

“We Struggle With Being ‘All Things To Everybody’”:

Negotiating Multiculturalism at KFAI.

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Abstract

This project explores KFAI – a non-profit, mostly volunteer based community radio station in Minneapolis, Minnesota – as a site of negotiation between assimilation and different types of multiculturalism. While KFAI’s mission of increasing understanding among peoples and communities by providing a voice to people ignored or misrepresented in the mainstream media corresponds to several theoretical conceptualizations of multiculturalism, various constraints of reality constantly push the station towards utilizing approaches that assimilate the difference. Based on a series of in-depth interviews with station’s paid staff and volunteers, author’s observations and the analysis of the listener survey report, the project reveals and discusses the major tensions between KFAI’s mission and everyday reality in areas of station’s programming, audience and internal relations among the staff and volunteers. Having determined the key areas of tension in station’s practices, the project also outlines the directions for future research.

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Introduction

This project emerged as a synthesis of the two areas of thought that have interested me in many different ways for a few years. The first area – the practices of community-based and other sorts of media that embody an alternative to the mainstream commercial media – captured my mind long before I started my academic work. As a media consumer, I was getting increasingly dissatisfied and frustrated with almost all aspects of the mainstream media, from content they provided, to ways they perceived and treated the audience, to the clear domination of one particular gender and ethnic/racial group in most media organizations. Many points discussed by the critical media scholars, whose works I became familiar with later, in graduate school, directly responded to most of my concerns and influenced, in certain ways, my mode of thinking in general and this project in particular.

The second area – the concept of cultural diversity and the idea of multiculturalism models as ways of making diversity work through incorporation of difference – also concerned me personally as well as from a research perspective. Growing up in one “melting pot” (The U.S.S.R. and then the Russian Federation), and later coming to another, very different “melting pot” as an international student, naturally made me wonder about the ways societies deal with difference. A brief but fruitful and certainly inspiring inquiry into the field of sociology made me think of the question of difference in terms of the relationship between the categories of solidarity and diversity, or, to use even broader theoretical terms, universalism and particularism.

For some time, these two streams of thought ran through my mind like two parallel lines; they did not quite intersect. Then I found KFAI – a community radio station in Minneapolis, Minnesota, with a mission of increasing understanding between peoples and communities by providing a voice for people from various social, racial and economic backgrounds, especially those ignored and misrepresented by the mainstream media.

When I looked at KFAI’s programming schedule I clearly saw the two parallel lines intersecting, especially when I thought of multiculturalism in a broader sense of the term, not being strictly tied to ethnic/racial diversity. The programming of this non-commercial, volunteer-based, definitely non-mainstream radio was nothing like the “melting pot.” Neither did it resemble any of the alternative media that serve particular ethnic/racial/gender/cultural groups and often face the problem of “reifying difference rather than supporting complexity.”¹ Instead, KFAI programming resembled something between a “salad bowl” and a “mosaic.” The station seemed like a place where difference was accepted, incorporated and celebrated. Moreover, the commitment to “increasing understanding among peoples and communities”² defined KFAI as a station that strived to foster dialogic understanding among the different groups in the community it served.

Several contemporary trends that are both national and global in their reach make it especially important to examine community radio from the perspective of the relationship between the particular and the universal, between multiculturalism and

¹ Annabelle Sreberny, “‘Not Only, But Also’: Mixedness and Media,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31, no. 3, (May 2005), 443- 459.

² KFAI mission statement, KFAI strategic plan 2005, KFAI Fresh Air Inc., <http://www.kfai.org/files/strategicplan2010.pdf>.

assimilation. First, the decreasing credibility of major traditional media outlets³ and the proliferation of all kinds of alternative, community, citizen and minority media,⁴ partly due to the rapid development of the new communication technologies, make these alternative media important actors in the media scene, as well as in the society at large. Second, while the development of these media may contribute to the development of participatory culture,⁵ largely through “giving voices to the voiceless,” often times they cannot resist the convenience of serving niche audiences. The narrow focus of those small-scale, special interest media outlets leaves no chance for developing channels and genres that would cross over the cultural divisions and foster dialogic understanding.⁶ All diverse societies at all times must confront the need to achieve understanding amongst the various groups, negotiating between diversity and solidarity, particularism and universalism. Our society is not exceptional in that regard. Increasing speeds of communication, transformations in communication patterns that often transcend national and cultural borders, shifting patterns of migration that bring together groups of people and values that have never come in contact with each other before – all these trends make the discussion of the relationship between the particular and the universal and the role and place of alternative media in it necessary and timely.

³ “Americans Spending More Time Following the News,” *Survey Reports, Section 5: News Media Credibility*, The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, September 12, 2010. <http://people-press.org/report/?pageid=1796>.

⁴ Mark Deuze, “Ethnic Media, Community Media and Participatory Culture,” *Journalism* 7 (2006): 263.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Sreberny, 443.

The goal of this project is to explore KFAI as a site of negotiation between the universal and the particular, between assimilation and different kinds of multiculturalism.

The following questions guide my research:

- How do KFAI staff and volunteers understand multiculturalism?
- How does KFAI programming reflect the staff's and volunteers' vision of multiculturalism?
- How does the KFAI audience correspond to KFAI's understanding of multiculturalism?
- How do the internal relations at the station, mainly between the paid staff and the volunteers, reflect their visions of diversity and multiculturalism?

Before exploring these questions, it is important to discuss and define the main theoretical terms that this project is grounded on, as well as examine the historical and conceptual background of the community radio. It is the history of the development of the community radio in the United States with which I start this project.

The Origins of Community Radio.

Determining a point of departure in the discussion of the history of community radio in the United States is a challenging task. As David Dunaway pointed out, "like radio itself, the beginnings of the non-commercial spirit in North American radio are difficult to delineate precisely. Does it begin with the first experimental broadcasts at the end of World War I, such as Professor Terry's at WHA in Madison? With the time provisions of ethnic broadcasters in the 1940s? With the campaign for public frequencies,

which resulted in the 1945 decision for a 20% set-aside of FM frequencies? Or outside of governmental institutions, in 1949, at KPFA-FM in Berkley?”⁷ While some community radio researchers start “a community radio story” with the story of KPFA-FM, others also discuss the historical, political and cultural transformations that preceded and potentially influenced the emergence of KPFA-FM and other early community radio stations in the United States.

William Barlow⁸, for example, traces the roots of the community radio to the post-Second World War period, and discusses two main sources that influenced the emergence of the community radio stations in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s.

First, urban commercial radio stations without network affiliations that “existed on the periphery of the radio industry,”⁹ started selling blocks of air time to ethnic broadcasters. Recent European immigrants – Germans, Polish, Russians, Italians, Jews and others – were the primary audiences of ethnic broadcasters. The immigrant communities needed ethnic programming in order to preserve ties with their homelands, maintain a sense of community and adapt to the new environment. Like all ethnic media, ethnic radio programs strived to fulfill a function that was later articulated in the ethnic media scholarship as “giving minority members a feeling of identity, increasing their social cohesiveness, and providing an escape from homesickness and the isolation of life in a strange or hostile environment.”¹⁰

⁷ David Dunaway, “Community Radio at the Beginning of the 21st Century: Commercialism vs. Community Power,” *The Public*, 5, 2 (1998): 88.

⁸ William Barlow, “Community Radio in the US: the Struggle for a Democratic Medium,” *Media, Culture and Society*, 10 (1988): 81 – 105.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Jacques Guyot, “Minority language media and the public sphere,” in *Minority Language Media*, eds. Mike Cormack and Niamh Hourigan, (Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto, 2007), 42.

The jobs created by the war also attracted large groups of African-Americans from the rural Southern areas to the urban centers. As African-American population in the large cities grew, broadcasters turned their attention to these previously underserved audiences. Another reason broadcasters turned to what at the time was labeled as ‘Negro market’ in the radio trade publications¹¹ was the rapidly increasing popularity of television, which resulted in radio losing audiences it used to serve, as these audiences turned to television. As Susan Douglas pointed out, “by the early 1950s radio was thought to be dead, a victim, like the movies, of television. ... by 1954 network radio, with its primetime programming that brought national stars to a huge national audience, was all but gone.”¹² As networks were shifting from radio to television, a large number of radio stations were losing advertising revenues, and thus they needed to seek new audiences, new markets. The first step broadcasters took was the proliferation of small independent radio stations, the orientation toward local, rather than national stations. The second step was the hiring of African-Americans “to devise new formats to attract Black listeners.”¹³ At the same time, a step towards granting African-Americans a right for radio ownership was taken, though it was not until 1949 when the FCC granted a Black applicant a license¹⁴ and not until the 1970s when the number of Black radio owners increased to double digits.¹⁵ African-Americans who started working at the radio stations introduced many elements of the radio programming that at time were revolutionary, like

¹¹ Barlow.

¹² Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 220.

¹³ Barlow, 84.

¹⁴ Catherine Squires, *African-Americans and the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 170.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the figure of a DJ or a ‘disc jockey’ as they were called, who “played the latest jazz, rhythm-and-blues, or gospel recordings ... and were ‘telling it like it is’ to their listeners.”¹⁶ By introducing new styles and genres of music, as well as new ways of listening to the music and connecting to the listeners through humorous, outspoken, and at times provocative talk, as well as by just making themselves heard on air, African-American DJs set a foundation for a principle that would later be articulated as ‘cultural diversity on air’, and would become a crucial principle of the operation and existence of community radio stations. Even though some of the radio programs run by the African-American DJs in the 1950s were criticized for lack of sufficient local news and cultural programming, as well as for perpetuating stereotypes about the tastes and behavior of Black audiences,¹⁷ African-American radio outlets, in Barlow’s view, “worked to meet the social needs of their listeners and to preserve their cultural traditions.”¹⁸ In addition, according to Douglas, “many radio stations provided a trading zone between the two [Black and White] cultures”¹⁹, since Black DJs were highly popular among young Whites at that time. Thus, even though the African-American radio stations or the radio stations that employed African-Americans in the post Second War period were operating on the advertising revenue, they set the ground for the development of some of the major principles of the community radio: local rather than national reach, access for and representation of the marginalized groups, and experimentation and diversity on air.

¹⁶ Barlow, 84.

¹⁷ Squires, 168.

¹⁸ Barlow, 84.

¹⁹ Douglas, 223.

A second condition that Barlow identifies as a “source of community radio’s origins”²⁰ was the “progressive opposition to the repressive political climate of the Cold War era.”²¹ It was in that environment of the “progressive opposition” when such principles of community radio as volunteerism, non-profit nature, and opposition to capitalism and mainstream politics started developing. When in 1945 the FCC made a decision to reserve twenty of the hundred available FM channels for non-commercial use,²² a few left-oriented political activists and commercial broadcast renegades led by Lew Hill, “an ardent pacifist and a refugee from the mainstream broadcast journalism,”²³ started a process, which led to the launch of the first in the United States listener-supported, non-commercial, community-oriented radio station in Berkley, California in 1949. The articulated purpose of KPFA was to “encourage peace, social justice, promotion of the labor movement, and support of the arts.”²⁴ KPFA’s programming included news and public affairs, academic lectures and debates, drama and literature, children’s shows, classical and international folk music. What KPFA founders were trying to do was to combine “a highbrow cultural format with an emphasis on social activism and community involvement.”²⁵ KPFA was listener-supported, and its focus on the listeners, which, as Lewis and Booth state, at that time was unusual,²⁶ defined KPFA’s, and later all community radio stations’, philosophy and approach to broadcasting. Lew Hill described his philosophy in a report written in 1957: “The much-

²⁰ Barlow, 85.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Peter Lewis and Jerry Booth, *The Invisible Medium: Public, Commercial and Community Radio* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 116.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Lewis and Booth, 117.

argued characteristic of American radio which finds ‘serious’ subjects treated, if at all, in a way that will accommodate any degree of indolence in the listener, has arisen from the prior belief that the radio audience consists in numbers... The KPFA experiment set out to express an essentially opposite view. The audience was believed to consist of an individual, whose intention was to listen.”²⁷ Hill’s vision of community radio centered on four characteristics:

- The active participation of volunteers;
- That, with regard to listeners, quality rather than numbers was paramount;
- That listeners should listen selectively rather than around the clock which suggested the patchwork quilt of specialty shows;
- That volunteer staff does not constitute cheap labor, but an extension of the listening community itself.²⁸

The orientation towards the listeners, as well as the perception of the volunteers as an extension of the listening community, in other words, the use of listeners as producers, contributed, at least according to Lewis and Booth, to the adoption of the ‘patchwork quilt’ format of programming. KPFA encouraged selective listening by sending each of its listener-sponsors a copy of a monthly printed program schedule and by reinforcing the splintering of the public into distinct interest groups through its on-air announcements. The ‘patchwork quilt’ format of programming became a model of programming for the majority of community radio stations later on. At the same time, it became one of the stumbling blocks for the community broadcasters when it came to bringing the ideas of

²⁷ Lewis and Booth, 117.

²⁸ David Dunaway, “Community Radio at the Beginning of the 21st Century: Commercialism vs. Community Power,” *The Public*, 5, 2 (1998): 89.

listener involvement in production and listener exposure to a variety of programs together. This issue will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

KPFA also determined the principles of governance that the majority of modern community radio stations employ. KPFA was owned by a non-profit corporation, the Pacifica Foundation, which was controlled by the board of directors. Initially, the board of directors was comprised of the station's staff members. However, the staff control of Pacifica "led to a great deal of infighting and internal strife."²⁹ After the "internal strife" experience, outside parties, not the paid staff, were invited to serve on the board of directors, and the role of the paid staff was modified from governance to management and operation of the station.

While the foundations of the community radio were established in the 1940s and 1950s, with such principles as diversity and experimentation on air, inclusion of the marginalized groups in radio production process, localism, volunteerism, non-profit nature and opposition to the mainstream politics beginning to develop, the political, economic and cultural changes of the 1960s and the 1970s strongly influenced further development of the community radio.

Community Radio in the 1960s and 1970s.

The active involvement of the community radio stations in the civil rights movement in the 1960s and the anti-war movement in the 1970s contributed to the visibility, recognition and popularity of the community radio stations throughout the United States.

²⁹ Barlow, 86.

It was the Pacifica broadcasters who brought the civil rights movement to the airwaves in the early 1960s with a series of documentaries, interviews and live reports from the front lines of the struggle.³⁰ As Barlow pointed out, “the sounds of protests and the voices of Afro-American civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, Fannie Lou Hammer, Ella Baker, James Farmer, Stockely Carmichael and Malcolm X became familiar to Pacifica listeners.”³¹ The leaders of the Pacifica network of community radio stations also made several attempts to include the members of the marginalized groups in the production and operation of the stations. Some attempts were successful, like the launch of the WPFW-FM in Washington DC in 1977. Although a legal battle for frequency allocation lasted nine years, WPFW became first Pacifica’s first minority-oriented and controlled broadcasting outlet, serving the large Black population living in the nation’s capital.³² Other attempts to incorporate diverse populations into community radio ventures were less successful. For example, the leaders of another community radio network KRAB, which was initiated and run by Lorenzo Milam, a former Pacifica volunteer, attempted to launch and run a station called KDNA in a “squalid black ghetto in Saint Louis, Missouri”³³ in the late 1960s. While it was a “noble experiment,” the station soon ceased to exist for the reasons described by Barlow in the following passage:

It was a noble experiment, but the fledgling station and its young white staff quickly fell on hard times. The station's equipment and other valuables were routinely stolen by neighborhood junkies; female staff members were sexually assaulted and robbed coming and going from the station; the local press attacked the KDNA staff as communist subversives; the station was raided on several occasions by the local police who claimed to be searching for drugs. By the early

³⁰ Barlow, 88.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Barlow, 90.

³³ Ibid. 94.

1970s Lansman and his fellow-idealists gave up and sold their station to private investors.³⁴

There were also cases when the attempts to include the minorities in the operation of the stations failed, along with the failure of the radio stations to broadcast, because of the internal struggles. KCHU-FM, which started broadcasting in Dallas, Texas in 1975, went off the air after “two stormy years of racial conflict between the white founders, Hispanics and Afro-Americans.”³⁵

Some stations, however, managed to get through the internal conflicts, including the racial ones. KPOO-FM, another station of the KRAB network, founded in San Francisco, California in 1972, also known as ‘Poor People’s Radio’ went through the conflicts similar to the ones KCHM-FM experienced:

Although established to serve San Francisco's inner-city poor and minority populations, it was initially staffed and controlled by white community radio workers. This situation caused a series of conflicts between the white staff members and the minority volunteers, most of whom were black. The situation came to a head in the mid-1970s when protests initiated by Afro-American volunteers and listeners led to major changes in the station's organization and programming. KPOO's board of directors was reconstituted, giving Afro-Americans control over the station, and most of the white staff was replaced.³⁶

By 1980, KPOO became the country’s first multi-ethnic community-oriented radio station, as it had broadened its base of participation by including San Francisco’s Hispanic, Asian, Filipino and Native American populations.³⁷

In addition to supporting the civil rights movement and working towards diversifying its staff and audience, community radio stations became actively involved in

³⁴ Barlow, 94.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 94-95.

the anti-war movement in the 1970s. While many progressive commercial FM radio stations were supportive of the Vietnam War protests as well, community radio stations, along with the ‘underground press’ of the era took the initiative of actively opposing the war and the official position of the Johnson administration and the Pentagon. The stations of the Pacifica network were the first US media who questioned the official government version of the war by dispatching a reporter Chris Koch to North Vietnam to produce a series of documentaries on the war as experienced by the other side.³⁸ A sympathetic account of the struggle from the perspective of the North Vietnamese, provided by Chris Koch, resulted in Pacifica being charged with ‘aiding and abetting the enemy’ from the side of the Johnson administration and its allies in the mainstream media. However, it did not stop Pacifica, and in 1972 it broadcasted a report written by journalist Seymour Hersh on the atrocities committed by American soldiers against Vietnamese civilians in the village of My Lai.³⁹ In addition, Pacifica stations made its airwaves available to those who were actively involved in the anti-war movement, just like they did for the supporters and leaders of the civil rights movement. Pacifica provided a forum to those opposing the war in Vietnam to express their views and organize protests. As Barlow pointed out, “the civil rights and anti-war struggles of the 1960s and 1970s thrust the Pacifica stations into the forefront of a diverse and often chaotic movement to establish democratic alternatives to the dominant American mass media.”⁴⁰

In addition to questioning the government and providing alternative views of the events covered by the mainstream media in ways that confirmed the official government

³⁸ Barlow, 88.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 89.

position, community radio stations in the 1960s and 1970s started becoming more counter-cultural in terms of their programming format. Pacifica's traditional highbrow cultural format was about to be taken out of the ivory tower and moved into the streets.⁴¹ The shift towards a 'free form' programming style was in fact a larger trend in radio programming of the 1960s, a trend that Susan Douglas called the 'FM revolution:'

It was nothing like Top 40. A voice as rich and slow as aged honey read the poetry of the Soviet dissident Yevgeny Yevtushenko as rock music played in the background. Then the Doors played for nineteen minutes straight. Another DJ played Bob Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues" and reflected on how its symbolism compared with that in Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet*. The news was read over the guitar strains of Telemann. "Let it happen," urged the quintessentially cool, reassuring voice of Rosko, "'cause it's gonna happen anyhow... reality, eeeemmm-brace it. The mind excursion... the true diversion... the hippiest of all trips... join me." If you tuned in to 102.7 on the FM dial in New York City after October of 1967, you heard a new WNEW, and a new format, called free form, underground, or progressive rock. ...This was the FM revolution, another moment in radio's history when uncertainty and flux in the industry allowed for experimentation on the air.⁴²

The 'free form' programming style, which Barlow described as "a collage of live interviews, political commentary, dramatic sketches, poetry, satire, public events and listener call-ins... an open-ended exchange between a creative host, equally creative guests and the audience, punctuated with recorded music,"⁴³ was adopted by community radio stations as they were becoming more oriented toward the youth and the counter-culture of the youth. Moreover, the free form style allowed for even more diversity and experimentation on air, and for the inclusion of even more participants and opinions – the principles that guided the development of the community radio throughout its history. Even though the counter-cultural shift significantly broadened the spectrum of music

⁴¹ Barlow, 87.

⁴² Douglas, 256 – 257.

⁴³ Barlow, 87.

formats commercial radio stations began to include in their playlists, some community radio stations began to focus on ‘filling the gaps’ not covered by any other radio stations. In practice, according to Barlow, “it meant pre-Beethoven and post-Stravinsky classical music, jazz, international folk and ethnic music.”⁴⁴ Lorenzo Milam, discussing the music format of the KRAB Nebula stations, pointed out: “we play material that would be suicide on commercial stations but which is a sheer delight for us.”⁴⁵ Broadcasting material that listeners would not be able to find elsewhere became another important distinguishing feature of community radio stations.

The number of community radio stations was growing in the 1960s and 1970s. In addition to Pacifica and KRAB Nebula stations, other kinds of community radio stations outlets, including bilingual stations, African-American stations, multi-ethnic and progressive white stations, began to emerge.⁴⁶ Growing numbers as well as growing visibility and influence of the stations due to their involvement in civil rights and anti-war movements led to the founding of the National Federation of Community Broadcasters (NFCB) in 1975. NFCB was established to coordinate the growth and development of community radio throughout the country. Barlow summarized NFCB’s tasks as follows:

- facilitating the exchange of information and programming among member stations;
- collecting data and conducting research on community radio in the US and elsewhere;

⁴⁴ Barlow, 94.

⁴⁵ Lorenzo Milam, *The Radio Papers from KRAB to KCHU* (San Diego; California: Mho & Mho Works, 1986), 61-2.

⁴⁶ Barlow, 95.

- planning an annual NFCB conference;
- lobbying federal agencies and Congress on behalf of community radio's various constituencies;
- supporting the growth and development of new community radio stations.⁴⁷

Membership in the NFCB was open to any station which:

- was incorporated as a not-for-profit organization;
- was governed by a group broadly representative of the community it serves;
- had a stated and demonstrated commitment to the participation of women and Third World people in all aspects of its organization and operation;
- had a stated and demonstrated commitment to access by the general public and not to any single group, organization or institution;
- sought to reflect a diverse range of culture and opinion found in its community through its broadcast operations.⁴⁸

After the establishment of NFCB, community radio started clearly distinguishing itself from not only commercial radio stations but also from public radio stations.

Lorenzo Milam pointed out in his discussion of radio's development in the United States that "in the beginning American radio was wild and free; then the 'toads' and the 'bores' took over and it became a desert."⁴⁹ The 'toads' for Milam were the commercial radio stations, or "the commercial interests which had swallowed up American radio"⁵⁰ and the 'bores' were the educational radio stations that "trained future broadcasters in the same

⁴⁷ Barlow, 95.

⁴⁸ NFCB bylaws, Article One, Section 1.01, quoted in Lewis and Booth, 120.

⁴⁹ Lorenzo Milam, *Sex and Broadcasting: a Handbook on Starting a Radio Station for the Community* (San Diego; California: Mho & Mho Works, 1988), 19.

⁵⁰ Lewis and Booth, 119.

mould”⁵¹ and that set the foundation for the emergence of the National Public Radio in the United States.⁵² While NPR was established as a non-profit agency with the goal of providing the listeners with quality programming of cultural and educational value, the NPR stations, as Barlow puts it, “adopted a fairly cautious approach to program content and community access, becoming professional, and in most cases elitist, operations with high-brow cultural formats that were tightly controlled from the top down.”⁵³ It was NPR’s hierarchical and centralized system of management, as well as its close ties to the government that made NPR, in the view of the community radio leaders, different from community radio stations. In distancing themselves from NPR, the members of NFCB articulated the key features of the community radio as the following: *control* by the local community, typically in a board of management; a *commitment to community access*, especially for those normally excluded from the mass media; *use of volunteers* and maintenance of a *volunteer training program*; *participation of paid staff and volunteers* in station’s policy making process, and the *definition of a clear purpose* to which all can relate.⁵⁴

Thus, the 1960s and 1970s were instrumental in shaping and reaffirming some of the main features of the community radio, which distinguished it from commercial and from public radio stations.

⁵¹ Lewis and Booth, 119.

⁵² Barlow, 91.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Lewis and Booth, 121.

Community Radio from 1980s to the Present Time.

As much as the 1960s and 1970s were the decades of development, growth and expansion, the 1980s was a difficult time for community radio. The Reagan presidency era of “conservative counter-insurgency efforts”⁵⁵ brought both economic and political challenges to the ‘liberal’ mass media. Public radio and community radio found themselves in the same boat. According to Barlow, “the Reagan agenda for public broadcasting was two-fold: cut back the federal funds allocated to public broadcasting agencies and encourage conservatives both inside and outside government to scrutinize public radio and television programming – ever vigilant against liberal media hegemony.”⁵⁶

Conservative Reagan administration kept close watch of the community radio programming with the help of right wing media watchdog groups like ‘Accuracy in the Media.’ The group accused some community radio stations of supporting the communist and Marxist-oriented movements in Nicaragua and El Salvador,⁵⁷ after which the stations “tightened up its procedures for making editorial comments and presenting guests with controversial viewpoints on the air.”⁵⁸

The massive funding cutbacks, which had a major impact on the National Public Radio affected community radio stations as well. By 1980s most community radio budgets consisted of three parts: one-third came from local institutional support, one-third

⁵⁵ Barlow, 96.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 97.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 99.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

from listener and business support, and the final portion from federal monies.⁵⁹

Elimination of the government-sponsored grants, the Civilian Employment Training Assistance grant program being one of them, put a large number of community radio staff members out of work, since the grant allocated funds for the new community radio staff workers, especially women and minorities.⁶⁰ Some stations, especially ones that operated in poor rural areas where relying on listener financial support was impossible, went off air or moved to the areas where the potential subscribers had higher incomes. A decrease in federal funding pushed community radio stations towards the search of alternative sources of funding. First, more stations decided to accept ‘non-commercial advertising,’ now also known as ‘underwriting,’ even though such change in the policies was not an easy one for community broadcasters. However, while some saw it as a major violation of one of the core principles of community radio – the non-commercial nature, others shared the ‘do what you have to do to keep the programs coming’ view.⁶¹

Second, the stations started reassessing their relationships with the listeners; as Lewis and Booth put it, “community radio stations have learned that listeners, even to alternative radio, can no longer be taken for granted.”⁶² For the first time community radio leaders started thinking about the importance of being “skilled at identifying [listeners’] needs and satisfying them.”⁶³ As the Information Director of KBOO, Portland, Oregon pointed out in the Program Guide in 1986, “Listener support is the freest way we can support ourselves. ... The key is to design programming which we have

⁵⁹ Dunaway, 89.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Lewis and Booth, 123.

⁶² Ibid., 122.

⁶³ Ibid.

good reason to believe will appeal to listeners.”⁶⁴ Even though the shift towards building an audience was met with a great deal of resistance by some community radio members who opposed the ‘commercialization of community radio’, others perceived it as a matter of survival and insisted that community radio needed to respond to the larger political and economical changes by reviewing and reassessing some of its prior policies.

The challenges of the 1980s influenced what Dunaway referred to as “rationalization” of community radio in the 1990s. One side of the “rationalization” process was the merging of the smaller stations into the larger ones, as it was the larger stations that received federal support. Smaller stations had to compete for the Corporation of Public Broadcasting grants based on their audience size, not their mission or content.⁶⁵ As Schatz pointed out in 1996, “by 2000, roughly 60 stations... must increase their measured listenership or their local-raising base, to continue to receive CPB grants.”⁶⁶ Facing the pressure of competition, community radio stations (and in this case public radio stations as well) had to continue “changing their discourse, speaking of markets rather than audiences, and consumers rather than listeners.”⁶⁷ The shift toward accepting and using audience research as an essential management function⁶⁸ referred to by some scholars as a “research revolution”⁶⁹ marked the development of community radio in the 1990s. The revolution was surrounded by many debates. Like in the 1980s, some

⁶⁴ Ross Reynolds, *Why KBOO Needs to Build an Audience*, KBOO Program Guide, July/August 1986. In Lewis and Booth, *The Invisible Medium: Public, Commercial and Community Radio* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989).

⁶⁵ Dunaway, 91.

⁶⁶ Robin Schatz, “Public Radio Pressed to Turn its Success to Independence,” *New York Times*, March 25, 1996.

⁶⁷ Dunaway, 91.

⁶⁸ Alan Stavitsky, “Guys in Suits with Charts”: Audience Research in U.S. Public Radio,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Radio*, 39, 2 (1995), 177 – 189.

⁶⁹ Giovannoni, *Radio Intelligence, 1988-1990*. (Washington, DC: CPB, 1991).

perceived the need for audience research and for implementation of strategic approaches to community radio operation as means of survival; others, however, insisted that the necessity to contend with commercialization undermines the mission of community radio.⁷⁰ As one independent producer pointed out in 1994, “obsession with audience size, revenue and format have replaced the spiritual underpinnings of public radio, which sought to maximize intellectual and moral growth, passion, variety and pleasure.”⁷¹

It is the tension between the mission that has been driving community radio from the 1960s and the economic and political constraints that community radio has been facing since the 1980s that define the current state of community radio in the United States. Dunaway, for example, identifies four major areas of contradictions in modern community radio practice: finance, format, governance and process.

In the ‘finance’ area two factors work in opposition: access, which implies providing open access (in terms of both production and consumption) for the local community members, especially for the members of the marginalized groups, and audience-building, which implies utilizing strategic audience research approaches. While open access corresponds to the original aesthetic and moral imperative of community radio’s founding principles, it often does not help generate the funds necessary for a community radio station to exist. Audience-building, in contrary, helps to increase the amount of audience subscriptions, yet undermines the core principles of community radio by clearly defining the criteria for listener inclusion and exclusion.

⁷⁰ Dunaway, 92.

⁷¹ Stavitsky, 176.

In the 'format' area eclecticism/localism and standardization/national format work in opposition. Eclectic format, often also referred to as a 'patchwork quilt' is an almost inevitable result of the open access approach. The more community members with their various tastes and approaches are involved in production of the radio programs, the more diverse but also less predictable the format of the station is. Another problem with eclecticism that Dunaway points out is that an open access radio implies a dangerous tendency of turning into what he calls a "hobby radio," where "the frequent assumption is made that serving one's own tastes is the same as serving the listening community's."⁷² National format, in contrast, has a wider audience appeal and higher predictability. However, nationally produced and distributed programs completely exclude the option of community members' participation in content production. In addition, standardized programs rarely provide content that is not available elsewhere.

The 'governance' area is marked by opposition between the participatory and hierarchical decision-making structures. The participatory structure corresponds well with the ideals of community radio that are based on the ideas of democratic participation, inclusion and information transparency. Dunaway, however, points out that "though rarely acknowledged, the overarching orientation of the participatory station could be termed anarcho-syndicalist: those who contribute the most to the station's workload determine its policies."⁷³ While acknowledging the value of volunteer involvement in making of the key decisions at a community radio station, Dunaway also defines three problems of participatory structure:

⁷² Dunaway, 98.

⁷³ Ibid., 99.

- 1) those who vote on policies are rarely the ones to carry them out;
- 2) those who vote often lack the background to complex issues, sometimes being swayed by oratory;
- 3) voting by majority is often an unrealistic and impractical way to make necessary decisions; when such meetings take place only annually, or with complete freedom of participation, they are untimely and subject to meeting-packing.⁷⁴

Dunaway sees hierarchical structure as more realistic and efficient, especially with the limited resources that community radio stations usually have. On the other hand, he points out that those who are involved in community broadcasting usually have “the anti-authority bent,”⁷⁵ which Dunaway sees as a central challenge to the hierarchical structure.

The last area of tension in the modern community radio practice is defined by Dunaway as ‘process,’ where the amateur/activist commitment and professional commitment work in opposition. Community radio stations rely on volunteers who, as Dunaway puts it, “are there because they like what they hear and want to help, or to get the word out on some topic of great importance to them.”⁷⁶ While the volunteers are almost always people of “good heart and diverse experience”⁷⁷ and their desire to be a part of community radio reaffirms the reality of principles of access, inclusion and

⁷⁴ Dunaway, 99.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 100.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

participation, many of them lack the skills necessary for producing high quality programs. Dunaway writes:

Those who arrive at a station with a cause requiring publicity have little patience for required training programs and paperwork for scheduling equipment and airtime. They are there to get the word out; not to add new skills or a profession. Radio is one way for them to reach out. Issue-oriented, their patience for process may be limited; they might just as easily write an op-ed piece for the newspaper. Such attitudes often frustrate those making a career in broadcasting, to whom such esoteric as microphone placement, consistent recording levels, and digital editing are important signatures of quality. It is a thankless task to try and convince a new producer that even if the words are brilliant but the sound quality poor, a program should not be aired.⁷⁸

Involvement of professionals in community radio content production raises the quality of the material produced. However, professionals often move away from non-commercial radio, and as Dunaway puts it, “are tied to the volunteer ethos but [leave] volunteerism behind.”⁷⁹ In addition, having professionals only be in charge of the production and dissemination of information at the community radio undermines such core values of community radio as open access and involvement of community members. It also strictly defines the criteria of inclusion and exclusion that in this case are based on the level of professionalism.

Community radio as a mission-driven medium that operates within the market economy constantly finds itself having to negotiate between its idealistic core values and the constraints of reality. It also seems that the ideals that community radio is driven by, at least the ones of open access, content variety and democratic participation, are tied to the process of diversification, whereas the constraints of reality seem to pull community

⁷⁸ Dunaway, 100.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

radio toward standardization. Community radio with its “patchwork quilt” programming format and its commitment to inclusion of people with various backgrounds in community radio operation mirrors, in certain way, the diversity of the society and the specific communities that the community radio stations serve. However, the contradictions that the community radio stations deal with revolve around the question of how to make diversity work in the environment that requires at least some standardization in order for a media outlet to exist and function. Thus, community radio is a site where the negotiation between universalism and particularism, to use sociological terms, takes place. It is the discussion of these two principles, as well as the concept of multiculturalism as way of understanding the different ways in which universalism and particularism work, that I now turn to.

Diversity and Multiculturalism.

Diversity and multiculturalism are often being used as synonyms in the popular public discourse. While the two concepts are very close to each other, there are also some differences that are important to discuss in the context of this project.

Diversity, or cultural diversity, as it is also often labeled, refers to the *presence* of a variety of cultures and cultural perspectives within a society.⁸⁰ The society in which diversity takes place is heterogeneous in all senses of that word.⁸¹ However, diversity in a society does not automatically make a society multicultural. As Leidman and Wiggins

⁸⁰ Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

⁸¹ Mary Beth Leidman and Bradley E. Wiggins, “Developing a Paradigm for Describing Diversity and Multiculturalism in Modern America,” *Journal of Social Sciences*, 6, 1 (2010), 55 – 59.

point out in their discussion of diversity and multiculturalism in America, “American society has not become multicultural although there is diversity in the public sphere of American society. In reality multiculturalism is a misnomer.”⁸² While diversity is more about difference per se⁸³, multiculturalism refers to the various ways in which differences are viewed in the society and in which a society deals with differences by acknowledging and accepting them.

Multiculturalism has been widely discussed by many scholars in different contexts. The most common framework for looking at multiculturalism has been based on the juxtaposition of multiculturalism and assimilation.⁸⁴ In this framework, assimilation – a way of dealing with difference by removing it – represents a trend toward universalism, and multiculturalism, in turn, embodies particularism. Thus, multiculturalism has been conceptualized through the discourse that placed universalism and particularism in opposition to each other. This project, however, will rely on the theoretical framework developed by Hartman and Gerteis, who attempted to move away from a one-dimensional conception of difference that places multiculturalism in opposition to homogeneity or unity.⁸⁵ Hartman and Gerteis identify three forms of multiculturalism: cosmopolitanism, fragmented pluralism and interactive pluralism. The researchers discuss the similarities and differences of these three forms based on two dimensions. First, what kinds of cultural bases for cohesion – shared substantive bonds and practices or shared norms and adherence to common legal codes – each form of

⁸² Leidman and Wiggins, 55.

⁸³ Parekh, 2.

⁸⁴ See, for example, Schlesinger (1991), Miller (1998), Hughes (1993).

⁸⁵ Douglas Hartman and Joseph Gerteis, “Dealing with Diversity: Mapping Multiculturalism in Sociological Terms,” *Sociological Theory*, 23, 2 (June 2005), 218 – 240.

multiculturalism focuses on.⁸⁶ Second, what type of interactions – individual or group – each model emphasizes as the basis for social association.⁸⁷ While acknowledging that “assimilationism is not a form of multiculturalism,”⁸⁸ Hartman and Gerteis place it within their framework, arguing that “the placement [of assimilationism] in the framework highlights its complex (and potentially evolving) relationship with multiculturalism in all its forms.”⁸⁹

Assessing assimilationism on the two proposed dimensions, Hartman and Gerteis point out that “on the first dimension, this vision rests on the importance of substantive moral bonds as the basis for moral cohesion.”⁹⁰ On the second dimension, assimilationism strongly denies the mediating role of groups, and the connection between the individual and the social whole is more or less direct.⁹¹ That is, it is not the groups that are expected to assimilate but the individuals are expected to shed their previous markers of group identity and adopt those of the social whole.⁹² Assimilationism deals with difference by removing it and emphasizes cultural homogeneity and conformity.

The first form of multiculturalism that Hartman and Gerteis describe – cosmopolitanism – recognizes the social value of diversity, but it is skeptical about the obligations and constraints that group membership and societal cohesion can place on individuals.⁹³ Cosmopolitanism emphasizes tolerance and individual choice rather than mutual obligations as bases for social cohesion. Moreover, membership in the social

⁸⁶ Hartmann and Gerteis, 222 – 223.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 223.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 224.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 226.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 227.

⁹³ Ibid., 228.

whole is only one, and not necessarily the most salient, source of identity for the individuals involved. Group identification, according to the cosmopolitanism vision, is weak, and the group qualities are rather neutralized than negated, which makes cosmopolitanism similar to what sometimes is termed “ethnic hyphenation.”⁹⁴

A second form of multiculturalism – fragmented pluralism – “focuses on the existence of a variety of distinctive and relatively self-contained mediating communities.”⁹⁵ The value systems under fragmented pluralism may be divergent or even directly opposed across groups. Thus, on the first dimension, this vision emphasizes procedural norms rather than common moral bonds as basis of social cohesion on the level of society as a whole. On the second dimension, fragmented pluralism places heavy emphasis on the role of groups rather than individuals as being instrumental for social association. If for cosmopolitanism group membership is a matter of individual choice, for fragmented pluralism group membership is seen as essential, not voluntaristic.⁹⁶ Another important characteristic of fragmented pluralism is that “its focus tends to be less on rules of interaction than on group rights... such as legal rights to maintain separate institutions or practices.”⁹⁷ The role of state under this vision becomes one of a mediator who “manages the discrepant right-claims of groups without imposing any substantive moral claims of its own.”⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Alexander, “Theorizing the ‘Models of Incorporation,’” *Sociological Theory*, 19, 3 (2001), 237 – 49, 245.

⁹⁵ Hartman and Gerteis, 229.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 230.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

The last form of multiculturalism – interactive pluralism – is similar to fragmented pluralism in a sense that it also emphasizes the importance of groups as primary basis of association in society. However, it “posits the need to cultivate common understanding across [different groups] through their mutual recognition and ongoing interaction.”⁹⁹ Cross-cultural dialogue and exchange becomes the defining feature and value to be cultivated under interactive pluralism vision. This process of an ongoing cross-cultural interaction is viewed as a basis for social cohesion. The substantive moral order rather than procedural norms becomes the foundation of social cohesion. However, this moral order is understood to be emergent – not something that “is” but something in a constant state of becoming.¹⁰⁰

Applying Hartman and Gerteis’ multiculturalism framework to practices of community radio that are aimed at “making diversity work” allows determining at least two major areas of tension. The first area concerns the contradictions described by Dunaway, where the core values of community radio correspond to different elements of all three forms of multiculturalism, and mainly to recognition and acceptance of differences. At the same time, the political and economical constraints of reality pull community radio practices toward unification and standartization, or, in other words, toward dealing with difference by removing it – the main principle of assimilationism. The contradictions in this area work in opposition, as Dunaway pointed out, which in a way justifies Hartman and Gerteis’ approach of looking at assimilationism and

⁹⁹ Hartman and Gerteis, 231.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 232.

multiculturalism as forces that are working in opposition but are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

The second area of tension concerns the differences between fragmented pluralism and interactive pluralism when the two visions are applied to community radio mission and practices. The “patchwork quilt” format of programming, determined by the open access value of community radio represents the fragmented pluralism version of multiculturalism. However, community radio also stresses the importance of interaction between the different groups and members of communities. By providing diverse content, community radio strives to facilitate the cross-cultural dialogue and understanding among diverse groups that are represented in a community. Thus, interactive pluralism becomes an ideal, often articulated in the missions that community radio stations are driven by. The tension, however, revolves around the question of whether maintaining diversity of content helps facilitate the cross-cultural dialogue.

Methods

At an early stage of this project I envisioned interviewing the station’s staff and volunteers as my primary and only research method. I wanted to learn about KFAI staff’s and volunteers’ experiences at the station and understand their perspectives on the questions of this project’s interest, and thus the in depth, semi-structured interviews seemed like the most efficient research method. While developing the interview questions and working on the application for the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of my research, I made an initial contact with the station. My advisor introduced me via email to

Ahndi Fridell - KFAI's News Director. When I came to the station and had an informal conversation with Ahndi, she gave me a tour of the station and introduced me to the members of the staff and volunteers who were around at that time. It was during that first visit when I felt the power of the station's unique culture. I realized that the project could benefit significantly if I employed some elements of ethnographic research in it.

Other commitments as well as time constraints that I had at that time did not allow me to conduct *fieldwork* as it is defined by Wolcott¹⁰¹, when the researcher makes a commitment to be present on site full time or at least long time and the understanding is gained as a result of "an intimate, long term acquaintance"¹⁰², like in the works of Pedelty¹⁰³, Kozinets¹⁰⁴ or Fonseca¹⁰⁵. Neither could I truly engage in a participant observation by, for example, becoming a KFAI volunteer or intern, following the works of Squires¹⁰⁶ or Durán¹⁰⁷ who "experienced and recorded events in social settings"¹⁰⁸ while "being in the presence of others on an ongoing basis and having some status for

¹⁰¹ Harry F. Wolcott, *The Art of Fieldwork* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, c2005).

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Mark Pedelty, *War Stories : The Culture of Foreign Correspondents* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁰⁴ Robert V. Kozinets, "Utopian Enterprise: Articulating the Meanings of *Star Trek's* Culture of Consumption," *Journal of Consumer Research* 28, (2001): 67-88.

¹⁰⁵ Isabel Fonseca, *Bury Me Standing: The Gypsies and Their Journey* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).

¹⁰⁶ Catherine Squires, "Black Talk Radio," *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 5, no. 2 (2000): 73-96.

¹⁰⁷ Robert J. Durán, "Legitimated Oppression: Inner-City Mexican American Experiences with Police Gang Enforcement," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 38, (2009): 143-168.

¹⁰⁸ Herbert J. Gans, "The Participant Observer as a Human Being: Observations on the Personal Aspects of Fieldwork," in *Field Research: A Source Book and Field Manual*, ed. R.G. Burgess (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 53-61.

them as someone who is part of their lives”¹⁰⁹. However, I did what Wolcott called “borrowing of fieldwork techniques”¹¹⁰ and, following the works of Jimenez¹¹¹, Kaplan¹¹² and Shi,¹¹³ I attended various station meetings and interacted with my interviewees before and after the interviews (sometimes my interviewees shared the most interesting information after the interviews, when the recorder was off or when seeing me again in a different setting).

Over the course of three months I attended one Board meeting, three Programming Committee meetings, and one special all-station meeting. I took scratch notes and headnotes¹¹⁴ during the meetings, and turned them into fieldnotes – “gnomic, shorthand reconstructions of events, observations, and conversations that took place in the field”¹¹⁵ upon coming home. Usually the meetings’ minutes became available for downloading on the KFAI website within a week after the meeting, and I read and added the minutes to my fieldnotes. Observing the meetings, taking and later analyzing the field notes and the meetings’ minutes allowed me to gain a better understanding of the nature

¹⁰⁹ Thomas R. Lindloff and Bryan C. Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, c2002).

¹¹⁰ Wolcott, 59.

¹¹¹ Thomas Jimenez, “Mexican Immigrant Replenishment and the Continuing Significance of Ethnicity and Race,” *American Journal of Sociology* 113, no. 6 (2008): 1527-1568.

¹¹² Deborah N. Kaplan, “Dispatches from the Street,” *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 1, no. 4 (2008): 269-290.

¹¹³ Yu Shi “Chinese Immigrant Women Workers: Everyday Forms of Resistance and “Coagulate Politics”” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 5, no. 4 (2008): 363-382.

¹¹⁴ Lindloff and Taylor.

¹¹⁵ John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988):123.

and dynamics of internal relations at the station. It also helped me assess the station's internal diversity, learn about the most important issues on KFAI's agenda, and get a feel for the overall atmosphere at the station.

Additionally, I subscribed to the KFAI Forum list serve, which sometimes served as a continuation of the meetings. The conversations and the debates started at the meetings moved on line, where staff and volunteers shared their opinions and views on various issues. I copied, saved and then analyzed the online conversations relevant to this project.

It was also at the meetings where I met and recruited most of my interviewees. Meeting people in person before the interview and having an informal conversation about KFAI, their role at the station, their thoughts on the issues discussed at a meeting helped establish trust and rapport needed for both asking people to participate in my research and for interviewing them later.

The interviews were semi-structured and contained many follow up questions. Though the core questions were designed a few months before the interviewing process had started, and the order of the questions was determined as well, the interviewing process itself was guided by what Lindloff and Taylor call an *Interview Guide*.¹¹⁶ An *Interview Guide* allowed for more flexibility in asking the questions in terms of their

¹¹⁶ Lindloff and Taylor describe the interview guide as follows: "Interview guides simply consist of groupings of topics and questions that the interviewer can ask in different ways for different participants. There may be a preferred order for asking the questions, but the interview guide does not dictate that order. Nor does the guide dictate how the questions will be asked, because the social dynamics of the interviewing change from one participant and context to the next. With an interview guide, the researcher enjoys the freedom to ask optional questions or to go down an unexpected conversational path. Especially when it comes to informants whose experiences and expertise may vary widely, the interviewer can reshuffle topics and questions in order to find the best fit. Interview guides also allow the researcher to adjust to the verbal style of the participant. Questions can be rephrased, broken up into smaller question units, or altered in other ways in order to achieve the goals set out by the researcher." (p.195)

order, or even their content, since the expertise and the background of the people who I interviewed varied significantly.

I interviewed all four members of the paid staff: the Executive Director, the News Director, the Membership and Volunteer Director and the Programming Director, as well as ten KFAI volunteers - a very diverse mix in terms of their age, gender, ethnicity/race, role at KFAI and occupation.

Each interview turned out to be about forty minutes long, with a couple of interviews running longer. I then transcribed all recordings and read the transcripts closely searching for recurrent themes, similarities, differences and possibly contradictions.

While attending the meetings and interviewing KFAI staff members and volunteers, I realized that analysis of some of the KFAI documents and materials could help contextualize the information gathered from the interviews and observation. KFAI has a very high level of documentation transparency, so I found all necessary materials on the station's website. If I could not find something on the website or needed a more recent version of a material, I emailed or asked in person someone from the staff (depending on which material I needed) and they shared the information with me. I read and analyzed the following materials:

- Meetings' minutes, including the ones from previous meetings in order to better understand the conversations that took place at the meetings that I attended during my fieldwork;
- KFAI Strategic Plan;

- KFAI Governance Policy;
- KFAI Volunteer Training Handbook;
- An audio documentary on KFAI history.

Lastly, while I only planned on interviewing station’s staff and volunteers and relying on their description and assessment of KFAI’s listening audience, it was during the time of the data collection for this project when KFAI staff initiated a listener survey. The survey was conducted by Cincinnatus, an independent group. The survey report became available at the end of spring to the members of the KFAI Forum list serve, and was later posted on the website. I analyzed the Listener Survey Report and compared it to the interview data, which added valuable insights to the major findings of this project.

The research methods that I used allowed me to not only gather information crucial for exploring the main questions that guide this study. They also allowed me to discover and examine a number of contextual insights that are important to keep in mind when exploring KFAI as a cultural site. I put together these contextual insights and created what is often referred to as a “thick description”¹¹⁷ of KFAI, which constitutes the next section of this project.

KFAI as a Cultural Site

KFAI Mission and Core Values

KFAI mission statement reads as follows: *KFAI is a volunteer-based community radio station that exists to broadcast information, arts and entertainment programming*

¹¹⁷ Clifford Geertz, “Description: Toward and Interpretive Theory of Culture,” *The Interpretation of Culture*, (NY: Basic Books, 1973).

for an audience of diverse racial, social and economic backgrounds. By providing a voice for people ignored or misrepresented by mainstream media, KFAI increases understanding between peoples and communities, while fostering the values of democracy and social justice.

The role of the mission in determining the dynamics of almost all processes at KFAI – from programming to governance, to communication with the audience – is very significant. Every staff member and volunteer that I interviewed for this research project brought up and emphasized the idea that KFAI “stays true to its mission” in all situations, and that all decisions at the station are guided primarily by the mission. At the same time, conversations about shortening the mission statement took place at various station meetings from time to time. The idea also came up in the interviews, where some people insisted on narrowing the mission statement for the purpose of convenience, while others liked it the way it is: a broader mission statement, in their opinion, allows for more flexibility and inclusion in terms of programming choices and/or news content.

KFAI identifies its core values as:

- ◆ Inclusiveness and Diversity
- ◆ Community and Volunteerism
- ◆ Authenticity and Originality
- ◆ Globalism and Localism

KFAI identified its core values in 2006, when the Strategic Plan for 2006-2010 was developed at the station. While the strategic plan was future oriented, it was grounded on the principles that guided KFAI throughout its history. Thus, examining the

history of the station can help gain a deeper understanding of KFAI's nature as a community radio station. KFAI's history can also help contextualize some of the problems the station is encountering now.

KFAI History

The story of KFAI goes back to 1973, when a few determined individuals decided to bring a community radio station in Minneapolis to life. As was the case with many other community radio stations in the United States, the idea of having an alternative media emerged as a result of dissatisfaction with the existing mainstream media, kinds of information being communicated through the mainstream media, and the limited access that certain communities had to media at that time. As one of the founders of KFAI pointed out in a retrospective documentary produced in 2003 – the year of KFAI's 25th anniversary, - “everybody wanted something different than what was already on the radio, which at the time was very pop music oriented, top 40 oriented, very little attention to the community, local affairs, public affairs, minority communities.”¹¹⁸ Social movements of late 60s, early 70s created an atmosphere in which an underground media, an alternative media was important. As another founder of KFAI noted, “Fresh Air radio, I think, came out of a combination of the anti-war, civil rights, co-op organizing neighborhood development movement. All of these things had a lot of the same people working in them and just a nucleus of people took an interest in this particular idea and pushed it forward, and ultimately it happened.”¹¹⁹ It took much energy and determination to “push forward” the idea of starting a community radio station. First, a spot for a new

¹¹⁸ 'People Powered Radio: Twenty-five Years of Fresh Air', documentary, KFAI Fresh Air Inc., Minneapolis, 2003. <http://www.kfai.org/archives/special-features/25anndoc>.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

radio station had to be found: “The interesting problem back then was finding a spectrum to put these stations. The interesting thing about the non-commercial [radio station] is that you can put a station anywhere you can find space for it. And that meant a lot of pretty intense engineering work.”¹²⁰ Finding a spot in the spectrum was the first step, followed by filling applications with the FCC, constructing a studio, and getting a group of volunteers to set in a motion a support system to put and keep a radio station on the air: “To get the application process started, there wasn’t a great need for a lot of people; there was need for some skills, there was need for some money, there was some need for commitment, and there was also then the need to start forming a larger group, so then when you got... when Fresh Air got the permission to start building, and to start looking for going on the air, that there would be people to start doing the program, there would be people with ideas.”¹²¹

One of the KFAI volunteers described the initial process of starting KFAI as “a tough thing to work through,” as a process that entailed “a lot of ups and downs, a lot of people to deal with , a lot of personalities.”¹²² However, it was not only about dealing with external institutions and personalities; there were some tensions among the founders and volunteers of the future community radio station as well: “You know, I think everybody brought a slightly different vision to the table, and I have to say that most of it was shared but I do remember early days of KFAI being on air. I remember the very very tense or intense internal struggles about what the content ought to be and what was the

¹²⁰ 'People Powered Radio: Twenty-five Years of Fresh Air', documentary, KFAI Fresh Air Inc., Minneapolis, 2003. <http://www.kfai.org/archives/special-features/25amdoc>.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

right kind of material to put on the air, what was over the top, what was too extreme politically perhaps or socially or culturally or artistically. So as any artistic or political organization there were internal struggles about the vision.”¹²³

As an old time KFAI volunteer recalls, it was hard to find a consensus even for choosing call letters for the emerging radio station:

“People often ask where did KFAI come from, and I distinctly remember one of those weekly Monday board meetings in the basement of Walker Church where was a chalk board in the room and one day we decided that we had to pick our call letters. We just got our construction permit okayed, and we filled the black board with call letters and I don’t remember them all, I wish we had taken them all down but the only one that everyone could finally gradually agree to was KFAI and FAI stands for Fresh Air Incorporated. There were a lot of other cuter ones but nobody could... we couldn’t get a 100% agreement, so it was the consensus finally, the KFAI. And those call letters were owned by coast guard ship, so we had to get permission from the captain of the ship to take the ship’s call letters and he had to go get some different ones.”¹²⁴

The consensus was reached and KFAI founders started building studios at the attic of the Walker Church in Minneapolis. The group chose the church to be KFAI’s first home because the pastor of the Church was one of the principles involved in the process of getting KFAI on air.

By 1978, after 5 years of legal entanglements and FCC challenges, KFAI went on air, broadcasting 10 watts from studios in Walker Church, “where mice and bats to keep the programmers company was challenging but the all-volunteer staff of over 100 people managed to work through all the problems and bring community radio to the Twin Cities.”¹²⁵ The vision of KFAI founders and volunteers back then was grounded on the idea of giving access to alternative voices, to the voices of people who have not been

¹²³ ‘People Powered Radio: Twenty-five Years of Fresh Air’, documentary, KFAI Fresh Air Inc., Minneapolis, 2003. <http://www.kfai.org/archives/special-features/25amdoc>.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Milestones 1978 – 2007, KFAI Fresh Air Inc, http://www.kfai.org/files/milestones_1978-2007.pdf.

represented in the mainstream media: “I would say that my vision, and I think our vision as the early founders, if you will, was to have a station where people had access, and a decent franchise, and the people without access to mainstream media could come in and deliver their dreams, their opinions, or their information, or their art or their music to the Twin Cities community.”¹²⁶ For the first time in the Twin Cities media scene, women were given an opportunity to make their own program. As one of the producers of the “We Want You To Know” show – a show that was produced by women and for women, recalls, “At that time, in 1976 and 1978 you didn’t hear women’s voices even doing the announcing on the radio, so I just wanted them to be sort of flooded, once a day, with some period of time during that day when you would hear music created by women or an announcer would be a woman.”¹²⁷

KFAI also became a major media outlet for the immigrant communities in the Twin Cities. In 1981 “Gao Hmong” – a program that brought a regular program of music, culture, poetry, and news to the Hmong community, started airing on KFAI weekly. In the coming years KFAI would serve more immigrant communities of the Twin Cities, including various groups from East Africa.

In 1984 a Twin Cities reporter wrote: “After six years of listening in cars, huddling in basements, standing on chairs and pledging in phone booths...,” KFAI Fresh Air listeners could finally hear their favorite radio station. KFAI started transmitting 125 watts from the Foshay tower in downtown Minneapolis. A year later, in 1985, KFAI started broadcasting in stereo.

¹²⁶ ‘People Powered Radio: Twenty-five Years of Fresh Air’, documentary, KFAI Fresh Air Inc., Minneapolis, 2003. <http://www.kfai.org/archives/special-features/25anndoc>.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

In 1986 KFAI moved to new studios and offices above Butler Drugs at Lake and Bloomington in Minneapolis. Five years later KFAI moved again, this time for a longer stay, to the Bailey Building at Cedar Riverside. The new KFAI home had studios, newsroom, record library, staff offices, a kitchen and meeting rooms. Along with moving to a new, larger home in 1991, KFAI started expanding its signal reach. In 1994 KFAI got a second frequency; a translator was installed to rebroadcast station's signal to St. Paul. This meant that people could hear their favorite radio station on two frequencies – 90.3 FM in Minneapolis and 106.7 FM in St. Paul. The addition of the 106.7 FM frequency meant the potential for more listeners. However, KFAI membership numbers started dropping and the funds the station was receiving from its members started to decrease. The situation pushed station's staff and volunteers to critically examine the ways in which KFAI was serving its community. One idea that resulted from this examination was the rearrangement of the programming grid, which at the time resembled a "patchwork mosaic," into a more predictable format. A former KFAI general manager recalls:

"The program committee was definitely the leader on that but, you know, myself as a station manager took a look at ways that people use the radio, and we really undertook to learn something about how to make the station more accessible to more people. And it became very clear, looking at the ways of people using the radio, and the way our station was structured, [that] our station was just structured in a way that worked well for individual programmers, who had their own times, possibly, but not well for listeners who didn't know when things were happening. We did put out a schedule but it became increasingly clear to us, the more we learned about how people use radio that they weren't using radio by sitting and looking at the schedule. They were turning on the radio at certain times a day, when they were doing certain types of things, and listening to what was on at that time. And so we decided that it was really important to, even though we've never lost our commitment to volunteer programming, to the diversity of programming, but we thought if we could arrange all those things in an order that would

allow people to have a better sense of what was going to be there when they turn on the radio, that people would be more likely to turn KFAI on.”¹²⁸

The proposed change was met with resistance by some of the volunteer members, as well as by some listeners. KFAI staff, Board and the programming committee were trying to include everybody in the process of decision-making regarding the changes in the program grid: “So many long, long meetings until nine, ten, eleven, twelve at night, often meeting two or three times a week. Every decision that we made in the creation of that grid, from both the creation of each of the strips to placement of individual programs, was done by consensus. And in between meetings, the consensus makers, the programming committee meetings, were meetings as a station as a whole. I think at that time there were about 240-250 volunteers either engaged with or doing programs themselves. You know, there was a necessity to have meetings, to involve everybody at the station in that decision making process.”¹²⁹

However, volunteers felt that the process was managed by the staff, Board, and programming committee more than by the station as a whole; they felt excluded. One of the volunteers commented:

“Volunteers were really ticked off about the way things were going. And the Board had put out a process it was going to follow. And volunteers were just beginning to realize that this was serious and that they didn’t like it. And actually I think a meeting had been called or something, when in September the Board saw the proposal of the block programming, and passed it, which none of us accepted because it wasn’t the process that was put out. And so after the Monday night Board meeting, the minutes were put out there on the bulletin board, which everybody was reacting to. I mean, people were either playing music that was like ticked off, or they were saying sideways comments that were cryptic to just about anybody who wasn’t a programmer. But it was like people were starting to go through the first wave of “there is this change happening” and whether the

¹²⁸ 'People Powered Radio: Twenty-five Years of Fresh Air', documentary, KFAI Fresh Air Inc., Minneapolis, 2003. <http://www.kfai.org/archives/special-features/25amndoc>.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

change is happening is good or not good, it is incredibly disempowering the way the change is happening.”¹³⁰

Although the changes in programming grid were supposed to make the grid more predictable and thus more convenient for listeners, some listeners were very unhappy with the proposed changes:

“I used to be a fervent listener of Fresh Air. I listened to it all the time. I had a coffee mug for every single year, and I always pledged, and the Fresh Air was a really big important part of my life. And then after that I think that... yeah... I didn't really listen, I didn't get up at 5am to listen to Catherine, and then... I really hate the block programming. I used to love hearing rock music in the morning or in the evening, or hearing blues... you know, I really hate if I'm going to listen to the rock, it has to be from three to five. I think I went through a period of really hating Fresh Air and feeling that it's irrelevant to me.”¹³¹

Nevertheless, change in the programming grid took place at the station.

Interestingly, there is no mention in the history of the KFAI of whether the changes in the programming grid helped increase the membership or what kind of effect this change produced apart from splitting the “KAFI family” into groups, which held different opinions regarding the change. KFAI's approach to managing the station seemed to be rather intuitive than strategic until the 2000s.

The 21st century brought both new opportunities and new challenges to KFAI. One of the first challenges came when Minnesota Public Radio introduced the Current – a non-commercial, member-supported radio station - to the Twin Cities scene. The Current was designed to be a station that only played music, with its slogan being “Every day deserves a soundtrack.” The Current focused on alternative, non-mainstream music, which made it a direct competitor to KFAI's music programming. Having realized the

¹³⁰ 'People Powered Radio: Twenty-five Years of Fresh Air', documentary, KFAI Fresh Air Inc., Minneapolis, 2003. <http://www.kfai.org/archives/special-features/25anndoc>.

¹³¹ Ibid.

presence and the power of a strong competitor, KFAI moved towards making its programming content even more diverse by introducing more public affairs programs and more programs for Twin Cities ethnic and foreign language communities. KFAI also started developing its first strategic plan in 2006, where the station's mission, core values, vision and strategies were outlined and the organizational objectives and tactics throughout 2010 were set.

In 2007, right after approving the strategic plan, KFAI launched its website, which, in addition to containing different information about KFAI, also provided listeners with an option of listening to KFAI online, including access to the archives of all programs.

In the same year, KFAI relocated its transmitter from the Foshay Building to the IDS Center, which resulted in significant power boost, from 125 watts to 900 watts. However, the relocation of the transmitter also resulted in two new problems. First, the direction of the signal had changed; the signal became very strong in the North East, but extremely weak in the South, which led to the loss of audiences residing in the South. Second, moving the transmitter up to a higher IDS Center building put KFAI signal among other, even stronger radio signals, causing frequent interruptions.

In the past five years, KFAI experienced a significant drop in listenership and membership, which directly affected station's budget since the station is almost entirely listener-supported. Currently KFAI is going through a process of restructuring its program grid again in order to serve its listeners better, and, as a result, increase listenership and membership. The process of change seems to resemble one that took

place in the 80s in terms of bringing to the surface the disagreements and the conflicts of different views, perspectives, opinions and potential solutions that different people at KFAI have. The issue will be discussed in greater detail in the analysis section. For now, however, it seems important to discuss key aspects and processes that shape the station.

The Board and Politics

KFAI is governed by a volunteer community Board of Directors, managed by a small professional staff that currently consists of four people, and is operated by almost four hundred volunteers.

Members of Board of Directors are responsible for policy and budgetary planning decisions. The Board develops station and organizational goals and evaluates the performance of the Executive Director and accomplishment of station priorities. Board members are elected from listener members and volunteer members by their constituencies for a two-year period. In order to be a Board member, one must contribute \$25 minimum to \$500 or more to KFAI annually; volunteer members must volunteer at the station or on one of the board committees, contributing nine hours of time over a three-month period leading up to the elections. Board members must be at least 18 years of age, and U.S. citizens or legal aliens (FCC requirement). Board members are required to commit to an average of ten hours per month that includes attending monthly Board and committee meetings, as well as assisting with fundraising activities.¹³²

¹³² Frequently Asked Questions for Fresh Air, Inc. Board of Directors Candidates, KFAI Fresh Air Inc., http://www.kfai.org/files/Info_FAQs_for_Appl_for_Board_Candidacy2009a.pdf.

The Board also elects the officers – President, Vice President (two positions), Treasurer, and Secretary – at the beginning of the year, during the January Board meeting. The candidates for the officer positions are nominated by the Board members and are elected by a majority vote. The first Board meeting that I attended, in January of 2010, happened to be the one during which all officers for the upcoming year were elected. Board members took turns nominating individuals for particular positions. One Board member nominated himself. Another Board member nominated a person who was absent from that meeting. The impression that the Board elections made was that everybody knew in advance and/or took for granted, who was going to be nominated and elected. Also, there was one candidate for each position, and all members voted in favor of electing the nominated individuals. The Board meeting was rather formal and ceremonial, which Board members joked about even before the meeting started. A few people told me “I hope you don’t get bored at our Board meeting.” As I learned later, after attending other KFAI meetings (primarily the meetings devoted to the changes in programming grid), the ceremonial nature of the Board meetings was rather an exception from the way most meetings occurred at KFAI. Another element that stood out at the Board meeting as one very different from an impression KFAI made on me as an organization, was the Board composition in terms of the diversity of representation. Even though the section in the “KFAI Volunteer Handbook” that talks about the Board of Directors states that “KFAI actively seeks to achieve diversity of gender, skill, social and economic background on its Board of Directors,” nine out of eleven 2010 Board members are white men. Board members themselves expressed a concern about the

diversity on the Board during the election process, when a woman was nominated and elected for a Vice President position, and an African-American man was nominated and elected for a Board Secretary position. Both nominations were received with great enthusiasm, and other Board members and officers expressed a hope for more diversity on KFAI Board in the future.

The Board meets once a month to discuss major issues facing KFAI, to hear from station staff, review the minutes of last month's meeting, and hear the concerns of anyone who wishes to attend. The Board also receives a report from each of the Board Committees, which include the Finance Committee, the Board Governance Committee, and the Nominations/Elections Committee. The Board takes action, as necessary, on items that are brought to its attention. Motions are made and items discussed by all participants. Board members then vote to determine the outcome of a motion. The motion may be approved, disapproved or tabled and sent to committee for more work. Board meetings generally last two hours and are open to public.¹³³

Executive Director and Paid Staff

Board of Directors hires KFAI Executive Director. The Executive Director, in turn, has the power to hire the paid staff. The number of positions and titles of paid staff have varied and continue to change based on station needs and the availability of funds and qualified candidates. Currently KFAI paid staff consist of four members – the Executive Director, the News Director, the Programming Director and the Volunteer &

¹³³ Frequently Asked Questions for Fresh Air, Inc. Board of Directors Candidates. Information for Applicants for Board Candidacy - Fresh Air Board of Directors, KFAI Fresh Air Inc., http://www.kfai.org/files/Info_FAQs_for_Appl_for_Board_Candidacy2009a.pdf.

Membership Director. Until 2009 KFAI also had a Marketing Director and an Underwriting Director working at KFAI part time. Both positions are open now, and KFAI staff, mainly the Executive Director and the Programming Director, manage the marketing and the underwriting activities.

Volunteers

KFAI is operated by almost four hundred volunteers. Volunteers perform a wide variety of tasks at the station: host radio shows, train new volunteers, host KFAI table at the community events KFAI sponsors, answer phones during the pledge drives and during the shows, produce evening news, actively participate in KFAI marketing and fundraising events, organize records in the records library, serve as radio equipment engineers, volunteer at the reception desk, maintain KFAI website. KFAI defines itself as volunteer-driven radio station. As KFAI Programming Director put it in one of the interviews, “it is all volunteer run; the volunteers produce the material, which is probably the biggest part that sets us from other public radio stations locally and nationally.”¹³⁴

Anybody can become a volunteer at KFAI. There are, however, some formal steps in the process. First, a person who would like to become a volunteer must review a list of open positions (a list is available on KFAI website, as well as upon a phone or email request) and decide if these positions fit well with the volunteering role the person wishes to pursue. Then, a person must fill out a New Volunteer Profile, where she or he is asked to provide contact information and information about the different skills that the person can bring to KFAI, and interests that the person has. Next, after the Volunteer &

¹³⁴ Adam Mehl, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, February 22, 2010.

Membership Director reviews the person's information, the person is invited to come to KFAI and start volunteering. The new volunteer and KFAI staff sign a Letter of Agreement. As KFAI Volunteer Handbook states, "Volunteers are required to sign the Letter of Agreement to demonstrate knowledge of the expectations of KFAI volunteers. Members of the KFAI staff are also required to sign the Letter of Agreement, to promote and sustain respect for the time and work volunteers give to KFAI in service of its mission."¹³⁵

When reviewing applications, Volunteer & Membership Director tries to match the applicant's skills and talents with the nature of work that open positions entail. However, as one of the volunteers that I interviewed pointed out, it does not always work out in a desired way: "At the [volunteer] meeting where I was three people said that they want to work in the library; it ended up just me working and I was not one of three original ones. When you become volunteer here you have to put all your skills out on a table, and be open to the fact that they may actually not need any of that and tell you to do something completely [different]."¹³⁶ My interviewee said that she did not mind doing something else and looked at it as an opportunity to learn a new skill but she also added that "that kind of open-mindedness does not happen automatically with all people,"¹³⁷ and recalled a conversation with the Volunteer & Membership Director who said that

¹³⁵ "How to begin volunteering at KFAI," KFAI Volunteer Handbook, KFAI Fresh Air Inc., p.6. http://www.kfai.org/files/VolunteerHandbook08_0.pdf.

¹³⁶ Sara, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 4, 2010.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

“there may be twenty people coming to the meeting, and maybe five, which will stick. And out of these five, three or four, which will continue being active volunteers.”¹³⁸

KFAI asks each new volunteer to make a commitment of six months to a given position. After the six month period, volunteers have an opportunity to either take on a new position or continue in their current role. Volunteer positions usually require a time commitment of about two hours, once a week. However, there is some flexibility as long as the Volunteer & Membership Director is notified in advance about the necessary schedule adjustments. Volunteers record their hours on the Volunteer Record Log at the front desk, so the Volunteer Coordinator can track their participation. Tracking volunteers' hours is needed for KFAI's annual audit, for the right to participate in Board of Directors and Program Committee elections, and as important information to be included in the proposals for funding grants.

Audience

KFAI defines its audience broadly as “people who live in the Twin Cities metro area who are community-based, intellectually curious, enjoy diverse music, and are multiculturally-oriented.”¹³⁹ Community for KFAI is comprised of people who live in the area within the station's signal reach. KFAI defines community in geographic rather than in any other (for example, demographic) terms because the station's commitment to diversity allows producing content for very different populations that may not share anything in common except for the geographic area they reside in. The absence of an

¹³⁸ Sara, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 4, 2010.

¹³⁹ KFAI Fresh Air Governance Policy, KFAI Fresh Air Inc., <http://www.kfai.org/files/KFAIFreshAirGovernancePolicy.pdf>.

audience that is clearly defined in demographic terms allows for a maximum inclusion but at the same time creates a number of challenges for the station. I will discuss the problem of inclusiveness versus extreme fragmentation later in the Programming section. Another interesting aspect to note in regard to KFAI's perception of community in geographic terms is that although KFAI introduced an option of the audio streaming on the internet in 2007, which allowed KFAI to achieve national and international reach, majority of KFAI listeners, as the latest listener survey indicates, choose the traditional radio broadcast option when listening to the station, and do reside in the area of KFAI's signal reach.

KFAI also breaks down its constituencies into four main categories, taking the role they play in supporting the station as a main criterion. These four constituencies include listener-members, non-member listeners, volunteers and underwriters.

Listener-members are people who listen to KFAI and are members, which implies that they support the station financially by contributing at least \$25 per year (base membership rate). Non-member listeners are people who listen but do not contribute financially, although they might make one-time donations to the station, or participate in pledge drives. Volunteers are people who actively participate in day to day operation of the station, which includes a wide variety of tasks, from answering the phone at the reception desk to hosting a radio show. Underwriters are businesses that support KFAI by placing on air short (twenty to thirty seconds) paid announcements about their business. Currently KFAI has about thirty underwriters.

Although KFAI distinguishes between its different constituencies, in reality the differentiating border is very fluid and people can belong (and in most cases do) to more than one constituency. For example, one person can be a listener, a member, and a volunteer at the same time. However, identifying different constituencies helps KFAI develop different communication strategies depending on which audience they refer to.

With KFAI defining itself as a “voice of community”, a “people powered radio,” a radio station that has strong ties with the community it serves because it is the community itself that operates the station, it was surprising to hear from almost all people I interviewed that KFAI needs to do a better job at communicating with its audiences. Each staff member who I asked about different ways in which KFAI gets feedback from its listeners, named only phone calls and email messages as the primary, and in fact only, ways of communicating with the listeners, adding that this is the area KFAI needs to improve on. For example, when I asked KFAI Executive Director how they determine if KFAI content meets the needs of the community, she answered: “That’s based on feedback from listeners. And I would honestly say that that’s a place where KFAI needs to make some additional adjustments. We need to have a way where listeners can regularly give us feedback about what they’ve heard. It’s difficult... It’s a difficult proposition. We encourage our programmers to give out a telephone number, to ask people to call, so that they can give feedback. I think we are at the stage where we could better use our website to have a listener comment section where someone could send in information when they are hearing it or right after they have heard it. And we will have to

find some other ways to become stronger in gathering listener feedback. There is room for improvement.”¹⁴⁰

The KFAI News Director, when asked about finding a balance between what KFAI thinks people need to hear and what people want to hear, answered: “It is a huge struggle. And I ruffle with it because I get very little feedback on our newscasts. There is no formal mechanism for feedback. We get some feedback through these listener surveys but it is not a regular ongoing thing. So we do not really have a good dialogue with our listeners as to what they want and if we are providing that or not providing that.”¹⁴¹

Programming Director also stressed the need for KFAI to have a regular ongoing dialogue with its listeners when talking about the listener survey KFAI put out in February of 2010: “We are hoping to make it [the survey] more regular, actually. They’ve done surveys in the past and focus groups in the past but not for a while. We want to get more feedback from our listeners because we see this decline after five years, and we realize we have not really been talking to our listeners as much as we need to be. It is really important to do that because that is who we serve and ultimately those are the people who donate to us. And we became sort of inwardly focused and not asking questions outside. So we are trying to make it more regular process, so we can get this feedback and understand what’s happening and know that, you know, are we doing this right, are we doing that right?”¹⁴²

KFAI uses Arbitron ratings to measure its audience, and to get quantitative information on such people’s listening habits as their preferences for KFAI and other

¹⁴⁰ Janis Lane-Ewart, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, February 18, 2010.

¹⁴¹ Ahndi Fridell, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, March 3, 2010.

¹⁴² Adam Mehl, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, February 22, 2010.

stations, the times during which people listen most and least, how long people listen to KFAI in general and to particular programs. While Arbitron is considered to be “the best tool [KFAI] has to look at pure number of listeners”¹⁴³, all staff members recognize its main flaw of not encountering for the immigrant populations, who constitute an important segment of KFAI audience. When I asked how KFAI reaches to the immigrant populations, all interviewees answered that it is done primarily through the hosts of the ethnic/foreign language programs, who are “really connected to their audiences.”¹⁴⁴ In addition, KFAI reaches to immigrant communities by attending their meetings and events, as well as through participating in some of the community projects that those communities are involved in.

Programming

In the *Organizational Ends* section of the *Governance Policy*, KFAI defines its programming as “the principal product of Fresh Air Inc.,” which “shall be mission-driven.”¹⁴⁵ The programming is divided there into two major categories: public affairs and music. Public affairs programming is described as “program services [that are] regional, informative, and entertaining, with a strong emphasis on listener participation, portraying issues and events through perspectives representative of our region.”¹⁴⁶ Music programming is described as “programming [that is] distinct, unique and of high quality. It [is] intellectually and emotionally stimulating, capable of satisfying an audience with

¹⁴³ Adam Mehl, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, February 22, 2010.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Organizational Ends, Governance Policy, KFAI Fresh Air Inc., <http://www.kfai.org/files/KFAIFreshAirGovernancePolicy.pdf>.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

diverse, eclectic musical interests.”¹⁴⁷ When I asked Programming Director to elaborate on what is understood at KFAI by high quality music and public affairs programming, he said that “for the music it comes from the person’s, the host’s knowledge, the knowledge that they bring to the genre and the ability to pick out stuff that is unique and not heard elsewhere on the radio, the ability to give a story behind it. For talk it is something where we are asking tougher questions, where we hear voices, opinions of people we do not get to hear from on the mainstream media, or even on other public stations.”¹⁴⁸

KFAI currently has 125 programs, most of which can be put into either “music” or “public affairs” category. However, just as KFAI’s people can belong to more than one constituency, there are programs at KFAI that can belong to both the “public affairs” and the “music” types of programming. The best example is KFAI’s ethnic/foreign language programming, where programmers design shows to serve their specific communities. Many of these shows can include both talk and music. It is important to note in regards to ethnic/foreign language programming that KFAI is the only radio station in Twin Cities that provides communities from foreign countries/cultures with opportunities and space to host radio shows for their audiences. Some of these communities have additional media outlets. However, KFAI is the only station that gives (theoretically) *every* community a chance to create and host a program, especially those that are large in numbers and do not have other electronic media alternatives, like communities from East African countries.

¹⁴⁷ Organizational Ends, Governance Policy, KFAI Fresh Air Inc., <http://www.kfai.org/files/KFAIFreshAirGovernancePolicy.pdf>.

¹⁴⁸ Adam Mehl, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, February 22, 2010.

Programming Schedule

Even though KFAI programming is mission-driven - which means it strives to give a voice to as many underrepresented populations as possible - the time and space on the airwaves is limited, and thus there are criteria for programs' inclusion and exclusion. There is also a process that every program has to go through before it appears on air. In order to introduce a new program to KFAI schedule there must first be an opening. The most common reason for programs to go off air at KFAI is when the programmers decide that for various reasons (other commitments, limited time, lost interest or lost need for the program in the community it serves) they can no longer run the show. When an opening appears, KFAI Program Committee asks for proposals from the public, from the community. A written proposal should include information about what would the content of the proposed program be, who will it serve, what kinds of information will the program bring to the community and where will this information come from. The groups and individuals who submit the proposals are also asked to present a sample of a program. If, for example, it is an hour long program, how will it be structured, what will that hour include? Finally, the applicants are also asked to list their relationships or partnerships with organizations in the community, so that the decision making is based on whether or not the idea is going to meet the needs of the community they describe. When the KFAI Executive Director was explaining the program selection process to me, she gave the following example: "Recently, a group of young people from the Hmong community, mainly between 19 and 25 years of age, indicated that they were interested in having a program that was not necessarily all in Hmong, that it would be in English and

Hmong, and that they were wanting to reach the Hmong community that dealt with art and culture. They presented a proposal, the committee reviewed it, they looked at the examples of information they would share with the community. And we knew from the calls that we got from the younger Hmong people that we were not serving them well. The existing Hmong programs were really for the elders in the community. And so the committee recognized that there was a strong idea, there would be a number of listeners that would find that program appealing, and so they were given air time.”¹⁴⁹ The size of the community for which the show is intended, as well as some evidence of potential financial support the show would get are important criteria for inclusion at KFAI. When explaining these criteria to me, the KFAI Executive Director added that “it does require that during a pledge drive there are people from the community who are willing to financially support the programming. So it essentially costs a \$150 every hour to keep the radio station going. If you look at that in terms of community support, someone in the community that is starting a new program would want to be sure, or would want to be able to prove to the program committee that when pledge drive takes place there are people not only listening but are also willing to provide financial support. And that is not to say that each program has the financial resources to raise the same amount of money but there has to be some exchange between the value the community gets from the programming and a financial value that they can give back to the station.”¹⁵⁰

After a program gets on the air, KFAI management’s control over what the programmers do is minimal. The programmers have a lot of freedom in terms of what

¹⁴⁹ Janis Lane-Ewart, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, February 18, 2010.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

they can do with their program, as long as it meets the ethical and professional standards. The Program Director evaluates each program once a year. The process includes a confirmation of technical skills of the programmers and a written evaluation of the program content, which is largely based on listeners' feedback.

KFAI programming is mission-driven, which constitutes both the station's strength and weakness. The strength of the mission-driven programming is that it does represent a wide variety of voices and perspectives, including those that are not represented in the mainstream media or even in some other public or community media. However, the weakness of such type of programming, which can be best described as eclectic, is an extreme fragmentation that it causes. Fragmentation, in turn, causes inconsistency of the schedule, which leads to confusion among the audience members about when to expect what on KFAI. Another problem that fragmentation causes is that each program has a specific audience and for the most part the audiences do not overlap, although there are some overlaps in the public affairs shows, and in the shows devoted to specific music genres. The fragmentation problem leads to the listeners being devoted to one or few specific shows but not to KFAI as a station, which influences the membership level, and the amount of financial support KFAI gets from its listeners. This problem of staying true to the mission yet having some consistency in the programming schedule is particularly relevant for KFAI now, and I will discuss it in greater detail in the analysis section.

Analysis

“You come in at an interesting time,” said the KFAI News Director, my initial contact, when I came to the station for the first time in January of 2010. Indeed, by an interesting coincidence, it was the winter and the spring of 2010 when KFAI was, as pointed out by one of its volunteers, at a crossroads,¹⁵¹ and “going through a lot of growing pains.”¹⁵² The station has been losing listeners, members, and as a result financial support since 2005. By the winter of 2010 it became clear that some changes must be made in order to improve the situation. Many heated discussions and debates took place at the station at the time of data collection for this project. The debates emerged in an attempt of station’s staff and volunteers to find ways of overcoming the financial crisis. However, the debates also revealed the issues beyond the financial ones, or, in other words, the deeper ideological and structural problems that KFAI faced. As I attended the station meetings, interviewed the staff and volunteers, and then analyzed the minutes, the interview transcripts, and other documents,¹⁵³ it became clear that most of the difficulties the station finds itself wrestling with emerge from the contradictions between the mission of the station and the various constraints of reality.

This tension between the mission and the reality is especially prominent in such areas as the station’s programming format, the station’s audience and the internal relationships between the paid staff and the volunteers. The contradictions in these three areas also illustrate KFAI’s struggles to serve both parts of its mission, where the first

¹⁵¹ Mary, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 15, 2010.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Listener Survey Report, KFAI Strategic Plan, the staff reports, the Volunteer Handbook and the Station’s Policies.

part – providing a voice for people ignored or misrepresented by mainstream media – represents diversity as it was defined in the first part of this project, and the second – increase understanding between peoples and communities – represents the interactive pluralism form of multiculturalism.

While the issues that define the tensions between the mission and the reality in the three areas are linked together and often overlap, I will discuss each area in turn.

“Our Programming Is So Varied Even We Can’t Stand It”

KFAI’s programming is mission-driven, which means that the station tries to serve the Twin Cities community by giving the community members, especially the ones that are “ignored or misrepresented by the mainstream media”¹⁵⁴ an opportunity to represent themselves on the airwaves. Additionally, the station tries to provide the space for the dialogue and interaction among the community members.

It takes as little as taking a look at KFAI program schedule to see the wide variety of programs KFAI offers. Such variety, one could argue, represents diversity in general, as it was defined earlier,¹⁵⁵ as well as the diversity of the community KFAI serves. As one of the KFAI volunteers pointed out, “name the community – and it is somewhere on at the station, in some form.”¹⁵⁶ During one of the large, all-station meetings I attended in spring of 2010 KFAI volunteers were asked by an independent moderator to define the “heart and essence” of KFAI. There were fifteen groups, each having about six or seven

¹⁵⁴ KFAI Mission, KFAI Strategic Plan, KFAI Fresh Air Inc., <http://www.kfai.org/files/strategicplan2010.pdf>.

¹⁵⁵ Diversity, or cultural diversity, as it is also often labeled, refers to the *presence* of a variety of cultures and cultural perspectives within a society (Parekh, 2006).

¹⁵⁶ Mary, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 15, 2010.

people. Every group listed diversity among the first three elements that, in their opinion, constituted the heart and essence of KFAI. “I think diversity is embodied in what KFAI does,”¹⁵⁷ stated a volunteer that I interviewed for the project later. Another one said: “[KFAI] is really a station of diversity.”¹⁵⁸ KFAI Volunteer and Membership Director pointed out in an interview that “when [listeners] call, and become members, and give money as members, most often they... say that they appreciate the station’s diversity.”¹⁵⁹ However, the noble mission of giving anybody from the community an opportunity to produce and host a radio show, which implies almost absolute inclusion, and thus absence of a particular format, created at least two major problems for KFAI.

First, being “everything for everybody”¹⁶⁰ makes it very difficult to market the station. Even though KFAI is a non-profit radio station, it “does not run on love,”¹⁶¹ as one of the volunteers pointed out. According to the station’s Executive Director, “it costs \$150 every hour to keep the radio station going.”¹⁶² One of the volunteers I interviewed had fifty years of radio experience before he came to KFAI and he noted that “it is not hard for an experienced radio person to walk in the door of KFAI and see that this sort of scattered programming schedule that we have, where every hour or every couple of hours we have a completely different program... [raises] a significant concern about whether or not we as a radio station are attracting the audience we need to attract in order to also attract the donations.”¹⁶³ Another volunteer noted: “although diversity is a beautiful

¹⁵⁷ Ben, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 10, 2010.

¹⁵⁸ Mary, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 15, 2010.

¹⁵⁹ Pam Hill-Kroyer, Membership and Volunteer Director, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 18, 2010.

¹⁶⁰ Ahndi Fridell, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, March 3, 2010.

¹⁶¹ Mary, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 15, 2010.

¹⁶² Janis Lane-Ewart, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, February 18, 2010.

¹⁶³ John, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 23, 2010.

thing, it can sometimes create confusion and chaos. Because the mission and the vision of this station is to really have everyone included, it is kind of hard to know or to predict what is coming up in KFAI's [program] grid."¹⁶⁴ When KFAI launched a listener survey in spring of 2010, some listeners left the following comments about the programming schedule when answering the questions about what they would like to hear more and less on KFAI:

"To be entirely frank, I don't know what I'm getting at any given time...usually, I tune to a news station for news, and a music station for music. I don't know that KFAI's "brand" is extremely strong beyond its core of core audiences.

More of a predictable broadcast schedule. I'd like to know what is going on to be on the radio at a given period of time.

Unpredictability. Variety is good but you have too much. Boundaries can be a good thing.

The content of your programming is strong, for the most part, I think; it's just that, as a casual listener, the programming is so varied from day to day, I don't have much opportunity to cultivate loyalty for individual shows. I never really know when the stuff I might like will be on, and if I casually flip over to the station, more likely than not, it's not a program I'm especially interested in.

One of my stumbling blocks to listening more to KFAI is not understanding or knowing the schedule - so even if it isn't actually erratic, I usually find it less predictable than my other radio sources. This can be awesome, but I remember to turn to it less because I never know what will be on.

The schedule doesn't make sense to me, I think it's great that you have different hosts and shows but some continuity would be nice.

What I like the least about KFAI is that I never know what I'm getting when I tune in."¹⁶⁵

These comments further persuaded the staff and some volunteers that "they need to look at [KFAI] as a radio station, not just as a hodgepodge of programs,"¹⁶⁶ as one of the volunteers pointed out in the interview. Both the volunteers and the staff members

¹⁶⁴ Samantha, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 23, 2010.

¹⁶⁵ Listener Survey Report, KFAI Fresh Air Inc., March 24, 2010.

¹⁶⁶ John, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 23, 2010.

emphasized KFAI's diversity and its "ability to speak to a variety of community issues"¹⁶⁷ as the station's main strength. However, they also agreed that "station has not done enough yet to support its own strength."¹⁶⁸ Thus, according to the staff and some volunteers, it is crucial to find the middle ground between the uniqueness of KFAI, which is its diversity, and attraction, which may result from bringing some consistency into the eclectic programming schedule.

While all staff members supported the idea of revising the programming grid, KFAI volunteers clearly split up into at least three groups. The first group accepted and supported all staff decisions, including the one on changes in the programming schedule. The second group opposed changes in the programming grid because they feared that the new schedule would be made up in a way that would force some of the programs to go off the air. They also believed that consistency of the schedule as a way of making the station more marketable and more attractive to the larger groups of listeners threatened the non-profit, counter-cultural spirit of KFAI. These volunteers felt that "by trying to appeal to a wider audience, [KFAI] is going to sacrifice a lot of things,"¹⁶⁹ and seriously questioned whether "evolving [economically] and preserving the spirit of KFAI at the same time"¹⁷⁰ was possible. The third group of volunteers supported the idea of revising the programming grid. However, its members also insisted that changing the grid was not enough. The third group agreed with the second on the idea that "[KFAI] really lives by

¹⁶⁷ Ben, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 10, 2010.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ KFAI Volunteer, "Let's get together" meeting, March 15, 2010.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

[its] mission, which is not necessarily supported by the dollar,”¹⁷¹ and that the station “has to go where the dollar is not.”¹⁷² However, they believed in “accepting new ideas without losing what KFAI is and what it represents”¹⁷³ through “negotiating its mission”¹⁷⁴ and “creating new standards, new paradigms, new ways of measuring success”¹⁷⁵ for KFAI, as well as making the “idea of becoming a vehicle that successfully integrates in wider spectrum the unique character of [many] cultural communities”¹⁷⁶ work.

The ideas and opinions of the third group of volunteers seemed especially important and interesting for this project because they constantly tried to bring the attention of the staff and other volunteers to the second problem KFAI faced as a result of its “patchwork quilt” type of programming – the extreme fragmentation of the shows and hence the communities. While KFAI staff seemed to be mostly concerned with the financial crisis and pushed for revising the program grid in order to make it more consistent and thus more attractive to the listeners who would, hopefully, stay with KFAI longer, the volunteers from the third group reminded that changing the program grid was not enough. They reminded that serving the underserved was just one part of KFAI’s mission. The volunteers saw the eclecticism of the program grid as something that certainly represented diversity but did not necessarily support the second part of KFAI’s mission – increasing understanding among peoples and communities. Recalling the

¹⁷¹ Sara, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 4, 2010.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ KFAI Volunteer, “Let’s Get Together” meeting, March 15, 2010.

¹⁷⁴ Ben, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 10, 2010.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

theoretical framework of multiculturalism discussed previously, the third group of volunteers tried to get KFAI move away from the fragmented pluralism version and towards the interactive pluralism version of multiculturalism - one that emphasizes the interaction and the dialogue among the diverse groups constituting one larger community. Volunteers offered various approaches that, in their view, would allow KFAI to both thrive financially and build bridges between the diverse communities of the Twin Cities that KFAI claims to serve. For example, volunteers suggested “to train programmers to do more cross-promotion to keep [the listeners] listening throughout the day.”¹⁷⁷ They also insisted that KFAI had to “reach out to cultural communities not only on air but also off air”¹⁷⁸ and that “the only way [for KFAI] to survive is to become physically involved in the community... To put together music shows, festivals, book discussions, and be more than just airwaves.”¹⁷⁹ Volunteers also brought up the need for utilizing the capabilities of the internet more than KFAI already does: “... we need to look at new media as a really important adjunct to what we have. Yes, we have a digital radio station or what they call an HD frequency but it is not enough, and we are not promoting it enough.”¹⁸⁰ Another volunteer gave an example of online radio stations that do offer their listeners an opportunity to select and only listen to particular music genres/styles but they also offer a forum where all listeners can interact and learn about other music genres and other listeners/communities of listeners. Comments about the need to utilize social media more came up in the interviews, although I did not ask the staff and volunteers about it

¹⁷⁷ KFAI Volunteer, “Let’s Get Together” meeting, March 15, 2010.

¹⁷⁸ KFAI Volunteer, “Let’s Get Together” meeting, March 15, 2010.

¹⁷⁹ Sara, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 4, 2010.

¹⁸⁰ John, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 23, 2010.

explicitly. Interestingly, volunteers brought up social media more often than the staff, and discussed the opportunities of using social media in KFAI's practices as KFAI's immediate goals, whereas the staff members tended to table the topic for a later discussion as one pertaining to the station's long-term goals. Perhaps one of the reasons for it was that the meetings that I observed, as well as the interviews that I conducted occurred during the time of station's financial crisis, and the staff members were desperately searching for ways to increase memberships and generate funds. It seemed that once the staff members saw a potential solution for the problem – changing the programming grid – they focused their attention on that one opportunity and spent most of their time and effort, especially during the meetings, pushing for that particular change to happen rather than discussing alternative or additional opportunities.

Interestingly, while the volunteers talked about cross-promotion, becoming involved in the community, utilizing the internet – all active approaches to building the bridges between different communities, the staff members only mentioned providing diverse content, as well as the space for the dialogue and interaction to occur – rather passive approaches:

“That is kind of the challenge here. We hope that we are inclusive of everyone, so that people are listening to a program about cultural affairs or community affairs, are also listening to the music... but it is hard for us because we do radio and for a lot of people radio is just entertainment, so it is kind of hard to proactively do something, we cannot really make it but we hope that we can put out enough different voices on the air that people who listen will gain an understanding just because it is there. ...it is hard to bridge the gap... we just want to try to keep representing as diverse of groups as we can and just by doing that and showing that there are these different voices on the air, we are hoping that people who listen are going to hear those voices. A lot of our talk programs try to cover diverse groups. Beyond the actual program content like the music or

the talk...there is not a whole lot we can do other than just put it out there and hope that people enjoy it and learn from it.”¹⁸¹

KFAI Executive Director expressed a similar view when asked about what KFAI does or should do in order to fulfill the second part of its mission:

“I would say that happens by making various community people aware of other cultures. ...It is possible that you could live in a certain part of Twin Cities and have no contact with or be aware of people in another community. But by listening to the radio you have that opportunity to hear the music, or I will pick a different example where we are providing a mechanism for understanding across cultures, when someone from a European community listens to one of the African-American programs, where most of the interviews talk about issues related to African-Americans. And that allows an entry point for people who are not a part of that culture to know what is going on, to want to understand what is going on, and open up to new information.”¹⁸²

Similarly, KFAI News Director stated that “the best way of increasing understanding among different groups [is through] sharing information and communication and ...providing a space on the airwaves for communities to talk to one another.”¹⁸³ KFAI, the News Director stated, has taken the first step - providing the space on the airwaves. However, “the second step has not really happened yet.”¹⁸⁴ When asked whether she thinks the communities themselves are interested in building those bridges, she answered that “it is not necessarily a matter of wanting or not wanting to take that next step but a matter of time and effort, where ‘I have this show, and this is where I have this much volunteer time and I put it into the show, and I do not have any more time to start this whole new dialogue, or start this whole new conversation.’”¹⁸⁵ Interestingly, one

¹⁸¹ Adam Mehl, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, February 22, 2010.

¹⁸² Janis Lane-Ewart, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, February 18, 2010.

¹⁸³ Ahndi Fridell, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, March 3, 2010.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

of the volunteers I interviewed mentioned a similar reason for KFAI struggling with the second part of its mission, with only difference being that she applied it to the paid staff:

“... the staff is overworked and underpaid, and very much overinvolved in things, I would say. Not maliciously, but just by a virtue of being four paid people who are managing four hundred volunteers. They may just not look for any more work. I organized benefits last year. And it took me a full month to convince them that I had bands, and I had space, and that it would cost us nothing to produce. Free bands, free space, free sound set, everything. It would cost us nothing to produce but staff was looking at me coming to them and saying “Hey, I have this idea, and this is what I have done,” and all they were seeing was “Oh my God, more work.” It took me four months of being here and doing stuff and proving myself before they were like “well, she can do things without adult supervision,” so to say. And then when it happened, the second benefit that I will be organizing... no issues at all. The whole conversation took four minutes.”¹⁸⁶

The debates over the KFAI programming format illustrated the tension between the station’s mission that is “very idealistic”¹⁸⁷ and the reality of market economy, in which even the non-profit, counter-cultural media outlet can not exist without playing by the rules set by the larger media industry. Opting out, if possible, means developing completely new, alternative approaches and methods that, in turn, require putting in incredible amounts of time and energy, which neither the paid staff nor the volunteers may have or may simply be not motivated enough to sacrifice. Moreover, the contradiction between the desired ideal and the working reality occurs even *within* the KFAI mission. Ideally, the first part of the mission guarantees the accomplishment of the second. However, in reality a mere existence of the space for interaction does not result in the actual interaction and the increased understanding among peoples and communities.

¹⁸⁶ Sara, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 4, 2010.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

“We Are Still Mostly White Radio Station; White, Middle Aged American Station”

While there were contradictions between the mission and the reality, as well as between the real and the desired within the mission in the area of programming format and schedule, the most striking contradictions occurred in the area of KFAI audience – the real and the imagined.

Since KFAI does not have a regular mechanism of getting feedback from its listeners, as well as collecting the listener demographics, I asked each staff member who they thought their listeners were. The interviews were conducted before the results of the listener survey came out, which was beneficial in terms of being able to compare the opinions of the staff with the quantitative data on listener demographics and attitudes that became available at the end of spring.

When asked to describe who KFAI serves, the station’s Executive Director replied:

“Well, we are finding out now, we will be finding out more extensively through our survey that we are doing. However, my sense is that we serve individuals who do not have access to mainstream public radio, who are in some cases economically disadvantaged, other cases speak two or more languages and who strive for a sense of media democracy by their actions in their community. [Our listener] is an individual who enjoys the surprise of what they hear day to day, ... is likely to value community and local news and information, and is likely to like more than one kind of information.”¹⁸⁸

When the results of the listener survey came out, KFAI listeners were described as having access and listening to a variety of radio stations, reporting household incomes \$75K + (40%) and < \$75K (60%), where only 25% reported having incomes lower than

¹⁸⁸ Janis Lane-Ewart, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, February 18, 2010.

\$35K.¹⁸⁹ Recalling the listener comments from the previous section regarding the eclecticism of the station’s programming schedule, it also appears that the listeners may not necessarily enjoy the surprise of what they hear day to day and prefer some consistency and possibly even uniformity. Ethnic representation of KFAI listeners, according to the survey, is predominantly Caucasian (88%), which reflects the overall demographics in the Twin Cities but is rather surprising given the mission of KFAI, and its distinguishing feature of serving various immigrant non-White communities. The survey report described an average KFAI listener as “likely to be male, 45+ years old, Caucasian earning < \$75K and a college graduate.”¹⁹⁰ The report concluded that “KFAI’s current listener base is not necessarily the intended audience of ‘diverse racial, social and economic backgrounds,’”¹⁹¹ as stated in KFAI mission and repeated by, though worded differently, KFAI staff members.

In its Governance Policy’s *Audience* section KFAI defines its audience as people who are “multiculturally-oriented.”¹⁹² When asked to explain what KFAI means by a multiculturally-oriented listener, the station’s Programming Director said that it is “someone who appreciates stepping outside of their own culture... and learning by stepping into someone else’s culture.”¹⁹³ The statement resonated with what both the News Director and the Executive Director said about sharing information and

¹⁸⁹ Listener Survey Report, KFAI Fresh Air Inc., March 24, 2010.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² KFAI Fresh Air Governance Policy, KFAI Fresh Air Inc., <http://www.kfai.org/files/KFAIFreshAirGovernancePolicy.pdf>.

¹⁹³ Adam Mehl, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, February 22, 2010.

communication by listening to the programs produced by the communities that differ from your own:

“So when I know what is going on in your community and what people are talking about and vice versa, you about my community, that just makes that community less “the other” and now... I start thinking about you, and now we are from Twin Cities, we are from Minnesota, and this is the problem that we need to solve together, or this is the issue that we should all be concerned about.”¹⁹⁴

“For example, someone in the European community does not understand what is being said on the Somali program but often times they listen to the music that is played in between the conversations, and we have gotten numerous comments that say that they appreciate that we are doing these programs. While they do not understand what is being said, they think it is important that there is a place for that dialogue to take place. They also say that if those programs play a lot more music, they would listen to the music because they enjoy it even though they do not know what is being said. And so in small ways it is opening the path to understanding between cultures that may not necessarily cross in day to day life.”¹⁹⁵

While the staff members imagined KFAI listeners as multicultural, as ones who “appreciate stepping outside of their own culture ... and learning by stepping into someone else’s culture”¹⁹⁶ the comments in the listener survey indicated that listeners “want less ethnic/foreign language programs, even though they understand their importance.”¹⁹⁷

“I am sure the foreign language stuff and the world music serves a community but I personally avoid KFAI because of those two things.

I wish the evening shows related to one culture were not in prime time. I know they are needed, but I NEED KFAI music in the evening. You have lost me as a listener weekday evenings.

I do not speak any language other than English so, although I realize that non-English language speakers enjoy programs in their respective languages, it is the same as dead air to me.

Generally, I like and appreciate KFAI’s eclectic programming. However, I will often tune out some of the foreign language programming because I do not understand it but believe it is valuable for those communities.

¹⁹⁴ Ahndi Fridell, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, March 3, 2010.

¹⁹⁵ Janis Lane-Ewart, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, February 18, 2010.

¹⁹⁶ Adam Mehl, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, February 22, 2010.

¹⁹⁷ Listener Survey Report, KFAI Fresh Air Inc., March 24, 2010.

I would like less programs not in English – I do not speak Somali, Hmong and only limited Spanish.”¹⁹⁸

Interestingly enough, some of the volunteers I interviewed – also before the survey results came out – acknowledged that “[KFAI is] still mostly white radio station; white, middle aged American station. Language barrier does exist... and in some way it is stronger in the US than in other places like Europe. Here... they will tune out just for the sake of one song they do not understand.”¹⁹⁹

One of the recommendations that was developed for KFAI based on the survey findings connected the audience and the programming format, and illustrated well the contradiction between the mission and the reality in these two areas: “For funding sources, KFAI may need to be positioned to serve the underserved listening audience. Yet for market positioning, KFAI needs to recognize what segments are actually listening and execute programming around their interests and preferences.”²⁰⁰

Keeping this recommendation in mind, the station’s programming committee developed three versions of the new programming grid. While in the current/old version the programs for the non-English speaking audience were aired Monday through Thursday between 7pm and 10pm, and also on Sunday from 3pm to 9pm, all three versions of the new grid moved all non-English language shows to Sunday. Such layout allowed having the shows on air and thus claiming to stay true to the mission, yet it removed the discomfort of suddenly encountering “the other” during the weekdays and

¹⁹⁸ Listener Survey Report, KFAI Fresh Air Inc., March 24, 2010.

¹⁹⁹ Sara, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 4, 2010.

²⁰⁰ Key Findings: Possible KFAI Changes, Listener survey report. KFAI Fresh Air Inc., March 24, 2010.

especially the prime time for the audience that appeared to be not as “multicultural” as KFAI staff and some of the volunteers imagined it to be.

At least two major problems emerged as a result of this programming decision. First, moving the non-English language shows to Sunday certainly undermined the second part of KFAI’s mission and embodied a step back from moving towards an interactive pluralism form of multiculturalism. Second, this decision reaffirmed the extreme fragmentation of the audiences that already existed at KFAI and reinforced the segregation of the audiences based on the ethnicity/race or language. One of the volunteers wrote the following in the KFAI’s email list serve in response to the new programming grids:

“All the programs on KFAI represent minority voices, so it is especially disheartening when the majority WITHIN decides to even farther marginalize voices that are even more oppressed. I want to avoid perpetuating the exact systems we are all here to overcome. How can we say we stay to the mission when organizationally decisions are made to blatantly divide our programs based on race and ethnicity? I understand the reasoning behind it – the explanations of “programming that needs to be found by a certain audience”... but isn’t this true about ALL programming at KFAI? ... Let’s say you are an outsider looking at this grid... it would seem pretty loud and clear that there is some major segregation here. I mean, the block is even marked in a brown tone! ... It just feels like a nasty set up. If listenership is poor during certain programs, maybe THAT issue should be addressed with the program. The term “ghettoizing” has come up in regards to this block of programs, and I did not fully understand it at first, but now... it is very clear. I am reading between the lines and making my own conclusions based on my experience and the information I have gathered – listenership is low in the evenings when the foreign language programs were being aired – so, how does moving them to Sunday, when “regular weekly listening behavior does not apply” fix the situation? Isn’t this PERPETUATING the problem we should be trying to solve? It sounds to me like, Sundays do not matter so we will throw our problem programs there – then we do not have to be accountable when the failing fail.”²⁰¹

The email found some supporters but, as in most cases at KFAI, there were some alternative opinions as well:

²⁰¹ KFAI Volunteer, KFAI Forum, email listserve, April 16, 2010.

“A radio station is not the same as a residential neighborhood - so, putting all the immigrant/non-English language community shows on one day is not "ghettoizing". The fact is that the ONLY people who will be tuning into Hmong language programmer are Hmong-speaking people or Somali language programming will be Somali speaking people, etc. Evenings where perhaps a more "general"/wider audience - hopefully of some NEW listeners, as well! - would tune out non-English language programming - and hence tune out KFAI.

Sunday afternoons should be the most open time in the week (that is, people are not at work or school events) so as to make the programs available for audience of families. It might just be that listeners will go UP for immigrant community shows being on Sunday.”

Even though KFAI does not “attach itself to a particular ethnic group or particular social demographics”²⁰² and thus its diversity is not necessarily ethnic/racial (or rather is not only ethnic/racial), the debate around its foreign/bilingual language programs illustrates well the tension between the mission and the reality when it comes to audience and, more importantly, to what kind of audience the station serves.

In KFAI’s case its mission-driven programming assumes a particular kind of audience. However, it appears that KFAI’s programming does not resonate with the actual audience that the station has. As one of the volunteers noted in the interview, “... in a sense it is an attempt to carve the market for ourselves rather than finding a market and fitting in. ...we design the product without the need necessarily being there. We will find the people who have the need and present them the product that already is.”²⁰³

KFAI’s Programming Director expressed a similar idea when I asked how he knows that KFAI listeners are necessarily multicultural: “We really do not know but we put together programming that we hope reflects that and we hope that that programming draws in the people who are like that.”²⁰⁴

²⁰² Sara, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 4, 2010.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Adam Mehl, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, February 22, 2010.

“There Are Two Different Worlds That Are Not Intersecting Anymore”

The financial and ideological crisis and the debates around the ways of overcoming the two brought to light another major area of tension at KFAI – the internal struggles between the staff and the volunteers. I already discussed the differences in opinions between the staff and the different “camps” of volunteers regarding the changes in the programming grid. In this section, however, I will describe some of the tensions between the staff and the volunteers in terms of the power distribution in the decision making process. Here, again, the power dynamics among the people involved in making the key decisions was rather contradictory. The mission assumed equality and ability of every community member to voice an opinion and influence the decisions that were being made. The reality, with its financial, time and energy constraints, pulled in the direction of rather hierarchical decision making process, where the staff, not the volunteers, appeared to be on top of the hierarchy.

Almost all volunteers that I interviewed brought up this issue, even though I did not ask them about it explicitly. When talking about the changes in the programming grid, one volunteer said she “[thought] the process could have been less top – down.”²⁰⁵ Another one noted, commenting on the same process: “Now it just feels like ok, these are executive decisions and these are made without any consultation.”²⁰⁶ When the staff organized an all-station meeting in order for everyone to get together and talk about the station’s situation and ways of improving it, the after-meeting reaction of some of the volunteers was that “they were spoken to as they were children rather than “hey, we have

²⁰⁵ Lora, KFAI Volunteer, KFAI forum list serve, May 5, 2010.

²⁰⁶ Mary, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 15, 2010.

the situation, we need to solve it or fix it, or get some ideas, or whatever it is; let's get creative, let's think about it."²⁰⁷ As another volunteer pointed out, "every member, every volunteer at KFAI feel their ownership of the station because of how much time they give to it."²⁰⁸ That is why the volunteers felt that their input was important, yet it was overlooked by the staff during the decision making process. Some volunteers also expressed their concern for the weakening of the important role of the volunteer Board in life of the station. They said that the model of governance initiated by the station's Executive Director and adopted by the Board allowed the staff to "keep the Board out of their business."²⁰⁹ The Board became a "policy Board," which, according to some volunteers, was not enough for the station: "They used to be more involved, and there used to be places for the Board members to sit on the Board committees, and to work on programming and underwriting, and marketing and other things. What they essentially taken now is a hands off approach, which I think is just the reverse of what it needs to be in a station with our mission and our history."²¹⁰ The situation of "detachment between the Board, the [other] volunteers and the operation (the staff)"²¹¹ led to what another volunteer expressed as "staff is here, volunteers are here and the Board is here and... there is just like there are two different worlds that are not intersecting anymore."²¹² Even though KFAI's mission calls for a diverse yet united organization, the internal fragmentation seems to be one of the major obstacles in staying true to the mission even

²⁰⁷ Mary, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 10, 2010.

²⁰⁸ Samantha, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 23, 2010.

²⁰⁹ John, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 23, 2010.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Mary, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 10, 2010.

internally: “we have several people at the radio station who are driven in the right direction but they are not united. ... we do not have a cohesive agreement across the board of what do we want to see the station be.”²¹³ The statement resonated with one by another volunteer: “Right now [we] are very, very fractured... But how can we get that together and say “Okay, you bring this string, I will bring this string”? What can we do to hold this together, to hold the station together?”²¹⁴

The internal diversity of the station was also criticized by the volunteers who said that even though the volunteer base was quite diverse, the Board and the staff lacked the diversity necessary for the station that KFAI aspires to be. The composition of the Board – almost entirely white men – created a sharp contrast with the composition of “the rest of KFAI,” which I was able to observe at other meetings, and especially at a couple of very large, all-station meetings. While the station at large consisted of “all kinds of people from all walks of life,”²¹⁵ the people in charge of making some key decisions were predominantly white men. As one of the volunteers pointed out, “the Board does not have enough diversity on it. I think it is a white crowd, a white counter cultural crowd. ... The danger the station has to deal with and address is that even in the counter cultural community there is, it seems to me, an intuitive comfort level with white power. So even our friends, the progressive whites, will sometimes, without being conscious of it, make decisions and rely on notions that are formed by white supremacy and cultural supremacy...”²¹⁶ This statement resonates with the decision on moving the non-English

²¹³ Sara, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 4, 2010.

²¹⁴ Mary, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 15, 2010.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ben, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 10, 2010.

language programs to Sunday and the debate around it that I discussed in the previous part. Even though the Board was not solely in charge of making decisions regarding the changes in the programming grid, the decision itself illustrated an approach that, one could argue, was based on cultural/language supremacy. Most likely, the people in charge of making this decision thought, in the first place, of the ways of overcoming the financial crisis by raising the listenership and believed, as one of the volunteers clearly articulated in her response to the debate, in the idea that radio station was not the same as residential neighborhood. Thus, removing the non-English language shows from the week days and airing all of them on Sunday was a way of helping the station survive by making the English-speaking listeners (the majority, as the Listener Survey Report demonstrated) comfortable with the station on a daily basis, and also having space and time for the non-English speaking communities. Most likely, the “ghettoizing” was not intended. However, this is exactly what resonates with the idea of “the intuitive comfort level of the white counter-cultural crowd with the white power,” which is also supported by the statement that “KFAI listeners want less foreign language programs but they acknowledge their importance.” Even though in case of the decisions regarding the non-English language programs it is more about the comfort of the English speaking majority with the English language, such factors as race, ethnicity and nationality are strongly tied to the language factor. The decision was made based on the feedback from the listeners, and the problem of segregation did not occur to those in charge of making the decision until some of the volunteers (mostly non-white and/or bilingual people) pointed it out.

The staff members also acknowledged the contradiction between the internal diversity that the station's mission calls for and the reality in which "a bunch of white people are running the Board."²¹⁷ The Membership and Volunteer Director seemed especially concerned about it:

"...we work hard, not always successfully, but we work hard to make sure our organization represents all walks of life at the station. All walks of life from our community. So, the Board needs to have some people of color on it. We can't have a bunch of white people running the Board."²¹⁸

I asked what are the barriers that prevent people of color, bilingual people, people from the immigrant communities to get involved with KFAI and apply for positions on the Board and various station's committees. One of the factors mentioned by both the staff and the volunteers was the already existing composition of the organization, which sets a particular standard for the newcomers. As KFAI Membership and Volunteer Director pointed out, "the big thing is that if you go to an organization and you don't see people that you can immediately identify with, you are going to feel weird. You are not going to feel like you want to be part of that organization, truly."²¹⁹ Lack of time, other commitments and money were other important factors discussed by my interviewees. For example, the News Director, when talking about the diversity in the newsroom, said:

"It is a big struggle, getting people of color, people from ethnic communities, getting people who speak different languages. Or they will be here for a little bit, and if they are really good and I get a good report... they can go find paid work elsewhere. I have nothing to offer people except for the training opportunities, so people do not stick around very long. ...If I had my preference I would be paying, even a small stipend but that is not in our budget right now."²²⁰

²¹⁷ Pam Hill-Kroyer, Membership and Volunteer Director, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 18, 2010.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Pam Hill-Kroyer, Membership and Volunteer Director, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 18, 2010.

²²⁰ Ahndi Fridell, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, March 3, 2010.

When I asked the volunteers what prevents them from applying for positions on the Board or station's committees, almost all of them said that they put in a lot of time volunteering/running their shows and simply cannot give more time to KFAI. However, they also pointed out that they feel like everyone at the community radio station should have a voice in the decision making process, regardless of whether one belongs to the Board, staff or a committee.

Thus, the internal relationships at the station also revealed the tension between the mission and the reality, as well as between the two parts of the mission as they apply to the internal structure of the station.

The station tries to be all-inclusive and give everyone involved with the station a chance to participate in decision making process – and it seems to work in some cases or at some levels. However, the limited time and resources may just lead to “making executive decisions without any consultations” more efficient in some situations for the four paid people who are managing four hundred volunteers.

The station tries to be diverse *and* united – an interactive pluralism model of multiculturalism. Yet it ends up being fractured when “the different worlds do not intersect” and even create oppositions – the fragmented pluralism model.

The diversity part also becomes questionable under different constraints of reality, and the struggles around the internal diversity inevitably overlap with the struggles over the diversity of audiences and programming content.

Discussion and Conclusions

KFAI staff's and volunteers' understanding of multiculturalism reflects one articulated, though not explicitly, in KFAI's mission. The mission, in turn, corresponds to a variety of theoretical conceptualizations of multiculturalism. The first part of KFAI's mission – providing a voice for people from diverse racial, social and economic backgrounds who are ignored or misrepresented by the mainstream media – speaks to Taylor's multiculturalism model of equal worth²²¹, which emphasizes the importance of including voices that are different and often marginalized. By focusing on volunteer-produced programming content, KFAI includes people's voices as participants rather than represents their voices as audiences²²² and thus becomes a site of the “multicultural convergence”²²³. Using what Dunaway describes as an open access approach, KFAI strives to maximize inclusion and tries to put together programming that would reflect the diversity of the community the station claims to serve. By adopting an open access approach, KFAI commits itself to responding to difference by incorporating it, which lies at the core of multiculturalism, following Alexander, Hartmann and Gerteis, and distinguishes multiculturalism from assimilation.

The second part of KFAI's mission - increasing understanding among peoples and communities – speaks to Baumann's concept of “difference multiculturalism,”²²⁴ where the essence of a culture lies in its dialogical character with others and thus “finding cross-

²²¹ Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism*, ed. Amy Gutman and Charles Taylor (Princeton University Press, 1994), 25-74.

²²² Mark Deuze, “Ethnic Media, Community Media and Participatory Culture,” *Journalism* 7 (2006) 262 – 280.

²²³ Annabelle Sreberny, “‘Not Only, But Also’: Mixedness and Media,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31, no. 3, (May 2005), 443- 459.

²²⁴ Gerd Baumann, *The Multicultural Riddle* (London: Routledge, 1999).

cutting cleavages” becomes a way to make diversity work. “Difference multiculturalism” also relates to Sreberny’s idea of “developing channels and genres that cross over... divisions and foster dialogic understanding,” which, in turn, directly speaks to the interactive pluralism form of multiculturalism proposed by Hartman and Gerteis. Thus, multiculturalism and, in particular, the interactive pluralism version of it, is articulated in KFAI’s mission and is reflected in station’s staff and volunteer visions of the “mission-driven programming” and “multiculturally-oriented audience.”

However, as the analysis demonstrates, the station finds itself in a continuous struggle between its mission and the reality. When theory meets practice – a situation in which KFAI tries to stay true to its multiculturally oriented mission, and at the same time needs to generate funds in order to exist - matters become more complex. Even though KFAI’s mission-driven, diverse, based on the open access programming reflects the staff’s and volunteers’ understanding of multiculturalism, the problem for the station emerges when its diverse programming becomes eclectic and leads to what Dunaway puts in opposition to the open access approach – the inconsistency of programming format and schedule. An open access approach that allows KFAI to stay true to its mission and be guided by the principles of multiculturalism significantly limits or even completely removes criteria for exclusion, resulting in acceptance of almost any type of material by the station. As a result, the station’s programming schedule resembles a “patchwork quilt” and lacks consistency - something many KFAI audience members seek, at least according to the listener survey report.

At this point the contradictions around the programming intersect with the contradictions around the station's audience. Conversations with KFAI staff and the analysis of the listener survey report demonstrated that KFAI staff had a highly idealized image of the station's audience. They described it as "multiculturally oriented," as one favoring the eclectic schedule and being determined to learn about other cultures by stepping out of their own cultures. However, the listener survey revealed that the audience was not pleased with the eclecticism of programming, dissatisfied by the inconsistency of the schedule and disapproved the practice of airing foreign language programs during the prime time hours.

Having realized that the current programming schedule did not match the audience it was designed for, KFAI staff and volunteers began the process of restructuring the schedule. It was during that process when the most striking contradictions between the station's mission and the reality occurred. The contradictions occurred on two levels. First, in the situation of needing to attract listeners in order to generate funds, the station had to negotiate between the universalistic approaches of assimilationism usually employed by the mainstream commercial media (for example, "if our audience doesn't like foreign language programs during the prime time, we will take those programs off air during that time") and the particularistic approaches of multiculturalism embedded in the mission ("but we will still have foreign programs in our schedule"). Second, when trying to rearrange the programming schedule in a way that would keep all existing programs on air but would also bring consistency into the schedule, KFAI had to negotiate between the interactive pluralism and fragmented

pluralism forms of multiculturalism. KFAI's mission aimed at increasing understanding among peoples and communities, through encouraging dialogue and providing space and conditions for that dialogue to occur – a vision corresponding to the interactive pluralism form of multiculturalism. However, the decision to group programs into clusters that have some common features (e.g. all blues programs, all foreign language programs, all talk/issue-oriented programs, etc.) and air those programs in clusters on particular days in particular times reinforced fragmentation of the shows and possibly the audiences – a situation resembling a fragmented pluralism version of multiculturalism. Even though the schedule became more consistent and no shows went off air, the opportunities for “creating cross-cutting cleavages”²²⁵ that would “foster dialogic understanding”²²⁶ and follow the interactive pluralism model of multiculturalism, including the use of social media in KFAI's practices, were not utilized and possibly even dismissed in the process of decision making. Moreover, while all shows stayed on air after the restructuring process, some of them, especially the foreign-language programs were clearly separated from the rest of the shows, which resulted in strong reactions from some of the volunteers who called it a “nasty set up” and “ghettoization.”

These reactions and the debates that took place at the station as a result of this decision reinforced the already existing tensions between the station's staff and various “camps” of volunteers. KFAI's internal relations also resembled a continuous struggle between the universal and the particular, between hierarchical system of management with paid staff being on top of the hierarchy, and participatory type of management

²²⁵ Baumann.

²²⁶ Sreberny.

where everyone's opinion counted. Again, participatory system with its particularistic principles was embraced as part of the station's mission and vision, as an ideal to strive to. However, in most situations, due to the time and energy constraints, as well as the financial pressure, the hierarchical system with its universalistic principles, took over and the paid staff made decisions without discussing them with the volunteers. Internal diversity also constituted a large part of the desired but not necessarily achieved state of internal relations at the station with the volunteers being a very diverse group but the paid staff and the Board of Directors – the main decision-making agents at the station – lacking the desired diversity.

An alternative, non-commercial, volunteer-based media outlet that functions within a larger media environment dominated by the mainstream commercial media, KFAI becomes a site of continuous struggle between the principles of universalism and particularism, between assimilation and the different forms of multiculturalism. At the same time, the nature and the dynamic character of these tensions correspond to the idea of the universal and the particular being in a constant evolving relationship with each other, rather than constituting a binary. In a sense, KFAI embodies the particular within the universal, an attempt to be different and to incorporate difference in a culture that in most cases assimilates the difference.

While I explored KFAI as a site of constant struggle and tensions between different forms of multiculturalism and assimilation through gaining a deeper understanding of the internal (staff's and volunteers') visions of multiculturalism and its

role and place in station's life, more questions remain to be addressed and explored in the future.

Having gone through the schedule restructuring process, KFAI continues to broadcast; it runs the shows and the pledge drives, sponsors and participates in a wide variety of community events, trains new volunteers and recruits new members. I keep in touch with the station, and see this project developing further.

The main question to be explored and possibly answered in the future is what are the means through which a community radio can reach the ends articulated in its mission? How can a community radio develop a programming and an internal structure that would foster dialogic understanding among peoples and communities and contribute to the development of the interactive pluralism form of multiculturalism?

There are several possible directions that the future research can take attempting to answer these questions. The first direction involves more comprehensive research of the KFAI audience. It seems that even though many of the KFAI audience members consider themselves non-mainstream, counter-cultural listeners, their expectations of the radio programming are shaped by the mainstream radio. For example, listeners expect the schedule to be predictable and consistent, and they expect being able to understand the language in which the programs are aired. Having discovered these characteristics of the KFAI audience from the listener survey, it seems critical to investigate how the listeners themselves understand multiculturalism and what they think the role of KFAI in their community is. Are the listeners themselves interested in developing a community that is based on interaction, dialogue and mutual understanding? And where do they see KFAI

or a community radio in general fitting in when it comes to negotiating between universalism and particularism?

The second direction that I believe deserves additional attention concerns examining the perspectives of the hosts of the KFAI shows on developing programming that would support the interactive pluralism version of multiculturalism. Are the hosts interested in creating the programs that would cross over in some ways and connect the listening communities? What are the reasons KFAI hosts run the shows? Personal ambitions of various kinds, a desire to represent and serve their own micro communities or an interest in building bridges among the various micro communities?

The third direction that could lead to some critical discoveries involves exploring the ways in which community radio stations in general and KFAI in particular use or could use the capabilities of the new communication technologies in order to move towards the interactive pluralism version of multiculturalism. Some may argue that the format of an online radio encourages segmentation of the audiences and contributes to the development of the fragmented pluralism version of multiculturalism. However, it can be also argued that the same technology can be used to unite communities through forums, chat rooms, and a wide variety of technological settings that are equally capable of isolating and uniting the listening communities. The question of utilizing various social media in community radio practices becomes especially prominent when thinking about the ways of making the interactive pluralism version of multiculturalism work. Even though I did not fully explore staff's and volunteers' perspectives on utilizing social media in KFAI's practices, the issue came up several times during the meetings and

interviews. Since the staff and the volunteers seemed to hold different views on the role of social media in practices of community radio, it seems important to explore and analyze the reasons for this difference in perspectives. Are the reasons purely practical and the “overworked and underpaid” staff members are “simply not looking for more work”²²⁷? Is the reason behind the seeming failure of KFAI to utilize social media in its practices based on KFAI staff’s view of the station’s audience as “economically and socially disadvantaged”²²⁸ and therefore not having easy access to social media, which in turn makes social media a potentially ineffective channel? Why, even after discovering a “new audience,” the question of engaging social media did not move up on KFAI’s “immediate goals” agenda? Have staff’s and volunteers’ perspectives on the role and functions of social media in community radio practices in general and KFAI in particular changed since the time of my fieldwork?

Lastly, KFAI is just one of the many community radio stations in the United States and in the world. Most likely, other stations experience similar problems. However, do they come up with similar solutions? Are there any stations with a similar mission that use different approaches in their mission-oriented practices? Do their approaches work and what are the factors (political, economical, cultural, etc.) that make them work or not work at different stations in different contexts? I believe that a comparative study or a series of comparative studies will add valuable insights to the main questions explored in this project, as well as to the questions that are yet to be explored.

²²⁷ Sara, KFAI Volunteer, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air, March 4, 2010.

²²⁸ Janis Lane-Ewart, Interview, KFAI Fresh Air radio, Minneapolis, February 18, 2010.

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Appendix A

Basic Interview Protocol

- How long have you been working/volunteering for KFAI?
- Did you listen to KFAI before you started working/volunteering for it? Which programs did you mostly listen to?
- What brought you to KFAI? How and why did you decide to become a part of KFAI?
- Do you listen to it now? Did your program preferences change? Why?
- I imagine that as a community radio staff member/volunteer you do a variety of things/perform a variety of tasks. Which ones are your favorite and why?
- How does KFAI measure the size/scope of its audience?
- How does KFAI know who its listeners are?
- How does KFAI receive feedback from its listeners?
- Do you think that people who listen to the mainstream radio stations listen to KFAI as well?
- Can we talk of something like “a typical KFAI listener”? If yes, how would you describe such listener? If no, why?
- KFAI offers many different programs. Does each program have a specific audience or do you think the audiences overlap? *Depending on the answer: Is there any kind of evidence that could illustrate this point? Or: Could you give me an example?*
- KFAI’s Wave Project gives everybody an opportunity to create their one-time, one-hour radio show. Do you get many applications? How do you manage situations in which you have to reject some applications?
- One of the core values listed in KFAI’s Strategic Plan is diversity. This term is widely used now in a variety of contexts and there are many definitions of it. How does KFAI define diversity?
- What does it take, in your opinion, to make different people from different communities understand each other better? What is the role of a community radio in accomplishing this task?
- What, in your opinion, makes KFAI unique/one of a kind?/ What distinguishes KFAI from other community radio stations?