

Community media makers and the mediation of difference

Claiming citizenship and belongingness

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Introduction

When you are looking at SALTO, as a TV channel, you actually become a sort of shop window of the city. And the city is so multifaceted – from your own position it’s difficult to relate to everything that is going on. All those ethnicities, all those different social groups. At SALTO, you actually see a sort of carousel of diversity pass by. And what you get, then, is that people also in this contemporary moment can get to know other people’s bubble. That is where the inspiration lies.

– Willem (SALTO)

SALTO is Amsterdam’s community media organization. It enables the city’s communities to broadcast their material on local TV, radio and online channels to Amsterdam audiences. SALTO’s programming aims to establish new connections between different urban groups, illustrating how cultural difference is “always-already mediated, that is, constructed (re)presented, and experienced through the media of communication” (Siapera 5). However, in emergent discussions on the growing cultural and political polarization in Netherlands, Europe and beyond, there is much attention for how contemporary media platforms and social media may function as filter bubbles, as they allow users to connect only with like-minded people and encounter perspectives that confirm their own worldviews. As community media philosophies commonly reflect commitments to public participation, civic engagement, accountability and the promotion of a plurality of social, cultural and religious ideas (Buckley) there is particular urgency to uncover the potential of community media to promote audiences to move outside of their bubbles. The question therefore arises: how do community media mediate difference and inclusive citizenship? In aiming to provide community-oriented alternatives, are they inherently inclusionary, or do community media also prioritize, ignore or exclude particular experiences?

From SALTO’s approach to community media, it appears a key imperative is establishing a “discursive space” for diverse communities, on the basis of the twin principles of “participation” and “access” to accommodate “those voices, interests, and perspectives . . . typically marginalized in mainstream media discourse”

(Howley 818). Furthermore, in seeking to allow marginalized voices to be heard, community media foster alternative formations of citizenship from below.

Unlike community formation, the workings of citizenship are dominantly understood from top-down, institutional and legal perspectives that emphasize one-directional and relatively passive processes like paying taxes and voting. From this perspective, a small group of elites decides about the rights and obligations of a majority. When shifting the focus from the “institution of citizenship” towards performative “acts of citizenship”, “that is, collective or individual deeds that rupture social-historical patterns” (Isin and Nielsen 2), we can create awareness about the wide variety of civic engagement practices communities engage in and the role of media in sustaining these practices. The struggle for socio-cultural recognition (Honneth and Anderson) of minority communities – besides legal recognition – is fundamental for striving towards just and inclusive societies. Moreover, to be able to attend to citizenship claims it is important to understand how communities see themselves and how they see themselves as part of wider societies. Community media are important actors in acknowledging, enabling and amplifying such claims from below. Although policies, NGOs, the World Bank and scholars’ historical conceptions of community media predominantly originate from the Global North, community media in the West are understudied. As Bart Cammaerts diagnoses, community media “discourses, theories and policies are oriented towards developing countries and emerging democracies”, while paradoxically community media “in the West are often forced to operate in the margins” (635) as a result of neoliberal policies and budget-cuts.

This chapter sheds light on the mediatedness of citizenship and difference, by focusing on a case study of two groups of community media makers in the Netherlands: local public broadcasters and feminist podcasters. Each of these community media makers is distinctly situated and functions according to a specific logic of mediation and understanding of difference and citizenship. While now commonly institutionalized and subsidized, local public broadcasting emerged during an era of analogue media shaped by a pirate-broadcasting ethos. Feminist podcast makers are grassroots and cherish the medium-specific affordances that have emerged in the recent digital era. Both share a commitment towards increased access to information and strive towards a more inclusive representation of different voices and communities. As community media, both disrupt the common binary opposition between amateur and canonized professional media practice, and call into being non-mainstream counterpublics (Felski; Fraser). Challenging the view from the national center, local public broadcasters orient themselves to their local audiences and their concerns, while feminist podcast makers construct publics around their topical focus and ideological commitment. Both offer spaces of community withdrawal, differential identification and mediated belonging, but they also have to relate to the mainstream public sphere and remain aware of their distinct status (Warner). In mediating community voices, community media thus navigate between hegemony and counter-hegemony, inclusion and exclusion as “the power asymmetries of mediation map onto the pre-existing and deeply seated asymmetries” (Madianou 6) of for example race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class.

Field and focus

Community media mediate citizenship claims and co-shape difference; in their mediation they “produce and subsequently control a certain version of it. However, this very mediation simultaneously undermines such efforts by inserting a degree of instability, thereby keeping open the process of mediation” (Siapera 6). In this chapter, we focus on the practices of fifteen community media makers for mediating difference and citizenship. Interviewees represent local public broadcasters and feminist podcasters (see Table 2.1).¹

Table 2.1 Overview of interviewees and media outlets they represent.

<i>Local public Focus broadcaster</i>		<i>Podcast</i>	<i>Focus</i>
NLPO	“The Dutch Local Public Broadcasting Foundation (NLPO) is the cooperation and coordination body for local public broadcasting in the Netherlands. The foundation supports local public broadcasters in various fields to further professionalize the sector and to improve the quality of the productions of local broadcasters, so that they can meet the legal requirements of a Local Adequate Media Offering” (NLPO, 2019).	Bloed aan de Muur (Blood on the Wall)	“A podcast with anarchy-feminist touch. With recommendations, current events, good books, stories, poems and all those things that you do not necessarily want to hear” (Bloed aan de Muur, 2019).
REGIO8	“REGIO8 is a multimedia platform with a professional news editorial office of young and ambitious journalists and program makers. The news editorial team wants to inform Achterhoekers and involve them in current events in society. REGIO8, however, does not only focus on reporting regional news in a journalistic way, but also offers scope for positive developments in the Achterhoek” (REGIO 8, 2019).	Dipsaus (Dip)	“DIPSAUS is the bi-weekly podcast by and for women of color and anyone interested in a different sound” (Dipsaus 2019)

(Continued)

Table 2.1 (Continued)

<i>Local public broadcaster</i>	<i>Focus</i>	<i>Podcast</i>	<i>Focus</i>
Salto	<p>“The Netherlands is the country of opinions. And Amsterdam is its capital. This is where most opinions come together. Where you can you say what you want. We are proud of that. Put those elements together and you get what SALTO stands for: everyone’s proud and free opinions” (Salto 2019).</p>	<p>De Schemerzone (The Twilight Zone)</p>	<p>“In De Schemerzone Elias Mazian and Emma van Meyeren enter the border between the night and the day. They have a conversation twice a month about everything that has to do with nightlife with the people they love sharing the dance floor with” (De Schemerzone, 2019).</p>
OOG (EYE)	<p>“Omroep Organisatie Groningen is the local public multimedia institution for all residents of the municipality of Groningen. OOG stands for its journalistic principles, but also wants to be opinionated and non-conformist. OOG wants to inform citizens about everything that happens in the city” (OOG 2019).</p>	<p>Vuile Lakens (Dirty Sheets)</p>	<p>“Vuile Lakens (Dirty Sheets) is a podcast about sex, body and everything you dare not talk about in delicate company. Gender expert Anaïs Van Ertvelde and writer Heleen Debruyne venture into wet areas.” (Vuile Lakens 2019).</p>
DUIC	<p>De Utrechtse Internet Courant, (The Utrecht Internet Newspaper) is “Utrecht’s own, innovative news platform with daily general, cultural and municipal news from the city of Utrecht. By and for people in Utrecht” (DUIC 2019).</p>	<p>De Oppas en ik; lets doen, hoe doe je dat; Liefs van Woord; Het Mannenprobleem (The Babysitter and I; Doing Something, how do you do that?; Love, Word; The Men Problem) ZOUT. (SALT)</p>	<p>Variety of radio documentaries, covering topics like masculinity, activism, sexual harassment, gender, and love. “Podcast which features four Cultural Studies students starting a conversation about intersectional feminism” (ZOUT. 2019).</p>

Following dominant patterns emerging from our analysis of interview narratives, in this chapter, we discuss three dimensions of mediation (Martín-Barbero): institutionality, technicity and sociality. We highlight therefore community media's institutional context, their technological infrastructure and their contribution to community formation and claiming citizenship.

Legally, public broadcasters have the task to perform independent journalism that gives audiences access to information, education and culture, via all available channels, including TV, radio and online. The role of local public broadcasters is described in the 2008 Article 2 of the Mediawet (Dutch national media legislation), which requires a balanced and multi-perspectival offering of high journalistic quality, targeting both a general audience as well as specialized ages and societal groups, autonomous from commercial or governmental influences and which is "accessible to all" ("voor iedereen toegankelijk"). Local public broadcasters are expected to offer a Locally Sufficient Media Offering (Article 2.170b) through broadcasting. In contrast, podcasts narrowcast and publish audio files that listeners can access digitally via their digital device or computer. The feminist podcasts included here address questions of (in)equality, processes of inclusion and exclusion, and discrimination, thereby explicitly or implicitly working to contribute to the dismantlement of Dutch imperialist, white-supremacist, capitalist and patriarchal norms.

Institutionality

Community media function in a media landscape dominated by powerful gate-keeping institutions that co-shape mechanisms of in- and exclusion, thereby ensuring that mediated participation in the public sphere is generally reserved for elites, commonly middle-class, white, European men. Against this inaccessible dominant public, community media position themselves as counterpublics, "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinate groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser 67). However, in this arena, bottom-up and grassroots community media initiatives also operate as media makers, albeit from the fringes, thus occupying a position of power and having a particular responsibility and answerability towards their audiences. When engaging with community media practices and their mediations of difference, the institutional context in which they operate must be taken into account. Institutions mediate different opposite modes of "civility", meaning state-run communication media as a "public service" and "freedom expression" mediated through free trade (Martín-Barbero 288). These lines are increasingly blurred and impact "production processes and cultural matrices, i.e. practices and conventions, to produce social structures" (Lievrouw 228).

Both groups of community makers explicitly present themselves as offering a platform for unheard voices and covering under-represented experiences within and against a media landscape characterized by exclusion, gatekeeping

and increased commercialization. Local broadcasters offer platforms to seek recognition for people and local struggles not commonly covered on the national news or mainstream talk shows, while feminist podcasts draw attention to people who cannot or do not want to relate to mainstream normative frameworks of gender, race and sexuality, as they commonly want to maintain their own niche and establish their own feminist, anti-racist and queer reference points. As such, they highlight what differentiates them from norm-setting mainstream media.

Local public broadcasters claim awareness of the lived experiences of those living in close proximity. Marc (NLPO) notes that “everyone pretends to be in the capillaries of society, the regional broadcasters increasingly use that term and even the national public television. But I think that with a local broadcaster that really is the case”. Evert (OOG) emphasizes this sense of proximity: “We are also a social institute, which I think is equally important [. . .] It’s not comparable to the national level. It’s more fundamental, it’s closer to people”. In contrast to feminist podcasts, which are generally more grassroots initiatives, local broadcasters work within dominant institutions, albeit in the margins, and are recognized as such. As such, acts of locally engaged citizenship are performed within institutionally recognized frameworks, rather than outside them.

Local broadcasters, which with national and provincial broadcasters make up the public broadcasting services, receive significantly less financial support than broadcasting services on the provincial or national level. Here we observe a catch-22 situation: local public broadcasters are expected to professionalize in order to survive in the current media landscape, but the required investments to do so are missing for a substantial number of organizations. As Joost (REGIO8) explains, this lack of recognition and support threatens ambitions for professionalization:

Every municipality has its own local broadcaster, gives a little subsidy to it and in principle it is hobby-financing of the people who like to be involved. That certainly has its function. It creates a certain bond with your municipality, with your region, you hear people you know from the street, you hear them on the radio. . . . But, the substantive side got a bit of lost. The journalistic goal of the local, government-subsidized broadcaster has watered down.

The impetus of professionalization emerged from a new commitment to maintaining journalism standards necessary for safeguarding local democratic processes and standards. In order to sustain their broadcasting services financially, local broadcasters must reconsider their practices and their position in the media landscape. Professionalization is key, as well as the journalistic answerability broadcasting services have towards their communities. For some local broadcasters, moving towards professionalization means working increasingly with professional journalists and other media makers, using predominantly established journalistic practices (Joost, REGIO8). In contrast, Willem (SALTO) acknowledges the (financial) necessity of professionalization, but emphasizes that it is not his

goal in itself. A movement towards professionalization can impede the sense of belongingness community media offer communities. As local broadcasters are able to provide a platform for various communities, they mediate difference and constitute community members as citizens who are “beings with claims” (Isin and Nielsen 8). Sustaining local broadcasting is therefore increasingly important, not just in order to allow media makers to continue to do their work, but specifically because of the ways their work mediates difference and performs community-driven acts of citizenship. As community media, local broadcasters offer local communities recognition, connection and belonging.

According to Marc (NLPO), there is a “democratic hiatus” looming. Decisions about funding are made at the local level of municipalities. Municipalities receive state funding and are themselves in charge of allocating funding to specific services, local public broadcasting media being one of them, alongside road repair, schools etc. This is worrisome, given how journalism in the Netherlands is under threat. According to Leen D’Haenens et al., “what was once a tight network of local ‘watchdogs’ was slowly but surely being replaced by an accumulating number of ‘blind spots’ and ‘missing links’ in municipalities no longer covered by a professional journalistic presence” (“The Missing Link” 142). This development occurs in tandem with a recent decentralization of policy and governmental mandates. Thus, local municipalities have increasing power, but the local journalism that is supposed to control municipalities is waning. Representatives of community media have arrived at a crucial crossroads: either the law has to be changed so that the journalistic requirement of local public broadcasters would be removed, which means local public broadcasters would enter the domain of social work, or the infrastructure will have to be professionalized in order for community media to remain democratic safeguards at the local level. As an antidote, NLPO lobbies for extra subsidies on the basis of securing a future-proof community-driven perspective. Marc (NLPO) notes, “We said, let us start not from the administrative lines that exist, but from the perception of citizens. This we have sought to capture in the [notion of the] natural habitat. What is the natural habitat of people?” The question arises how an awareness of the local situatedness of audiences will suffice to ensure community media can continue their roles as “watchdogs” or whether observed decline of attention for citizen’s voices and participation will further exacerbate the local “democratic deficit” (Moore).

While volunteers and paid professionals work for local public broadcasters, the political economy and institutional position of podcasts differs, as they are mostly the result of unpaid labor. The topics podcasts center on often cannot find their way into the dominant public sphere. As a result, podcasters create content that attracts a small, but heavily invested audience. For independent podcasters, their desire to create content for an underserved, niche audience is an important motivation to start and continue their work (Markman). When connected to feminist podcasts, this motivation is more politicized: feminist podcasters “take up sonic space” by discussing topics that are often excluded from and/or misrepresented in mainstream media, and thereby challenge the processes of in- and exclusion of

dominant publics (Tiffe and Hoffman 116). Moreover, to claim this sonic space is a particularly radical act for those whose voices are considered too nice, specific, loud or angry to be included in mainstream media. As Nikki ('Mijn babysitter en ik' i.a.) illustratively notes: "Simply by letting so many women speak you can see it as an intervention, [by] letting people with a different experience be heard". Seeking to challenge structures of inequality with their work, feminist podcasters include multiple (often underrepresented) voices and perspectives from (recurring) guests. This multivocal representation allows feminist podcasts to be a platform from which to enact, express and explore different acts of citizenship. The mediation of difference is key here: with the deliberate inclusion of perspectives different than their own, feminist podcasters present difference as a key motivation for creating and sustaining the podcast. As Floor (ZOUT.) summarizes:

[We invite] people who then bring in perspectives that we simply do not know, because they experience the world in a totally different way because they have a slightly different background. [. . .] They then have stories that we do not know yet, and then we come to new conclusions again.

By making other opinions heard and building in space for critical reflection and answerability, podcasts connect mediated, political, ethical and aesthetic acts of citizenship.

Conceptualizing podcasters' practices in terms of counterpublics is particularly apt, as a counterpublic characteristically fundamentally maintains "at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status. The cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public but a dominant one" (Warner 119). Moreover, the lack of inclusion and representation in mainstream media can be an impetus for podcasters (and community media makers in general) to initiate alternatives to this dominant public sphere. As Anaïs (Vuile Lakens) notes:

We actually started with the podcast because we noticed that we had created our very own vocabulary, or our own manners of speaking about sexuality and about our bodies, but [that we say] that reflected very little in mainstream media. [. . .] We thought: maybe we need to do something with this, maybe there are even more people interested.

For Vuile Lakens, the ultimate goal of the podcast is to provide a space for this new vocabulary and to thereby attempt to push the boundaries of the ways in which sexuality, gender and bodies are discussed in the public sphere.

Importantly, podcasting allows community media makers to work independently, to work and create content on their own terms and thereby to circumvent the exclusivity of mainstream, institutionalized media platforms. In reference to discussing the podcast and its core topics in more mainstream, mass-audience outlets, Anaïs (Vuile Lakens) describes:

With a podcast, you can perfectly bring what you want to say. [. . .] But on the other hand [in mainstream media] you often encounter a sort of simplified version of yourself [. . .] and part of the revolutionary potential of what

you're sharing gets lost. Because it does get incorporated really easily into the interpretative framework that was already in place. While actually what you want to do is to break through that framework, and make it more diverse, or more fragmented, and that is really difficult.

The “revolutionary potential” that the articulation of a new vocabulary in podcasts offers, therefore, gets lost as its message is enveloped in the already-existing interpretative framework. By being situated on the edges of the Dutch mainstream media landscape, feminist podcasters are able to articulate a different vocabulary with which to create new, critical narratives that can transform these structures or, in Anaïs’ words, “at the very least pull a little or something, to break [norms] open slightly” (Vuile Lakens). Moreover, rather than being under- or misrepresented in mainstream media, feminist podcasters create their own platforms and infrastructures within which to articulate difference and citizenship.

Feminist podcasters do not only aim to provide an inclusive platform where their ideas and voices can take up (sonic) space, but also expect receptive and engaged audiences. As Mariam (Dipsaus) explained: “What I like best, or what we really wanted, is that after such an episode you start thinking for yourself. So that something is triggered that makes you think”. As community media, both local broadcasting services and feminist podcasters provide a platform from which to address topics and issues that in mainstream media would be considered too “niche” or radical. While local broadcasting services do so within a state-subsidized institutionalized context, both examples of community media follow from the idea that there might be an “untapped or underserved audience ‘out there’, waiting for the kind of content [community media] could deliver” (Markman 556).

Feminist podcasters highlight the opportunity grassroots community media have to push back against the boundaries of the public sphere and the distinct potential for transformative mediations. Moreover, as they develop, feminist podcasters become increasingly more visible as media platforms in the public sphere. While most feminist podcasts are not institutionalized in the same ways local broadcasters are, they do operate as media makers and as such have the power and responsibility that come with that position. This, in turn, affects their practices. As Mariam (Dipsaus) explained:

We are media now. [. . .] We have our blind spots, and we have to think about that and we have to be strict with that and see to that. [. . .] You have [blind spots] when you yourself are not in that position. [. . .] The funny thing is: we know that. That’s why it’s called a blind spot: before you know it, you’re doing it.

Recognizing and remedying such blind spots is a key practice both local broadcasters and feminist podcasters strive to employ to guarantee the inclusivity of their platforms. It highlights the power community media have as institutions: even in a public sphere dominated by bigger, more exclusionary media institutions, community media too occupy a position of power. By using this power

to circumvent and challenge media conventions, community media establish a discursive space from which marginalized communities can perform acts of citizenship. As such, community media give audiences and media makers a platform that gives space to the “revolutionary potential” of transformative mediations of difference and acts of citizenship.

Technicity

As community media, local broadcasters and podcasters use technologies to build connections among and within communities and can function as spaces for cohesion for both local and transnational diasporic communities. The technologies used impact upon the particular ways in which citizenship is mediated within the fringes of the media landscape and the forms of connectedness and belonging this mediation provides audiences. Community media operate in a media landscape characterized by socio-technical “disruption” as a result of media convergence, participation and interaction (Deuze and Prenger), which results in a “lively and contentious cycle of capture, co-optation, and subversion of [. . .] system architecture” that both shapes the dominant mainstream and expands the fringes of media culture (Lievrouw 2). The concept of technicity “mediates between production and industrial ‘formats’, generating new techniques and methods” (Lievrouw 228) and thus “refers more to the design of new practices than to technological devices” only (Martín-Barbero 289).

There are distinct media-specific differences between local broadcasting services and podcasts. Local broadcasting services are institutionally recognized media platforms that must conform to the Dutch ‘Mediawet’, providing a balanced, diverse offering that simultaneously targets general audiences and specialized communities. Many local broadcasting services are simultaneously accessible via television, radio, digital platforms or even hard-copy newspapers. Through cross-platform-programming they strive to be “accessible to all”. As Joost (REGIO8) summarizes:

Yes, definitely, you 100% have to present everywhere. And you have to distinguish yourself in that and build an identity for the region. And show that everywhere, in order for the region to also feel connected to you. So you can achieve a sense of trust.

Accessibility generates connectedness on a local level: audiences and community media makers share a sense of belonging and recognition by being both physically present and visibly/audibly present in the region. For REGIO8, for example, Joost states:

After four years I know almost all roads in the entire Achterhoek, and I think that’s important. This way, you come everywhere and we try to make

a connection with all the people from those places, who also know these streets, and we try to foreground that.

Moreover, as Willem (SALTO) describes, the local connectedness among community members has outgrown its geographical limits and has developed into an example of transnational community media:

The community aspect has outgrown the territorial aspect. So the fact that this is the only channel which is so Surinamese, has a stronger attraction than the fact that it is an Amsterdam-based channel. I think the same holds for the Ghanaian television.

Communities abroad tuning in to local broadcasting services engage in transnational citizenship formation and allow for the formation of diaspora belongingness (Georgiou, "Diaspora in the Digital Era").

Connections among and within audiences are facilitated in part by the technological infrastructure local broadcasters use: by combining various technological formats and uniting them under the umbrella of one local broadcasting service, broadcasters are able to create new production formats that highlight accessibility and community participation. Local broadcasters can build in room for participation by allowing and encouraging community members to create their own programs, giving them time, space and resources to "speak in their own voice", thereby "simultaneously constructing and expressing one's cultural identity through idiom and style" (Fraser 69). The technologies used offer both community media makers and audiences an opportunity to disrupt and subvert dominant technological infrastructures. This distinguishes local broadcasting services greatly from national or provincial broadcasters, as it means that those who make media are not necessarily always professional and experienced journalists, but often community members with ideas and a desire to express and share them.

With this significant difference from provincial and national broadcasters, local broadcasting must be regarded through a different lens. As Willem (SALTO) argues:

If you create community media, do not critique those people as if they are a [mainstream] radio- or television channel. So do not judge them on the quality of the program. The quality does not lie in the objective quality of the images or whatever. The quality lies in the participation. In diversity. So in being present in the system in the first place. That is a quality.

SALTO works to ensure this quality by offering an open access media platform to various communities who want to broadcast their media, which, for Willem, "also means that if you open the gate to everyone, then you shouldn't start worrying about quality". Community media must therefore be considered on its own

terms, rather than by constant comparison to professional or corporate mainstream broadcasting services.

Similarly, podcasting pushes against the boundaries of what are considered to be “good” audio productions. Notably, early studies on podcasts and podcasting emphasized the medium’s relation to radio, examining in what ways podcasts are drawing on and/or re-shaping the conventions and practices of traditional radio (Berry). However, given the continuous growth and increased popularity of the medium, podcasting must now be considered on its own terms in order to articulate a sense of “podcastness” that incorporates its medium-specific allowances, limits and transformative potential (Berry 29). Similar to local broadcasting services, podcasts are characterized by, and often described in terms of, accessibility: by creating a podcast, media makers are able to circumvent the restrictions and gatekeepers of dominant media institutions. Podcast listeners create their own libraries of podcasts they want to listen to, voices they want to hear and topics they are interested in. As podcasts are delivered regularly into a listener’s podcast library, a sense of connection and belonging is created: listening to another person’s voice becomes a ritual that is “hyper-intimate”, and where “listeners can feel deeply engaged with both the process of listening and the material to which they listen” (Berry 20). For podcasters, the ritualized intimacy of podcast listening ideally results in the start of a conversation, the articulation of ideas or that, as Mariam (Dipsaus) states, “you start thinking for yourself”. A key aspect of that process is representation and recognition, which Johanna (ZOUT.) explains, is one of the main goals of the podcast: “If we can at least help one person, or that a person sees themselves represented, or that a person maybe learns something, then we have actually achieved our goal and was it worth it”.

Community recognition and inclusivity is practiced structurally and by virtue of community media’s technological infrastructures. Willem (SALTO) conceptualizes this practice on SALTO’s open access platform as “acknowledgement through recognition”. For example, the Arabic community was initially under-represented in SALTO’s programming compared to the community’s numerical presence in Amsterdam. In SALTO’s philosophy, it is expected that when communities structurally feel acknowledged they are more inclined to feel at home. In order to attract media producers from the Arabic community, SALTO made sure to add more Arabic music to their programming. This policy has proven successful and resulted in an increased volume of Arabic media producers at SALTO. Such mediating practices allow both local broadcasters and feminist podcasters to establish a ritual connection with their audiences. The establishment of regular patterns – of inclusive programming, of producing content, of sparking debate and dialogue – results from intersections between technological and industrial formats and audiences’ ability to receive and access these media and encounter other communities. This results in an inclusive accessibility that allows community media makers to disrupt the existing frameworks of mediation and to construct citizenship on a community level. Through co-opting and re-imagining technological

possibilities, community media create new possibilities which affect how acts of citizenship may be performed. In the use of accessible technologies and increasingly open-access platforms, local broadcasters and feminist podcasters can disrupt social-historical patterns of exclusion.

Sociality

In combination with institutionality and technicity, the mediation of citizenship is shaped by sociality. In the notion of sociality people's competences, preferences and cultural interests "on which they base the primary processes of articulation and constitution of social subjects and identities" (Martín-Barbero) are combined. As such, community media's sociality connects the ways in which community media create a sense of belonging for marginalized communities via a specific and strategically disruptive use of technologies and highlights how these practices contribute to the formation of communities through mediations of difference. While the local broadcasting sector mainly focuses on creating content tailored towards a specific geographical area (D'Haenens et al.), the target audience is mostly community-driven. Joost (REGIO8) argues:

We strive to represent a good balance between all societal layers of society. We do not only have an eye for politics, we also look out for what else is going on. Whether it's covering the local summer school or talking about a migrant issue.

Within this conceptualization, the mediating properties of community media focus on fostering connections through updating people about local affairs. Circulating local, community-specific cultural expressions potentially acts as a social glue for local communities, as D'Haenens et al. confirm:

Through consuming audio, video and web content, audience members may imagine themselves as part of a larger local audience. They play a significant role, because when a community loses its local news media, it also loses an institutional memory needed to maintain or raise the profile of the community, to inform citizens and to campaign on issues of local relevance.

(144)

In recognizing audiences as members of distinct communities, community media makers create belongingness that moves beyond formal and institutional forms of citizenship. As Willem (SALTO) describes:

The first step is acknowledgement through recognition. . . . In times of bubblification, when everyone finds their own news channels and their own sources, at SALTO you encounter these different connections which offers a source of inspiration. [. . .] That is where introductions lie. That is where all

those buzzwords politics are looking for lie to keep society afloat. Interest in the other. Connection between different bubbles.

Local broadcasters like SALTO Amsterdam actively mediate difference in response to communities who are increasingly speaking to themselves in parallel echo chambers. They respond to the “bubblication” of communities by connecting different audiences in their programming. Because the city and its potential audiences are multi-faceted, they feel this needs to be reflected in their programming. Local broadcasting stations can serve an important role as the physical and symbolic space where different communities and generations of broadcasters come together. Inclusive and democratic programming can introduce audiences to content and perspectives they might not encounter otherwise. Notably, this is different for feminist podcasters. Rather than audiences ‘automatically’ being exposed to difference, podcast listeners choose to download and listen to a podcast. For feminist podcasters, a key practice is therefore including a multiplicity of perspectives within their programs, in order for listeners to simultaneously recognize themselves and be exposed to and challenged by different voices.

While most local broadcasters strive to be inclusive organizations, practicing this inclusivity remains difficult. Institutionalization and a focus on professionalization and quality have the potential to serve as an exclusionary mechanism to various groups of media producers and consequently to various audiences. It is important for media makers to question what kind of audiences they imagine they cater to and if their programming reflects those audiences. Ethnic diversity is one of the key ways in which in- and exclusion are addressed by broadcasters within their programming. The following target groups were highlighted among local public broadcasters: the white expat and international student community, the Surinamese, Caribbean, Somali, Arabic, Bhagwan and migrant communities. However, local broadcasters generally fail to approach diversity as an intersectional practice by disproportionately emphasizing race and ethnicity. In local broadcasts the voices within different programs do not often join within a single show (unlike in feminist podcasts where multivocal representation is a key practice within each program). In times of increased digital mediatization, a diversification of platforms creates opportunities for different voices to perform acts of citizenship. Yet, struggles for power also take place within those particularistic media environments. Thus, particularistic media alone are not enough for addressing issues associated with inclusion and participation in the media: “voice does not guarantee recognition” (Georgiou, “Does the subaltern speak?” 45). In the case of local broadcaster SALTO, a remarkable percentage of 2.5% of visitors originate from Paramaribo (SALTO 2019). The same holds for Osho, which addresses the transnational Bhagwan community: from audience statistics SALTO knows this is one of their most popular internet channels. The channel is viewed from various geographical locations including Italy, Egypt and India, illustrating again the potential of diasporic groups to claim community across national borders.

This contrasts sharply with the audiences of other local broadcasters, mostly originating from the local or bordering municipalities. For example, while OOG includes programming in English to cater to the international student community, it previously also featured Somali-language programming which has recently been abandoned, to avoid alienating Dutch speaking audiences. The inclusivity broadcasters present is therefore inherently limited: diversity is often limited to catering to ethnic, social or religious groups as separate categories. An intersectional approach that addresses multiple axes of identity is not reflected in their programming. In opposition to the local broadcasting networks, podcasting seems to be a format through which intersectional feminist identities are able to represent themselves. We see this tension reflected in community media makers' self-definitions. SALTO's slogan *verbind Amsterdam* ("connect Amsterdam") explicitly focuses on the social and connective bridge they seek to establish between communities. Feminist podcasts like *Dipsaus voor en door vrouwen van kleur* (for and by women of color) specifically position themselves towards their audiences based on specific interests or intersectional identities.

Both feminist podcasters and local broadcasters seek to answer to demands from communities they serve. Nevertheless, their inclusivity is limited. As all acts of citizenship, community media "emerge from the paradox between universal inclusion in the language of rights and cosmopolitanism, on the one hand, and the inevitable exclusion in the language of community and particularity on the other" (Isin and Nielsen 11). Community media are not able to recognize and address every member of their community, but through mediating difference and performing intersectionality as practice, they can open up the parameters of who is and is not included in the public sphere. In order to fulfil their connective potential, community media must continue to re-evaluate their imagined audience and the audiences they truly manage to reach. Key practices that community media can and must deploy are therefore not only open and democratic programming and "acknowledgement through recognition", but also an awareness of potential representational blind spots and an openness to create space for underrepresented community members. Through this ongoing process, community media can become and remain open and inclusive and allow citizenship claims to come forth in the mediation of difference.

Conclusions

In providing a community-based platform for unheard voices, community media are able to circumvent the traditional conventions of institutionalized mainstream media practices. In the Netherlands, both local broadcasters and feminist podcasters – two distinct community media under study in this chapter – perceive a representational void in mainstream media and seek to fill this on their own terms. As community media, they are invested in providing accessible platforms for marginalized communities, where community members can present themselves on their own terms and recognize themselves in others. In pursuing a more

inclusive politics of representation, community media provide communities with opportunities for actively claiming citizenship and belonging from below. Community media's practices highlight the levels of institutionality, technicity and sociality that co-shape the mediation of difference. From an institutional perspective, community media challenge and transform the mainstream public sphere and current media landscape, while remaining aware of their position of power as media makers within that landscape. Through co-opting disruptive technologies and rethinking the technological architecture through which the mediation of difference occurs, community media strive towards inclusivity, accessibility and a new appreciation of the particular aesthetic, ethical and political qualities community media offer in performing acts of citizenship. In the notion of sociality, institutionality and technicity are brought together: via democratic programming and an openness to inclusive participation and representation, community media build and sustain marginalized communities and their acts of citizenship.

Community media's mediations of difference, we argue, are acts of citizenship that contrast with both the gatekeeping institutions dominating the current media landscape and the common conceptualization of citizenship from a top-down rather than a community-driven perspective. Local public broadcasters and feminist podcasts demonstrate how the mediation of difference is a multi-layered and contested terrain as it offers the possibility for transformation within and outside of institutions. Both groups of media makers position themselves outside of and as alternatives to the mainstream public sphere. The community media makers discussed how they mediate difference by representing difference and how they use various strategies to do so. Examples of such strategies are "acknowledgement through recognition", a multi-media approach to broad- or narrowcasting, and actively working to define and remedy media makers' representational "blind spots". Our alternative interpretive and evaluative framework of community media champions a multiplicity of voices and bridges diverse communities, which is pivotal in our contemporary increasingly bubbled, scattered media landscape where filter bubbles proliferate. In practicing "acknowledgement through recognition" community media create space for an exchange of perspectives. Mediating differences among and within communities demonstrates how community media enable active acts of citizenship, which demands greater scrutiny alongside the legal and ontological dimensions of both institutionalized citizenship and recognition.

Through drawing on alternative theoretical understandings of citizenship, this chapter explored community media as examples of doing citizenship from below as an active practice. We have analyzed how these media makers mediate difference and strive for the recognition and inclusion of a multiplicity of voices in the hierarchical media landscape. While community media have always been around in a wide variety of forms, their position in an increasingly fragmented and digitized landscape is changing. Moreover, given the current "democratic hiatus" media find themselves in, and to counter the bubblicization of fragmented communities, the future potential of community media to maintain stronger inclusion and recognition of different voices should be warmly embraced.

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Note

- 1 The empirical analysis draws from two periods of fieldwork: in winter 2018–2019, in-depth interviews with five representatives of institutionalized local public broadcasters have been conducted as part of a Council of Europe study on community media, COMMIT *das Community Medien Institut für Weiterbildung, Forschung und Beratung* (*Across Generations*, forthcoming). In spring–summer 2018, eleven independent feminist media makers that represent six feminist podcasts have been interviewed as part of fieldwork conducted for a gender studies master thesis (De Koning).

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