

ANOTHER RADIO IS POSSIBLE:
COMMUNITY RADIO, MEDIA REFORM AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THAILAND

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in Media Studies

(Special Case)

University of Regina

by

Patricia W. Elliott

Regina, Saskatchewan

Canada

December 2007

Copyright December 2007: Patricia W. Elliott

Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the emergence of community radio in Thailand. It takes the position that community radio has played a significant role in empowering marginalized communities, and in influencing the agenda for political and regulatory reform. It concludes with a call to expand prevailing theoretical frameworks and research methodologies so that the media power of grassroots actors may be better recognized and understood.

Borrowing elements of journalism and *testimonio*, the first-hand observations of practitioners and reform advocates are related in narrative style, with supporting background information. The first chapter provides a framework of key concepts related to community radio, and a discussion of literature and methodology employed in the research. The second chapter describes the Thai broadcast sector, focusing on how community radio presented a direct challenge to state control of the airwaves, and the relationship of these events to wider issues of national identity and democratic reform. In the third chapter, migrant workers discuss how community radio improved their ability to communicate with members of their community in a dialogic manner. From the basis of these participant observations, the fourth and final chapter provides a summary of the main ways community radio contributed to social change, and examines the nature of grassroots media power. The conclusion calls for an expanded theoretical framework and action research capable of recognizing and measuring the rapidly expanding world of people's media. The research contained in this thesis is of interest to scholars, community activists and grassroots media practitioners who are engaged in exploring how home-made media intersects with civil society to bring about social change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to acknowledge first and foremost community radio practitioners and media reform advocates who risk a great deal to share their stories for the benefit of others. I also thank the members of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP) Local 481 and the Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU) for assistance received through their joint education program for union members. Likewise, the University of Regina and the University of Regina Faculty Association provided support for my work through educational support provisions under their collective agreement. In addition I gratefully acknowledge travel assistance received through Dr. Sheila Petty's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant. The School of Journalism, Faculty of Arts, provided office space and material support. I also acknowledge Patricia Bell and Dr. Jill Spelliscy, formerly of the School of Journalism, for their encouragement, and Dr. Christine Ramsay and Dr. Alison Hayford, for their valuable input as committee members. Finally, I am most grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Sheila Petty, Dean of Fine Arts, for her wise guidance throughout.

DEDICATION

To my very patient family
and
to community radio volunteers everywhere

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE – A FRAMEWORK FOR GETTING TO KNOW GRASSROOTS RADIO	10
CHAPTER TWO – THAI RADIO, IDENTITY AND MEDIA REFORM	35
CHAPTER THREE – MIGRANT WORKERS ON THE AIR	63
CHAPTER FOUR – ANOTHER RADIO	89
CONCLUSION	103
REFERENCE LIST	114
APPENDIX A – KATHMANDU DECLARATION	127
APPENDIX B – MARRAKESH DECLARATION	131
APPENDIX C – AMMAN DECLARATION	132

INTRODUCTION

“Mye Soong!” With this traditional Shan greeting, migrant workers in Chiang Mai, Thailand take to the airwaves twice a week on FM99 Voice of the Community Radio. In laundry rooms throughout the city, domestic workers turn up the dial. At the local immigration jail, unlucky detainees climb to the rooftop with a transistor set, the better to catch the station’s low power FM signal. They are listening to something new, revolutionary and desperately needed – radio speaking their own language, presented by their own people. It is also radio technically outside the law. Thailand’s broadcast frequency spectrum is ‘owned’ and managed entirely by military and state bodies. In the past ten years, legislative efforts to open up the airwaves have foundered. Meanwhile, volunteer community radio broadcasters have forged ahead, setting up tiny transmitters in temples, farmhouses and city apartments. Unlike the tightly managed content of state radio, grassroots radio operators invite community participation through open studios and open phone lines, creating an alternative model of democratic communication. Singly, each station’s reach is limited to a few kilometres. Networked, their reach is unmeasured.

In this thesis, I will argue that the scholarly attention paid to mass media and pop culture – while important to understanding some aspects of western society and globalization – is in danger of overlooking some of the world’s most powerfully evolving media, often produced by marginalized and remote communities. In Thailand, this includes a rapidly expanding network of small volunteer-run radio stations that emerged in 2001, moving with unexpected force to the forefront of public discourse on political and media reform. With this in mind, the challenge for researchers is to discover ways to recognize and measure social networking and social empowerment – as opposed to audience size and geographic reach – as indicators of

media impact. Only then may we draw a complete picture of the media landscape in Thailand and elsewhere.

Thailand's *wittayu chomchon* – community radio – harkens back to the imaginings of Bertolt Brecht, who wrote in 1932:

The radio would be the finest possible communication apparatus in public life, a vast network of pipes. That is to say, it would be if it knew how to receive as well as to transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a relationship instead of isolating him (Brecht 1932, 1).

The problem, Brecht stated in his essay “The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication,” was that the technology was more advanced than the societies that employed it. To the unimaginative commerce-driven mind, radio was simply a substitute for live attendance at events, acting as a delivery boy for concerts, plays and news. It furnished the state with a manner in which to become “rich” in art and culture, while the people – now divorced from the involvement of performance – became “poor” (Brecht 1932, 1). Unlike the technology, radio’s content and its social impact were neither revolutionary nor novel. But the potential of radio was revolutionary, Brecht suggested, in that signals could be both given and received, opening the door to “change the apparatus over from distribution to communication” (1). Admitting this was a Utopian idea, he acknowledged the world is ruled by “vast institutions” that “cannot do all they ‘could,’ and not even all they want” (Brecht 1932, 1). Rather than trying to convince these monoliths to practice radio a new way, he recommended “resistance by the listener,” who should simply seize the technological possibility and start talking back: “it is not our job to renovate the ideological institutions on the basis of the existing social order by means of innovations. Instead our innovations must force them to surrender that basis” (1932, 1). By all appearances, however, radio remained a tough monolith to crack, a closely-

guarded, heavily regulated tool of dictators, national governments and media industrialists. As part of a radio research project of the late 1930s, Theodor Adorno posited that the technology itself allowed no other outcome: “When a private person in a private room is subjected to a public utility mediated by a loudspeaker, his response takes on aspects of a response to an authoritarian voice even if the content of that voice or the speaker to whom the individual is listening has no authoritarian features whatsoever” (Adorno 2006, 113). Radio, according to Adorno, was a blunt instrument of monopoly capitalism over which the listener exercised no control beyond twiddling the dial, writing letters to the station manager, or switching off (Adorno 2006, 149-172). Studying a program called ‘The Home Symphony’ – which invited listeners to play along with an orchestra – Adorno concluded that attempts to democratize the medium through audience participation were rigid, futile undertakings in which “the amateur’s participation only harms the resulting musical phenomenon” (2006, 169).

While Adorno dismissed audience participation as a disingenuous manipulation of untalented amateurs, a small core of radio amateurs in Latin America held to Brecht’s contrasting “Utopian” vision of participatory radio. Believing that radio held, by virtue of its ability to both send and receive signals, a democratic potential, these early activists began mapping out a new approach that invited the audience to take over the microphones. On October 16, 1946, a Catholic priest’s assistant named Joaquin Salcedo Guaurin launched a volunteer-run community radio station to help disseminate information among the farmers of Colombia’s Tenza Valley, eighty per cent of whom were illiterate (Ibrahim, www.powerofculture.nl under *Community Radio*; Gumucio-Dagron 2003, 13). That same year, Pacifica Radio was founded in the United States by Lewis Hill, a member of the pacifist

movement who intended to challenge the commercialization of the airwaves; the first Pacifica station, Radio KPFA, began broadcasting in 1949 and remains on the air today (Downing 2001, 325, Lucksona 2004, 24). Community radio activists seldom cite these two projects as the birth of community radio, however. The Sutatenza station evolved into a Church-run distance education project that quickly lost its participatory nature, while Radio KPFA was philosophically more alternative than activist in its mission, operating within the bounds set by the state regulatory regime, the Federal Communications Commission (Gumucio-Dagron 2003, 13; Downing 2001, 325). Among radio activists, the first 'true' community radio is more commonly identified as Bolivian tin miners' radio. Taking to the air in defiance of the authorities, tin miners established Radio Sucre in the mining town of Cananiri and Radio Nuevos Horizontes in the southern city of Tupiza in 1948 (Buckley 182). Supported by union dues and worker-controlled, the radio stations represented "an extension of literally centuries of struggle by workers against the exploitative oligarchy" (Huezca 1995, 151). Thus a community radio model emerged that was ideally audience-controlled, autonomous and concerned with challenging power. As Brecht had suggested, grassroots radio operators advanced this new radio paradigm simply by seizing the technology and using it differently. This vision remained consistent over several decades of community radio development, coming to the notice of UNESCO's McBride Commission in 1980 as part of a panoply of new "horizontal communication channels" being developed among marginalized populations "living in a communications ghetto," as well as among oppositional groups "of varying political and philosophical origin," most prominently in Latin America (UNESCO 1980, 170). The Commission concluded that these types of

alternative media were relatively tiny enterprises compared to mass media, yet their emergence was worth noting:

...the radical departure from the dominant assumptions of vertical flow and the capacity it provides to develop horizontal networks, the achievement in strengthening the self-awareness of coherent groups, give it a significance out of all proportion to its quantitative scale (1980, 171).

In the years following the Commission's report, community radio began to expand globally, riding the crest of late 20th Century trends that included: liberalization of the airwaves; increased access to cheap communications technology; a supportive 'communication for development' movement among international development agencies; rising indigenous movements, and; the global progression of civil society and emergence of new transnational social movements. Today, some seven decades after Brecht's observations, grassroots radio operators are in the process of taking an aging technology and turning it upside down, changing it over from an instrument of broadcast to an instrument of communication. This much has not changed, however: for the most part radio remains a heavily controlled field; its riches still lie with the state, which imposes regulatory regimes designed to protect state and commercial broadcasting. Yet, as Brecht predicted, the very act of innovating a new form of radio on a small scale in multiple locations is forcing regulatory change in almost every corner of the world, most recently including India, Bangladesh, Fiji and Sri Lanka. Augmented by court challenges, street demonstrations, and the threat of radio piracy, the presence of community radio pressures governments to open the airwaves up to other voices, other methods and other purposes. This in turn leads to profound cultural and political shifts that alter long-standing relationships between power centres and the periphery.

Using the example of community radio in Thailand, and drawing on interviews with key informants, I will demonstrate that grassroots radio by its very nature challenges dominant concepts of cultural identity. At the same time, the emergence of community radio creates regulatory crises that expose the declining ability of nation-states to monopolize the airwaves. These factors accelerate popular pressures that inevitably weaken authoritarian regimes.

In Chapter One, I will provide a general framework of the study of grassroots radio, highlighting some key issues and contexts. I will also provide a brief literature review and outline the methodology used in this study. Chapter Two will contain an historical overview of the development of broadcast media in Thailand. During the previous century, nation-states around the world moved to monopolize the broadcast spectrum in the service of state modernization and nationalism projects. I will show how emerging radio technology was inextricably linked to the construction of a modernist Thai national identity, and examine methods by which the nation-state has sought to maintain control over the radio frequency spectrum as a means to define and promote this identity. This hegemony remained largely unchallenged until recent decades, which witnessed the rise of civil society throughout much of Asia, along with a blossoming notion of public participation in governance. Along with democratization and liberalization trends of the 1980s, these factors placed pressure on long-held state media monopolies throughout the region. I will then turn to Thailand's political crisis of May 1992, a time when citizens were confronted with the broadcast media's glaring inability to accurately and objectively report important events as they occurred. As a direct result of this failure, media reform vaulted to the top of the reform agenda, becoming a centrepiece in the drafting of a new Constitution, later abrogated by a military coup.

During roughly the same period, civil society organizations, with the assistance of international development and lending agencies, began to promote handbooks and workshops aimed at engaging citizens in grassroots media production, particularly community radio. My research will reveal that these development educators underestimated how quickly local communities would seize the opportunity to set up radio stations, without waiting for legal sanction. I will describe how the thirst for locally produced news and culture was greater than anticipated, and how the emergence of low power FM stations dovetailed with wider popular reform agendas. Although not overtly political in itself, Thailand's nascent community radio network found itself at the forefront of a communications and social revolution that challenged state and military power on a number of levels. This led to a legal stand-off between the grassroots community radio sector and the military-state apparatus, a stand-off that today remains unresolved.

Chapter Three will present the specific case of Shan and Karen migrant worker broadcasts in Chiang Mai. In this chapter, I will show how ethnic and transnational communities were able to tap into the burgeoning community radio scene, presenting a new voice of Thailand on the air, one that is multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual, and imbued with a much more fluid concept of nation, citizenship and identity. To provide this thesis with a solid experiential base, the individual experiences of community radio volunteers – from their encounters with oppression in Burma* to their personal growth as media activists in Thailand – will be described largely in their own words, with supporting background information. I have chosen the example of migrant workers and community radio because it illustrates

* In 1989 the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) changed the name of Burma (*Bama*) to Myanmar (*Myanma*), however opponents of the regime argue that 'Myanmar' historically reflects the Irrawaddy valley region inhabited mainly by people of Burmese ethnicity, and therefore is not inclusive of other nationalities. In particular, the name Myanmar has been widely rejected by the ethnic nationalities who informed this study, a position this thesis will respect.

how the workers first gained their media training through the official channels of military radio, with the support of the NGO community and international development agencies, and from there moved into the non-official world of unlicensed community radio. In this chapter, the volunteers describe the constraints and content controls placed on ethnic language broadcasts they produce for the state-owned Radio Thailand AM station. They then compare their relationship with Radio Thailand to the relatively unrestrained, uncensored airtime offered by a volunteer-run community radio station, Voice of the Community Chiang Mai FM 99. In discovering community radio, the migrants gained the means to engage in live two-way communication with their listeners, and to directly address the legal and social problems of migrant populations on the air, possibilities denied to them by the state broadcaster. Following a September 2006 coup, however, Thailand's military swiftly moved to retake control of the airwaves and once again assert 'correct' Thai national identity. Three hundred community radio stations in northern Thailand, including Chiang Mai, were ordered off the air, with the condition that they could return to broadcasting only if they agreed to promote national unity (Chinnawat, et. al., 2006). Chapter Three will conclude that despite this setback, community radio, combined with other social processes, is a 'cat out of the bag' that cannot be effectively suppressed in the long run. By creating from-below pressure for media democratization, community radio will continue to influence the surrounding political landscape, even more so when it is faced with oppression.

In Chapter Four I will argue that people's media plays a seminal role as a catalyst for social change and political reform in Southeast Asia. I will then look at the points of tension this creates between community actors and the state, using the example of the military's efforts to suppress Thai community radio in the wake of the

2006 coup. To understand why the Thai state is threatened by community radio, I will provide an overview of the community radio movement's evolution into a global political and social project aimed at democratizing communications on a broad scale, in concert with other transnational campaigns and social movement organizations that seek a new global economic and social order. I will further argue that to understand community radio in Thailand, you must first arrive at a theoretical conception of power relations that acknowledges the ability of horizontal grassroots communications networks to influence and at times abruptly overturn the social order, in many cases using no greater technology than a photocopier, a cell phone or a homebuilt radio transmitter.

My conclusion will summarize the issues raised by the example of Thai community radio development, and highlight how community radio contributed to social change. In this section, I concur with the community radio movement's assertion that current research methodologies do not accurately measure community radio's impact, and that new tools are needed to measure broad social change occurring in the presence of community radio. Recognizing that the power to effectively disseminate and exchange information is not the exclusive province of tyrants and tycoons, the thesis will conclude with a call for action research and an expanded concept of communications power that perceives and supports community radio and other forms of grassroots media as crucial agents of social change.

CHAPTER ONE

A FRAMEWORK FOR GETTING TO KNOW GRASSROOTS RADIO

*When radio fosters the participation of citizens and defends their interests;
...when no type of dictatorship is tolerated, not even the musical dictatorship
of the big recording studios; when everyone's words fly without
discrimination or censorship, that is community radio.*

- José Ignacio Lopez Virgil (1997, www.amarc.org)

This thesis places grassroots radio within the framework of dialogic communication as a key driver of social change. By inviting the audience to participate as producers, and by opening up radio as a channel of two-way conversation on the air, grassroots radio creates a shared social space for communities to interact with one another, define themselves as communities, develop shared social goals, and, ultimately, bring about social change.

SOME KEY CONCEPTS AND ISSUES

What is Community Radio?

Physically, community radio generally operates via low power FM transmitters, ranging from five or ten watts up to 1,000 watts. The broadcasting equipment may be housed in a radio station, a person's home, or even in a specially designed suitcase. Philosophically and structurally, it is volunteer-directed, and takes on a wide variety of social aims according to the collective goals of the participants.

Community radio's global network, the Association Mondiale des Radiodiffuseurs Communautaires (AMARC) avoids strict definitions of the type of media being practiced. Instead AMARC offers up the most commonly used terms – community radio, rural radio, cooperative radio, participatory radio, free radio, alternative, popular, educational radio – and then invites and accepts multiple definitions, acknowledging that community radio is named, understood and practiced in a variety of ways:

Some are musical, some militant and some mix music and militancy. They are located in isolated rural villages and in the heart of the largest cities in the world. Their signals may reach only a kilometer, cover a whole country or be carried via shortwave to other parts of the world. Some stations are owned by not-for-profit groups or by cooperatives whose members are the listeners themselves. Others are owned by students, universities, municipalities, churches or trade unions. There are stations financed by donations from listeners, by international development agencies, by advertising and by governments (AMARC, www.amarc.org, under *About Community Radio*).

Among the many definitions culled from the writings of radio practitioners around the world and posted on the website, the following characteristics receive frequent mention:

- Non-profit (although not necessarily non-commercial)
 - Volunteer
 - Community-based and community-controlled
 - Pluralistic
 - Participatory
 - Democratic
 - Tied to social movements and democratization struggles
 - Tied to development
 - Tied to oppressed or marginalized peoples
 - 'Voice of the voiceless'
- (AMARC, www.amarc.org under *About Community Radio*)

The reluctance to accept a single definition of community radio perhaps arises from the mediating technology itself: low power FM with a limited signal range, reaching a multiplicity of localities and communities of interest rather than a single mass audience. In a jointly published handbook for community radio operators, AMARC

Africa and PANOS Southern Africa stress that proffered definitions should remain varied and open-ended, and examples should be understood as dynamic. The authors add "the concept of 'community radio' should be re-visited or redefined as societal developments dictate" (Mtimde et. al. 1998, 4). The lack of definition is itself defining, however, in that it conveys the implication that community radio is a democratization project based on pluralistic principles. Within this mission is a strong attachment to audience participation and two-way communication.

Dialogism's Political Aspect

As stated in the introduction, grassroots radio practitioners primarily concern themselves with using radio as an instrument of local communication and interaction, as opposed to an instrument of broadcast from the centre, bringing the possibilities imagined by Brecht into praxis on a small-scale localized basis. This act creates tension with the centre not only in terms of the messages exchanged, but also with the very manner in which they are exchanged. In a medium that has historically been carefully controlled by the state, the free flow of publicly-heard conversation threatens to shape and change interactions among citizens in ways the state is unable to anticipate or control. In this manner, a new space has opened with the potential to change the centralizing – or, what Mikhail Bakhtin would call centripetal – forces of the centre's monologic voice. This new process is essentially dialogic and decentralizing – or centrifugal – as described by Bakhtin in relation to language.

Bakhtin proposed that our language is in constant interplay with the world around us; every utterance shapes future utterances, just as it is shaped by utterances past. Further, every word is "at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is

the situation of any living dialogue” (Bakhtin 1981, 280). Whether or not today’s community radio activists are directly influenced by Bakhtin, the idea of dialogue is central to their conception of participatory communication. This conception has been influenced by and filtered through the lens of liberation theology, and by Freire-inspired grassroots education projects carried out in community radio’s ‘homeland,’ Latin America. In *Education as the Practice of Freedom*, first published in 1967, Paulo Freire introduced the concept of Dialogue within education praxis, stating:

Just as there is no such thing as an isolated human being there is no such thing as isolated thinking. Any act on thinking requires a Subject who thinks, an object thought which mediates the thinking Subjects, and the communication between the latter, manifested by linguistic signs (1976, 134-135).

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published one year later, he wedded dialogue to liberationist philosophy, writing that dialogue “must generate other acts of freedom; otherwise it is not love...If I do not love the world – if I do not love life – if I do not love men – I cannot enter into dialogue” (1972, 78). One must acknowledge, however, that Freire does not credit Bakhtin for the concept of dialogism; instead he references Mexican-Spanish philosopher Eduardo Nicol (Freire 1976, 134). It is also worth noting that the tin miners’ stations that radio activists most frequently identify as the first ‘true’ community radio projects – established in 1948 – predate Freire’s first major published work by nearly two decades, raising the possibility that community radio influenced Freire’s understanding of dialogue as much as he influenced community radio’s understanding of the concept. Further, as may be discerned from the examples presented in this thesis, Freire’s ideas have been modified by the community radio movement, which has collectively redirected Freire’s observations through the eyes of the ‘peasants,’ focusing more on the autonomous agency of base communities than on the problem of their relationships

with interveners. In so doing, the movement has mitigated the inherent vanguardism that may be read in Freire's works. In this manner, the concept of dialogism itself enters into dialogic interplay between movement actors and theorists, creating new communication models.

Herein lies community radio's inescapable political aspect. Born in the crucible of oppression, community radio's dialogism is historically oppositional and political. Yet this history is not the sole source of community radio's placement as an agent of social change. Today community radio is removed from the mid-to-late 20th Century Latin American context and practiced in many ways, in many different locations, and with many different goals; yet it remains intrinsically linked to what Kac identifies as "the political dimension of dialogism" (1999, 5). This dimension arises from the fact that the simple act of speaking dialogically contains within it a critique of those who speak monologically (Kac 1999, 5). Thus grassroots community radio producers who would not identify their aims as political – perhaps joining community radio as cooking show hosts or music deejays, for example – often find themselves drawn into wider struggles connected to the right to communicate and to express one's identity.

However, it is not just the manner in which dialogue is exchanged, but that which it represents that lends community radio a political dimension. Community radio in Thailand, as in many locations throughout the world, provides a site where the centripetal forces of state-sponsored culture and language collide with the centrifugal forces of local, ethnic and class culture. These centripetal forces are enabled by state regulation and military might, while centrifugal forces are enabled by grassroots communication networks and decentralized people power. Together these competing narratives - each highly empowered in their own way and bending toward

one another when necessary - form a heteroglossia far more stratified and complex than the 'official version' of a unified, uniform Thai culture. Jokes, fables, songs and complaints against Thai officialdom migrate from the market grounds to the airwaves, where they may be softened or coded to mitigate backlash and remain 'under the radar': it is this complicated, multi-authored social landscape that leaks into the broadcasts, a heteroglossia denied by the state but evident in many aspects of daily life and language. Thus however small and powerless individual community radio stations may seem at surface glance, they create cracks in the system through which the state glimpses "the authentic environment of the utterance" (Bakhtin 1981, 272) – an alternative competing universe not small and powerless at all but representative of the organic seething masses.

Communication as a Right

Media activists, including many of the informants to this study, often state they are exercising their right to communicate. Observers should take care not to confine this rights-based concept to a narrow, legalistic framework, however. For one thing, the right to communicate is not a concept expressly enshrined in either multilateral declarations or national constitutions. After decades of discussion and debate within social movement networks, the United Nations, and the academy, it has not yet even been successfully defined. Michael Traber offers the following summary:

So far there is no definition of the right to communicate. But the majority of thinkers stress the equality of partners in the communication process. It should comprise multi-way flows of information, with a passive as well as an active right to communicate (1993, 157).

At best, then, the right to communicate is an incomplete project. Therefore it makes a poor standard by which to assess grassroots radio's impact. Even were it more

precisely defined, a legally enshrined rights framework – as we experience it in relation to concepts like freedom of the press and freedom of expression – is limited by both theoretical and practical pitfalls. “Neither law nor right is a neutral regulator of power relations. They are themselves sites of power,” notes Amir Hassanpour in his study of the suppression of Kurdish language TV (1998, 15). Hassanpour’s statement draws our attention to the fact that while we may describe rights declared in textual form as ‘universal’ or ‘inalienable,’ such rights are typically a construction of many tiers of authoritative bodies, conferred upon the weak by the strong and ignored when they become inconvenient. From this perspective, rights are discretionary and, in the words of Hamelink, routinely “violated around the world and around the clock” (2003, 5). Therefore the achievement or non-achievement of declared rights may have virtually no impact in grounded reality, depending on the local situation. Additionally, universalist statements guaranteeing a right to communicate do not fully address the great variety of conflicts, challenges and problem-solving that grassroots media producers engage in on a daily basis. Recognizing this, Alice Munyua and Emamanuel Njenga advised a Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS) campaign meeting that “communication rights campaigns as a lone concept would not be easily understood in many African countries particularly outside civil society groups unless linked to livelihood issues and civic education activities” (Munyua and Njenga 2004, 21). Speaking of the Asian context, Ubonrat agrees that a narrow rights-specific focus does not adequately address the broad challenge of gaining freedom to express and to dissent (“People’s Media” 2004, 22-23). With this in mind, addressing community radio as a communications rights project requires a broader view of human rights, one that accepts that rights can be developed and contested locally, placing everything from the re-ordering of interpersonal relations to

the drafting of municipal bylaws on the same field as universalist multi-lateral statements and initiatives. White argues that this fluid, bottom-up construction of rights – as opposed to static, top-down construction – takes in the whole field of grassroots struggle, thus widening the array of actors and issues involved (White 1993, 25). Such a framework therefore envisions rights not only through the narrow frame of a legalistic master narrative, but also encompasses a broad field of specific local and personal struggles – between farmer and district governor, husband and wife, panhandler and police officer, for example – as part of the struggle to communicate and relate to others in fairness, equality and dignity.

Grassroots Radio and Power Relations

Community radio networks and the transnational social movements they interact with often describe their social power as a force deriving ‘from below.’ This brings to mind Michel Foucault’s discussion of popular revolt, which he describes as a bubbling social undercurrent that occasionally erupts into a sudden “wrenching away that interrupts the flow of history” (Foucault 1994, 449). However, when discussing grassroots radio power one must apply the Foucauldian model with caution. Foucault’s world is in many respects a prison house from which is there very little opportunity for liberation: “metapower” extends beyond the state to all social structures and interactions and “revolution is a different type of codification of the same relations” (1994, 122-123). Within the Foucauldian framework, we are all strings in the same tangled ball, occasionally reordered but never separated. The institutions and ideas that surround us form the very fabric of our lives, in a sense making us colluders in our own oppression. This conception operates in consensus with the earlier works of Horkheimer and Adorno, who in 1944 extended a similar

concept to the media: “Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part. Even the aesthetic activities of political opposites are one in their enthusiastic obedience to the rhythm of the iron system” (Horkheimer and Adorno 1986, 120). Within the “iron system” the audience is subjected to the “ruthless unity” of the culture industry, in which “something is provided for all so that none may escape” (1986, 123).

The works of Horkheimer, Adorno and Foucault easily frame the highly developed bureaucracies and pervasive corporate media of the Western world. They also provide a tool for describing wholesale changeovers of government such as the 1979 Iranian revolution, which amounted to one meta-structure replacing another in a process of massive re-ordering (Foucault 1994, 449-453). However, the framework of power relations advanced by Foucault does not fully correspond with many sites of grassroots radio operation, where the source of oppression is more overt, and where actors are engaged less in wholesale revolution and more in creating alternative possibilities at a local, grassroots level. In the example of Burma, for instance, oppression does not arrive primarily in the form of cloying bureaucracies and mind-numbing media, but rather more likely in the form of a soldier’s boot breaking down the front door. A depoliticized conception of co-collusion in one’s own oppression and an inability to clearly name an enemy becomes less valid in the face of such scenarios. At this point it is helpful again to consider the contribution of liberation theology to the question of power relations: “The concerns of the so-called Third World countries revolve around the social injustice-justice axis, or, in concrete terms, the oppression-liberation axis” (Gutierrez 1973, 174). This framework introduces polarities that are not present in the Foucauldian worldview but cannot be denied as part of the practical reality in which grassroots media activists operate. The theology

of liberation and the praxis it inspired also introduces an underlying optimism that a new order, although perhaps “more of a motivating idea than a reality” (Gutierrez 1973, 214), is possible:

The horizon of political liberation allows for a new approach to the problem, it throws new light on it, and it enables us to see aspects which had been but dimly perceived; it permits us also to get away from an alleged apolitical science and provides a different context for the crucial role of scientific knowledge in the historical praxis of man...And in this history, injustice and oppression, divisions and confrontation exist. But the hope of liberation is also present (Gutierrez 1973, 174).

The addition of a liberating horizon to the comparatively dark world of Adorno, Horkheimer and Foucault provides – indeed, demands – a framework for action for “concrete measures that begin to actualize new possibilities” (Bonino 1989, 51). Hence the popular rallying cry of ‘Another Media is Possible’ among alternative media practitioners, and hence their project to build alternative media constructs that operate outside the totalitarian media landscape presented by Horkheimer and Adorno. Grassroots radio volunteers confront global media hegemonies not by despairing or submitting, but by doing things differently. This falls under the rubric of activities that Freire called Cultural Action for Freedom: “the kind of counterhegemonic activity that is intended to precede and help create the climate for social change” (Mayo 2004, 56). The transformative imperative is echoed in the words of Tiemoko Kone, director of Radio Tabale in Mali: “The biggest challenge we have is to change our society” (cited by AMARC Africa n.d., 1).

Who/What are the Communities in ‘Community Radio’?

The Thai phrase most widely used by practitioners for the type of media described in this thesis is *wittayu chumchon*, which translates to English as ‘community radio.’ As Lucksana Klaiko points out in her dissertation on Thai

community radio, *chumchon* is in fact a relatively recent construct in the Thai lexicon; the post-War Thai government put *chumchon* forward as a translation of the English word ‘community’ and used it in the establishment of a district structure capable of disseminating rural development programmes and other national priorities (2004, 58). To this day the government’s definition of community remains highly geographic and development-oriented, leading to the state’s insistence that community radio should be delivered by *tambons*, or local administrative districts, a debate further described in Chapter Two. Meanwhile, grassroots radio activists offer a different reading of the term ‘community’ as any grouping of people with a shared social kinship, be it ethnic, political, geographic, work-related, or based on sexual preference and gender, to name a few of the myriad possibilities. In handbooks and discussion groups, they also put forward the idea of a ‘community of communities.’ This presents a challenge of representation, as described in the *African Community Radio Manager’s Handbook*:

Your community is made up of many different people: men, women, old, young and so on. If you want the community to participate in the station, you have to approach all of these people. This means you need to know who makes up your community. Then you have to understand their interests and their constraints (AMARC Africa n.d., 31).

Thus, one should not approach the concept of ‘community’ lightly. In a UNESCO-sponsored handbook for radio volunteers, Fraser and Estrada observe: “Some discord is present in all communities; they are not the peaceful, harmonious gatherings that outsiders may idealistically imagine” (2001, 18). Definition of the community, including issues of membership, exclusion and control, can become sites of furious struggle, as described by Downing in his examination of the near-implosion of the Pacifica Radio network in the U.S.A. (Downing 2001, 325-353). Downing, for his part, discounts ‘community’ as a “rather fluffy notion” (2001, 51). Nonetheless, it is difficult, if not impossible, to approach the subject of grassroots radio while denying

its practitioners the right to describe themselves as a community or communities, for this is typically the basis of their self-definition as participants in a collective process. To acknowledge this reality without becoming paralysed by the debatability of community definition, Fraser and Estrada place the issue within the framework of community as an ongoing social process that is never fully complete or beyond contention, concluding that conflict over community definition is something to be acknowledged and accepted as a necessary element in the democratic process (2001, 18). From a broader perspective, Bakhtin would recognize this proposal in relation to what he called the ‘unfinalizability’ of language and dialogue.

Migration, Hybridity and Transculturality

Radio volunteers who participated in this study include migrants to Thailand from Burma. The Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat reports there were an estimated 190 million migrants worldwide in 2005, up from 75 million in 1960 (United Nations 2005, *World Migrant Stock online data base*). We live in a world increasingly on the move and, for some of us, increasingly connected through technology. This trend has been accompanied by a growing body of study into the relationship between migration and culture. In post-modern literature, Featherstone points out, fixed identity has been replaced by “hybridity” as the common coin to describe multi-directional cultural constructions that arise from “travel, nomadism, migrancy, border-crossings, living on borders” (Featherstone 1995, 126). Urban theorist Michael Peter Smith notes that “new modes of communication have penetrated to even remote hinterlands,” turning migrants into border-free actors who “maintain transnational connections by using advanced means of communication and travel” (2001, 1, 5). In the field of media and communications study, Roza Tsagarousianou has coined the phrase “late modern

transnational mobility” to describe this phenomenon, which she describes as a condition of intense and constant global connectivity (2004, 56). Noting that “late modern migrants are not lonely and isolated in the sense that their predecessors were” (60), she states:

New technologies and faster communications devices in the new century, contrasted to the long and precarious journeys of emigration and the slow and fragile communications among earlier migrants...have clearly shaped what we understand as diasporic experience in late modernity (61).

While this framework certainly seems to describe the 21st Century world we imagine ourselves to inhabit, this should not, however, be taken as a universal experience. As Friedman warns us, “Experienced hybridity is one thing. To impose it on others as an ‘objective phenomenon’ is another” (1999, 251). Several of the informants for this study fall into the category of migrants and border-crossers, however their experiences seem far removed from the prevailing discourse of fluid transnational interconnectivity. Typically, travel out of Burma is accomplished on foot under difficult and highly dangerous conditions, including the threat of land mines and roving Burma Army (*Tatmadaw*) patrols. One informant had no contact with his parents for ten years because of the fighting and a lack of travel funds; when he finally returned to Burma for a visit he had difficulty finding his family because their village had been relocated by the Burma Army. During the ten-year separation, his parents had assumed he was dead (Informant 6, 2004). Another informant was able to speak with his parents by telephone, but couldn’t tell them about his life in Thailand because of fear that Burma’s Military Intelligence Service was monitoring the call (Informant 4, 2004). Even among the transplanted migrant community in Chiang Mai, communication is difficult, particularly after recent measures have been taken in Thailand outlawing the use of cell phones and motorcycles by migrants (Sai Silip, 2007).

Friedman similarly discovered in his research that “while intellectuals may celebrate border-crossings, the lumpenproletariat (*sic*) real border-crossers live in constant fear of the border and express a very different view of the matter” (1999, 254). Here Featherstone agrees that for many of the world’s people, the conscious experience of globalization “may be absent or limited, or occur only spasmodically” (1995, 123). From this we may understand the ‘global connectivity’ framework not as an objective state that includes all the world’s population, but as a political viewpoint that favours the metanarrative of globalization as a culturally harmonizing experience and natural end-point of civilization, a viewpoint Friedman argues is “the product of declining hegemony” (1999, 253). If this is so, it is not a viewpoint that should be expected to be shared by all peoples, which helps explain why, as Castells observes, the broadly-held assumption of a universalized, globalized, rootless world has not materialized in the expected way; rather, people continue to “assert their own culture and experience in their own localities” (2004, 30). When this happens there is a tendency for global elites to assume the assertion is backwards and “red-neck,” observes Friedman (1999, 252). Wolfgang Welsch makes a similar observation: “Enlightenment people don’t like these [cultural] particularisms. This is quite understandable. But it is not sufficient. As concerning as one many find these phenomena, we won’t be able to get by without taking seriously the demand for specific identity” (1999, 204). While Welsch tends to accept the same false meta-assumptions about technological interconnectivity and hybridity, he thankfully furthers the migration model to include a more tolerant view of difference, coining the term ‘transculturality’ to describe a condition in which the presentation of ethnic and local culture does not necessarily translate as hatred and fear of others, but may also be tied to the positive production of diversity (1999, 203). This model fits the

experience of the Shan migrant radio volunteers interviewed in this research, who described careful efforts to ensure authentic presentation of culture, traveling to the border areas to collect cassette tapes of Shan folk songs (Informant 4, 2004), and taking pains when describing cultural practices not to state inaccuracies that could be misconstrued as “trying to change our culture” (Informant 11, 2004). At the same time, the Shan volunteers worked side by side with other ethnic nationalities such as the Karen and Thai, and spoke positively about the presentation of many cultures on air, not just one. Indeed, the peoples represented in this study historically have centuries of experience living transculturally before the arrival of colonial-era borders – not without conflict, but also not with the feeling that ethnic culture is abnormal or backward.

Cultural Identity and Grassroots Radio

As illustrated by the example of Thai community radio, central to the context of grassroots community radio is its role in challenging dominant cultural identities. Indigenous and ethnic communities are drawn to community radio as a tool for preserving and presenting cultures they perceive as threatened from without. It is fair to say that the perceived threat is usually not without some foundation; in his study of Kurdish satellite TV, for example, Hassanpour raises the case of the Kurdish language being banned from broadcast in Turkey (Hassanpour 1998, 5-6). Likewise, Shan and Karen refugees and migrants have experienced the well-documented ongoing suppression of ethnic minorities under the Burma Army’s totalizing slogan, “One Blood, One Voice, One Command.” In a world where the planned extinction of certain cultures remains a concrete possibility – yet migration and cultural mingling is

unavoidable – community tensions arise around the presentation of ‘correct’ culture, as acknowledged by informants for this research project.

Without mediating influences, the cultural preservation imperative implicit in many grassroots radio undertakings could easily slide into sectarianism. Indeed, Freire warned against just such a possibility, describing the sectarian as one who disrespects the choices of others and “sets himself up as the proprietor of history” (1976, 11). There are many recent historical examples of micro-media being used to empower the voices of separatist cultural projects that are in conflict with surrounding cultures, such as the use of cassette tapes and handheld digital video cameras by religious fundamentalists. While these media projects are to some extent outward-directed, to a larger extent they are inward-directed, laying out prescriptions for proper conduct and belief systems among members of the religious or ethnic community involved. At this point, the media project leaves the praxis of liberation: “Sectarians can never carry out a truly liberating revolution, because they themselves are unfree” (Freire 1976, 12). Within the sphere of grassroots radio production, a factor that tends to mitigate this potential is the higher degree of organization and resources needed to build a radio station, as opposed to operating a hand-held video camera or cassette recorder. Typically, links must be forged and maintained among multiple ethnicities and communities of interest to meet the demands of raising a transmission tower, purchasing equipment, filling live airtime, meeting regulatory requirements and defending the station’s right to exist.

Another mediating factor is the influence of local workshops and networks, many financed or assisted by regional UNESCO offices. Since the Commission into the Study of Communications Problems (UNESCO 1980) brought culture to the foreground of communications discourse, UNESCO has consistently raised cultural

preservation and promotion as a world development priority, identifying cultural diversity as a phenomenon “as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature” (UNESCO 2001, Article 1). This concept is echoed in the many handbooks and statements created by community radio networks, such as the Community Radio Charter for Europe, which declares that community radio should “provide a right of access to minority and marginalised groups and promote and protect cultural and linguistic diversity” (AMARC 1994, point 7). Through the influence of NGOs, scholar-activists and community radio networks, this thinking appears to permeate the movement down to the local level. Whatever their own internal community cultural debates may be, the informants for this research consistently raised diversity of voice and respect for all cultures as desirable goals to be promoted through community radio. Thus the overall framework for understanding community radio should recognize that there is a stronger tendency toward pluralism than toward sectarianism and cultural retrenchment.

The Context of Globalization and Liberalization

Community radio’s transformation from a few isolated projects to a global network of 3,000 member stations in 110 countries (AMARC nd.) was greatly accelerated in the closing decades of the 20th Century, which saw “rapid expansion in the number and popularity of community radio stations” (Fraser and Estrada 2001, 1). This occurred during a period of rising globalization and liberalization of the broadcast sector, a time when independently owned local media were drawn into transnational corporate mergers (McQuail et. al. 1992, 23). The simplest conclusion from this historical confluence is that community radio emerged as a form of

resistance against globalization, as part of a larger phenomenon that Francisco Entrena identifies as “competitive responses to globalization processes” (Entrena 2003, x).

At the same time, however, one cannot ignore the fact that community radio may well owe its period of ascendance in the 1980s and 1990s to the very privatization and deregulation that is often viewed as a *threat* to independent media. Globally, community radio activists have proven themselves adept at taking advantage of openings created by media liberalization and the retreat of state broadcasters. This is because the power centres of global capitalism require ever-expanding territories of operation and new regulatory freedoms, generating conditions that conversely create pinholes through which decentralizing cultural forces are able to penetrate the centre.

The retreat of public broadcasting is one aspect of this trend. While external lending institutions pushed broadcast deregulation in the South, in Northern countries such as Canada internal factors served to diminish public broadcasting, including the growing influence of the corporate sector and neo-liberal thinking on government policy. Meanwhile other countries found their state broadcast monopolies challenged equally by both commercial interests and citizen’s organizations. Such was the case in India when the Cricket Association Bengal challenged the state’s control of broadcast rights to an important cricket match. The Indian government claimed a broadcast monopoly under the 1885 Telegraph Act, which set the broadcast regulatory framework for a full century. In February 1995, the Supreme Court reviewed the case and ruled the constitution’s guarantee of freedom of expression necessarily required more open access to the airwaves, a decision that broke the monopolies of the country’s two public broadcasters, All India Radio and Doordarshan TV (Ghosh 2005, 1-2).

Thus, although the intent of deregulation was often driven by neo-liberal economics, it was not the sole driving factor behind media liberalization. In the South, popular media reform movements applied pressure from below. Community radio stations in the Andean nations of Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador, for example, engaged in a decades-long fight to gain legislation affirming their right to exist (Gumucio-Dagron 2003, 6). Additionally, liberalization did not produce a uniform commercialization of the airwaves. As frequencies became available, the private sector did not rush in to seize markets that held low commercial value, nor did they move to respond to locally-based information and culture needs. Meanwhile, the retreat of public sector broadcasters created a gap in public service radio. Stepping into the vacuum, community radio found access to the dial for the first time in rural, ethnic and indigenous communities, where commercial broadcasters found little incentive to set up shop. In cases where the state attempted to deny access to community radio, citizens used the new, more liberal legal regimes to argue their case for the right to broadcast. Thus by the opening of the 21st Century “the breakdown of the monopolistic public service model...[and] the expansion of local media possibilities” progressed in small, largely unnoticed ways throughout the world (McQuail et al. 1992, 23), including within the radio broadcast sector. Amazingly, amid the hyper-profit frenzy of global capitalist expansion, grassroots radio and local culture had wrested a place on the dial.

LITERATURE

Robert Hackett observes: “Of all contemporary popular struggles, the struggle to democratize the communication media is arguably one of the most important and least recognized” (2000, 61). With this observation in mind, one of the first

challenges for the student of grassroots radio is to unearth a solid literature base. The following highlighted titles represent just a few of the many texts consulted in this thesis, which are listed in full in the bibliography.

The writings of American media scholar John Downing – in particular his 2001 book *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements* – provide an excellent starting point for understanding alternative media within the context of community, democracy and dialogue. Another valuable overview is the essay collection *Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World*, edited by Couldry and Curran. The contents provide theoretical reflection on the paradox of media power, as well as specific case studies of alternative media in action around the world, including China, Malaysia, Chile, Indonesia and the United States. Further, I found it helpful to refer to Bandy and Smith's essay collection *Coalitions Across Borders: Transnational Protest and the Neoliberal Order* to help place my understanding of community radio within the wider context of the global rise of civil society and new social movement networks. Turning specifically to the Asian context, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation published a special issue of *Development Dialogue* in 2002 under the title *Access to Information in Southeast Asia and Beyond*. The title did not refer exclusively to Access to Information laws, as one might assume, but instead encompassed a broad look at information and knowledge transfer, including the rise of grassroots communications networks and popular media reform movements in Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines and India.

Thailand's popular democratization movements and their connection to media reform are documented in the works of McCargo (2000), Callahan (1998) and King (1992). In 2005 the Thai Broadcast Journalists Association (TBJA) published a series of papers by scholars and media reform activists, titled *Is Media Reform Going*

Backward? The works, edited by Sopit Wangvivatana, collectively reveal Thailand's media reform movement at an important crossroads, when it appeared the forward momentum of the early 1990s had been effectively blockaded by the state. Turning specifically to community radio in Thailand, the major works available are the papers of Ubonrat Siriyuvasek of Chulalongkorn University's communications programme. Professor Ubonrat[†] has developed a substantial body of papers on the subject of media reform in Thailand, dating back to the constitutional struggles of 1994, several of which are referenced in this thesis and listed in the bibliography. Combined, these papers are invaluable in that they form much of the historical record of the media reform movement in Thailand.

Another rich source of literature are the many informal papers and presentations emerging from alternative media gatherings, including regional and global conferences organized by the Association Mondiale des Radiodiffuseurs Communautaires/World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC). This thesis has drawn on presentations at the 1st Annual AMARC Asia-Pacific 2005 in Jakarta, including Mohan Bista's remarks on producing content in a restrictive environment, Kukuh Sanyoto's description of the regulatory debate around recognized community radio as a 'third sector' in broadcasting, and Supinya Klangnarong's account of the fight to democratize Thailand's broadcast sector. This thesis also makes reference to papers put forward by OURMedia/NUESTROSMedia, a global network aimed at creating dialogue between practitioners and academics. The Latin American research and alternative media communities in particular have made excellent contributions to the OURMedia project, and to our understanding of grassroots media from a grounded perspective. In particular, Victor van Oyen's

[†] *In this thesis, Thai names are referenced according to common usage in Thailand, in most cases employing the given (first) name as opposed to family (last) name as the main identifier of an individual.*

“Challenges for Community and Popular Radio in Latin America,” presented at OURMedia III in Barranquilla, Colombia, and Alfonso Gumucio Dagron’s “Call Me Impure: Myths and Paradigms of Participatory Communication” (2001) and “Art of Aerialists: Sustainability of Community Media” (2003) provide excellent insight into the daily struggles of grassroots radio. The OURMedia initiative is headed by Clemencia Rodriguez, a scholar-activist whose study of Latin American citizens media presents the type of action-theory research discussed in Chapter Four, particularly her inquiry into a radio station in an isolated Chilean town, described in “The Bishop and His Star: Citizens’ Communication in Southern Chile,” which appeared in the aforementioned Couldry and Curran collection, *Contesting Media Power* (2003). In addition to specific examples, Rodriguez provides a broad look at citizen’s media as a site of empowerment and source of radical democracy in her 2001 book, *Fissures in the Mediascape: An International Study of Citizen’s Media* (NJ: Hampton Press).

Finally, in my discovery of emerging research methodologies for grassroots media, I was greatly informed by the texts of Paulo Freire, as well as the participatory research perspectives put forward by Orlando Fals-Borda (1991) and John Gaventa, author of the essay “Toward a Knowledge Democracy” (1991). I also turned to Patricia Hill Collins’ *Black Feminist Thought* (1990) as a general reference point for recognizing the grassroots intellectual traditions and theory under development among global and regional community radio networks.

METHODOLOGY

This thesis uses interviews with community radio practitioners and media reform academic-activists in Thailand as a primary source of information to outline

the historical development, socio-political context and daily practice of community radio. This method of inquiry employs elements of both journalism and participatory action research: 1) the interviews were wide-ranging and open-ended, allowing participants to set the speaking agenda as much as possible; 2) the resulting information is delivered in clear, narrative format, and; 3) participants reviewed the research in process and provided guidance to ensure accurate presentation of their situation and their ideas. Chapter Two, which provides a contextual exploration of Thai community radio and state broadcast policy, engages in what PAR researchers identify as “critical recovery of history,” reconstructing events through interviews with eye witnesses and combining them with other historical records (Fals-Borda, *Some Basic Ingredients*, 1991, 8). Colombian popular researcher Orlando Fals-Borda argues that not only do people’s recollections help us understand critical events, but the very act of recollecting and recording contributes to “self-awareness and self-reliance of base communities and hence their power of independent action” (*Remaking Knowledge*, 1991, 155). Chapter Three, which outlines the experiences of migrant workers engaged in community radio, continues this methodology, presenting the information as a *vivencia* – or ‘life study’ – based on *testimonio*. *Testimonio* is a research approach developed specifically in response to researchers’ encounters with oppressed peoples and therefore is highly appropriate in this study, which concerns itself with the experiences of migrants from Burma, a highly oppressive military state. Developed primarily by Latin American ethnographers and anthropologists, but employed in many other locations and disciplines, *testimonio* provides a framework allowing ‘interview subjects’ to step forward and become driving-force narrators of their own stories. John Beverly describes the renegotiated relationship thus:

...it is the intention of the direct narrator, who *uses* (in a pragmatic sense) the possibility the ethnographic interlocutor offers to bring his or her situation to

the attention of an audience – the bourgeois public sphere – to which he or she would normally not have access because of the very conditions of subalternity to which the *testimonio* bears witness (2003, 320).

The interlocutor in turn, according to Fals-Borda, plays a legitimate editorial role in situating the *testimonio*, using other texts and historical documents to place the raw words into a comprehensible context.

To summarize Beverly and Fals-Borda, participatory action research acknowledges that the creation and outcomes of research are important to both the ‘subject’ and the researcher. Consequently it is important to consider Freire’s argument that the work of the researcher/educator is more than the study and delivery of highly technical information; ideally it is also a form of communication.

Achieving this end requires the use of shared vocabulary wherever possible: “What is intelligible is only communicated insofar as it is communicable. This is why, when the significant content of the object under discussion is not comprehensible to one of the subjects, communication cannot take place” (1973, 137). With these principles in mind, Chapters Two and Three – which present the core information shared by the participants – are presented in clear narrative format, with attention to the recovery of history and previously untold experience, using direct quotes as much as possible.

Participants in the research have also had opportunity to review and comment on the information presented, another basic PAR principle. This is important not only for ensuring accurate representation of their experiences, but also for security reasons.

Many of the participants in this study live in precarious circumstances, particularly since the Thai military coup of September 2006, which was followed by a crackdown on both community radio operators and migrants from Burma. Consequently the identities of informants have by mutual agreement been removed from Chapter Three, and information about the interviews has been excised from the bibliography. This

approach is supported by the recommendations of Raymond M. Lee, author of the research handbook *Dangerous Fieldwork* (1995, 38).

CHAPTER TWO

THAI RADIO, IDENTITY AND MEDIA REFORM

“What we successfully did, was that we changed the paradigm...of the thinking of the people in Thailand. We could challenge the authorities that now the airwaves don’t belong to you anymore. They belong to the people.”

Supinya Klangnarong, Secretary-General
Campaign for Popular Media Reform (2004)

On the morning of October 11, 2006, a small group of media activists gathered at the foot of Bangkok’s Democracy Monument to mourn the nation’s Constitution. Since establishing an on-again off-again parliamentary democracy in 1932, Thailand’s political leaders had promulgated and abrogated no less than sixteen constitutions. Now, following a September 19 military coup, a seventeenth was in the drafting stage. For Thailand’s nascent media reform movement, however, the latest constitutional casualty held more than routine significance. Following a popular uprising and several years of lobbying and negotiations, the 1997 Constitution contained not only a guarantee of press freedom, but also a framework to end a decades-long state monopoly of the airwaves.

Nation, Religion and King

In Thailand, the broadcast frequency spectrum – a natural resource created by the planet’s electromagnetic fields – is in law the property of the state, with access to frequencies enforced under the Post and Telegraph Act (1940). In 1955, the Radio and Television Act clarified that actual ownership of radio and television stations was

the exclusive privilege of the Public Relations Department (PRD) and the Ministry of Defense, which in turn assigned ownership to various divisions of the Royal Thai Army (Ubonrat 1994, 105). Later, the Mass Communications Organization of Thailand (MCOT), an agency under the Prime Minister's Office, was added to the list (Luckana 2004, 81). This remains the basic framework of today's system, under which 524 AM and FM radio stations enjoyed legal sanction in 2006 (United States Department of State 2006, 13). Effectively the system operates as a dual monopoly, with the army and government stations at times battling one another and at times working in concert, depending on the politics of the day. Ultimately, the state regulates and owns all of Thailand's legal radio stations.

State regulation of the spectrum is not unusual – it is in fact the global norm. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) was formed around the notion that radio waves travel freely across borders, but in the 130 years since the first international conference on telegraphy was held in Paris, no international system for assigning radio frequencies has emerged. Although globalization has brought renewed calls – led primarily by the U.S. – to create a global regulatory system, historically the international community has tacitly agreed the assignment of radio frequencies should remain the purview of national governments (Raboy 1998, 1). There is little imperative for national governments to willingly give up the task of regulating broadcast frequencies, especially given their importance to military communication. Further, in the global South, control of the airwaves by the nation-state has been an essential ingredient in emerging nationalism and modernization, an imperative that still figures strongly in today's communications landscape. As Hassanpour points out in his study of Kurdish TV, broadcast is a powerful tool with

which to privilege language – an important site of class, gender and racial/ethnic power – and to construct and impose hegemonic national identities (1998, 24).

Certainly this has been the case in Thailand, where the Army sees itself as the defender of the official core national values of *Chat, Satsana, Phramahakasat*: Nation, Religion and King. All three of these values are tied to radio broadcasting by history. HRH Prince Purachatra was the first to tinker with experimental broadcasts in 1927. Three years later, Radio Bangkok began operating from the grounds of Phayathai Palace in central Bangkok. HRH King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) delivered the inaugural public broadcast from the throne room of the Grand Palace on February 5, 1930. During this early period, a typical broadcast day featured Buddhist sermons, political speeches and approved drama and music (Thailand PRD 2007, *Radio Broadcasting*).

But it was political leaders – not the palace – who took radio to its greatest height as a tool to construct and defend national identity. Field Marshall Plaek Pibulsonggram oversaw a major cultural overhaul that began in 1939 with a new name for the country: Thailand. Pibulsonggram had come to power as leader of the 1932 revolution that replaced regal authority with a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy. Then, just one year later, he overthrew the civilian government, setting the pattern of coups and counter-coups that defines Thai politics to this day. Under Pibulsonggram's modernization campaign, the throne was stripped of power and repositioned as the symbolic embodiment of nation and religion. Next, the Thai alphabet was streamlined and feudalistic vocabulary eliminated. The government devised codes of acceptable national dress and advertised them on posters, depicting a blend of European business dress and traditional styles. Borrowing from the model of Germany's Ministry of Publicity, Thailand's

Department of Publicity (today's Public Relations Department) was tasked with developing music, drama and films to express the new Thai-style modernity. The 1942 Decree on Artistic Culture and Drama Theatre contained a complicated licensing system to sanction acceptable public performances of opera, drama and musicals. Public radio broadcasting was also recognized as a potential tool of modernity. Responsibility for public radio was transferred from the Post and Telegraph Office to the Publicity Department on April 1, 1939, and in 1941 the Department created Radio Thailand. Radio Thailand was immediately enlisted as part of a publicity arsenal employed to spread Pibulsonggram's Twelve Decrees. According to the Decrees, citizens were expected to dress and behave appropriately, recognize their flag and understand the basics of the Constitution. Significantly, they were also expected to learn and speak Central Thai (Thailand PRD 2007, *Thailand Before*; Ubonrat 2000, 4-8; Daradirek 2000, 435).

To this day the government retains an entire bureaucracy – the National Identity Office – dedicated to *Chat, Satsana, Phramahakasat*, with the stated goal of “promoting national identity to all Thais, in thought, value and behavior” (Thailand NIO 2007, *Vision*). As noted by Lewis, the longstanding military-royalist identity embodied in “Nation, Religion and King” is wedded to the notion of a pure Thai race that raised its first kingdoms on the banks of the Chao Phraya, a broad river winding through the flat paddy lands of Central Thailand (Lewis 2002, 78). Battles between the Central Thai lowland kingdoms and Burma still play a key role in defining ‘Thainess’ (*khwan pen thai*), celebrated and mythologized in sprawling film epics like *Bang Rajan* (Tanit Jitnukul, 2000) and *Suriyothai* (Chatrichalerm Yukol, 2001). But in the words of historian Thongchai Winichakul, “our graceful national past is in fact a huge dose of tranquilizer” (cited by Lewis 2002, 78). The reality of Thailand is

more fragmented and contested. There are at least thirty-six distinct ethnic nationalities in Thailand, and even the Thai majority contains a mix of dialects and historical narratives, such as the Lanna and Issan cultures. In total, the country is home to five major language groups containing seventy-four languages (Gordon 2005, *Ethnologue Online*, under *Languages of Thailand*). Living mainly in border regions, many ethno-linguistic minorities have cultural ties that extend as much to neighbouring countries as they do to Central Thailand, sometimes more so. These remote populations are also often among the first to be affected by major development projects like dams and resource extraction, creating tension between the country's periphery and its Bangkok-centric planners. A recent example is the Trans Thai-Malaysia gas pipeline project in southern Thailand. Adam Simpson observes: "It was difficult for the Muslims in this region not to see the enforcement of the pipeline on them as an attack on their Muslim identity" (2006, 25).

It's not surprising that the economic and social tensions created by globalization – including the rise of ethnic and religious narratives (Tehrani 2000, 45) – should unfold in Thailand, an 'Asian Tiger' with free trade aspirations. Although centralized nationalism remains a strong political force in Thailand, a few popular leaders, like Buddhist philosopher Sulak Sivaraksa, have embraced a more decentred post-nationalist future. In an address commemorating the HRH King Bhumibol Adulyadej's sixtieth year on the throne, Sulak put forward an alternative notion of national identity:

Perhaps, we need to reinterpret 'nation' not to mean a group of people who speak the same language, who live in the same territory, or who share the same ethnicity or nationality (which is illusory) but to mean everyone who is alive and who is confronting happiness as well as suffering. As such, we will be supportive of one another and will be willing to serve those who are exploited and lack opportunity even though they belong to different nationalities, ethnicities, etc. (2006, III para 3).

In recent years, this reinterpreted nation has become empowered with its own means of communication, employing consumer-level technology. In 2004, for example, the Thai government found itself struggling to suppress the sale of homemade VCDs depicting the ‘Tak Bai massacre’ of Muslim citizens (Anucha 2004). Within this broad context, the continued orchestration of national identity through state control, including the retention of a broadcast monopoly, has become a growing challenge for both army and government.

Media Liberalization and Commercialization

The Thai military has been quick to step in whenever a civilian government appears to waver. Likewise, civilian politicians are tempted to ‘knock on the barracks door’ at the first sign of governmental instability. Military coups and manipulations are as much a part of the political landscape as elections (King and LoGerfo 1996, 103). In this environment, state controlled radio has propped up many an unpopular military regime. When frustrated Thai students held mass demonstrations for democracy in 1973, one of the few buildings they attacked was the Public Relations Department building that housed Radio Thailand. “It was, symbolically, a rejection of the dictatorial regime that suppressed the right and freedom of the people for more than two decades,” observes Ubonrat Siriyuvasek, the country’s foremost communications scholar (1994, 107). Yet even under subsequent civilian governments, the task of separating broadcast media from the state was never high on the political agenda.

Media liberalization was certainly high on the global agenda, however. During this period, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank applied pressure on governments to scale back state broadcasters, commonly viewed

by the corporate sector as unfairly subsidized competition. Despite the global push to liberalize the media in the 1980s, however, the Thai state put up a surprisingly effective defense of its monopoly. It did so by allowing private economic interests to participate in the broadcast media, without ever relinquishing Army and government ownership. Since the 1960s the Army had sold advertising spots to private businesses and allowed homegrown commercial radio producers to buy packages of airtime on Army stations, primarily for pop music programs. Under Chatichai Choonhavan's liberalizing government of the late 1980s, both Radio Thailand and the MCOT stations followed suit, but in a much more substantial way. An open bid process on three- to five-year contracts encouraged markedly greater competition for higher stakes, and small-time freelance producers soon gave way to emerging media/entertainment conglomerates (Luksana 2004, 80-81). Liberalized advertising regulations – including lifting a twelve-minute per hour limit on advertising – made radio attractive to private business. At the same time, the awarding of contracts became a lucrative business for the Army, as did agreements to build new stations: under Thai law, only the state is allowed to buy and sell radio transmission equipment. The healthy profit potential for all players resulted in a radio boom. In 1982 there were 252 radio stations; by 1996 the number had increased to 480 stations (Daradirek 2000, 435). By 2006, the PRD, MCOT and Royal Thai Army held between them 524 stations, almost all operating under private concession contracts (United States Department of State 2006, 13). Meanwhile the market value of broadcast equipment sales to Thailand was on the rise, from \$US 3.9 billion in 2001 to \$US 5.3 billion in 2004 (Canada Business 2005, 4).

Significantly, neither Chatichai nor subsequent governments pushed the radio sector to the point where the state relinquished any real control over the market. The

result is radio that today looks and sounds free – delivering a heavy diet of pop music and consumerism – but is not free, because the government and the Army still own the keys to the studio. All stations are required to air government-produced news at least twice a day and all must tread lightly to retain their broadcast licenses, which are reviewed annually (United States Department of State 2006, 13). Phone-in shows that allow two-way conversation are tightly monitored and frequently suppressed. This situation is not unique to Thailand; as Coronel observes, throughout Southeast Asia the dance between IMF-pleasing liberalization and underlying state control has created “glitzy but compliant presses that please the authorities but keep the citizenry ill-informed” (1998, 9). In times of crisis, such a press is unable to deliver the goods people seek: objective, relevant news.

Black May and the Failure of State Media

The small gathering at Democracy Monument in October 2006 was a faint echo of mass protests that had shaken the same area of Bangkok some fourteen years earlier, giving birth to Thailand’s media reform movement. On April 7, 1992 a coalition of elected pro-military parties installed General Suchinda Krapayoon, an unelected military leader, as prime minister. Technically the appointment occurred within the parameters of the Constitution, but the events that preceded it smacked of military takeover. Just one year earlier, Chatichai’s elected government had been upended in a military coup co-led by Suchinda. Declaring a return to democracy, the pro-military parliamentarians now installed Suchinda as prime minister, a move widely perceived as an entrenchment of the coup with parliamentary window dressing.

At any other time in Thailand's postwar history, Suchinda's appointment might have been accepted by the populace with a resigned shrug. But in 1988, in the handover between the Prem and Chatichai governments, Thai citizens had experienced a legal, peaceful transition to an elected government for the first time in their nation's history. As a result, political expectations changed. Having found a measure of prosperity and stability under Chatichai's laissez-faire 'no problem' government, a growing middle class was no longer willing to live under the old patron-client relationships of military control. Through the media, citizens had witnessed mass uprisings in the Philippines (1986), Burma (1988), China (1989) and the East Bloc (1989). The notion of 'people power' – premised on the essential idea that the public has a role to play in governance – was gaining ground throughout Asia. In mid-April 1992, pro-democracy advocates began congregating in and around Democracy Monument, Sanam Luang Park, Parliament and other public spaces in Bangkok. When two pro-democracy MPs undertook hunger strikes, people from all walks of life – farmers, academics, slum dwellers, students – flocked to their sides. The crowds swelled to an estimated 100,000 within a matter of days. Callahan describes a "carnival" atmosphere of music, jokes, impromptu speeches and food vendors (1998, 88). Although the hunger strikers provided some focus, for the most part the crowds lacked both a geographic center and an easily pegged identity:

The newspapers tried to use familiar categories to identify demonstrators in April 1992 as 'students, academics and opposition party members', but...the popular uprising of May 1992 overwhelmed these simple categories. The only word left was 'mob', which means that commentators needed to find new ways to talk about 'the people' that could adequately account for the blurring of participant's multiple identities (Callahan 1998, 88).

By mid-May an estimated 150,000-200,000 had gathered along points between Sanam Luang and Parliament. Meanwhile the Thai broadcast media reported

nothing out of the ordinary. Even when the military began stringing razor wire across Ratchadamnoen Avenue, newscasters remained silent. The privately owned print press, on the other hand, carried full reports, as did satellite TV stations like CNN (McCargo 2000, 13; Ubonrat 1994, 102; Eng 1998, 28). The Thai state should have gleaned from the unfolding crisis that the days of easy information control were history. Pro-democracy protestors had access to cell phones, faxes, photocopiers, cameras and hand held video cameras. Word-of-mouth networks were boosted by consumer-level communications technology, allowing information and strategies to be passed around easily and effectively. At one point a speech in Bangkok was broadcast using no more than one cell phone held up to a loudspeaker in Bangkok, while another phone was held up to a microphone attached to a public address system in Chiang Mai. To make matters worse for the authorities, a mysterious group known as Ai Laem began broadcasting over top of police and military radio frequencies (Callahan 1998, 78; Ubonrat 1994, 103). As the protests moved toward an inevitable and tragic confrontation with the military, fluid grassroots communications networks made a mockery of state radio and television. Ubonrat observes: “It was clear that the closed and highly manipulated state media systems could not produce any reliable information. This was in great contrast to the coming of the information age” (1994, 101-102).

On May 17 the military made its move to reclaim the streets. The carnival atmosphere quickly disintegrated as unarmed protestors faced off against police batons and bullets. In the past, the conflict might have ended in a matter of hours with the rebellion fully crushed. Now, cheap communications technologies and multiple participant groups meant the uprising was more lateral and less reliant on individual leaders, a factor noted by Callahan (1998, 85-86). Once again, the crowd

sought out Radio Thailand's broadcast centre and set it alight. Unable to end the conflict by arresting a single leader or surrounding a particular area, the military had difficulty gaining control. When the dust settled four days later, Radio Thailand's headquarters were in shambles, as they had been back in 1973. This time, though, the military was also in shambles, shamed by the King and undermined in a popular information and media war for which it was vastly unprepared.

Civil Society and Media Reform

Democratization policies and popular movements in Thailand and Southeast Asia are frequently read as the natural outcome of top-down globalization processes and middle class expansion. Within the context of this thesis, however, it is important to recognize the agency of rural, migrant and poor people's movements and their organizations in media reform. In Thailand, as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, grassroots networks have been significant contributors to reforms that are more commonly credited to the urban, educated middle class and professional journalists. Thai civil society organizations have their roots in rural villages, a factor that helps account for some of the developments discussed in this thesis. Thai NGOs emerged in the 1970s as a counter-force to official rural development schemes that often seemed at odds with the best interests of local populations. Based in scattered villages, they eventually came together in national networks such as the Union for Civil Liberties, a farm-labour organization founded in 1973. However, the dichotomous left-right politics of the day kept independent NGOs on the margins of political discourse for much of the Cold War period; indeed several NGOs were labeled 'communist' and driven from the scene altogether (Callahan 1998, 97). In the mid to late 1980s, the first stirrings of a new type of political discourse were

evident in the fight against the Pak Mun dam, a large hydroelectric project that threatened fishers, small farmers and several riverside cultural sites in Thailand's northeast. Early protests against the dam involved just a few hundred people in Kheng Chiem district in 1989. Then a link was made with the provincial chapter of the Union of Civil Liberties, one of the surviving old guard NGOs. With public relations assistance from the Union, the movement picked up steam, becoming a *cause célèbre* among students, environmentalists and civil society activists throughout the country (Elliott 1990, 26-28).

The importance of anti-dam movements in the global South cannot be over-emphasized; anti-dam protests have generated a capacity to revitalize and reshape the more ideologically-driven debates of the Cold War era, by pursuing broad anti-poverty and environmental agendas outside the traditional left-right struggles of labour unions and left wing political parties. Examples like India's Narmada Valley (Palit 2004, 74-75) show how anti-dam movements create important bridges between rural farmers and urban students, and link local struggles to emerging transnational networks like the International Rivers Network. Certainly this was the case when Mun River villagers arrived in Bangkok en masse and set up camp in front of Government House. Their continued presence in the city contributed to a new political paradigm and to the later development of shared citizen's spaces like the Assembly of the Poor and the Forum for Democracy, where connections were made with urban counterparts such as Slum People for Democracy. Similar developments were emerging and cross-fertilizing throughout the region, prompting Hedman to declare: "The spectre of civil society is haunting Southeast Asia" (2001, 921).

While the May 1992 protests occurred in cities, in the shadow of university campuses and government buildings, the crowd in the street represented many

interests, locales and walks of life. According to a Chulalongkorn University study undertaken in the immediate aftermath of Black May, based on 8,450 survey responses, there was no great demographic difference between those who joined the demonstration and those who did not, indicating that the gathering was fairly representative of the general population (King 1992, 1113-1114). These varied social groupings eventually coalesced under the Campaign for Popular Democracy, formed in 1979 but dormant for many years (One World Action, “CPLG”). The revitalized CPD and its later coalition partner, the Campaign for Popular Media Reform, very clearly echoed decentralizing social movement trends unfolding around the world, as did networks like Civicnet and the Thai Environment and Development Network (TEDNET).

Within an emerging ‘movement of movements’ paradigm, Black May marked a new coming of age for Thai NGOs and a “testament to the growing power of civil society” (King and LoGerfo 1996, 105). Chastened by King Bhumibol and humiliated by a seemingly headless ‘mob,’ the military went into political retreat. An interim government led by Anand Panyarachan fired the leaders deemed responsible for civilian deaths. Anand announced elections for September 13, and recruited members of the NGO and academic communities to participate in Poll Watch; the volunteers were tasked with leading awareness-raising democracy forums in schools, hospitals and other public places, as well as monitoring the elections (King 1992, 1115). Despite his government’s temporary mandate, Anand set about laying a foundation for democratic reforms – and the glaring failure of state broadcasters vaulted media reform to the top of the agenda. Prior to 1992, spoken word content, including news, talk radio and drama, was monitored and censored by the Broadcast Executive Board (BEB), comprised exclusively of station owners, meaning army

divisions and government bodies. Anand announced the Board would be replaced by a National Broadcasting Commission that would include academics and civil society representatives (Ubonrat 1999, 3).

Progress from this point onward was slow, indeed at times indiscernible. The broadcast landscape remained populated by powerful military leaders and wealthy leaseholders with political connections. Even after the September election of Chuan Leekpai, Thailand's first prime minister to have no military background, very little in the way of real regulatory change came to fruition. The academics and NGO representatives invited to participate in the reform process felt marginalized and powerless to change a deeply entrenched monolith (Ubonrat 1999, 3). It was not until a renewed government was elected in 1995 that media reform found its second wind. But it was private business, not the NGO sector, which enjoyed the first breakthrough: in 1996 iTV (Independent Television) went on the air as Thailand's first privately-owned television station. Worried that press freedom would be interpreted only as market freedom and privatization, social activists lobbied hard to ensure media reform would benefit the people, not just media and telecommunications conglomerates. They were joined by professional journalists, notably members of the Thai Broadcast Journalists Association and the Thai Journalists Association. Both of these organizations belonged to the Southeast Asian Press Alliance, a forum actively engaged in democratizing and professionalizing the media throughout Southeast Asia.

On paper, at least, the reformers' efforts were successful. In 1997 a new Constitution – popularly referred to as 'The People's Constitution' – set forth protection of the media from censorship (Thailand 1997, Article 39) as well as recognition of "liberty of communication" as an expressly stated right (Article 37). Further, Article 40 contained what would become a watershed statement:

“Transmission frequencies for radio or television broadcasting and radio telecommunication are national communication resources for public interest.” The Article promised “an independent regulatory body having the duty to distribute the frequencies under paragraph one and supervise radio or television broadcasting and telecommunication businesses as provided by law.” No longer would access to the airwaves be doled out by a closed cabal of generals and government officials. Encouraged by these developments, a new advocacy group called the Campaign for Popular Media Reform went into high gear, pushing for concrete measures to uphold the Article. The campaign’s goal was summarized by CPMR Secretary-General Supinya Klangnarong: “We are asking for freedom of speech and freedom of expression; also we are fighting for space in the media [for a] voice of the voiceless” (interview, 2004).

Passed by Parliament in 2000, The Organization of Frequency Wave Allocation and Supervision of Radio Broadcasting, Television and Telecommunications Enterprises Act contained a significant nod to the CPMR’s work. The Act stated the National Broadcasting Commission – which had been announced under Anand but given no effective role heretofore – should set about allocating frequencies, with twenty per cent of frequencies expressly allocated to public access radio and television (Supinya, interview, 2004). An interim Frequencies Allocation Committee was struck to appoint members to the commission. Encouraged, media activists and community organizers began informing Thai citizens – particularly in rural and marginalized communities – about their right to the airwaves under Article 40.

This forward-looking and, in hindsight, rather innocent education campaign led to an explosion in community radio, in turn leading to direct conflict with

powerful interests that saw little reason to give up their iron grip on the airwaves, despite promises made on paper.

The Emergence of Community Radio

Supinya credits community radio as the most significant success in Thailand's media reform movement because it showed that "the people could open up their own space" on the airwaves (interview, 2004). Her conclusion is shared by Sopit Wangvivatana in her introduction to a series of papers jointly published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the Thai Broadcast Journalists Association: "The most concrete part of the media reform has been taking place among the people – through community radio stations. They are the clearest examples of media reform" (Sopit 2005, 6). Emanating almost exclusively from rural villages and marginalized communities, tiny volunteer-run low power FM stations put flesh to the bones of a movement that heretofore had been defined primarily by urban academics and professional journalists. Rural participants responded to Article 40 with a vigour that surprised not only government authorities but even the reformers themselves. Few anticipated how quickly the promised reforms – not yet fully realized in law – would translate into grassroots citizen journalists taking radio into their own hands and challenging the powers that be. From this point forward, the agenda was set and pushed to its limit by ordinary people living "outside the gaze and powerful control of the center" (Ubonrat 2005, 62).

At first the state tried to control the agenda by introducing community radio through thirty state-managed community learning centres. In Ubon Ratchathani, Dr. Nirun Pitakwatchara, a kidney specialist at Sappasit Hospital and member of the Senate and the government's Frequencies Allocation Committee, became chair of

Ubon Ratchathani's state-sponsored Community Radio Programme. He worked with community volunteers to set up three daily broadcasts, and found the content naturally gravitated toward that which was missing in the mainstream media: information about the Pak Mun dam and the lives of people living along the riverside (Nirun, interview, 2004). When volunteers interviewed a fisher named Sompong Vienchain, listeners heard about the failure of the government's fish ladders – a measure meant to offset the rising water levels – and about the fishers' request for fifteen *rai* of farmland to replace their lost income. "We have nothing to lose by speaking on the radio... We have no land and we have no fish," said Sompong (cited by Supara 1999). While the government might have been able to accept critique of national-level initiatives like the Pak Mun dam as part of the country's ostensibly democratic framework, the airing of locally-driven issues presented a more difficult challenge, raising complaints and pressures from within. In Ubon Ratchathani, the local flashpoint issue was criticism of the Governor's pet tourism project, the construction of a twenty-two-metre high sculpture of a candle in Thung Si Muang Park. Stung by community radio open line shows and pointed news reporting that raised the ire of local officials, the Thai government cancelled its pilot radio project in 2000, cutting off the only legal avenue of community access to the airwaves (Gonzales 2002, 3). However, community radio still had access to start-up funds through a World Bank-supervised government program, the Social Investment Fund (SIF). The \$US 120 million fund had been set up in 1998 with the backing of the World Bank, UNDP and Japan. With the goal of off-setting the social fall-out of austerity measures introduced under a \$US 17.2 billion IMF loan, the SIF supported "civil works" that would generate employment and training (Hashimoto 2005). Although the funds were not initially intended for

NGOs or alternative media, a few applications for training workshops and radio start-up grants found their way under the radar.

With a 700,000 baht SIF grant, the first wholly independent community radio station, *Wittayu Siang Chumchon* (Kanchanaburi Community Voice), took to the air in December 2001 (Luckana 2004, 214). Using a ten-watt transmitter situated in an orchard, the station reached an estimated 20,000 to 40,000 villagers in Kanchanaburi province (Gonzales 2002, 3; Uajit, interview, 2004). Its founders had become socially active during protests against a Thai-Burma gas pipeline; they perceived radio had great potential to give voice to this and other local concerns. Radio host Boonsang Jansongratsamee explained: “This station is about two-way communication and listener participation. We remind people about their rights to access the media and encourage them to make use of the airwaves” (cited by Gonzales 2002, 3). Although the station was small and funded mainly through donations and t-shirt sales after the SIF grant ran out (Luckana 2004, 216), it nonetheless rattled the authorities. As Gonzales notes:

In a country where the broadcast spectrum has traditionally been in the hands of the government and the military, the idea of villagers learning to freely and independently operate radio stations outside the purview of officialdom is a frightening thought for the powers that be (2002, 4).

In February 2002, the Public Relations Department sent out its first cease and desist letter. Wichien Kuttawat, a volunteer at nearby Wat Praesen Community Radio and today a coordinator of the National Community Radio Network, recalls: “When community radio in Kanchanaburi went on the air, there was a warning letter. And we said that we were not illegal. We are unregistered, but we are not illegal” (Wichien, interview, 2004). While the Constitution and the Frequencies Allocation Act opened the door to community radio, the government had yet to follow through with a

regulatory regime to sanction the radio station. Concerned about their status, the Kanchanaburi activists phoned Dr. Uajit Virojraitrat, a sympathetic academic with Thailand's Civicnet Institute, and asked how to proceed. Her response was to request funding from Germany's Freidrich Naumann Foundation for a workshop series on community radio: "So I remember in 2002 we started to have seminars and I said we will proceed no matter what will happen. I still remember the words: Let's prove that the jail is big enough for all of us" (Uajit, interview, 2004).

To prepare for the workshops, Uajit learned about community radio as she went along, gathering information about Japan's neighbourhood radio stations through a personal contact in the Public Relations Department. At five watts with a five-kilometer radius, the Japanese model was too geographically limited for Thailand, but Uajit gained the basic idea that community radio should be small and affordable. Drawing on principles developed by UNESCO to promote community management and sustainability, Uajit then set about organizing four three-day workshops for interested community representatives: the first focused on participants' opinions of the media, followed by discussion of Article 40; the second focused on the meaning of community radio; the third looked at participation and self-reliance; the fourth workshop focused on the nuts and bolts of programming and producing. The intent of the workshops was to send people back to consult with their communities and prepare a plan for community radio. Uajit hoped they would also practice their new skills off-air. However, this plan failed to take into account just how strong the desire was for locally-produced independent radio. The results were much more immediate than anticipated:

What we learned is that after the workshop, nobody can stop them, they just want to broadcast. They even made it (radio) behind me. They didn't want me to know because I told them most of all they have to [first] prepare in their community (Uajit, interview, 2004).

The role of international agencies in this process was small but significant. In addition to the World Bank, the World Health Organization provided workshop funding on the understanding that community radio could promote basic development goals such as health education (Uajit, interview, 2004). UNESCO encouraged educational workshops and pilot radio projects and awarded a grant from its Intergovernmental Program for Development Communication, to help the Campaign for Popular Media Reform develop proposals for community radio regulation and licensing (Lapapan, interview, 2004). More importantly, UNESCO provided a theoretical framework for community radio development, with examples from around the globe. Although the idea of a New World Information and Communications Order was pilloried and buried in the 1980s, UNESCO field staff continued to work in small, quiet ways to encourage communication rights. This included funneling support through Community Media Centres in developing countries, with the assistance of Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) (Gumucio Dagron 2003, 2), as well as supporting forums such as the 1999 regional community media seminar in Kampala, Uganda (Boafo 2000, 5) and the 1998 Summer Programme for Community Radio Practitioners in the Caribbean (Cholmondeley 2000, 13). In Thailand, UNESCO engaged itself in translating a community radio handbook based on the collective experience of communications experts and practitioners in various countries (Lapapan, interview, 2004). The theory developed by grassroots practitioners through UNESCO-sponsored forums in other regions figured highly in the first Thai community radio gatherings. As well, early organizers began reading online material of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), which provided a model of horizontal, dialogic communication on the air.

With a modest amount of encouragement and very little direct financial support, more than one hundred community radio stations were on the air within two years of Article 40's proclamation (Ubonrat 2005, 62). Although the law allowed only the state to own and sell transmission equipment, it was easy to find the necessary parts in Thailand's grey markets. If the equipment couldn't be cobbled together locally, it could be found in Bangkok's Klong Thom market, a centre for pirated electronics (Supinya, interview, 2004). Typically, community donations and labour were the main ingredients in creating a station: if a new building were needed, villagers came forward to clear land and provide wood (Uajit, interview, 2004). Thus farmhouses became broadcast studios. Temple grounds were another popular site for radio stations, because their hilltop locations providing greater signal boost to the surrounding area. Buddhist clergy welcomed the community stations and participated in broadcasts. Although the reliance on donations and volunteer labour made staying on the air a constant struggle, it ensured authentic roots in the community. Radio activist Wichien describes the relationship to the community with a simple equation: if the community supports the radio station, it will exist; if the community does not support the station, it will not exist (interview, 2004). The stations' accessibility to the people provided the foundation, illustrated by an example provided by Uajit:

There is a blind man in Mae Hong Son. He's completely blind. One day he listened to the radio and heard, 'This is our community radio. Anybody can come to speak over the microphone if you have anything (to say) to make our community better.' He asked his neighbour, 'Put me on a motorcycle and take me to this place.' When he arrived, he proposed himself, and now he is one of the most popular voices in that community. He is the most famous deejay, and he operates the equipment by himself (interview, 2004).

The on-air content contained as much variety as the communities themselves. Local languages, culture, story-telling and music figured highly in the programming of the first rural stations, as did local concerns ranging from environmental problems to

corrupt officialdom. In one village on the Lao border, the local forestry officer's house was burned under suspicious circumstances. Through radio, the villagers were able to ease the tension by creating an open dialogue between forestry officials and villagers who disagreed with forestry policies. In a rubber-tapping community near Rayong, local musicians came together at the community radio station and eventually recorded their own album of songs expressing their local identity (Uajit, interview, 2004). Not all of the content was political or progressive in content, notes Supinya (interview, 2004), and in some cases programmers merely imitated the mainstream (Lucksana 2004, 178). Supinya acknowledges that some urban NGO activists were dissatisfied with rural community radio programming, but argues that under Thailand's decades-old authoritarian paradigm it is "impossible" to expect rural villagers and marginalized peoples to become political activists overnight:

I don't expect that all community radio has to be critical... What community radio stations can serve now, they have become a space for local people where they didn't have a space before. It's just decentralization. People can have their own tools to talk in their own language, to talk about their own stories... That is good enough. If you compare to the past, the local people didn't have their own space. They had to watch radio and TV from Bangkok, but now they could have their own small channel to talk in their own language (interview, 2004).

Yet even that simple act – speaking in one's own language to one's own community – can be deeply threatening to the power centre, turning the very fabric of what it means to be Thai from an official pronouncement into an open question.

Threats and Co-option: The Battle for the Airwaves

Without a regulatory process, it was difficult for community activists and government officials alike to track the progress of community radio over the next few years. By late 2004 there were 250 members in the National Community Radio

Network, a coalition of seven regional networks (Wichien, interview, 2004).

However, many thousands more existed outside the network. In 2004 both government and non-official estimates placed the number of stations at 2,000. By 2005, the number most frequently reported in the press and in Asian Human Rights Commission documents was in the 3,000 range. It seemed clear that community radio, while technically illegal, had become unstoppable within a regulatory vacuum.

Meanwhile the old system of regulatory controls remained firmly in place, albeit unsupported by the Constitution. The government continued to drag its feet on creating the necessary legal framework for non-state radio. Senator Nirun Phitakwatchara, a member of the Frequencies Allocation Committee, found the lack of progress frustrating: “I think the system is okay. The problem is about people, not the system. Our big problem is about other interests” (Nirun, interview, 2004).

One of the most frequently cited interests was financial: the government and Army stood to lose a major income source if the old concession system were replaced by an open application process. In 1999 General Kasemsak Pluksawad expressed the Army’s position clearly: “In the past, the government allocated the frequencies for us. But now we are being pushed out. We were given the land deeds and they would be taken back for resale. This is dangerous for us...” (cited by Ubonrat 1999, 7).

As well, retaining control over radio meant control over the sale of transmission towers to a growing sector. When the Public Relations Department announced its intention to assign ‘community radio’ frequencies to local governments, the value of potential tower sales was estimated at more than ten million baht (Uajit, interview, 2004).

The other major interest was political: not surprisingly, the state was reluctant to allow unfettered voices and two-way conversation on the air, particularly at the

local government level. On October 31, 2002, acting under orders of the Post and Telecommunications Ministry, police raided Angthong Community Radio, seized the equipment and charged fifty-five-year-old farmer Sathien Janthorn with illegally possessing a transmitter and broadcasting without a license, under the 1955 Radio and Telecommunications Act. Ironically the transmitter had been placed in Angthong by the government's own pilot program; after the project was abandoned Sathien gained assistance from the Social Investment Fund and the Ministry of Finance to carry on broadcasting as a community project (Reporters Without Borders 2004, 3; Asian Human Rights Commission 2005, *Urgent Appeal-197-2005*). As was the case in Ubon Ratchathani, the flashpoint issue was local:

He made the governor angry, because they said the governor didn't give enough money, because that year there were floods all over the province. They attacked the governor, so the governor called the government, the police, to close it...They said it is all illegal. The equipment is illegal, [to be] on air is illegal (Wichien, interview, 2004).

The Public Relations Department had earlier issued a statement that 'illegal' community radio broadcasters faced penalties of five years in jail or 100,000 baht fine (\$US 2,350). After the Angthong arrest, though, the state softened its aggressive posture. Clearly community radio was popular with the people, and its operators could argue constitutional legitimacy before courts. As well, community radio had the support of international lending and development agencies. UNESCO no doubt played a role in tempering government backlash: regional staff were able to frame community radio in the language of national development, and were sympathetic to state concerns about national unity. In the words of UNESCO Communication and Information staff person Lapapan Choovong:

Personally I don't think community radio should do anything to disintegrate a nation – but to preserve cultural and ethnic diversity, yes, by all means. But then we have to look at the bigger picture and see all community radio stations

and all community agencies as part of a larger identity, which is Thailand (interview, 2004).

Thailand's National Human Rights Commission also advocated for community radio, keeping close watch on any state transgressions against it. Still, the threats had a chilling effect. Wichien describes how programming at the Wat Prasean station was affected:

We don't touch...the very hot issues. We tell about community programs but we try to avoid confrontation with the government, with the local government. I think it's not the time for us to take this action. We think that after we are registered, on that day we will move in this area, to talk about these issues in public (interview, 2004).

In addition to placing a chill on the sector, the state embarked on other measures that had the effect of co-opting and subverting the development of 'true' community radio, defined by Thailand's National Community Radio Network as non-profit and community-run. The Army in particular began to move into the 'twenty per cent' territory of community access radio by setting up its own self-described community radio stations. As part of its campaign to quell southern Muslim unrest, in 2004 the Army announced it would provide fifteen small transmitters to the Special Warfare Unit's psychological operations in southern Thailand. Local Muslims and soldiers seconded from Ubon Ratchathani were employed to set up 'community' stations in Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala. The local stations would capture a satellite signal emanating from Bangkok to air government press conferences and the Prime Minister's weekly message (*Bangkok Post* 2004). Likewise, the Public Relations Department continued to pursue its own brand of 'community radio'. After the small pilot stations were abandoned, the state set about creating community radio programs to air on Radio Thailand and Army stations for a set amount of time each day. Such programs were produced in studio, employing a magazine-style format. Next the

PRD undertook a more serious step to completely control the community radio sector, announcing its intention to distribute the new community access frequencies exclusively to 1,500 local administrative districts, or *tambons*, which were essentially state bodies. Critics such as Uajit responded immediately:

When the PRD said they want to do community radio, I said you are the big truck, community radio is only a bicycle. Why don't you let them go wherever they want to go? Sometimes people need to have their freedom to find their own way of life (interview, 2004).

According to media reform activists interviewed for this thesis, however, a more worrisome threat to independence lay in commercialization of the sector. In the absence of regulatory control, anyone could buy a transmitter and lay claim to the title 'community radio.' Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was a media and telecommunications tycoon whose business enterprises included a majority stake in iTV, the country's independent TV station. He naturally favoured the unfettered growth of commercial media in Thailand. Community radio supporters in Thailand freely admit that many of the thousands of new community radio stations that flowered under Thaksin's government were in fact profit-making enterprises, typically set up by music companies and operating with transmitters ranging from 300 to 500 watts, much larger than the non-profit stations' 10-20 watt transmitters. According to one activist, "This is not by accident, but (occurs) with the help of some government departments" (Wichien, interview, 2004). Other stations emerged with the backing of local politicians and political parties, including Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party. The situation was deeply distressing to would-be media reformers:

Some have their broadcast antennas higher than the thirty-metre limit. All want their broadcasts to cover as wide an area as possible, largely for commercial and political purposes, disregarding the very principle of community radio operation (Sopit 2005, 7).

In December 2004, Thaksin's government announced that advertising would be allowed on community radio for eight minutes per hour, a measure the community radio sector had never advocated; members of the National Community Radio Network regarded this development not as a new freedom to raise revenues, but rather as an unwelcome government attempt to commercialize the sector (Uajit, interview, 2004). At the same time the government announced that the stations must register with the Public Relations Department by year's end or face prosecution. Throughout all of these developments, the promised National Broadcasting Commission never materialized. A detailed account of the behind the scenes manipulations, court challenges and conflicts related to the Commission is provided by Senator Chirmsak Pinthong (2005, 16-33); suffice to say the lists of NBC candidates' names put forward since 2000 were discredited on many counts as thinly veiled attempts to sideline civil participation. These developments combined to make activists deeply distrustful of the Public Relations Department's proffered registration system. All of the National Community Radio Network members declined to participate in a registry created outside the due process originally promised in Article 40. As a result, beginning in 2005 almost all non-profit community radio stations were illegal, making them targets for closure when the military regained power in September 2006. Still, as Ubonrat points out, the small rural stations had revealed possibilities and alternative voices that, once presented, could not be denied in the long run: "It makes everyone aware that change is on the way" (interview, Dec. 2004). Indeed, as shall be further discussed in Chapter Four, the military found community radio was now undeniably part of the landscape, and could not easily be brushed aside.

In the next chapter I will present an example in which a transnational community of migrant workers intersected with the Thai community radio movement,

adding yet another dimension to community radio's capacity to challenge the way things are.

CHAPTER THREE

MIGRANT WORKERS ON THE AIR

“The people are the radio station. The radio station belongs to the community.

We are them and...they are us.”

Informant 9, Program Host
Chiang Mai FM99 (interview, 2004)

As described in the previous chapter, the Thai government's response to public pressure for more diverse radio involved broadening existing ethnic language programs into a state-managed version of 'community radio' that invited community participation. Broadcast slots ranging from one hour to fifteen minutes were set aside daily on Radio Thailand for ethnic representatives to address prescribed topics like HIV-AIDS education. The Migrant Assistance Programme (MAP), a Chiang Mai-based NGO concerned with the conditions of migrant workers from Burma, began creating pre-recorded Shan language programs for Radio Thailand in 1996, adding on Karen, Akha and Lahu as resources allowed (Manning 2003; Informant 1, interview, 2004). In 2004, some migrant workers who did occasional volunteer work for MAP reached an important juncture in their communications activities after one of them made a connection to Voice of the Community FM99, a Thai community radio station broadcasting from a suburban Chiang Mai house. Outside of their involvement with MAP, some of these volunteers took slots on the volunteer-run station, a move that introduced them to a new type of radio with markedly different rules, program formats and outcomes. To understand the difference between state and non-state ethnic language radio production, I interviewed volunteers who had been involved in

media production for both or either of MAP Radio and FM99, which included seven Karen (three women and four men) and four Shan participants (two women and two men). Drawing on elements of *testimonio* and *vivencia*, as the methodology is described in Chapter One, my intention is to present their experiences in a narrative format that relies on direct quotes as much as possible, providing background information from other sources to assist the reader's contextual understanding of recent Burmese history. Due to the current security situation in Thailand, names have been withheld by mutual agreement, interview details have been removed from the reference list, and some information has been omitted in consultation with the participants. However, the core story of their involvement in radio remains intact. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to provide an experiential foundation from which to consider Supinya's notion of radio as a potential "voice for the voiceless" (Supinya, interview, 2004).

Nations Without Borders

When asked about their birthplace, migrants commonly use terms like 'the border', 'the jungle', or 'the KNU (Karen National Union) area'. While this may seem like imprecise information, it is in fact more accurate than 'Thailand' or 'Burma'. The current Thai-Burma border is a recent construct, drawn in 1948 across a mountainous, thickly forested region that has been home to an overlapping mosaic of cultures for millennia. From pre-colonial times, peoples defined themselves not by geography but by ethnicity, kinship bonds and fealty to various district leaders and feudal princes. Under Burma's British colonial period, demarcations with Thailand, China and Laos were drawn up but the new borders remained porous, with responsibility for trade route maintenance, policing and taxation left largely to local

ethnic leaders. In the 1960s this evolved into mercurial territories held by paramilitary Home Guard units, rebel ethnic armies, the outlawed Communist Party of Burma, opium warlords, and Chinese nationalist (KMT) forces displaced from China. (Elliott 2006, *White Umbrella* 32-33, 95, 347-361; Kaur 2007, 304). At times these forces warred against each other, and at times against the Burma Army. Essentially, these areas have been engaged in a decades-long resistance to a hegemonic Burmese ethnic/national identity forged under the Burma Army's wartime slogan 'One Blood, One Voice, One Command' (Elliott 2006, *White Umbrella*, 204). Although the actors have changed, these are the basic conditions that remain in place to this day. Fifty-nine years after the establishment of the Union of Burma, large stretches of frontier territory have yet to surrender to the central government. Organizations like the Shan State Army-South (SSA-South), the Karen National Union (KNU) and the United Wa State Army (UWSA) oversee cross-border traffic in their areas and provide a modicum of social services such as schools and clinics. Thus, one is not from 'Burma' but from 'the SSA area' or 'the KNU area'.

The majority of the study participants grew up in a state of flux between the two countries, attending school on both sides of the border at different times. Some had one parent from Thailand and one from Burma, and legal residency in both countries. Trans-border cultural identities are further complicated by the fact that several ethnic nationalities co-occupy various regions: for example, a person from Shan State may not necessarily be of the state's majority Shan (Tai) ethnicity, but could be Kachin, Hkun, P'ao, Wa, Lisu, Chinese or even Burmese, to name a few of the possible identities. Accordingly, the Shan programs place ethnic identity above territorial identity, focusing on the Shan (Tai) language and culture in both Thailand and Burma. These distinctions are important to note in relation to this thesis as an

indicator of the decentering influence grassroots media plays in relation to national cultural identity in both Thailand and Burma.

New Networks

All of the Karen radio volunteers had spent time at one or more of nine refugee camps set up in the aftermath of the 1988 uprising. At that time, ten thousand students fled to KNU territory and Thailand; about 2,000 of these made their way to Bangkok, where they petitioned for UN protection (Alden et.al., 1996, 1561). In response, the UNHCR designated displaced Karen as ‘persons of concern’, and supported the establishment of border camps under the authority of the Thai government (Thai Burma Border Consortium, “Map of Camps” and “Border History”). The need for camps grew after the Burma Army unleashed its 1996 ‘Four Cuts’ campaign, aimed at reducing civilian support for ethnic armies. The campaign was marked by the burning and forced relocation of villages, as well as widespread rape, conscripted portering, and extrajudicial executions, conditions that have been well documented by the International Labour Organization (ILO 1998, IV-b). By 1998, approximately thirty per cent of the rural Karen population had been uprooted by the campaign (Grundy-Warr and Wong 2002, 96). In 2002, the Thai-Burma Border Consortium reported an estimated one million people had been displaced in eastern Burma, and some 150,000 people, mainly rural villagers, had crossed into Thailand seeking refuge (Thai Burma Border Consortium 2002, 2).

Despite their similar circumstances, Shan people were not recognized as ‘persons of concern’ or provided with camps. In Shan State, the Four Cuts involved a fierce battle between the UWSA and Burma Army forces, followed by the forced relocation of villages into Burma Army-held territory (Thai Burma Border

Consortium “Border History”; Thai Burma Border Consortium 2002, 6). Another major development was the ‘retirement’ of border warlord Khun Sa, who turned his territory over to the Burma Army in exchange for a comfortable exile in Rangoon, cutting loose thousands of civilians who had lived under the protection of his Mong Tai Army (Grundy-Warr and Wong 2002, 102). Following these events, tens of thousands of rural dwellers simply melted into Thai towns and cities, picking up whatever work they could find. Those who stayed on the border were moved three times by Thai authorities, before a few hundred were given leave to settle on some temple land (Thai Burma Border Consortium website, www.tbbc.org under *Wiang Haeng*). With the support of the exiled Shan community living in Chiang Mai, small NGOs began forming to aid the arrivals. The Shan Women’s Action Network (SWAN) set up border clinics, documented human rights abuses like military rape and, later, spearheaded a campaign against the Salween River dam, a project they felt was likely to displace even more people. Other border presences included *médicins sans frontières* and Dr. Cynthia Muang’s Mae Tao clinic, where both Shan and Karen people took training as medics. Refugee youth and women’s groups like the All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF), the Karen Student Network Group (KSNG) and the Women’s Exchange Program (WEP) also provided links to the NGO community. Such organizations became another node in the network of contacts and opportunities for migrants, connecting people to NGO projects on the border and in Chiang Mai (Informant 2, interview, 2004; Informant 3, interview, 2004).

Push and Pull

Agencies such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees refer to ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors relating to migration, but according to the experiences of

informants interviewed, push and pull factors were largely indistinguishable from one another. Typically, political violence and poverty in Burma, along with news of education and employment opportunities in Thailand, created motivation for migration, while cross-border kinships, village-based loan systems and employment brokers created opportunity. Rather than a single culminating incident, many combined factors drew people to Thailand. Informant 4, a Shan male, arrived as a teenager:

Actually, I wanted to come to Thailand. My parents didn't want me to come so I told them, "Oh, I'm going to study, I'm not going to work." So that's why my parents allowed me to come to Thailand. At first I worked in an ice shop in Chiang Mai, selling ice. I had to get up at five, sometimes four o'clock in the morning (interview, 2004).

Informant 4 earned 2,000 baht per month, well under the 3,500 baht considered necessary to enjoy disposable income (Bradford and Vicary 2005, 18). He seldom enjoyed a day off, even when ill, because no one else knew the delivery route. However, he was able to improve his education while working, studying English at night school and participating in skills training offered by the Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) (interview, 2004).

Informant 4's experience reflects not only the hopes of migrants, but also Thailand's growing structural dependence on migrant workers for general labour and basic services. Throughout history, men from Burma have traveled to neighbouring lands for work and trade. As Thailand's economy grew stronger and Burma's grew weaker in the 1970s and 1980s, the number of construction workers, fishers and general labourers migrating to Thailand increased dramatically. Regional economic integration policies of the 1990s, shepherded by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), further accelerated this process. Between 1995 and 1999, 1.3 million Southeast Asian workers took contract work abroad, and many more were

estimated to have migrated outside the various systems of official government guest-worker registries (Piper 2004, 72; Grundy-Warr and Wong 2002, 112). Semi-skilled Thai workers were drawn to higher-wage work in factories and construction zones in Malaysia and Singapore, leaving Thailand with a labour shortage in the middle of a construction, manufacturing and tourism boom (Kaur 2007, 302-303, 305). To fill the gap, the number of migrants from Burma climbed steadily, reaching a peak of 120,000 new arrivals in Thailand in the year 2001 (Bradford and Vicary 2005, 4). By 2005 there were between 1.2 and two million migrant workers in Thailand, eighty per cent of them from Burma (Arnold, 2005).

The nature of work had changed under globalization, leading to increased feminization of the labour force. Expanding manufacturing and service sectors created greater demand for female labour. Informant 5 of Shan State was one of tens of thousands of women who joined the flow of new migrant labourers during this period. She found work at a Chiang Mai clothing factory, where she spent eight hours a day stitching clothes alongside ten other Shan people. She reported her employer was decent to them, but paid just 1,500 baht a month (\$US 42), or about fifty baht per day (\$US 1.50), about one-third of Chiang Mai's[‡] minimum wage at the time (U.S. Dept. of Labour, ILA Bureau, 2007; Thailand Board of Investment 2006). Nine of the ten employees were female. Women from Burma had begun arriving daily in Chiang Mai as word spread to their villages of jobs in restaurants and bars, on assembly lines, in clothing factories, and in the homes of Thailand's growing number of middle and upper class professional women. Due to the wide range of social factors related to gender and work, this has had the effect of lowering wages (Piper 2004 76-77; Kaur 2007, 305). It also extended the work day for women like Informant 5: unable to live

[‡] Thailand's minimum wage varies according to region and gender.

on the factory wage, she took a second job working a full evening shift in a restaurant after the factory closed at 5:00 p.m. (interview, 2004).

The migrant work force was further stratified by child labour. At age ten Informant 6 traveled two days by foot to Mae Sot, Thailand, where one of his older cousins, a woman of twenty-two, was employed as a domestic worker. In Mae Sot he took a job in a bottle-recycling plant, scrubbing bottles by hand with sand and water: “I got five baht a day. I had to clean about 300 to 400 bottles per day. They figured I was a child, so they gave me five baht” (interview, 2004). He spent three months at the job before starting school at a nearby refugee camp, which had been his original motivation for leaving Burma. He was determined not be illiterate like his parents and other relatives were:

My village school was run by the KNU. The system was not so good and it wasn't stable because when the Burmese came we would have to stop learning all the time. And when we came back, the school was burned, all the village was burned. Then I heard that in the refugee camps they had a school where people were learning English, learning Burmese (interview, 2004).

Unfortunately the camp Informant 6 settled in was overrun by the Burma Army not once but twice, leading him back to the life of a migrant worker in Thailand:

The first time the Burma Army came, they started shooting. I escaped. The second time, many people died. The army just showed up and started shooting. The first time we saw it [the camp] burn down, and then we rebuilt it. Then again it was burned down and we moved to a new place, but I didn't move with them. I came out [from the border]. Many people came out at that time (interview, 2004).

Informant 6 and his adopted camp family became farm workers in rural Thailand. Still driven by the desire for an education, he eventually made his way to Chiang Mai where he enrolled in night school. None of his Karen schooling was recognized, so he had to start at the beginning again, as an adult primary school student. Then one

day a friend asked if he'd like to try something new – working on a radio program by and for migrants from Burma like himself (interview, 2004).

Migrant Workers and Radio Thailand

The Migrant Assistance Programme (MAP) Foundation grew out of a network of five Chiang-Mai based NGOs that came together to cope with the fall-out of the Four Cuts campaign. In 1997 they launched their first full year of education and advocacy projects, including written materials, workplace visits and help for injured and mistreated workers (Lao Liang Won 2004; Informant 1, interview, 2004). That same year the Thai baht collapsed, throwing thousands of Thais out of work. MAP was immediately thrown into the task of helping deal with the backlash against migrant workers, whose jobs had suddenly become coveted. Responding to public pressure, the Thai government began rescinding work permits and threatening to push migrant workers back over the border (Lao Liang Won, 2004). Under these circumstances, migrant workers badly needed information in their own languages.

One of the MAP network members was a media studies graduate who worked with Empower, a women's organization known for creative approaches to popular education. She was aware of Radio Thailand's new community outreach effort, and acted as the catalyst for participation. Radio offered an excellent medium to reach homes, factories and construction sites, where many workers were illiterate or too tired at the end of the day to read complicated information (Informant 1, interview, 2004).

The radio project began with two cassette tape recorders, a microphone, and four unpaid volunteers who took a one-day training session with Radio Thailand professionals. MAP agreed to produce ten to fifteen minutes of pre-recorded content

per week, to be played during Radio Thailand's ethnic language broadcast slots, which included programs in Akha, Lisu, Lahu, Hmong and Yao, as well as Shan and Karen. At first MAP's Karen and Shan contributions were stilted and boring, as the volunteers tape-recorded themselves reading translations of Thai policies:

We took their [migrant workers'] rights, took what they had, and translated it and read it. But people didn't really understand and it wasn't attracting an audience because, you know, the information wasn't really about people (Informant 7, interview, 2004).

Every three months, the volunteers took further workshops on interviewing, script writing and other basic radio skills. Gradually they added listener-friendly elements to the program like skits and music. The audience began to respond positively, sending letters of thanks to the MAP office. With primary support from the Dutch agency Novib[§] and CARAM Asia (Coordinated Action Research on Aids and Mobility), along with smaller grants from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and various international NGOs, MAP was able to provide volunteers with the basics to support their work (Informant 8, interview, 2004).

Radio By and For Migrants

One of the volunteers was the aforementioned clothing factory worker. She and her workmates listened to MAP radio while they worked (interview, 2004). Until now all radio and television in Chiang Mai was in Thai or English only. Even for those who could understand Thai, the programs didn't speak to their issues and the scant reports on migrant workers were highly negative, usually focusing on crime and disease (Informant 6, interview, 2004). Grateful to hear her mother tongue on the air,

[§] In 2006 this agency merged with Oxfam and is now called Oxfam Novib.

Informant 5 frequently wrote letters to MAP Radio. It wasn't long before she was invited to the studio to play the part of a patient in a radio drama. Told her soft voice was good for the role, she was invited back; eventually her radio appearances evolved into part-time volunteer involvement with the Shan media team (interview, 2004).

Informant 4 was selling CDs in Chiang Mai's massive Night Bazaar when a MAP outreach worker stopped by to chat. They recognized one another from MAP's outreach work at a SWAN training program. The MAP worker invited Informant 4 to contribute to the radio show (interview, 2004). As the program grew, all of the volunteers were recruited in a similar manner, through prior personal contacts made at the various Shan and Karen youth organizations and border-based NGOs. This is worth noting, because it indicates new networks at play that were different, although not entirely divergent, from the village and kinship networks used to find employment in Thailand.

Only one of the team members had previous media experience. Informant 9 had been a Shan-language radio and television broadcaster in Rangoon, a role she found "very depressing" (interview, 2004). In Burma there was no press freedom, and just two staff members were hired to produce Shan radio and TV services for the whole nation:

I was just reading pre-written scripts, just translating SPDC** policy. The story line up was always prioritized the same: first stories about General Than Shwe, then General Khin Nyunt, then state news, then culture...I was really oppressed in Rangoon. There was no freedom for journalists (interview, 2004).

When she crossed to Thailand, through personal contact with other migrants she joined MAP as a volunteer and became team leader of Shan radio programming. She

** The State Peace and Development Council, the name used by the governing body of Burma's military junta.

soon discovered, though, that creating programs for Radio Thailand also involved dealing with censors and promoting government priorities (interview, 2004).

Wide Radius, Narrow Content

Radio Thailand offered a strong AM signal and a vast broadcast radius. The programs were relayed by army transmitters throughout northern Thailand, boosting the signal across the border into Shan and Karen States. However, very narrow restrictions were placed on the programs. First and foremost, Radio Thailand only allowed prescribed topics to be addressed – focusing on aspects of health care and crime prevention – a list that narrowed as time passed. The second restriction was that the content must be pre-recorded and pre-screened by Thai censors. This involved the arduous work of translating all scripts into written Thai, a task that greatly taxed the time and skills of the few volunteers who knew Thai. A third restriction was time – just ten to fifteen minutes per week each for the Shan and Karen programs, between 6:30 and 6:45 p.m. A fourth restriction defined who the audience was: to protect Thai-Burma relations, all material had to be addressed as if the sole audience were Thai ethnic peoples, not migrants or people inside Burma. Ancillary to this, no Burmese language broadcasts were allowed because, despite the presence of many thousands of Burmese-speaking people, Thailand could not legitimately argue to the Burmese authorities that there was an indigenous Burmese community in Chiang Mai.

Thus while Radio Thailand allowed MAP Radio to take to the air, the program hosts could never clearly state their prime concern, the rights and conditions of migrant workers in Thailand.

Working Within the Rules

1. Content Restrictions

In spite of these restrictions, the value of a far-reaching AM radio signal could not be denied. The MAP Radio volunteers worked creatively within the restrictions presented to them. Although at first they did news reports, before long Radio Thailand banned news reporting and asked for content only on health-related topics. Even within the general topic of health some material was discouraged, such as information on HIV-AIDS and child trafficking, because Radio Thailand's programmers felt it overlapped too much with existing programs (Informant 8, interview, 2004; Informant 4, 2004). Each ethnic language program had its own committee, overseen by a committee head. Noted Informant 9: "It's very difficult to make program changes – you have to please the head" (interview, 2004). The censorship was not overt, but there was a sense that Radio Thailand and MAP had a mutually beneficial relationship to be maintained. Sometimes Radio Thailand used the relationship to invite MAP to join in government campaigns, for example finding dancers for an anti-drug concert. The MAP volunteers found that taking part in these initiatives, while time consuming, provided greater flexibility when they needed it: "That way, if we want to do something they will say, 'okay, we support each other'" (Informant 9, interview, 2004). They also had to maintain good relations with station employees:

Actually, we have good relationships with the high positions on the committee but it's not enough – you have to work very well with the staff and the programs very well, so that there might not occur any problems. We have to be flexible to make sure that it works, and is not too compromised (Informant 9, interview, 2004).

To manage within content restrictions, the volunteers tread a line between self-censorship and testing of the boundaries. Referring to the Radio Thailand staff person

in charge of ethnic programs, a volunteer stated: “She just wants us to broadcast only about health issues. But sometimes we broadcast about HIV-AIDS, child development and children’s rights, a little bit like that, but not too much” (Informant 4, interview, 2004). The volunteers also sought creative ways to relay relevant news items within a purely health-information format. “If some news is happening about migrant people, I write a script to talk around it,” explained Informant 7, a member of the Karen team (interview, 2004).

2. Two-way Communication Restrictions

Oversight was enforced by Radio Thailand’s requirement that all material be pre-recorded, as opposed to live on air, and that scripts must be translated and submitted before broadcast. A measure of balance was brought to the relationship in that a portion of MAP’s overseas grants contributed material support to Radio Thailand, which accepted donated equipment and translation services from the MAP Foundation in lieu of the 3,000 to 3,500 baht monthly fee charged to private interests for a daily half hour on air (Informant 1, interview, 2004). With a certain symbiosis of need at play, volunteers found that as long as the radio programs stayed within the topic area, the hand of censorship was light. In one case, MAP was asked to remove its contact information from the end of its broadcasts; however, the request was not followed through by either side (Informant 7, interview, 2004). The contact information was important to MAP because, being restricted to a pre-recorded format, the closing call for letters and feedback was the only way they could invite two-way communication with and among their listeners. The letters they received helped reunite families behind the scenes, and provided MAP with a wealth of information

about the real issues facing migrants; this guided the creation of other print and audio media produced outside the Radio Thailand broadcasts.

3. Time Restrictions

The other materials created by the media teams included booklets and cassette tapes based loosely on the Radio Thailand programs, a strategy that allowed MAP to move beyond the fifteen minute weekly maximum on Radio Thailand and deal with a broader range of issues in a more in depth and engaging manner. Audio magazines, produced every two months, typically included an interview, two songs, a drama and news. Employing NGO and personal networks, the cassettes were distributed hand-to-hand throughout the border area, in the camps, and inside Burma. The Karen cassettes were broadcast on the Karen Youth Network Group's homebuilt camp transmitters (Informant 8, interview, 2004; Informant 7, interview, 2004). The Shan cassettes did not have a broadcast outlet, but were widely distributed among farm workers, on construction sites, and as gifts for people returning to Burma (Informant 4, interview, 2004). Each audio cassette was accompanied by a booklet on the featured issue, useful for people without access to tape players. To encourage greater audience participation, the booklets contained questionnaires and feedback forms, as well as contact information and a call for poetry and stories (Informant 8, interview, 2004). The audio and print content related primarily to health and social issues, such as family violence, family planning, drug abuse and HIV-AIDS prevention, and provided opportunity to introduce basic human rights concepts like the rights of women and the rights of children without straying too far outside the bounds of 'acceptable' topics. The Thai Army acknowledged the audio magazines as practical information, and even at one point requested a special magazine on drug trafficking.

4. Audience Restrictions

The fourth major restriction, the prohibition against directly addressing a non-Thai audience, remained a difficult barrier to overcome, made more difficult by direct pressure from Burmese officials:

In the last three years, the SPDC sent some people to come and monitor, to find out why the Shan and Karen languages are able to broadcast as MAP. And they wanted to complain to the local authorities. But one Karen professor, he said, well you know MAP has nothing to do with...political issues, nothing to do with the Burmese soldiers, so we should allow them to continue their broadcast. So now there's no problem (Informant 1, interview, 2004).

Despite the sense that an accommodation has been reached between Thai and Burmese authorities, volunteers remained aware that this accommodation could be withdrawn at any time. Experience showed that when push came to shove, Thailand's trade partnership with Burma ranked higher than the rights of minorities. Therefore, managing news concerning Burma was a delicate task. Informant 2, a volunteer with the women's section of the Karen media team, provided the example of systemic rapes committed by the Burma Army, an issue that gained a great deal of attention and international press with the publication of a SWAN report titled *Licence to Rape* (2002). She explained: "In Burma there is abuse of women but we can't talk about it on radio. It's very limited. We can do it, but indirectly" (interview, 2004). In this case, the report's findings were indirectly addressed by encouraging rape victims to seek medical attention and report the crime to authorities. While the program was framed entirely within the Thai context, it was hoped women listening in Burma might be able to transfer some of the advice to their own situation. As for broadcasting in the Burmese language, in 2004 MAP began seeking grants for Burmese language radio in the event that such a program might become viable in future. "It's not allowed but we're still trying. In the situation where we have our

own radio, like community radio, we might be able to start one [Burmese program]” (Informant 1, interview, 2004).

Thus the media volunteers sought strategies to carry their work beyond the boundaries of broadcast restrictions without jeopardizing their relationship with Radio Thailand or straying outside broadcast laws. However, being barred from directly addressing migrant workers and their issues remained a continuing problem for MAP Radio, as did the struggle to communicate more conversationally with listeners. These barriers remained firm until some migrant workers connected with the Thai community radio movement.

Community Radio: Alternate Possibilities

The first link to Thailand’s emerging community radio sector occurred in 2001, when a Shan volunteer joined the Northern Community Radio Network. Although Informant 10 had no station to operate, he immediately recognized the potential of community radio as an on-air voice for migrants. In discussion with radio activists, he learned community radio was governed not by Radio Thailand, but by the community. According to the movement’s principles, and within the evolving legal foundation set in place by Article 40, the community could decide for itself what languages to broadcast in, how many hours to broadcast in a day, and what the program line-up should be. Further, ‘community’ did not mean a local administrative district (*tambon*), as the government had defined community radio. It meant whoever wanted to come together and create radio. Any listener could join in and talk to others on the air: not only were live phone-in shows possible, they were part of the network’s core philosophy of horizontal communication. With this principle in mind,

Informant 10 imagined community radio could fill the information and communications gap that had left Shan people on the outside of Thai society:

Ninety per cent of the migrants who live in Chiang Mai...are Shan, but they are not carried on AM radio programs. The AM stations only carry entertainment. But I think migrants want to learn about the law and some of the culture (interview, 2004).

With a dream of setting up a Shan station, Informant 10 independently took a two-week training course jointly sponsored by the U.S. Embassy and the Campaign for Popular Media Reform in July, 2003 (interview, 2004; US Embassy in Thailand, 2003). However, starting a station from scratch was no easy task. Instead of waiting to build the Shan station, he contacted Voice of the Community FM99 to find out if they would consider inviting migrants on the air (interview, 2004).

FM99 broadcast from the home of Dr. Uthaiwan Kanchanakamol, a dentist, university lecturer and public health activist. Dr. Uthaiwan's work on dental health issues brought him into contact with marginalized peoples in Chiang Mai, whom he felt could be empowered by community radio. He used his own pension funds to set up a pilot project that would open its doors to any community group that needed airtime (Amporn 2006). To house the station, he converted a small room in his house into a studio with two broadcast desks, a telephone line, and a fifty-watt transmitter, slightly larger than the standard twenty to thirty watt transmitters used by most Thai volunteer-run stations. He also erected a transmission tower in his yard, capable of boosting the signal throughout Chiang Mai city and, on clear days, to the surrounding hills, a radius of about ten to thirty kilometres (author observation, Dec. 16, 2004; Informant 10, interview, 2004; Informant 8, interview, 2004). Although the station was unlicensed – as all community stations were in the absence of a functional licensing framework during that time – Dr. Uthaiwan was a Fulbright Scholar who

represented Thailand on several international committees; this doubtless identified him as a ‘responsible citizen’ in the eyes of the authorities, and helped protect the station from government crackdowns.

When Informant 10 approached the station, the response was unexpected. The volunteer committee said migrant workers could begin broadcasting right away; program slots of one to two hours were available for community groups that could demonstrate they represented a particular constituency, such as students or the disabled. After years of being restricted to a few minutes a week on tightly prescribed topics, the offer was overwhelming (Informant 10, interview, 2004). Over the next several months, he helped recruit volunteer hosts to take on the community radio broadcasts. The Karen migrant workers started by appearing on a Thai-Karen language show every Thursday, before moving to their own one-hour slot Tuesdays at 8:00 p.m. (Informant 7, interview, 2004). The Shan volunteers accepted two slots Mondays and Wednesdays from 11:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. (Informant 8, interview, 2004). Each team agreed to contribute five hundred baht per month toward water and electricity. Far from onerous, the contribution provided a sense of ownership (Informant 10, interview, 2004).

Strong Voice, New Energy

On February 27, 2004, the Shan radio program *Saeng Tham Hang Mai* – Strong Voice, New Energy – took to the airwaves for the first time, nearly three years after Informant 10 first considered the possibilities offered by community radio. His instincts were on target: within weeks the program hosts were inundated with appreciative letters (Amporn 2006). The program was especially valued by some of the community’s most isolated members:

Most of the audience are domestic workers because they work at home....Also, people who are in prison. They say all the Shan prisoners in Mae Rim run to the roof because they can get a better signal. All the Shan, they call each other to go up there to listen to the radio. They are longing to listen to a program like this (Informant 9, interview, 2004).

Informant 9 and the other volunteers stressed the connection was deeper than language. Audience approval had more to do with the style of radio on offer: communication as opposed to mere information. The program provided an opportunity for a previously silent community not only to listen but to tell, via letters, live on-air phone calls and suggestions: “The radio program is actually to give the power to the people. The people are the radio station. The radio station belongs to the community. We are them and they feel like they are us” (Informant 9, 2004).

Strong Voice, New Energy settled into a fairly simple format. Each broadcast had two hosts, one male and female, with hosting duties rotated among volunteers who could spare time from their workplaces. Occasionally guests were brought on air to interview – anyone from well known folk singers to ordinary workers. The first hour of the program, broadcast while people were working, usually consisted of Shan music and light chat with the audience about coming events and music requests. During the lunch break the pace swung into deeper discussion, with the day’s topic often chosen from among questions and concerns contributed by listeners. The diversity of topics and questions that came forth from the community immediately set the broadcast apart from the Radio Thailand spots. While the state identified disease and drug use as the priorities for Shan broadcast, the migrants’ concerns were much broader and more connected to the reality of their daily lives, ranging from unfair workplace practices to how to cope with the relatively chilly Chiang Mai weather (Informant 10, interview, 2002). The breadth of topics was liberating for the program hosts:

The topics that we broadcast on FM 99, it depends on the listeners, what they want to hear about. Like traditional medicine, HIV-AIDS, migrant rights, and also about their ID cards, work permits and also green cards – there are so many different green cards in Thailand (Informant 4, interview, 2004).

FM99 provided a platform for basic information about Thailand's complicated and often punitive residency and work regulations, and the hosts were able to address common employer abuses that greatly impacted migrants' lives. For example, although the law required employers to pay a 3,900 baht annual registration fee per worker, it was common to pass this expense on to the employees instead. As a result, families with more than one worker could often afford to register just one family member, leaving others – usually the wives – in legal limbo. This sometimes ended in forced family separation, as non-carded members are subject to arrest and deportation. Another common problem was health care entitlements: registered workers were entitled to full medical care for a nominal fee of thirty baht, but often lacked the confidence and language skills to press for this right. Rather than face discriminatory and humiliating questions at Thai hospitals, many chose instead to pay private practitioners, some of dubious training, for their health needs (Informant 1, interview, 2004).

These are just two examples of the everyday concerns of migrant workers that had hitherto been ignored by state media. To connect these concerns to the wider picture, the hosts regularly made use of U.N.-designated days, such as International Women's Day and International Children's Day. On a typical broadcast day, December 16, 2004, the broadcast theme was International Migrant Day, observed annually on December 18. The Shan radio hosts highlighted excerpts from a new booklet about migrant worker rights, and read the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. In

addition they played Shan music and took twenty-seven on air calls, mostly music requests and information about community events (author observation, Dec. 16, 2004). Program hosts report an average of thirty calls per show (Informant 5, interview, 2004).

All of the community radio hosts interviewed stressed audience participation was the most important ingredient. “They can talk to me like a friend, like family, because we’re not officials, we are Shan, too,” said Informant 10 (interview, 2004). Informant 9 noted this as a key distinction from the Radio Thailand programs, one that was appreciated by the audience: “They like the FM show because they can participate, they can say something they want to say. On Radio Thailand they cannot speak. They can leave a short message, but they cannot speak very long. So it’s not like FM99” (interview, 2004). The broadcasts also included news – a program element expressly forbidden by Radio Thailand – and provided space for audience reaction:

At the Shan temple some teenagers fought each other and one died – like a gang. So the next day we broadcast the news. Many people called in and said it should not happen, we are in Thailand and it shouldn’t be like this. They gave suggestions. This is good because I’m not the only one who speaks, to tell people we shouldn’t do this or that. The people are telling each other what to do (Informant 9, interview, 2004).

Karen radio hosts agreed that the horizontal communication format on community radio, as well as the extended broadcast time and relatively unrestricted topic field, substantially marked FM99 apart from Radio Thailand (Informant 8, interview, 2004; Informant 2, interview, 2004; Informant 7, interview, 2004). However, both teams also reported that there were some restraints placed on their work.

Restraints

The main broadcast restraint reported related to an overall sense of insecurity arising from the lack of regulation of community radio. In the absence of a legal rule book, participants developed a common understanding of the unwritten rules, similar to the self-censorship noted by Kanchanaburi community radio's Wichien Kuttawat in Chapter Two. Overtly political topics that might be deemed sensitive to the Thai government were avoided by program hosts, including political folk songs (Informant 8, interview, 2004; Informant 4, interview, 2004). A strategy commonly used to address sensitive issues was to simply translate relevant documents without comment:

Everything is okay, because when we raise the issues of migrants' rights we take all the information from the Thai constitution, from Thai policy to protect the rights of migrant workers. So we take these papers, we take all this information, and we translate it (Informant 1, interview, 2004).

This strategy was an effective way to inform workers when their rights were being denied, without openly saying so. The audience appeared to understand the unwritten rules as well. There was no tape delay to allow hosts to cut a phone-in call, but as yet they hadn't needed one. Asked what would happen if a caller began speaking against the prime minister, the response was: "We don't have experience like that, so I cannot say" (Informant 8, interview, 2004).

Another restraint was a requirement to present the shows in a mixture of the ethnic language and Thai, which required at least one program host to be proficient in Thai. Although there was no clear legal basis for this requirement, FM99 accepted this as a policy that would clearly indicate to the authorities that the programs were for a Thai audience as well, and that no anti-government messages were being fomented in unknown languages. Radio hosts reported, however, that this requirement in fact became a strength, as FM99 evolved into a rare shared social

space for Thais and migrants. Employers called the station to ask questions about the regulations and laws concerning migrant workers, and some sympathetic Thais called to offer moral support to the migrants. Overall, program hosts felt the Thai language requirement ensured Thai listeners heard stories beyond the stereotypes and had opportunity to learn about the rights of migrants: “The listeners understand more. Like, some Thai, they say, ‘Oh, the migrants breed disease’, or something like that. They don’t know very much about migrants, I guess. People are learning slowly” (Informant 8, interview, 2004).

Another notable restraint was geographic – namely, the limited radius afforded by a fifty watt transmitter. The informants noted that for all its weaknesses, Radio Thailand’s AM service offered an opportunity to reach people on the border and in Burma who badly needed basic information to survive. The trade-off was clear:

Actually AM is better because AM has a better signal. But you’re just recording first and sending in the tape. With FM, you’re talking directly. AM is better listening, the signal can go very far. FM, you can talk more, but only in the community (Informant 2, interview, 2004).

The Future

At the time of the research, some informants clearly stated their desire to purchase and operate a stand-alone migrant workers’ community radio station. However, in September 2006 the growing community radio sector was cooled considerably by a military coup. In the months prior to the coup, broadcast media freedom became a political flashpoint, centering on the cancellation of a television talk show hosted by Sondhi Limthongkul, a vocal critic of the Thaksin government. As street protests grew, community radio began to bear some of the fall-out of an increasingly nervous government; sixty stations near the border that aired programs in Akha, Chinese and Shan were ordered shut to protect “national security” (Sai Silip

2006). At the same time, Thai stations that were more commercially-oriented and agreeable toward Thaksin's government were allowed to stay on the air. Within days of the coup, however, the new military government ordered an additional three hundred stations off the air in northern Thailand, including seventeen in Chiang Mai province, home province of the ousted prime minister. In addition, fifty stations were ordered off air in Issan, Thailand's poorest region. At the time, the *Manila Times* speculated that the targeting of poor and northern community stations likely related to Thaksin's ballot box popularity among the rural poor, who appreciated his 'thirty-baht health care' scheme and folksy demeanor (*Manila Times* 2006).

Voice of the Community FM99 was among the 300 northern stations ordered off the air. In the first week of November, 2006, the station resumed broadcast, but now operated within an even more constrained political atmosphere. A nation-wide ban on call-in shows was enacted and all community radio stations were put on notice that the 1997 constitution was abrogated and, consequently, Article 40's guarantee of public access to the airwaves was rescinded (*Manila Times* 2006). All stations still on air were ordered to broadcast military-prepared news three times a day and the national anthem twice a day, and to translate and submit all non-Thai content to the Public Relations Department (Crispin 2007). At the same time, Thailand's provincial governments – including Chiang Mai – began drafting decrees to restrict movement and communication among migrants, including the use of mobile phones and motorcycles (Sai Silip 2007). In light of these actions, an expansion of community radio activity is unlikely in the near future. However, the seed of a new type of communication had been planted – not only in Thailand but also Burma:

In the future if we have democracy in our own country, we want to have a community radio station so we can talk about our own issues on our own station. Maybe when we go back there, it will be easier. We won't need to train (Informant 3, interview, 2004).

One may conclude the migrants' experience with community radio was indelibly transformative, in that the idea of communicative democracy has been introduced into their lives not just as theory, but also as a practical, working premise that can be duplicated in other times and places.

In Chapter Four, I will examine how this alternative communications model contributed to social and political change in Thailand, revealing tensions and possibilities that did not openly exist one decade earlier, and how the experience of local community radio is tied to global movements for communicative democracy.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANOTHER RADIO

“What is Community Radio? Not the media moving into community but the community moving into the media. We...are not the media but the facilitators of social movements, the voice of civil society.”

AMARC 2007, 22

In the aftermath of the 2006 coup, the Thai Army’s swift move to control community radio prompted the *Bangkok Post* to note that “community radios are now seen as a significant threat to the (junta’s) authority” (cited by Macan-Markar 2006). This raises an important question: why should Thailand’s power centre feel threatened by scattered rural community radio projects? Low power FM radio seems an outmoded, geographically limited technology subject to heavy government control. Its key participants include some of the country’s most powerless citizens – farmers, slum dwellers, minorities, children, women and migrants. Yet clearly the rapid emergence of community radio and other alternative media networks has precipitated change in Thailand. Further, this change is not confined to Thailand, but is regional and global in nature.

From Local Need to Social Change

At its genesis, grassroots radio is a response to local need. In a small community, the radio station serves as the “post office, department of complaints and a meeting place,” notes Gumucio-Dagron: “Youth meet at the radio station, women complain on [sic] goods prices, the teacher warns that there will not be classes the

next day, and the nurse announces dates for the next vaccination campaign” (2001, 14). In Thailand, rural community radio sprang up as a medium to relay local and ethnic narratives that were absent from mainstream radio, and as a space to debate local issues like dams and forestry policy. During emergencies like the 2004 tsunami, community radio stations became useful information-sharing platforms for people in the affected areas, while commercial media played on the drama of pictures and interviews (Rizvi 2005). When the village of Hot was suddenly flooded in 2006, community radio broadcasters relayed around-the-clock survival information, advising which escape routes were underwater and which were still open (Crispin 2007). Among Chiang Mai’s migrant workers, community radio offered an accessible medium to share important information, enjoy ethnic music, and generate open discussion on topics of interest to migrants. Meanwhile, confrontation with Thai authorities was avoided as much as possible through acquiescence to unspoken boundaries and expectations. Still, the simple act of presenting information in a non-controversial manner and inviting listener participation can be understood as part of a larger social change process that is central to community radio theory; this grassroots-derived theory recognizes community radio as a social agent that “can initiate or accompany social change and carries responsibility to be effective is facilitating civil society development and democratic processes” (AMARC 2007, 8).

In the case of migrant worker radio, the social change underway involved the emergence of migrant workers as a people with voice, culture and legal rights within Thailand. The process of creating radio shows contributed to the development of volunteer networks, and drew previously isolated listeners into an organized activity. Perhaps the most important change generated involved bringing migrant workers into greater contact with Thai society: the informants reported they felt their work had

raised awareness of migrant rights among Thai employers and had influenced attitudes among the general population. On a practical level, the sharing of a radio facility with Thai community groups resulted in a common social purpose – keeping the station running – and brought the volunteers into contact with regional organizations like the Northern Community Radio Network. Finally, volunteers learned new skills and experiences that they hoped might one day be transferred to Burma.

From the latter two points, one may conclude that grassroots radio activity in Thailand is not a purely parochial, isolated exercise focused on a sectarian presentation of culture. Rather, examples like migrant worker radio are very much part of diverse alliances and campaigns aimed at democratizing communications. Leading the way through action, rural members of Thailand's regional community radio networks have helped strengthen Thai civil society by providing a forum for airing grievances, offering a working model of media democratization, and helping build "a strong network of activists, trainers and policy advocates for community radio" (Chittoor 2003). Whatever their varied intentions for first taking to the air may have been, grassroots radio operators have thus emerged as leading spokespersons for national-level media reform.

Since 2001, the presence of unlicensed community radio has weakened the Thai state's previously unchallenged claim to ownership of the airwaves, and has opened debates that resonate in surrounding countries. While media reform in Thailand seems to follow a pace of one step forward, two steps back, there are ample signs of steady forward momentum regionally: since 2002, Indonesia's Broadcasting Act has allowed provincial committees to license community stations; in October 2006 the Indian Cabinet cleared a Community Radio Policy developed in consultation

with civil society organizations; Bangladeshi and Fijian radio activists report slow but steady progress in their respective countries. These legislative changes are not isolated – they have the effect of setting the tone for other policies and other states by recognizing the right of ordinary people to stand on the same ground as state and commercial interests.

It is telling that when Thailand's coup government put forward its draft constitution to the public in 2007, the key statement contained in the former Article 40 – that transmission frequencies are “a national communication resource for public interest” – remained intact (Thailand, Constitution Drafting Committee 2007). Instead, attempts to rein in the community radio sector were bundled into a Broadcasting Television and Operating Bill, one of eight bills drafted to reassert government controls over broadcast content. However, following the draft constitution's passage by referendum, the attempt to use bills rather than constitutional change to muzzle Thailand's media did little more than provide a new legislative arena for the media reform movement to continue agitating for their agenda to encourage and protect people's participation in media production (Northern People Network, et. al. 2007).

Caught in the middle of these developments are migrant workers who, being brought into Thai society through community radio, now share the uncertain future of Thai media reform. Although this brush with Thai politics was never their stated desire, their experience reveals that the act of finding a voice on the airwaves is not possible in isolation, being by nature inseparable from a wider struggle to claim a right to communicate. Primarily concerned with their own community's daily struggles, to some extent the migrant workers remain on the margins of this discourse. But from another perspective, they are on the leading edge of a new radio horizon,

providing a model of what dialogic communication and a ‘voice for the voiceless’ can achieve for highly marginalized and excluded populations. Consequently, their experience becomes the *raison d’être* of media reform.

Community Radio’s Global Project

As stated in the opening chapter of this thesis, part of the answer to the question of why community radio threatens the status quo lies in the mediating technology’s dialogism, which contains an inherent political dimension that challenges monologic discourse. In recent decades, this dimension has been recognized, articulated and theorized by community radio and alternative media networks like AMARC, which states: “One of the strengths of community radios is their *horizontality* and *diversity*, which shows they are built from the bottom up, thus reflecting a network of multiple languages and the expression of differences” (AMARC 2007, 22). When the first AMARC gathering was held in Montreal in 1983, the world of community radio still appeared to be little more than a disparate scattering of hobbyists, radio pirates, alternative music fans and isolated community ventures. Over the next two decades, however, AMARC’s network steadily expanded and took on the dimension of a decentralized transnational coalition, mirroring developments in other sectors of global civil society. Today AMARC claims 3,000 member radio stations in 110 countries, with regional coordinating networks responsible for Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and North America (AMARC 2007, 5; AMARC nd. “What is AMARC?”). AMARC readily admits that in an atmosphere of explosive growth, its networks remain weak and sustainability remains a key problem for individual members (AMARC 2007, 7-8). Membership numbers alone do not reflect the evolution of community radio as a global movement, though.

In addition to an expanding number of stations, community radio has evolved from a few people sharing technical information into a global movement deeply concerned with the democratization of communication.

This evolution is illustrated in international charters and statements developed by AMARC activists. On February 26, 2003 an International Charter of Community Radio was ratified in Kathmandu, Nepal. The Charter marked a significant expansion of community radio concerns, broadening the field of discussion to all media forms, and to communication as a universal human right. Signatories from around the world pledged to “exercise the human right to communication and facilitate the full and equal access of all social sectors to radio and television, and other media, including new information and communication technologies (ICTs)” (Appendix A). The following year, in November 2004, AMARC hosted a roundtable in Marrakesh that welcomed community media practitioners beyond the world of radio, including video, Internet and popular theatre activists. While the Kathmandu Charter concentrated on defining key movement principles, the Marrakesh Declaration addressed external communication barriers, calling on governments to open up broadcast licensing and to provide legal frameworks allowing broader public participation in media production (Appendix B). The 2006 Amman Declaration carried forward these ideas, additionally calling for official recognition of community broadcasting as a “third media sector,” alternative to state and commercial broadcasting, that “plays a specific and crucial role in enabling public participation towards a just and equitable information and knowledge society that includes the voices of the poor and marginalized” (Appendix C).

At the same time these ideas were being developed internally, AMARC laterally expanded its involvement with several other organizations and campaigns,

such as the Platform for Democratic Communication, the People's Communication Charter, the Association for Progressive Communication, the World Social Forums, Vidéazimut, the Third World Network, the World Association for Christian Communication, EcoNews Africa, and the Communication Rights in the Information Society-CRIS Campaign, to name a few. In a statement calling for global media democratization, the web-based organization Voices 21 summarized the historical development of these campaigns, stating:

More recently, these [organizations] have embarked on what is in effect a process of global mobilization, seeking common ground, joining forces around specific issues, and developing proposals for cooperation. Alongside and supporting this have been numerous international events, in every region of the world and organized by a great variety of organizations and coalitions, where civil society voices are calling for a fundamental review of the media and communications domain, including global governance structures (2006).

In summary, through a combination of local practice and globally networked activism, many thousands of grassroots media producers around the globe have arrived at certain key shared theoretical concepts, which at their simplest level are:

1. That communication is the source of human existence.
2. That communication is therefore an inherent social right.
3. That this right is best achieved by seizing it at the local level, forcing national and multilateral bodies to respond.

The third point takes the *declaration* of a right into the realm of the *exercise* of a right, moving theory into action. It is here that community radio generates political conflict and creates momentum toward media reform and, ultimately, political and social reform.

Grassroots Media Power

The example of Thai community radio offers us an opportunity to re-imagine our predominant historical understanding of media as an extension of empire and an agent of globalization and mass consumption. This commonly-held understanding privileges technology over social networks, which in turn presents a skewed picture of how people share information. The Asian scene lends itself particularly well to a narrow fixation on vertical power, for the ‘usual suspects’ are prominent: a highly visible mix of large-scale army and government broadcasters exists comfortably alongside globalized broadcasters like Star TV and CNN, and postcolonial English-language newspapers like the *Bangkok Post*, the *Singapore Straits-Times* and the *Times of India*. Meanwhile, as Gunaratne suggests, to truly understand information flow across Asian communities, greater importance may well lay in grassroots and traditional forms of communication (2000, 8). When these communication networks go unnoticed, mass protests appear chaotic and sudden, like thunderstorms on a clear day. Lim cites the example of Indonesia: neither government bureaucrats nor academics paid any serious attention to the Internet as a social force because less than one per cent of the population had access to it. However, a single email titled *Daftar Kekayaan Suharto – A List of Suharto’s Wealth* – was photocopied, passed around and shared word-of-mouth, bringing thousands of protestors into the streets to overthrow a regime that had seemed unassailable (2003, 280-282). Lim suggests observers failed to predict the transformative power of email because they spent too much time counting Internet access points, a “meaningless” and overly narrow exercise. Meanwhile, the email was deployed through non-linear, unexpected, dialogic grassroots networks, so that “those with seemingly little power were able to create and carry out their own agendas” (275-276). David Celdran presents a similar

example in the case of the presidency of Joseph 'Erap' Estrada of the Philippines, undone by thousands of citizens wielding SMS-enabled cell phones; what began as text-messaged jokes and rumours about President Estrada soon evolved into calls to gather in the streets in a popular uprising that, combined with the withdrawal of the business community's support, ultimately overthrew his presidency (2002, 92).

These modern-day 'people power' manifestations recall the jokes and rumour-mongering of Rabelasian medieval markets as described by Bakhtin (Bakhtin 1984, 4). They also recall the explosive power of Scott's 'hidden transcripts,' illustrated by his example of the 1929 anti-tax protest that quickly developed into a broad agrarian revolt against British colonial power in Burma (Scott 1990, 105). Nearly eighty years after the Saya San uprising, Scott's notion of hidden versus official social transcripts remains a significant tool for understanding Burma's landscape, where much of the population dons the impassive mask of survival between occasional ruptures of mass protest, sparked by the charismatic acts of figures like Saya San, Saw Yanda, Aung San Suu Kyi and, more recently, members of the Buddhist clergy. At these moments, the power of people's media and communications networks is revealed as a force capable of facilitating nation-wide coordination of protests despite a lack of access to mass media and telecommunications technology. Indeed, Burma is ripe with what Sao Harn Yawngnaw calls "everyday acts of resistance," (Elliott 2006, "Forbidden Route," 20), including the sporadic appearance of a corps of 'journalists-in waiting.' In a survey of Burma's media, Chadha and Kavoori noted with interest that during the student-led August 1988 uprising, more than forty newspapers appeared on the streets almost overnight, some of them looking quite professional (Chadha and Kavoori 2000, 345).

In interviews conducted for this and other works, I have not personally encountered evidence of underground pirate-style community radio operating inside Burma, in the vein of North American and European micro-power pirate stations, although radio is certainly used as a communication device by insurgent armies for coordinating troop movements, and foreign radio broadcasts that seep across the border are popular. As the case of Thailand indicates, community radio finds its greatest power in its openness. Grassroots radio activists insist on carving a citizen's space into the official transcript. They are aided by the fact that the task of suppressing volunteer radio publicly strips away the pretenses of power-holders who make claims on democracy – what Scott calls “breaking the charm” (1990, 224). Consequently, community radio remained front and centre in the days following the 2006 coup:

...while there is little sign of the junta lifting this siege on the radio for the poor, the contradiction this reality conveys...is leading to protest from some quarters. Most glaring is that such brazen censorship goes against the claims of the junta that the September coup was to restore democracy and media freedom to this South-East Asian nation” (Macan-Markar 2006).

We may read Thai community radio, then, as a catalyzing “public declaration” (Scott 1990, 218). Within a few years of the declaration's unveiling, some 2,000-3,000 stations sprang up nationwide in a spontaneous and largely unforeseen rejection of broadcast law. A similar scenario played out in Indonesia, where up to 3,000 community stations appeared between 1998 and 2005 after the fall of Suharto (Sanyoto 2005, 3). The sudden flowering of community radio in disparate places suggests the public declaration of community radio springs from a long-simmering hidden transcript, one comprised of a wellspring of resentment against centralized mass media and a desire to reclaim waning cultures, languages and localisms, to a

degree that surprised not only government regulators, but also media academics and activists working in the field.

As previously stated, the migrants interviewed in this study noted that their new radio skills may someday facilitate locally-controlled radio in Burma, and indeed that this is one of their collective desires. Given the patterns revealed by Thailand and Indonesia, and given the ready availability of smuggled electronic goods on the Thai-Burma border, one may readily predict that when Burma's current regime loses power, that country will experience a similar blossoming of thousands of grassroots radio operators demanding regulatory recognition and the right to communicate. Further, one may expect that these humble radio stations will help set the pace and tone of democratic change, with a tilt toward decentralization and cultural pluralism.

Toward a Broader View of Media Power

To understand community radio in Thailand, one must view the world differently. Horizontal and networked, community radio hides in plain sight while we remain fixated on the vertical structures of global corporate media. As previously stated, this vertical view is influenced by the work of Adorno, who presented radio as an extension of monopoly capitalism, confined by its technology to no other possibility than dominance over the listener. Foucault later provided a more networked, lateral concept of power relations. Yet without an emancipatory, transformative aspect neither Adorno nor Foucault's models recognize the agency of ordinary people as meaningful media producers. From this perspective the landscape remains dominated by unassailable architectures of brute power.

This view largely framed United Nations debates of the 1970s and 1980s, which were informed by a series of research papers based on an understanding of

communications not as a social process, but as a sender-to-receiver flow that could be quantified through the empirical measurement of technological capacity and public access points, with the distribution point occupying “the most important sequence in the chains of communications systems” (Mowlana 1985, 13). Through a detailed accounting of, for example, the number of American foreign correspondents or the number of radio transmitters per capita, the world was divided into information ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots.’ This approach in turn led to a resoundingly failed attempt to restore ‘information balance’ through a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) that proposed limits on foreign ownership and transnational monopolies (Thussu 2000, 47-50; Kleinwachter 1993, 16-17).

However, when UNESCO’s MacBride Commission expanded the consultation process to include community activists, commission members glimpsed a world of “‘alternative’ media channels, usually but not always on a local scale,” employing the participation of “non-professionals in producing and broadcasting programmes” (UNESCO 1980, 169-170). This recognition of alternative media – including low power FM – comprised less than three pages of the commission’s 275-page report. However, the inclusion of ‘alternative’ media necessarily carried with it an inextricable argument for the democratization of communications and the recognition of communication as a social and cultural right – an argument that, in the end, after the MacBride Report was buried in an avalanche of controversy over its industry-related recommendations, became what may be the Commission’s sole lasting legacy. Thus, like the tiny radio transmitters and hand-cranked presses it employs, alternative media insinuated itself as a small but surreptitiously influential kernel of a re-imagined communications landscape.

Indeed, during the decades vertical broadcast hegemonies were under the microscope, a new kind of media agency was emerging, one that flowed along traditional people-to-people networks. Castells posits that today media is in the process of becoming public space, with the audience gradually taking control over communications tools. This trend is powered by the Internet as well as greater public use of “media inherited from the mass media age” Castells (1998, 30). This inherited mass media can be found in the refurbished radio equipment rescued from rubbish dumps and sold in the South’s growing electronics street markets.

Thus a stroll through Bangkok’s Klong Thom market unveils a wider picture of who creates and disseminates media products. The matter of ‘who’ is highly important. For Horkheimer and Adorno, the ‘who’ is comprised of dictators and capitalists, a view reinforced by the complimentary works of Marx and Gramsci. Drawing on the latter, communications rights theorist Aliaa I. Dakroury presents a media landscape divided into two camps: great powers who own the media, and individuals who do not. From this arises the question of whether “these individuals, with their lack of resources, are in any way able to confront the giant powers of the world” (2004, 47). From a communication rights perspective, this problem may at times seem insurmountable indeed.

Looking at the example of community radio, however, I would argue that the people are not under-resourced when it comes to communicating with each other. In fact, in many ways they are better resourced than the captains of media industry. This is particularly evident in recent decades, which have witnessed the rapid dissemination of basic communication tools into a widening array of hands and, accordingly, into a widening field of unforeseen uses, actors and ends. From Islamic militants to urban slum dwellers, ordinary people have proven themselves highly

adaptive and creative when it comes to building communications networks, seizing on whatever technology is close to hand. Pulling back the curtain to reveal media 'ownership' in its full variety opens the possibility that communications power is ultimately situated along much broader, deeper networks than the space occupied by seemingly all-powerful vertical structures. This is well illustrated by examples like Indonesia, where Suharto's iron control over the country's mass media ultimately could not compete with small-scale media deployed among traditional grassroots communications networks. It is also illustrated by the case of Thailand, where a sudden explosion of community radio development clearly caught the state off guard and helped lead the country to a crisis point over the matter of media freedom. One might conclude from this and similar examples that people's media is not so much under-resourced as it is overlooked. In other words, yes, individuals are more than able to "confront the giant powers of the world." They have done so throughout history and are doing so today.

CONCLUSION

“Community radio cannot be perceived any longer as the sum of local, isolated, marginal and experiences, but as a social movement that keeps growing and reflects the lives of struggles for freedom of millions of people around the world.”

AMARC 2007, 48.

Downing notes that more than thirty years ago C.B. Macpherson presented us with the idea that the public has ‘capacities’ to create viable social arrangements – however he further notes that Macpherson tempered this with the statement that “the public’s ability to activate them is widely shackled” (Downing, 2001 43). Today these shackles are being wrested off around the world, including in Thailand and, in the long view, even in highly repressive states like Burma. While observers like Yvonne T. Chau view this as an organic outcome of top-down trade liberalization and globalization processes (Chau 2002, 22), it is just as easy to argue from the examples presented in this thesis that bottom-up pressure from an increasingly networked, activist, media-empowered populace greatly influences social change and political reform in Southeast Asia and elsewhere.

This thesis presents the original argument that our inability to clearly see these movements arises from frameworks of media power – such as those articulated by Horkheimer, Adorno and Foucault – that tend to deny agency to ordinary people as meaningful media producers. As well, for several decades multilateral debates on global media power approached the issue as an unequal balance of resources, skewing

sponsored research toward technological as opposed to social capacity. Yet, as argued by Cees J. Hamelink – one of the UN’s own advisors – the empirical-analytical act of measuring information flows “provides no meaningful guidance” in the face of a “paucity of theoretical reflection” (1995, 16-17). But while Hamelink argued for a broadening of the framework, the UN’s major post-NWICO initiative, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) remained strongly focused on issues such as Internet governance, ICT ‘access points’ and satellite technology (WSIS Plan of Action, 2003).

Meanwhile, in recent years the theoretical examination of media power has gradually fallen to a burgeoning cultural studies field. Here the heavy focus on virtuality and cyber-reality (Hayles 1999; Everett and Caldwell 2003); the privileging of visual images over spoken-word culture (Mirzoeff 1998); the obsession with spectatorship and celebrity (Rogoff 1998; Marshall 1997); and the question of reality versus hyper-reality (Baudrillard 1993) are valuable for understanding some aspects of Western media culture. However, these lines of inquiry are in danger of leaving behind the vast majority of the world’s poor and stateless, the very people who produce some of the world’s most diverse, culturally rich and influential media. This is a significant oversight: if one follows the trajectory of global population growth and economic trends, the possibility arises that the cultures arising from slums, barrios and refugee camps are poised to become the dominant cultures of the world.

This calls for a much deeper examination of the media of the poor, which has been steadily developing along a more nuanced trajectory than communications planners have thus far understood or anticipated. As White observes:

It is these [civil society] groups which are increasingly pushing the communications agenda beyond efforts of governmental bureaucracies and the scientific-rational approach of the North Atlantic nations, bringing in humanism, religion and deeper philosophical dimensions (1993, 24).

To this end, on the fringes of official forums like WSIS and in their daily activities, grassroots media practitioners gather, debate, develop and articulate an understanding of media not as a commodity or a technology, but as an extension of collective social goals and an agent of social change. Through this process, media is transformed from the realm of hard technology – where a privileged few hold the greater power – into the realm of unfinalized dialogue, reflecting a heteroglossia of diverse centrifugal powers and voices.

Suggestions for Further Study

While Thai academics like Ubonrat have been attentive to community radio, for the most part the work of grassroots journalists remains “unmeasured, uncounted, and poorly known in official circles or outside their localities” (Downing 2001, 27). Even social movement researchers, whose task is to study resistance movements, tend to overlook how social movement actors share ideas and information. For example, in a 2003 collection of essays on global social movements, *The Future of Revolutions: Rethinking Radical Change in the Age of Globalization* (Foran 2003), not one of eighteen chapters is dedicated to an examination of grassroots media practices, despite their arguable centrality to the development of the movements described. In this and other collections, Internet-based movements like the Independent Media Centers (IMCs) are presented mainly as interesting ancillaries to anti-globalization protests, while print and broadcast media exist only as hegemonic, homogenizing Big Media. There is scant recognition of the diversity of people’s media, and no commonly held understanding of grassroots media organizations as movements unto themselves. Downing, who has himself written extensively on radical alternative media, observes:

“It frankly beggars the imagination to explain how so many social movement specialists could think it feasible to analyze the dynamics of social movements without systematic attention to their media and communication” (2001, 26).

To be fair, this is not a problem confined to academia. Social movement organizations themselves have been slow to recognize grassroots media, including community radio, as an important agent of social change. In the Kathmandu Declaration, AMARC delegates declared that social movements, while important to the achievement of communication rights, “have often tended to marginalize community broadcasting to the same degree that has existed in government and corporate sectors” (Appendix A). Only after persistent lobbying from AMARC and its allies did the World Social Forum gatherings begin to consider media production outside the traditional critique of corporate media. It was not until 2005 that participants at the 5th WSF in Porto Alegre adopted the concept of communication rights as a key component of global social activism, a development AMARC president Steve Buckley called a “milestone” (AMARC 2005).

The lack of a research base has concrete implications for grassroots radio volunteers, limiting the sector’s ability to be included in national communications planning, to attract needed development funds, and to gain a seat at policy forums. Recognizing this, the community radio sector itself has already begun the task of addressing its research deficit. In 2006, AMARC undertook a global assessment of community radio’s social impact. The assessment was carried out as a participatory action research process through which 927 community radio operators in 96 countries partook in regional roundtables, an electronic forum, and a survey. Published in 2007, the 128-page study found that quantity indicators demanded by donors – such as audience size, programming hours on specific topics and the number of

organizations represented in interviews – were not adequate tools to measure the social impact of community radio. Highlighted among the key findings was a very clear statement of the research approach and indicators required to understand the role of community radio:

Community radio practitioners and stakeholders agree that the measurement of community radio social impact should be people-centred and based on a multi-dimensional understanding of poverty. In this perspective the key indicators of community radio social impact are related to voice, empowerment and local ownership of the communication processes (AMARC 2007, 8).

Participants called for a new type of measurement capable of tracking the ‘buzz’ of call-in shows, SMS text-messaging, listeners’ clubs, letters and other indicators of increased community networking precipitated by community radio. They recommended that future research “consider the increased participation of citizens in setting the public agenda to the resolution of existing problems through collective action facilitated by the communication processes initiated by CR [community radio]” (9). They also called for longer research timelines, noting the example of community radio in Nepal “that after ten years of experiences, became a contributing factor in the return of democracy after the Royal Coup of February 2005” (9).

The study described its own research methodology as one that built on practices of the ‘Communication for Development’ community, in particular the use of the same action research methods that had helped build the Latin American community radio movement thirty years ago, based on the works of Paulo Freire, Ramiro Beltran and others (12). Within this framework, the project planners set out a methodology in which community radio volunteers and community members could describe among themselves the main challenges they faced and ways to overcome those challenges. This was based on the theory that the research’s main goal should be to provide supportive information to the community, a goal best achieved by

bridging the gap between research and practice. The study's authors described this approach as "little or no separation of knowing and doing," a process the study noted is not without its critics (14). Yet the proof is in the pudding: despite charges that non-academic participants are not objective or removed enough to collect and interpret their own experience, through this methodology participants were able to clearly articulate the shortcomings of current measurement tools and present creative ideas for a new research paradigm.

Further to the idea of bridging the "knowing and doing" gap, it is worth noting that Thai academics like Ubonrat, Uajit, and Uthaiwan have forged a close relationship between the study and practice of community radio. This includes taking an active role in coordinating workshops, acting as policy advocates in the government arena and, in the case of Uthaiwan, setting up a pilot radio project and handing it over to community groups for their use. Latin American academics such as Clemencia Rodriguez (*Fissures in the Media Landscape*, 2001) also actively work with community members in support of radio and other media projects, a process that has drawn Rodriguez's perspective and research practices away from audience surveys and more toward consideration of grassroots media as "catalysts of processes, as connectors of peoples and collectives" (Rodriguez, 2003, 191). In North America, the deep integration of alternative media theory into praxis is evident in the work of the University of California's Dee Dee Halleck, who has engaged in participatory media projects with school children, farm workers, seniors, the mentally ill and other communities. These activities – along with network building among Latin American, Asian and African media practitioners – have been seamlessly integrated into her academic work for more than forty years, as has her communications rights advocacy work through Vidéazimut and the National Alliance for Community Media. In the

introduction to *Hand-Held Visions: The Impossible Possibilities of Community Media*, Halleck presents the model of a university-based academic who describes herself first and foremost as a “media educator” engaged in transferring practical knowledge to the wider community (xvii). In turn, she collects and interprets community-based knowledge from locations ranging from New Delhi to inner city New York. Speaking of her work, Downing writes: “...while sociologists might be more systematic, the fur would not fly, or even stand on end” (in Halleck 2002, xii).

Further to this notion, bridging the gap between academic detachment and community involvement requires an act of letting go. This is particularly true in the community radio field, where participants often operate in a precarious legal environment, filled with potential for politically-motivated violence, arrest and deportation. Allowing participants to frame research objectives and control the use of potentially damaging information is a necessity from a security standpoint. But beyond security, the process of shared power is a necessity from the standpoint of best possible outcomes – namely, the generation of research that is relevant and useful to society, instead of harmful and forgotten. Such research would be helpful to multilateral organizations, donor agencies, NGOs and, indeed, even governments, by providing a picture of community radio stations not as isolated rural projects supported only for their potential to convey information, but as part of a holistic expression of community goals and aspirations across a number of fields, from advancing the rights of women in the home, to preserving ethnic and indigenous languages, to fundamentally challenging and changing societal and political power relations.

Widening the Focus

In addition to employing research tools to measure the social impact of community radio, potential supporters of community radio must broaden their theoretical understanding. In the past, government bodies and international agencies have supported community radio without full recognition of the inherent political dimension of dialogic communication, with unfavourable results for grassroots practitioners. The Thai example is an apt illustration, in that the early development of community radio was aided by government-sponsored pilot programs and funding support from the Social Investment Fund without full thought as to how a participatory, accessible medium might become a participatory, accessible message the government could not control. In this case, the door to dialogic communication was opened and then abruptly closed, leaving participants in a more vulnerable position than they held at the beginning of the process, as illustrated by the case of the Angthong farmer who was arrested and endured a lengthy criminal trial for his radio activity. To date none of FM99's migrant volunteers have been arrested, but informants report increased fear of arrest and deportation as a result of radio activities that were at one point tacitly supported – or at least not opposed – by the authorities. This experience has been played out in other parts of the world: for example, the first African community radio station was set up by the Kenyan government, with assistance from UNESCO. Two years later the government – fearful of the use of local language and the range of issues discussed – shut it down and removed the broadcasting equipment (Githaiga 2005). With this experience in mind, potential funders of community radio must recognize that supporting community radio is not the same as digging a well or launching an immunization drive. Community radio is not just another development communications tool that primarily requires material

assistance. Supporting community radio means supporting the wider social project it is embedded in, including the democratization of communications and the presentation of voices that are alternative and/or oppositional to the status quo. Government bodies that support community radio must therefore be prepared to accept challenges to the status quo without engaging in reactive oppression, while development agencies must be prepared not only to assist community radio materially, but also to defend community radio and its practitioners socially and politically.

Final Considerations: Why Community Radio Matters

In its 2007 report on community radio impacts, AMARC notes that despite recent technological developments, radio remains the world's most widespread and accessible communications technology. A low-cost oral medium, radio is receivable by ninety per cent of the world's population (AMARC 2007, 81). Historically, radio's ability to reach a mass audience has not escaped the notice of the state. In Thailand, radio was used to privilege a Bangkok-based view of the country, a view often at odds with local realities and aspirations. As well, the commercial potential of radio was harnessed by the military, which likened its 'ownership' of the spectrum to a farmer's ownership of paddy lands. Indeed since the advent of radio technology, the Thai state assumed sovereignty over the airwaves as a natural right of the state, not the people. Until the arrival of community radio in 2001, this assumption remained unchallenged. In the ensuing years the state proved highly resilient against change, employing a number of strategies to avoid its new constitutional duty to free up the airwaves. During this time, it was rural volunteers – not urban activists – who refused to accept delays and immediately began exercising what they interpreted as their right

to broadcast independently. Voices from the margin led the way, pushing community radio forward as the centre-piece of democratic reform in Thailand. Today citizens' access to the airwaves remains a key point of contention in an ongoing public struggle over the country's political future. In fact, some observers state the struggle for community radio activism has only intensified since the 1997 Constitution was abrogated and stations were ordered off the air (Macan-Markar 2007).

These unfolding events deserve the close attention of media scholars. Just as global community radio development is creating a new communications model so, too, is it creating a new model for the way research intersects with social movements. Too often we are still counting computers when the dictator's statue already lies in rubble, contrary to our best equations of power. Meanwhile community radio presents a world where media is not a technologically-derived product, but a process of change. It is a world in action, busy creating its own fluid, pluralistic theory. Thus it becomes futile to stand on the outside, parse the content and throw definitions at it like darts – they will not stick. Researchers will achieve better success directly engaging with the community, through scholarship with rolled up sleeves.

At the same time, we must view our world and its power relations differently. In the words of Nick Couldry: "To study alternative media seriously, and not out of incidental curiosity, is to view society's mediated landscape from a different perspective, which refuses to take for granted its current centralization" (Couldry 2001, 5-6). Community radio operators necessarily see their activities in this light; had they assumed all power lies at the centre, they would have given up long ago. Following their example enriches our scholarship. From this ground-level view, that which we have been trained to hold important falls away, revealing far more interesting interpretations and possibilities.

As this thesis demonstrates, community radio is important, from both a social change perspective and a research perspective. For those who are attentive, Thailand's ongoing struggles over community radio offer an opportunity to see a new communications paradigm in formation. At its most basic level, community radio has played a crucial role in the evolution of Thailand's public discourse on media and society. Beyond this level, the emergence of tiny community radio stations in Thailand is part of a global phenomenon with lasting consequences for the manner in which the earth's electromagnetic waves are claimed, monopolized and commercialized by states. This phenomenon also holds consequences for the manner in which people allow themselves to be governed, as oppressed communities become more empowered, assertive and networked through community radio. In this manner, community radio occupies a space beyond the mediascape as part of the rich fabric of human experience, offering a framework of empowerment and agency coursing beneath the bleak surface of our age.

REFERENCES

Note:

Thai names are referenced as they are commonly used in Thailand, employing the given (first) name as opposed to family (last) name as the main identifier of an individual. Ex: Ubonrat Sirayuvasek is identified and alphabetized under the name 'Ubonrat'.

Adorno, Theodor W. 2006. *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Alden, Kathleen, et. al. 1996. "Burmese Political Dissidents in Thailand: Trauma and Survival Among Young Adults in Exile". *American Journal of Public Health*. 86:11, Nov. 1561-1569.

AMARC (Association Mondiale des Radiodiffuseurs Communautaires/World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters). n.d. "About Community Radio" www.amarc.org.
http://wiki.amarc.org/index2.php?topic=What_is_community_radio&lang=EN&style=amarc&site=amarc (accessed Oct. 14, 2007).

— 1994. *The Community Radio Charter for Europe*. 1st AMARC Pan-European Conference of Community Radio Broadcasters. Sept. 18. Ljubljana, Slovenia

— 2003. *Kathmandu Declaration*. AMARC 8th General Assembly, Kathmandu, Nepal, Feb. 26.

— 2004. *Closing Declaration of the Round Table on Community Media and Sustainable Development*. Marrakesh, Nov. 21.

— 2005. "The 5th World Social Forum Adopted the Communication Rights Approach". Press release. Porto Alegre, Jan. 31.

— 2007. *Community Radio Social Impact Assessment: Removing Barriers, Increasing Effectiveness*. Montreal: AMARC.

AMARC Africa. n.d. *The African Community Radio Manager's Handbook: A Guide to Sustainable Radio*. AMARC Africa.

Amporn Jirattikorn. 2006. "Reaching Out Over the Airwaves: A community radio station in Thailand connects to marginalized Shan expats in Chiang Mai." *Bangkok Post*. Feb. 9.

Anucha Charoenpo. 2004. "Govt ban on Tak Bai VCD decried." *Bangkok Post*. Dec. 14.

Arnold, Dennis. 2005. "Work, Rights, and Discrimination Against Burmese Workers in Thailand." City University of Hong Kong Working Paper.
<http://www.amrc.org.hk/5306.htm> (accessed June 12, 2007).

- Asian Economic News*. 1998. "Thailand launches social investment fund for poor." Sept. 14.
- Asian Human Rights Commission. Urgent Appeals Program. 2005. "UA-197-2005: Thailand: Farmer taken to court in challenge to community radio." <http://www.ahrchk.net/ua/mainfile.php/2005/1325/> (accessed May 20, 2007).
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1984. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination*. ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bangkok Post*. 2004. "Chasit to push community radio programmes in South." June 20.
- Bandy, Joe and Jackie Smith. 2004. "Factors Affecting Conflict and Cooperation in Transnational Movement Networks." In *Coalitions Across Borders: Transnational Protest and the Neoliberal Order*. Eds. Joe Bandy and Jackie Smith. Toronto: Rowman and Littlefield. 231-252.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 2002. "The Precession of Simulacra." In *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*. ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner. Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc. 521-549.
- Beverly, John. 2003. "Testimonio, Subalternity, and Narrative Authority." In *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*, 2nd ed. eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 319-335.
- Bista, Mohan. 2005. "Developing Content for Community Radio in a Restrictive Environment." 1st AMARC Asia Pacific Regional Conference. Jakarta, Indonesia. Nov. 24-27.
- Boafo, S.T. Kwame, ed. 2000. *Promoting Community Media in Africa*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Bonino, José Míguez. 1989. "Theology and Peace in Latin America." In *Theology, Politics and Peace*. ed. Theodore Runyon. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.
- Bradford, Wylie and Alison Vicary. 2005. "Preliminary Survey Results About Burmese Migrant Workers in Thailand: State/Division of Origin, Year of Entry, Minimum Wages and Work Permits." *Burma Economic Watch*, 1/2005, 3-25.
- Brecht, Bertolt. 1932. "Radio as an Apparatus of Communication." Originally published as "Der Rundfunk als Kommunikationsapparat." *Bjitter des Hessischen Landestheaters*. Darmstadt, No. 16, July. English translation <http://home.freeuk.net/lemmaesthetics/brecht1.htm> (accessed Sept. 15, 2007).

- Buckley, Steve. 2000. "Radio's New Horizons: Democracy and Popular Communication in the Digital Age." *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. 3:2. 180-187.
- Callahan, William A. 1998. *Imagining Democracy: Reading "the Events of May" in Thailand*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Canada. Canada Business. 2005. "Broadcasting Industry in Thailand 2005". [http://commercecan.ic.gc.ca/scdt/bizmap/interface2.nsf/vDownload/ISA_2332/\\$file/X_7410225.DOC](http://commercecan.ic.gc.ca/scdt/bizmap/interface2.nsf/vDownload/ISA_2332/$file/X_7410225.DOC). (accessed April 11, 2007).
- Castells, Manuel. 1998. *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. Vol. III: End of Millenium*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- 2004. "Informationalism, Networks, and the Network Society: A Theoretical Blueprint." In *The Network Society: A Cross-cultural Perspective*. ed. Manuel Castells. Northhampton MA: Edward Elger. 3-45.
- Celdran, David. 2002. "The Philippines: SMS and Citizenship". *Development Dialogue*. 2002:1. 91-103.
- Chadha, Kalyani and Anandam P. Kavoori. 2000. "Myanmar." In *Handbook of the Media in Asia*. ed. Shelton A. Gunaratne. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 350-371.
- Chatrichalerm Yukol (Prince). *Suriyothai*. Thailand, 2001.
- Chau, Yvonne. T. 2002. "Democrats and Dictators: Southeast Asia's Uneven Information Landscape." *Development Dialogue*. 2002:1. 22-36.
- Chinnawat Singha, Prasit Tangprasert, and Wassana Nanuam. 2006. "Thailand: Community Radio Stations Closed." *Bangkok Post*. Sept. 26.
- Chirmsak Pinthong. 2005. "The Truth Behind the Selection of the National Broadcasting Commission that Contradicts the Constitution." In *Is Media Reform Going Backward?* ed. Sopit Wangvivatana. Bangkok: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Thai Broadcast Journalists Association, 2005. 16-33.
- Chittoor, Jayalaskshmi. "Booming Radio Revolution." *Manila Times*. Dec. 28, 2003.
- Cholmondeley, Colin H. 2000. "The Development of Community Media in the Caribbean." *Promoting Community Media in Africa*. S.T. Kwame Boafo, ed. Paris: UNESCO. 97-116.
- Coronel, Sheila S. 2002. "Opening a Pandora's Box: The Emergence of a Free Press in Southeast Asia." *Development Dialogue*. 2002:1. 37-50.
- 1998. "The Information Crisis." *Development Dialogue*. 1998:2. 7-20.
- Couldry, Nick. 2001. "Mediation and Alternative Media or, Reimagining the Centre of Media and Communication Studies." Paper presented to the ICA pre-

conference 'Our Media, Not Theirs', May 24, The American University, Washington, DC.

Couldy, Nick and James Curran, eds. 2003. *Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World*. Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Crispin, Shawn W. "Thailand at a Crossroads." Committee to Protect Journalists Briefing, May 15, 2007.
http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/2007/DA_spring_07/Thailand_07/thailand.html
(accessed July 31, 2007).

Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation. 2002. *Development Dialogue*. 2002:1. (Access to Information in Southeast Asia and Beyond.)

Dakroury, Aliaa Ibrahim. 2004. "Globalization and the Right to Communicate: Utopia or Prison?" *The Journal of Intergroup Relations*. 31:3. 40-59.

Daradirek Ekachai. 2000. "Thailand." In *The Handbook of Media in Asia*. ed. Shelton A. Gunaratne. London: Sage.

Downing, John D. H. 2001. *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

— 2003. "Audiences and readers of alternative media: the absent lure of the virtually unknown." *Media, Culture and Society*. Vol. 25. 625-645.

Elliott, Trish. 1990. "Moon River: The Environment Loses to Development Again... This Time, in Thailand." *Briarpatch*. 19:9, Nov. 26-28.

Elliott, Patricia W. 2006. "The Forbidden Route? Most human rights activists agree that tourism in Burma is a "difficult question." *Briarpatch*. 35: 7, Nov., 18-20.

— 2006. *The White Umbrella: A Woman's Struggle for Freedom in Burma*. 2nd ed. Bangkok: Friends Books.

Eng, Peter. 1998. "The Democracy Boom." *Development Dialogue*. 1988:2. 23-36.

Entrena, Francisco. 2003. *Local Reactions to Globalization Processes: Competitive Adaptations or Socioeconomic Erosion*. New York: Nova.

Everett, Anna and John T. Caldwell. 2003. *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality*. New York: Routledge.

Fals-Borda, Orlando. 1991. "Some Basic Ingredients." In *Action and Knowledge: Breaking the Monopoly with Participatory Action-Research*. eds. Orlando Fals-Borda and Mohammad Anisur Rahman. New York: Apex. 3-12.

— 1991. "Remaking Knowledge." In *Action and Knowledge: Breaking the Monopoly with Participatory Action-Research*. eds. Orlando Fals-Borda and Mohammad Anisur Rahman. New York: Apex. 146-164.

- Featherstone, Mike. 1995. *Undoing Culture: Globalization, Postmodernism and Identity*. London: Sage.
- Foran, John, ed. 2003. *The Future of Revolutions: Rethinking Radical Change in the Age of Globalization*. London: Zed.
- Foucault, Michel. 1994. *Power*. Vol. 3: Essential Works of Foucault. ed. James D. Faubion. trans. Robert Hurley and others. NY: The New Press.
- Fraser, Colin and Sonia Restepo Estrada. 2001. *Community Radio Handbook*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Freire, Paulo. 1972. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Myra Bergman Ramos, trans. New York: Herder and Herder. Translated from the original Portuguese manuscript, 1968.
- 1976. *Education: The Practice of Freedom*. London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative. Originally published as *Educação como Prática da Liberdade*, Rio de Janeiro: Editoria Paz e Terra, 1967.
- Friedman, Jonathan. 1999. "The Hybridization of Roots and the Abhorrence of the Bush." In *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*. eds. Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash. London: Sage. 230-256.
- Gaventa, John. 1991. "Toward a Knowledge Democracy: Viewpoints on Participatory Research in North America." In *Action and Knowledge: Breaking the Monopoly with Participatory Action Research*. eds. Orlando Fals-Borda and Mohammad Anisur Rahman. New York, Apex. 121-131.
- Ghosh, Rishab Aiyer. 2005. "Monopolies and Free Speech." *The Indian Technomist*. (online newsletter) July. <http://dxm.org/technomist> (accessed July 24, 2006).
- Githaiga, Grace. 2005. "The African Perspectives and Experiences: Comparative Analysis of the Legislative Environments and Advocacy Initiatives." 1st AMARC Asia Pacific Conference. Jakarta, Indonesia. Nov. 24-27.
- Gonzalez, Alejandro. 2002. "Media – Thailand: Struggle for Airwaves Still On." *The Irrawaddy*. June 18, 2002. Online version. <http://www.irrawaddy.org/art/2002-1/02art02.html>. Reprinted with permission from Inter Press Service (IPS). (accessed Nov. 10, 2004).
- Gordon, Raymond G., Jr. (ed.). 2005. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Fifteenth edition*. Dallas, Tex.: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com/> (accessed June 1, 2007).
- Grundy-Warr, Carl and Elaine Wong Siew Yin. 2002. "Geographies of Displacement: The Karenni and Shan Across the Myanmar-Thailand Border." *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*. 23-1, 93-122.

- Gumucio Dagron, Alfonso. 2001. "Call Me Impure: Myths and Paradigms of Participatory Communication." Paper presented to ICA Preconference 'Our Media, Not Theirs' (OurMedia I), The American University, Wash., May 24.
- 2003. "Art of Aerialists: Sustainability of Community Media." Presented at OURMedia III, Barranquilla, Colombia.
- Gunaratne, Shelton A., ed. 2000. *The Handbook of Media in Asia*. London: Sage.
- Gutierrez, Gustavo. 1973. *A Theology of Liberation*. ed. and trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson. NY: Maryknoll.
- Hackett, Robert. 2000. "Taking Back the Media: Notes on the Potential for a Communicative Democracy Movement." *Studies in Political Economy*. No. 63, Autumn. 61-86.
- Halleck, Dee Dee. 2002. *Hand Held Visions: The Impossible Impossibilities of Community Media*. New York: Fordham Univ. Press.
- Hamelink, Cees J. 1995. "The Democratic Ideal and Its Enemies." In *The Democratization of Communication*. ed. Philip Lee, ed. Cardiff: University of Wales Press. 15-37.
- 2003. "Statement on Communication Rights." World Forum on Communication Rights, Geneva, Dec. 11, 2003.
http://www.communicationrights.org/statement_en.html (accessed Sept. 6, 2006).
- Hashimoto, Atushi. 2005. *Thailand: Social Investment Project. Field Survey, Dec. 2005*. http://www.jbic.go.jp/english/oec/post/2006/pdf/project08_full.pdf (accessed June 5, 2007).
- Hassanpour, Amir. 1998. "Majority Censorship, Minority Broadcasting." Virtual Conference: The Right to Communicate and the Communication of Rights, 11 May 11 – June 26. <http://commposite.uqam.ca/videaz/docs/amhaen.html> (accessed Nov. 12, 2005).
- Hayles, N. Katherine. 1999. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Infomatics*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Hedman, Eva-Lotta E. 2001. "Contesting State and Civil Society: Southeast Asian Trajectories." *Modern Asian Studies*. 35:4. Oct. 921-951.
- Hill Collins, Patricia. 1990. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. London: Harper Collins Academic.
- Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno. 1986. *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. New York: Continuum. Originally published as *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. New York: Social Studies Assoc., 1944.

- Huezca, Robert. 1995. "Subject-authored Theories of Media Practice: The Case of Bolivian Tin Miners' Radio." *Communications Studies*. Fall 1995. 6:3-4, 149-169.
- Ibrahim, Zane. nd. "Community Radio". *Radio Africa: The Power of Culture*. <http://www.powerofculture.nl/uk/specials/radio/community.html> (accessed July 28, 2006).
- International Freedom of Expression eXchange (IFEX). 2007. "Alert: Three Community Radio Stations Closed for Broadcasting Thaksin Interview". May 18. <http://www.ifex.org/en/content/view/full/83485/>
- International Labour Organization. 1998. *Forced Labour in Myanmar (Burma): Report of the Commission of Inquiry appointed under article 26 of the Constitution of the International Labour Organization to examine the observance by Myanmar of the Forced Labour Convention, 1930. (No. 29)*. ILO: Geneva. July 2.
- Kac, Eduardo. 1999. "Negotiating Meaning: The Dialogic Imagination in Electronic Art." Proceedings of Computers in Art and Design Education Conference, University of Tesside, UK.
- Kaur, Amajit. 2007. "On the Move: International Migration in Southeast Asia since the 1980s." *History Compass*. 5:2, 2007. 302-313.
- King, Daniel E. 1992. "The Thai Parliamentary Elections of 1992: Return to Democracy in an Atypical Year." *Asian Survey*. 32:12. Dec. 1109-1123.
- King, Daniel and Jim LoGerfo. 1996. "Thailand: Toward Democratic Stability." *Journal of Democracy*. 7:1. 102-117.
- Kleinwachter, Wolfgang. 1993. "Three Waves of the Debate." In *The Global Media Debate: Its Rise, Fall and Renewal*. eds. George Gerbner, et.al. Norwood, NJ: Ablex. 13-20.
- Lapapan Choovong. 2004. Interview by author. Tape recording. Bangkok. Dec. 8.
- Lao Liang Won (Nang). 2004. "No Human Being is Illegal." *Asia Society: Asia Source*. Nov. 15. <http://www.asiasource.org/asip/chiangmai.cfm> (accessed Nov. 15, 2004).
- Lee, Raymond M. 1995. *Dangerous Fieldwork*. Qualitative Research Methods Series 34. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lewis, Glen. 2002. "The Politics of Memory in Thailand and Australia: National Identity, the Media and the Military." *Media History*. 8:1. 77-88.
- Lim, Merlyna. 2003. "The Internet, Social Networks, and Reform in Indonesia". In *Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World*. eds. Nick Couldry and James Curran. Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield. 273-288.

- Lucksana Klaiko. 2004. *Community Radio in Thailand in 1998-2002: Comparative Studies of Four Community Radio Stations*. PhD diss., University of Canberra.
- Macan-Markar, Marwaan. 2006. "Coup Master Ban Community Radio". Interpress Service News Agency (IPS) online, Oct. 6, Bangkok.
<http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=35023> (accessed Oct. 20, 2006).
- 2007. "Community Radio Refuses To Go Silent." InterPress Service News Agency (IPS) online, May 21, Bangkok.
<http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=37815> (accessed July 24, 2007).
- Manila Times*. 2006. "Thai Military Shuts Down Rural Radio Stations." Sept. 25.
- Manning, Kevin R., with additional reporting by Kyaw Zwa Moe, Naw Seng and Htian Linn. 2003. "Now You're Speaking My Language." *The Irrawaddy*. Dec. 12.
- Marshall, David P. 1997. *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*. Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mayo, Peter. 2004. *Liberating Praxis: Paulo Freire's Legacy for Radical Education and Politics*. Westport CT: Praeger.
- McCargo, Duncan. 2000. *Politics and the Press in Thailand: Media Machinations*. London: Routledge.
- McIver, William J. Jr and William F. Birdsall. 2002. "Technological Evolution and the Right to Communicate." Presented at Euricomm Colloquium: Electronic Networks and Democracy. Nijmegen, The Netherlands. Oct. 9-12.
- McQuail, Denis, Rosario de Mateo and Helena Tapper. 1992. "A Framework for Analysis of Media Change in Europe in the 1990s." *Dynamics of Media Politics: Broadcast and Electronic Media in Western Europe*. eds. Karen Siune and Wolfgang Truetzchler. London: Sage. 8-25.
- Mirzoeff, Nicholas. 1998. "What is Visual Culture?" In *The Visual Culture Reader*. ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff. New York: Routledge. 4-13.
- Mtimde, Lumko, et.al. 1998. *What is Community Radio? A Resource Guide*. Johannesburg: AMARC Africa and Panos Southern Africa.
- Mowlana, Hamid. 1985. *International Flow of Information: A Global Report and Analysis*. Paris, UNESCO.
- Munyua, Alice and Emmanuel Njenga. 2004. "Communication Rights: What Issues for Africa". In *Framing Communication Rights: A Global Overview. A report on the CRIS Campaign meeting, Geneva, Dec. 8, 2003* by Clemencia Rodriguez and Seán Ó Siochrú. Communication Rights in the Information Society: 2004. 18-21.

- The Nation*. "Junta Accused of Exploiting News Media." Feb. 28, 2007.
- Nirun Phitakwatchara. 2004. Interview by author. Tape recording. Bangkok. Dec. 9.
- Northern People Media Network, et. al. 2007. "Statement of Media Groups Rejecting the Draft Constitution B.E. 2550 (2007) and Legislation Against Media Reform." <http://www.archk.net/pr/mainfile.php/2006mr/472> (accessed Nov. 26, 2007).
- One World Action. n.d. "CPLG – Strengthening Citizen Participation in Local Governance in South East Asia: Thailand." <http://owa.netxttra.net/indepth/project.jsp?project=211> (accessed June 4, 2007).
- Palit, Chittaroopa. 2004. "Monsoon Risings: Mega-Dam Resistance in the Narmada Valley." In *A Movement of Movements*. ed. Tom Mertes. London: Verso. 71-93.
- Piper, Nicola. 2004. "Rights of Foreign Workers and the Politics of Migration in South-East and East Asia." *International Migration*. 42:5. 71-97.
- Raboy, Marc. 1998. "Challenges for Global Regulation of Communication." Paper presented at Vidéazimut Virtual Conference: The Right to Communicate and the Communication of Rights, May 11 – June 26, 1998. <http://commposite.uqam.ca/videaz/docs/maraen.html> (accessed Sept. 1, 2005).
- Reporters Without Borders. 2004. *Thailand 2003 Annual Report*. http://www.rsf.org/print.php3?id_article=6489 (accessed Nov. 1, 2006).
- . 2006. "Citizens' Radio Case Postponed as More Accused Face Charges." Press Release. http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=19715 (accessed July 11, 2007).
- Rizvi, Syad. 2005. Remarks to the 1st AMARC Asia Pacific Conference. Jakarta, Indonesia. Nov. 24-27.
- Rodriguez, Clemencia. 2001. *Fissures in the Mediascape: An International Study of Citizens' Media*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- . 2003. "The Bishop and His Star: Citizens' Communication in Southern Chile." Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World. Nick Couldry and James Curran, eds. Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield. 117-194.
- Rogoff, Irit. 1998. "Studying Visual Culture." In *The Visual Culture Reader*. ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff. New York: Routledge. 14-26.
- Sai Silip. 2006. "Northern Thai Province Shuts Down Community Radio." *The Irrwaddy Online Edition*. March 7.

- 2007. “Migrant Workers in Chiang Mai Protest Proposed Restrictions.” *The Irrawaddy Online Edition*. May 11.
- Sanyoto, Kuhkuh. 2005. “The Regulatory Environment Challenge and the Recognition of Community Radio as a Third Sector.” Presented at the 1st AMARC Asia-Pacific Regional Conference. Jakarta, Indonesia. Nov. 24-27.
- Sassen, Saskia. 1999. “Digital Networks and Power.” In *Spaces of Culture: City-Nation-World*. eds. Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash. London: Sage. 49-63.
- Scott, James C. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale.
- Shan Women’s Action Network and The Shan Human Rights Foundation. 2002. *Licence to Rape: The Burmese Military Regime’s Use of Sexual Violence in the Ongoing War in Shan State*. Chiang Mai: SWAN and SHRF.
- Simpson, Adam. 2006. “Downfall? Capitalism, Dissent and the Media in Thaksin’s Thailand.” Second Oceanic Conference on International Studies, University of Melbourne, July 5-7.
- Smith, Michael Peter. 2001. *Transnational Urbanism: Locating Globalization*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sopit Wangvivatana, ed. 2005. *Is Media Reform Going Backward?* Bangkok: Thai Broadcast Journalists Association and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
- Sulak Sivaraksa. 2006. “The Monarchy and the Constitution.” Speech at Thammasat University, April 28. <http://www.sulak-sivaraksa.org/web/sulak715.php> (accessed April 21, 2007).
- Supara Janchitfah. 1999. “Radio Free Isan?” *Bangkok Post*, May 16.
- Supinya Klangnarong. 2004. Interview by author. Video and audio tape recordings. Bangkok, Thailand. Dec. 9.
- 2005. “Community Radio: Freedom of Civil Voices.” Presented at the 1st AMARC Asia-Pacific Regional Conference. Jakarta, Indonesia. Nov. 24-27.
- Tanit Jitnukul. *Bang Rajan*. Thailand, 2000.
- Tehrani, Majid. 2000. *Global Communication and World Politics: Domination, Development and Discourse*. Boulder, CO: Rienner.
- Thai-Burma Border Consortium. n.d. *Map of Camps/ Border History*. <http://www.tbtc.org> (accessed June 11, 2007).
- 2002. *Internally Displaced People and Relocation Sites in Eastern Burma*. Bangkok: TBBC. September.

- Thailand (Kingdom of). 1997. *Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand*. Enacted on the 11th Day of October B.E. 2540 (1997).
- Thailand (Kingdom of). Constitution Drafting Committee. 2007. *Draft Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand*. Edition for Review, April 26.
- Thailand (Kingdom of). National Identity Office. n.d. "Plans of the National Identity Promotion Work: Vision" <http://opm.go.th/thai/em0202.asp> (accessed April 10, 2007).
- Thailand (Kingdom of). Public Relations Department. n.d. "Radio Broadcasting in the Days before the National Broadcasting Service of Thailand Came Into Being." http://thailand.prd.go.th/about_prd.php?id=2. (accessed April 10, 2007).
- n.d. "Thailand Before the Advent of State Publicity Mechanism." http://thailand.prd.go.th/about_prd.php?id=1 (Accessed April 10, 2007).
- Thailand Board of Investment. 2006. *Minimum Daily Wage Rates 2006*. <http://www.boi.go.th/english/how/demographic.asp> (accessed Dec. 1, 2006).
- Thussu, Daya Kishan. 2000. *International Communication: Continuity and Change*. London: Arnold.
- Traber, Michael. 1993. "Communication Ethics." In *The Global Media Debate: Its Rise, Fall, and Renewal*. eds. George Gerbner, et. al. Norwood, NJ, Ablex. 151-159.
- Tsagarousianou, Roza. 2004. "Rethinking the Concept of Diaspora: Mobility, Connectivity, and Communication in a Globalized World." *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*. London: Univ. of Westminster. Vol. 1:1. 52-65.
- Uajit Virojtrairatt. 2004. Interview by author. Tape recording. Bangkok. Dec. 8.
- Ubonrat Siriyuvasek. 1994. "The development of participatory democracy: Raison d'être for media reform in Thailand." *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Sciences* 22:1. 101-114.
- 1999. "The Thai Media, Cultural Politics and the Nation State". *International Journal of Communications Law and Policy*. Issue 3, Summer 1999. 1-19.
- 2000. "Cultural Control and Globalized Culture." Working paper, Chulalongkorn University, May.
- 2001. "Regulation, Reform and the Question of Democratizing the Broadcast Media in Thailand." *The Public*. 8:2, 89-108.
- 2004. "People's Media and Communications Rights in Indonesia and the Philippines." Paper prepared for the Third Asian Public Intellectuals Workshop on the Theme Power, Purpose, Process and Practice in Asia. Fukuoka, Japan. Nov. 30 – Dec. 4.

- 2004. Interview by author. Tape recording. Bangkok, Thailand. Dec. 7.
- 2005. "A Geneology of Media Reform and Its Discourses." In *Is Media Reform Going Backward?* ed. Sopit Wangvivatana. Bangkok: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Thai Broadcast Journalists Association. 50-73. English translation by Suwanna Assavaroengchai.
- UNESCO. 1980. *Many Voices, One World: Report by the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problem*. Paris: Unesco.
- 2001. *UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*. Adopted by the 31st Session of the General Conference of UNESCO. Paris, Nov. 2.
- United Nations. Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. 2005. *Trends in Total Migrant Stock: The 2005 Revision*. <http://esa.un.org/migration> (accessed Oct. 14, 2007).
- United States. Department of Labor. Bureau of International Labor Affairs. n.d. *Thailand: Minimum Wage*. <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/media/reports/oiea/wagestudy/FS-Thailand.htm>. (accessed June 7, 2007).
- United States. Department of State. 2006. *Country Report on Human Rights Practices – Thailand*. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78792.htm> (accessed April 21, 2007).
- United States Embassy in Thailand. 2003. "U.S. Community Radio Veteran Conducts Workshops in Thailand, July 6-20, 2003." <http://bangkok.usembassy.gov/news/programs/2003/010commradio.htm> (accessed June 18, 2007).
- van Oeyen, Victor. 2003. "Challenges for Community and Popular Radio in Latin America." Presented at OURMedia III, Barranquilla, Colombia, May 17-21.
- Virgil, Jose Ignacio Lopez. nd. "Manual urgente para Radialistas Apasionados". Cited in *About Community Radio*. AMARC website. http://www.amarc.org/index.php?p=What_is_Community_radio?&l=EN (accessed Oct. 14, 2007).
- Voices 21. 2006. "A Global Movement for People's Voices in Media and Communication in the 21st Century". <http://www.comunica.org/v21/statement.htm> (accessed Oct. 29, 2006).
- White, Robert A. 1993. "The New World Order and the Third World." In *The Global Media Debate: Its Rise, Fall and Renewal*. ed. George Gerbner et. al. Norwood NJ: Ablex. 21-34.

Welsch, Wolfgang. 1999. "Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Culture Today." In *Spaces of Culture: City-Nation-World*. eds. Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash. Sage. 194-213.

Wichien Kuttawat. 2004. Interview by author. Tape recording. Bangkok. Dec. 9.

World Summit on the Information Society. *Plan of Action*. Document WSIS-03/Geneva/Doc5-English. December 12, 2003.
<http://www.itu.net.int/wsis/docs/geneva/official/poa.html> (accessed Jan 1, 2005).

APPENDIX A

The Kathmandu Declaration

Preamble

As governments, private corporations and international non-governmental organizations met in the worlds banking capital for the Second Preparatory Committee of the World Summit on the Information Society, the General Assembly of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters opened in Kathmandu, Nepal, a country in which only fifteen percent of people have access to electricity. This assembly of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters convened in Kathmandu in 2003 at a moment when our world is grievously threatened by rampant militarism, accelerated privatization of our most basic resources, religious fundamentalism, and extreme capitalism. These collective forces threaten all human rights as defined in the United Nations Charter on Human Rights. We find it inexplicable and indefensible that many nations have failed to sign this document more than fifty years after its creation. Most of the worlds people including those in Asia exist in conditions of abject poverty which can only be rectified by insuring that all people have access to water, food, shelter, the means of livelihood, and that their cultural and linguistic diversity is protected. AMARC considers that all of these rights are underpinned by the right to communicate as defined in Article 19 of the UN Charter on Human Rights which includes the opportunity for a free exchange of information and ideas for all people regardless of borders. This right is in great jeopardy where it is recognized and routinely infringed where it is not recognized, as the consolidation of ownership of mass media leaves the control of these domains in the hands of a few.

Despite these conditions or because of them, there are also many hopeful trends regarding rights of communication. The community radio broadcasting movement is rapidly growing including in areas such as Asia where there has been little development of this sector until now. AMARC and its community radio members and partners have been able to demonstrate the possibilities which the right to communicate embodies. They have directly contributed to progressive social change and social justice by providing access to those marginalized and disadvantaged by the mainstream media; have successfully created legislation for the sector in many countries; and have undertaken training projects which have built capacity and contributed to sustaining community access.

There are also openings for representatives of civil society including grassroots movements and non-governmental organizations to participate in global agenda setting in the communications realm. There are vibrant grassroots movements and popular actions emerging and making their presence felt in all global regions.

In light of all of these things, we, the General Assembly of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters declare the following:

Community Radio

We acknowledge and endorse the African Charter on Broadcasting which defines community broadcasting as that which is for, by and about the community, whose

ownership and management is representative of the community, which pursues a social development agenda, and which is non-profit.

We believe that broadcasting spectra constitute a part of the global commons which should not be privatized, rather that only use rights should be given and that community media should have first access.

We call on all nations and governmental authorities, particularly those in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Africa to create legislation which would provide access to all the electronic, especially to community radio in equal opportunity for all, with particular attention to the rights of women and children, and to provide the necessary support and training to make it viable.

We call upon all nations, governmental authorities and community radios to ensure access and ownership of all means of communications for women.

We call for regulation of frequency spectra for community radio such that it favors the development of this medium for the use of local communities.

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and Beyond

We consider the WSIS that is taking place in Geneva Switzerland in December 2003 and in Tunis, Tunisia in 2005 to be an important venue for highlighting the role of community media in the overall struggle for social justice and peoples empowerment.

We, along with other progressive media sectors and civil sector actors, abhor the threat to an open internet or the infringement of rights to privacy in the name of 'national security or a 'war on terrorism, and call on all governments and all social forces to oppose these threats whether corporate or governmental.

We consider that it is an established fact that community media, particularly community radio, have given communities the means of cultural expression, news and information, and local dialogue. Radio is the most widespread electronic communications device in the world and a unique means of reaching the worlds poorest communities. Community radio broadcasting is increasingly recognized as a bridge across the digital divide between those who have access to the worlds information resources and those who do not. We, therefore, urge all the participants in the WSIS process to recognize and support the role of community media in providing spaces for peoples voices to be heard in the formulation and implementation of national, regional, and international policies on information and communication technologies and in the construction of an information society which is globalized for the many rather than the few. Further, this approach must extend beyond the WSIS into the foreseeable future.

The Role of Community Media in Progressive Social Movements

We consider the emergence of social justice movements such as the World Social Forums to be essential in achieving the goals stated above and commit AMARCs resources to continued participation in them as a critical conduit for information about such events and actions. However, we regret that such movements have often tended to marginalize community broadcasting to the same degree that has existed in the governmental and corporate sectors.

We, therefore, call on the organizers of these movements to recognize and support the role of community media in providing spaces for peoples voices to articulate the ways in which they imagine that another world is possible, and to open a seat at the planning table for representatives of community broadcasters.

Conclusion

The General Assembly of AMARC is committed to the realization of the Right to Communicate in its broadest, most inclusive sense. We pledge to work to protect our members and those they serve from any infringement of this right and thereby to contribute to the securing of all the rights included in the United Nations Charter on Human Rights and those rights which have been ratified since its establishment. We will do so in the open, transparent and accountable manner which we demand from the other sectors with which we interact.

AMARC International Charter of Community Radios

Drafted and ratified by participant community radio broadcasters members of AMARC during its 8th General Assembly in Kathmandu, Nepal, February 26, 2003

We call upon AMARC International and AMARC members to strengthen all efforts in the following areas:

- Exercise the human right to communication and facilitate the full and equal access of all social sectors to radio and television, and other media, including new information & communication technologies
- (ICTs).
- Share to mission to democratise communications in order to guarantee freedom of expression and to contribute to equitable and sustainable development.
- Express the aspirations of civil society, especially those excluded from decision making, by age, gender and from the economic arena.
- Promote socio-cultural and linguistic heritage, independent from commercial and governmental interests, partisan political and religious proselytise.
- Represent the interests of all communities.
- Assist them to define themselves as non-profit civic organisations and to seek sufficient diversity in their financing, to prevent the compromise of their objectives.
- Offer quality programming services that is informative, educational, entertaining and are subject to community participation and evaluation.
- Operate as a platform for citizens participation, where their voices and perspectives can be heard and where diversity is encouraged.
- Defend fundamental human rights, gender equality, resist discrimination and promote the spirit of peace and mutual understanding.
- Maximise the use of available technologies by community media centres to enhance the capabilities of their participants.
- Practice participative democratic governance and transparent administration, respecting the rights of both their personnel and the community being serviced, including persons with disabilities as well as women and children.

- Guarantee participation of women at all levels, including those of decision-making.
- Act to promote harmony, co-operation and communication within our heterogeneous membership.
- Recognise the power of community radio and work to ensure that our members use it responsibly, particularly in conflict.

APPENDIX B

Closing Declaration of the Round Table on Community Media and Sustainable Development

Marrakesh, 21 November 2004

We, community media practitioners and stakeholders, meeting in Marrakesh, the 21 November 2004, at the first Round Table on Community Media and Sustainable Development;

Recognising that Community Media, that is media which are independent, community-driven and civil society based, have a particular role to play in enabling access and participation for all to information and communications, especially the poorest and most marginalized communities;

Noting growing recognition of the crucial contribution that community media can make to the achievement of the goals of the Millennium Declaration and that Community Media can be vital enablers of information, voice, and capacities for dialogue; Recognising that legal, regulatory and policy frameworks that protect and enhance community media are especially critical for ensuring vulnerable groups access to information;

Call on Governments to ensure that legal frameworks for community media are non-discriminatory and provide for equitable allocation of frequencies through transparent and accountable mechanisms;

Call for targets to be established for the opening up of broadcast licensing to allow for the operation of community broadcasting where this is not currently permitted; Insist that spectrum planning and regulation should ensure sufficient spectrum and channel capacity, and appropriate technical standards, for community media to develop in both the analogue and digital environment;

Call for a donor civil society partnership to invest in and support community-driven information and communication initiatives, using traditional media and new ICTs including projects that make provision for the poorest communities, for cultural and linguistic diversity and for the equal participation of women and girls;

Propose that this should include:

- Engagement of community media expertise in planning for media and ICT investment around development,
- inclusion of a community media element in all ICT investment,
- establishment of a Development Fund for Community Radio in Africa,
- encouragement of national level funds for community media support;

And agree to establish a Task Force on Funding and Resourcing Community Media to take forward these proposals and to evaluate their implementation.

APPENDIX C

Amman Declaration

Drafted and ratified by participant community radio broadcasters members of AMARC during its 9th General Assembly in Amman, Jordan, November 16, 2006

We, the participants in the 9th World Congress of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC 9) held in Amman, Jordan, from 11 to 17 November 2006;

Recalling Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media, and regardless of frontiers;"

Recalling United Nations General Assembly Resolution 59 (I) of 14 December 1946, which states that freedom of information is a fundamental human right, and General Assembly Resolution 45/76 A of 11 December 1990 on information in the service of humanity;

Acknowledging the Declarations of Windhoek (1991), of Alma-Ata (1992), of Santiago (1994), of Sana'a (1996), and of Sofia (1997) resulting from the UNESCO-sponsored seminars which assert the establishment, maintenance and fostering of an independent pluralistic and free press is essential to the development and maintenance of democracy and economic development;

Considering Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights which reaffirms the right that every individual shall have the right to receive information;

Considering that the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Declaration of Principles reaffirms the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, as well as those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of media are essential to the Information Society;

Noting that the WSIS Plan of Action calls for the provision of "support to media based in local communities and support projects combining the use of traditional media and new technologies for their role in facilitating the use of local languages, for documenting and preserving local heritage, including landscape and biological diversity, and as a means to reach rural and isolated and nomadic communities;"

Recognizing the powerful role that community radio plays in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by raising awareness of the key development challenges across the world and promoting peoples' participation in and ownership of development process;

Recalling that the women and media section of the Beijing Platform for Action calls for the increased participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication and urges

governments, NGOs and the media itself to promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media;

Recalling the AMARC Declaration of Principles adopted at the founding conference of AMARC in Managua (1988), the European Charter for Community Radios adopted at the founding conference of AMARC Europe in Slovenia (1994), and the AMARC International Charter of Community Radios (2003) and their expression of the organization's commitment to represent the interests of all communities;

Declare that:

1. The promotion and protection of peoples' communication rights are crucial in the free flow of information and ideas which are the pillars of a functioning democracy;
2. Communication rights are based on a vision of the free flow of information and ideas which is interactive, egalitarian and non-discriminatory and driven by human needs, rather than commercial or political interests;
3. Respect for pluralism, culture, language, and gender diversity should be reflected through all the media as a fundamental factor in a democratic society;
4. Communications media that help sustain the diversity of the world's cultures and languages should be supported through legislative, administrative, and financial measures;
5. Women's access to and participation in decision-making in the media should be guaranteed at all level,
6. Media plays an important role in highlighting and promoting women's role in conflict transformation, peace building and reconstruction and in expediting national, regional and international peace processes;
7. Community media plays an important role in strengthening cultural rights, and in particular, the rights of linguistic and cultural minorities, indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees by providing access to the means of communication;
8. The rights of indigenous peoples should be respected in their struggles for access and participation in communications media;
9. People with disabilities should be portrayed realistically and that their disabilities are explained accurately while at the same time promoting their access to media;
10. Independent media can play a significant role in achieving sustainable peace and promoting social development in the Middle East and North African region;
11. The continued expansion of transnational corporate media conglomerates and the concentration of ownership increasingly threatens plurality, including the existence of independent and community broadcasters;
12. New digital broadcast systems have led to re-planning existing frequency allocation and new approaches to regulation risk further marginalization of communication services run by and for citizens, communities and social organizations;
13. While the growing convergence between telecommunications, computing and broadcasting is increasing the number of potential users, the digital divide is also continuing to widen and within that divide exists a gender digital divide;

We call for:

1. All social actors including governments, NGOs and other members of civil society, the United Nations and other intergovernmental agencies to contribute in efforts to ensure just and equitable access to all communications media by all people;
2. The growth of local, community-based and independent media initiatives that promote pluralism, cultural, language, and gender diversity by instituting policy and legislation and providing administrative, financial and technical assistance;
3. The full implementation of the women and media section of the Beijing Platform for Action including the media provisions in the 2005 Outcome Document by governments, media industry bodies and civil society;
4. Support by governments, corporations and international institutions for the promotion of communication rights including the formulation and enforcement of telecommunications regulation in favor of the development of South-South communications infrastructure;
5. Allocation of a percentage of public funds for development projects be dedicated to the enhancement of local communications capacity;
6. Rules to prevent concentration of media ownership and the take-over of community broadcasting services by commercial companies and reservation of a portion of any new digital spectra for community broadcasters;
7. Establishment of standards, norms and measures at national, regional and international levels, to enable and assist the development of independent community broadcasting services;
8. Support for the development of digital systems, which are appropriate to the needs of community broadcasting services, assessment and monitoring of the impact of technological convergence and regulatory change on the community media sector, measures to assist adaptation of community broadcasters to media convergence and appropriate forms of new technology;
9. Preservation of existing analog frequencies used by community broadcasters until such time as a digital replacement is available; and allocation of part of the broadcast spectrum for self-regulated use by microbroadcasters;
10. The International Telecommunication Union to ensure that frequency planning, technical standards for telecommunications and radio, and development resources give a high priority to the needs of local communities and civil society;
11. International financial institutions to dedicate a percentage of loans and bonds to supporting community-based and independent media;
12. Recognition of the crucial role of community media in disaster relief and management and in emergency preparedness;
13. All governments that have jailed journalists for the practice of their profession to release them immediately and unconditionally. Journalists who have had to leave their countries should be free to return and to resume their professional activities. Those who have been dismissed unlawfully should be allowed to regain their positions.
14. Continue condemnation of the continued physical assault, threats, arrest, detention and other forms of harassment, against community radio broadcasters and other journalists.

We call on the community media sector to:

1. Monitor transnational corporations (TNCs) and launch international campaigns to raise consciousness about and develop strategies to halt the increasing control TNCs on our communications systems and structures;
2. Lobby for national and international measures to ensure new information and communication technologies provide affordable access to citizens and communities to establish new community media service;
3. Develop community media program exchanges and build solidarity and support for community struggles for human rights and social justice;
4. Promote and support the training of journalists, broadcasters, engineers and other media professionals, especially those working in rural and marginal urban areas; and
5. Educate civil society organizations, governments and regulators, and the general public on the policy issues of regulation, the importance of a sustainable and pluralist broadcasting environment, and the benefits of community media.

We, the members of the General Assembly of AMARC gathered here in Amman are firmly convinced that community media plays a specific and crucial role in enabling public participation towards a just and equitable information and knowledge society that includes the voices of the poor and marginalized. We recognize that the lack of proper enabling legislation is the single principle barrier to the further development of community radio. We call for community broadcasting to be recognized as a distinct media sector as a vital alternative to state owned public broadcasters and commercial private media. We assert the existence of a positive link between information communication technologies and community radio. We recognize that community radio sustainability is a global challenge and the in spite of the increasing positive experience of socially sustainable community radio, financial and technological sustainability remain challenges for community radio organizers. We view community radio as an initiator or accompaniment to social change that carries responsibility to be effective in facilitating the civil society development in democratic processes. We recognize the role community radio can play in facilitating women's inclusion and the recognition of women's rights, the reduction of poverty and promotion of sustainable development.

We are committed to the realization of our demands in this declaration and we pledge to continue our work for the promotion and protection of people's communication rights and all rights embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We call on the international community and all independent and community media advocates to contribute to the same.