

Tribal radio stations as key community informants and sites of resistance to mainstream media narratives

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Abstract

Rural US Indigenous communities are disproportionately affected by digital divides, insufficient infrastructures, and health disparities, so that community radio still represents a key medium in the lean mediascapes of these communities. The first US radio stations licensed to American Indian/Alaska Native tribes began broadcasting in 1971, about 50 years after the rise of rural radio in the US, which until then had almost entirely ignored Indigenous news, concerns, and voices. This paper draws on interview data from 2016 fieldwork conducted in Alaska and Arizona with two community radio stations serving the local, mostly Indigenous audience, to highlight how its historical ties to social activism continue to play a role in how tribal radio functions as a medium today. Tribal radio stations value not only traditional journalistic standards, but also advocacy for the community, combating stereotypes, and view themselves as distinct from mainstream and other community media.

Keywords

Tribal radio, Indigenous peoples, American Indians/Alaska Natives, community radio, Indigenous activism, social movements, Hopi, Yupik

Introduction

Community media, particularly radio, continue to play a central role in rural Indigenous communities in the United States (US). Not only are tribal lands in the US predominantly located in rural and remote areas, but as the Indigenous peoples of this continent, Native American and Alaska Native tribes have a unique and complex legal relationship with the US federal government, diverse and strong cultures, and a long history of colonialism, leading to the severe infrastructure injustice and health inequities affecting Indigenous communities today.

According to the most recent available US Census data, 2.9 million Americans (about 0.9 percent of the US population) identified as solely American Indian or Alaska Native, and an additional 2.3 million Americans identified as American Indian or Alaska Native in combination with one or more other races. The latter group experienced rapid population growth between 2000 and 2010, with a population increase of 39 per cent (US Census, 2010). Both groups combined total 5.2 million American Indian or Alaska Native individuals, or 1.7 percent of the US population (US Census, 2010). There are 567 federally recognised tribes and a number of small, presently unrecognised Indigenous communities in the United States today, who may refer to themselves as tribes, bands, pueblos, rancherias, villages, or communities (National Congress of American Indians, 2017; United States Federal Register, 2017). Many federally recognised tribal governments have rights to certain lands (here referred to as 'tribal lands'), however, no tribe in

the US fully owns or controls land they have been granted, as the United States federal government is holding these lands in trust for tribal governments (Russell, 2004). Areas designated as tribal lands across the United States total 55.7 million acres, which are administered and managed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (US Geological Survey National Map, 2018).

Indigenous peoples in the US, particularly the majority who live in rural areas, including most Indian reservations, experience some of the worst information, economic, and health inequities out of any racial/ethnic group in the nation (Geana et al., 2012; Friedman & Hoffman-Goetz, 2006; Tran et al., 2010). For example, many of these communities lack 9-1-1 emergency operator services, door-to-door mail service, paved roads, public transportation, sufficient landline and mobile telephone service coverage, and in some cases even electricity and running water (Bissell, 2004; Hudson, 2011; Hudson, 2013; Kemper, 2013; Morris & Meinrath, 2009). One in six reservation residents has to travel more than 100 miles to reach the nearest bank branch or automated teller machine (Miller, 2012: 2), and in 2000, the Department of Energy estimated that 14.2 percent of households on tribal lands lacked electricity, compared to 1.4 percent across all US households (Miller, 2012: 2). Indian reservation residents also have some of the lowest median incomes and highest unemployment rates in the United States (Hudson, 2011, 2013; Kemper, 2013; Morris & Meinrath, 2009). The average unemployment rate across all US Indian reservations was 50 percent in 2001 (Miller, 2012: 2). The Indigenous population in the US is further disproportionately affected by health disparities (Friedman & Hoffman-Goetz, 2006; Geana et al., 2012; Tran et al., 2010). For example, rates of hospitalization and mortality due to cancer are above national average for Indigenous individuals, and five-year cancer survival rates are lower for this group than for any other ethnic group in the United States (Weaver, 2010: 273). Indian reservation residents in particular also have the shortest life expectancies, highest malnutrition rates, and highest infant death rates in the United States (Miller, 2012). In addition, residents of tribal lands are affected by severe digital divides that complicate their ability to access information. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) data indicate that as of 2016, over 90% of US households are connected to high-speed broadband Internet, whereas only about 30% of households on tribal lands have access to this technology (FCC, 2016: 34).

In many rural Indigenous communities in the US with such limited — nearly non-existing — infrastructure, and economic challenges, local community radio stations are the main or even the sole source of news and other critical information, and also play a key role in the preservation of Indigenous languages and cultures (Keith, 1995; Browne, 1996; Smith & Cornette, 1998; Smith, 2004). Tribal radio does critical work under challenging circumstances to bridge information gaps by providing national and local news, health and safety information, weather hazard warnings, and access to economic and educational opportunities. The current study discusses the history of tribal radio and its current role in US Indigenous communities and draws upon individual, in-depth interviews conducted with tribal radio station managers and employees in Alaska and Arizona, to explore the continued relevance of the medium's historical roots in social activism as well as its identity in relation to mainstream media.

Currently, not one clear or universally accepted definition of US tribal radio exists, and the meaning of this term may be defined differently by different scholars, depending on the specific tribal radio stations and geographic regions under study. In the current study, 'tribal radio' includes both public radio stations serving a predominantly Native American or Alaska Native audience and stations licensed to a Native American tribe. Tribal radio stations share certain common goals, priorities, and functions, besides serving predominantly Indigenous audiences. First and foremost, tribal radio stations are committed to serving their local communities with critical information, often focusing on emergency, health and safety information, as well as national news, local news, and community updates such as school closures, cultural and ceremonial activities, and local events. Many tribal radio stations, such as those included in this

study, are also deeply committed to the revitalization and preservation of the Indigenous languages and cultures in their geographic region.

Most tribal radio stations operate under a non-commercial license, are governed or advised by a board comprised of predominantly Indigenous members from the local community, and are funded like most community media, as media scholar Kevin Howley states, 'through donations, underwriting, limited advertising, grant funding, in-kind contributions, and other noncommercial forms of support' (2010: 3). Howley further notes that 'in this way, community media are insulated from the direct and indirect influence advertisers exert over media form and content' (2010: 3). As a medium, tribal radio often exists in extremely lean mediascapes, bridges severe information gaps, and serves communities which continue to be underserved, underrepresented, and misrepresented by mainstream media. Tribal radio certainly fits within Howley's definition of community media which posits that:

community media are popular and strategic interventions into contemporary media culture committed to the democratization of media structures, forms, and practices. Popular in that these initiatives are responses to the felt need of local populations to create media systems that are relevant to their everyday lives; strategic in that these efforts are purposeful assertions of collective identity and local autonomy (2005: 2).

Given the general lack of Indigenous voices and concerns in mainstream media, tribal radio stations respond to a need for media systems and content relevant to Indigenous populations. They also assert collective identity through the use of Indigenous languages, cultural norms, and a topical focus on community initiatives, Indigenous activism, and other content highlighting tribal sovereignty.

Echevarría, Ferrández Ferrer and Dallemagne (2015) caution that media produced by underrepresented groups should not automatically be considered alternative or counter-hegemonic in all of their approaches and content. Fuchs has defined alternative media as 'mass media that challenge the dominant capitalist forms of media production, media structures, content, distribution, and reception' (2010: 178). Tribal radio stations may identify with and fit into the category of alternative media to varying degrees and they may challenge certain dominant structures and content more than others, depending on their particular station's history, mission, funding structure, specific cultural context, or the current political situation of the Indigenous community they are serving.

Indigenous communities are distinct from any other population group, not just historically as the first peoples inhabiting and caring for the land, but also politically and legally, in that Indigenous peoples have collective rights and a legitimate claim to sovereignty and nationhood. While tribal radio is overall best described as a community medium with an often counter-hegemonic orientation, there are characteristics that set it apart from community media produced by other, non-Indigenous groups. Given the long history of forced relocation and dispossession and the ongoing exploitation and oppression that Indigenous peoples face in many parts of the world, having media outlets to share Indigenous perspectives and strengthen local cultures takes on particular importance (Keith 1995). In many countries the languages of Indigenous groups were prohibited in schools for several decades and radio became a particularly effective tool for cultural and language revitalization among Indigenous communities. One international example is New Zealand, where te reo Māori, the language of the Indigenous Māori people, was prohibited in schools during the early 1900s until high Māori military enlistment during World War II led to the first regularly scheduled Maori radio program in 1942 (Browne, 1996). However, similar to the history of tribal radio in the US, it was not until 1979 that *Radio Pacific*, the first radio station broadcasting primarily to a Māori audience, including programming in te reo, came on air. This was largely a result of Māori social activism during the 1960s and 1970s, and the misrepresentation thereof in New Zealand mainstream media that Māori activists sought to

counter with their own stories and accounts of current events (Browne, 1996).

Indigenous media are also regulated through a different process than other mainstream or community media in the US. Since its establishment in 2010, the Office of Native Affairs and Policy (ONAP) at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulates media on tribal lands, including tribal radio, and is responsible for consulting with federally recognised tribes in the US on broadband and other infrastructure development projects (FCC, 2018; McMahon, 2011).

Media production and regulation are inextricably linked to Indigenous sovereignty and the collective rights of Indigenous peoples. With regard to broadband Internet infrastructure and access regulation, for example, Canadian media scholar Rob McMahon introduced the concept of 'digital self-determination' (2011: 155) and names control over and active participation in broadband infrastructure development on tribal lands as one way tribes can exercise their sovereignty in the 21st century.

Very little academic work has been done on tribal radio in the US, or Indigenous audiences' experiences and uses of this particular medium (Keith, 1995; Smith & Brigham, 1992). Most of the existing work on tribal radio in the US has examined its role in Indigenous language preservation and revitalisation (Browne, 1998; Moore & Tlen, 2007). Even though this is undoubtedly a key contribution tribal radio can make to its respective communities, it is evident that more research is needed to understand the many other ways in which tribal radio benefits its respective communities.

To this day, tribal radio stations fulfil a critical function for the predominantly American Indian/Alaska Native communities they serve — as a primary source of news, political, health, and safety information, but also as a highly trusted source of information and narratives that often still stand in opposition to mainstream narratives produced by cultural outsiders about the Indigenous population and their concerns. For all of these reasons, radio continues to be a key medium in the lean mediascapes of these communities. Its historical ties to Indigenous activism also still play an important role in its identity today.

Indigenous Activism and the Historic Origins of Tribal Radio

Rural radio in the US, beginning as early as 1922, had almost entirely ignored Indigenous news, concerns, and voices (Keith, 1995; Browne, 1996; Smith & Cornette, 1998; Smith, 2004). Even mainstream stations possessing a signal that reached large Native populations, such as Albuquerque's KKOB-AM, neglected Native concerns, although it broadcast to two-thirds of the state of New Mexico, which has always had a particularly large Indigenous population; currently the second-highest in the nation after Alaska (Keith, 1995: 6). Half a century passed before the first commercial radio station was licensed to a US Native tribe when WYRU-AM in Red Springs, North Carolina, was licensed to the Lumbee tribe in 1970. The first public, non-commercial radio station officially affiliated with a Native tribe, and serving a predominantly Indigenous audience, namely the Yup'ik, went on air in Bethel, Alaska, less than a year later, in 1971. This station, KYUK AM & FM, is now the oldest continuously operating tribal radio station in the US and one of two community partners on this project. Unable to comply with the financial requirements attached to a commercial radio license, the pioneering Lumbee station WYRU-AM has since been sold and is no longer under tribal ownership (Smith & Cornette, 1998: 3). According to the Native Public Media website (2018), 57 tribal radio stations across the United States are active today.

The early 1970s, when the first tribal radio stations came on air, was a time of social activism. Just weeks before WYRU-AM came on the air, Indigenous activists from across the US had occupied Alcatraz Island for 19 months in an effort to protest against the continued disregard of tribal treaty rights and Indigenous concerns at the federal level (Keith, 1995: 19). During this time, Indigenous activists became acutely aware of the powerful role the media could play in shaping

public opinion and in soliciting support for their cause from the American public. Also, since most mainstream media framed Indigenous activists and their protests as overly aggressive, disorganised, and unwarranted, Native activists increasingly needed to communicate their perspectives on political debates and protests to the broader public, including non-Indigenous Americans (Keith, 1995: 19).

As a medium, tribal radio has been most comparable to early rural radio and 'farm radio' in the US, which functioned as a community medium providing critical information regarding weather, local politics and markets, and current pricing for agricultural products to farmers in the area in a timely fashion (Smith, 2004). There was a high need for this information among farmers and residents of rural areas during the 1920s and 1930s, and the number of radios in US homes doubled between 1929 and 1933 (Ware, 2009: 63). In his book about US rural radio, Steve Craig points out that 'radios blended well with rural and social work routines' (Craig, 2009: 80). The popularity and influence of rural radio peaked in the 1930s and 1940s, about a decade after the first radio station began operating in the United States and before television became commonplace in American households (Smith, 2004).

The reasons for the popularity of rural radio in the 1930s also hold true for tribal radio stations serving rural populations today. As an auditory medium, radio blends well with rural lifestyles, but it also resonates with the oral cultural traditions of Indigenous peoples (Smith & Brigham, 1992; Smith & Cornette, 1998). KUYI Hopi Radio in Arizona, for example, plans its programming around the ceremonial calendar of the Hopi Tribe, showing respect to traditional Hopi culture. One example is their refrain from playing fast, loud music using drums during the time of *Kyaamuya* in December, which is considered a time for reflection, when mostly calm, relaxing music is played on KUYI, and more radio story segments are aired than during other times of the year (Dukepoo, 2013).

Tribal radio also continues to be an important medium of Indigenous resistance and a mouthpiece for activist movements. One recent example is the makeshift radio station run out of a trailer at the water protectors' camp on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation during the Dakota Access Pipeline Protest in 2016, which was named *Spirit Resistance Radio*. The station operated with a low-power FM signal that could barely be picked up outside the camp, but was later able to stream online, so that its programming became accessible nationwide, and could also be shared on other radio stations (Norrell, 2016; Upham, 2016).

Methodology

This study, which is part of a larger research study that focuses on access to information in remote, rural areas and implications for health equity, is based upon community-based, participatory research (CBPR) (Israel, Eng, Schulz & Parker, 2013) with two tribal radio stations — KYUK in Bethel, Alaska, the oldest continually operating tribal radio station in the US, and KUYI Hopi Radio located on the Hopi Reservation in northeast Arizona. These two stations and their audiences serve as case studies of tribal radio as a unique medium and a critical information resource for remote, rural Indigenous communities in the US. Both serve communities similar in structure, rurality, and social circumstances, but quite different in culture and history, so as case studies they allow for comparative analysis. Both stations provide bilingual programming in both English and the respective Indigenous language, and both stations have a website on which they are able to stream their programming live online. The online streams allow community members who have moved away to stay connected and continue hearing their Indigenous language spoken regularly. At each location, the station is the only radio station that serves the area with entertainment, news, and information — including emergency communication like severe weather warnings or search and rescue missions.

The study utilises a community-based participatory approach, in which general managers

and staff of each radio station were closely involved in the design of the project and in recruiting a diverse group of participants, resulting in individual in-depth interviews with station employees and focus groups with groups of audience members (for a total of 65 participants across the two study locations during 2016). All research participants were adults who identified as members of the respective local tribes and as regular listeners of the local tribal radio station. This paper draws upon a sub-set of this data — the individual interviews conducted with radio station employees — which highlight how advocacy and a counter-hegemonic positioning continue to be central to tribal radio's identity as a medium. These include seven individual in-depth interviews of about 60 minutes each with employees of KYUK in Alaska and another five individual in-depth interviews of the same length in Arizona with employees of KUYI.

In addition to the author's university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), two additional review boards, one representing each Indigenous community, reviewed and approved the study prior to data collection — the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office and the Human Subjects Committee of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation, a board elected by representatives of the 58 Alaska Native villages in the area which frequently reviews health-related research studies aiming to collect data in the region. Tribal oversight over the study ensures that information and representation of the communities are accurate. Each manuscript and public presentation resulting from this project undergoes official tribal review at both project sites, and any suggestions from these reviews are incorporated prior to publication or oral presentation. Both of these tribal review boards also reviewed this manuscript prior to publication.

Indigenous communities in the US continue to be a drastically under-researched population, compared to other racial/ethnic communities in the nation and experience some of the most severe economic and health inequities. While results from this study cannot necessarily be generalised to other Indigenous communities and cultures beyond the two case studies included here, this project can make an important contribution to our understanding of Indigenous media and the information needs of this population.

KYUK

KYUK, founded in 1971, is located in the town of Bethel, situated in the rural Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta in Southwestern Alaska, and serves a rural population of approximately 22,000, predominantly Yup'ik tribal members who live in small villages along the Yukon River. Bethel is a small town with just over 6,000 residents (Data USA, 2018). It is located about 400 miles west of Anchorage and can only be reached by airplane or boat; however, it has a single paved road, about 10 miles in length, connecting local infrastructure, such as the airport, hospital, schools, a small number of restaurants, and the two grocery stores in the area. Over 60% of Bethel's residents identify as Native American or Alaska Native, predominantly as Yup'ik (Data USA, 2018). The 58 Yup'ik communities of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta are federally recognised as distinct tribes, and live in 50 villages in the region, which are not interconnected by roads. Many Delta residents hunt and fish for subsistence.

KYUK is a public radio station owned by Bethel Broadcasting, Inc., an Alaska Native owned and operated 501(c)(3) non-profit organisation and public broadcasting licensee. KYUK's mission is twofold:

We are dedicated to serving the rural Alaska and Alaska Native population of our region and responding to issues that affect the people of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta [...] Our mission is to educate, stimulate, and inform, as well as to provide cultural enrichment, entertainment, and opportunity for public access and language maintenance for cultural survival (KYUK Website, 2018).

KUYI

On air since 2000, KUYI's signal range covers the Hopi Reservation and is thus available to its roughly 7,500 residents, who are almost exclusively Hopi or Tewa tribal members. The Hopi Tribe is a federally recognised American Indian tribe with over 10,000 enrolled members, of whom about 7,500 reside on the 1.6 million-acre Hopi reservation in northeastern Arizona, according to Hopi tribal enrolment records. The rural Hopi reservation consists of 12 distinct village communities and is entirely surrounded by the Navajo Nation reservation, the largest Indian reservation in the United States (Russell, 2004). KUYI is a tribal non-profit organization licensed through the Hopi Foundation and governed by the Hopi Foundation's Board of Directors and KUYI's own Community Advisory Board. KUYI Hopi Radio is deeply committed to its mission 'to have a positive effect on the lives of the people living on the Hopi reservation and in surrounding communities through the public discussion of issues and events that will enlighten the community' (KUYI Website, 2018).

Results

The interviews with station leadership and employees spoke to the continued importance of the counter-hegemonic spirit that tribal radio embodied from its earliest days. Four major ways in which the medium's history is relevant today are (1) advocacy for the local community, as well as Indigenous peoples more broadly, (2) its positioning outside mainstream media and even other US community media, (3) the radio station being understood as a community member, and (4) its mission to educate cultural outsiders about the local Indigenous culture and values.

Advocacy for Indigenous peoples, which was a major motivation for the founding of tribal radio stations, continues to be central to the work of both stations today. General managers, producers, and journalists at tribal radio stations see advocacy for their communities as part of their mission, extending it beyond uninvolved journalism. This is partly due to the high community involvement and community ownership of these stations and a high sense of accountability to the local audience. Tribal radio is also uniquely positioned to advocate for communities that mostly find themselves either misrepresented or entirely absent in mainstream media. One reporter at KYUK put it this way: 'And then on the individual level, people can feel like they don't have a voice. So I mean obviously our biggest commitment is to those with the least voice' (KYUK Interview 2: 15). The same person later said: 'I think on some level our job is to advocate for the community. [...] Like, there's advocacy beyond just sharing information. [...] It's absolutely, you know, more than just journalism' (KYUK Interview 2: 17). This speaks to how Indigenous peoples in the US, particularly in rural regions, have very little representation in other media, resulting in a continued struggle for voice. Tribal radio plays a key role as an amplifier of community voices and advocate for their concerns. Given the stark inequalities affecting Indigenous populations to this day, much is at stake for these communities, and media representation can have broader impacts on their visibility and consideration in policy processes and US society at large.

Interview data also indicate that tribal radio stations do not understand themselves as part of the mainstream media, but rather as a distinct medium that offers information and education that cannot be found in any other media outlet. In addition, the counter-hegemonic identity of the medium, closely tied to Indigenous activism in its earliest days, remains strong today. When asked about reasons they began work at KYUK, one reporter said: 'I thought it was a fascinating opportunity to do something [...] just out of like mainstream America' (KYUK Interview 2: 1). A similar motivation was echoed by an employee at KUYI, who also felt that the radio station was not part of the mainstream American culture or media, and that working for the station as a community member could be one way to protect the community from outsiders who have

historically exploited and taken advantage of Indigenous peoples:

My growing up was 'learn the White man's way, learn how they do everything, come back and teach us so we [...] don't get taken advantage of, we don't get misled or anything like that. Learn their ways, come back, help us, work for us and then protect us in that way' (KUYI Interview 4: 11).

The idea of protecting the community is realised in two ways at tribal radio stations: by serving the local community with information that is vital to their everyday lives and by sharing information about the community to the outside world, helping to protect them from further misrepresentation. Many employees felt that even when Indigenous issues were covered on other media outlets, the stories presented there often lacked depth or were incomplete. Tribal radio is present in the communities and can provide a much more complete, detailed picture. Employees saw a clear distinction between programming done by outsiders and that produced on the ground by tribal radio stations:

A lot of times I feel like we're the underdog out here. I used to love doing statewide stories about us. Who we are, what our struggles are, how we're dealing with them. Giving them a more complete picture than the other larger media organizations that aren't out here but report on us sometimes — a larger picture than what they are providing (KYUK Interview 1:10).

However, tribal radio does not only understand itself as distinct from US mainstream media, but also different from other community media, in that comparatively, there are fewer radio stations — or media outlets in general — that represent Indigenous communities than those that represent other minority populations in the US. Even within the realm of community media, Indigenous voices are marginalized and there are significantly fewer community radio stations on air that serve Indigenous groups than there are for other minority populations. One KUYI employee expressed this in the following way: 'With just about 50 Native stations on the air right now as compared to well over 1,000 [non-tribal] community radio stations — the largest distinct difference is the amount of people whose communities are not being represented' (KUYI Interview 1: 2). This also speaks to a desire for representation within the US public sphere that adequately reflects the diversity of Indigenous groups and provides greater visibility and opportunity for participation in public discourses.

In their programming, tribal radio stations are also conscious of who is being highlighted and celebrated in the stories they share. When asked about their approach to sharing health information, one KYUK reporter said: 'The stories that I think of first are, like, stories that kind of celebrate YKHC [Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation, principal healthcare organization in the region, whose Board of Directors is elected by tribal leaders] and that, like, sort of Native self-determination' (KYUK Interview 4: 25). This is exemplary of the strong sense of responsibility to their local communities that characterises both stations. They regard themselves less as an independent media organisation serving the community and more as an integral part of that community. When asked about the station leadership structure at KUYI, a staff member asserted: 'This station is owned by the community. Nobody else. [...] They're the ones running the station, not us' (KUYI Interview 1: 3). This was echoed by a staff member at KYUK who explained:

There's a strong sense that we are the property of the community. Because we are. And when we do something that displeases the community, they make that known to us. And I feel that it's within their right to, you know, have ownership over their public radio station (KYUK Interview 2: 8).

Community members are highly involved with each station, calling and visiting frequently. Local residents would walk or drive to the station to request songs, share local news, visit with

station leadership and reporters, make a donation, or to volunteer their time. Not only is the local community very involved with tribal radio stations, it seems fair to say that these stations are seen as an integral part of the community, not an external medium reporting on them. One long-term employee of KYUK said the station occupies a space in Yup'ik society that mirrors that of a traditional teaching and learning space:

You know, the Natives out here, Yup'ik speakers, they consider - have the idea [...] that KYUK is like a *qasgiq*. *Qasgiq* was a men's house in the early days, where young boys were taken to live with their fathers and grandfathers in the men's house. [...] They lived separately in the old days. And so, a lot of our listeners consider, and especially I consider KYUK as their *qasgiq*, because that's where we teach. In the early days like how to make hunting tools, canoes, sleighs, stuff we used every day to make a living in the early days. But now it's a *qasgiq* for passing on information and knowledge, so people will know what to do in case of an emergency or something. But it's - they consider it a *qasgiq*, a place where information is given out for everyone to hear and learn from (KYUK Interview 3: 9).

The comparison with a traditional cultural space of great importance in Yup'ik society highlights the cultural relevance and integrity of the radio station, as well as the deep-rooted respect for the station as a space of learning and teaching that exists both among employees and community members. Another employee of the same station added that the station itself functions not very differently from the community in which it is embedded: 'The culture in the workplace just sort of reflects the region and I think that's what I like about it. It really is a nice reflection of the whole community in one little station' (KYUK Interview 4: 9).

Given that both stations also stream their programming online, they communicate not just to their local communities but have the potential to reach much wider audiences, both in the US and abroad. When asked about educating cultural outsiders who may listen to tribal radio online, or who are visitors or professionals in the area, many employees evoked the earliest days of European contact and spoke about the continued need to educate outsiders about Indigenous culture in a way that opposes assumptions and stereotypes. Regarding these stereotypes, Indigenous media and film scholar Beverly Singer has written:

The historical misrepresentation of "Indians" has been outside of tribal control and perpetuated by American cultural, political, academic, and social institutions that promote, produce, and communicate information to the public. Indians have been misrepresented in art, history, science, literature, popular films, and by the press in the news, on radio, and on television. The earliest stereotypes associating Indians with being savage, naked, and heathen were established with the foundation of America (2001:1).

One KYUK employee made an interesting connection between the need to educate European missionaries about Alaska Native cultures when they first arrived in Alaska, on the one hand, and the educational mission of the radio station today:

And the funny thing is that when the missionaries first came to our area, they were telling us all about "Love one another, care for one another" and stuff like that, but that's what we were doing long before they came. So we tell them "Oh we know how to do that already." And we tell them about the Yup'ik way of doing things. We want them to know. [...] Different people that work in different areas, from the hospital,... we want them to hear our language and understand how we think. You know? Because our way of thinking is different from the White man's way (KYUK Interview 3: 6).

Several station employees spoke to understanding their mission in the two-fold way of providing highly specific content for their local audiences which they would not be able to access elsewhere, and the need to educate cultural outsiders, especially non-Indigenous individuals

living in the area. In this way, the stations also act as an instrument of intercultural understanding, aiming to support the sustainability of a local community which is becoming increasingly diverse. Another station employee at KUYI also spoke to the need to oppose stereotypes with accurate information, with the purpose of protecting the community from further exploitation:

The role of any tribal station is to think about being that vanguard of protecting the things about a culture that have already been exploited and to not propagate that further. At the same time being aware of stereotypes that are unfolding in the mainstream world. [...] This [radio station] is an organ of communication, of strength, of resilience, and perseverance (KUYI Interview 1: 11;21).

The radio station is framed here not only as a source of information, but as a site of resistance and resilience, opposing stereotypes, amplifying Indigenous voices, and increasing visibility of Indigenous issues in mainstream society.

Conclusion

Particularly in the light of its historical roots in social activism, these voices emphasise the unique positioning of tribal radio in the modern mediascape. These stations consider themselves not part of the mainstream, but also distinct from other, non-Indigenous community stations, which, as one station leader stated, are not quite facing the same magnitude of lacking representation.

Tribal radio stations do extremely critical work, providing information, under challenging circumstances, to rural populations in areas where many residents may not have access to information from any other source. The data on various social, economic, and health inequities affecting Indigenous communities highlight the potential of tribal radio, which provides greater access to information, to have a significant impact in terms of preventing chronic diseases that are prevalent in Indigenous communities, for example. The data presented here suggest that tribal radio stations are acutely aware of their role and responsibility as the key or even the sole informant for their communities.

This is also true with regard to the political and regulatory context in which Indigenous communities exist and under which tribal radio stations operate. Tribal lands, resources, and media are all regulated by the federal government, and tribal nations in the US must continually struggle for their sovereignty. Many station employees mentioned the importance of using tribal radio to educate cultural outsiders, whether in the region or in a national/international context. Such intercultural education may be particularly important when public support for pro-Indigenous policies could have drastic impact on the daily lives of members of tribal nations resident on tribal lands, which are directly regulated by representatives of the American public.

Within the local community, tribal radio stations enjoy unparalleled support, respect, and trust from their audience. This is coupled with a great responsibility and high accountability to the community that tribal radio stations are acutely aware of. Tribal radio staff sees their programming not only as community-facing, but purposefully counter-hegemonic, in its approach to information shared with local and national audiences. Representing cultures suffering from the adverse outcomes of colonialism leads tribal radio stations to have a self-concept closely tied to advocacy, giving voice, educating others, and protecting communities whose people, land, and resources have been exploited for centuries. After being ignored or misrepresented in mainstream media — and founding tribal community radio stations for this very reason — a counter-mainstream positioning is part of this medium's history and present, given that little has changed and the living situation of Indigenous peoples in rural areas has only improved marginally, if at all.

Staying true to its founding values and principles, communicating information in accordance with cultural norms and taboos, and being highly involved with, and accountable to, the local

community likely has a strong impact on the audience. This leads to high trust in the information shared and a greater potential impact of Public Service Announcements and other calls to action, whether about staying healthy, voting, or any other topic of social importance. Therefore, tribal radio provides a strong catalyst for social change in rural Indigenous communities. Radio is accessible even to households without electricity at very low cost, does not require literacy, provides programming in the local Indigenous language, and blends with rural lifestyles, e.g. in terms of requiring less attention than television or print media, which do not allow for multitasking and information consumption in the outdoors as readily as radio does.

Very little academic work has been done on US tribal radio as a medium, on its history, its current function, and audience reception. More research is needed to understand the impact of the information tribal radio stations are providing to rural, remote communities and how access to information is tied to health equity, social justice, and tribal sovereignty.

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