enacting the atrocities of the state forces in Mindanao and testimonies by those who were at the scene of the killing of Lumad leaders or the massacre of family members. This section demonstrates that online alternative media amplify offline activism since publicising it leads to greater support from both the policy-makers and the masses of people.

These cultural presentations served as expressions of protest, cries for justice and expressions of solidarity with the oppressed Lumad and the devastated environment. In 'Gathering for Lumad weaves peoples' high resolve for solidarity, justice' (22 September 2015), supporters from various groups registered their solidarity with the Lumad struggle for justice, self-determination and freedom through cultural presentations held at Mandell Hall, Trinity University in Quezon City on 18 September. Lumad from Davao, Bukidnon and Surigao del Sur who were victims of militarisation recounted their harrowing experiences of human rights violations. Telling of such a gathering, Mabalay (2015) writes:

> Combined emotions of grief, rage, desire for justice, and solidarity to support and defend the Lumad were felt by those who participated in the cultural-solidarity gathering organized by civil society organizations such as Promotion of Church People's Response (PCPR), Kasimbayan/ECD, Bayan, and Katribu. Aside from the prevailing sentiment of solidarity felt from the gathering, it also aimed to gather a minimum of P50,000 as support for the campaign of Lumad against militarization and provide for the primary needs of the refugees in evacuation centers.

The protest caravan known as Manilakbayan has affected the capital of the Philippines, Manila. In '#Manilakbayan2015: "We have affected the center"' (22 November 2015), Ayroso (2015c) writes about the 700-strong protest caravan consisting of hundreds of Lumad and hundreds of their supporters who travelled 1000 kilometres through the Visayas, Bicol and Southern Tagalog all the way to Manila. They marched hundreds of kilometres, staged dozens of protests and had some skirmishes with police.

Their calls were: 'Stop Lumad killings, Save our schools, Pull out military from the communities, Disband paramilitary groups'. Manilakbayan caught the attention of, and drew overwhelming support from, schools, students, athletes, netizens, the Catholic Church and other church denominations, NGOs, showbusiness personalities, Aldub fans and even local government councils, although the national government ignored them. A chain reaction of protest and calls on the government was the outcome of the Manilakbayan, ramping up the struggle for social and environmental justice for the Lumad.

Aside from cultural performances, protest caravans, global days of action for the Lumad and public statements, civil society organisations in the Philippines have also been working at the grassroots level on various forms of protest against the encroachment and destruc-

tive effects of neoliberal capitalism. In an advocacy article entitled 'A world to win: people's actions on climate change' (26 November 2015), Leon Dulce (2015b) describes the growing resistance of peasant, fisher folk, indigenous people and other grassroots communities who are staging various forms of protest, from people's barricades and picket actions to calibrated acts of sabotage and ultimately armed resistance, which successfully are delaying or ousting mining projects from the north to the south of the Philippines. In Batangas City, a participatory environmental investigative mission on the proposed JG Summit-owned coal power project was launched to ascertain the possible ecological and health impacts of the project. The Roman Catholic Church also set out on a million-signature campaign against coal power projects as a concrete response to Pope Francis's encyclical, Laudato Si. Progressive NGOs have established community-based renewable energy systems and sustainable agriculture farms to deliver basic needs such as food security and rural electrification.

Data discussion, summary and conclusion

The framing analysis of alternative news by the alternative media outfit bulatlat.com and articles posted by civil society groups and NGO networks on their websites revealed two frames: the human rights frame and the climate crisis frame, which are intertwined in more of the articles analyzed. The protection of the human rights of the Lumad, as shown in this article, is intertwined with the protection of the environment—the ancestral lands of the indigenous peoples. Thus the struggle of the Lumad and people who fight for them is for social justice as well as environmental justice.

According to the US Department of Energy, environmental justice is

> fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people with respect to development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Fair treatment means that no population bears a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or from the execution of federal, state, and local laws; regulations; and policies. Meaningful involvement requires effective access to decision makers for all, and the ability in all communities to make informed decisions and take positive actions to produce environmental justice for themselves.

Hawkins (2010) discusses the connection between social justice and environmental justice, defining environmental justice as the right of current and future generations to a clean, healthy and safe environment. She cites Hancock's (2003) definition of 'environmental human rights' as the human right to live in an environment free from toxic pollution and to exercise control over local natural resources. The poorest people, the marginalised communities and the ethnic minorities, pay the greatest cost for ecological damage, including loss of access to natural resources. It can never be emphasised enough that it is essential to secure environmental justice as a basic human right.

Alternative media's role in this socio-environmental movement is shown to be vital in this study. Four categories of the role of alternative media have been identified in the study, all showing the need to present critical and counter-hegemonic content that opposes the values of the neoliberal economic system currently in place. The first category shows alternative media as giving a voice to the exploited, at the same time revealing the intertwined human rights and climate crisis frames. The second category shows alternative media as social movement

media—the media produced by civil society groups and NGO networks through press releases, campaign posters and advocacy articles posted on their websites. The third category shows alternative media outfits as the partners of social movements fulfilling three other functions: as monitor, articulator and network-builder, publicising the social movement's programs and activities, articulating their assessment of the consequences of the neoliberal policies of the state and their alternative development model, and strengthening and expanding networks.

Finally, the fourth category shows the role of alternative media outfits in making visible the offline activism of social movement actors, in the process fulfilling its fourfold function of giving voice to the voiceless; monitoring the programs and activities of social movement actors; articulating the social movement's identities, aesthetics, narratives and agenda; and strengthening and potentially enlarging networks through its online platform and publicity for events by gaining more sympathy and support from people and groups, from the local to the global arenas.

This discussion shows that alternative media outfits can actually complement the social movement media, or the media produced by civil society groups who are part of the social movement. Alternative media outfits can monitor programs and activities, make visible and amplify what the social movement agents are doing, articulate their agenda, give voice to the voiceless and forge solidarities through their media power. At the same time, civil society groups' online media presented on their own websites are rhizomatic in nature, as they link with other groups online and use the power of social media.

While the supporters and campaigners of the corporate mining industries and monocrop plantations refuse to budge from their complacency, the increase in support that has created networks of groups and movements from the Western and Asian countries proves that the work of social movement and the role of alternative media have not been in vain. The challenge of confronting neoliberalism and mitigating climate crisis continues; hence, future research needs to focus on assessing the impact of specific social movements and of alternative media through other qualitative methods, such as key informant interviews and ethnographic and/or quantitative methods.

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CHAPTER 71

Indymedia and the Long Story of Rebellion Against Neoliberal Capitalism

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Abstract

Indymedia was born of the anti-globalisation movement of the late 1990s and quickly spread to become a social movement in its own right. This article reflects on how prescient the claims of the anti-globalisation movement have proven to be and how 20 years ago Indymedia and the anti-globalisation movement predicted there was trouble ahead and that neoliberalism was a central part of the problem. It notes how a history of struggle and protest emanating from the days of Indymedia has developed over time building a counter-politics that is becoming ever wiser about the multiple intersectional harms of capitalism and ever more sophisticated in its political response. The challenge is what comes next.

Keywords

activism, anti-globalisation, Indymedia, Internet, neoliberalism, protest

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Indymedia is now part of history—something to look back on fondly and mull over the good old days when protest seemed to matter and the Internet still held the promise of revolutionary potential. It was born of the anti-globalisation movement of the late 1990s and quickly spread to become a social movement in its own right. It came into the public consciousness at what became known as 'The Battle of Seattle' on 30 November 1999 (Fenton, 2016). As an alliance of labour and environmental activists congregated in Seattle in opposition to the neoliberal politics of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), little did they know that just under 10 years later we would be in the grips of a financial crisis brought about by some of the very forces they were objecting to. Although the Battle of Seattle was portrayed by much of the mainstream media as a group of anarchists hell-bent on destruction, in reality the anti-globalisation movement was made up of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), debt campaigners, students and indigenous peoples, all finding common cause in the harms committed by forms of trade liberalisation that undermine local economies, decimate communities and serve global corporate expansion above all else (Downing, 2003). How very prescient.

Twenty years later, neoliberalism has run amok. The brutal form of capitalism that many of us now exist within has massively increased global and national inequality with the accumulation of wealth in ever fewer hands (Dorling, 2014; Oxfam, 2019) and has led to more precarious and insecure labour (Armstrong, 2018), with increases in poverty (Armstrong, 2018; Piketty, 2014) and massive environmental degradation as a result of extractive relations to nature (IPCC, 2018) alongside the hollowing out of democracy by market forces (Brown, 2015). And as Fraser and Jaeggi (2018) note, it has involved 'the corporate capture of political parties and public institutions at the level of the territorial state . . . [and] . . . the usurpation of political decision making power at the transnational level by global finance' (p. 3).

Twenty years ago, the protest against the neoliberal policies that contributed to the current crises was huge, transnational and fast moving. A petition of more than 1700 groups, mostly from the Global South, was raised within a day to object to how the WTO talks were being conducted. At the time, it was believed to be one of the largest and fastest responses ever on a global protest issue made possible because of digital communications (Halleck, 2002). Back then, that seemed to count. Now of course, hundreds of thousands can sign petitions from all over the world and no one blinks an eye. This was followed by a march of more than 5000 people led by steelworkers, trade unions and students indicative of a new mode of coalition building and an increased awareness that neoliberal trade policy was destroying livelihoods around the world and wreaking havoc on the environment. Simultaneously, it was claimed that nearly 1200 NGOs in 87 countries called for the wholesale reform of the WTO staging their own protests wherever they were located. The Internet became a crucial part of their strategies. The Independent Media Centre, itself a coalition of different alternative media groups and activists, was formed to provide grassroots coverage and counter mainstream misrepresentations, respond to journalists, and distribute up to the minute reports, video footage, photos and audio. As one activist said, 'Indymedia goes to where the silences are' (cited in Pickard, 2006: 20). During the Seattle demonstration, the site logged more than 2 million hits and was featured on major news outlets. This was collective citizen journalism combined with Internet activism, and it worked. Independent Media Centres sprang up on every continent connecting protests around the world, building participation in the movement and bringing people news and information they were unable to get from the mainstream

media while attempting to provide non-hierarchical and inclusive forms of media production, at a speed that was unprecedented (Pickard, 2006). Indymedia was exciting and hopeful: this was the moment that democratic, non-corporate, citizen-controlled media production could flourish—it had a movement to organise around and a platform to distribute from (Kidd, 2003). Yet, 20 years on things have only got worse—we are faced with massive and unprecedented inequality, exasperated citizens in degenerative democracies with deeply degraded public spheres—so did Indymedia fail? What sense can we make of this as media scholars?

While the protests may change and the media activism adapts to the technological environment it is part of, the same questions about who holds the balance of power pertain now as they did then. The media activist is able to use digital media to mobilise social protest but seems unlikely to be able to overthrow global capitalism. And while alternative media producers can circulate oppositional and counter-hegemonic content with increasing ease, legacy media still dominates the media landscape (Media Reform Coalition (MRC), 2018). Even after Indymedia's heyday, when digital activism was sometimes (and wrongly) credited with sole responsibility for the uprisings that came to be known as the Arab Spring, more measured analyses have noted how elite power often works behind our backs and out of view and is largely unaffected by major forms of protest that have followed in the anti-globalisation movement's wake (such as Occupy, the Umbrella movement and pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, and climate change strikes across many nations). We have more protest than ever before and more radical media sites, production and distribution than ever before, yet we also have to recognise that global inequalities between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless are increasing while environmental degradation continues apace.

One simple response is that as inspiring and exciting as digital activism can be, technology alone is never the answer if global capitalism is the problem. Digital activism may begin with a revolutionary impulse but too often becomes the end focus itself as the means of communication is invested with the ability to undermine dominant power and challenge authority. However radical alternative media is and digital activism can be, turned inwards it becomes fragmentary and loses sight of the broader politics and solidarity building required to form counter-hegemonic blocs and shift power. Some media theorists were lured into the same trap and too quickly heralded new technology as political saviour. Much of this literature chimes with Castells' argument that the Internet offers multiple prospects for intervention and manipulation coming from a myriad of social nodes that can combine to create a new symbolic counter-force capable of shifting dominant power relations and empowering sovereign audiences through the creative autonomy bestowed upon them. Ultimately, Castells (2009) suggests this could provide 'the material and cultural basis for the anarchist utopia of networked self-management to become a social practice' (p. 346) such that 'significant political change will result, in due time, from the actions of networked social movements' p. 312). Such accounts depend on the implicit assumptions about the consequential relations between networked communications and political demands that will result in social and political change. But the political demands were often unclear. The radical democratic politics on which Indymedia operated sought to diminish structural inequalities and be dynamically decentralised, non-hierarchical, inclusive and open—a politics deemed well-suited to the architecture of the Internet. Hence, although many of the activists involved were vehemently

opposed to corporate capitalism, they were reluctant to organise around this principle for fear of adopting what could be seen as yet another totalising and exclusionary grand narrative.

Twenty years on and few remain in thrall to the revolutionary potential of the Internet that has been well and truly captured by capitalism. The tech giants dominate our digital lives—Facebook, Alphabet (the parent company of Google), Amazon, Microsoft and Apple together have a combined annual revenue larger than the gross domestic product (GDP) of 90% of the world's countries (Lawrence and Laybourn-Langton, 2019). Apple is the first trillion-dollar company in history. Jeff Bezos, the founder and owner of Amazon, is the richest person in history, with his net wealth increasing by US$400 million a day in 2018. These corporations form the largest oligopolies the world has ever seen. They are resistant to traditional forms of regulation and are largely out of reach of democratically organised political will-formation.

Meanwhile, Facebook is fast becoming the dominant digital platform for news. Google has some 90% of global desktop search, and Google and Facebook together account for around two-thirds of all digital advertising in the United States (eMarketer, 2019). According to the *Wall Street Journal* (2017), 85 cents of every dollar spent on digital advertising in America goes to Google and Facebook, evidence of a concentration of market power in two companies that not only own the playing field but are able to set the rules of the game as well. And in 2019 they soaked up 67% of the world's digital ad spend (eMarketer, 2019). These companies are not only the most concentrated forms of media ownership we have ever seen, but they are also key to the contemporary condition of advanced capitalism. The bewildering market power wielded by the likes of Google and Facebook has not come at the expense of the influence of mainstream press and broadcasters. Google, Facebook and Twitter are, if anything, *reinforcing* the agenda-setting power of the mainstream news brands by facilitating their increased circulation through algorithms. The gatekeeping power of Google and Facebook works *in tandem* with that of mainstream news providers, mutually reinforcing each other around what they consider to be real, legitimate and authoritative news (MRC, 2018).

Technology may not be the answer, but the politics that Indymedia and the anti-globalisation movement were campaigning against did point us in the right direction. Continued deregulation of the market has enabled the amassing of global corporate capital and huge economic inequality. In 2011, the Occupy movement took this politics further and linked inequality directly to the demise of democracy. But still the likes of the WTO aim to maximise the flow of international trade uninhibited by national policies that may seek to protect the national interest and the public good to the advantage of mega global corporations (including media and tech corporations). Global capitalist geo-political hegemonies are ever more entrenched. Most recently, we have seen this in the form of financialised capitalism that involves a new layer of governance through global financial institutions—the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the WTO, the European Central Bank and bond rating agencies—that set the rules around free trade, are entirely unaccountable and largely untouched by political action at the state level, yet set strict limits on what states can and cannot do. This was made alarmingly clear in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008 when these organisations instructed national governments how to order their economies so that banks and financial agencies could recoup the finance they had lent to governments in order to solve the problems they had brought about in the first place through irresponsibly and recklessly encouraging individual debt. As Davis (2019) notes, '[t]he largest transnational

corporations and financial institutions now control more funds than most of our largest economies' (p. 47). While nation states are losing control of things such as environmental degradation, climate change, food distribution and energy resources, they are left having to cope with the consequences of reduced corporate taxation, deregulation and a weakened welfare state, leading to more crime, more homelessness, more ill-health and more protest. Citizens experience this variously as a loss of sovereignty, being over-looked and left behind or simply as feeling irrelevant (CSF, 2018).

The precise configuration of capitalism at any one time is reliant on the dynamic between economic power and political power with citizens having virtually no influence over the former and increasingly being squeezed out of the latter. But Indymedia also taught us that this does not mean that economic power is totalising or that the capitalist state has a single and unified political character. Struggles take place constantly within capitalism and in relation to the state: whether they come from media activists, Black activists, climate activists, anarchists, socialists or feminists. These struggles do not just evaporate into thin air, they leave trails of hope and provide tracks for other movements to take up the baton. In his work on media reform movements, McChesney (2008) argues that the contemporary US media reform movement was triggered by the anti-globalisation struggles which raised serious questions about the incorporation of the right to communicate within neoliberal frames and policies in which Indymedia was key. The reverberations did not stop there.

In 2018, the teenager Greta Thunberg went on strike from school in Stockholm Sweden in response to the lack of government action about climate breakdown. She said she was inspired by the young people in Parkland, Florida, who led a national wave of class walkouts demanding tough controls on gun ownership after 17 people were murdered at their school in February 2018. In turn, Thunberg inspired youth climate strikes in 125 countries across the globe with an estimated 1.6 million young people participating. As heroic as Thunberg is, she is not a lone traveller but part of a transnational response that has been building over decades. The anti-globalisation movement and Indymedia were part of this history of struggle and protest that grows and develops over time building a counter-politics that is becoming ever wiser about the intersectional harms of capitalism and ever more sophisticated in its political response.

The latest environmental movements seem to be gathering more public support. In the United Kingdom, Extinction Rebellion has sparked a raft of direct action and civil disobedience that has quickly spread. In the United States, the Sunrise Movement occupied the office of Nancy Pelosi demanding Congress immediately adopt a rapid decarbonisation framework (Klein, 2019). Although climate change activism has a long history, the difference now is that capitalism is evidently failing on multiple fronts and people are beginning to join the dots. As Naomi Klein notes, the destruction of the planet goes hand in hand with the destruction of people's lives in other ways, from wage stagnation, to gaping inequalities to crumbling services, to the rise of the far-right and the collapse of our information ecology, and all are marked by race, gender and class. It is the system of global capitalism that needs to change, and more and more people know it. Everywhere you look, in neoliberal economies around the world, the stark contradiction of growing inequalities between rich and poor while striving for economic growth against all odds, with dire consequences for the planet and its inhabitants, is finally being understood. A market-driven politics that drives ever higher production

output, ever worse labour conditions and demands ever increasing consumption has come up against the demise of collective services on which democracy depends, including news and information provision.

Twenty years ago, Indymedia and the anti-globalisation movement knew there was trouble ahead and that neoliberalism was part of the problem. They started to set out the hard edges of the jigsaw. Twenty years on, it is abundantly clear that neoliberalism is not working for the vast majority of people, many of whom are beginning to acknowledge that global capitalism is the cause and are beginning to rebel against an economic system hell-bent on profit at the expense of their futures. The pieces of the jigsaw are beginning to fall into place and the picture is not pretty. Over the next 20 years, we need to break it up and start anew.

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CHAPTER 72

Bearing Witness to Authoritarianism and Commoning through Video Activism and Political Film-Making after the Gezi Protests

Özge Özdüzen

In *The Aesthetics of Global Protest: Visual Culture and Communication,* edited by Aidan McGarry, Itir Erhart, Hande Eslen-Ziya, Olu Jenzen, and Umut Korkut, 191–210. Amsterdam University Press, 2020.

Abstract

This chapter examines the intersection of politics and the culture of visual media to delineate the ways in which activists/artists have coped with increasing authoritarianism in Turkey following the Gezi Park protests. The study relies on in-depth interviews and participant observation with video activists and film-makers as well as textual analysis of recent films and videos with an aim to capture the political voice and ongoing creative resistance in urban centres since 2013. By clustering recent videos and films together in the light of their aesthetics of protest against the Islamist and neoliberal authoritarianism of the AKP (Justice and Development Party), the chapter investigates how creative communities used 'visual

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commons' to engage in democracy, relate to politics in an increasingly authoritarian setting, and deal with urban issues.

Keywords

Gezi Park, creative resistance, authoritarianism, video activism, documentary activism, visual commons

Introduction

In the last decade, political image and alternative media outlets have set the visual scene of Turkey. Documentaphobia (Bernstein 1994; Sönmez 2015) and videophobia rely on audiences' fears of direct visual exposure to social and political facts, especially based on 'an expository mode of filming including the voice of God narration' (Nichols 1983). Although such overarching phobias provide a factual framework for the production and circulation of activist media in Turkey, creative resistance and spatial strategies are still common traits of political film-making and video activism. This chapter examines the intersection of politics and the culture of alternative visual media to delineate the ways in which activists/artists have coped with and bore witness to increasing authoritarianism in Turkey in the aftermath of the Gezi Park protests. The study, by focusing on the political voice in recent activist films and videos from Turkey, aims to portray the ongoing creative resistance of activist/artists since 2013. It gives a glimpse of how creative communities engage in democracy and deal with ecological and urban issues through videos and films. The chapter will further discuss how the AKP (Justice and Development Party) governments in power, their neoliberal and Islamist urban control (Akçalı and Korkut 2015; Ozduzen 2018, 2019) and media and Internet regulation (Yeşil 2018) have created a generation of visual activists foregrounding a new type of aesthetics of protests in which 'the visibility of protest is both a matter of direct visual experience and of images' (see Faulkner, this volume).

Recently, videos and political films became two 'commons' in authoritarian Turkey in that their makers and audiences engaged in ecological citizenship over spaces and visual material. Commoning is 'a way of pointing out that resources should be owned and managed collectively as shared/common goods. The concept of commons is not limited to urban commons (Bromley 2008; Harvey 2012), but extend to knowledge, social, intellectual, cultural or musical commons' (Bruun 2015: 154). Video activists and political film-makers in Turkey aim to witness, record and disseminate various social movements and resistances on social, economic, political and cultural injustices by producing and circulating visual commons. Butler (2015: 11) argues that 'only when bodies assemble on the street, in the square, or in other public (including virtual) space, they exercise a plural and performative right to appear and instate the body amid the political field, which delivers a bodily demand for a liveable set of economic, social and political conditions against induced forms of precarity'. In capturing the bodily demands of activists, the most important aspect of the aesthetics of videos and films in question is the camera's relation to the protest space, the position of the activists' bodies within the frame and the bodies of the recording video-makers/film-makers within the political field, thus constituting a public space between the digital and the material (McGarry et al., this volume).

The chapter rests on the argument borrowed from McGarry, and restate the quote that 'politics is not produced solely by the vocalised claims or demands of protestors but by their action, and sometimes their inaction, thus the aesthetics of protest reveals how democracy is constituted through performance or images' (McGarry 2017: 2). For this, first, I will look at how video/ film activists cope with direct state violence on streets or indirect forms of state violence, particularly censorship following the Gezi Park protests. Second, I will address how the videos and films capture and document visual and creative attempts to constitute democracy in contemporary Turkey such as the Occupy Gezi and No! campaigns against Tayyip Erdoğan's presidency [1] as well as the aspects of Kurdish struggle. [2] Within this framework, in this chapter, I will focus on the censored films and popular activist videos mostly relying on the testimonies of their makers through in-depth interviews. In my spatial ethnographic research in 2013–2014 and 2016–2017 within cultural spaces in Istanbul that mimicked the Gezi experience, I also followed the circulation contexts of videos/films and had access to their makers. The film-makers include Reyan Tuvi (the director of *Love Will Change the Earth*, 2014), Ayşe Çetinbaş [3] (the producer of *Bakur*, directed by Çayan Demirel and Ertuğrul Mavioğlu, 2015) and Kazım Öz (the director of *Zer*, 2017), as well as the video activists Fatih Pınar, İmre Azem, Kazım Kızıl from Kamera Sokak, and Güliz Sağlam from Videoccupy and the Women for Peace Initiative. The censorship of *Love Will Change the Earth* at the International Antalya Film Festival (IAFF) in 2014 along with the censorship of *Bakur* a year later at the International Istanbul Film Festival (IIFF) signalled a new era for cultural and political regulation in Turkey. The chapter also captures a newer case of censorship, namely *Zer*, in 2017 at the IIFF.

In-depth interviews and participant observation for this research commenced in 2014 during the Documentarist film festival, followed by my participation in other politically engaged screenings and festivals from 2015 to 2017. I chose the research participants based on the reception contexts of their films and videos. The sample of video activists represents the well-known figures of the activist video scene in Turkey and film-makers and producers, whose films on various rights movements were censored by RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council) between 2014 and 2017. Following the Gezi protests, I also collected and downloaded popular activist videos on social movements in Turkey. I collected data on censorship and circulation of films through politically engaged cinema and media collectives and organizations that I took part, including SIYAD (Turkish Film Critics Association). The first part of the chapter delineates the specific authoritarianism of the AKP period (2001–present), while the following section investigates aspects of video and documentary activism between digital and physical activism. The ensuing two sections examine the voices of video/ film-makers and protest aesthetics of videos and films.

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[1] Campaigns against the constitution change comprised of many political organizations, including the main opposition party CHP, the pro-Kurdish party HDP, and other left-wing groups, commenced in February 2017.

[2] The conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party) began in 1984, which resulted in the loss of over 100,000 people and had major social, political, and economic consequences. The PKK has been involved in armed conflict with the Turkish state to create a Kurdish state and later to build Kurdish autonomy. 'Amongst the legal parties, the HDP is the last to represent Kurds and compete under adverse circumstances' (Grigoriadis 2016: 40).

[3] Cetinbas represents *Bakur* as the film's producer because one of the directors had a severe heart failure right before the censorship of *Bakur*.

Turkey's Slide towards Authoritarianism

Coming into power as a 'moderate Islamic' party following the financial crisis in 2001, the AKP governments have evolved into an authoritarian governing rule, especially since their second term in power in 2007. According to Korkut and Eslen-Ziya (2017: 2), 'the more moderate AKP government consolidated its power and merged with the state, the more authoritarian it became to reproduce the semi-democratic centre in a religious conservative form'. While relying on 'a high degree of political recentralization, operating in conjunction with a neo-liberal macroeconomic programme' (Tansel 2019: 321), AKP erected a loyal business class along with its implications for regime change (Esen and Gümüşçü 2018: 350). AKP's regime change has operated not only with the help of state institutions such as local authorities (Tan 2018), where the abovementioned aspiring class is a part, but also with the involvement of religious civil society (Islamist newspapers, communities, associations) and mainstream media.

AKP increasingly constructed a competitive authoritarian regime (Iğsız 2015; Esen and Gümüşçü 2016) following the Gezi protests, which has broader implications for the cultural fabric, including the production and circulation of media. 'Competitive authoritarian systems' (Levitsky and Way 2012) are 'ruled by democratically elected charismatic leaders, who resort to aggressive political discourses that mobilize 'genuine nations' against 'old elites' and divide the remaining world into friends and foes. Political parties create consent, service their clients and replace more independent institutions and state agencies' (Öktem and Akkoyunlu 2016: 470). Increasingly after the Gezi protests, the then Prime Minister Erdoğan's speeches and actions reinforced the existing divisions in society such as the Sunni and Alevi, Turk and Kurd, *çapulcu* and *non-çapulcu.*[4] In this context, society has become more polarised while many cultural institutions have been complicit in the top-down changes. For Eraydin and Taşan-Kok (2014: 123), the state has become less democratic over the years, especially regarding AKP's aggressive responses to any protest and social mobilization, exemplifying heightened police surveillance, the arrest of journalists, and the use of physical force, which instill fear and discourage organized social response.

DIY Visual Activism between Digital and Physical Activism

DIY and user-generated media circumvent mainstream news media, which generally either ignore or disseminate a distorted coverage of protest movements (Thorson et al. 2013: 425). The result is that 'ordinary people, including residents, tourists, soldiers, activists, insurgents and terrorists can bypass established editorial and censorial filters and turn their personal record of an event into a public testimony that disrupt "official" perspectives' (Andén-Papadopoulos 2014: 754). Additionally, 'unlike "traditional" forms of digital activism such as denial-of-service actions or online petitions' (Yang 2016: 14), video activism has a distinctly narrative character. The production of videos in public spaces opens discussions on the functions of activists' bodies as a source of narrative. Video activists' bodies and cameras transform into 'narrative tools', along with the produced photos and videos.

[4] Erdoğan used the term *çapulcu* (marauders) to describe the Gezi protestors, which was deconstructed by the protestors, taking the meaning 'fighting for your rights'.

In most activist videos, audiences do not observe the video activists' body within the frame, but feel the shakiness of the camera, hence, their body movements. Also, their voices interact with other activists or the police, which determine their involvement in the virtual space of the video and the physical space of resistance. The proximity to protest violence makes these amateur recordings an extraordinary 'resource for understanding the subjective experience of ordinary people, who find themselves on the front line of revolutionary struggle' (Snowdon 2014: 401). While some of the videos and films in question are highly professional, especially in terms of editing, some of them like the videos of Videoccupy and Kazım Kızıl, represent amateur recordings. What makes their aesthetics similar is activists' spatial use of filmic spaces with their bodies in physical protest spaces such as eating, praying or listening to music altogether in parks during the protests (*Love Will Change the Earth*/the video of Videoccupy), cooking or playing volleyball together in the 'guerrilla camps' (*Bakur*) or being collectively taken into custody on a random street (Kızıl's video).

Video activism did not start with the Gezi protests in Turkey, but the protests generated an unprecedented number of YouTube videos, recording events within the occupied Gezi Park and other public spaces and reinforcing the sense of sharing and solidarity, whilst consolidating activists' understanding of DIY citizenship. Activist communities created their DIY networks of offline media such as film festival communities (Ozduzen 2018) or online media networks such as Facebook groups of the park forums e.g. Resist Kadikoy and online bulletins such as 'The Parks Are Ours' (Akçalı 2018). These forms of media activism emerged out of a young, urban movement with a high ecological and environmental awareness to generate a more sustainable future and find creative ways of disseminating their discontent with the political regime.

While Istanbul transformed into a video city during the Gezi protests (Jenzen et al., this volume), it has long been a 'cinematic city' (Brundson 2012), a home for various film industries from Yesilcam [5] to New Turkish Cinema. Istanbul's 'film identity' has changed in the 2000s primarily due to the emergence of an international 'New Turkish Cinema'. Since 1996 (Erdoğan and Göktürk 2001; Suner 2010), it has entered an era defined by its 'artsy' stylistic and narrative features and its independent infrastructure of production and distribution. Economic liberalization was an important reason behind 'the revival in the film industry in the 1990s, which also transformed creative industries, including a booming art scene' (Öz and Özkaracalar 2017: 67). Increasing numbers and impact of film festivals and alternative exhibition avenues have also played fundamental roles in Istanbul's shifting film identity, particularly in comparison to the remnants from the historical film cluster in Beyoglu (Öz and Özkaracalar 2017: 79–83). This could be related to top-down urban regeneration programmes, including the loss of large-format movie theatres.

In response to the authoritarianism of AKP, the influence of leftist and alternative outlets has increased in the 2000s and 2010s. Meanwhile many mainstream festivals and media platforms conformed to the silencing mechanisms of the regime by, for instance, shutting down their documentary sections as was the case with IAFF following their censoring of *Love Will Change the Earth*. It is important to note what counts as a political voice both as films and film festivals during periods when laws are suspended and reformulated according

[5] The Yeşilçam film industry (mostly melodramas, comedy and action films) is the 'Turkish Hollywood' active from the 1950s to late 1980s, which was extremely popular across Turkey unlike any other era.

to official perceptions (see Viernes, this volume). While some mainstream avenues covertly complied with the ideologies of the state, Karaca (2011: 156) identifies how contemporary art from Turkey over the past fifteen years has largely centred on political works regardless. The explicitly political image dealing with the social and political predicaments has become a major currency in the circulation of art and 'the way silencing mechanisms work and are addressed leads to a high visibility of censorship and visible responses' (Karaca 2011: 179–180). Although censorship is not a new phenomenon as Kurdish films have been widely censored, the Gezi protests and the popularity of the pro-Kurdish party HDP amongst Kurdish and Turkish publics in the early 2010s have triggered a new wave of censorship.

Glimpses from Video Activism in Turkey

For years, Istanbul has been the centre of video and media activism, including Fatih Pınar, İmre Azem and Videoccupy. However, most existing collectives chose Izmir and Ankara as their headquarters, which accounts for the regional spread of media activism and shifting place-making practices of video and visual activists vis-à-vis the authoritarian urban politics in Istanbul. Azem's documentary *Ekümenopolis*,[6] a landmark of activist film/ documentary, portrays photographic images and footage from the construction projects such as the Third Bridge and the Marmaray in Istanbul that have massacred the last remaining forests, and focuses on not only experts' opinions but also people's resistance against the top-down urban renewal projects. Azem (interview by author, August 2017) talks about how he has dealt with authoritarianism:

> I started making videos for Diken following the Gezi protests to capture ongoing social movements to give voice those people, whose voices were unheard, and portray what wasn't shown on mainstream media. My first video was on the anniversary meeting of Hrant Dink's assassination. I also made videos on [incursions into] labour rights in 'New Turkey'. For instance, when ten workers were killed at Torunlar Centre's construction site in Istanbul after an elevator carrying them plunged to the ground in 2014, I went there to record on-site resistance and violence. Furthermore, I travelled outside of Istanbul. For instance, I went to Soma in 2014 following the coal mine fire with a death toll of 301 miners to show the suffering and potential resistance.

Azem participated in the DIY ecologic citizenship by creating videos on various issues from labour rights to assassinations. Similar to other research participants, Gezi protests became a trademark moment in his understanding of visual activism. When I met him in 2017, he was coming out of a meeting of activists, architects and urban planners at the TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects), which has been an active party to urban social movements. To capture the changes in his ways of combating the authoritarian state, I focus on two videos on Pride in Beyoglu in different years after the Gezi protests. Pride 2014[7] was among the most crowded pride walks in the history of Turkey. The video highlights the colours, clothes, bands of the LGBTI+ communities on Taksim's streets in June 2014 by using close-ups of LGBTI+ activists, combined with long and medium-shots of marching and dancing crowds.

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[6] *Ekümenopolis: Ucu Olmayan Şehir* (video), YouTube, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=maEcPKBXV0M&t=376s, accessed 14.03.18.

[7] *Pride Taksim* (video), Vimeo, 30 June 2014, https://vimeo.com/99517268, accessed 14.03.18.

Following 2014, the pride walks have forcefully been prohibited, partly with an excuse that they coincided with Ramadan. Far-right groups, along with the government, threatened the LGBTI+ groups and recused to religious discourses, related to the holy month of Muslims in order to bolster public support for their violent attacks. Referring to ambiguously defined religious practices as an excuse has become a general authoritarian pattern to suppress left-leaning and liberal groups by the AKP government. While Pride was prohibited, LGBTI+ communities continued to go out in Taksim, which has been the original location of Pride since 2007. The video from 2014 shows this as resistance by mainly using long shots to capture the density of crowds, whereas the video from 2017[8] mostly consists of an interview with an LGBTI+ activist as the walk could not take place due to heavy police intervention. On the recorded interview, audiences can discern that the police forces were on a witch hunt, constantly passing by and running after those alleged 'suspects' in front of the camera. Both videos unfold the ways that the bodies of protestors utilize public spaces in different ways when authoritarianism encroaches on everyday life in different levels, which radically transforms the costumes, objects and voices within the frame. The touchstone of the video from 2014 is the vivid use of colours, revealed through the LGBTI+ individuals' costumes. However, the camera also captures greyness of concrete buildings and the dire blackness of police uniforms in 2017.

During my fieldwork in 2017, Azem introduced me to Fatih Pınar. Pınar's most recent and most popular videos on YouTube were made during the curfew in Turkey's Kurdish region in 2016, which represent some of the rare footage from the AKP's recent war in the region. One of these videos[9] depicts Sur (a district of Diyarbakır) after the curfew, which lasted three months and destroyed the whole neighbourhood. It relies on the testimony and memories of witnesses, namely people who had first-hand knowledge of executions and torture carried out by the Turkish state during the curfew. Thus, it runs counter to the state-sanctioned 'truth' about terrorism in the region and represents the political voice of those who suffer from state violence. It features the testimony of a mother who lost her daughter due to police violence during curfew. The video does not treat residents of Sur 'as objects of political subjugation or victims but shows the ways in which they became voluntary subjects of knowledge and purposeful subjects aware of their own voices' (Spence and Avcı 2013: 299). Similar to other videos that came after the Gezi protests, this video does not capture crowds, but features individuals' stories and memories of state violence and therefore becomes the voice of agents who are not afraid to express their grief against the authoritarian practices of the state. Pınar (interview by the author, February 2018) recounted how he copes with increasing state violence as follows:

> Following the Gezi protests, there has been a variety of processes of resistance from Soma[10] to Validebağ.[11] I recorded the social movements and made videos during the curfews in Kurdish towns

[8] *Pride Taksim* (video), Vimeo, 26 June 2017, https://vimeo.com/223111378, accessed 14.03.18.

[9] *Sur after the Curfew* (video), YouTube, 9 February 2016, https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=VJsfBpvvUJY, accessed 14.03.18.

[10] In May 2014, 300 mine workers died in Soma (north Aegean Turkey) due to a mine explosion, leading to strike and protests.

[11] Validebağ Volunteers (1995) were formed by neighbourhood residents against Validebağ Woods' commodification and organized petitions and demonstrations. Their widest social movement, called 'Validebag Resistance' and commonly referred to as 'Small Gezi', took place in 2014 when the government wanted to build a

> and neighbourhoods without self-censoring. If Ahmet Şık [12] is on trial and there is a protest, I record it even if I don't circulate it instantly. However, social movements on the streets are in decline. Yet, activism is not only about street movements. There is so much to do now as the impact of authoritarianism has increased. For instance, I made a short video for the first day of trials of Academics for Peace [13] and circulated it. Now there is so much resistance around courts.

In the aftermath of making and circulating these videos, Pınar continued with recording cases such as Ahmet Şık's trial but has not been active in circulating them due to his feeling more 'unsafe' as he recounted to me. In 2018, he was looking into independent funds to facilitate his act of visual commoning as media outlets were not employing him anymore.

In addition to Pınar and Azem as more professional activists, during and following the Gezi many collectives, including 'ordinary' people, have transitioned into what Andén-Papadopoulos (2014: 754) calls 'citizen camera- witnesses', defined as 'camera-wielding political activists and dissidents that put their lives at risk to produce public testimony and mobilize global solidarity through the affective power of the visual'. These videos record activists' and police's practices, but the camera identifies with protestors during police interventions. Hence, audiences view events from the activists' perspective. One of the most well-known video collectives during the Gezi period was Videoccupy. Güliz Sağlam from Videoccupy (interview by the author, December 2018), who has also collectively produced and circulated videos as part of the Women for Peace Initiative to highlight the testimony of women in the Kurdish region, expressed the evolution of their 'citizen camera-witnessing' and the ways she resisted the authoritarian state:

> Videoccupy met in Gezi Park and recorded everyday life in the park and street protests. Everyone in the collective took the initiative to record events and circulate them instantly. After the occupation was over, we didn't use the same name but some of us formed Vidyo Kolektif and mostly followed women's struggles. In May 2016, when I was recording the Gezi protests' anniversary, police took my camera and asked me to delete some footage, which put me off from recording, but I recently made a video of the 8th of March for the *Taz* newspaper, which is diasporic media based in Germany.

Like other film and media communities that used the park as a physical space of DIY media activism, such as film festival circuits (Ozduzen 2018), video activists encountered each other and organized into action by using protest camps as their base. Videoccupy created 'visual commons' and recorded everyday life in protest camps, such as concerts, gatherings, police interventions, communal dinners or Friday prayers. The most viewed video of the Videoccupy is the police intervention at Gezi Park on 22 June 2013. [14] Like other videos on state violence, the shaky camera is the landmark of its aesthetics. Bolstering its shaky existence, the camera does not focus on an individual story but captures the movements and bodies of mass numbers of people. It showcases the ways crowds attempt to run away from persistent

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mosque in the woods.

[12] A journalist who was jailed for a year in 2011-2012 and another year in 2017-2018. Now he is an MP of the pro-Kurdish party HDP.

[13] The Academics for Peace represent over 2,000 academics from Turkey who signed a petition in January 2016 to end AKP's violence in the Kurdish region. They have since been brought to court and been fired from their jobs. Some were taken into custody and four of them were imprisoned.

[14] *Police Intervention at the Taksim Square* 22.06.13 (video), YouTube, 23 June 2013, https://www. youtube.com/watch?v=V4pyzFeIHJo, accessed 14.03.18.

police violence and chaos on the streets. Rather than narrating individual stories, these videos benefit from the cacophony of voices, multiplicity of spaces, and consistent movement/action.

While Videoccupy is a single-event focused initiative and remained as a symbol of the Gezi protests, Camera Street prevailed in subsequent social movements, following a diversity of resistances around Izmir, including ecological movements, such as the anti-coal movement in Yırca.[15] The chosen video of Camera Street[16] shows the momentary instance of how video activists are taken into custody along with other activists. In these moments, the camera captures the ongoing, fast-pace dynamic on the streets, which exemplifies the everyday effects of authoritarianism. Abusive power of the police, implemented through threats and physical assaults, is a growing trend in that police forcefully ask activists to erase their recorded witnessing as it was the case with two of my participants, Sağlam and Kazım Kızıl (Camera Street). Video activists still utilize visible technological tools to record ongoing state violence even when they are increasingly subject to state violence, exemplified by the detention and arrest of Kızıl. In one of Kızıl's videos, the moment police violence target him and other activists are showcased.

While Kızıl was filming other people's detention at the boycott in Izmir, he ended up filming his own detention. During this incident, audiences see Kızıl's camera and hear his conversation with the police. The video originally intends to record other activists on site, but eventually the audience hears and sees the video activist, as the camera unintentionally captures his own body movements and personal experience of state violence. Kızıl was taken into custody once more on 17 April 2017 along with six other activists. Although Kızıl, who was recording a protest related to plebiscite results, presented his press card to the police, he was taken into custody and arrested on 21 April 2017 on charges of 'insulting the president'. Effectively operating as lèse majesté, the insult clause has become a ludicrous reason for journalists, activists and academics to be sacked, censored and arrested. Kızıl (interview by the author, March 2018) tells the story of Camera Street and his ongoing visual activism:

> Camera Street started as the Izmir branch of Gezi's DIY media. We have met each other once in every two weeks since then although we are not that active now. As the social movements on the streets lessened, our collective has also dispersed. To change this trend, we need to go beyond documenting state violence on the streets and focus on other issues, such as political prisoners, refugees, women's or children's issues or the economic crisis.

Increasing authoritarianism has also opened a room for a discussion on how to transcend formulas of Occupy activism. Rather than solely following street movements, video collectives capture the routes of refugees, labour rights and court cases. However, video activists could not follow political prisoners inside the court houses as cameras and phones were not allowed. To combat mechanisms of institutional exclusion, some activists drew sketches from the courthouses to visually narrate the situation, such as the drawing of Zeynep Özatalay from the courthouse where two hunger strikers, namely Nuriye Gülmen and Semih Özakça, were on trial in September 2017. There is a forceful passage from video activism to pre-digital activism even if visual activism is persistent.

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[15] A Turkish village where 6,000 olive trees were destroyed to construct a coal-fired power plant.

[16] *Kazım Kızıl's Detention* (video), Facebook, 13 February 2015, https://www.facebook.com/kazimkizil/videos/10152762090042857/, accessed: 14.03.18.

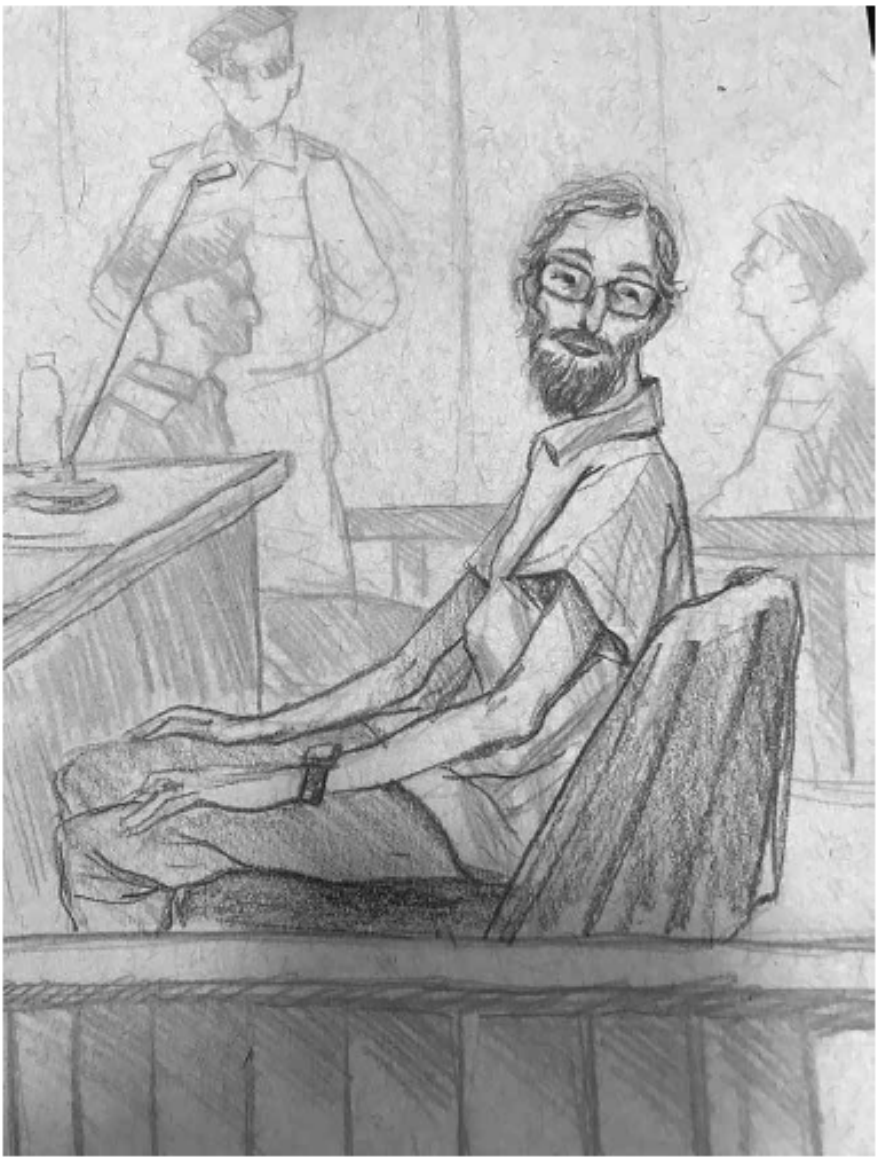


Figure 9.1. Özatalay's drawing of semih Özakça. This image became a touchstone of digitally shared posts on the hunger strike of Özakça and Gülmen.

Filmic Activism against Censorship

Similar to the forceful prohibition of activist videos, the complicity of film funds and mainstream film festivals have limited the production and circulation of politically engaged films. However, this also led to finding alternative locations and strategies. Similar to the police's behaviour towards the video activists Sağlam and Kızıl, *Love Will Change the Earth* was forcefully censored at IAFF in 2014. Although it was scheduled to be screened upon the decision of the preliminary jury and was previously screened and awarded at the Documentarist film festival, it was excluded from the IAFF's programme with an excuse that the subtitles included

'a swear word' targeting the president of Turkey. The censorship was implemented, citing Articles of 125 and 299 of the Turkish Criminal Code, which prohibit 'insulting' the unity of Turkey and its president, namely, Erdoğan. However, the documentary focuses on the practices of Turkey's disconnected populace, including a plethora of activists, such as youth, nurses, Alevites, and Kemalists, who fought to reclaim Gezi Park and thereby challenged the authoritarian politics of the government.

In contrast to the film's tone of coexistence and presentation of multiplicity of political voices, its censorship at the IAFF brought stigmatization of and isolation on the part of the director and the documentary selection committee. Likewise, the initial festival screening of *Bakur* also took place at the Documentarist film festival in the following year (June 2015). These two screenings reflected ongoing right struggles, whilst initiating intersectional bonds between audience members against the re-homogenizing agenda of the government. Three months prior to being censored at the IAFF, the screening of *Love Will Change the Earth* in Documentarist film festival in June 2014 was filled with symbolic slogans and discussions of Gezi protests. Despite the indirect forms of violence, Reyan Tuvi (interview by the author, March 2018) continued producing media: 'I bypass wider mechanisms of censorship by participating in News Watch in Diyarbakir or by making another film. Doing what you can do is the best way to defeat censorship.' The fact that Tuvi has become part of News Watch in the Kurdish region in the aftermath of the arbitrary detention and imprisonment of Kurdish journalists accounts for the increasing convergence of media and cinematic activism in Turkey.

Upon the imprisonment of Kurdish journalists, Kurdish newspapers had to almost shut down in 2016. In order to reinvigorate Kurdish-language journalism, News Watch hosted voluntary activists. These kinds of vernacular alliances were a direct outcome of the Gezi protests, as with Tuvi, who told me that she took the uprising as a point of departure in her subsequent political action. In 2017, she completed her new film *No Place for Tears*, which is an observational documentary portraying local people's everyday life practices in Maheser village. The village lies at the border between Turkey and Syria, facing the Kurdish town Kobane, which was then under the siege of the Islamic State. The documentary provides glimpses of how residents sheltered their neighbours whilst watching the war happening in front of their eyes. Tuvi's engagement with the resistance during the war in the Kurdish regions of Syria and Turkey for her documentary and participation in News Watch foregrounded her visual activism and stance against mainstream festivals and media amidst the ongoing state violence.

While the screening of *Love Will Change the Earth* took place prior to its censorship at the IAFF, the first screening of *Bakur* at the Documentarist film festival followed its censorship at the IIFF. The screening on 15 June in 2015 in Şişli municipality's Cultural Centre started with '*Biji berxwedana Kobane*'[17] slogans by the audience members, representing solidarity with the ongoing Kurdish resistance against the Islamic State in Kobane in Northern Syria. This screening took place when Kurdish guerrillas ceased using guns and pulled back to cross-border zones; therefore, it was yet again a 'special' moment for the Kurdish 'problem' in Turkey. The documentary is based on the first-hand testimony of lower- and higher-ranked guerrillas during the 'peace process'[18] when it was possible for the film crew to enter guer-

[17] 'Long live the Kobane resistance' in Kurdish.

[18] The peace process between the PKK and the Turkish state started in 2009. However, after the pro-Kurdish party HDP got 13% of the votes in the elections on 7 June 2015, the AKP restarted the war in the Kurdish

rilla camps in south-eastern Turkey. *Bakur* illustrates instances of how guerrillas resisted the state, such as their daily exercises or community gatherings and felt strange having to leave behind their camps during the peace process. Its tone relies on an account of the 'human' aspect of the Kurdish armed forces in a bid to challenge the demonising discourse of the mainstream media.

Once the film was censored at the IIFF, audiences established their own meeting venues at parks in Istanbul and Ankara, especially at Abbasağa Park. The structure of the 'censorship forum' at Abbasağa Park allowed various actors to speak out about censorship to counter the official view. Film critics, audiences, intellectuals, and film industry workers, including one of the directors of *Bakur*, Ertuğrul Mavioğlu, spoke about the need to create a network of solidarity and initiate new alliances. The producer Ayşe Çetinbaş (interview by the author, July 2017) expanded on the connections and functions of the Abbasağa censorship forum as a place where communities defied and defeated censorship:

> On the day the censorship happened, we invited film-makers to a restaurant and initiated the email group 'Against Censorship'. Simultaneous with our film's screening, Nadir Öperli's film was to be screened at the IIFF. They were waiting for our sign and upon the censorship of *Bakur*, they withdrew their films and boycotted the IIFF. Then the IIFF fell apart—the juries withdrew, ceremonies were cancelled, and the films were not screened. What we gained were the censorship march and the forum at Abbasağa Park, which were at the intersection of the Gezi protests and Kurdish resistance.

Gezi brought together different actors on the streets. Demirel and Mavioğlu decided to make *Bakur* in the occupied protest camp of Gezi Park. The park became an avenue connecting a journalist (Mavioğlu) and a film-maker (Demirel) to make the film on guerrilla camps in the Kurdish region. As Çetinbaş's comment also shows, Gezi was not only a romantic reference, but it also functioned as a point of departure for activists and audience members to continue to use its practices, such as the forum structure employed in Abbasağa Park.

More recently, Kazım Öz also had to deal with censorship in creative ways. On 11 April 2017 the government rescinded the screening license for his fictional film *Zer*, which narrates the story of a diasporic Kurdish young man, Jan, on a journey from New York (his home) to Turkey (his ancestors' home), following the passing away of his grandmother. Through the story of Jan and his grandmother, the film recalls the 1938 massacre of Kurds in Dersim and the eradication of the event from Turkey's official history. At the film's premiere, Öz showed black screens in place of the censored scenes that depicted the history and culture of Dersim. Written on each of these blackened scenes were the words: 'You cannot watch this scene because the General Directorate of Cinema of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism deemed it inconvenient.' Öz (interview by the author, November 2017) addressed the whole process of censorship and his way of dealing with authoritarianism in the culture and politics of Turkey in this way:

> When the ministers initially saw the film, they authorized it with the black scenes, but they had no clue that I was going to disclose their censorship of those scenes. The film finally got to an audience at the IIFF with the ministry's name all over it, which led them to censor the whole film. Even with this difficulty, however, the film continued its journey.

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region of Turkey as Kurdish forces impeded their potential victory.

When I went to the screening on 11 April 2017, the biggest room of the Atlas movie theatre was full of a crowd that clapped and cheered during each scene with the disclosed name of the censoring body. In the aftermath of this radical screening, the film was re-censored and had to continue its journey through Turkey and Europe under the strict surveillance of the Turkish state. Thus, both the text and context of the film run as a counternarrative to the state-sanctioned truth about struggles in the region in the past and today.

Concluding Remarks

In combining textual and contextual analysis, the chapter presents a unique case study by clustering recent videos and films together in the light of their aesthetics of protest and creative resistance against AKP's Islamist and neoliberal authoritarianism. These videos and films bring along the subjective experience of activist bodies in public spaces during and following the Gezi protests and they point to the creativity and resilience in activists' resistance against state violence in an increasingly authoritarian setting. Following the physical violence or censorship, rising audience attention to these videos and films also turned them into visual commons, whilst their directors and producers were at the forefront of dissident publics. In this chapter, I define these acts of resistance as creative because the visual material and their makers (1) do not engage in conventional forms of protest, such as marching, but employ their visual presence and voice to come into prominence, and (2) use the bodies of video activists and other activists as a source of narrative. Furthermore, these acts of resistance are not just creative in their nature; they are also aesthetic, especially because they constantly find new digital or bodily ways to question the politics of the state and conventional Occupy activism.

While the early videos and films in 2013 and 2014 present crowds of dissident voices and bodies, recent ones since 2015 rely more on prescheduled interviews with activists and the presence of the police is much more increased within the frame. In the increasingly videophobic and documentaphobic state ideology relying on their fears of the visual versions of facts going viral in our digital era, my informants used fewer vivid colours and followed more dangerous routes to produce and circulate videos and films while utilizing alternative avenues such as Documentarist film festival or the Labour Film Festival or Kurdish media. These ongoing strategies at times fall short as they cannot prevent media censorship and regulation, but the testimonies here account for the willingness of creative communities to resist and fight back with their cameras and bodies, even if the outcomes are not yet 'successful'. While the interview material may seem to have captured a sense of optimism, authoritarianism continues to dominate Turkish politics. Authoritarianism, however, does not block, but, in fact, it encourages visual and creative resistance to diversify by using international platforms such as diasporic media or by turning to pre-digital activism, such as drawing from within courthouses, which broaden the horizons for the future of social and political change. Based on this framework, the chapter points out that 'protest by videos, films and visuals' bears witness to the atrocities committed by authoritarian regimes, which also feed our understanding of repertoires of protests and their aesthetics in similar regimes during the Arab Spring and beyond.

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CHAPTER 73

Alternative Media in Latin American Grassroots Integration: Building Networks and New Agendas

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Abstract

In recent years, Latin America has experienced different integration initiatives aimed to cultivate a more unified and sovereign position in the world. However, the neodevelopmentalist and extractivist policies that characterize some of those initiatives have been rejected by social movements. In awareness of the vital importance of communication, alternative media projects are promoting grassroots integration through new agendas, narratives, and aesthetics in Latin America. This article shows the important role these projects have in the articulation of regional social struggles in order to promote coordinated actions concerning common issues and alternatives to the rationale of dominant media.

Keywords

alternative media, Latin American grassroots integration, social movements, political economy of communication and culture (PECC)

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The relation between alternative media and grassroots integration has not been fully explored in Latin American integration, nor in its communication studies. However, the growing relevance and influence of these experiences have increased the debate on how they build new national solidarities, counter-hegemony, and popular power on a continental scale. These possibilities need to be studied in very complex contexts, taking into account the challenges that alternative communication usually represents. This article aims to establish connections between ostensibly dissociated objects, and to widen the analysis and comprehension of the voices of those who build communication bridges throughout Latin America.

Most studies about Latin American integration have focused on the economic dimension of the process. These views have enhanced not only the theoretical, but also such practical matters as free trade and cooperative production, displaying a history of both good intentions and failures. The appearance of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) in 1991 added new political and cultural elements to this analysis (Páez & Vázquez, 2008). Likewise, the births of the Bolivarian Alliance of the People of Our Americas-People's Trade Agreement (ALBA-TCP) in 2004, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR)in 2008, and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean Nations (CELAC) in 2011, opened the discussion to such complex matters as security, defense, infrastructure, energy, technological independence, and a new financial organization for the region.

The new initiatives generated debates about how integration could promote participatory citizenship in order to strengthen national sovereignty, economic cooperation, and conflict resolution between countries. It also redrew the objectives and strategies to be followed that, with the time, could allow integration gain social support and sustainability. [1]

In this regard, since the 1990s, several researchers, academics, and social activists have warned about the need to incorporate a cultural and communicative agenda for a solid integration scheme. Several authors (García Canclini & Moneta, 1999; Garretón, 2003; Martín-Barbero, 1992) have emphasized the scarce place that these dimensions occupy in integration projects, and have called for new public policies for communication's democratization. Such policies are fundamental for communication to be more than a media issue, but "a space for dialogue, consensus and articulation of plural voices, divergent intentions and unstable solidarities" (Sierra, 2008, p. 1,370).

In these debates, the presence of different alternative media projects arose. These projects began to address with great interest the multiple realities of the continent, and they also had an active role in integration initiatives promoted by social movements. Their role has created new media agendas for Latin America, as well as new media networks to establish links and exchanges among grassroots movements.

Currently, these experiences are still few and incipient, but gradually acquiring relevance in a context of media monopolization and political struggle throughout the continent. Multiple social movements are now aware that an emancipatory communication can create new paths

[1] Without losing its validity and current importance, the impulse that Latin American integration had between 2006 and 2012 has lost some strength. This is due to economic and political crisis within and between countries, lack of consensus between divergent ideological projects, changes in regional leadership, internal contradictions of progressive governments, and social pressure for democracy. Other factors of this deceleration have been the impulse of the neoliberal integration project of The Pacific Alliance and the strengthening of free trade agreements between the European Union and the United States. Likewise, changes in global geopolitics show Asian nations, especially Russia, India, and China, as new centers of power.

for grassroots integration. The intention is to explore the nature of these types of communication experiences, recognizing the subjects behind them and pondering the possibilities and difficulties of such an enormous task.

Tracing Latin American Grassroots Integration

Latin American integration is a multidimensional phenomenon composed by spatial scales, cultural heterogeneities, national inequalities, power relations, and transnational spaces (Harvey, 2004). In this sense, three main integration projects can be identified: one imposed by capital (e.g., Free Trade Area of the Americas [ALCA] and free trade agreements), one driven by governments and states (e.g., MERCOSUR, UNASUR, ALBA-TCP, and CELAC), and one composed by social movements (e.g., Americas Social Forum [FSA], Continental Social Alliance [ASC], Vía Campesina, among others). These projects are not only economic or commercial, but also geopolitical, ideological, and historical. Disputes and consensus take place between them in order to maintain hegemony versus new counter-hegemonies.

In a grassroots dimension, Latin American integration reveals the establishment of different alliances—some historical, others more recent—of social movements and grassroots sectors which have joined their efforts to defend their territories, resources, identities, and autonomies from capitalist damage. According to Elizabeth Jelin, the democratic deficiency of official integration organisms has been surpassed by the ways in which social actors seek integration independently. This has been enabled through

> porous national frontiers permanently trespassed by migratory currents, cultural exchange of diverse type and tourism. These exchanges have generated kinship and friendship networks as well as transnational labor relationships that are vital for the daily lives of large population sectors. (2001, p. 260)

From a Gramscian conception, grassroots integration refers to grassroots sectors that have historical determinations and an organizational dimension, and are in permanent conflict with hegemony (Acanda, 2007). In Latin America, although these sectors are diverse and multiple, cohesive elements that identify them can be recognized, such as "dignity and autonomy repossession, defense of their identities, rebellion against oppression, solidarity as a tool to confront critical situations" (Argumedo, 1993, p. 156).

Without naturalizing these alliances, since they are constructions made out of conflict and address multiple tactics and strategies, social movements related to integration have generated collective ways to denounce, organize, plan, and develop initiatives against dominant sectors. Since the 1990s, in light of catastrophic results of neoliberalist policies and the rising of the so-called progressive governments in the first decade of the 20th century, social movements embraced Latin American integration as a central matter to work on, using the concepts of "people's integration," "integration from below," and "grassroots integration."

Unifying Pains: Social Movements and Grassroots Integration

During the 1990s, the significance and accomplishments of popular mobilizations gave social movements a clear notion that grassroots integration needed to be built. This period was a

result of a maturing process that began in the emancipatory struggles of the 19th century [2] and the socialist fights of the 1960s and 1970s, and it was forged by the recent bonds and solidarity networks across the continent.

The strong presence and solidarity of Latin American organizations in the anti-globalization movement was explained by a previous wave of articulations. Some examples are the Continental Campaign "500 years of Indigenous, Black and Popular Resistance" in 1992, and the Intercontinental Encounters for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism organized by the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) in 1996, 1997, and 1999. Some other social mobilizations led to the victory of progressive governments, especially in South America, who encouraged participatory mechanisms in integration organisms to guarantee political independence and regional sovereignty.

In 2005, the People's Summit against the ALCA in Mar del Plata placed Latin America as the prime example of social criticism, resistance, and alternatives to neoliberalism. Social movements gained a bigger Latin Americanist, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist awareness, allowing them to debate and propose new paths for integration with "the conviction that without a regional projection there is no way to consolidate the grassroots achievements gained in each country" (Katz, 2008, p. 26). Since then, activist groups began to organize forums, meetings, and articulations to think and act toward integration.

By 2009, in the middle of the global economic crisis, the Declaration of the Social Movements of the Americas' "Building people's integration from below, encouraging ALBA and people's solidarity facing the imperialist project" was presented during the World Social Forum (WSF) in Belem do Pará, Brazil. Appealing to the principles of solidarity, self-determination, sovereignty, and respect for human rights, identities, and cultures, the declaration affirms:

> It is necessary to build together a Latin American grassroots integration project that reconsiders the concept of "development" to defend nature's common goods and life, moving toward an alternative civilizational model from the predatory capitalist project, assuring Latin American sovereignty against imperialism and transnational plundering policies, embracing all emancipatory dimensions, confronting the multiple oppressions generated by capitalist exploitation, colonial domination and patriarchy, which reinforces oppression against women. (Rebelión, 2009, para. 8)

According to this proclamation, integration cannot wait for the state's decisions, but must be taken "from below," in direct and horizontal ways, in order to reach autonomy. However, the presence of the multiple social actors involved exposed that there were several approaches to reach integration, not only about the vast agenda that had to be addressed, but mostly about the methods, strategies and political means to achieve it.

The main challenge for such social movements is then to build an anti-capitalist continental articulation to prevent them from dissolving in "a series of community interests geographically fragmented, easily absorbed by the neoliberal market penetration" (Harvey, 2009, p. 406). David Harvey suggests that a way to achieve this is to underline "the pattern

[2] Continental unity has been a historical desire which was first predominantly defensive; that is, anti- imperialist and anti-colonial. The first visions developed during the independence processes lead by revolutionary leaders between 1810 and 1830 (Codas, 2006) intended to build a unified political entity, independent of the metropolis, being best represented in the figure of Simon Bolívar. At the dawn of the next century, the Cuban José Martí outlined a revolutionary proposal for a unified Latin America, with the masses as protagonists in opposition to United States' Pan-Americanism. His influence on discourses about Latin American integration is still present.

and systemic qualities of the damage caused in different scales and geographical differences" (2009, p. 102) which can be called common pains.

The recognition of these common pains constitutes a solid ground for grassroots integration, which needs new routes for dialogue in order to coordinate and debate the strategies and methods to make it happen. This is how communication awareness has developed movements that search for integration (Bolaño, 2010), urging new strategies to get to know each other, coordinate projects, rebuild social tissue, and gain significance in the public sphere.

Communication's Role in Integration

As mentioned before, there are three main tendencies in Latin American integration that are not necessarily exclusive, with meeting points and tensions among and between them: capitalist integration, a state organism's integration, and grassroots integration. The distinction is equally useful to analyze the place that communication has in integration, using the theoretical perspective of political economy of communication and culture (PECC).

PECC has contributed to understanding communication's role in the capitalist accumulation process and the way it overcomes its crisis. This perspective has tried to escape a mechanist and totalitarian view of media effects, as well as an excessive autonomy of ideology or culture regarding the economic sphere. Therefore, it allows scholars to link "the analysis of national and supranational power structures and ideological processes . . . with the proposal of responses to dominant classes' projects" (Bolaño et al., 2005, p. 9). Hence, it enables a dialectical articulation between the study of hegemonic apparatus and the alternatives to them. It also permits a view of Latin America within the communication mode of production in global capitalism.

In this sense, we first recognize a capitalist communication integration with media conglomerates and transnational cultural industries as leaders of Latin American "unity." Using deregulation and liberalization to avoid all kinds of frontiers, capitalist actors have spread a vision of the region according to their economic interests, the same that capital needs to deepen its process of accumulation and social reproduction (Mastrini & Bolaño, 1999; Moraes, 2011).

In Latin America, the internalization of communications and technological convergence has strengthened media groups such as Televisa (México), Cisneros (Venezuela), O Globo (Brazil), and Clarín (Argentina). Offering multimedia services, these groups have centralized more capital through a North American commercial-inspired structure (Mastrini & Becerra, 2006). Consequently, the region has become part of a global logic of information production composed by the contradictory phenomena of standardization-differentiation and monopolization-sectorization. This has led to an unequal exchange between our countries, as well as between the global North and South.

The capitalist info-communication order (Miège, 2002) limits not only access, but also the possible diversity of content, themes, narratives, formats, or genres that can be produced from and about Latin America. The image of what we are has been committed to few people, leaving our cultural background at the mercy of reductionist representations that generally provoke disagreements, exclusions, and racist and discriminatory attitudes. This has prevented the appearance of possible solidarities and meeting points among countries and cultures. Besides economic agents of major influence, mainstream media act as political trenches where elites

express and justify social relations rationalized by the dominant systems (Mattelart, 1970). In this sense, the deepening of dispossession projects against popular sectors that defend their territories, resources, identities, and world views, has one of its epicenters in the ideological offensive carried out by dominant media and cultural industries.

Second, we identify the proposals made by state integration organisms in relation to communication and culture. At a national level, some governments have been gaining power over the private media system with new participation rules and regulation policies that have reactivated the struggle for hegemony and created new paths for media democratization. Countries like Argentina show undeniable progress, with an important impact on a regional scale. However, some difficulties and contradictions have been revealed. According to Dênis de Moraes, progressive governments' public media "also act as political parties because their ideological perspective—tuned in to the visions of the political subjects that command the governmental machine—influence the ways of verifying events and the assessment of facts" (2011, p. 61). The confusion between public and state is tangible in the way that some media areas act as governmental spokespersons, denying the plurality of voices of those who do not share their political views. In addition, there are still numerous projects that copy "commercial media formats and, applying the narrow mindedness, showing reactive and non-proactive policies, losing the opportunity to spot ethical differences" (Aharonian, 2013, p. 21).

The multi-national television project Telesur, created in 2005 by the Venezuelan government, shows some of these limitations. Although the project began with creative, diverse, and innovative content to promote Latin American integration, current programming is mainly news that counterbalances the negative dominant discourse about the Venezuelan government. Even if Telesur's news programs address different themes, they are similar in format, aesthetics, rhythms, and editing to the capitalist media. This has limited a heterogeneous agenda for Latin American integration. Telesur has succeeded in creating alternative information and positioned some themes in the public debate, but it has not been able to transcend the national or allied governments' interests.

Projects like Telesur are promoted by progressive governments as alternatives to hegemonic models of communication and means to effective integration. Then, a doubt arises: Beyond rhetoric, are these kinds of projects real alternatives to dominant ideology and capitalist integration? This question can only be answered if other forms of communication are recognized. This is the third tendency: alternative media initiatives which coexist with capitalist and state forms of communication. Social movements who stand by grassroots integration have insisted that alternative communication is essential to shape "a media agenda allied to social movements and alternative communication networks to position themes and perspectives different from mainstream media" (ALAI, 2012, para. 1).

Alternative Media and Grassroots Integration

According to Margarita Graziano, "alternative stands up not only in front of another concept of communication, but of power relations, signed transmission and code imposition that those relations allow" (1980, p. 6). The concept of alternative is tied to the notions of alternative information (contrainformación in Spanish), counter-hegemony, and popular power. More than a technological modification, alternative media involves social appropriation to

transform collective relations toward a political project of structural change conducted by emancipatory ideological assumptions (Neüman, 2010).

Particularly in Latin America, the large tradition and diversity of grassroots communication experiences demonstrate that alternative media practices carry within them new social practices determined by context, daily praxis, and class relations confronted against the rationale of social reproduction (Mattelart & Piemme, 1981). This implies—as Natalia Vinelli and Carlos Rodríguez mention—that alternative communication relates to and can only be comprehended through a wider ideological or political project. According to the authors, the alternative discourse "manifests the necessities of political juncture and the objectives of social organization incarnated in media practice" (2004, p. 13).

Alternative media entails non-private and collective forms of property; a participatory and flexible mode of management; alternative ways of funding with voluntary work and social activism; media content that addresses different and complex realities with innovative aesthetics, formats, and genres; audience participation and constant feedback; technological adaption and appropriation to overcome technical barriers; and integration with grassroots movements to contribute in their organizational processes, among other characteristics (Atton, 2002; Pierucci, 2004; Reyes, 1981).

In addition, alternative media experiences refer to "subjects-actors involved in the processes of production, distribution and consumption of communication contents" (Crovi, 2011, p. 265), which encompasses collective phenomena, interactions, identities, territories, and spaces in which social appropriation and representation take place. Furthermore, Clemencia Rodríguez's (2001) perspective on citizen media is useful to see that this particular media transforms, culturally and symbolically, the subjects which participate in its daily creation. Citizen media has become a space to question, confront, and dialogue with established and newly born identities about Latin Americans.

With this basis, there are two main and inseparable dimensions in which to analyze the relation between alternative communication and grassroots integration. In a cultural and symbolic dimension, communication works as a cohesive mechanism, a tool for dialogue and identification. This suggests the possibility to elaborate new forms of representation, content, formats, narratives, aesthetics, and discourses that allow for the encounter of diverse social sectors and cultural identities.

On the other hand, communication is a strategic tool for collective organization and working class struggle, as well as a catalyst for grassroots political projects (Vidal & Roselló, 2009). Referring back to the notion of pains, communication is present in Latin America's class conflicts, impositions, antagonisms, negotiations, mobilizations, subordinations, acculturations, resistances, etc.

To build grassroots integration, alternative media faces several challenges: defining its political project, overcoming bureaucracy and sectarianism, gaining sustainability through shared financing and management, reaching the region's population with innovative media content, and influencing new communication policies, among others. Still, one of the main challenges regarding social movements is being able to create collaborative articulations between mobilized sectors within the context of capitalist atomization (Mata, 2011; Reyes, 1981).

Alternative Networks in Latin America

In Latin America, several experiences of alternative media articulation have been in practice for several decades. The first big experience was Latin Press (PL), a news agency born in 1959 in Cuba by a group of the most influential left-wing journalists, including Rodolfo Walsh and Jorge Eduardo Masetti. In 1972, one of the largest grassroots radio associations was created: the Latin American Association of Radiophonic Education (ALER). Other important projects in this decade were the Latin American Special Information Services Agency (ALASEI), born in 1976, and the Latin American Information Agency (ALAI) in 1977, an organization that is currently working in production and information exchange, giving support to social organizations in communication skills, and promoting communication rights (ALAI, 2014).

According to Dorothy Kidd (2007), in the 1980s, alternative media networks began to link locally and globally for content exchange, technical training, and campaigns to legalize community radio, as well as to discuss issues about technology and communication policies. During this decade, networking was a response to corporate and military communication networks, coordinating joint responses to similar problems. New global convergences emerged, and there was a strong regional presence, such as the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), the Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS), and the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS). For Kidd, this networking provided a "platform and connective tissue of many new transnational social movements" (2007, p. 242).

During the 1990s, experiences like the Latin American Summit of Alternative Media held in Quito in 1993, the mobilizations against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) in 1998 and the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1999, and the innovative communications initiatives of the EZLN (the Mexican Zapatista Army for National Liberation) indicated that a national movement could transcend boundaries for international solidarity. It also revealed the potential that social networks and the Internet held for the achievement of social movements' goals (Leon, Burch, & Tamayo, 2005).

Later, the website Minga Informativa was created in 2000 to mobilize and train Latin American social movements in communication skills. The appearance of the World Social Forum (WSF), along with the social and economic crisis that erupted in Argentina in 2001, led to an explosion of alternative media and new social uses of technology. By 2002, the failed coup orchestrated by the media against Hugo Chavez showed that alternative media had a central role to both break the media blockade imposed by the national and international reactionary bourgeoisie and allow popular mobilization.

In 2005, the 1st Communication and Information Global Forum (FMCI) discussed new technologies, empowerment, community media, cultural diversity, democratization of communication, and social movements' news agendas. Later, in 2009, the Florestan Fernandes School of the Landless Worker's Movement (MST) in Brazil gathered 40 journalists from 10 countries to develop strategies to defend their communication rights, support the efforts for Latin American grassroots integration, and train new communicators and social leaders (Vidal & Roselló, 2009).

In 2013, the Latin American Summit on Communication for Integration took place in Ecuador. Organized by ALAI and ALER, this meeting brought together representatives of social movements, alternative and public media projects, public entities, and integration organisms.

One of the main achievements was the establishment of the Communication Forum for the Integration of Our America, a space that seeks to influence integration policies, share and create content, build databases, promote media observatories, and guarantee technological sovereignty in the region (León, 2013).

It is important to mention that, in these meetings and articulations, the technological issue has been addressed specifically. New technologies have profoundly changed dynamics within social movements. They allow new possibilities for articulation, access, production, and circulation of content, but also demand new skills, knowledge, and technology development (León, 2005; Zallo, 2011). The Internet has enabled a low-cost message transmission "where alternative communication projects located in different parts of the globe can link and enhance their knowledge exchanging experiences of struggle in their specific contexts, enabling concrete action" (Colectivo ConoSur, 2004, p. 91).

Regarding these possibilities, it is worthwhile to gain some distance from celebratory speeches that conceptualize new technologies as the ones which operate and enable social change. Assigning them "characteristics as if they were inherent—transparency, horizontality, interactivity, unlimited access to knowledge, etc.—when they are only potential" (León, Burch, & Tamayo, 2005, p. 224), ignores the structural asymmetries, power relations, and historical circumstances in which they are inserted.

Searching for Latin American Voices on Grassroots Integration

The following considerations are part of my master's thesis, which based on field research and interviews with members of alternative and community media who participate in regional networks and have a special interest on Latin America and integration processes. The projects were chosen for their links to social movements and their autonomy from the local governments and market. They also demonstrate eagerness to create links to organize, produce, and exchange communication products within Latin America. Some of these are listed in Table 1.

My field research consisted of a four-month visit to Argentina, Chile, and Brazil, as well as some virtual interviews with people in Venezuela, Uruguay, and Ecuador. The analysis from the interviews was complemented with data from documents obtained during research visits and media web pages to ensure the full comprehension of each media entity's political positioning, tasks, and articulations with other media. Finally, a review of their productions and content was achieved through research of their audios, videos, notes, etc. This gave a closer look into their agendas, narratives, and aesthetics. Triangulation of these three elements, according to specific theoretical categories, was the main source for the observations developed in this section. The analysis pursues the identification of common tendencies, issues, and challenges, as well as specific characteristics of each media, technological support, and country. [3]

[3] It is important to point out that this article only addresses a small portion of the field research material and analysis. In relation to the study limitations, a deeper acknowledgment of each project on its daily dynamics is needed, as well as more time devoted to analyzing their productions. The focus is centered on South American experiences, with an absence of projects in Central America and the Caribbean. Nonetheless, research confirmed that some of these projects are the most active and outstanding in continental networks, as well as in their approach to grassroots integration, and therefore constitute a fairly representative sample of what happens elsewhere in the region.

Table 1. Projects and Participants Analyzed in Field Research.

Country	Project	Description	Participants
Regional (decentralized)	Otramérica	Digital media with news and analysis on Latin America and the Caribbean	Paco Gómez—journalist, founder of Otramérica
Chile	Red de Medios de los Pueblos (RMP)	Network that gathers Chilean radio, TV, digital, and graphic projects	Pablo Villagra—journalist, member of the network
Chile	Mapuexpress	Digital media about the Mapuche people in Chile and Argentina—also about other indigenous people of Latin America	Felipe Gutiérrez—Mapuche journalist, member of the editorial group
Argentina	Barricada TV (BTV)	Alternative and community TV channel in open signal and Internet	Natalia Vinelli—journalist, academic, project founder
Argentina	Red Nacional de Medios Alternativos (RNMA)	Networks that gather radio, TV, news agencies, websites, and graphic projects in Argentina	Alejandro Pérez—journalist of the news agency ANRed and active member of the network
Uruguay	Radio Mundo Real	Grassroots web radio project in service to social movements and community radio stations	José Elosegui—journalist and active member
Regional	Alba Movimientos	Regional articulation of social movements allied to ALBA with their news website	Carina López—journalist, coordinator of Argentina's social movements for ALBA
Regional (coordination in Venezuela)	Alba TV	Latin American network of alternative and community television outlets	Pablo Kunich—communicator, one of the network's coordinators
Brazil	Webradio Unila	University and community radio of the Federal University of Latin American Integration (UNILA)	María Gimena Machado—student and member of the project
Regional (decentralized)	Agencia Púlsar	Latin American news agency of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC)	Alejandro Linares—journalist, coordinator in Argentina of South America's news
Regional (coordination in Ecuador)	Contacto Sur	Radio program with news on Latin America and the Caribbean—part of ALER	Isabelo Cortez—ALER's information and content director

Without being able to thoroughly discuss each element of analysis in this article, we propose the following topics for discussion: a) the political and communication basis of the projects, as well as their views on integration, b) the characteristics of their media agendas

and use of new technologies, and c) the way networks and regional media allied with social movements operate to promote grassroots integration.

Political Views on the Table

Generally, these projects share the aim to function as communication bridges between social organizations, territories, and subjects with an anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-imperialist basis. They seek to be a space for grassroots expressions, showing their demands or interests and shaping ethnic, gender, or class identities. To reach these aims, strategies focus on technical training, public support to social movements, and alternative information agendas, all to break the siege imposed by mainstream media:

> In Otramérica we have a political view of reality, we do not hide it. We are very clear about our anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, anti-extractive principles. We have a special trust in communities, and we will always believe in a community rather than in some official spokesman but with journalistic standards—because we are also a media. We do not make propaganda; we try to avoid pamphlets, and try to be very pluralistic from a left view Anyone who wants to write does it, as long as it is from the perspective of building another world. (P. Gomez, personal communication, February 26, 2013)

Political and ideological definitions of these media are also intersected by a Latin American identity which is not merely an idealist or utopian discourse. Aware of the common oppression and dispossession throughout the continent, as well of the synchrony in social struggles, Latin America becomes a place for common action. Consequently, solutions to each country's issues are seen as attached to the achievements made on a continental scale.

When it comes to integration, most projects share a positive vision about organisms such as CELAC, UNAUSR, and especially ALBA.[4] They argue that they build regional sovereignty against the United States' hegemony, recognizing their geopolitical and discursive value. However, the relationship is limited or contradictory because they pursue infrastructure, interconnection, or security projects that do not strictly promote social participation or inclusion:

> We understand that [Alba Movimientos] needs to relate with governments that are part of ALBA, but above all, we need to articulate from below and from the left. The way in which articulations are built from below, how each nation sympathizes to another and how that is shaping the identity in Our America are things that cannot be thought only from institutions. They must be thought from the people to be learned in a massive scale. (C. Lopez, personal communication, November 26, 2013)

These statements reveal how grassroots integration is approached in different ways, depending on the media's political perspective and its relationship with the state and government in each country. For instance, in countries with right-wing governments (like Chile or Mexico) which criminalize or fully ignore the existence of alternative and community media, political positioning is of autonomy and clear denouncing. Information regarding these governments and national realities is more homogeneous within alternative media.

In countries led by the so-called progressive governments, the relationship is troubled and contradictory. The media siege and manipulation toward these governments has led to alter-

[4] The ALBA-TCP reunites most of the so-called progressive governments: Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua. The organization has a Social Movements Council in its structure, but other organizations participate with more autonomy in the Continental Assembly of Social Movements toward the ALBA.

native information that, at times, lacks nuance and self-criticism. The most controversial case may be Venezuela. The difficulty of having a unified stance is stronger in regional articulations that represent multiple countries and diverse media in a single space, for example, Contacto Sur, a project allied to the Fe y Alegría Institute funded by the Venezuelan government. An ambiguous posture can be perceived in Isabelo Cortez's declaration:

> We will always respect each country's decision; ALER cannot act critically toward the ruling party or the opposition. ALER has never declared itself in favor of [President Nicolás] Maduro and neither has Fe y Alegría. However, we will never support those who are in favor of a coup or the rupture of constitutional order. We will never support multinationals or media powers. (I. Cortez, personal communication, May 20, 2014)

The relation has turned even more complex in recent years, with governments favoring extractive projects, dispossession of indigenous communities, and criminalization of social activists. This is currently happening in Ecuador, were an indigenous movement is protesting against President Rafael Correa's decision to sustain a free trade agreement with the European Union; open-cast mining projects; and disrespect of the indigenous rights to autonomy, education, healthcare, and territory, among other issues. In junctures such as these, some media choose to replicate the government's official position that claims it is offensively orchestrated by right-wing sectors aligned with U.S. imperialism. Others try to offer information to understand the demands of the indigenous movement, as well as showing the repression held by Correa's government. Finally, some avoid publishing or wait to confirm information to provide a consistent approach to facts. [5]

New Agendas

Alternative media moves between two main positions that constantly seek to be balanced. On one hand, there is a necessity to produce alternative information regarding the dominant media agenda from a grassroots perspective. On the other hand, an original, creative, and quality agenda is required. These two possibilities are in constant tension and dispute, because they are attached to specific political junctures. In the experience of some projects, the disadvantage of just creating alternative information is that, given the urgency to inform, they tend to simplify information, copy commercial formats, and eliminate other important issues that are not in the mainstream media agenda.

In terms of their own agenda, there is increasing attention being paid to prioritizing Latin America in their productions and content. This involves dismantling regional myths and stereotypes, while sharing other realities through independent music, graphic design, film, and theater projects that provide original narratives and aesthetics about the region. This is how Natalia Vinelli from Barricada TV visualizes it:

> On the one hand, we turn around these stereotypes, we question them, we ask them questions that bother and disarm them. On the other hand, we narrate from our own vision, we build and circulate our own identities and our own problems. These two elements must always go hand in hand. (N. Vinelli, personal communication, October 19, 2013)

[5] The first position was held by Contacto Sur (Aler, 2015); the second position by AnRed, a news agency that is part of the RNMA (ANRed, 2015); and the third position by Otramérica (2015).

Following Crovi (2011) and Rodríguez (2001), the disarmament of these stereotypes and identities does not only happen from the alternative media outwards. The new rationale of media production questions and challenges the subjects that participate within these projects, like in Webradio Unila:

> First we had a theoretical idea on how our radio could be alternative and community based. But the way we made it real was a big problem. It was difficult to realize that there is a lack of knowledge among ourselves of what Latin American culture is. So, communication not only opened channels to meet each other, but led us to discover what is beyond samba or tango. (M. Machado, personal communication, October 23, 2013)

Despite the great diversity of themes that are addressed, the core of their production lies in the symbolic and material capitalist damage visited on grassroots sectors, as well their defensive strategies throughout the region. Main issues include the promotion and defense of human rights (especially of indigenous people, women, children, workers, and social activists), defense of territories (resistance against agribusiness, extractive and mining industries, transgenic corporations), and promotion of grassroots experiences (achievements in gender equality, education, climate justice, food sovereignty, among others).

In this sense, alternative media narratives tend to unite grassroots sectors and foster solidarities and social participation, rather than division. Projects like Otramérica that focus on the region have the intention to "explore the interdependencies between countries, communities, economic, political, cultural and social facts, people" (Otramérica, 2014, para. 8). However, there are multiple ways to embody this. Some media have a more analytical approach, not about headlines or events, but about processes. Some use a formal and academic language, while others target audiences with easily digestible talks and friendly language. A lot of clichés appear as well: Descriptions of mobilizations or marches, political statements, and accusations are often more common than information that would actually deepen these processes.

As a topic, grassroots integration is not a priority for many of these projects. One reason is that most of them have to solve their local communication needs first. In this way, integration is addressed superficially because of a lack of human or financial resources to report it. This happens in the Red de Medios de los Pueblos (RMP) in Chile:

> We know there is a common problem in Latin America and events happen every day but it is practically impossible to report all those stories. What we have achieved is a peer group dedicated to select and make a news recap of the week. Different media notes are uploaded, but we don't do anything farther than that. (P. Villagra, personal communication, September 23, 2013)

As a response to this absence, alternative media members think that this topic needs to be constantly promoted, both discursively and practically. Their content is progressively incorporating a Latin American vision of reality, displaying common issues from different points of the continent, and widening the debate on integration as an important issue among grassroots sectors.

In this regard, new technologies have been fundamental tools for message circulation. Through the Internet, electronic bulletins are distributed in thousands of e-mails, and simultaneous media coverage is simplified by live transmissions. Notes, texts, audios, and videos can be accessed and downloaded for free. In news agencies and networks like AlbaTv, Púlsar,

and Contacto Sur, some productions have a minimal edition so other media can add graphic or aesthetic elements for each local context.

However, most Latin Americans do not have access to these technologies, and being followed on a social network does not mean that a media project is constantly read or heard. A way in which projects like Radio Mundo Real overcome this barrier is by working closely with the community or alternative radio stations that are closer to social movements, to assure they reach places with no Internet access.

Building Networks Against Dispossession

The origins and relationships of these media with social movements is diverse. For instance, Mapuexpress was born as a tool of the Chilean Mapuche social movement to have information, dissemination, and an organizational backup in order to defend their territories and identities. Radio Mundo Real was created by the international organization Friends of the Earth, when they needed to cover the WTO summit in Cancun. Subsequently, that experience gradually grew into a radio project to produce information and constant coverage of actions promoted by organizations such as Vía Campesina and the Latin American Coordination of Peasant Organizations (CLOC). Otramérica began with a group of journalists related with the indigenous movement of Panamá, which first saw communication as a place to contribute, to spread the word about that struggle and reality, and then afterwards, about diverse national and regional realities that were absent in dominant media.

The degree of articulation with social movements varies within each country, as well as the presence and importance that each movement gives to communication in their action spectrum. Networks among regional alternative media—the existence of which reveals Latin American integration itself—also have different degrees of progress. Many articulations are still nascent or initial conversations of how they could work collectively. Others, like AMARC and ALER, are much more solid due to decades of experience in networking inside and outside Latin America.[6] What stands out is that, for both social movements and alternative media, communication is seen as a catalyst for solidarities needed to strengthen mobilizations and position their agenda in public opinion.

Working with grassroots sectors allows alternative media to participate and cover events, mobilizations, or marches, strengthening confidence among the people they represent. This transcends the traditional conception of media as an information transmitter. It helps to organize and mediate experiences of struggle that can strengthen social movements' capacities. The sectors they are most related to are peasant, indigenous, labor, and student movements, but mostly, people affected by mining and extractive and dispossessive projects, as well as victims of state violence and criminalization of social protest. They are also allied to social movements' articulations, such as the World Social Forum, the People's Summit, and articulations of environmental or feminist organizations.

[6] For example, ALER has created nine networks with different themes and objectives: the Pan Amazonian Network, the Kiechwa Network, the Youth Network, the Sound Engineers' Network, the Mayan Radios Network, the Migration Network, the Evangelization Network, the Communication and Education Network, and the American Indigenous Network.

Mediation between social movements and society sometimes consists in enabling media to spread the social movement's voice on their struggles and realities. The past notion of "giving voice to the voiceless" is now seen as serving social movements, not only to distribute information, but also to make visible and articulate demands, territories, subjectivities, identities, and alternative lifestyles. Consequently, these projects consider themselves part of these processes, spaces for dialogue, debate, and participation.

From a material perspective, grassroots integrations is being made by face-to-face exchanges, festivals, continental encounters, social forums, or experiences like international internships between media projects. The possibility to both know first-hand the physical spaces in which they operate and have a notion of their daily job stimulates one's work.[7] It is a moment for political debate of what happens in each country in terms of media concentration and the difficulties they have to operate and sustain over time. This is how Carina López from Alba Movimientos perceives the importance of these articulations:

> We have been working on initiatives that could, on one hand, enhance, multiply and share rich communication experiences that exist in our continent . . . but also to pressure, influence, try to reach the big media which must be able to show the reality that arises from the peoples of Our America . . . We see that it is very difficult to break that siege and to show the population what actually happens if there is no concrete strength of counter-hegemonic media with a joint strategy at a continental level. (C. Lopez, personal communication, November 26, 2013)

Some difficulties have also arisen, like divisions due to the stardom of some projects, the imposition of a working agenda, and the difficulty of working with distinct technological formats. Another problem is the way in which each media presents other country's news to be understood in a foreign context, which can reduce the complexity of a process or fact: "Generally, to be clear, international news gets simplified, presented in a homogeneous way, this is the bad guy, this is the good guy. Sometimes there is no contradiction or internal dispute" (A. Linares, personal communication, February 24, 2014).

There are also financing restrictions that inhibit a key experience for media networking: face-to- face encounters. The costs that continental reunions require are hardly affordable for most projects. Consequently, they are limited to having virtual meetings or annual reunions among projects from the same country or the nearest countries. Along these lines, one of the challenges is to adopt funding mechanisms to foster these reunions. One last difficulty is the ability to sustain these articulations over time, given the number of members versus the quantity of work, as well as contexts of violence or repression that can restrict or discourage the articulation's potential.

In this sense, networks need to go beyond a sum of projects or technological tools, instead becoming spaces to articulate political and ideological views to discuss communication strategies:

> We think the political agreement comes first and then the communication agreement because we have to agree on the role our media is playing. In this context, we see some opportunities for regional articulation but it is necessary to build a coordination not tied to the needs of States and its foreign policy. It needs to allow a progress in common issues for the region as the problem of peace, ex-

[7] An important example is the encounter of the RNMA in Argentina that takes place every year. The occasion is especially important to get to know the experiences, challenges, or achievements that alternative media has in other countries, especially in South America.

> tractivism, food sovereignty and human rights as key issues and above all, the ways in which people are thinking and building popular power. (N. Vinelli, personal communication, October 19, 2013)

Conclusions

Grassroots integration is a result of Latin America's historical legacy of social struggles. It is a process that aims the articulation of excluded sectors for a post-capitalist social order. Nowadays, this possibility is being encouraged by the conditions of capitalist dispossession that forces grassroots sectors to face defragmentation and create political strategies collectively. In this process, alternative media offers spaces that can link local, continental, and global realities, issues, and alternatives.

For alternative media, Latin America is rapidly becoming a material and symbolic place from which to think and act politically, a space to understand the region's diverse and common realities. As a result, one of their main challenges is to portray and include within each project the social, political, and cultural plurality of our continent's grassroots sectors. To achieve this, the analyzed projects are trying to defy the commonplaces and canons of classic journalism, along with the standardized formats and genres of commercial media, all to reflect and debate contradictions, not only about what happens during political junctures, but also in daily life.

Given the technological, funding, management, and coverage difficulties, these projects are constantly struggling to provide new and creative agendas, narratives, and aesthetics that can reach a significant portion of Latin America's population, and not only those who are politically involved. Moreover, most of the information that nourishes alternative media—and that is being shared—is presented as news or opinion. There is a visible disproportion of this genre over others, such as the documentary or the cinema, which could help achieve the challenge of embodying our complex diversity.

This is why grassroots integration is central for alternative media. Because exchanging experiences between countries and promoting mutual training, collective content production, technological experimentation, and articulation with social movements will allow alternative media to position solid alternatives to capitalist and governmental models of integration and communication. Networking is a priority in order to have content from the places where facts occur, with correspondents that are often members of social movements. It also allows them to have a minimum and diverse amount of content to be published; to spread information in different projects in order to position a subject and break the media siege; and to tighten links for political debate, artistic production, and technical training.

My field research demonstrates that, although alternative media has the potential to dialectically link a local issue into a regional concern, grassroots integration needs solidarity and the strength of Latin America's mobilized sectors. This explains why the main challenge for alternative media is in how to deal with ideological differences in political junctures or crises, especially for those related with the so-called progressive governments. When the time comes for political positioning and common action, intractable differences may arise, delaying the possibilities to carry out proposals outlined in meetings or joint declarations.

Some organizations still have an instrumental notion of communication that only understands it as a means to spread information according to their needs and interests, especially

in conflicts and crisis. When these arise, alternative media should create spaces to promote dialogue, participation, and plurality. This matter is being addressed by most of the projects analyzed here to take a step forward into grassroots integration. In a troubled and complex present for Latin America, alternative media appears as a strategic tool, both to assure the historical achievements of grassroots sectors and platforms and to show us all the possible continents that we are part of and can be part of.

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CHAPTER 74

Feminist Media as Alternative Media? Theorising Feminist Media from the Perspective of Alternative Media Studies

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In *Feminist Media: Participatory Spaces, Networks and Cultural Citizenship*, edited by Elke Zobl and Ricarda Drüeke, 55–72. transcript Verlag, 2012.

Introduction: Feminist movements and feminist media

Forms of media—in the broadest sense of this term—are an invaluable part in furthering the determinate goals and specific demands of a given political movement. This might seem a harmless enough contention; for what would a political movement be without any means of dissemination and circulating its ideas to a wider political constituency? If winning support and forging alliances are necessary prerequisites for a movement to gain what is colloquially regarded as "critical mass", then with what means is political momentum (which a movement thrives off) possible other than through the effective (meaning the *affective*) transmissibility of ideas between a movement and what is outside of that movement? At its most basic level, the delivery of a political message between the sender and recipient entails a "medium" that shuttles between addresser and addressee. Consider the array of possible media forms that function as a transmitter of political content: more often than not the forms of delivery are associated with strictly textual output (newspapers, bulletins, zines, flyers, leaflets, etc.). This,

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however, is not exclusively the case. The mode of delivery could just as well be "performative", including street theatre or musical performance, graffiti or other art forms. Today, with the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the platforms open for the transmission and dissemination of political agendas have multiplied greatly (for example, e-zines, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc.), providing the possibility for more immediate and responsive media output, which are in a synergetic relation with a movement that changes in accordance with the changing times and terrains of its struggles.

This chapter takes as its starting point two related observations about feminist political struggles:[1] First, the history of women's and feminist struggles have demonstrated time and again the central role that media production has played in the dissemination of political ideas, political mobilisation and the constitution of political identities. Second, this essential connection remains largely under-theorised.

Historicising feminist media: From cartes-de-visite *to newspapers to Twitter*

Already since the latter half of the previous century, suffragist and anti- slavery activist Sojourner Truth (born Isabella Baumfree) sold photographic cartes-de-visite of herself as a way of disseminating her politics and supporting herself financially (Irvin Painter 1994: 482–488; Downing 2001: vivii). More generally, the suffrage movements in various countries were known to be avid producers of their own press, cartoons, postcards, and posters (cf. Israels Perry 1993; Di Cenzo 2003; Di Cenzo & Ryan 2007). This rich and multifaceted feminist publishing tradition was to continue well into the twenty-first century, and has over the years taken on multiple formats, genres, modes of expression and political agendas.

Publications such as the British *Votes for Women* and Swedish *Tidevarvet* both constitute notable examples of print media in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century—and feminist publication was to peak once again during the so-called "second wave of feminism" which in many countries prospered in the spirit of 1968, with titles such as the North American news journal *Off Our Backs* (since 1970) and the long-lived and influential UK feminist magazine *Spare Rib* (1972–1993). The 1980s witnessed the birth of significant media contributions: the internationalist UK feminist newspaper *Outwrite* (1982–1988) and the self-proclaimed first ever feminist radio station *RadiOrakel* (since 1982) in Norway. In the mid 1980s, the world's first known unlicensed women's radio, *Radio Pirate Women* had its inaugural broadcast in Ireland. The 1990s saw the emergence of Nicaraguan feminist quarterly *La Boletina* (since 1991; also available online since 2005) and the Iranian independent feminist journal *Zanan* (subsequently banned in 2008). The decade of the 1990s also witnessed what has often been referred to as the transnational "girl zine revolution"—young women becoming involved in feminist politics through the development of feminist zines (see for example Harris 2003; Zobl 2004a; 2004b; Schilt and Zobl 2008; Kearney 2006; Chidgey 2007). Today,

[1] This chapter is a slightly reworked version of the article "Feminist media as alternative media? A literature review", originally published in *Interface: A Journal for and About Social Movements* volume 1(2), pp. 190–211. It has been reprinted with the kind permission of *Interface*. Work on the original version of this chapter was conducted as part of the project *Feminist Media Production in Europe* (supported by the Austrian Science Fund, P211-G20). For feedback and support, I would like to thank my colleagues within the project, Elke Zobl and Red Chidgey. Many thanks go also to David Payne for his thorough in-depth commentary on the essay.

feminist media continue to flourish. New titles of magazines (such as the Norwegian *FETT* and Swedish *FUL_*, both since 2004) and broadcast media such as the Swedish community and online television programme *HallonTV* (2008–2009) and *an.schläge tv*—the sister project (since 2005) of the long-established Austrian feminist magazine with the same name appear alongside "new media" and hybrid genres such as the UK e-zine *The F-Word* (since 2001), such blogs as the Romanian *F.I.A.* (since 2005) and the extension of the queer feminist *FUL* magazine with a monthly podcast (Sweden since 2008).

Given this rich history of feminist media production, it is surprising that—despite the recently growing interest in the phenomenon—the terrain is still somewhat uncharted, both empirically and theoretically (cf. Riaño 1994; Steiner 1992; Byerly and Ross 2006). Specifically, this chapter shall attempt to rectify the theoretical inattention to the *constitutive* role that media production has for feminist and women's movements more generally. To this end, my particular focus for this chapter will in the first instance be a trend in media research captured under the appellation "alternative media studies". The purpose of this intervention is to examine the existing literature in this field and to offer an assessment of the tools that this literature makes available for the specific treatment of feminist media production.

With these broad intentions outlined, the structure of this intervention shall take the following form: I will first begin by addressing the strand of theorisation which emphasises alternative media mainly as oppositional, or counter-hegemonic, in their relationship to the state and the market. This strand of alternative media theory shall mainly be represented by media scholars John Downing and Chris Atton. Second, I will discuss a number of critiques that have been raised against these former approaches, and via these introduce alternative conceptualisations such as the notion of "citizens' media" (Clemencia Rodriguez) and the more recent idea of "rhizomatic media" (Olga Bailey, Bart Cammaerts and Nico Carpentier).

Defining alternative media: Between formal specificity and historical complexity

Still suffering from being largely under-researched, the field of alternative media can be characterised by the continuous attempts made by researchers to find and refine suitable frameworks as a way of, first, complementing existing media theories which have proven insuffcient at understanding the specificity of these media forms in opposition to dominant mass media, and, second, in a way that takes into account the vast complexity within this subset of media production. These overarching—and occasionally conflicting—aims often pose a dilemma in distinguishing "dominant" or "hegemonic" from "alternative" media, while at the same time avoiding the reductive and inflexible binary oppositions drawn between "mainstream" and "alternative". The field is characterised by what I see as a somewhat problematic tension between formal specificity and historical complexity.

At its most anodyne, alternative media is defined as *any form of media which constitutes an alternative to, or positions itself in opposition to, widely available and consumed mass media products* (Waltz 2005: 2). A very general and formal definition, the inclusivity of it is only a strength for as long as it is used as an intuitive, "commonsensical", umbrella term. Here, the problem is that the terminology contributes very little to any sustained and rigorous study of these phenomena (cf. Comedia 1984: 95). Indeed, at this, the most basic definitional level, many

have questioned the utility of the appellation "alternative", claiming that its nebulous nature means that what counts as an instance of "alternative" media is easily abused by personal predilection and self-definition (see Abel 1997). John Downing—who is known to prefer the term "radical media"—has argued that "alternative media" is a term that is nearly oxymoronic: "Everything, at some point, is alternative to something else" (Downing 2001: ix).

The most commonly deployed solution within alternative media scholarship to the vagueness of the term has been to denounce vague definitions and conceive of "alternative media" not only as "alternative", but more specifically as media positioned in opposition to dominant mass media—as *counter hegemonic*. This has the merit of excluding "apolitical" media forms such as niche special interest media such as sport club newsletters) (see Downing 2001: xx). More specific still, Michael Traber defines alternative media as media which aims to effectuate "change towards a more equitable social, cultural and economic whole in which the individual is not reduced to an object (of the media or the political powers) but is able to find fulfilment as a total human being" (Traber 1985: 3; also in Atton 2002: 16). [2]

The definitions so far surveyed all make the same assumption, namely that "alternative media" breaks free from the status quo, presenting alternative resources antagonistic toward "mainstream" and "official" channels. The work of James Hamilton is in this regard conspicuous in the attempt he makes to complexify the prevailing way that "alternative media" is understood. Notably, Hamilton sees congruence in the *ends* of media production, whether alternative or mainstream. Both tend to educate and mobilise a general public in the sense of a particular movement or political cause.

If seen simply as a technological process of manufacture, distribution and consumption, Hamilton argues, media/communication then simply names the *use* of media products. The resulting implications are that communication is functionally equivalent to any other consumerist practice and that it is an optional add-on to society—at best, a means of conveying ideas about more basic and important processes—rather than essential to it (Hamilton 2000: 361). Instead, he wishes to make a distinction between "media" and "communication", defining the former as "physical techniques of amplifying and making durable the expressions of individuals, thereby making them available to many more people than would otherwise be the case" (ibid.). The latter, he argues, is "related to and dependent on technical processes of reproduction, amplification and fixing (making durable)", but not equivalent to them. Instead, communication is described in terms of cultural processes, as the "creative making of a social order" (ibid.). Hamilton thus argues that alternative media must enable "alternative communication" that, in turn, facilitates "an articulation of a social order different from and often opposed to the dominant" (ibid. 362).

The work of Downing, more contextual and descriptive than Hamilton, offers instead an improved definition of "alternative media" which avoids both the risk of vacuous generality on the one hand and a specifiable purity as to what "alternative media" ought to be on the

[2] Within the category of alternative media Traber advances a further distinction between *advocacy media* and *grassroots media*. Alternative *advocacy* media is any media project and product embodying values other than the established ones and which in the process introduces "new" social actors (such as the poor, the oppressed, the marginalised etc), but is nevertheless produced "professionally". *Grassroots media* is a more "thorough" version of alternative media, according to which the media is produced by the people whom it aims to represent. Professionals may (or may not) be involved in these publications, but if so, only as advisers to support non-professionals to produce their own independent media (Traber 1985: 3; ibid., Atton).

other, which rarely if ever exists in reality other than in the books of normative theorising. Thus, and in an attempt to offer a more workable terminology, Downing defines "alternative *radical* media" as any "media, generally small-scale and in many different forms, that express an alternative vision to *hegemonic* policies, priorities, and perspectives" (2001: v, emphasis added).[3] Apart from this definition, which positions radical media (or, radical alternative media) as distinctive from the merely "alternative", Downing steers clear of any clear-cut definitions. Instead, he argues that:

> There is no instantaneous alchemy, no uncontested sociochemical procedure, that will divine in a flash or with definite results truly radical media from the apparently radical or even the non-radical (Downing 2001: vii).

This is already a step further than Hamilton and other alternative media theorists. Instead of resorting to simple binaries, Downing argues that *context* and *consequences* should be the key to demarcating the radicality of a specific medium (Downing 2001: x). To give an example, Downing highlights the contextual importance of Truth's *cartes-de-visite* depicting her as a "lady", a respectable women of her times, most often sitting down with her knitting placed on her lap, and often dressed in glasses and with a book strategically placed on her side table (Downing: vi–vii; Irvin Painter 1994; Israels Perry 1994). While, when measured by contemporary standards, this representation of femininity could hardly be considered revolutionary, in the context of the mid to late nineteenth century, it is to be read as a radical refusal to identify with her previous status of enslavement. This historical example, therefore, represents a potential rearticulation of black femininity.

Chris Atton, author of the book *Alternative Media* (2002), has celebrated Downing for his nuanced and theoretically eclectic approach of drawing together theories of counter-hegemony, counter-publics and resistance, but sees at the same time his approach as overemphasising the collective dimension of radical alternative media production, thereby constructing a theory suitable mainly for the study of the media production of social movements. By doing so, Atton argues that Downing ignores the fact that

> hybridity and purity as problematics of alternative media are certainly accessible through an examination of new social movement media, but they can also be approached through media that accommodate themselves rather more cosily with mass media and mass consumption (Atton 2002: 21).

Atton (2002), therefore, proposes a theory of alternative media that is considerably more far reaching than those assessed thus far. Building and expanding upon the work of Downing (1984; 2001), Stephen Duncombe (1997) and Robert Dickinson (1997), Atton constructs a theory which includes not only the more politically radical variants (or the so-called "resistance media"), but one which includes also media forms such as zines, video, mail-art and creative writing, and "hybrid forms of electronic communication"—forms of media production

[3] In a related manner, Waltz has stressed the need for further terminologies to complement the notion of alternative media, using instead the overlapping (but not equivalent) distinction between "alternative" and "activist" media. The latter would, she argues, involve encouraging readers to "get actively involved in social change" (Waltz 2005: 3). Similarly to Downing's definition of radical media, activist media can include media promoting any ideological strand, ranging over the whole scale from "left of left" to far right extremism (ibid.). In addition to this, however, Waltz's concept of activist media can – when the additional label of "alternative" is left out – also include media which advocates views that support what would generally be understood as "mainstream" (such as voting) (ibid.).

which are not necessarily in themselves aiming at any radical social change. This theoretical perspective stresses "the transformatory potential of the media as reflexive instruments of communication practices in social networks" and focuses therefore on the *processual* and *relational* aspects of these media forms (Atton 2002: 7–8). Drawing on a wide range of discussions on alternative and radical media, Atton has constructed a "typology of alternative and radical media" (reproduced below):

1. Content—politically radical, socially/culturally radical; news values
2. Form—graphics, visual language; varieties of presentation and binding; aesthetics
3. Reprographic innovations/adaptations—use of mimeographs, IBM typesetting, offset litho, photocopiers
4. "Distributive use" (Atton 1999b)—alternative sites for distribution, clandestine/indivisible distribution networks, anti-copyright
5. Transformed social relations, roles and responsibilities— reader-writers, collective organisation, de-professionalisation of e.g. journalism, printing, publishing
6. Transformed communication processes— horizontal linkages, networks (Atton 2002: 27)

These six elements form the basis of Atton's model, with each element representing a dimension of alternative media. The first three elements in this typology specify "products"; the last three specify processes of communication (i. e. distributing, writing, printing) (Atton 2002: 27).

Atton's procedures allow, in principle, for a more refined study, sensitive to the inconsistencies of a given media project. Broken down into its composite dimensions, various aspects of a specific media form can be judged specifically as to the extent to which its constituent dimensions break with established practices, modes of representation and organisational relations respectively. For example, there could be inter-dimensional discord: the same medium can be "radical" in terms of its distribution, but "conservative" with regards to political contents. There could also be intra-dimensional ambivalences, so that *within* each dimension there are complexities to take into account that preclude easy categorisation: if, for example, a media form only allowed professionals to write, but had a collective process of decision making (2003: 28). One also needs to weigh up both historical and geographical contingencies, and appreciate that the absence of radicality (at least according to the properties listed in the typology) need not necessarily prevent its overall radical/revolutionary potential. For a certain dimension might not be available for radicalisation in certain cultural and historical contexts.

Attention to all this would enable an analysis of the "mixed radicalisation" of alternative media—looking at hybridity rather than a set of characteristics to determine "purity" of these publications (2003: 29). Atton's model thus tries to capture the *contents* of these media, as well as their *sociocultural contexts* and *modes of organisation*. In this manner, he wishes to provide a definition which includes not only their critical reactions against cultural stereotypes circulating in the mainstream, but also to create an alternative space which builds on different values (Atton 2002: 10). These media, he argues, provide forums for the "direct voices" of "subjugated knowledges" in the Foucauldian sense (cf. 1980: 81–82), offering spaces for what Raymond Williams would call *democratic communication*, the "origins" of which are "genuinely multiple", affording the possibility of "true" communication and "active response" between

all participants (Atton 2002: 9; Williams 1963: 304). In the context of feminist media production, such a possibility might hold true for media forms using easily accessible and cheap technologies such as zine production and blogging. However, it would be more difficult to sustain the argument for, for example, non-commercial but established feminist cultural magazines (e.g. the Swedish *Bang*) that might, which might not be free of a certain exclusionary agenda-setting (even if, indeed, this "agenda" might be based on different, and perhaps even more democratic, principles than the ones generally found in the mainstream media).

Atton states that the ultimate "test" of a theory of alternative media would, in addition to its explanatory value, be its aptitude to capture diversity in the phenomena under study (Atton 2002: 9). The question is whether Atton's theory itself passes this test: Despite its break away from a *rigid* dichotomisation, Atton remains faithful to the basic grammar of "alternative media studies", which as a consequence imposes certain restrictions on both the plasticity and durability of his proposed theory vis-à-vis concrete instances of media production. Focussed, still, on normative judgements and evaluative criteria between radicality and non-radicality, Atton himself reintroduces the binary opposition he wishes to avoid, preventing, ultimately, the analysis of the complex relationships of interconnectedness between various media forms. Even though much feminist media has indeed managed to fill the various criteria as stated by above mentioned authored (see DiCenzo and Ryan 2007), such a dichotomous logic cannot capture the diversity of these practices. Instead, study of feminist media production needs to take into account a varied range of practices. In other words, analyses of feminist media production needs to show an ability to capture media which, to paraphrase Clemencia Rodriguez, are:

> . . . legal, a-legal . . . illegal, pirate, commercial, amateur, local, regional, diasporic, monilingual, bilingual, daily, weekly, monthly, once-in-a-while (1992: 64).

Connecting feminist media: The rhizomatic alternative

Instead of, and in a response to, the aforementioned attempts to distinguish between more oppositional, radical or activist media forms, Olga Bailey, Bart Cammaerts and Nico Carpentier have formulated a theoretical framework that seeks to further the move from a rigid economy of oppositions. Building on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's conceptualisation of the rhizome, which juxtaposes the *rhizomatic* (non-linear, nomadic, connective) with the hierarchical tendencies of the *arbolic*, or tree-like, systems (linear, unitary, with fixed points of origin and sub-divisions) (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 3–25), Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier argue that this metaphor does better justice to "alternative" media systems by accenting their contingent character in contrast to the more "arbolic" and rigidly organised mainstream media (Bailey et al. 2008: 29). Similarly, the notion of the rhizome has previously been employed as a perspective to shed light on the riot grrrl movement, arguing that their zine networks, websites and distros are typically rhizomatic, stressing their character of an "underground culture multiplying via lines of connection that are not controlled from a primary location", but rather as a polymorphous de-centralised movement without leaders, spokeswomen or a unified political agenda attached to its name (Leonard 2007; see also Piano 2002). In Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier's understanding of rhizomatic media, however, the emphasis lays not primarily in the "subterranean" nature such rhizomatic networks. Rather, I would argue

that its analytical strength lies in its ability to explore their elusiveness and contingency *as well as* possible interconnections and linkages with the state and the market (2008: 27). As such, this approach has proven useful to understand also alternative media which do not easily fit into models of counter-hegemony (such as certain zines or blogs, for example).

Feminist zines and rhizomatics

Although the majority of existing feminist zines may subscribe to the antagonistic ethos of anti-commercialism, anti-elitism and anti-professionalism, far from all of them do. A recent case study by the Central and Eastern European *Plotki Femzine* provides an instructive example of a media project which, while motivated partly by the knowledge of existing "grrrl zines", also have employed non-prototypical strategies of media production. While the first edition of *Plotki Femzine* was a cheaply produced photocopied zine, the editorial team later successfully applied for funding from the German-Polish Youth Foundation in order to print a somewhat more magazine-like second edition, thereby negating the widespread assumption that zine production is inherently anarchist and anti-state (Chidgey et al. 2009). Similarly, the Swedish feminist magazine *Blek* initially employed the DIY format of the zine, only later to be re-launched as a more costly magazine, which in turn assisted the editor Linna Johansson in establishing herself as a well-known columnist in one of the major national tabloid newspapers (cf. Gunnarsson Payne 2006).

In light of these ambivalences, the concept of rhizomatic media has the asset of steering clear of simple oppositions between "mainstream" and "alternative". As Deleuze and Guattari argue, the relationship between the rhizomatic and the arbolic is not one of mutual exclusiveness, but,

> A new rhizome may form in the heart of a tree, the hollow of a root, the crook of a branch. Or else it is a microscopic element of the root-tree, a radicle, that gets rhizome production going (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 15).

The analytical value of this statement is one which should not be underestimated—but one which has yet been downplayed in both the work of Leonard and in the alternative media theory of Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier. This calls for further investigation, as it offers a much-needed analytical possibility which manages to avoid romanticised ideas of alternative media as *inherently* democratic and radical, as well as demonising and simplified meanings of the "mainstream" as completely devoid of any potential for the production of counter narratives. Thereby, the rhizomatic approach may offer a potentially fruitful solution to the aforementioned tension between specificity an historical complexity in alternative media theory. Although I agree that the former *tend* to be more rhizomatic in character, and the latter more arbolic, this impasse allows for analyses of, for example, the ways in which arbolic hierarchies can and do form also within alternative media frameworks and, subsequently, how journalistic practices occasionally manage to subvert meanings and instigate social change.

Tactical media and hegemonic appropriations: Culture jamming as rhizomatic media

The term *tactical media* has been coined as a way of expressing a position outside of both mainstream and alternative media, or, as David Garcia calls it,

> . . . a no-man's land on the border of experimental media—art, journalism and political activism—a zone that was, in part, made possible by the mass availability of a powerful and flexible new generation of media tools (2007: 6).

As such, the recent developments of tactical media have been inextricably linked to the expansion of new ICTs. The growth of tactical media should, however, not be understood as a simple adaptation of movement strategies into the "information age". Instead, their positioning is one of refutation in relation to not only the presumed objectivity of journalist practices and the elitism and personality cults of the art world, but also of the disciplinary an instrumentalist strategies of traditional social movements (Garcia 2007: 6). Importantly, the term *tactical* alludes to Michel de Certeau's distinction between strategy and tactics, the latter referring to the art of the subordinated, as opposed to strategies being implemented from a locus of domination. Tactics, in this sense, consists of parasitic appropriations, subversing the meaning of signifiers, which makes techniques such as "subvertising"—the practice of parodying commercial or political advertisements by for example altering their texts or images—prime examples of tactical media.

Exemplary of feminist tactical media would be the work of Princess Hijab, whose provocative street art includes "hijabising" adverts—painting black hijabs on commercial adverts for products such as jewellery and make-up. In her manifesto she states, albeit obliquely, what could be interpreted as a feminist statement:

> Princess Hijab knows that *L'Oréal* and *Dark&Lovely* have been killing her little by little. She feels that the veil is no longer that white. She feels contaminated. (Princesshijab.org, quote no longer accessible online, archived at "Princess Hijab: Hijabizing Advertising", Grassroots feminism)

She declares her influence by "movements such as Adbusters", but argues also that "since 9/11, things have changed" and that she therefore has chosen to subvert images in a non-American way. She claims to "know all about *visual* terrorism" (emphasis added), and rearticulates thereby the dominant cultural stereotypes of the Muslim terrorist, as well as the hijab, which so often in Western contexts has served as the signified of women's oppression per se. Her street art manifesto subverts the meaning of the capitalist beauty industry by pointing its messages out as "lethal", as a threat to her life in a symbolic sense ("killing her little by little"), as well as the epithet used by dominant culture to demonise the Muslim Other. Despite these strong political statements, Princess Hijab does not position herself within any political or religious movement, but states quite clearly her independence and dedication to art only.

> And don't forget, she acts upon her own free will. She is not involved in any lobby or movement be it political, religious or to do with advertising. In fact, the Princess is an insomniac-punk. She is the leader of an artistic fight, nothing else. (Princesshijab.org, quote no longer accessible online, archived at "Princess Hijab: Hijabizing Advertising", Grassroots feminism)

The brief example of "hijabising" makes a strong case for the rhizomatic approach to tactical media, particularly with its use of the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of *deterritorialisation*, shedding light on the process of undermining the authority of corporate advertising by tactically turning its own rhetorical tropes and imagery against it, and thereby destabilising their meaning.

Cultural and political jamming, however, should not be understood as inherently radical modes of operating.[4] On the contrary, what is used as tactics of subordinated groups and oppositional movements can also be used as "strategies" of the dominant. Processes of deterritorialisation, in this sense, are always inextricably tied to *reterritorialisation*, a process demonstrated by Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier's discussion of the ways in which corporate companies deploy jamming techniques for marketing purposes, and political parties appropriate techniques of jamming in their election campaigns as a way of mocking their political competition—in a way that presumably functions as an effective strategy in appealing to younger and "trendier" sections of the electorate (2008: 143–147).[5] In a feminist context, the conceptualisation of de- and reterritorialisation would be particularly useful in understanding the reciprocity between would-be "alternative" and "mainstream" socio-political messages. To give some brief examples: the ways in which the Riot Grrrl slogan "Girl Power!" has been reterritorialised by postfeminist commercial products such as women's magazines and popular music (e.g. the Spice Girls) and feminist jamming tactics such as "Revolution. Because you're worth it!" (an adaptation of the cosmetics company *L'Oréal's* slogan employed by Swedish zine *Radarka*).

I argue that a rhizomatic approach to alternative media shows a flexibility in its theoretical apparatus that is otherwise lacking in much of the literature that comprises the field of alternative media studies. The perspective offers a compelling framework for the study of the tactics, processes and connections within and between feminist media production. However, this is not to say that the approach is without its limitations. Its strength resides in its understanding of the processual dimension of media production—and an understanding that furthermore does not reduce the complexity of such processes. It is therefore particularly informative in obviating the "how" of these connections. What it does *not* offer is an explanatory purchase on the "whys" of these connections and processes.

Devoid of any notion of the subject as it is, this mode of theorisation consequently also lacks any notion of political subjectivity and the more "strategic" aspects of the building of alliances between struggles. It might even be said, then, that the gains of expunging "alternative media studies" of the dichotomies implicitly or explicitly present in the more counter hegemonic approaches has carried with it the loss of explanatory value as to how these media function as crucial sites for the constitution of political identification. In the study of feminist media production, this latter aspect cannot be underestimated. On the contrary,

[4] Although tactical media is predominantly discussed as a 1990s phenomenon, the tactics of cultural and political "jamming" are not entirely new. Their genealogy can be traced back to, for example, techniques of *détournement* (Debord 1959/2006) and the radical bricolages (Hebdige 1979: 103) of the Situationist and punk movements, both of which involve re-using and re-articulating elements of the dominant culture so as to subvert their meanings, thereby rendering their contingent character visible and showing how "things could be otherwise" (see Bailey et al. 2008: 138–9).

[5] Åsa Wettergren has defined culture jamming as a "symbolic form of protest located within a field of anti-corporate activism where tensions between democratic principles and the undemocratic principles of the 'free' market are articulated as pivotal contemporary political conflicts" (Wettergren 2009: 2).

any rigorous analysis of *feminist* media production needs to take seriously the ways in which gendered identities are transformed into feminist identities. I would now like to sketch out a further contribution to the field that at least begins to make incursions into these questions.

Feminist media and political identification: From citizens' media to sites of antagonism

Rodriguez's starting point is the supposition that social subjects identify in multiple, contingent and heterogeneous ways, constituted by an assembly of subject positions (Mouffe 1992: 372). Social categories such as "women" are produced through complex intersections of various discourses and institutions, and the subordination of women cannot be understood to be constituted by a single cause or underlying essence. From this destabilised notion of the subject it follows that one can no longer view any member of a historically subordinated group as belonging to a certain "interest group" with predetermined interests and needs (Rodriguez 1992: 18). Media representations therefore cannot be said to represent the "true" interests of any certain groups. Rather, from this perspective, *interests do not precede political action, but are constituted in political acts*. As such, alternative media plays a crucial role in the constitution and negotiation of political interests and collective identities.

Mediated representations of "interest groups", then, are seen as a *constitutive practice*, actually producing the very interests that they claim to represent. Instead of risking to reproduce essentialist notions of "women's writing", this perspective allows for feminist identities not to be revealed by feminist media production, but the latter to be part of producing them. It is telling that Rodriguez dismisses the terminology of "alternative media" altogether, arguing that it problematically predetermines these media as necessarily in opposition to the mainstream media, and thereby "limits the potential of these media to their ability to resist the alienating power of mainstream media" and claims that this "approach blinds our understanding of all other instances of change and transformation brought about by these media" (Rodriguez 1992: 20). In its place Rodriguez proposes the formulation of *citizens' media*, an idea entailing three fundamental properties: i.) that it would be a collective enactment of citizenship through active interventions and transformations of dominant media; ii.) that these collective practices of citizenship take place through the contestation of social codes, legitimised identities and institutionalised social relations; and, iii.) that these interventions have an empowering—and, as a result of this empowerment, transformative—effect on the community in which they are located (2001: 20). In her notion of citizens' media, Rodriguez stresses Chantal Mouffe and Kirstie McClure's extensive understanding of "the political", extending the political from the narrow definition of "juridical demands upon the state" to also include a

> quotidian politics—a politics which extends the terrain of political contestation to the everyday enactment of social practices and routine reiterations of cultural representations (McClure 1992: 123).

In feminist terms, this "everydayness" of politics have been long known and articulated in the famous slogan "The personal is political!", so often reiterated in feminist political manifestations, relating to crucial feminist issues such as sexual violence, heteronormativity, reproductive rights and issues concerning body images.

Contemporary feminist media production can be said to embrace this quotidian dimension of politics, not least in relation to media forms such as zines and blogs. The value of feminist media production such as zine writing and blogs would not *necessarily* lie in its potential to affect political policy, but rather in the contestation of symbolic codes and rearticulation of everyday experiences. Many feminist zines, for example, offer personal accounts of negative feelings towards one's own body, thereby de-naturalising the beauty standards of commercial girls' and women's magazines.

> why do i cry when i look in the mirror? why do i look at stupid magazine ads wish that i look like that? why is there so much fucken emphasis placed on looking "pretty" and i dont know what i want to be. just don't want to hate myself anymore for not being the delicate little flower that i am told to be. why does the media try so hard to dictate to us what is and what isnt beautiful . . . I am so sick of hating myself. i don't want to cry in the mirror anymore. (*Revolution Rising* #1, in Kearney 2006: 181, spelling in the original)

This quote demonstrates a tendency displayed by many feminist zines, namely that capitalist and patriarchal mainstream media is articulated as the constitutive outside of feminist zine culture. That is, this "outside" would not only be different from feminist media, but it would constitute its "radical other" and thereby be positioned in an *antagonistic* relationship to feminism as such.

I argue that this antagonistic relationship takes us back somewhat, showing us, as it were, the loss of an analytical strength of the counter hegemonic approaches surveyed in the first part of this chapter. From the post-Marxist approach of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, there is no *inherent* opposition between even the most unequal subject positions (e. g. "men", "women"). Rather, the *antagonistic* relationship occurs only if the subordinated group *opposes* the unequal relationship by construing it as a relationship of domination and subordination (Laclau 1990: 6; Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 122; Mouffe 1993: 77). With its strong anti-essentialist ontology, Laclau and Mouffe's perspective avoids any pitfalls of reproducing any metaphysical ideals of any inherent "female" way of writing, or of any determinist idea of universal interests of "all women" (cf. Rhodes 2005: 10–23). Instead their theoretical approach makes possible theorisation of the ways in which feminist identities are actually constituted through the practice of media production, and how these identities—on both an individual and a collective level—are necessarily contextual, relational and processual. The explanatory value of this is that it offers a way to study not only the "hows" but also the "whys", the conditions of emergence for feminist identification and the construction of "chains of equivalence" between collective identities that are articulated in opposition to one another, between a collective identity and its "oppressive other" (e.g. "sisterhood" vs. "patriarchy") (cf. Gunnarsson Payne 2006; 2012). Understanding this process is crucial in order to understand the role that feminist media production plays in producing spaces where gendered identities and relations are transformed into sites of antagonistic struggle.

Concluding reflections: Current developments and future challenges

There has been something of a blind spot in alternative media studies to date. The limited numbers of sustained engagements with the rich and variegated history of feminist media is surprising given its historical prominence over the last two centuries. The question that

I wished to raise in this chapter was that given the lack of attention to feminist media production, can it be said of the conceptual tools available that there is an essential difficulty in teasing out the specificities and nuances of instances of feminist media? The intention was not necessarily to propose that there is something "different" about feminist initiatives, which set them apart from other modes of media production, as if an engagement with feminist media projects requires a specifically feminist theoretical perspective. Rather, the aim was to move away from theorisations of alternative media with too broad and formal conceptions, under which too many concrete examples can be subsumed and made identical to one another, to the detriment of paying attention to the differences between instances of alternative media as well as the tensions and inconsistencies internal to a particular media project. A more dynamic (less static) understanding of media production was sought.

An assessment of alternative media theories reveals a wide ranging set of theoretical engagements. Ultimately, each can be brought back to a common denominator wishing to give the idea of "alternative media" a conceptual and phenomenal specificity that overdraws the distinction between alternative and mainstream forms of media. The vicissitudes and complexities of actually existing feminist media are not best served by such hard-edged analytical distinctions. Examples abound within the feminist movement itself that would caution against the use of such metaphysically infused distinctions. Both Deleuze and Guattarian and the Mouffe and Laclauian insights might be better harnessed to provide a more durable, a more empirically responsive theory, far more sensitive to the contingencies of media production. The work of Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier as well as Rodriguez was referred to as examples that have actively developed these insights into theories of media production beyond hegemonic mass media. Each departs from the attempt to define what constitutes an instance of "alternative media" (and whether or not we should even use this term) from outside of its particular manifestations, but at the same time brings to bear with it a set of theoretical tools that do not merely set out to describe a particular case of media production but seek to explain the processes by which media comes to be produced in a given socio-political situation.

What each of these scholars advance can only be just the start, however. As far as the successes of their operationalisations of certain post-structuralist presuppositions, further advances need to be made to fully meet the requirements of rigorous study of feminist media production. Importantly, I would suggest attention needs to be paid to the constitution of feminist identities, furthering particularly not only the ways in which alliances and coalitions are made, but also the role feminist media production plays in the constitution of collective feminist identities. A significant but hitherto overlooked dimension of alternative and/or feminist media production is the central role of media production for affective investments in certain feminist vocabularies, aesthetics and political prioritisations. Such explorations would need to combine theoretical insights of post-structuralist approaches to alternative media and nuanced conceptualisations of political subjectivity with thorough empirical investigation of both audiences and producers (to the extent such a distinction can at all be made) of feminist media.

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CHAPTER 75

Media Activism from Above and Below: Lessons From the 1940s American Reform Movement

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Abstract

The 1940s was a contentious decade for US media policy. Activists, policymakers, and communication industries grappled over media's normative foundations and regulatory guidelines. At this time, a reform agenda was taking shape at both the grassroots social movement level and inside elite policy circles. This paper examines the tensions within this nascent media reform movement, many of which are still negotiated among media activists today. by recovering contingency and conflict, this research sheds light on larger paradigmatic shifts. It suggests that despite significant reform activism in the 1940s, a commercial, self-regulated media system emerged largely inoculated against further structural challenges. The failures of this reform movement hold important lessons for contemporary activists.

Keywords

1940s, media activism, media advocacy, media policy, media reform

American media history is often sanitized of its contentious past. To suggest that the "winners" have been the sole authors of this history would be an overstatement, but

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most historical accounts downplay popular resistance to what would become the dominant commercial media model. To the extent that it is pondered at all, our current media system is often assumed to be part of the natural order of everyday life. However, many features of the American media system actually trace back to resolutions borne from repeated confrontations over the design and democratic purpose of communication institutions. during these policy fights over media's normative role in a democratic society, grassroots activists, DC-based regulators, and commercial media industries grappled overcompeting visions. The following study aims to reorient our understanding of American media policy history by reinserting this conflict at the heart of the media system's design. Drawing from a historical analysis that I expand on elsewhere, [1] I emphasize that media reform efforts—advanced by both public interest-oriented policymakers from above and grassroots advocates and activists from below—are a mainstay of American media history. In doing so, I draw attention to a largely forgotten history of media reform activism, particularly during the 1940s. My main purpose for foregrounding this "usable history" is to bring a number of lessons and implications drawn from these earlier contestations into focus and show their relevance for the challenges facing media reformers today.

American Media's normative Foundations Rooted in Conflict

Most Americans are taught in school that an independent press is necessary for democratic self-governance, but rarely do we stop to reflect on what this really means. How did we as a society determine media's primary role as a democratic force? How did we decide upon media institutions' obligations to the public? How was the relationship between the state, the polity, and media institutions constructed, and how has this arrangement changed over time? Such inquiries require historical analyses that trace policy discourses and trajectories back to moments of conflict when normative foundations were fought over and assumptions about media's democratic role ossified. This approach highlights contingency; it reveals that outcomes were neither foreordained nor natural. At key junctures in this media system's development, amid multiple sites of struggle, certain claims won out over others. Thus, the contours of our media system have resulted more from contestation than any consensual notion of what media should look like. [2] In many ways, a history of media is, in fact, a history of media reform. More specifically, it is a history of often-failed attempts to decommercialize the American media system.

"Media reform," as I use it, refers to activist attempts to make structural changes to a media system, usually through policy interventions. American history is punctuated with moments of struggle and reform in which politicized groups saw media as a crucial terrain of contestation. [3] An overview of this history benefits from the inclusion of case studies in which conflicting interests and their respective discourses are cast into sharp relief. These moments tend to occur

[1] Victor Pickard, *America's Battle for Media Democracy: The Triumph of Corporate Libertarianism and the Future of Media Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[2] See, for example, Robert McChesney, "Conflict, not Consensus: The debate Over broadcast Communication Policy, 1930-1935," in *Ruthless Criticism: New Perspectives in U.S. Communication History*, ed. William Solomon and Robert McChesney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 222–257.

[3] For an examination of media reform as a social movement, see Robert A. Hackett and William K. Carroll, *Remaking Media: The Struggle to Democratize Public Communication* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006).

during what previous scholars have termed "critical junctures"[4] or "constitutive moments"[5]: periods of rapid change marked by crisis and opportunity. This essay draws from archival materials to reflect on past struggles to change the American media system, focusing on the especially contentious debates of the 1940s. As activists, policymakers, and media industries grappled over the normative foundations that governed major communication and regulatory institutions, a reform agenda was taking shape at both the grassroots social movement level and inside elite policy circles. In an effort to inform future media reform efforts, this essay examines the tensions within this nascent media reform movement, many of which are still negotiated by media reform groups today. It pays particular attention to the retreat from a structural critique of the commercial media system in the immediate postwar years.

Historicizing media reform efforts and policy debates allows us to address the question of how we got here, and it restores contingency and deferred alternatives—ideas which merit recovery not only because they correct the historical record by reclaiming resistance, but also for their potential to inspire future reform efforts. This kind of critical historical analysis problematizes and politicizes current media policies. To varying degrees, resistance against the media system is always present. during critical junctures—or whatever "pivotal moment" metaphor we choose—this resistance peaks, opening up windows of fleeting opportunity. At the same time, it is during these moments of crisis that a media system's normative foundations become concretized. Recovering forgotten alternatives like activist and noncommercial models sheds light on larger paradigmatic shifts. For example, it shows that the ideological consolidation that girded a commercial, self-regulated media system emerged from the 1940s largely intact and further inoculated against structural challenges despite activist efforts. The rise and fall of this postwar media reform movement holds several key lessons for contemporary media activists. before explicating these implications, however, I will first discuss a historical and theoretical framework that brings these struggles into focus. next I discuss some specific 1940s reform initiatives and their parallels in our current political moment. Finally, I draw some general lessons from the history of this failed media reform movement.

A Gramscian Approach to Power and History

Like all social phenomena, media policy does not spring fully formed from Zeus's head; rather, it emerges from a multiplicity of sociopolitical influences. In making sense of these inherently messy processes, a historical analysis of media policy invites a particular theoretical model: one that underscores contingencies without obscuring the evolving contours of power relationships. At its best, this kind of theoretical approach encourages and guides action by underscoring the stakes and by bringing political arrangements and power structures into focus. In general, historicizing is valuable in that it allows us to see contemporary relationships, practices, and institutions as historical constructs contingent upon contemporaneous factors instead of simply natural phenomena. by applying this approach to current media debates, we can reimagine the present and reclaim alternative trajectories.

A number of theoretical approaches fall under the rubric of historical research. Although high theory is unnecessary for understanding the history of American media reform, a par-

[4] Robert McChesney, *Communication Revolution* (New York: New Press, 2007).

[5] Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

ticular framework may prove useful if we are to understand recurring patterns of struggle. Combining intellectual, social, and political histories, my theoretical approach to understanding how power operates and history unfolds vis-à-vis media processes and institutions can best be described as Gramscian. Fleshing out patterns like contingencies, contradictions, conjunctures, and ruptures, this analysis assumes that all historical processes transpire over time in complex dialectical interplays, especially between hegemonic forces and the disempowered. Rendered correctly, such historical approaches avoid over-determination. The critical media studies scholar deepa Kumar reminds us that Marxist methods enable an understanding of "the world in all its complexity" and thereby "opens up the possibility for change."[6] Despite an emphasis on showing how power ensures its own preponderance, this approach does not assume that policy outcomes always reflect the most powerful interests' intentions and, as such, are predetermined. Rather, a Gramscian critique allows for various kinds of agency in the form of engagement with and resistance against dominant power structures.

Much Gramscian theory centers on the notion of "hegemony," a contentious political process by which elites control that which passes as "common sense."[7] These power relationships are inherently unstable, and constantly open up new terrains for political struggle between dominant interests and those they attempt to subjugate. They must be recreated daily, constantly opening up new areas for resistance. Stuart Hall notes that hegemony "should never be mistaken for a finished project."[8] A Gramscian historical framework restores the promise of change, allows for unexpected outcomes, and assumes that human events reflect not societal consensus but ongoing conflict. This conflict is greatest during realignments of what Gramsci termed "historic blocs" of the ruling elite. Such reconfigurations produce new political opportunities, which in turn allow for new policy formations.

Gramsci referred to these periods in which historic blocs are challenged as "conjunctural moments." A conjuncture marks the immediate terrain of conflict. Explicating this useful concept, Gramsci wrote:

> A crisis occurs, sometimes lasting for decades. This exceptional duration means that incurable structural contradictions have revealed themselves . . . and that, despite this, the political forces which are struggling to conserve and defend the existing structure itself are making every effort to cure them, within certain limits, and to overcome them. These incessant and persistent efforts . . . form the terrain of the "conjunctural," and it is upon this terrain that the forces of opposition organize.[9]

Those points in American history when industry control of major media institutions was challenged serve as conjunctural moments. during the depression and the new deal, for example, a counter-hegemonic regime was struggling to take hold as historic blocs were in flux. new alliances were forming, serving as an impetus for what Gramsci termed a "crisis of the ruling class's hegemony" and a "crisis of authority."[10] "If the ruling class has lost its con-

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[6] Deepa Kumar, "Media, Culture and Society: The Relevance of Marx's dialectical Method in Marxism and Communication Studies," in *The Point Is to Change It*, ed. Lee Artz, Steve Macek, and Dana Cloud (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 83.

[7] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 323, 334, 419, 425.

[8] Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal* (London: Verso, 1988), 7.

[9] Gramsci, "Selections," 178.

[10] Ibid, 210, 275.

sensus," Gramsci argued, "this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies." According to this Gramscian analysis, "the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born." [11]

The ultimate failure of these counter-hegemonic attempts makes them no less significant. As cultural historian Michael denning argues in his examination of the "Popular Front," a coalition of left wing radicals, new deal liberals, and political progressives that drove reform during the 1930s and 40s, these efforts often have lasting material effects even in failure. He notes how a prolonged "war of position" unfolded during the Great depression and World War II, between conservative forces and a Popular Front social movement that attempted "to create a new historical bloc, a new balance of forces." denning argues that the "post-war settlement" that eventually emerged—exemplified by the corporatist arrangement of big labor, big capital, and big government—resulted from "the defeat of the Popular Front and the post-war purge of the left from the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and the cultural apparatus." "If the metaphor of the front suggests a place where contending forces meet," denning observes, "the complementary metaphor of the conjuncture suggests the time of the battle." based on this view, denning sees the history of the Popular Front as "a series of offensives and retreats on the 'terrain of the conjunctural.'" [12]

This focus on evolving historical patterns of power struggles and shifting institutional life cycles around conjunctural moments brings Gramscian analysis into conversation with concepts associated with historical institutionalism. At first glance, Gramscian theory and historical institutionalism may seem like an odd pairing. After all, the latter seeks to move beyond grand theorizing and basic material explanations for institutional change that do not adequately explain all variations of institutional behavior. [13] However, historical institutionalism assumes that larger macro-level historical and political relationships—the focus of much Marxist analysis—are mediated through interconnected institutional discourses, habits, and imperatives to impact micro-level processes. both Gramscian theory and historical institutionalism focus on how struggles over foundational assumptions during times of crisis can result in intellectual paradigm shifts. Furthermore, in seeking to shed light on sharp breaks from the past, combining these theoretical models can help account for how moments of equilibrium are ruptured, ushering in a new set of policies that may result in new institutional arrangements. both theoretical approaches also assume that institutions and their relationships reflect historical experiences of conflict and compromise among organized constituencies. Among other types of inquiry, historical institutionalism tries to make sense of how some trajectories are chosen over others. [14] Thus, discerning "paths not taken" is as significant as identifying the chosen trajectories and resulting path dependencies. [15]

The most important overlap in the two frameworks is found in Gramsci's notions of crisis and conjuncture and historical institutionalism's focus on "critical junctures." The concept of

[11] Ibid, 275–276.

[12] Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Labouring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1996), 22.

[13] Theda Skocpol, Peter B. Evans, and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[14] Theda Skocpol, "Why I am a Historical-Institutionalist," *Polity* 28, Fall (1985): 103–106.

[15] Paul Pierson and Theda Skocpol, "Historical Institutionalism in Contemporary Political Science," in *Historical Institutionalism*, ed. Ira Katznelson and Helen V. Milner (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 693–721.

critical junctures brings into focus how institutional regimes and relationships see long periods of relative stability and path dependency punctuated by sudden systemic jolts, in which new opportunities for change arise. Much of the literature within policy studies shows how decisions made during such periods profoundly impact systemic development.[16] As Kathleen Thelen notes, "Politics involves some elements of chance (agency, choice), but once a path is taken, then it can become 'locked in' as all the relevant actors adjust their strategies to accommodate the prevailing pattern."[17] Robert McChesney has applied this theory specifically to understanding media reform, and argues that the US media system is undergoing a critical juncture in the early twenty-first century.[18] Critical junctures tend to invite more public engagement with and scrutiny of media systems than less contentious periods and typically emerge during times of technical, political, and social change. during these moments, radical ideas that were previously deemed beyond the bounds of permissible discourse are suddenly granted more legitimacy. Thus, this theoretical and historical framework brings into focus recurring moments of contestation when a media system's normative foundations are challenged and, possibly, redefined.

Waves of Media Reform

Periods of media reform are often marked by an explosion of activist media. Indeed, activist media have been a crucial resource for American social movements and marginalized groups who have often resorted to contesting representations in the mainstream press or creating their own media to advance political causes. Revolutionary pamphleteers helped mobilize the struggle for independence against the british. A vibrant abolitionist press galvanized reformers in the decades preceding the Civil War. A popular working class press was integral to the burgeoning labor movement in the first half of the twentieth century. In the early 1900s, the advertising-supported socialist newspaper *The Appeal to Reason* reached nearly a million subscribers and helped advance socialist candidate Eugene debs's presidential ambitions. during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an ethnic press provided support for various marginalized cultural groups.[19] In the 1960s, an underground press helped sustain the civil rights and antiwar movements. Today, digital social media are central to media reform efforts.

In the twentieth century, media reform struggles have increasingly centered on questions of policy to effect change in the structures of media themselves. The 1930s and 1940s witnessed targeted policy reform efforts, particularly toward broadcast monopolies and the newspaper industry, when both elites and grassroots activists considered a relatively wide range of policy options. In the 1930s, a spirited media reform coalition attempted to establish a more public-oriented broadcast system, while the newspaper Guild challenged the commercial

[16] See, for example, Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (New York: Longman, 2002); Deborah Stone, *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).

[17] Kathleen Thelen, "Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 385.

[18] McChesney, *Communication Revolution*, 9–12.

[19] Juan Gonzalez and Joseph Torres, *News for All the People: The Epic Story of Race and the American Media* (London: Verso, 2011).

publishers' ownership and control of print media.[20] These efforts were ultimately crushed, but they established footholds for future reformers to carry on various struggles, particularly during the 1940s, as I will show. Antiwar, civil rights, and other social movements advanced media reform projects in the 1960s. during this time, public broadcasting was established, the Fairness doctrine enjoyed its golden age, and reform groups coordinated around a number of key policy issues.[21] Within the new World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) debates in the 1970s, a global media reform movement, perhaps the first of its kind, took place around communication rights. Many of these reform initiatives would later reemerge during the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) debates in the early 2000s.[22]

More recently, issues like media ownership and internet policy—as well as ongoing struggles over representation and alternative media—have galvanized vibrant media reform movements. Media democracy, media justice, and media reform movements coalesced in the late 1990s to take on different aspects of the corporate media system. These movements often took advantage of new digital media, especially the Internet. The rise of Internet-based activism would help drive a radical indymedia movement in the early 2000s that established Independent Media Centers in communities across the country and globe.[23] A similar emphasis on changing the media system helped establish the formidable media reform organization Free Press that would successfully engage and organize broad constituencies around what had previously been seen as obscure media policy issues. For decades, these issues had typically been negotiated behind closed doors and beyond public scrutiny, but media reformers proved that an engaged public could quickly change that calculus. In 2003, nearly three million people wrote letters to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) contesting plans to loosen media ownership restrictions.[24] In 2006, over a million people petitioned the FCC in favor of a then-obscure policy called "net neutrality" designed to maintain a nondiscriminatory internet.[25] In 2012, 4.5 million people signed a petition to roll back two proposed internet piracy bills that would have given government and corporations tremendous power over web content.[26] In the summer of 2014, nearly four million people submitted comments in response to the FCC's proposed Open Internet rules. Similar activist energies have coalesced around a series of large national media reform conferences, which attract thousands of attendees.

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[20] Ben Scott, "Labor's new deal for Journalism: The newspaper Guild in the 1930s" (PhD diss., University of Illinois, Urbana, 2009).

[21] Mark Lloyd, *Prologue to a Farce: Democracy and Communication in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Milton Mueller, Brenden Kuebris and Christina Page, "Reinventing Media Activism: Public Interest Reform in the Making of U.S. Communication- Information Policy, 1960-2002," *Information Society* 20, no. 3 (2004): 169–187.

[22] Victor Pickard, "Neoliberal Visions and Revisions in Global Communications Policy from NWICO to WSIS," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 31, no. 2: (2007): 118–139.

[23] Victor Pickard, "Assessing the Radical democracy of Indymedia: Discursive, Technical and Institutional Constructions," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 23, no. 1 (2006): 19–38.

[24] Eric Klinenberg, *Fighting for Air: The Battle to Control America's Media* (New York: Metropolitan books, 2007), 238–244.

[25] Stephanie Kirchgaessner, Patti Waldmeir, and Richard Waters, "Google Action Tests Power of Cash vs Votes in Washington," *The Financial Times*, July 18, 2006.

[26] "SOPA Petition Gets Millions of Signatures as Internet Piracy Legislation Protests Continue," *Washington Post*, January 19, 2012, accessed May 14, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/sopa-petition-gets-millions-of-signatures-as-internet-piracy- legislation-protestscontinue/2012/01/19/gIQAHaAybQ_story.html.

It is tempting to assume that these increasingly common reformist manifestations are unique to this period in American history. However, as this brief historical sketch suggests, these waves of activism are, in fact, continuities of ongoing media reform traditions. One of these historic moments of media reform holds particular contemporary relevance, both in terms of forgotten antecedents and important parallels. For the remainder of this paper I focus on the post-World War II media reform movement.

The Rise and Fall of the Postwar Media Reform Movement

Although I discuss the postwar media reform movement in more detail elsewhere,[27] a brief synopsis is useful here. The 1940s saw widespread public discontent with commercial media institutions, stemming from a perceived lack of local accountability, the rise of media monopolies, and increasingly obtrusive advertising. Radio was subject to especially vehement public criticism, and the newspaper industry underwent a crisis that prompted policymakers to call for structural reform.[28] The disintegration of the liberal new deal consensus, reactions from threatened business elites, and a rightward shift in the political landscape led to sociopolitical turmoil and uncertainty. Technological changes were also dramatic; broadcasting was still a relatively new medium, especially given the rise of FM radio, and television lay just over the horizon. These factors combined to produce a fleeting opportunity for a fairly radical overhaul of an entrenched media system—reforms that would be unthinkable during less contentious times.

At this time, political elites in Congress, the Supreme Court, the White House, and the FCC aligned with labor, educators, and civil rights groups to negotiate a number of crucial policy debates about the role of media infrastructure in a democratic society. The resolutions of these debates helped define the relationships between media institutions, various publics, and the state: the FCC forced nbC to divest itself of its blue network, which became AbC; the Supreme Court's 1945 antitrust ruling against the Associated Press called for government to encourage "diverse and antagonistic voices" in media; the 1946 FCC blue book, which outlined broadcasters' public service responsibilities, advocated for more local news, public affairs, and experimental noncommercial programming; the 1947 Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press established journalistic ethics; and the 1949 Fairness doctrine mandated public interest parameters for broadcasters.

The logic driving these reform efforts is best described as "social democratic" in the sense that it assumed a progressive role for the state in protecting media's public service responsibilities from excessive commercial imperatives.[29] The massive governmental programs of the new deal changed fundamental expectations about government and the role of civic participation. beginning in the late 1930s, the US economy was under pressure from the federal government to ramp up war production, restoring financial health after a disastrous economic depression. In the early to mid-1940s, the United States was directly involved in a

[27] See Victor Pickard, "The Air belongs to the People: The Rise and Fall of a Postwar Radio Reform Movement," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 30, no. 4 (2013): 307–326.

[28] For newspapers, see David Davies, *The Postwar Decline of American Newspapers, 1945–1965* (Westport: Praeger, 2006); for radio, see Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Waves of Opposition: Labor, Business, and the Struggle for Democratic Radio* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

[29] Pickard, *America's Battle for Media Democracy*, 4–5.

world war, which ushered in a period of government and corporate propaganda and limited speech in some ways, while reorganizing priorities for telecommunications and media policy. At the same time, the new deal agenda, which arrived later and stayed longer at the FCC than other areas of government, focused on breaking up monopolies and imposing public interest obligations on companies that commanded much of the economy.

By the mid-1940s, progressive policymakers' concerns about commercial capture squandering radio's democratic potential were further bolstered by increasing dissent from below, which manifested as a media reform coalition composed of dissident intellectuals, civil libertarians, African American groups, religious organizations, educators, labor unions, and other progressive activists.[30] These groups pressured broadcasters and the FCC via petitions, call-ins, and letter-writing campaigns, urging them to democratize the public airwaves and to improve programming.[31] This public pressure challenged the ascendant libertarian notion of media industry self-regulation, and prompted policy measures like the FCC blue book. The blue book documented the lack of diversity in typical radio programming, and it established criteria that defined and protected the "public interest." but it also encouraged more engagement from local communities to help keep broadcasters accountable.

The neighborhood or community listener council was a signature model of 1940s radio activism.[32] Although there was no single leadership formula or blueprint for the creation of these institutions, the veteran reformer and media scholar Charles Siepmann stated that the "idea of such councils is the federation of interest in radio of all social groups in a given community—independent of influence or financial support by radio stations."[33] Throughout the mid- to late 1940s, reformers placed much hope on listener councils' potential.[34] Usually created by local communities—sometimes organized by parents, educators, and various civic organizations—listener councils fostered active engagement with radio programming. by the mid-1940s, listener councils were established in Cleveland, Columbus, and new york City, and in more rural areas like central Wisconsin and northern California. As these councils emerged across the country, reformers advocated for their broader deployment to counter commercial broadcasters' control of broadcasting, especially their dominance over programming selections and their reliance on excessive advertising. Some reformers hoped that the councils could extend to the state level,[35] and coordinate nationally, thereby harmonizing

[30] Ibid., 9–37.

[31] Other groups involved in 1940s media reform campaigns include the ACLU, Jewish organizations, and women's groups. For an interesting case study of the latter that was often pro-industry and anti-media regulation, see Jennifer Proffitt, "War, Peace, and Free Radio: The Women's national Radio Committee's Efforts to Promote democracy, 1939–1946," *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 17, no.1 (2010): 2–17.

[32] A related model was the "radio listening group." Thousands of these groups sprang up across the United States during the 1930s and 1940s. For an in-depth review of listenening groups' deployment in the United States and in other countries, see david Goodman, "FREC and Radio Listening Groups," ICA Conference, San Juan, May 2015. See also david Goodman, *Radio's Civic Ambition: American Broadcasting and Democracy in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011)

[33] Siepmann, 1950, 78.

[34] See, for example, dorothy McFadden, "Voice for the Listener," *New York Time*s, February 27, 1944, X7; Jack Gould, "Listeners Council: An Active Organization would benefit Radio, *New York Times*, January 4, 1948, X9; Robert Lewis Shayon, "TV Programing Changes: don't Look Too Much to FCC–for it looks to . . ." *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 14, 1950, 6; "Listener Council Movement backed as Means to Improve TV Programs," *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 19, 1950, 12.

[35] In some states, for example in new Jersey, successful state-level councils were established. See McFadden,

their standards and survey techniques with the FCC and potentially with an overarching public national council. They proposed that councils receive local government support or be volunteer-based to provide institutional backing for groups collecting research on the state of broadcasting. Armed with this data, listener councils could pressure radio stations to privilege localism with the threat of presenting their critical evaluations to the FCC during broadcasters' renewal procedures.[36]

The potentials of listener councils generated a lot of support from 1940s media reformers, even if this model never became a major force within policy debates. Especially as the 1940s progressed and the FCC seemed to falter in its activist agenda, many progressive policy elites hoped for an aroused public to step into the breach. For example, Charles Siepmann saw listener councils as the "community's best safeguard against the exploitation of the people's wavelengths and the surest guarantee [that radio stations consider] . . . its needs."[37] by devising blueprints for high-quality local programming, Siepmann opined, the councils serve as "watchdogs for the listener, ready and able to protest the abuse of airtime and to promote its better use."[38] Siepmann and other reformers hoped that an engaged public could succeed where the FCC had failed to police a commercial media system into being more public service oriented.

Robert Shayon, another prominent supporter, referred to a "Listener Council movement" and saw them as an instrument for potential democratization of broadcasting.[39] He endorsed Siepmann's "eight functions of a listener council," including the following: collect and publicize essential facts on the present state of broadcasting; facilitate and encourage discriminative listening to worthwhile programs; bring pressure on stations to eliminate abuses; voice the needs of the community by preparing blueprints of worthwhile programs to be executed by a station; provide listeners with opportunity to meet and discuss their interests in radio and television; alert listeners to important developments in radio and television by means of bulletins and circulars; carry its members' views to the FCC regarding matters of policy raised in public hearings before the FCC or to the renewal of a given station's license; and influence not only radio and television but also the press by correspondence and prepared articles on radio and television as a social force.[40] The listener council seemed like the ideal vehicle to advance a more socially responsible broadcast system, but the model was also at risk of becoming appropriated by commercial stations who established their own industry-friendly listener councils. Ultimately the model never became the social force that reformers had envisioned.

Many activist groups participating in the 1940s media reform coalition also created their own alternative media, contested negative imagery in mainstream media, and exploited openings within commercial media to disseminate their political messages. Labor unions succeeded in buying a number of stations and instructed their members on producing their own

1944.

[36] See Llewellyn White, *The American Radio* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), 122–125, 222–234.

[37] Charles Siepmann, *Radio's Second Chance* (Boston: Little, brown & Co., 1946), 51–52.

[38] Ibid., 50–52.

[39] Shayon, Robert. *Television and Our Children* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1951), 71–82. Similarly, McFadden, 1944 referred to a "growing movement" toward establishing listener councils.

[40] Ibid., 74, listed in Siepmann, 1950, 78.

shows or insert labor-friendly scripts into commercial radio programming. The left-leaning CIO galvanized reformers with its *Radio Handbook*, a pamphlet that contained instructions for getting on the air and promoting "freedom to listen" and "freedom of the air." It insisted that workers had not exercised "their *right t*o use radio broadcasting." "Labor has a voice," the pamphlet stated, and "the people have a right to hear it." Although broadcasters owned radio stations' equipment, "the air over which the broadcasts are made does not belong to companies or corporations. *The air belongs to the people*."[41]

The handbook instructed activists on how to gain radio time for a labor perspective via different techniques and formats, including the Straight Talk, the Round Table discussion, the Spot Announcement, and the dramatic Radio Play. It encouraged activists to generate good publicity and coordinate with consumer groups, cooperatives, women's organizations, and religious organizations.[42] beyond labor-related concerns, this media reform coalition shared major grievances, critiques, tactics, and strategies with which to engage in media policy debates in Washington, DC. Media reformers continuously pressured the FCC and commercial broadcasters to include diverse perspectives in radio programming. Their objectives often would converge around specific policy interventions, especially with progressive allies at the FCC. However, sometimes at critical moments (like when the FCC blue book was being released) there was a lack of communication and coordination between inside-the-beltway progressive policymakers and grassroots activists.

That the air belonged to the people, that the radio spectrum was a crucial public resource that should be protected from commercial interests, was a unifying rallying cry deployed by disparate activist groups.[43] but although the movement was successful in realizing a number of high-water marks in terms of progressive policy reforms, it ultimately failed, largely as the result of a corporate backlash that used Cold War politics to red-bait and silence reformers. Even attempts at relatively light and innocuous regulations (such as requiring media institutions to be more locally accountable) were pounced on by industry representatives and conservatives in both major parties as evidence of socialist sympathies. As the anticommunist hysteria reached a fever pitch in the late 1940s and early 1950s, progressive policy elites were essentially chased out of dC while more radical left-leaning activists were blacklisted. Once this reform movement was demobilized, its initiatives were variously ignored, contested and co-opted by industry-friendly arrangements. I refer to this elsewhere as the "Postwar Settlement for American Media," which cemented a self-regulating, commercial media system based on a "corporate libertarian" arrangement that continues to shape much of the media with which Americans interact today.[44] The media reformers would, however, succeed in advancing some progressive policies, including the policy that would develop into the Fairness doctrine, and their discursive gains would set the stage for future victories like establishing the public broadcasting system in the late 1960s.

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[41] Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), *Radio Handbook* (their emphases), 1944, 6.

[42] Ibid., 25.

[43] Pickard, "The Air belongs to the People."

[44] Pickard, *America's Battle for Media Democracy*, 5–6.

Lessons from the 1940s Media Reform Movement

There are a number of reasons that the rise and fall of the 1940s media reform movement remains relevant today. The recent collapse of commercial journalism makes the 1940s reformers' inability to effect structural change and the passed-over alternatives especially timely for reexamination. The persistence of similar crises suggests that many of our media problems are structural in nature and therefore require structural alternatives. Specifically, given the failure of the market to provide viable journalism, structural alternatives like nonprofit and/or worker-owned newspapers, as well as more proactive regulatory interventions and resources devoted to public media, are worthy of reconsideration.[45] Another parallel is that the issues facing new media businesses in the 1940s have returned today: questions of gatekeeping (e.g., net neutrality); corporate capture of policy discourse and regulatory agencies (as well as, at least for a time, renewed efforts toward red-baiting),[46] and questions of spectrum allocation and management.[47] As the FCC and other regulatory agencies take up questions regarding the future of journalism and broadband provision, they would do well to remember that the lack of clear public interest standards can be traced back to earlier policy battles. And finally, just as a media reform movement was coalescing in the wake of World War II, a vibrant one is emerging now, albeit in fits and starts. History can provide guidance and help steer this new movement away from past mistakes.

Indeed, the purpose of this research is not to mourn a lost golden age or to lament what could have been. Rather, it aims to draw linkages between previous struggles and alternative futures, to learn lessons from past failures, and to see contemporary media reform movements as part of a long historical tradition. This kind of research also reminds us that our media system could have developed differently. If policy initiatives proposed by 1940s reformers had been given fair consideration we would likely have a different media system today, one based more on public service and less on commercialism. but beyond the general historical lesson that affords a long, properly contextualized view of social change, there are at least three key lessons for today's media reformers that can be gleaned from the decline of the 1940s movement:

1. Media reformers must continuously cultivate a strong inside/outside coordination between progressive policymakers and grassroots social movements.
2. Media reformers must maintain a strong structural critique and a "big picture" long-term vision.
3. Media reformers must interconnect with other social movement struggles and political issue networks.

The first lesson is fairly intuitive for contemporary reformers: it is imperative to maintain a strong inside/outside strategy that keeps regulators connected to the grassroots (and not

[45] Victor Pickard, "The Great Evasion: Confronting Market Failure in American Media Policy," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 31, no. 2 (2014): 153–159.

[46] Sascha Meinrath and Victor Pickard, "The new network neutrality: Criteria for Internet Freedom," *International Journal of Law and Communication* 12 (2008): 225–243.

[47] Victor Pickard and Sascha Meinrath, "Revitalizing the Public Airwaves: Opportunistic Unlicensed Reuse of Government Spectrum," *International Journal of Communication* 3, (2009): 1052–1084.

only to corporate lobbyists). Had progressive policymakers in the 1940s coordinated more with community activists, they may have been able to better withstand the ensuing onslaught. In more recent times, a similar vulnerability arguably occurred in the United States around net neutrality and other internet policy issues that focused too much on a Washington, dC strategy and failed to connect with less technocratic circles. Moreover, when liberal regulators come under pressure from industry—as they inevitably will—they will require popular support, which is difficult to maintain while compromises are being hatched behind closed doors, often in the public's name but without public consent.

Second, we learn that media activists retreat on structural reform at their own peril. Postwar media reformers faced many difficulties beyond their control, but the movement's decline was also partly due to their failure to maintain a structural critique of the commercial media system. In the early 1940s, reformers were trust-busting media conglomerates, but by the end of that decade they were trying to shame media corporations into being good. A structural approach recognizes that, short of public ownership, the most effective safeguard against an undemocratic commercial media system is a combination of aggressive government regulation at the federal level, and local control and oversight at the community level. In light of the current struggle to prevent an overly commercial and concentrated media system from becoming more so, it is instructive to recall a time when the FCC fought to bolster public interest safeguards instead of throwing them out. For a reinvigorated media reform movement to rise up, however, will require an intellectual project that maintains a clear structural critique, one that penetrates to the root of the problem with a commercial media system. This structural critique could potentially unite diverse constituencies and lead to not just reform, but transformation of the media system.

This brings us to the third and final lesson: We are reminded that media reform rises and falls with other political struggles and social movements. More coalition-building between diverse social movements and issue-based coalitions is paramount. For example, we must convince voting rights activists, the movement against the carceral state, anti-death penalty activists, the environmentalist movement, and the civil rights movement, among others, that media reform should be a central piece of their platforms. However, we also have to seek out ideologically diverse coalitions. This does not just mean linking arms within "strange bedfellow" alliances with conservatives around issues like excessive commercialism, media concentration, and indecency; it also means liberals should be finding common cause with more radical social movements. An article in *The Nation* from the founding editor of the socialist magazine *Jacobin* reminded liberal reformers that they needed radicals to advance their issues, as history shows that radicals often provide punch and coherence to liberal reform agendas.[48]

In other words, American media policy advocates should be aiming for a new "popular front," one that unites inside-the-beltway liberals with more radical grassroots activists and intellectuals. While DC-based policy liberals understand the political process and can remain focused on steering reform initiatives through legislative and regulatory channels, radicals can maintain a "big picture" structural critique, remind liberals what is at stake, and focus on the long-term vision. Given that new models for media policy formations typically exist at

[48] Bhaskar Sunkara, "Letter to 'The nation' From a young Radical," *The Nation*, May 21, 2013, accessed May 14, 2015, http://www.thenation.com/article/174476/letter-nation-young-radical#axzz2fuJjTC5K.

the margins of political discourse, it is incumbent upon activists and intellectuals—including radical scholars—to bring those alternatives to light, challenge dominant ideologies and relationships, and assist reform movements working toward a more just and democratic media system. This level of engagement also requires a kind of intellectual labor for successful media reform, one that draws attention to the underlying discourses, paradigms, and narratives that do so much to shape the parameters of policy debates. Although a lack of vision too often hinders our imagination of what is possible in terms of media reform, this intellectual project stands to benefit greatly from a long historical view, drawing lessons from previous media reform campaigns to inform future struggles.

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CHAPTER 76

Queer Blogs and Digital Archives: A Tactical Shift Towards Queer Utopia in Bangladesh

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In the Summer of 2019, a particular name was making its rounds in the LGBTQIA+ community of Bangladesh. The name was of a newly formed archival website, *Mondro*, created primarily as a queer literary digital archive and blogging platform for LGBTQIA+ subjects in a country that criminalizes people with non-normative sexual orientations and transgender identities through social stigmatization and constitutional law.[1] The hateful rendering of LGBTQIA+ subjects in the nation-state's legislation, law enforcement, religious ideologies, popular media and culture, public spheres, and society meant that such an archive needed to function by remaining hidden from the government and the public. Functioning as a not-for-profit, volunteer-run cultural organization, *Mondro* started as a blog-posting website with only three contributors. Within two and half years the site has grown into the country's largest queer literary archive and publishing platform, with forty- five volunteers currently working in the areas of publication, research, cultural text and performance archival, and social media outreach. In addition to functioning as an archival and blogging website, *Mondro* also supports LGBTQIA+ poets, performers, writers, and thinkers from all over Bangladesh, by arranging mentorship workshops that range from topics on mental health, gender and sexuality-based violence and trauma, and suicide prevention. In this essay, however, my

[1] MONDRO, https://mondro.org (accessed February 3, 2022).

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objective is not only to describe *Mondro*'s vital role in community organizing and queer curation in Bangladesh, but also to analyze how the queer blogging and archival website challenges traditional blogging platforms in the country through counterpublic formation.[2] I argue that by functioning as a digital counter-space that promotes solidarity and affective communication between queer publics and their allies, *Mondro* continues to operate as both reminder of and resistance to the dominant cissexism and heteronormative ideology rampant in traditional blogging communities and the Bangladeshi digital platforms writ large. As queer subjects begin to adapt to oppressive digital networks and platforms, queer blogs such as *Mondro* continue to provide an avenue to tactically challenge established community blogs by uncovering their oppressive logics.

Blogging emerged as a form of digital media in Bangladesh in 2005 with the inception of *Somewhere in... blog*, the first Bangladeshi blogging platform. Since then, blog communication has established itself as one of the most significant alternative media forms in Bangladesh, challenging mainstream and popular media production and raising questions around hegemonic discourses upheld by the political and religious institutions of power.[3] Community blogging functions as one of Bangladesh's primary platforms for digital resistance and community organizing against social inequalities and oppressive government policies, as seen many times over the years during local and national uprisings such as the BDR Mutiny in 2009, the Shahbagh Mass Protests in 2013, and the Student protests against Tax on Education in 2015. In these sociopolitical movements, community blogging has played crucial roles for activism as bloggers functioned as citizen journalists and active protesters both online and offline. Through such blogger engagements and activism, the Bangladeshi blogosphere gained a reputation for being liberal, unbiased, pro-nationalist, and most importantly, progressive. Let us take the role bloggers have played during the BDR Mutiny as an example. In late February 2009, the blogging community made the first report of the BDR Mutiny, when a section of the paramilitary force for the nation's border protection rebelled and assumed control over their headquarters in Pilkhana, Dhaka, killing fifty-six other army officers and holding their families hostage in the process. Fahmidul Haq, in his chapter on citizen journalists and the Bangla blog community in *Bangladesh's Changing Mediascape*, outlines how a blogger named Onrino from the *Somewhere in... blog* community reported on the BDR tragedy almost instantaneously.[4] Onrino's one-sentence blog post read, "Since the morning exchange of fires is heard inside BDR," and this created a web of communications both inside and outside the blogging community ensuring public engagement against the mutiny. While law enforcement agencies worked hard to bring the situation under control, the public's demands and protests led to the eventual surrender of the mutineers on the fourth day.

The Bangladeshi blogging community and blog practices, in comparison to traditional forms of mass-media, were increasingly seen as progressive, liberal, and the nation's primary platform for digital resistance against social, cultural, and political oppression. Another ex-

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[2] Gayatri Gopinath, *Unruly Visions* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

[3] Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2002); *Antonio Gramsci, A Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916–1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

[4] Fahmidul Haque, "The Profile and Activity of Citizen Journalists: A Study on Bangla Blog Community," in *Bangladesh's Changing Mediascape*, ed. Brian Shoesmith and Jude William Genilo (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 269.

ample of such resistance was the blogging community's contribution during the Shahbagh Mass Protests in 2013. The Shahbagh Protests, named after the neighborhood of Shahbagh within the city of Dhaka, were mass public demonstrations carried out to force the government to bring the war criminals from Bangladesh's 1971 Independence War to justice. The pro-nationalist public demonstrations demanded the trials of a handful of powerful political leaders who had climbed into positions of political power after the independence of Bangladesh. These political leaders had originally worked against the nation's independence due to their allegiance to former West Pakistan, commanding anti-independence groups during the 1971 war for Bangladesh's freedom and were responsible for the deaths of numerous Bengali freedom fighters and pro-liberation nationalists and intellectuals during the time. These leaders belonged to a political party called the Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh which is fundamentally the post-independence name of Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan, a political party that was responsible for war atrocities during 1971. Interestingly, the political ideology of the Jamaat-e- Islami Bangladesh depends on Islamist Sharia'a law and the ultimate creation of a Bangladeshi Islamic State. The opposition against such a political party began to grow as the progressive and secular publics of the country started to engage in producing pro-nationalist and secular narratives primarily through blogging websites. These events are aptly recorded in Fahmidul Huq's study on Bangladeshi blogs, in which he analyzes the importance of bloggers in the movement towards bringing war criminals to justice during the Shahbag Protests of 2013. Focusing on how blog writers participate and contribute to the politics of nation-building, Huq writes in his essay:

> In contemporary Bangladesh bringing war criminals to trial is a big political issue and bloggers have joined the row. They have created a mass campaign of protests against the alleged war criminals, collecting hundreds of thousands of signatures to pressurize the government into bringing the war criminals to trial. Bloggers worked for this in the real world and through their blogs. Two blog community authorities actively supported this program by opening a corner in the front page of the blog devoted to bringing the alleged criminals to justice.[5]

These two examples suggest that the Bangladeshi blogging community in general has consistently been progressive and reactionary in the face of social and political oppressions and injustices. Much of these protests and activism can be better understood by how the blogging community engages in community blogging rather than in isolation. In other words, while the medium of the blog is mostly associated with individual people in the contemporary digital mediascape—where each digital blogspace works as a personal scope for mediated expression—in the context of Bangladesh, blogging always eventuated in the form of a community.[6] Any Bangladeshi blogger who wishes to partake in blogging is first required to be a member of a blogging community like *Somewhere in... blog*, *Sachalayatan*, or *Amarblog*. This process does not mean that blogging websites based on individual people cannot exist in Bangladesh, but it simply suggests that most bloggers have a membership in at least one of the aforementioned digital blogging websites as their primary engagement in blogging. Additionally, already being a part of a blogging community opens up the possibilities of certain

[5] Haque, "The Profile and Activity of Citizen Journalists," 271.

[6] Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," in *Media and Cultural Studies Keyworks*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 584–603.

kinds of publicness based on blog discourse and affect, and in times of community organizing and protests, such familiarities between community members definitely help. However, despite being equipped with key foundations of digital resistance and community activism, and historically functioning as a medium of confrontation with oppressive political establishments and religious ideologies, the Bangladeshi blog-publics remain selectively unconcerned at the vitriolic representation and brutal treatment of queer subjects all over the nation-state. Such was the case when, in 2014, the LGBTQIA+ community officially came out in public. Additionally, queer people were made subject to online hate speech and constant abuse, even within the blogging community. It became increasingly obvious that the progressive and secular blog-publics of the Bangladeshi blogging community held specific reservations about which oppressions they would protest, and which ones they would allow to continue.

The LGBTQIA+ movement in Bangladesh was first visible in 2014 when Bangladeshi LGBTQIA+ rights activists Xulhaz Mannan, Mahbub Rabbi, and Ali Asgar organized the country's first Pride Rally on 14 April 2014, the first day of the Bengali New Year, 1421.[7] Queer activism may not have begun with this movement, but it demanded visibility and acknowledgement from the government and the general people, for the first time in the nation's history. Almost a hundred LGBTQIA+ people and allies took part in a rainbow-themed procession on the morning of 14 April as the assembly walked from the Fine Arts Building in Dhaka University to the Intercontinental Hotel on Minto Road. The objective was clear: abolish Section 377 of the Bangladesh Penal Code—the legislation that deems diverse sexual orientations and acts as illegal and punishable by a life sentence or even death—and establish the basic human right to love. The first wave of LGBTQIA+ rights activism, as I will henceforth address this, continued through 2015 with the organization of the second Pride Rally despite violent reactions from both the nationalist ruling party and the country's homophobic and transphobic religious institutions. Nevertheless, severe backlash and life-threatening circumstances created by religious extremist groups like Ansarulla Bangla Team (ABT), an Islamic extremist organization responsible for the death of many secular Bangladeshi blog writers, and the antipathy of government and law enforcement agencies resulted in the cancellation of the third Pride Rally in 2016. The organizers and anyone related to the Pride Rallies received death threats and feared for their lives. Amidst the fear, Xulhaz Mannan and the other founders of the LGBTQIA+ organization *Roopban* stopped organizing physically and moved online. The *Roopban* magazine that complemented the formation of the organization also ceased print.[8] On 25 April 2016, key Bangladeshi LGBTQIA+ movement founders Xulhaz Mannan and Mahbub Rabbi were murdered in their own apartments in Dhaka by armed assailants who later identified themselves as members of an Islamic extremist group called Ansar-al Islam.[9] With the death of prominent LGBTQIA+ rights leaders, the *Roopban* human rights organization ceased to operate in Bangladesh, and its organizational members either went into hiding or left the country entirely under conditions of fatal danger.[10]

[7] Inge Amundsen, "The Ruins of Bangladesh's LGBT Community," *East Asia Forum*, 23 March 2018.

[8] "Publications," Roopbaan, accessed 26 August 2021, roopbaan.org/publications/

[9] Faisal Mahmud, "Six sentenced to death in Bangladesh for killing LGBTQ activists," *Aljazeera*, 31 August 2021, www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/31/six-death-penalty-bangladesh-lgbtq-gay-rights-activists-murder.

[10] Saad Hammadi and Aisha Gani, "Founder of Bangladesh's first and only LGBT magazine killed," *The Guardian*, 25 April 2016.



Figure 1. Pride Rally, 2014

Interestingly, the continuous assault on and oppression of queer subjects after 2014, including the deaths of Xulhaz Mannan and Mahabub Rabbi, and the forced migration of many LGBTQIA+ people and allies like Ali Asgar— who was forced to leave Bangladesh for the United States for fear of being killed—was never protested in the traditional Bangladeshi blogosphere. Extreme circumstances such as public shaming, social isolation, death threats, and even lynching led the queer population to become anonymous in the virtual worlds of social media, blogs, and digital archives. However, their efforts to protest through anonymous blog writing also proved futile as their posts were bombarded with hateful comments and later deleted by the blog administrators. The first wave of the LGBTQIA+ movement in Bangladesh would therefore face a grim setback. As one queer activist (whom I will call Robin), explains in an interview with me, this setback was also due to the rising number of homophobic and transphobic publics in the Bangladeshi networked media.[11] Robin suggests that 2014—which for the LBGTQIA+ community was when anti-queer violence began to reach its peak in Bangladesh—was also when the ruling political party Bangladesh Awami League got reelected to power based partly on the promises made during its previous term (2008–2014) around a digital revolution that assured high- speed networked communication services for all.[12] Networked and digital media infrastructures saw a rapid growth in the years leading up to 2014, and more people than ever had access to the Internet and associated networked media services. This growth had profound implications on public communication, information dissemination, and more specifically, exacerbated institutional and ideological

[11] Robin, interview with the author, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 31 January 2022.

[12] "Bangladesh Awami League announced its Election Manifesto, 2014," *ALBD*, 28 December 2013, www.albd.org/articles/news/27097/Bangladesh-Awami-League-announced-it's-Election-Manifesto, 2014.

control over permissible sexual identities and practices. The networked mediascape of Bangladesh, including micro-blogging and social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, was frequented by the general homophobic and transphobic publics, who, primarily indoctrinated in religious (in most cases Islamist) beliefs, see non-normative sexual identities and practices as prohibited not only by religion, but also the country's legislation. These publics particularly affected the blogging communities, and as more people joined every day, Bangladeshi blogs started losing their initial identity as platforms that fought for justice and equity, and simply became another space for digital communication.[13] This process became increasingly evident when queer people in these networked spaces were the subjects of extreme hate, repulsive language, and murder threats. Community blogs that once functioned as domains of sociocultural movements against systems of social oppression now either turned against queer subjects or remained silent in response to their everyday oppression. Such online hate and aggression is further legitimized by the state, who participates in systemic and structural violence against LGBTQIA+ individuals by not recognizing their socio- cultural existence or constitutional rights.[14] It became increasingly clear to the queer population of the country that the publics of the blogosphere made a clear distinction between the rights of queer and non-queer subjects. Bloggers whose strong efforts have led to popular and political uprisings such as the Shahbagh Mass Protests in 2013, have seemingly forgotten how to raise their voices against queer oppression. Additionally, certain blog chapters that focus on the oppression and struggles of women in Bangladesh remarkably kept quiet on the issue of queer rights. Scholars have mentioned that specific digital spaces may work as safe options for feminists and their allies to raise and discuss social problems and solutions.[15] While there are several women's rights organizations in Bangladesh—from the women's wings of political parties to non-government organizations (NGOs) such as Naripokkho, Steps Towards Development, Adhunika, and Ain o Salish Kendro (ASK) that are active in online networks—it is interesting to note how none of these progressive organizations advocate for queer rights in Bangladesh, despite resisting Islamic fundamentalist movements.[16] Clearly, there is a lack of what Audre Lorde calls "systems of shared support" as the most vocal feminist groups in Bangladesh continue to downplay the importance of intersectionality when it comes to the dehumanization of marginal LGBTQIA+ communities.[17]

Queer subjects in Bangladesh quickly realized the importance of a digital counter-space that anti-queer networked publics in general would not frequent. The digital queer counterspace *Mondro* emerged out of the need to provide digital safe spaces for queer subjects

[13] Fahmidul Haque, "The Profile and Activity of Citizen Journalists: A Study on Bangla Blog Community," in *Bangladesh's Changing Mediascape*, ed. Brian Shoesmith and Jude William Genilo (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 259–276.

[14] Nur E Makbul and Md. Ashraful Goni, "Bangladesh's Invisible Cyberqueers: Self-Image, Identity Management, and Erotic Expressions on Grindr," in *LGBTQ Digital Cultures: A Global Perspectiv*e, ed. Paromita Pain (New York, NY: Routledge, 2022), 210–223.

[15] Rosemary Clark-Parsons, "Building a Digital Girl Army: The Cultivation of Feminist Spaces Online," *New Media and Society* 20, no.6 (2018), 2125– 2144; Joy Jenkins and J. David Wolfgang. "A Space for Women: Online Commenting Forums as Indicators of Civility and Feminist Community- Building," in *Mediating Misogyny: Technology, Gender, and Harassment*, ed. J. R. Vickery and T. Everbach (Basington, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 247–268.

[16] Firdaus Azim, "Feminist Struggles in Bangladesh," *Feminist Review* 80, no.1 (2005), 194–197.

[17] Azim, "Feminist Struggles in Bangladesh," 194–197.

and allies to communicate, and to ensure the preservation of the knowledges, experiences, and creative expressions of the Bangladeshi queer community. This shift in modality from public digital platforms such as community blogs to more secluded forms of online counter-spaces that deliberately remain hidden is crucial in reorienting the project of queer utopia in Bangladesh towards a more sustainable future. In a nation-state where the dominant public ideology results in violence towards queer subjects, it is important to keep employing tactics that reconsider publicness until conditions are more suitable for queer subjects.[18] Alternate blogging and archival websites not only facilitate a digital space for queer counter-publics to engage in critical and creative expressions, but they do so without having to experience the fear of being seen. *Mondro* again provides a great example. Each of its writers and contributors write under pseudonyms such as "living large in little boxes" or "joker of Hamelin" (translated from Bangla *Hameliner Hashiwala*). Blog writing under such anonymity allows for the safety of these queer subjects, which the nation-state has failed to provide. Additionally, working under the conditions of anonymity allows for the Bangladeshi queer community to function as what Catherine Squires calls "enclave publics," a strategic mobilizing of counter-publics that are more concealed and do not typically engage with the dominant publics in any manner, for their larger goal is to ensure the safety of their public sphere *t*hat is often under intense aggression and oppression from other dominant groups.[19] *Mondro*, a Bengali word that roughly translates to a "deep calling or a sound from within that is difficult to hear from the outside," functions specifically as a platform for Bengali queer enclave publics, hidden from the homophobic and transphobic dominant publics in Bangladesh with no intentions to become publicly available or visible in the near future. Additionally, over the last couple of years, *Mondro* published several works of literature in print. These include the inaugural non-fiction collection on LGBTQIA+ issues in Bangladesh titled *Thahor*, a collection of LGBTQIA+ short stories *Shomaroor*, and an anthology of indigenous LGBTQIA+ literature in Bangladesh titled *Ludong*. These are only made available to the LGBTQIA+ community and allies. It is also important to focus on how *Mondro* identifies itself and evaluates its mission to truly understand its queer world-making project in Bangladesh. On the site, *Mondro* identifies its community as the queer people in Bangladesh whose "existence is denied, voices are silenced, and our organizers are murdered."[20] It states its mission is "to uplift queer voices and promote histories of gender and sexual diversity in Bangladesh in order to sensitize contemporary society." It is crucial to note that the focus on the histories of queerness in Bangladesh is a significant turn towards celebrating practices and identities of gender and sexually diverse subjects within Bangladesh that seeks to reclaim queerness not as something that has been imported from the West, but that has always already been a significant practice within the Bengali sociocultural fabric that expands beyond the South Asian subcontinent. In this sense, *Mondro* reconceptualizes queerness within a far-reaching framework of multiple yet connected historical references and cultural interpretations that may open up new ways of understanding sociocultural, political, and religious narratives and discourses originating from the region. *Mondro*'s use of culturally appropriate imagery and designs that uphold

[18] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

[19] Catherine Squires, "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres," *Communication Theory* 12, no.4 (2002), 446–468.

[20] "What does the name Mondro mean?," *Mondro*, accessed 2 September 2021, mondro.org/about-mondro/.

various aesthetics of Bengali culture and history can also be interpreted as a deliberate move towards constructing publics through design processes. [21]

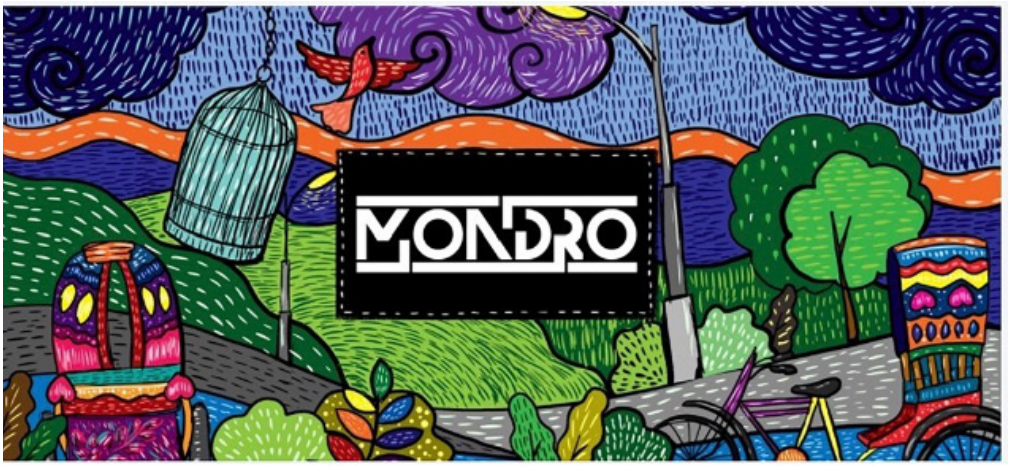


Figure 2. *Mondro*'s use of Cultural Imagery

The emergence of queer blogging communities such as *Mondro* not only demarcates a tactical shift from traditional blogging communities that are now oppressive towards queer subjects in Bangladesh, but it also clearly points to the beginning of a second wave of queer activism in Bangladesh and lays the foundations for a possible queer utopia when certain conditions are achieved. With political and religious ideologies extremely adversative towards queer rights, identities, and existences in the real world, digital communities like *Mondro* provide ways to continue the conversations through creative expression, affective intimacies, queer archiving, and curation in the present, and conditioning and constructing publics for the future. [22] However, it is important to realize that queerness in the context of Bangladesh and Bengali culture is an extremely complex concern. At the least, networked queer activism, to achieve the conditions of queer utopia in Bangladesh, as discussed in this essay, requires an awareness of the dangers of immediately attempting radical shifts and policy alterations in this part of the world. At the same time, activists need to remain hopeful and suggestive of tactical practices that would help set long-term egalitarian conditions and equitable futures.

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[21] Carl DiSalvo, "Design and the Construction of Publics," *Design Issues* 25, no.1 (2009), 48–63.

[22] Shaka McGlotten, *Virtual Intimacies: Media, Affect, and Queer Sociality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013).

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