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SCHOLARSHIP

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THE PROMISE, PERFORMANCE AND FUTURE OF COMMUNITY BROADCASTING

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Community (originally public) broadcasting is recognised as Australia's third tier of radio, with public service and commercial broadcasters comprising the other two sectors. The first community radio stations were introduced in the early 1970s following public agitation for a more inclusive broadcasting system. Community broadcasting was enshrined in legislation in 1978. Since that time the sector has continued to grow and expand. This dissertation explores the extent to which community broadcasting has achieved the aspirations espoused by its many and varied pioneers and how this form of broadcasting is likely to fare in the new millennium. As indicated by its title, the dissertation considers community broadcasting in terms of its promise, performance and future.

The "promise" is established by considering the origins and rationale of what became Australia's third sector of radio. A close analysis of government policy statements and public debate generated during the planning of the sector lead to the identification of the following as key elements of community broadcasting: "access and participation," "independent, non-profit and non-commercial," "diversity and plurality," and "alternative." The formation of these categories was instrumental in helping frame the research question — i.e. to what extent and in what form are the original key elements evident in the operation of contemporary community radio stations? A case study approach was adopted and three community radio stations were selected on the basis of their heterogeneity. Fieldwork required a three to four week residency at each station. As access to the radio stations was dependent on an agreement of anonymity, their locations have been disguised and their names changed.

The "performance" is informed by an analysis of the three radio stations using the key elements identified earlier. The case studies rely on information gathered through 42 in-depth interviews, analysis of documentary sources, direct observation and participation by the author in some activities at each radio station. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule developed around the key elements and the adoption of a recursive approach to questioning.

By "standing back" and looking across the completed case studies, it became evident that factors common to each site appeared to have some bearing on the extent and form of each of the key elements. Using an iterative process to help build explanation, these factors were isolated and refined to a stage where they provided the basis for a case data display. Eventually, this display emerged in matrix form, juxtaposing the three radio stations with the following conceptual and operational characteristics: *raison d'être* /mission; nature, structure and style of

organisation; nature and primary perception of workforce; source and nature of funding; broadcasting mode and reach, and programming derivation and focus; editorial stance and presenter/producer autonomy; provision of and attitude towards training; perception of listeners; perceived role re the broadcast community; and, perceived role and image of the base facility.

As well as enabling a snapshot of the three stations, this framework provided the basis for the cross-case analysis. By interrogating the conceptual and operational characteristics, it was possible to tease out how they influenced or impacted on the key elements at each station. The cross-case analysis illustrates how and why each of the three radio stations conceive and operationalise the key elements in quite different ways.

The "future" takes its prompt from conclusions drawn in the cross-case analysis to explore how a number of current and impending pressures are likely to impact on the wider community broadcasting sector. This is achieved by way of an adapted SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities) analysis. Consideration is given to how the current multichannel media and communications environment together with the government's plans to rationalise its long term financial commitment to the sector are likely to impact on the key elements. It is within this context that issues of convergence, localism, identity and mission are explored, which, it is suggested, symbolise choices and opportunities for the community broadcasting sector. The dissertation concludes by suggesting a continuing role for a reoriented and reconstituted community *media* (rather than *broadcasting)* sector based on the key elements identified by this study.

The content of the dissertation is arranged in four parts. Part I, "Origins and Rationale: The Birth of a Third Sector," spans the conception, inception and subsequent legislative underpinning of public broadcasting. Chapter 1 charts the dissatisfaction with a dual sector radio broadcasting system and the emergence of a broad but uncoordinated movement for change. Chapter 2 focuses on tussles over the form and control of a prospective third tier of radio and moves by the Whitlam Australian Labor Party government, which led to the first licences being issued to community stations. Chapter 3 outlines the subsequent flurry of radio initiatives in the latter period of the Whitlam government and concludes with an overview of developments initiated by a newly elected Fraser Liberal-National Country Party Coalition government, one of which was to legislate for the introduction of public broadcasting.

Part II, "Articulating the Promise: From Aspirations to Policy," considers the basic premises of public broadcasting, outlines the initial and subsequent policy frameworks and, in doing so, charts the development and expansion of this emerging third sector of radio. Chapter 4 delineates the four key elements of public broadcasting as "access and participation," "independent, non-profit and non-commercial," "diversity and plurality," and "alternative." Chapter 5 provides an overview of the first policy statement on public broadcasting and an analysis of the subsequent licence hearings conducted by a newly formed Australian Broadcasting Tribunal. Chapter 6 summarises developments in the community broadcasting sector over the next decade before examining the context and thrust of the *Broadcasting Services Act* 1992 which recast public broadcasting as community broadcasting.

Part III, "Promise to Performance: Live at the Radio," consists of three case studies which explore the currency of the key elements in contemporary times. Chapter 7

focuses on Seaview and Hilldene Broadcasting (*SHB-FM*), Chapter 8 on Metropolitan Community Broadcasting (*MCB-FM*) and Chapter 9 on Indigenous Community Radio (*ICR-FM*). Chapter 10 comprises the emergent cross-case analysis, which considers the extent and form of the key elements by interrogating a number of conceptual and operational characteristics common to all three radio stations. An account of the case study methodology and its justification appears in Appendix I.

Part IV, "Contemplating Futures: Whither Community Broadcasting?" considers the future prospects for Australia's community broadcasting sector. Drawing on the experience of *SHB-FM*, *MCB-FM* and *ICR-FM,* Chapter 11 examines how the current media and communications environment and government plans to rationalise its financial support for community broadcasting are likely to impact on the sector as a whole and the key elements in particular. Chapter 12 explores a number of choices and opportunities facing the community broadcasting sector before suggesting a continuing role for community media in the context of a multichannel global information society.

LEONOR CAMAUËR

FEMINISM, CITIZENSHIP AND THE MEDIA: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF IDENTITY PROCESSES WITHIN FOUR WOMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS

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The primary purpose of this doctoral thesis is to investigate the media practices of four women's associations and some of their individual members in order to gain insight in the role of the media in the women's individual and collective processes of identity formation as feminist and citizens. The concept of "media practices" is conceived as comprising two broad domains. First, women are involved in the individual and collective meaning-making processes when using a variety of media in their daily lives. Secondly, the associations' production of their own media and their participation in, and interplay with, the mass media in order to diffuse their own meanings. Associations' appearances in the media have been registered, and their outcome (e.g. articles and talk shows) is examined with an analysis of media output.

Whereas much current audience research constructs people as receivers of the messages of others, women and associations are conceptualised here as political, civic and cultural actors, and as parts of the autonomous women's movements' larger counter-public. As such they are involved internally in the ongoing reconstruction of collective identities, and externally in spreading their versions of reality to wider publics through public-oriented practices (e.g. media production and

participation in the mass media), thereby taking part in the redefinition of society and the construction of public spheres. The interplay between the women's movements and the mass media has thus far been given scant attention in feminist media research inspired by public sphere theory. The dissertation presents an attempt to fill this gap. On the whole this work can be characterised as ethnography of citizen and feminist identity and of public-oriented practices.

The theoretical starting points of the project are to be found at the intersection of several research traditions: the framework of the public sphere, the media and democracy; recent feminist theory on the public sphere; civil society and citizenship theory; the perspective of narrative identity; newer perspectives on social movements inspired by the sociology of culture; and Swedish and Scandinavian studies of the women's movements.

The project's empirical work comprises three main steps: participant observation at associations' meetings; individual life story interviews and group and focused interviews with members; and analysis of media coverage of the associations. The methods used are ethnography, text analysis and the narrative study of lives.

The range of actual public-oriented practices in which the groups were involved was relatively limited, but the emphasis put on different practices by each association and the outcomes of the former clearly varied, which resulted in a particular pattern of public orientation for each association. The pattern depend on the particular kind of feminist identity constructed in each group, the material conditions under which the groups work, and the specific characteristics of the media with which they interact. For example, three of the groups (the Fredrika Bremer branch, the Shelter and the local group of the Women's Front) shared a relatively modest production of their own media and an emphasis on one or more practices of face-to-face communication (e.g. lectures), whereas the Magazine Group's very *raison d'être* was the production of their Magazine. As regards the groups' participation in the mass media, two associations (the Shelter and the Magazine Group) enjoyed relatively abundant media coverage, but the Women's Front received almost no attention from the press and was invited only to a few talk shows. Through neglecting some features of the groups and emphasising others, the mass media construct a public identity of the associations, which — disregarding whether it is accepted or rejected by them — is nevertheless incorporated in the groups' ongoing processes of collective identity formation and has consequences for their work. The groups expressed a sense of exclusion from the mass mediated public sphere or an ambivalent sense of inclusion, i.e. they felt invited to participate, but under conditions which were not of their making.

In the four groups, the role of the mass media in the ongoing reconstruction of their feminist identity was pervaded by a series of tensions: between rejection and incorporation of media texts, between rejection and dependence on the news media for keeping oneself informed, between the symbolic goods expected and those actually delivered by the media, and between frustration and awareness of the media's power to incorporate — through coverage — the group into the local community's public life. In two of the groups, media user identifications were closely and explicitly intertwined with participant and/or producer identifications.

For most of the women included in this study citizenship was a "silent" narrative identity: if, in contrast with feminist identities, citizenship was not devoted much

narrative effort, it lied deeply embedded in the women's subjectivity and feminist collective identities. However, citizenship was not only an unconscious substratum sustaining the groups' feminist practices and versions of reality. As a normative vision encompassing freedom from oppression, equality among all human beings, and participation in the polity with one's own voice and without constraint, it was highly desired; and in its actually existing forms, citizenship was felt — in however dim ways — as something worthy of being acted upon and changed. The main change the four groups aimed at achieving was the engendering of citizenship, even though they worked for it in very different ways: the Women's Front and the Shelter addressed mainly women's physical rights and their violation; the Fredrika Bremer branch chiefly foregrounded women's representation in the institutional political system, as well as our situation in the labour market and the educational system; and the Magazine Group stressed the significance of, and through its publication provided an arena for, women's participation in the polity as producers of political talk. Through the demands they placed on society and their own ways of working the groups were also redrawing the boundaries between the private and the public.