

CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF 'THE COMMUNITY' AND 'COMMUNITY  
KNOWLEDGE' AMONG COMMUNITY RADIO VOLUNTEERS IN  
KATUTURA, NAMIBIA

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## ABSTRACT

Community radio typically relies on volunteers to produce and present stations' programming. Volunteers are generally drawn from stations' target communities and are seen as "representatives" of those communities. It is with such volunteers and their role as representatives of stations' target communities that this study is concerned. It poses the question: "what are the central concepts that typically inform volunteers' knowledge of their target community, and how do these concepts impact on their perception of how they have gained this knowledge, and how they justify their role as representatives of this community?" The dissertation teases out the implications of these conceptualisations for a volunteer team's ability to contribute to the establishment of a media environment that operates as a Habermasian 'critical public sphere'. It argues that this can only be achieved if volunteers have detailed and in-depth knowledge of their target community. In order to acquire this knowledge, volunteers should make use of systematic ways of learning about the community, rather than relying solely on knowledge obtained by living there. In a case study of Katutura Community Radio (KCR), one of the best-known community radio stations in Namibia, the study identifies key differences in the way in which different groups of volunteers conceptualise "the community". The study focuses, in particular, on such difference as it applies to those who are volunteers in their personal capacity and those who represent non-governmental and community-based organisations at the station. It is argued that two strategies would lead to significant improvement in such a station's ability to serve as a public sphere. Firstly, the station would benefit from an approach in which different sections of the volunteer team share knowledge of the target community with each other. Secondly, volunteers should undertake further systematic research into their target community. It is also argued that in order to facilitate such processes, radio stations such as KCR should recognise the inevitability of differences between different versions of "community knowledge".

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## **Introduction**

It is generally assumed that community radio stations must be 'owned and controlled' by their target communities (Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998; Van Vuuren 2006; Hochheimer 1993). To achieve this, they are expected to create access routes into their own structures, which will allow community members to be represented. A strategy for creating such access, common to many community radio stations, is through the participation of volunteers in station activities (Van Vuuren 2006: 379-80; Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998). It is with the role of such volunteers that I concern myself in this thesis.

The research question I intend to address is: "what are the central concepts that typically inform volunteers' knowledge of their target community, and how do these concepts impact on their perception of how they have gained this knowledge, and how they justify their role as representatives of this community?" I sought to tease out the implications of these conceptualisations for a particular volunteer team's ability to function as a critical public sphere at a local level.

Community radio volunteers are typically seen as representatives of the diverse interest groups within a station's target community. They are usually expected to represent the interests of such groups through their contributions to the station's programming content (Van Vuuren 2006: 380; Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998: 25). The assumption is, furthermore, that to be effective representatives (and as part of this to ensure ownership and control by the community), they should be in touch with the most immediate concerns of community members (Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998: 20-26). There seems to be broad agreement that, internationally, this volunteer-driven model has contributed positively to increasing access to, and representation within, the media for marginalised social groups (Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998: 15-17). At the same time, it has been argued that the implementation of the volunteer model has not, in all cases, gone far enough in the realisation of these ideals (Hadland & Thorne 2004: 55-57). This study is an attempt to respond to such critiques.

In conceptualising this study, I have kept in mind two points of criticism that have been raised with regards to the realisation of the volunteer model. Firstly, according to some researchers, volunteers often do not develop the links with local civic structures and organisations that could allow them easy access to the concerns

of community members and be a route for ensuring ownership by the community (Hadland & Thorne 2004: 55-57; Hochheimer 1993). Secondly, it is suggested that volunteers often play the role of 'gatekeepers' rather than 'representatives'. They become more concerned about 'filtering' content that 'comes to them' from their target community, rather than enhancing the involvement of a community within the processes of meaning-making (see Hochheimer 1993: 348). Such stations can become a centre of power and privilege for these volunteers – and groups and interests that they favour or belong to – to end up getting precedence on the air (Hochheimer 1993: 348-351 Van Vuuren 2006: 379-80).

I argue, in this thesis, that where these observations apply, such problems can be at least partly explained by inadequacies within the model of community radio to which such stations refer in their operation. More particularly, the model is not informed by a clear enough articulation of concepts such as 'community' and 'representation'. Building on arguments made by Davidson (2004: 20-25) and Van Vuuren (2006: 379), I argue that, in the absence of such clarity, volunteers may invoke concepts that seem 'natural' or 'common-sense' to them, but which actually serve to restrict their ability to play the role they are supposed to, as representatives of a community. A crucial example of this is that, in everyday speech, the term 'community' is often associated with harmony and solidarity. If unchallenged, this connotation can be carried over uncritically to a radio station's conceptualisation of its relationship with its target audience. This vision of a station's audience can obscure the very real power dynamics and divergent interests that exist within such a community.

It is with the acknowledgement of such power relations that this thesis is most centrally involved. Communities are almost always composed of groups and interests with contrasting values and rival objectives (Van Vuuren 2006: 381). There may also be divergent views within the target community about exactly who constitutes a 'community member', and what geographical area constitutes 'the community' (see Davidson 2004: 23-25). It is my view that the approach taken to volunteerism within a community radio station needs to be able to engage with such conflict. Furthermore, differences and power dynamics are by necessity a reality within the volunteer membership of a community radio station itself (Van Vuuren 2006: 379-80). However, within volunteer groups, too, these power dynamics and differences in backgrounds and perceptions are often glossed over (Davidson 2004:

25; Van Vuuren 2006: 380-81). It is common to refer to a group of volunteers as a 'family', a word that – in popular speech – connotes harmony and a common purpose (See Davidson 2004). It is possible that if stations have indeed failed to implement the ideals of community radio, this can, in many cases, be linked to this smoothing over of conflict and difference.

In this context I sought to investigate the concepts that inform a particular volunteer team's knowledge of their target community, how they felt they gained this knowledge and how they justified their role as representatives. I sought to tease out the implications of these conceptualisations for their ability to function as a critical public sphere at a local level.

I further sought to investigate the research question by capturing the ways in which different members of Katutura Community Radio (KCR) describe the 'community' that the station serves, and went on to try to tease out the implications of these different perceptions for the role that KCR should play in serving that community. I also examined to what extent the vision statement for the station and its programming schedules seem to manage the tension between these differing perceptions.

KCR was chosen as a case study for two reasons. Firstly, the station sees itself, in its mission statement, as an intervention both into the social space of Katutura and Khomasdal, two poor residential areas of Windhoek, and into the Namibian media environment. It aims to provide a communication medium that is driven by its users, and which deliberates with them on solutions to social problems (KCR 2005). Thus, it can be said that KCR's goals, broadly in line with the World Organisation of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) model of community radio, made it a good subject for research that is involved with the problems of implementing this model. Secondly, KCR is one of Namibia's oldest community radio stations (Isaacs 2005), and other Namibian community stations have often followed its lead, thus making it a good choice for a case study that would be relevant to the Namibian community radio movement as a whole.

Chapter One presents the theoretical background that informs the research. It draws on Habermas's (1964, 1992) model of the public sphere and in this context presents a set of criteria that is applied throughout the rest of the thesis to my evaluation of the role that community radio can play in society. I illustrate how arguments and criteria similar to those advocated by Habermas are expressed within

the classic ideals of community radio. I then show how the interpretation of these ideas falls short when it comes to creating a local public sphere in practice. In particular, I illustrate how the lack of recognition of the need for systematic, structured knowledge of the target community alongside the situated, ‘organic’ knowledge acquired through being a community member could possibly cause problems for community radio in practice.

Chapter Two sketches the history and social context of Katutura and Khomasdal, two residential areas that together form the target community for KCR. The chapter also describes the mainstream media scene in Namibia. KCR describes itself, in its mission statement, as making an intervention into both these social spaces. For my case study of KCR, it is therefore vital to acknowledge these environments, the role that they have played in determining the nature of KCR and how KCR, in turn, aims to engage with them.

In Chapter Three I explain the methodology I used in my investigation and argue for my decision to make use of a qualitative approach, based chiefly on in-depth individual interviews and a group discussion. I also describe the challenges that arose in implementing this research design.

In Chapter Four I outline my research findings. I summarise key themes in the volunteers’ description of ‘the community’ and interpret what this could mean in terms of the different sources of the volunteers’ knowledge, and, in turn, the implications of this for the station fulfilling the requirements of the ‘critical public sphere’. I analyse the problems within the station as a whole regarding the conceptualisation of knowledge and the position of the volunteer group within the station’s structures.

Finally, the conclusion brings together these strands of argument and evaluate what the findings may mean for the research question. I also offer a number of suggestions for further research.

My case study gave me the opportunity to find out what informs a particular volunteer team’s knowledge of their target community, how they felt they gained this knowledge and how they justified their role as community representatives. In the process the research also uncovered a number of related issues like the extent to which KCR acknowledged differences in the conceptualisations of the target community within its volunteer group and how the knowledge that the volunteer group ‘brought in’ from the community was treated within the station’s broader

structures. It is my hope that the research will be of relevance to other community radio stations wanting to improve their representation of their own target communities, as well as to researchers investigating these issues elsewhere.



## **Chapter One: Theoretical Background**

### **Introduction**

It is often argued that community radio has an important role to play in promoting democracy at a local level. To perform this role community radio usually relies on volunteers. These volunteers are tasked to represent, or speak for, the people who live in the area in which a community radio station is based, or the ‘community of interest’ the station serves. There is no doubt that this volunteer driven model has the potential to enable radio stations to gain access to the in-depth knowledge that such volunteers may have about the communities they represent (Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998: 20-26). It will, however, be argued in this chapter that this potential remains limited because of two assumptions that tend to accompany the implementation of the volunteer model. Firstly, the approach that stations adopt to what one might call ‘community knowledge’ is often based on the assumption that volunteers will ‘automatically’ know about the community they are ‘from’ (Davidson 2004: 24). Secondly, the approach assumes that small communities are defined by shared interests, a view which can blind people to the fact that such communities are in fact, composed of different power blocs, interests and social classes (Thomas 1994: 55). A similar point applies to stations that target communities of interest: the fact that a particular group of people define themselves in terms of a shared social category (such as a religious denomination or educational institution) does not stop such a group from being composed of different sub-groups, or containing power struggles. It will be argued, furthermore, that these two assumptions form part of a particular way of speaking and organising knowledge about community. As will be illustrated in this chapter, volunteers at community radio stations need to vigorously question accepted discourse on community in order to fulfil what is, after all, their primary responsibility: to represent their communities as fully as possible.

The first section of the chapter will draw on ‘public sphere’ theory in order to show the important role that community radio can play in representing small and marginalised social groups in a participatory manner. The second section discusses the extent to which community radio stations have, in practice, realised this potential– and argues that volunteers’ understandings of their target communities are a key factor in the success or failure of community radio stations.

### **1.1 Public Sphere Theory and its Implications for Progressive Media**

Theorists aiming to make sense of the representation of marginalised social groups in the media – and developing a language through which to critique it – have often relied upon Habermas’s ‘public sphere’ model as a starting point (Curran 1991: 102-103). A public sphere is understood, within this theory, to be an institutional space where all participants may address each other as equals, regardless of their social or economic position. It is, crucially, understood to be a space where quality of argument is regarded as more important than the social origins of the speaker (Habermas 1964: 116). Although there has never been a perfect public sphere in which this is completely true, the concept remains useful as a norm against which ‘real-world’ media systems can be evaluated, and interventions can be made to give the least empowered people more time on the air and space in printed publications (Curran 1991: 83-84).

Many authors have argued that power relations in society limit the effectiveness and representivity of all actually-existing public spheres. These power relations, be they based on class, gender, age or other divisions, restrict who can participate in debate, how seriously different people’s opinions are taken, and what is acceptable for public discussion (Fraser 1992: 132-136; Curran 1991: 107-110). For example, in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when many argue that the concept of a public sphere came into being, women were frequently not allowed to participate in political debate, or if they did, their opinions were not given the same weight as those of men (Garnham 1992: 360-361; Fraser 1992:113-114). Theorists have argued that if the media are to function as a public sphere, they must ensure that such barriers to participation are reduced (Garnham 1992: 362-366; Curran 1991: 107-108). Habermas himself eventually drew a distinction (Habermas 1992) between a genuinely ‘critical’ public sphere (critical publicity) and communication processes staged by the powerful through the mass media in order to bring about conformity, loyalty or specific consumer behaviour (manipulative publicity).

Within discussions of public sphere theory, it is possible to identify four conceptual contributions which appear particularly valuable for a project aiming to democratise the public sphere. These can serve as guidelines against which one can

judge both the mainstream media and the projects, such as community radio, that make an intervention into the media in order to improve public representation.

Firstly, it has been argued that there are, in fact, competing 'publics', some of which have more ability than others to influence state policy, as well as practices in society in general (Fraser 1992: 132-136). There are always a number of less influential 'subaltern counter-publics', or dissident discursive spaces. The voices emerging from these spaces often struggle to be heard in the broader society amid other influences that are backed up by social and economic power (Fraser 1992: 123-124). The level of development (or underdevelopment) of these discursive spaces and their impact on the national public sphere can be seen as an indicator of how far the establishment of a critical public sphere has progressed.

Secondly, one of the strengths of the public sphere model is that it views essential democratic discussion mechanisms as distinguished, ideally, from both the state and the market. It thus allows us to acknowledge threats to democracy, and the public discourses in the media on which it depends, from both the modern media industry, which is dominated by a few large firms, and the modern state which may be controlled by a few dominant power blocs (Garnham 1992: 361). For media organisations to function as a critical public sphere, therefore, one can argue that they should make a conscious decision to see themselves as distinct from both the state and the market. Doing so would open up the possibility of being critical commentators on both these institutions.

Thirdly, it has been argued that discussion in a critical public sphere must be able to question existing power relations. To do this, commentators have suggested that media must be prepared to revise some of the commonly held definitions of what is 'private', and thus inadmissible for public discussion. These would include such institutions as gender relations, the practices of private firms, and relationships between employers and employees (Fraser 1992: 137; Garnham 1992: 360).

Finally, theorists such as Murdock (1992: 21-22) and Curran (1991: 102-109) state that a key challenge in the development of progressive media is for practitioners to recognise their listeners or readers as 'citizens'. Media that see their listeners as citizens would, most importantly, help their listeners in their efforts to gain control of the structures governing their communities, through such methods as participating in elections, running for office, taking protest action, engaging in public activism and making hitherto unknown facts that affect their situation public.

This, and not commercial success, would be the main consideration guiding the production of content (Murdock 1992: 21-22, Curran 1991:108-9). Furthermore, it has been argued that to do this, media practitioners should themselves be involved in activism within their communities, either through their media content or through other activities. This would enable media practitioners to be recognised not just as passive observers but as citizens who represent other citizens (Harwood & McCrehan 1996). The above requirement of treating audiences as citizens applies to all media. It has also been suggested that, ideally, media organisations should allow audience members a further dimension of citizenship: being able to democratically control the media organisation itself through its structures (Harwood & McCrehan 1996). In the case of community radio, such control – through the board of trustees, the involvement of volunteers from the community and public participation in annual general meetings – is part of the dominant model of this type of broadcasting (Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998: 20-26). Sadly, these ideals are not often realised in actually-existing media globally. More often than not, audiences are viewed and addressed as ‘consumers’, who are seen only as relatively passive recipients or buyers of media messages and who in turn constitute a ‘resource’ which can be sold to advertisers (Murdock 1992: 21-23).

## **1.2 Community Radio and the Critical Public Sphere**

The worldwide community radio movement has been seen by many scholars as a movement which aims to create critical public spheres at a local level (Van Vuuren 2006: 379; Servaes 2000). In doing so, community radio stations around the world have seen themselves as being involved in a community building and cultural empowerment<sup>1</sup> project, seeking to encourage dialogue between different sections of poor and marginalised communities, and to enable these communities to contest meanings and issues within mainstream public spheres (Van Vuuren 2006: 379-380). The objectives of community radio, as we will see, correspond closely to those characteristics which theorists have suggested a critical public sphere should possess.

The characteristics of community radio, as defined by AMARC, include community ownership, participation and not-for profit status (Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998: 20-23). AMARC also stresses community radio’s mission is both

participatory - allowing every community member a chance to take part in its activities - and developmental - existing primarily to improve the quality of life of the community (Perkins 2000: 12-13). It has been suggested that community radio that lives up to these demands is well placed to fulfil some of the functions necessary for a critical public sphere (Servaes 2000). We can see this in terms of the four criteria identified earlier for such a public sphere.

Firstly, the requirement that a station be participatory helps to ensure that its listeners are treated as citizens rather than consumers. Participation requires community members to take part in the station's activities, and exercise a degree of democratic control over them. This can be done through training volunteers from the community in the production of programmes, setting up forums where community members can comment on content, inviting community members to Annual General Meetings, and the involvement of Community-Based Organisations (Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998: 24). The requirement that community radio be developmental implies that through radio, community members should be able to learn about development initiatives in their areas and contribute to the running of such initiatives and the planning of new ones (Servaes 1996a: 39-40). This once again implies that a strong 'citizenship' ethic should guide relations between community radio stations and their listeners.

Secondly, community radio stations are supposed to be owned and controlled by small communities. In the developing world, such stations are often situated in poorer and more marginalised areas of countries (Gumucio 2001: 14-15). This has allowed marginalised 'publics' – such as the landless in Latin America, historically disadvantaged people in South Africa and ethnic minorities in Europe and Australia – a greater voice in national discussions (Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998: 15-17). Community radio thus has the potential to make national or regional public spheres more 'critical' by giving subaltern counter-publics a greater chance to make inputs into them. Indeed, this has been defined as one of the central roles of community radio stations across the world (Van Vuuren 2006: 384-5).

Thirdly, 'genuine' community ownership can enable stations, at least in theory, to be distinguished from both the state and the market, as a critical public sphere requires (Garnham 1992: 361). This community ownership, and their not-for-profit status, could imply that community radio stations are not subject to the same pressures as commercial stations to limit content for the sake of obtaining a

large audience (Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998: 24-26). They are also not under the control of the state, while public broadcasters frequently are controlled by the state, or put under undue pressure by the state to limit content, especially in the developing world (Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998: 24-27). Community radio sees itself as developmental and this implies that these stations are there to promote the well-being of the community as a whole (Servaes 1996a: 39-40). It also implies that they are not there to make profit for individuals, thus taking their distance, once again, from the market.

Finally, the participatory structures that community radio stations set up should enable people to contribute to governing the radio station irrespective of race, class and gender divisions in society (Gumucio 2001: 14-15). Such participation irrespective of social divisions is an essential aspect of a critical public sphere (Habermas 1997: 117). It also serves to make the station an instrument that is likely to challenge existing power relations in society, as it represents not only those benefiting from power relations, but also those disadvantaged by them. In addition, community radio, especially in the developing world, has historically become a space for activism for greater democracy, workers' rights and gender equality (Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998: 7-8). This activism may involve broadening what is considered acceptable for public discussion. For example, it may include exposing wrongdoing in spaces that the broader society might consider 'private' such as the home and private businesses.

There is no doubt, then, that community radio has the potential to act as a powerful vehicle through which contributions can be made to the establishment of a critical public sphere. In this next section it will be argued, however, that the extent to which this potential can be realised is dependent on the way in which such radio defines the concept of 'community'.

### **1.3 Problematising the Concept of 'Community' in Community Radio**

It has been argued that for a participatory, 'strong' version of democracy to take root in society, people must organise themselves around communities as places of discussion, and if necessary, debate and controversy (Friedland 2001: 359). This is, however, not the only view of community in circulation. On the contrary, the word 'community' often carries connotations of harmony, both in common speech and in some sociological literature (Friedland 2001). 'Community' is often understood as

defined by close ties between its members and a collective identity. It has been seen as a concept that stands in opposition to that of 'society' which is understood to be an economic grouping, where there is no common identity to hold the group together (Carpentier, Lie & Servaes 2003: 53). Since the word 'community' carries connotations of harmony, its use to describe a certain section of society can lead to the misleading assumption that this section of society is egalitarian and free of power politics (Davidson 2004: 23). Often this misleading assumption has been made especially about poor 'communities', which are regularly the social grouping served by community radio, especially in southern Africa.

It is arguable that the assumption that communities are defined by these characteristics – i.e. that of shared identity and harmony – can be detrimental to the ability of community radio volunteers to fulfil the criteria for a critical public sphere discussed earlier. For one, the assumption of unity - of a community that exists "outside power" - tends to obscure the existence of dissident discursive spaces. Fraser (1994: 123) argues that the assumption that one can keep existing societal inequalities "out of the public sphere" puts minority groups who are subject to the control of a dominant group at risk of being marginalized. While a community radio station may represent a subaltern public within the national public sphere (a poor community, for example), there may still be other 'subaltern publics' within it. Many social theorists have argued that there are centres and peripheries at all levels of society. A poor community may exist on the periphery of a larger society, forgotten about by those living in centres of power and wealth. At the same time, even within that poor community there are centres - groups with more power, influence and wealth - and peripheries – relatively powerless, non-influential and poorer groups of people (Servaes 1996; Van Vuuren 2006). This is often not acknowledged in community media environments. Writing about Australian community broadcasting, for example, Van Vuuren (2006: 388) states that community radio stations often see their function as a "channel for minority groups to agitate and influence the larger [national] public sphere", but that these groups also often choose to keep the 'lid' on internal dissent within their community and try to present a more or less 'unified voice' to the broader society. She adds that this ignoring of 'internal' dissent within the community may often be masked by the use of terms such as "sharing", 'participation', 'association' and 'fellowship' (Van Vuuren 2006: 388). Such an approach to 'community' may obscure some of the

pitfalls involved in establishing the relationships of ownership and control through which community radio is supposed to interact with its entire target audience. As a result, the principle referred to above of addressing audiences as citizens can be compromised.

Theoretically, community radio makes use of mechanisms of ownership and control to allow the community as a whole to be involved in running a station democratically, thus ensuring 'citizenship' at a local level. However, it has been pointed out that once a community radio station is established, it often becomes a new centre of influence and privilege for those given 'gate-keeping' roles. Those who manage which voices go on air soon find they have the ability to exclude those they 'do not like', or grant favours by giving certain people access to the airwaves. Discrimination along the lines of class, race, and gender can still take place, and the self-interest of organisers can take precedence over 'community' wishes (Thomas 1994: 55). Stations are frequently dominated by particular sub-groups, such as the more disaffected parts of a community, or those with easiest transport access to the station, or with the most time off work, or by people such as municipal councillors who may feel they have a legally-granted 'right to speak' (Hochheimer 1993: 476-7). If the discourse on which community radio is based does not recognise these possibilities, it remains unable to respond strategically, in order to guarantee wider ownership. Without such recognition, the ideal of microphones that are 'open to all' – and with this the notion of the listener as citizen – can be compromised.

Thirdly, as we have seen, a community radio station must distinguish itself from the state and the market. As part of this objective, a station needs to be aware that if it does not recognise communities as places of controversy, it is likely to be used to promote the sectional interests of commercial organisations based in its target community, or people in authority in local government, such as mayors and councillors. North American research has suggested that local elites and corporations have worked to conceal economic power relations in city communities, instead creating, through the mass media, perceptions of communities that are more suited to their commercial needs (Friedland 2001: 383). The concept of the community as a place of harmony has been used, furthermore, as propaganda for the dominance of both the state and the capitalist market. In post-colonial Africa, words like 'community', used to mean a society 'outside power', have often been used to prop up political elites and to 'paper over' differences, by silencing those who wish



to challenge the perceived consensus that ‘the community’ has achieved (Opubor 2001). This is also a relevant concern in southern Africa specifically. A recent report on small media in South Africa found that the content of community radio stations often mirrored that of commercial stations, suggesting they had failed to keep their distance from the dictates of the market (Hadland & Thorne 2004: 56-57). Since many southern African countries, including Namibia, have largely followed the South African model of community radio, one might expect a similar situation to prevail in this country.

Finally, it is crucial that community radio stations challenge distinctions between public and private to probe into some of the things society traditionally defines as ‘none of its business’ (Fraser 1992: 137; Garnham 1992: 360). Defining a community as a social unit in harmony will not help it to do this. If a community is seen as a social unit ‘outside power’, one might be in danger of thinking, for example, that there is no need to question relationships between husbands and wives where there is domestic violence, and no need to look into workplace relations when employees are being exploited.

Community radio has a mixed record in this regard. In some instances community stations have been involved in bringing what was hidden into public view, and doing so with an emancipatory agenda. In Southern Africa once example of this is ‘gay’ programming. Bosch (2007: 1-3), for example, identifies how the programme In The Pink on Bush Radio in Cape Town, South Africa, has opened up discussion about sexual orientation, previously considered a topic inadmissible for public discussion, and thus liberated gay people to talk on air about aspects of their personalities that they had previously kept hidden. In Katutura, the programme Talking Pink on KCR has had a very similar function. However, on other occasions community radio stations have prevented this critique of their communities by only allowing ‘authorised’ spokespeople of communities time on air, which, not surprisingly, has often led to a lack of investigation of abuses taking place outside the public arena (Van Vuuren 2006: 4-5, 9).

#### **1.4 The Volunteer-driven Model and Perceptions of ‘Community’**

What could be called the dominant model of community radio, as expounded by organisations like AMARC and set down in national legislation in some countries (such as South Africa and, to an extent, Namibia), is driven by volunteers, who are

typically responsible for producing programming content and possibly other duties as well. The notion of volunteerism within community radio is in itself caught up in understandings of the four principles discussed above. The volunteers, as the most visible public 'face' of the station, have to implement the values of treating listeners as citizens, of recognising subaltern counter-publics, of questioning public-private distinctions and of carving out a niche for the station distinct from that occupied by the state and the market. Because of this crucial role that volunteers play, it is important to look closely at the way the notion of volunteerism operates within community radio in order to make sense of this sector's ability to contribute to a critical public sphere.

Volunteers are seen as 'representatives' of the community in which they live, and the station benefits from the knowledge they have of the community, which (it is assumed) they are more likely to possess than professional media practitioners from outside the community (Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998: 15-17, 24-26). They are either members of the station in their individual capacity or are there as members of community-based organisations and civic structures with which the station must build relationships (Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998: 24-26). Thus, a key understanding underlying the volunteer-based model is that volunteers have detailed knowledge of the communities they represent, including the problems, political concerns and culture of the residents, so that they can serve as the 'voice' of the people in the areas they are from (Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998: 24-26).

The knowledge volunteer representatives should have to contribute to a community radio station consists of more than simply knowing their neighbours or having a generalised sense of the problems in their community. Rather, volunteers would have to have knowledge not only of the groups within the community that they are from, but also other groups, which possibly compete with, oppose, or even possibly exploit or oppress, their own (Hochheimer 1993; Harwood & McCrehan 1996). This is because community radio is often required to mediate between different groups within the community (Hochheimer 1993) and also because a critical public sphere relies on recognising the existence of subaltern counter-publics (Fraser 1992). Furthermore, some theorists have identified a number of 'layers' of interaction within communities, some of which may not be visible at first glance. These layers of communication interact with each other in complex ways which often require detailed research to uncover (Harwood & McCrehan 1996). Such

investigation may involve delving into the unofficial layers of interaction that take place in supermarkets, bars, barbershops, and even at home (Harwood & McCrehan 1996). This may require volunteers to challenge commonly-held perceptions of what is 'public' and what is 'private', because many of the places of interaction that authors like Harwood & McCrehan refer to are traditionally 'private' or 'semi-private' spaces. Because these assumptions are commonly held, volunteers will likely not consider challenging them unless they have gone through a process of focused thinking about their role. Such focussed thinking would also, ideally, lead to volunteers' serving as checks on the power of both state and market at a local level. We can see that a very sophisticated awareness of their target community is necessary to achieve citizenship rights for members of that community. Only through volunteers who have this awareness can members of the target community 'use' community radio as a channel through which to make their views known to the radio station and to argue for change where they feel it is needed.

Empirical research suggests that community radio volunteers do not always define their station's target community inclusively, as they would be required to do in order to operate as a critical public sphere. For example, while examining the level of ownership and control of Radio Graaff-Reinet by the community, Kanyegirire also looked at perceptions of 'the community', and discovered some disturbing data. Despite the fact that the station is officially designated as being for the whole community, regardless of race, one of its volunteer presenters said in an interview:

Members of the community are having to make an appointment to come in and see the studio... while whites are shown around without appointments. (Kanyegirire 2003: 48)

This would seem to imply that only the black<sup>2</sup> and coloured residents of Graaff-Reinet constitute the community for this person, whereas whites do not. In a broader context, a recent review of small media in South Africa for the Media Development and Diversity Agency found that, in many community radio stations, volunteerism has not ensured a feeling of ownership of the stations by the target community. While the report does not comment directly on volunteers' knowledge of their communities, it does indicate that interaction with local civil society groups

and community-based organisations, possibly a rich source of knowledge about the community, is non-existent in many radio stations (Hadland & Thorne 2004: 55-57).

It has been suggested that one of the key reasons for the limitations of volunteerism within community radio has been the assumption that volunteers ‘automatically’ and ‘instinctively’ know the communities they are from. Investigation reveals this assumption to be false, but it is nevertheless widely held and rarely challenged in southern African community radio circles (Davidson 2004: 23-25). It is not at all certain that volunteers from a certain community can be assumed, without sufficient training and research, to know that community well enough to report on it. In particular, volunteers may lack some critical understanding which, as discussed earlier, is necessary for the implementation of a critical public sphere. Davidson (2004: 23-25) suggests that we should not be surprised about these differences in perceptions of the community. Nor should we be surprised about related differences of opinion about who should represent community interests. In many ways these differences represent underlying power dynamics within stations’ target communities. Far from being ‘big (happy) families’ these communities are themselves often composed of different power blocs and socio-economic classes, some of which have much greater political and economic power than others.

### **1.5 Theories of Knowledge: How People ‘Know’**

We can see from the above section that knowledge of a target community is essential for community radio volunteers if they are to operate their station as a critical public sphere at the local level. The situation is complicated, however, because there is a range of different ways through which people can be said to know about the world around them (Lumpkin 1996: 1-4; Sousa & Quarter 2003: 1-2). These ways of perceiving the world and definitions of acceptable knowledge are not only the result of individual understandings but also relate to culture and politics in the social space in which an individual lives (Lumpkin 1996: 1-4). More specifically, theorists have identified a number of ways in which people can be said to ‘learn’ about the social world. In this regard, some commentators make the distinction between (1) intentional learning that occurs when people take a *decision* to pursue new understandings and knowledge, either inside or outside of formal educational or research institutions, and (2) the kind of learning that occurs as result

of “basic socialisation and one’s everyday experiences” (Livingstone 2001: 5). Some authors argue that there are two key “knowledge traditions” which people use to explain how they have ‘come to know’ something. As Livingstone (2001: 3) puts it, these two traditions are:

1. A rational or scientific cognitive knowledge tradition which emphasizes recordable theories and articulated descriptions as cumulative bases for increased understanding, and
2. A practical knowledge tradition which stresses direct experience in various situated spheres.

From the perspective of research into a community broadcaster, one of the possible goals of such research is to identify which knowledge tradition volunteers rely on most to acquire the ‘knowledge’ they say they have about their target community. As we saw earlier, ‘community’ is a problematic term, and the pervasive idea that volunteers automatically know the community they are from may lead to exclusion of certain publics from the airwaves (Davidson 2004). To put this differently, the kind of knowledge about the community that volunteers have acquired as a result of everyday experience may not be sufficient to make them good community representatives. Indeed, for a station to be able to operate as a critical public sphere, this knowledge may need to be supplemented with various forms of intentional learning about their target community. This learning may have to include systematic research into the target community, which would allow volunteers to combine knowledge from the rational or scientific tradition with that from the practical knowledge tradition, which appears to predominate at many community radio stations.

In terms of the four principles identified as necessary for the operation of a critical public sphere, we can also see possible dangers of relying only on ‘practical’ or ‘everyday’ knowledge. The extent to which these dangers are realised, or whether they are in fact, not relevant, is one of the aspects this thesis investigates. But broadly speaking, it has been suggested that a volunteer’s knowledge of dissident discursive spaces may (or may not) be limited to those he or she is part of. It could also be said that the more volunteers engage in intentional learning about their target community, the more they will see their role as distinct from the state and the market. A detailed investigation into their target community may persuade

volunteers to question the links their station has with state and market, perhaps by uncovering the ways in which state and commercial media have failed to report on certain issues. Also, investigating the target community from a systematic viewpoint might well require one to question traditionally-held distinctions between public and private by raising the social consequences of abuse of power behind closed doors.

It is clear that systematic knowledge of the target community may help volunteers to interact with community members as citizens. For example, it may give them wider knowledge of which community members lack information that they could use in exercising their democratic rights to control local society. It may also be an opportunity for members of the target community to gain knowledge that will enable them to exercise 'ownership and control' of a radio station. However, community radio's traditional insistence on practical knowledge and situated experience may have, on some occasions, helped stations ensure community members' 'citizenship'. Another dimension of citizenship is that of journalists being 'citizens who represent other citizens', and this suggests that "practical experience in various situated spheres" is an important attribute for the community radio volunteer. Without situated experience as community members themselves, it is unlikely that volunteers will feel the conviction to make the sacrifices necessary to act as citizens (Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998: 20-26; Hochheimer 1993).

So, rather than necessarily condemning 'unscientific' forms of community knowledge, it should perhaps be a goal of research into knowledge at a community radio station to investigate whether it is able to accept and integrate both 'experiential' and 'systematic' knowledge about the target community. It must be stressed that in the absence of such empirical research it would be difficult to determine exactly how the dimensions of knowledge at a community radio station are related to the ways in which the station represents its target community. Such research should also need to investigate whether members of the radio station are willing to share with each other the 'community knowledge' they have obtained, regardless of its source.

### **Conclusions**

I have argued in this chapter that community radio has the potential to represent people often excluded from the actually-existing public sphere (Curran 1991: 109)

and to allow poor people to express their needs based on their own experience (Servaes 2000). However, community radio has not always lived up to these ideals. One of the reasons is a common assumption that volunteers instinctively know their community (Davidson 2004: 25). In fact, such knowledge also requires systematic investigation into the community. Elsewhere in Southern Africa, some community radio volunteers have been quoted as expressing understandings of the community they serve which don't fully acknowledge its complexity or the power relations which shape it (Kanyegirire 2003: 47-48). This may be because the discourses through which volunteers see their target community have not been sufficiently questioned. There is a danger that the discourse of the community as a phenomenon 'outside power' is dominant, as opposed to a discourse which recognises conflicts, inequalities and power dynamics. A somewhat naive discourse may be dominant because stations and volunteers have a limited understanding of the different kinds of knowledge available to volunteers, and of the need for systematic investigation into the target community. In this thesis I examine these issues at Katutura Community Radio as a case study. I investigate which discourses are dominant in the volunteers' visions of their target community, and how they 'came to know' about this community. I then discuss what this implies for the volunteers' implementation of the 'critical public sphere' principles discussed in this chapter.

<sup>1</sup> 'Empowerment' is used in this thesis to mean the giving of greater social, economic or political power to socially, economically or politically disadvantaged people and groups. The phrase 'black economic empowerment' refers specifically to broadening the ownership based of private sector firms to include historically disadvantaged groups, including 'black' people and women.

<sup>2</sup> It has been noted that terms such as 'black', 'white' and 'coloured' are essentially social constructs rather than actually-existing groups, and that the boundaries of these so-called 'identities' are far from clear. However, owing to the commonness of use of these terms in southern Africa, and in opinions quoted in this thesis, I have, for ease of reading, chosen not to put these terms in inverted commas.

## **Chapter Two: Context**

### **Introduction**

The case study that forms the subject of this research deals with a community radio station serving Katutura and Khomasdal, two residential areas of Windhoek<sup>i</sup>. This chapter provides a contextual backdrop to the study. Section one of the chapter deals broadly with the social context in which the station finds itself. It describes the history of the two townships, as well as the social conditions that now characterise them. The second section focuses on the media environment of the station, providing a description of the contemporary Namibian media landscape. The final section deals with Katutura Community Radio (KCR) itself, and its struggle to make an intervention in both of these contexts. Through this contextualisation, the chapter provides important reference points for the analysis of the interview material in Chapter Four.

### **Section One: The Social Context of Katutura and Khomasdal**

#### **2.1 History and Identity**

The township of Katutura was created in the late 1950s and early 1960s, as a result of the policy of apartheid pursued by the South African-backed administration of South West Africa (as Namibia was then called). The movement of people to Katutura began in 1959 with forced removals of black people from the ‘Old Location’ close to the Windhoek City Centre. Police killed a number of demonstrators on the first day of the removals, an event widely remembered both in Katutura and in Namibia as a whole (Katjavivi 1988: 29; Leys & Saul 1995: 42, 1995a: 69). The name ‘Katutura’ was given to the place by its new inhabitants and means “we have no place to stay”. Some scholars have argued that a sense of rootlessness pervaded the place many decades afterwards (Lush 1993: 4-9; Leys & Saul 1995: 42-47). The original area of Katutura was split into different sections for different so-called ‘ethnic groups’. The divisions were based largely on the home language spoken by the people settled there. This approach was representative of a ‘Bantustan’ policy followed in Namibia as a whole (Katjavivi 1988: 72-76). Although the policy has been legally abolished, there are still areas of Katutura where a given group of people who speak a certain language and define themselves



as coming from the same ‘culture’, form the vast majority of that area’s population (Lush 1993: 4-9).

The township of Khomasdal had been created along similar lines during apartheid days as living space for the ‘coloured’ or ‘mixed-race’ people of Windhoek. Like Katutura (which it now adjoins in some places, but initially was separate from) it was a racially segregated area, although after the repeal of some apartheid legislation in Namibia in the 1980s, some of the wealthier black people moved there from Katutura (Lush 1993: 9). Housing in Khomasdal was (and usually still is) of a better quality than in Katutura and incomes are higher (Lush 1993: 9). During the years before independence it was common for the coloured community of Khomasdal to look down upon black people in Katutura and regard them as ‘lazy’ and ‘ignorant’, despite their shared history of oppression and close geographical proximity (Lush 1993: 9-10). Post-independence, movement and interaction between Katutura and Khomasdal has increased, but old suspicions between black and coloured groups have not entirely been erased (Lush 1993: 10; 310-11).<sup>ii</sup>

It has been observed that ethnic groups are constructed socially as distinct units, even though, in fact, this is rarely the case, as there have always been links between different groups and their boundaries are hard to define. In racially divided societies, however, these boundaries, no matter how arbitrary, may be fixed artificially by separate social institutions (Katjavivi 1988:72-73). There is evidence that, once split off from other groups, many people in pre-independent Namibia often thought of themselves as belonging to entirely separate ethnic identities, and that a political discourse developed that exaggerated the differences between the various ethnic groups (Katjavivi 1988: 72-76). There was resistance to this categorisation in pre-independence years (Katjavivi 1988: 75), and the post-independence authorities have also tried to reconcile ethnic groups, but are widely regarded as having failed to eliminate tribalist discourse completely (Lush 1993: 4-9) In Katutura, tribalism is not as apparent as it once was, but is not yet a spent force. As one example, ‘inter-ethnic’ marriages now occur more frequently. However, most neighbourhoods and churches in Katutura are still perceived by many people as the ‘domain’ of one ‘ethnic group’ (Skidmore-Hess 1998).

From the late 1970s onwards, a new area of better housing was established in Katutura in line with the aims of the South-African supported administration at that time to foster a limited black middle-class. This area was populated by black people

of all ethnic groups and was named Wanaheda, after the initial letters of the oWAmbo, NAma, HErero and DAMara groups (Lush 1993: 4-9). It is now relatively prosperous, but its inhabitants still feel (and indeed, are) disadvantaged compared to the residents of the former 'white' suburbs, and even compared to some residents of Khomasdal (Lush 1993: 6-7). Despite the fact that many 'ethnic groups' settled there, it can be said that individual residents of Wanaheda still identify themselves as members of one or other distinct group (Lush 1993: 6-7; Skidmore-Hess 1998).

## **2.2 Quality of Life**

Katutura's population, including that of Wanaheda and the informal settlements on its outskirts, was estimated at 146 830 people in 2004 (City of Windhoek 2004: 2). Post-independence, a large number of informal settlements were established on Katutura's north-western edge, containing both homeless unemployed people who had been 'moved out' of central Katutura and a large number of rural poor and unemployed who had migrated to Windhoek to look – often unsuccessfully – for work (Lush 1993: 310-313). The informal settlements have now reached almost the same population size as that of the 'formal' settlement of Katutura (City of Windhoek 2004: 2). Khomasdal's population was estimated at 23 052 in 2004. Thus, at 169 882 people, the population of Katutura and Khomasdal – KCR's 'target audience' or 'target community' – formed the majority of Windhoek's population, which stood at 233 000 in 2004 (City of Windhoek 2004: 1-2).

In the 'old', or original, part of Katutura there was an average of 5.4 people living in one household in 2004, whereas in one informal settlement there was an average of 4.2 people per household (City of Windhoek 2004: 2). These new areas are comparatively crowded, considering that most houses in the 'old' part of the township have no more than two small bedrooms and houses in the informal settlements usually consist of one room only (Leys 1995: 145).

Unemployment remains a serious problem in both Katutura and Khomasdal. In the Khomas region, in which Windhoek is situated (and is, in fact, the only town), the unemployment rate was 29.4 per cent in 2004, marginally lower than the national unemployment rate of 34 per cent (Bank of Namibia 2005). Figures for Katutura and Khomasdal (as separate from Windhoek as a whole) were not

available, but it is likely that unemployment is higher in these areas than elsewhere in Windhoek (Leys 1995: 144). Nationally, most Namibian employees fall into the categories of semi-skilled and unskilled workers. These workers generally earn poor salaries and receive few benefits (Jauch 2004: 21). Only in a few sectors have minimum wage agreements been brokered for these workers (Jauch 2004: 21-22). It can be assumed that many of Katutura and Khomasdal's employed people fit into this category. On the other hand, the small number of people in Katutura and Khomasdal who have acquired professional qualifications can be expected to live quite well. Census data shows that Namibia's professional and managerial class earn salaries that are close to 'first-world' standards (Jauch 2004: 22). In Katutura, the end of apartheid has brought new opportunities for those who have been able to start successful businesses or enter the managerial class, but most Katutura residents do not fall into this category. In fact, economic inequalities between employed and unemployed, and skilled and unskilled continue to mark out clear distinctions between people in Katutura and Khomasdal (Skidmore-Hess 1998). The greatest range in wealth and power in modern Katutura is between those living in new 'luxury' housing and those in burgeoning squatter settlements on the northeast edge of the township (Skidmore-Hess 1998).

Crimes against both people and property are common in Katutura, as they were before independence, although there is a general perception that crime has worsened in some areas since 1990 (Leys 1995: 144). There has also been an increase in the reported levels of gender-related violence, although this has long been a common problem in many areas of Namibia (Leys 1995: 144-148). In Khomasdal, crime is generally less severe than in Katutura, but much more prevalent than in the former 'white' areas of Windhoek (Leys 1995: 152). Alcoholism, already a major problem before independence, has increased, and outlets selling liquor, both legal and illegal, have mushroomed (Lush 1993: 310-311).

There is some evidence that the introduction of a new police service by the Windhoek Municipality in 2006 has begun to curb crime somewhat, but certain communities, especially in the informal settlements, are reported to still be living in fear of gang-related violence (De Boer 2006).

There has, however, been some progress with regard to development. The vast majority of Katutura's streets, formerly gravel, have been tarred following

independence (Lush 1993: 310). More than 82 per cent of houses are now privately owned, allowing more security for residents than in the pre-independence past, where most houses were owned by the municipality and evictions for non-payment of rent were commonplace (Skidmore-Hess 1998). Residents of shanty towns inside the townships have been given the opportunity to acquire legal title to plots of land, as have most of the new informal settlers (Lush 1993: 311-313). The government has offered loans to shack dwellers to allow them to build permanent houses, a programme that has had varying degree of success in different areas. Nationally, although about 12 300 houses have been built through this programme, a backlog of around 300 000 applications for housing loans remains (Dentlinger 2006). Also, allegations of corruption have been levelled at people administering the scheme in several areas of the country (Dentlinger 2006; Weidlich 2006). An initiative by a shack-dwellers' association to set up self-help house-building groups has achieved some positive results for their members (Ellis 2006). Over 51 hectares of developed land is now under the control of these self-help groups (City of Windhoek 2004: 1).

The Namibian government has taken a relatively neo-liberal approach to economic development since independence, with the private sector expected to create most of the jobs necessary to guarantee a life of human dignity for Namibia's people (Jauch 2004: 21-24, 51). In view of the continued high unemployment rates, it has been argued by some that this strategy has failed to deliver results (Jauch 2004: 25). However, deliberation about economic alternatives is rare in public discourse, whereas debate around economic nationalism (for instance, the need to buy products from Namibian businesses and for black economic empowerment) is much more prevalent (Jauch 2004: 51). It could be argued that more research is needed into the ability of the private sector to create significant numbers of jobs without state involvement, both in Namibia as a nation and in specific depressed areas like Katutura and Khomasdal.

### **2.3 The Relevance of the Social Context**

We can see, therefore, that KCR's target community faces very significant challenges. Inequalities between itself and the rest of the city of Windhoek, and within itself between classes and genders, present major obstacles to its people living truly empowered lives. Crime has evolved at least partly as a result of these inequalities, but now often serves to make them worse. Much more needs to be

done to combat distrust between ethnic groups, one of the most insidious results of the colonial past.

These challenges form an important backdrop to the study of KCR. By definition, the station represents an intervention into this community and the problems it faces. It should, however, be noted that the station's volunteer members have, in most cases, lived within this community for many years. The conditions that they experienced here are likely to have affected their perceptions of the community. For example, it may be that the 'fault lines' that split the Katutura and Khomasdal communities shape the volunteers' perceptions. A volunteer who has lived in an informal settlement may be significantly more sympathetic to the struggles of the homeless and those living in informal housing than a volunteer who grew up in one of the more affluent areas of Katutura. A female volunteer may be more aware than her male colleagues of the problems of gender-based discrimination and violence. On the other hand, it is possible that the overwhelming experience of discrimination against the entire black and coloured community, especially before independence, has shaped the perceptions of the volunteers such that they see the whole of the target community as defined by hardship and marginalisation. One might suppose – but cannot be certain – that this may lead them to 'paper over' the obvious cracks in the community along racial, ethnic, class and gender lines, and may, to an extent, blind them to the extent of inequality and possible exploitation *within* their target community. I argued in Chapter Two that such perceptions may impact on what it is currently achievable for a project such as KCR in terms of contributing to the establishment of a critical public sphere. It is the impact of such perceptions that will be explored in the analysis of interview material in Chapter Four.

## **Section Two: The Namibian Media Environment**

### **2.4 Characteristics of the Media Landscape**

Habermas's theory of the public sphere implies a free exchange of ideas in a public setting. For this to occur in modern society, it is clear that state support for freedom of expression, including expression in the media, is necessary. Namibia can be described as a relatively free media environment. The Namibian Constitution

specifically guarantees freedom of expression. Article 21(1a) of the Constitution states that all persons have the right to “freedom of speech and expression, which shall include freedom of the press and other media” (Constitution 1990: 13). Consequently, compared to some other states in southern Africa, the Namibian government has imposed relatively few restrictions on who can open media, especially printed media, outlets (MISA 2003: 88-90).

There are relatively more restrictions in the broadcasting sector, due to a perceived need to allocate the limited resource of the frequency spectrum in a just manner. For commercial and community stations, these regulations are contained in the Namibian Communications Commission Act of 1992 (Namibian Communications Commission Act 1992). The Act created an independent body, the Namibian Communications Commission (NCC), to oversee the issuing of radio and TV licenses as well as licences for cellphone operators and other users of the frequency spectrum. Among the regulations of the 1992 Act is a requirement that all radio and TV stations be at least 51 per cent Namibian-owned (Namibian Communications Commission Act 1992). The Act states that priority in allocation of licences should be given to “stations that broadcast 24 hours a day, as well as to community radio stations” (Namibian Communications Commission Act 1992; Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998: 5). Six community radio licenses have so far been awarded. The licences can be allocated either for communities of interest such as communities of religious believers, or for geographical communities (Kruger 2005). In general, no restrictions are placed on the radio station’s ideological standpoint by the NCC (Kruger 2005). However, a strict 1991 law prohibits racial or ethnic hate speech of any kind.

Nevertheless, the relative lack of restrictions should not necessarily lead us to believe that ‘all is well’ with the Namibian communications sector or that freedom of expression in Namibia is secure (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2005: 1-2). Commenting on the European media scene, Curran (1991: 108) warns that while all citizens and groups of citizens may have the legal right to publish or broadcast, many do not have the financial, technical or other means to do so, thus effectively limiting their rights to communicate.

In the case of Namibia, there are a number of areas of concern in relation to free communication through the broadcast media. Structurally, one can discern two main forces operating on the Namibian media environment.

Firstly, there are pressures from some elements in government for a top-down media structure, as represented by the government's continuing control of the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), and its unwillingness to allow the NBC to be restructured into a public broadcaster. This force, towards top-down government interference in the media, is most evident in state control of the state-owned broadcaster, the NBC. Despite the existence of several commercial and community stations, the broadcasting industry is dominated by the NBC, the radio section of which is also informally known as National Radio (MISA 2003). Most commercial radio stations do not have offices outside Windhoek and a few other regional centres, and their signal is available almost exclusively in the urban areas (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2005: 5). Thus choice for radio listeners in rural areas is much narrower and is often limited to the state broadcaster (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2005: 5). The NBC is (at the time of writing this dissertation) run by a board appointed by the President, on the advice of the Minister of Information and Broadcasting. Unlike many public broadcasters worldwide, there is no direct process by which the public can make inputs into these appointments, or the running of the NBC generally (MISA 2003: 88-90). Pressure on government to make the NBC more directly accountable to the public and to restructure it into a public broadcaster has yielded no results so far (MISA 2003: 88-89). Related hereto, critical reporting in the commercial printed media has come under increasing public verbal attack from senior government officials in recent years, although no punitive action has been taken against these media (Melber 2003: 18-19). One could expect that this harsh criticism has proved a big disincentive to the emergence of new voices and critical coverage in the radio sector.

Secondly, an emerging capitalist market sector is trying to challenge the state's dominance, taking advantage of a relative lack of restrictions on the privately owned media, but possibly also appealing to the lowest common denominator in terms of coverage, in order to appeal to the biggest audience. This force is evident in the growing commercial broadcasting sector. Six commercial radio stations are available to listeners in bigger urban areas, although hardly any of these reach far beyond these areas (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2005: 5-7). The commercial broadcasters generally concentrate on music and entertainment, with a small amount of news, largely provided by the State-owned Namibian Press Agency, NAMPA (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2005: 7-10). Thus the range of news and current affairs

content a listener can receive from commercial radio stations is rather limited, forcing listeners to rely on state media for most in-depth news and analysis. Parts of the commercial radio sector clearly do cater for the tastes of the black elite. However, there is no black economic empowerment scheme within the commercial radio sector (as there is in some other commercial sectors such as financial services and tourism) leaving it open to the change that mainly benefits the white minority (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2005: 10).

Content studies have generally indicated that socially disadvantaged voices are poorly represented in both state and commercial broadcasters' reporting. One recent study, the Namibian Media Monitoring Project, funded by the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, investigated news broadcasts and publications only, during 2002. It found that all media, but especially NBC radio and television, relied on single sources for most of their stories. It was common practice for conferences, workshops and speeches to form the basis of news stories. What is worse, 61 per cent of stories originated from the Windhoek area, and roughly 75 per cent of all the voices accessed in the stories were male (MISA 2003: 90).

In a more detailed research report on gender and reporting, the Namibian Gender and Media Baseline Study, the majority of Namibian media, both state and independent, did not fare well. The study revealed that female sources amounted to only 19 per cent of sources for news stories. While better than the southern African average of 17 per cent, it is still shockingly low considering women form 52 per cent of the Namibian population. None of the five newspapers and two electronic media (NBC Radio and NBC TV) monitored had more than 30 per cent female news sources during the month in which the study took place – September 2003 (MISA/ Gender Links 2003: 8-10; 2003a: 27-28). Furthermore, women were rarely quoted on 'hard news' matters such as politics and economics. Only on the subjects of gender equality and children were women quoted more than men. Women's family roles were much more frequently mentioned than those of men (MISA/ Gender Links 2003: 12-13). Subtle stereotyping of women could be observed in some of the media's reporting, while examples of blatant stereotyping could also occasionally be found (MISA/ Gender Links 2003: 15-17; 2003a: 40-41, 53-54). The seven media surveyed had more female journalists than most of the southern African regional averages, and NBC TV had more female than male journalists. However, it seems



this has not significantly changed (at least, not yet) the lack of gender-sensitive reporting in the Namibian media (MISA/ Gender Links 2003: 14).

When considering the Namibian media's contribution to democracy, another fact that needs to be considered is the economic status of most Namibians. Considering a national unemployment rate of 34 per cent (Bank of Namibia 2005), the economic ability of many Namibians to buy a newspaper every day, write a letter to an editor, or call in to a radio programme can be questioned (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2005: 5-7).

Thus, while all groups of people are legally relatively free to put their opinions into the public sphere, in reality, the mainstream media, both state and commercial, cater only for the interests of certain groups. In the face of these two dominant forces, a civic society sector of activist media is trying to get established and is succeeding on a small scale. This process of media activism began with the establishment of The Namibian in the 1980s as an 'alternative' newspaper, although some commentators would now classify it as a mainstream publication (MISA 2003). Several other smaller independent publications were established during pre-independence years to question the South African presence in the country. Post independence, activist magazines like Sister Namibia were set up to promote women's rights and development for previously excluded people (MISA 2003). The drive towards community radio did not start until some years later, with the setting up of KCR in 1995. A number of NGOs which had been – and still are – involved in advocacy work through the mainstream media contributed significant funds to establish the community radio station, then Namibia's first (Barker 1996; Thibinyane 2006). These included the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC), which provides legal aid in public-interest cases, and the feminist organisation (and activist-magazine publisher) Sister Namibia. As I will discuss later, KCR has been through significant problems since its inception. However, it has continued to believe, and some would say, now believes more strongly than ever, that the core part of its mission is to give exposure to those who are in danger of being excluded from mainstream media coverage (Barker 1996, Thibinyane 2006).

## **2.5 The Mainstream Namibian Media Assessed as a Critical Public Sphere**

The Namibian media environment can be said to fall short of the four criteria for the establishment of a critical public sphere, as discussed in Chapter Two. Firstly, within this environment, the ability of media to address their audiences as citizens remains limited. Due to the predominance of commercial channels and the fact that there is limited consumer choice, especially when it comes to news and current affairs programming, it is unlikely that listeners are fully able to exercise ‘citizenship’ rights over the mainstream media. This is also made difficult by the limited extent to which members of the public can exercise rights of ownership and control over the public broadcaster. Since the NBC’s board members are approved by the President on the recommendation of the Minister of Information and Broadcasting, a member of the public can only exert control in a very indirect sense, through voting for political office bearers in national elections or trying to influence them through lobbying. In practice this may amount to very little influence at all.

Secondly, this media landscape does not recognise subaltern counter-publics as much as it should. The Gender and Media baseline study has shown, for example, that the ‘public’ of women has been significantly neglected. Reports of the Media Monitoring Project and African Media Barometer (see Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2005: 1-5) also suggest that subaltern counter-publics such as rural dwellers are largely ignored. The willingness of the Namibian media, particularly the NBC, to focus on conferences and speeches as sources of news stories is also worrying, as it might imply neglect of the views of poor and marginalised publics in favour of those groups who normally give speeches and hold conferences: generally political and business elites (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2005: 1-4).

Thirdly, the mainstream Namibian media, especially in the broadcast sector, are not clearly enough distinguished from the state and the market. On the contrary, the commercial broadcasters are business enterprises, whose most important purpose is to make a profit for their shareholders. The NBC is a state broadcaster at the moment, rather than a truly independent public service organisation. According to civil society analysts, there are not enough opportunities for public input into its governance for it to be considered a public broadcaster (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2005: 1-5). On several occasions in the recent past, the NBC has obeyed presidential directives to change its content without protest (MISA 2003: 88-89).

Finally, it is hard to establish to what extent the Namibian media challenges conventional distinctions between public and private. In certain areas, such as gender relations, the evidence reveals that they have far to go. The Gender and Media Baseline Survey found that the Namibian media did little to challenge existing power relations between men and women. This was especially true of power relations within the home (MISA/ Gender Links 2003: 15-17). Challenging existing public-private distinctions requires investigative reporting. While there is some of this particularly in the print media, the broadcasting sector, and especially the NBC, has lately not been heavily involved in investigative work, preferring to report mainly on predictable public events (MISA 2003: 90). Investigative reporting could be expected to, among other aspects, challenge traditionally held concepts of what is 'private', including, for example, gender relations within the home or relationships between employers and employees in private companies. This seems not to happen on a large scale in the Namibian media currently.

KCR sets out to do things differently from much of the Namibian mainstream media, as we will see in the next section<sup>iii</sup>. This was one of the reasons for my asking, in the context of the case study, how KCR volunteers saw their role and the relationship between themselves and their target community. It was hoped that this would shed light on the extent to which KCR volunteers saw themselves operating as a critical public sphere, possibly differentiated from the mainstream Namibian media, which has in some areas failed to live up to these ideals.

### **Section Three: KCR Envisaged as an Intervention**

#### **2.6 An Intervention into its Media Environment**

Katutura Community Radio's Mission Statement says that 'KCR wants to encourage the communities of Katutura, Khomasdal and environs to take part in producing ethical, creative and responsible radio (KCR 2005)'. This commits it to being a community radio station, which, through the ethic of direct community participation, and through defining 'community' as a geographical area, is different from much of the established Namibian media scene (Thibinyane 2006).

The KCR board consists of five members: The Chairman, Kae Matundu-Tjiparuro, a community activist and senior journalist at the public newspaper New

Era; Norman Tjombe, director of the Legal Assistance Centre, a public interest law organisation, Virginia Witts, a veteran broadcaster with the NBC and for various NGOs, and community activist Veripi Kandenge. A further two positions, for an additional board member and for a treasurer, were vacant at the time this thesis was written (KCR 2006). The board is supposed to facilitate, in broad terms, the ownership and control of the station by the community as a whole. It is assumed that the members' wide experience in community activism and/ or journalism allows them to do this (Thibinyane 2006). The board of trustees appoints the station manager, who is one of only two salaried employees at the station, the other being a receptionist/secretary (Thibinyane 2005, 2006).

While the board and station manager have the task of setting the overall direction of the station, the volunteers have to make the station live up to its objectives on a daily basis through their work of producing programmes and hosting radio shows (Thibinyane 2005). As is the case on many community radio stations, the volunteers fit into two broad types: those working directly for the station, and those who work for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with links to the station and produce regular programmes for KCR relating to the concerns of their particular NGO (Barker 2005; Isaacs 2005).

KCR's official list of Aims and Objectives states that it is to "broadcast information within Katutura, Khomasdal and environs concerning community issues". The list also states that KCR will provide training opportunities in community radio for volunteers from Katutura and Khomasdal to enable their active participation in the station. It further says that KCR will serve as a "pilot project" for the establishment of community radio stations throughout Namibia, and will "contribute to the establishment of [other] community radio stations in Namibia" (KCR 2005). It adds that KCR will "promote the full participation of marginalised sectors of the community" and co-operate with community based and non-governmental organisations in this regard (KCR 2005).

These aims suggest that KCR situates itself within a common model of volunteer-based geographical community radio, as defined by organisations such as AMARC. This model has been applied extensively in South Africa, but in Namibia it is comparatively rare. Three community radio stations based on geographical communities (as well as two Christian 'community of interest' channels and one university campus station) currently exist in Namibia (Kruger 2005). Little research

has been done on these stations, but broadly they adhere to the dominant model of community broadcasting, including being staffed by volunteers and having boards of trustees appointed through structures within their defined ‘communities’ (Kruger 2005).

As we have seen, the Namibian mainstream media, although it has few restrictions upon it, falls short of many of the public sphere ideals. KCR attempts specifically to do some of the things that the Namibian mainstream media has been accused of not doing. By trying to enable the community’s active participation in the station, KCR intends to address its listeners as citizens, who can take democratic control over the station, rather than seeing them in the more passive role of consumers. Its aim to “promote the full participation of marginalised sectors of the community” shows that it does intend to recognise and even empower subaltern counter-publics (such as women and the unemployed) in its programming (Thibinyane 2006). By promoting community involvement through volunteerism and working with community-based organisations, it aims to situate itself as a social force distinct from the state and the market, as required by theorisations of the critical public sphere. Its intention to promote the marginalised sectors of the community shows a commitment, at least to some degree, to expose and challenge existing power relations in society. This might well mean, in practice, that KCR journalists will have to challenge the common perception that the private spaces of homes and businesses are not open to public scrutiny, even where abuses are taking place (Thibinyane 2006). Regrettably, however, no direct mention of challenging the traditional public/private dichotomy is to be found in the KCR mission statement or Aims and Objectives document (see KCR 2005).

## **2.7 An Intervention in its Social Environment**

The KCR mission statement claims that KCR wants to “encourage them [community members] to participate in decisions that affect their lives”, “celebrate their own cultures”, “affirm their own dignity and identity” and “promote social responsibility and critical thinking” (KCR 2005). Therefore, KCR can be seen not just as a relatively new form of media in Namibia, but also as an attempt to change many of the social conditions and material realities of Katutura and Khomasdal.

KCR has objectives that go beyond merely putting a new kind of programming into the Namibian media marketplace. These objectives imply

involvement in making material changes within Katutura and Khomasdal, and assisting in the promotion of social justice and repairing the damage done by the communities' apartheid past.

According to KCR's statement of Aims and Objectives it will "facilitate community identification of needs and problems and foster the local initiation of solutions, build community consensus and strength and promote the full participation of marginalised sectors of the community" (KCR 2005). Historically, the community did not take most of the decisions about Katutura and Khomasdal. Indeed, Katutura's very existence was as the result of bureaucratically planned forced removals in the 1950s and 60s (Lush 1993: 4-9). As mentioned earlier, it has been argued that there is a widespread sense of powerlessness to this day in Windhoek's previously disadvantaged suburbs, owing both to poverty and to feelings of inferiority engendered during colonial times. Thus, KCR's objectives to build community strength and facilitate the local initiation of solutions to problems can be seen as a direct attempt to redress these imbalances and historical injustices (Thibinyane 2006).

As we have seen, there are big inequalities between Katutura and Khomasdal and the rest of Windhoek. There are also deep divisions – in income and housing, for example – between Katutura and Khomasdal, and between the more prosperous areas of Katutura and the informal settlements on its north-western edge. These and many other inequalities continue to exist in KCR's target community. Given these divisions, KCR's aim to "promote the full participation of marginalised sectors" can also be seen as an aim to change historical patterns and improve the material existence of the most vulnerable members of the community (Isaacs 2005; Thibinyane 2006).

A further goal, that seems to be aimed at bettering the material conditions of the Katutura and Khomasdal is included in KCR's list of Aims and Objectives. Here it is stated that KCR shall "... collaborate with other non-profit CBOs [Community Based Organisations], NGOs [Non-Governmental Organisations], educational institutions and other associations with similar objectives to KCR" (KCR 2005). This objective ideally would involve working closely with grassroots groups to achieve greater development and equality. However, this objective also suggests the possibility of conflicts of interest between KCR and the NGOs and educational institutions that give it support, especially if those NGOs have members

and funding from outside Katutura and Khomasdal. For example, NGOs who currently support and produce programmes for KCR include Sister Namibia, a nationwide feminist organisation, The Rainbow Project (TRP) a national organisation for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, and Lifeline/Childline, a telephone counselling organisation with branches in several towns throughout Namibia (Isaacs 2005; Thibinyane 2006). There is also the danger of conflict between the NGOs and the educational institutions supporting KCR. When first re-established, KCR broadcast for several months from the premises of the College of the Arts, a national educational institution. KCR was of the opinion that it later had to raise funds to establish its own transmitter, as it felt there might otherwise have been pressure from Government to prohibit it from broadcasting the programme *Talking Pink*, which is produced by two volunteers from TRP (Thibinyane 2006).

### **2.8 Putting the Principles into Practice: KCR's Difficult History**

Concerns about the central issue of ownership and control of the station by its target community have manifested themselves throughout KCR's history. As mentioned in the introduction, KCR was set up in August 1995 with substantial funding from a number of donors, including Namibian NGOs and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Initially broadcasting 10 hours a day, the station attracted a wide following, especially among the 15 to 35 age group (Barker 1996). However, issues regarding advertising, and in particular the acceptability of adverts for alcohol, caused disagreement between volunteers and management within the first few months. A programme advisory board was elected in early 2006 to involve the community more on issues of ethics and content, after certain community members had indicated that they were not being consulted enough (Barker 2006). Thus we can see, even early on in KCR's history, tensions were developing between different routes through which the community was meant to have access to the station: NGOs, volunteers, and station management structures.

In 2000 the station was forced to go off the air owing to a dispute about the payment of transport allowances between volunteers and station management, which later reportedly led to a walk-out by some of the volunteers (Isaacs 2005; Dentlinger 2003). KCR was also accused at the time of not fully representing all sectors of the Katutura community (Dentlinger 2003). The station was re-launched in 2003 with

substantial support from a coalition of Namibian NGOs. Re-launching the station was a major task, especially since the Namibian Communications Commission had specified that the station had to begin broadcasting in less than six months from the issue of a new broadcasting licence (Thibinyane 2006). While intending for KCR to broadcast for ‘all residents’ in Katutura and Khomasdal, KCR’s new management made a priority of giving exposure to groups whose voices are not often heard in the mainstream media, including women, sexual minorities and the poor (Isaacs 2005; Thibinyane 2005, 2006). Shortly before the re-launch, a member of the interim board recognised in an interview that mistakes had been made at KCR, but said the interim board was determined that the revitalised station would be run in a more strategic, consultative and inclusive way. In other words, they would not take the community’s participation in - or acceptance of - KCR for granted (Dentlinger 2003).

Thus, we can see that KCR’s objective to be an intervention into the Namibian media scene has faced considerable challenges in its practical implementation. The radio station seems to have been characterised, in the first years of its history, by disagreement between its major stakeholders (namely the management, volunteers and community leaders) all of whom saw themselves as legitimate community representatives. KCR’s definition of exactly who they represent has also changed, with an initial focus on the youth now replaced by a greater focus on all ‘Katuturans’, but especially marginalised groups in society.

### **Conclusions**

I have attempted to show in this chapter that KCR exists in a community that bears the legacy of Namibia’s oppressive past. Despite progress in some areas since independence, poverty, inequality and violence remain serious problems in Katutura and Khomasdal. Namibia’s mainstream media, while having wide-ranging legal rights, has often failed to use them to address the suffering of the majority of Namibian people, and this is especially true of the broadcasting sector which, until recently, has been dominated by the state media and a few commercial channels with limited reach.

KCR sees itself as an intervention into these areas. It aims to provide a communication medium that is driven by its users themselves and which deliberates with target community members on solutions rather than merely describing social



problems. It aims to empower members of the target community to take decisions on their own development and raise the standard of living of the marginalised members of this community. It aims to give the people of Katutura and Khomasdal a sense of confidence in their cultures and abilities. It can be argued, however, that KCR's limited financial resources limit the extent to which it can become a comprehensive and fully independent voice of the community. Furthermore, communication and co-operation between various stakeholders and different sections within KCR's staff have at times been lacking, resulting in serious problems for the station in the past.

How far KCR can go in achieving its ambitious goals remains to be seen. As I argued in my theoretical background chapter, in order for the media to function as a critical public sphere, journalists require a sophisticated knowledge of community structures, dynamics and issues. In many ways KCR's objectives foresee it functioning as such a public sphere in its target community. It is possible, however, that the environment in which KCR volunteers live and work – including Katutura with its history of ethnic division, and the rather limited mainstream media discourse – places limits on how sophisticated this knowledge can be.

This thesis will have to be aware of these contexts and will have to investigate whether these contexts have either inspired KCR volunteers to develop a more nuanced understanding of their community, or have limited their understanding. By asking the volunteers how they came to be aware of nuances within their social and media context, one should be able to test the extent to which volunteers have engaged in intentional learning about their target community, and this may allow us to make observations about the value of this learning.

KCR's self-understanding may have encouraged its volunteers to investigate issues of social and economic inclusiveness, and act upon them, in ways that mainstream media journalists have so far ignored. It may have encouraged them to begin processes of intentional learning that would facilitate such investigative journalism. This self-understanding may allow volunteers to begin to think about, for example, how their radio programmes could empower the most marginalised sections of Katutura and Khomasdal. These aspects are to be hoped for, but, as I argued in my theoretical background chapter, only an investigation into volunteers' actual perceptions of the community can show the extent to which such emancipatory thinking and learning actually takes place. This investigation should

be able, in turn, to suggest how successful KCR can be as an intervention in the social space in which it was established.

<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere in this thesis these areas are referred to as ‘townships’. This is because they were set up as ethnically exclusive areas during apartheid days, and still have some of the characteristics of such areas.

<sup>2</sup> This is also the impression I got based on my interviews with some of the volunteers at KCR, which I will elaborate on in the Findings chapter.

<sup>3</sup> This point, as well as being made in KCR’s Mission Statement and Aims and Objectives, was specifically made to me by the first Station Manager, Natasha Thibinyane, who is now a volunteer producer, in one of the interviews that will be described in the Findings chapter.

## **Chapter Three: The Research Design and Execution**

### **Introduction**

This chapter describes the research design of the case study presented in this thesis. I needed to develop a research design that would help in answering the central research question in this thesis. To recap, that was to identify the central concepts that typically inform volunteers' knowledge of their target community, and investigate how these concepts impact on their perception of how they have gained this knowledge, and how they justify their role as representatives of this community. It was also important to find ways, within the research design, of analysing the implications of these conceptualisations for the volunteer team's ability to function as a critical public sphere at a local level.

Section One clarifies decisions taken in the design of the research. In this section I explain why I chose a qualitative approach, which draws both on interpretivism and critical realism. I also explain why I chose to undertake a case study and opted for the use of qualitative interviews and a group discussion in my fieldwork. This section also includes a description of how the interview schedules were developed for this study, and discusses a constructivist approach to language, which I applied in analysing the interview data. Section Two deals with the implementation of the research. It includes an explanation of how the case study and the interviewees were selected, and goes on to discuss how the research design worked out in practice.

### **Section One: The Research Design**

#### **3.1 The Research Methodology**

##### **3.1.1 A Qualitative Approach**

It has been convincingly argued within the available body of literature about research methodology that, while quantitative research can uncover broad trends and cause-and-effect relationships in society, qualitative research is more appropriate when the purpose is to gain insight into people's subjective understandings and perceptions (Bryman 1988: 9-10; Deacon et al 1999: 7; Silverman 2000: 1-3). Given

that my research looks at understandings of the concept of community amongst a small group of KCR staff members, I have chosen a qualitative design. Qualitative research also allows greater flexibility in pursuing unique avenues of enquiry with each interviewee or research subject. Different directions can be followed in each interview depending on the subject's response to initial questions (Bryman 1988: 9-10). Such flexibility is crucial to a study that explores subjective interpretations of the ideals of community radio.

### 3.1.2 The Choice of Paradigm

Textbooks tend to categorise dominant approaches in social science according to three main paradigms; those of positivism, interpretivism or critical realism (Deacon et al 1999: 7; Snape & Spencer 2003: 11-13). The choice of paradigm has far-reaching implications for both the questions that are asked within a given research project and the ways in which the research tries to answer these questions (Deacon et al 1999: 7; Bryman 1988). Given the aims of this study, it seems appropriate that it should draw on both an interpretivist and a critical realist framework.

Both of these paradigms present themselves as alternatives to the approach of positivism. They are critical of the positivist claim that the principles of natural science can be applied to the social sciences. Positivism sees the researcher as essentially 'objective' and uses statistical and numerical measures to produce scientific statements or 'laws' about the relationships between social actors (Deacon et al 1999: 2-4). Researchers based in the interpretivist and critical paradigms have, however, argued that this approach does not work well when applied to the area of human interaction. It tends to oversimplify very complex matters of people's interpretation of social phenomena and the way they navigate and negotiate their own way through socially defined systems of meaning. Also it often ignores the broader social context in which a single person's actions may be situated (Deacon et al 1999: 4). In the study of KCR it will be necessary to look at perceptions of community in just this broader context and seek to interrogate subjective, not easily quantifiable, understandings.

Interpretivism provides a much more valuable reference point for the design of this research project. It explains the analysis of human culture as "not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning"

(Geertz 1973, cited in Deacon et al 1999: 5). Interpretive research is centrally concerned with the way in which people make sense of their own lived experience (Deacon et al 1999: 4-5). This is what I look at in this study, since I concern myself with the ‘maps’ that the volunteers have in their heads of the communities that they serve and the methods through which they acquired these ‘maps’. Furthermore, the purpose of interpretive research is to understand social reality from within (Deacon et al 1999: 5). This is important, too, in my study of KCR. It is necessary to take seriously the knowledge about community radio generated within the station rather than projecting from the outside what such knowledge should look like.

At the same time, the interpretivist paradigm would not on its own answer all the requirements of this research project. The aim of this research is not only to come to a greater understanding of how the volunteers at KCR ‘understand’ the community they serve and their relationship to this community, it also concerns itself with the need to look critically at the mechanisms that underpin these understandings and their implications for the station’s ability to serve that community according the principles of community radio. For this reason, it is also appropriate to draw on a critical realist paradigm. Critical realism recognises that there is a material reality that limits the changes people can make to their everyday lives. It also acknowledges the power of culture and perceptions in allowing (or not allowing) people to take steps to transform their social world (Deacon et al 1999: 5-7).

This dimension is important for this thesis. The thesis accepts that the perceptions of a group of people (community radio producers) about a certain place (Katutura) and their role in it are important for achieving social change in the community. Specifically, it accepts that, if people’s perceptions of the community are limited, the radio broadcasts produced by volunteers will be less emancipatory in nature. At the same time, the study acknowledges that material conditions (such as the experience of growing up under the apartheid system, in some cases) will have affected these perceptions.

Critical realist research accepts that, as people become more aware of the mechanisms underlying their social situation, these perceptions are likely to change and may involve the individual helping others make new meanings out of their lived experience (Deacon et al 1999: 5-7). This was my hope in conducting the case study of KCR. I sought, through the research process, to make volunteers more

aware of the power relations and discourses at work within the station itself and in its target community. I was aware that I should only make a limited intervention in this regard but I nevertheless believed I could make a small contribution to more meaningful media discourse by possibly providing the volunteers ways of enhancing their reflections on the station by providing them with critical tools and concepts that may be useful in this process.

## **3.2 The Research Methods**

### **3.2.1 A Case Study**

Postgraduate students doing research about media very often opt for case studies, despite the availability of a spectrum of other methods. It is worth stating, therefore, the reasons why a case study method was chosen for this thesis rather than any other method available on the spectrum of methods. An experiment deliberately divorces a phenomenon from its context so that only a few variables can be studied. An experimental design would divorce community radio from its social context and would not be a viable way to analyse the complex effects that society has on a subjective matter such as people's perceptions of their community. A history, on the other hand, does deal with context but with non-contemporary events. A historical study of community radio would miss important contemporary events and possibly the most recent changes. A survey deals with phenomenon and context, but its ability to investigate such context is severely limited. The survey designer has to constantly try to limit the number of variables to be analysed so a sufficient number of respondents can be surveyed (Yin 1989: 13). A survey on community radio in Namibia would likely not have been able to examine each station in detail. Lines of inquiry at each would have had to be reduced in order to survey a sufficiently large group within a reasonable time and not to be overwhelmed with data.

In contrast, the advantages of the case study method become clear. Yin (1989: 13) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that uses multiple sources of evidence to investigate a specific contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. He argues that researchers use a case study when they want to cover contextual conditions – believing them pertinent to the phenomenon under study (Yin 1989: 13-14). This present study is, indeed, informed by the assumption

that volunteers' perceptions of their station's target community are often powerfully determined by the social context.

It has been argued that case studies have four facets: they are particularistic, descriptive, heuristic and inductive (Merriam 1988, quoted in Wimmer & Dominick 1991: 150). A case study is particularistic because it focuses on one particular situation, event or phenomenon. This makes it a good method for studying practical problems and institutions (Wimmer & Dominick 1991: 150). Thus, it is well suited to research into a 'real-world' institution like a community radio station. Case studies are most instructive where one case can be seen as illustrative of broader problems or issues (Wimmer & Dominick 1991: 150). I believe that KCR may be considered 'typical' of community radio stations in southern Africa (see 2.1.1. "selection of radio station" for more detail). A case study is also descriptive - the final result is a detailed description of the topic under study (Wimmer & Dominick 1991: 150). Such a detailed description, rather than a positivistic cause-and-effect relationship, is what I hoped to uncover in my research. A case study is heuristic - it helps people to understand the object of study. New meanings, perspectives and insights are all goals of a case study (Wimmer & Dominick 1991: 150). Also, case studies often depend on inductive reasoning. Principles and generalisations emerge from an examination of the data. Thus case studies attempt to discover new relationships and principles as much as verify existing hypotheses (Wimmer & Dominick 1991: 150). These last two principles make the method well suited to the goals of qualitative research.

### 3.2.2. An Interview-driven Study

It can be said that qualitative interviews are a productive way of learning about the respondent's social world as he or she sees it, which is exactly what I intended to find out about in my study of KCR. In an interview, the researcher listens to what people themselves say about their lived world (Kvale 1996: 1). Thus qualitative interviews can be seen as the ideal starting point for a study that seeks to understand an aspect of the social world (such as the community or the role of community broadcasting from the subjects' own points of view (Kvale 1996: 1-2).

The qualitative interviewer should not be seen as an objective observer, whose own views and plans remain unchanged by his or her interactions with

interviewees. Kvale (1996) argues that social research has generally been conceptualised through one of two key metaphors. While the interviewer can be seen as a miner, uncovering and refining the essential truths in an interviewee's statements, some have argued that it is more appropriate for him or her to see him/herself as a traveller, on a journey through the interviewee's social world that leads to a narrative to be told on returning home (Kvale 1996: 3-5). In my study of KCR, I thought that the traveller metaphor would be useful, as I did not want to go into it with the assumption that the volunteers were ignorant of the essential truths in their narratives. Rather I wanted to understand the 'community knowledge' they had produced, and the methods through which they arrived at it, before pointing out possible 'gaps' in this knowledge, or ways in which the station does acknowledge or does not acknowledge differences between different individuals' knowledge.

For this reason I thought it would be vital that I follow – to some extent – the directions laid out by the interviewees, because this would show what *they* regarded as the most important aspects of their community. It would thus be necessary not to go in to the domain of community knowledge with a fixed and inflexible 'route map', but to try to make sense, together with the volunteers, of what knowledge they currently have, and what possibilities that knowledge opens up (or does not open up) for KCR to fulfil its potential functions as a public sphere.

The individual interview data is supplemented by a focus group discussion (sometimes called focus group interview, see Hansen et al 1998: 257-9). The advantage of including this method of research is that it allowed me to explore not only the individual understandings of individual volunteers but also the shared understandings of the station as a whole (Hansen et al 1999: 283). By doing this, it was my hope not just to expose the ways in which individuals acquired knowledge, but also how far the station as a whole supported these ways of gaining knowledge. Did the station, for example, encourage volunteers to share their experiences of living in different communities with different levels of prosperity? Did it seem willing to provide resources for volunteers to undertake systematic surveys of their target community? In the discussion I hoped that the dynamics of group interaction would generate insights that might not be accessible without the interaction of the group (see Hansen et al 1999: 262). These might include ways in which discourse about community is formed at the group, not individual, level, and ways in which



some individuals may submit to the shared community discourse rather than argue for their own, differing, discourse (Hansen et al 1999: 263-4).

As opposed to the individual interviews, which were planned as an ‘interpretive’ process, the focus group discussion was planned to be a more ‘critical’ one. The individual interviews would give me some idea of the volunteers’ perceptions of the community. I planned that the results of the individual interviews would inform the design of the group discussion. The basic idea behind the discussion, though, was to facilitate a scenario in which the volunteers expressed thoughts and ideas that they did not ordinarily voice in each others’ presence, and which they might find surprising to hear; I believed this would possibly make relationships visible that they had not been conscious of before. It was also hoped that during these discussions the discourse that emerged could be analysed to see whose ideology it reflected, whose points were given greater importance, and whose concerns were left out of the emerging shared community discourse.

### 3.2.3 Critical Analysis of Interview ‘Texts’

#### 3.2.3.1 Identifying narratives

Some social researchers have argued that qualitative interviews like the ones that form the basis of this study can be interpreted on two levels. On the one level, they can be seen as ‘realist’ descriptions of life and society as seen from an individual’s point of view. On the other, they can also be seen as revealing the way the respondents use – or reject – commonly available cultural resources to tell their stories (Silverman 2000: 122-3; Kvale 1996: 1-3). This level of analysis often reveals a greater complexity in the data than a pure realist analysis would do (Silverman 2000: 123). Such an analysis is based on a number of theorisations of how narratives work and are structured.

An event or social phenomenon, when told in story or narrative form, can always be constructed in a number of different ways and be manipulated to mean things differently. By analysing these narratives, a critical researcher can separate out the actors and the action into key functions, and by seeing who fulfils these functions and how the action in the narrative is structured, can gain an insight into who benefits, or does not, from the text’s construction of reality (Hall 1983: 1). Implicit in this understanding is that the stories we tell ourselves are not simply

‘natural’ or ‘obvious’, but involve a social process by which the ‘real’ is represented in certain terms (Janks 1998: 195-6).

In this research project, the ‘texts’ produced are transcripts of the interviews with KCR volunteers and the focus group discussion. Media and social theorists have developed a number of approaches to the analysis of texts. I intended to use principles from these theoretical approaches in looking for common patterns in the interviews. The advantage of examining these interview texts in this way is that we can then ‘read’ them not just for surface meanings but as also for the categories the interviewees use to dissect the social world, how the respondents are using culturally available resources to tell their stories, and whether these narratives are supporting or resisting common ‘cultural stories’ (Silverman 2000: 124-5). In using such an analysis to study the responses of KCR staff members, therefore, I was able to examine not just what the interviewees have to say about things on the surface (for example that “crime is a major problem in Katutura”), but also how they came to know about these things (for example from neighbours, police officers, government officials or from a process of intentional learning or just from living in the community). I could illustrate how their knowledge may often be grounded in cultural stories about social life (for example that crime is the result of poverty). I could also explore how their reception of their own role as community radio volunteers is based in such cultural stories (for example that media should help prevent crime by making potential criminals aware of other alternatives or by challenging the economic conditions that lead to crime) and how this might lead them to limit or expand the ways they acquired knowledge about the community (for example whether they had strategies for finding out about crime and its causes other than official police reports).

### 3.2.3.2 Making Use of a Constructivist Approach to Language

The tools of analysis introduced above, rest on certain theorisations of the way in which ‘knowledge’ is produced and comes to be accepted as ‘true’. It is likely that interviewees may have taken-for-granted knowledge of their communities, which, when examined, can be shown to be a product of the social and cultural environments in which they live. Various theoretical perspectives have evolved concerning the relationships between language, knowledge and power. In this section I will explain how a constructivist approach to these relationships can be

useful in interpreting discussions around community radio, not least those discussions on what defines a 'community'.

Constructivism stresses the shared, public nature of language. It acknowledges that neither things in themselves nor individual users of language can 'fix' meanings. Things do not simply mean anything by themselves: we construct meaning, using representational systems, such as languages or images. To make meanings in such a system the individual must 'negotiate' with social forces (Hall 1997: 25-26).

Theorists in this paradigm are concerned about the rules and practices which produce meaningful statements in different historical periods. Foucault used the term 'discourse' to mean not only sets of linked statements about a particular matter, but also the rules which prescribe ways of talking that are 'acceptable', 'subjects' who personify the discourse, ways in which 'truth' may be defined, the methods of investigation that can be said to produce 'true knowledge' about the matter, and the practices of institutions dealing with that matter (Foucault, quoted in Hall 1997:45-46). For example, an investigation on the discourse of mental illness would have to examine not only statements about mental illness, but also the rules for talking about it (whether it is acceptable to call someone a 'madman', for example), how subjects such as the 'madman', patient or psychiatrist are seen, who defines mental illness, how this definition has changed through history and how the practices of psychiatric hospitals and mental asylums have also changed (Hall 1997: 45-46). Discourse is influenced by ruling elites, as it often depends on practices and institutions they have set up (Hall 1997: 49). However, knowledge can never entirely be controlled by those with power. This is because competing alternative discourses always exist alongside the dominant ones (Hall 1997: 49-51).

This approach has relevance in the investigation of conceptualisations of 'community'. It gives us a number of questions we need to ask: whether it is acceptable to speak about, for example, division within the community, how different subjects personify the discourse (such as the 'typical' community member, or 'typical' community radio volunteer), and how these subjects are constructed. Such investigations should help to throw light on the type of knowledge of communities that is being produced in community radio stations. It should also help reveal the ways the station's volunteers understand this knowledge to be acquired. Within such an approach one would also have to examine to what extent this

knowledge is influenced by dominant social discourses of community or by 'alternative' discourses.

In Chapter One I argued that, to function effectively as part of a critical public sphere, a community radio station should subscribe to four central principles. As part of an examination of the discourse of community that operates within a community radio station's volunteer team, it would be important to establish the extent to which these elements are present. If we can, as discourse theory suggests, uncover unwritten 'rules' for both finding out the truth about and speaking about the community, we could interpret these in terms of these four 'critical public sphere' principles. One part of this would be to examine whether the volunteers' discourse about the community includes the idea of dissident discursive spaces within their target community, and whether it envisages volunteers investigating where these spaces exist and reporting on the 'alternative' discourse often generated in these spaces. If not, members of such discursive spaces may not be considered when volunteers construct a human subject such as the 'community member'. Another necessary part of this investigation was to determine if the volunteers' discourse recognised that some abuses that happen 'behind closed doors', in the home or in private companies, are the public's business. As I argued in Chapter One, such recognition is necessary if a community radio station is to function as a critical public sphere, but may, in fact be limited by the ways in which volunteers acquired knowledge about their target community. It was, furthermore, important to examine whether volunteers' discourse saw the station as a separate entity from the state and the market, which was able to form its own 'knowledge' independent of what these two social entities view as 'acceptable' knowledge. As the theoretical chapter indicated, actually-existing public spheres have often been limited by state and market and challenging their dominance over spaces of critical public discussion remains a key challenge today. It was also vital to determine if the volunteers' discourse allows them to view the members of the target community as citizens and to speak of them having rights to control both the local government of the target community and the radio station itself. In Chapter One I identified three ways in which this can be articulated. Firstly, volunteers should see community members as people who affect the decisions of state authorities and their mission should be to help their listeners do this. Secondly, volunteers themselves should be involved in activist work in the 'community'. Thirdly, in the specific case of community radio,

volunteers should be aware that their job involves giving the listeners the chance to exercise democratic control over the radio station itself. One of the signs that these requirements are not implemented would be if the volunteers' discourse were dominated by narratives about producing content as a product for consumption, with no further implications for society once that product is 'consumed'. It would also be of serious concern if no mention was made of the listeners, in the final analysis, being the 'owners' of the radio station and 'decision makers' with regard to its content. In this regard, one would be interested to see how volunteers' discourse justifies their position as 'community representatives'. This may offer us pointers to their sources of knowledge about the target community. It may also help indicate how they see the relationship between themselves and members of that community, and whether they see this relationship as one of selling products or one that captures the definitions of 'citizenship' identified above.

### **3.3 The Research Techniques**

#### **3.3.1 The Stages of Research and the Instruments Required by Each**

The first stage of the research process was designed to be a set of in-depth interviews with the programme producers. The second stage was to consist of a focus group discussion. During this discussion I attempted to investigate further the extent to which shared perceptions about the station's target community could be said to operate within the group. The focus group also examined the extent to which these perceptions, shared or otherwise, inform the station's programme design. It also attempted to explore whether differences in perception are formally acknowledged within this design. Programme schedules aided this discussion. By allowing participants to respond to issues raised by other participants, well-conducted focus groups can generate highly detailed information (Wilkinson 2004: 180-182). Thus, it was hoped that the focus group would add to the richness of the data. Focus groups should also allow consensus to emerge freely (Wilkinson 2004: 182). For this reason, I thought such a group be useful in tapping into the organisational culture of the station.

#### **3.3.2. The Individual Interviews**

##### **3.3.2.1 Interview Guides**

An interview guide is a rough outline of the questions that will be asked during the interview. In qualitative interviewing, interviewers are allowed varying degrees of flexibility, but some leeway is usually given to depart from the interview guide and follow up the most interesting angles of enquiry in each interview (Kvale 1996: 129-131). This defined my approach at KCR, given the subjective matter to be dealt with in the interviews. An interview guide is nevertheless needed to ensure certain basic topics are covered. The guide will usually contain several interview questions for each of the broader research questions that need to be answered (Kvale 1996: 131).

A copy of the interview guide is attached as an appendix. I included several questions in it designed to address three key research themes: (1) how the volunteers perceive the community; (2) how they perceive their own role as broadcasters within the community; and (3) how this affects the representation of different groups and their fulfilling of KCR's mandate. With regard to the first theme I included such questions as "please give a brief description of the Katutura community", "what are the most important issues that we must address to make Katutura a better place?", and "how would you describe a typical member of the Katutura community?". With regard to the second, I posed questions such as "how do you know that crime is a big problem in Katutura?" as well as "do you feel you can report on anything?" and "what issues should not be reported?". In addressing the third, an analysis of responses to questions in their first two categories will be instructive (see the section on analysis below).

These groups of questions relate also to the four 'critical public sphere' principles discussed in Chapter One. The first group of questions are designed to enable us to see the extent to which dissident discursive spaces are included in volunteers' understandings of community. The second group of questions relate to the other three principles: listeners should be addressed as citizens, the station should be distinguished from state and market and distinctions between public and private may need to be challenged. The third group allows us to test whether those 'counter-publics' are acknowledged within KCR's programming. The answers to questions in group (2), therefore, should allow us to see, in the volunteers' interpretation of their practice, whether such principles are being put into effect.

### 3.3.2.2 Reliability and Validity in Interviews

In gathering qualitative data, one has to be careful to ensure that, despite the flexibility of such techniques as in-depth interviewing, one still has some basis to compare the different interviews/discussions (Fontana & Frey 1994: 370-372). Doing the interviews at KCR required a balance between the flexibility necessary to explore people's subjective perceptions and the need to compare and contrast different responses, both with each other and with the predictions made by the relevant theories.

Also, it is vitally important to understand the language usage and culture of the respondents and establish rapport with them (Fontana & Frey 1994: 366). This was a concern to this researcher, as I am not of the same culture as most of the intended respondents. Nevertheless, I hoped that I had enough cultural knowledge to achieve a degree of communication and trust. Since the station broadcasts chiefly in English, most of the respondents could be expected to be able to express themselves in this language. Nevertheless, the fact that less-than-perfect command of the English language might inhibit some people from participating fully, especially in the group discussions, needed to be borne in mind. The possibility of explaining questions in another language, or having them translated, was a consideration.

Matters of gender must also be considered. It has been argued that, due to patriarchal influences on society, interviews are widely seen as 'masculine' ways of doing research, which do not allow traits such as emotional sensitivity, traditionally thought of as 'feminine', to be expressed (Fontana & Frey 1994: 370). One must be aware of this masculinist view of the interviewing process and how it might cause, perhaps, women to withhold information seen as too 'personal' and men to give curt answers as they would feel threatened by possible criticism.

### 3.3.3 Group Discussions

A guide for the focus group discussion is attached. It is based on the idea that the focus group discussion represents a critical realist 'moment' in the research process. That is to say, while the individual interviews were designed to be mainly about understanding the images of the community in the interviewees' minds, the aim of the focus group discussion was to make visible both commonalities and differences in the discourses of community that operate within the station, and the extent to which these discourses acknowledged different individual perceptions of the

community (or the extent to which these differences were ignored or minority opinions silenced).

The discussion was designed to be composed of three sections: a clarification exercise which involved participants responding to statements about themselves and how they relate to the target community and the volunteer group; a more in-depth discussion of what these differences may mean for KCR's common vision for the station; and finally a discussion relating this information to the radio station's programming schedules.

I hoped that the dynamics of group interaction would generate insights that would not be accessible in individual settings (see Hansen et al 1999: 262). At the same time, it was important that the focus group did not only represent the discourses that operate within the station but also began to reflect on them openly. It was therefore vital that the facilitator of the focus group encourage all members to contribute ideas and arguments. This is no easy task and requires the facilitator to constantly be alert to possible dominance by one or two more powerful personalities (see Wilkinson 2004: 180-182). In the stage of debating the shared station discourse, I felt that one had to take care to ensure that any consensus that emerged was genuine, that is, that people did not feel obliged to agree to the 'official' policy of the organisation at this stage (see Wilkinson 2004: 182).

#### 3.3.4 Analysis and Interpretation of Data

As mentioned earlier, the examination of discourses of community within the interviews was to take into account four key criteria that can be said to be necessary if community radio is to function as a critical public sphere. That is, from a public sphere point of view, one may see, through the common narratives of their role in the community, the extent to which journalists/ broadcasters see themselves as distinct from the state and the market, whether they see their listeners as consumers or citizens, and whether they see their role as getting involved in matters that society often defines as 'private'.

The interpretation exercise was designed to begin with a process of extracting key themes from the interview data that seemed more relevant to the research question, specifically focusing on, firstly, the common themes in how the volunteers described the target community and secondly, how they came about this information and how they justified their status as 'community representatives'. This



was also a way of eliminating the less relevant material in the interview transcripts. The next stage was to examine what was said under each of these themes and what they might imply about the four ‘critical public sphere’ criteria listed above. While doing this, I intended to pragmatically apply the insights of narrative analysis. In other words, in interpreting the relevance of each theme to the critical public sphere criteria, I planned to look for instances where volunteers had made use of common cultural narratives or were constrained by discursive ‘rules for speaking’ when describing the target community. Where this did happen, I planned to examine who benefited from their framing their description in this way and how these frames of reference may have limited the possibility of the volunteers’ acquiring additional sources of knowledge within the community.

The next stage of interpretation was to be a thematic analysis of the group discussion. Here I planned to group themes into two categories: (1) those that introduced more nuances and complexities into themes already identified in the individual interviews, and (2) those that introduced new material relevant to the research question. In examining both of these sets of themes, I was also looking for instances where the narratives that came out of the collective discussion about the target community at the level of the volunteer group were different from some of the individual understandings of volunteers in the interviews. In this analysis I also tried to establish what the discourses implied for the relationship of the volunteer group to other parts of the station, such as the management and Board of Trustees.

### 3.3.5 Issues in Writing up Findings

It has been argued that many studies using interviews and focus groups are not reflexive enough about the interpreting processes: it is sometimes said that data ‘speak for themselves’ or the researcher is implied to be neutral (Fontana & Frey 1994: 372). However, as we have seen, such a ‘reflective’ approach to any discourse, even an academic one, is unrealistic (Fontana & Frey 1994: 372; Silverman 2000: 123-4).

More recently social researchers have come to acknowledge the problematic and, at times, contradictory nature of their data, and the “tremendous, if unspoken, influence of the researcher as an author” (Fontana & Frey 1994: 372). This implies that one should be careful about writing up one’s findings without including both data that supports the main thrust of one’s conclusions and data that contradicts it. I

also understand this to imply that I should consider my role as researcher critically, and bear in mind that the discourse I have generated from my interviews at KCR could have been different had a researcher with a different cultural background or from a different paradigm done the work.

It has become a widely shared view that “no research project is politically innocent, least of all those that claim to have no politics” (Deacon et al 1999: 7). Situated as it is the critical realist paradigm, this research project seeks to expose power relations hidden within concepts of community, and make a certain group of people – community radio volunteers – more aware of them and, in so doing, contribute to social justice. In questioning the data I have obtained, then, I should also bear in mind whether it has, to some or any extent, achieved these objectives.

## **Section Two: The Research Execution**

### **3.4 The Selection of Cases**

#### **3.4.1. The Radio Station**

I chose KCR for this case study because it represents, both in its potential and its shortcomings, much that can be said to be ‘typical’ of community radio stations in southern Africa. Its mission statement requires it to represent the views of people within a poor and disadvantaged community to the wider public. It also seeks to represent the community to itself (KCR Mission Statement 2003). This is important because one of the main areas I want to scrutinise in this research is the relationship of ‘representativity’ between the station and its community. This makes the station theoretically appropriate.

KCR further seeks to promote social change and empower disadvantaged people (KCR Mission Statement, 2003). Once again, this makes it appropriate to my research, conducted as it is in the critical realist paradigm. The thesis is concerned with the extent to which the ability of volunteers to ‘represent’ communities allows this aim of social change to become realised.

Finally, it is relevant that KCR has historically been accused by media commentators and, indeed, by some of its own volunteers of not representing ‘the community’ in all its diversity and of mimicking the programming of commercial radio stations (Isaacs 2005). Not much research has been done into Namibian

community radio as a whole, but such patterns are typical of community radio stations in South Africa (Hadland & Thorne 2004: 56-57) and the aims of Namibian stations like KCR are often premised on a South African model of community broadcasting.

#### 3.4.2 The Interviewees

In order to select candidates for the interviewing process, I used purposive sampling. This method, although it may not provide a 100 per cent 'representative' sample, is useful because it allows predictions drawn from relevant theories to be easily tested. Interviewees were selected, in other words, because they represent or challenge what theories predict to be the 'typical case' (Deacon et al 1999: 52-53). Thus, within KCR I chose to interview programme producers whose shows generally allow marginalised voices onto the air and whose producers one could thus expect to be more aware of the diverse nature of the community, the existence of sub-groups, power relations and who could reasonably have been expected to have engaged in more systematic investigation of the target community and its social issues.

The interviewees were, therefore, to be chosen from amongst two groups. The first group included the producers of shows such as Talking Pink, a programme that aims to represent gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people; Women's Voices, a feminist advocacy show; Workers' World, a show aiming to educate workers on their rights; Getting it Right, a show aimed at those living with HIV/AIDS, and The Road Ahead, a show in which volunteers spend a part of the day in a township taxi and interview whoever travels in it. The second group of producers from which I chose interviewees consisted of those whose shows that have more 'mainstream' content, to see if this content indicates a different version of community knowledge. Examples of these shows include Sports Life, a sports show, Unplugged, focusing on 'FHM-type' men's magazine content, as well as SME Talk which is aimed at promoting small business development.

Another consideration was to interview a more-or-less equal number of NGO-based volunteers (those working for non-governmental organisations that produced programmes on behalf of their organisations to be broadcast on KCR) and 'general volunteers' (those who worked at KCR in their personal capacity, many of whom worked at the station full-time). In practice, these two objectives could easily be accomplished alongside each other, as several of the more 'radical' shows, or

shows representing disadvantaged groups, such as Talking Pink, Women's Voices, and Workers' World were, at this time, produced by NGO-based volunteers.

### **3.5 Issues in Putting the Research Design into Practice**

#### **3.5.1. Selection of Interviewees and Group Discussion Participants**

Selection of interviewees for the individual interviews took place in mid-2006 in consultation with the KCR Station Manager.

My original plan, as outlined in the previous section, was to select volunteers from both shows seemingly more 'radical' in content, and those whose content seemed to support the social 'status quo'. In practice, it was hard to make this distinction with 'general' volunteers who were often involved in producing several shows with varying content and sometimes presented these shows as well. Most NGO-based volunteers were producing content that seemed to support vulnerable groups in society, whereas, in most cases, 'general' volunteers were producing some programmes aimed at disadvantaged groups and some with more mainstream content.

It seemed, then, more appropriate to base my selection of interviewees on my other chief consideration: that of interviewing an equal number of NGO-based and 'general' volunteers. However, owing to the withdrawal of a number of NGO-based producers from KCR's staff shortly before I began the research, I was only able to focus on the producers of two radio shows: Women's Voices, focusing on issues of gender equality and women's empowerment and Talking Pink, a show focussing on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues. These withdrawals from the KCR staff were the result of resignations of producers from the staff of the NGOs, and not in protest against any situation at KCR. They may have complicated the research by meaning that fewer NGO-based producers were included, and thus the 'sample' consisted mainly of 'general volunteers'. There could thus be a danger of giving the 'general' volunteers too much prominence. However, in retrospect I am confident that this did not happen because the NGO-based producers were, in general, more vocal and expressive than the 'general' volunteers. The NGO-producers chosen proved good interviewees because their shows, Women's Voices and Talking Pink are easily the most controversial and well-known of KCR's talk shows, and because of their specific activist mandates,

are somewhat different in character from much of the rest of KCR's content. These three interviewees (there are two producers working on Talking Pink and one for Women's Voices), then, did allow a basis for comparison with the 'general' volunteers.

Another unexpected development was the setting up of the KCR news team in late 2006. The Station Manager suggested that I include two members of this team in the individual interviews, which I readily agreed to, thinking they would possibly add new dimensions to the research. I thought that they might have interacted with the community on a more sustained and day-to-day basis than, say, producers of magazine programmes or NGO-based talk show producers and may have had less control of what aspects of the 'community' they focussed on as 'community members' sometimes may have 'come to them'.

The focus group discussion was conducted in March 2007. Holding the discussion very soon after the individual interviews, as originally intended, proved impractical owing to the Christmas/New Year break. Another difficulty was that three of the 'general' volunteers had left KCR in the New Year, to take up employment in other media organisations. It was felt that their contributions in a group discussion held after their resignation would not be relevant, since the discussion sought to establish what the shared community discourse of the organisation was, and they were no longer part of this organisation and thus no longer able to contribute towards this discourse. I was also worried that some of them may not be willing to come back to their former workplace. For this reason, I felt obliged to enlarge the discussion group, rather than conduct the discussion with only the individual interviewees as had been the plan. In enlarging the group I included one more member of the news team and two DJs who had occasionally presented talk shows as well.

This may have led to the discussion not being as good a basis for comparison with the individual interviews. However, the discussion did lead to a number of new points being made which were not made or not elaborated upon, in the individual interviews. As will be discussed in the Findings chapter, discussion participants also made a number of comments that allowed me to infer differences between how the representation of the target community was seen at the collective level of the radio station and at the level of the individual volunteer.

### 3.5.2. Issues in Conducting Interviews and Group Discussion

The individual interviews were conducted following the interview guide fairly closely. Occasionally, interviewees seemed to need prompting in a number of questions. For example, a question initially included in the interview guide along the lines of “tell us a bit about yourself and where you’re from” tended to provoke one-sentence answers, and often required further prompting to get useful information. Questions like “how did growing up in a poor neighbourhood affect your reporting at KCR?” had occasionally to be ‘inserted’ into the interviews at this stage. Another problem was that some interviewees seemed to use the interviews as an opportunity as much to complain about issues within KCR as to talk about KCR’s relationship with its target community. However, more than enough material was generated concerning the volunteers’ views of the community and their relationship to it. Some of the complaints, although not expected, proved to be useful as well. Together with information from the group discussion, they did seem to point to a number of structural issues at the station which may impede its representation of certain groups within the target community.

The group discussion allowed lively debate through much of its course. The clarification exercise, which allowed people to respond to self-definition questions by moving to a different corner of the room based on whether they agreed or disagreed that certain statements applied to themselves, proved to be invaluable in generating debate and encouraging volunteers to express themselves more fully than in the individual interviews. On the other hand, the exercise of analysing the programme schedule proved somewhat disappointing, with most discussion participants concentrating only on a few gaps in KCR’s coverage, and only a few on how the schedule favoured and did not favour certain groups, through issues like timing of shows and ‘flagship’ programmes. It may also have been that, at about one-and-a-half hours, the discussion was too long, with some participants possibly getting bored towards the end, thus shortening their answers. However, once again, it was my feeling that enough material was gained through both research methods to answer the research question fairly comprehensively.

### 3.5.3. Analysing and Interpreting the Data

After the individual interviews and group discussion were concluded I transcribed them from the audio and videotapes into written form. These written transcripts

were then used to analyse the data. The analysis consisted chiefly of extracting key themes from the individual interviews, based on the theoretical background I sketched in Chapter One, as well as the research question. My second task was to compare these themes to those that emerged in the group discussion. I tried to break the themes which emerged in the group discussion into two kinds: (1) those that introduced more nuances and complexities into these already identified in the individual interviews, and (2) those that introduced new material with relevance for the research question. I ended up using constructivist analysis in more ‘broad strokes’, rather than making detailed use of constructivist interpreting techniques. I did, however, try to keep constructivist conceptions of language and its relationship to power in mind in identifying key themes in the interviews and the discussion. I aimed to keep in mind as well the key question of where the knowledge the volunteers were presenting about the target community came from, and how it was acquired. In this regard, I also found it useful to follow Silverman’s (2000: 122-4) approach of treating interviews both as narratives containing facts and as stories constructed using ‘culturally available resources’. These culturally-constructed stories, Silverman states, may conform to or challenge popular representations or cultural stereotypes and may be constrained by many factors, including the ways of learning which are available to the volunteer. Thus, it proved useful to my research project, which looks both at what the volunteers know about the community and how they can claim ‘to know it’.

### **Conclusions**

In this chapter I have shown that the use of a qualitative research method, underpinned by the interpretivist and critical realist paradigms, was the most appropriate way to tackle a research project like the one this thesis describes. I have also argued that the use of interviews and group discussions, coupled to a critical analysis of the ‘texts’ that result, was a feasible way of investigating the research question. In my opinion, the implementation of the research design, although not following my initial plan exactly, allowed collection of all the data required to satisfactorily answer the research question. The findings that resulted from the research design, its execution and the analysis of the results as described here will be presented in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

### **Introduction**

The first section of this chapter describes the individual interviews and the group discussion that I conducted with the KCR volunteers. The first section contains a degree of interpretation, to the extent that I clarify as far as possible, my understanding of what the participants were communicating during the course of the interviews and discussions. It also identifies themes that recurred during the interviews and discussions. The individual interviews are discussed separately from the group discussion because I wanted to make a distinction between the points that emerged when people were speaking to me individually and when they were interacting with each other as well. Some important differences emerged, as I will explain later, between individuals' discourse about the 'community' and the more 'collective' discourse which emerged from the group discussion. The second section then comments on this material in terms of the criteria for a 'critical public sphere' examined in Chapter One, teasing out its implications for the research question posed in this thesis.

### **Section One: Themes in the Interviews and Group Discussion**

#### **4.1 Individual Interviews**

As explained in the research design chapter, the first stage of my fieldwork consisted of eight individual interviews which I conducted with volunteer programme producers at KCR. I have grouped my summary of the participants' responses according to themes that recurred during the interview process and in the narratives about their roles in KCR, about the community served by the station and about KCR's role in that community. These are, briefly, hardship as a criterion for describing the target community, personal experience of hardship as a criterion for representivity and subjective identification and personal involvement as a descriptor of the volunteer-community relationship.



#### 4.1.1 Hardship as a Criterion for Describing ‘The Community’

The interviewees were asked to describe ‘the KCR target community’ in general terms. Most of them immediately began by talking about its problems. They saw ‘poverty’ and ‘crime’ as the most serious issues. Sam<sup>1</sup> said:

... you cannot compare someone living in Ombili [an informal settlement on outskirts of Katutura], their living standards, to someone staying in Academia or Olympia [upper-class suburbs of Windhoek], for instance. People in Katutura and Khomasdal, they live on a day-to-day basis (Interview transcript 2: 2).

A few volunteers said that the youth particularly faced temptations to get into crime and drugs as a result of this underprivileged environment. Natasha said Katutura and Khomasdal had “... a very high unemployment rate. There’s a high rate of alcohol abuse. A high rate of violence” (Interview transcript 5: 1). After describing the widespread unemployment and other problems among the youth, Sam said:

You know, when you are growing up in this environment you want to try things, you know, be it alcohol or drugs... Some guys, you know, they try it and they like it and they got hooked. Now for me – my mom was also very strict... if she just left me, like those guys, to do what they want, I was going to have gone the same way (Interview transcript 8: 2).

This hardship that volunteers spoke about was often framed comparatively, in other words, hardship was contrasted to other people’s privilege. This can be seen, for example, when Sam said that, “... you cannot compare someone living in Ombili [an informal settlement on outskirts of Katutura], their living standards, to someone staying in Academia or Olympia [suburbs in Windhoek]”. He then added that people in Katutura and Khomasdal “... live on a day-to-day basis”. For some people, this story of hardship versus privilege was a story of Katutura versus the richer parts of town, while for others the contrast also exists within Katutura and Khomasdal itself. Natasha, for example, said:

... the majority of the people [in Katutura and Khomasdal] are poor. But you do find middle class and even wealthy people living in Katutura and

Khomasdal. In Khomasdal you find many middle class people. In Katutura you would find more poor and some middle class. We have very few wealthy people living in Katutura (Interview transcript 5: 6).

Not everyone made this distinction. Bob, for example, said:

If you really want to know about suffering, don't go to town – but if you come to Katutura, that's where you will see, now, the reality of what is poverty. You can see just by looking at people that they are sad, and that's because of poverty. One thing I know about Katutura – it is in poverty, total poverty (Interview transcript 1: 2).

For this volunteer, it seems as though all of the Katutura and Khomasdal community is underprivileged. Whereas Natasha compared the people within the community to each other and saw that some are richer, Bob compared the whole community to an outside community, those living “in town”, and commented that compared to “town,” all are “living in poverty”.

In describing KCR's target community and its problems, interviewees frequently made reference to Katutura's past as a black township under the apartheid regime which ended in Namibia in 1990. One volunteer began his description of the station's target community by reminding the interviewer that Katutura began as the result of forced removals of people from locations closer to the city centre in the 1960s (Interview transcript 1: 1). A few volunteers said that people in the community were still affected by past injustices, not only economically, but also on a psychological level. At times they also saw this in terms of people's 'ethnic' characterisations of other people. Bob, for example said, “That's how Katutura came to be; it is because of the evil past. When we got independent, people's minds were supposed also to get decolonized. But the minds of the people are still colonized.” He later added, “They are still living in the past. Here you find tribalism is still high. People call each other Vambo, Damara, Kwangara, whatever. These things are of the past, and they were introduced so as to divide the people” (Interview transcript 1: 3).

Exceptions to this linking of present-day problems with the past occurred in the comments made by the producers of Talking Pink, who saw discrimination against sexual minorities as prevalent today, and not just a hangover from the past

(Interview transcript 3: 6). The producer of Women's Voices, also an NGO-based volunteer, acknowledged that laws that discriminated against women had been repealed but what was needed now was “complete behaviour and attitude change”, and this had not yet taken place (Interview transcript 5: 8).

We can see that most of the volunteers equated the Katutura and Khomasdal community with a poor, underprivileged neighbourhood which is at least partly the result of the apartheid past. At the same time, only some of them made much of the differences within the community, such as the different social classes. NGO-based volunteers tended to make these distinctions more than general volunteers did. This, as will be discussed later, offers us a clue that perhaps this group of volunteers have conceptualised the target community in a different and possibly more comprehensive way than the general volunteers.

#### 4.1.2 Personal Experience of Hardship as a Criterion for Representivity

In the interviews, stories about difficulties faced when growing up were a key part of self-description. Natasha, one of the volunteers, said, “I grew up in a very violent society with high crime rates, high poverty rates, high unemployment rates, high alcohol abuse rates” (Interview transcript 5: 1). Lukas, another interviewee, described how he had grown up on the streets as an orphan and had eventually made it out of absolute poverty through a part-time job at a church organisation. Bob, a member of the KCR news team, said, “I was born in Lubango in Angola, at the refugee camp for Namibians fleeing South African rule, way back in '78. I was moving, as a small child, from one refugee camp to the other.” He then detailed how he lived in several countries as refugee before returning to Namibia at independence in 1990 (Interview transcript 1: 1).

Related to this, interviewees also made a point of explaining that similar stories of suffering characterise their communities today. Often they pointed out how this shared history of hardship defined their work at KCR. Many of them explained that the work they did at KCR was aimed at alleviating this suffering and suggested that this commitment was informed by their own shared experience of hardship. That this was mentioned is not coincidental: it can be seen that the volunteers were legitimising their status as community representatives by calling on their own experience of hardship in relation to the KCR community's experience of hardship.

The interviewees described their own relationship to hardship within their community not only as something they experienced themselves, but also as a process of witnessing the difficulties faced by people close to them. One could argue that such witnessing provided legitimacy to their status as representatives, within the KCR structures, of the Katutura community. Natasha, for example, said, “I’m very much a community person. I ultimately think I’m a community activist as well, besides being a journalist and a women’s rights activist” (Interview transcript 5: 7). She traced the origins of this sense of self to what she had witnessed, while growing up, about destructive forces at work in the lives of her friends. She described how, as a teenage girl she “already started freaking out” about her friends not finishing school and getting into drug abuse:

It’s like this vicious cycle. You don’t finish school, because they get into drugs or alcohol, there’s teenage pregnancy; it’s just the *same* vicious cycle over and over again. I’ve been struggling for years now, talking to the guys, especially the guys – before it was mainly guys who were into drug abuse, but now it’s also young women. I really want KCR to somehow bring positive change in our community (Interview transcript 5: 13).

At other times, it was volunteers’ own hardship which motivated them to try to change things for others, through their involvement at KCR. Lukas, a former homeless person, said his experiences as a poor orphan had motivated him to offer ‘motivation’ and ‘education’ to others:

My aim at KCR is to educate others, especially those who are in the street right now. We know that people are suffering – at least they need motivation, need someone to tell them how to change their lives one day. (Interview transcript 4: 1).

Many interviewees emphasised how they had taken up positions of activism and social responsibility within a poor and disadvantaged area of the city, and seemed to imply that this gave them a certain legitimacy to speak about the community’s problems.

The theme of drawing legitimacy from an activist role in a troubled community was, in one interview, alluded to in collective as well as individual terms. A former member of the station management, who now runs a women’s

advocacy programme, described how the organisational structures of the radio station had been set up. She described how it had been “a race against time” to re-launch KCR, before a deadline set by the Namibian Communications Commission had run out. She and a small group of activists, mainly from the NGO community, had worked day and night to set up KCR’s structures, many in an ad hoc fashion. Having previously worked as a full-time feminist activist, she admitted that she had had very little radio training previously. She also explained, like other interviewees, how KCR had decided to make a costly move from a Government-controlled arts training centre to its own premises, so that it could broadcast Talking Pink without putting the arts centre’s management under pressure from higher officials or politicians who had a discriminatory attitude to ‘homosexuality’ (Interview transcript 5: 3-4). The story of KCR’s re-founding that was told here emphasised the ‘activist’ roots of the station and the determination of its staff to succeed in getting certain messages to the community irrespective of the obstacles in their way. It can be said to suggest, as some of the volunteers’ life stories did, that growing up in a poor environment led them to carve out an activist, or advocate, role for themselves.

#### 4.1.3 ‘Knowing about the Community’ through Personal Experience

In the interviews, volunteers placed considerable emphasis upon the ways in which they ‘know’ about Katutura and Khomasdal, as ‘radio representatives’ of that ‘community’. Chief among the ways they listed were (1) by drawing on personal experience, (2) through bearing witness to what they saw and heard in day-to-day interactions, and (3) ‘knowing’ through empathy. In the previous section I argued that volunteers legitimised their representative status by making a link between the community as a place of hardship and their own histories of experiencing and/or observing hardship within the community. As part of this process of legitimisation, particular emphasis was often placed on the nature of their knowledge about the community. In describing this knowledge, interviewees seemed to imply that, because they subjectively identified with what community members were going through, they were able to see them in a different way to disinterested researchers or journalists from outside the community.

Having described the community and its problems, interviewees were asked how they knew that these social conditions existed. Some said that they knew about

Katutura and Khomasdal and their problems simply because they were 'from there'. Tuli said, for example, "I actually just know unemployment is a big problem in Katutura. Because a lot of people I know don't have jobs" (Interview transcript 6: 2). Others said they knew about social problems through their own experiences while growing up. They often said that they had grown up knowing poor people, drug users or survivors of domestic violence; sometimes such people were their own relatives (interview transcripts 2, 5 & 7).

We saw earlier that several interviewees claimed legitimacy for their role as representatives through their experiences while growing up and the positions of activism these experiences encouraged them to take up. Some interviewees articulated these experiences as ways in which they came to acquire knowledge about the community. For example, Ndalulilwa said that she had become involved in a feminist organisation after finding out how one of her relatives suffered from abuse at the hands of her male partner (Interview transcript 5: 2-3) and had gained understanding of problems facing women in Katutura. Others, however, suggested they had acquired this knowledge 'organically' (although they did not use this word): simply by living in areas where these problems existed. Tuli, for example, said she was a good representative of township dwellers simply because she, too, was "from that community" (Interview transcript 6: 2).

Another example of this is the way in which many of the volunteers identified themselves with the youth of the community in particular, and said that being youths had enabled them to report on issues facing 'the youth'. Mandume, for example, who was 20 years old when the interview took place, saw his role at KCR as one of promoting the interests of poor and unemployed youth in general. He said, "Being a youth that grew up in not the best of conditions, I know what the majority of the youth really wants" (Interview transcript 8: 9). For this young man it seemed as though the idea of being a youth in Katutura or Khomasdal was linked to suffering, especially through unemployment, and that being a youth gave him legitimacy to speak about these issues.

Several people also said that they empathized with the problems the youth of Namibia faced and made particular references to unemployment, disillusionment and drug abuse. That the notion of empathy was mentioned could imply that the 'legitimacy' claimed here is not only grounded in membership of the group but also flows from emotional identification because of the ability to empathise directly.

While some people identified themselves according to generalised categories (youth being the key one), others related their identity to more specific categories, such as sex and gender, and pointed out that they had been survivors of specific discrimination along these lines, as women, for example, or as gay people. One person volunteered to mention her status as a lesbian and added that she was a member of the production team of a show promoting gay rights (Interview transcript 3: 1). Another young woman (19 years old) said quite early on in her self-description that she was “a mother of one” (Interview transcript 6: 1). Many of the people in the later category were also those who seemed to have a more nuanced idea of power relations within KCR’s target community. Many (although not all) were from the NGO-based category, suggesting perhaps that there is a prevalent view among this group of people that one’s own personal identity is important with regard to how one tackles power relations within the target community.

It seems significant that only a few volunteers mentioned that their knowledge of the communities they served as volunteers for KCR was in any way a result of journalistic research, either in the form of newsgathering or studio discussions with guests. One volunteer noted that she had grown up knowing certain problems, such as domestic violence, existed, but at KCR she had heard more “eye stories” (by which she meant eyewitness accounts) about people who actually had to deal with them. Only one interviewee said that she had learned more from exposure to official statistics and scientific information while working at KCR.

However, despite this identification of themselves as advocates for their communities, few of the volunteers articulated their role as that of reporting selectively, or maybe ‘gatekeeping’. Little mention was made of the role of the media practitioner in choosing what to cover (and what gets left out). In some cases, this role was explicitly denied. Lukas, when asked how he chose people to interview for a magazine programme, said:

I don’t choose people. As I walk, I see a person, I speak to him... even as you are listening there are boys hanging round outside the radio station, those are the people I used to target (Interview transcript 4: 4).

One could argue that, while he is not necessarily denying that there is some process of ‘targeting’ going on, he is nevertheless making a distinction between, on the one

hand, the more distanced, formal process of selection of the ‘objective’ journalist (“I don’t choose people”), and on the other a more ‘organic’ networking as a member of the community (“as I walk, I see a person, I speak to him”). It is possible that the reference to the boys outside the station is part of a description of an organic self-selection, in which the community ‘comes to him’. In other words, Lukas was making a distinction between an intentional process of learning about the target community – where a journalist goes into the community and finds out about living conditions according to predetermined criteria about who to visit or interview – and his own more situated, everyday process of learning – where the journalist lives in the target community and community members ‘come to him’.

In fact, from the interviewees’ responses in general, one can see that for most of them, their primary strategy of information gathering is that of simply being observant in their day to day interactions with their target community. This is very different from the conventional approach of journalists in the commercial or public media, in which a more disciplined, structured process of investigation is demanded, often with pre-determined criteria of what is ‘newsworthy’. As we will see under the next discussion point, the more systematic and intentional approach to journalistic research in particular, and knowledge about the target community in general, was nevertheless present in the radio station. It seems significant that, again, this distinction occurs in the case of the NGO-based volunteers.

#### 4.1.4 The NGO Volunteers: a More Systematic Approach to Community Knowledge?

As noted in the previous chapter, some of the volunteers at the station work for NGOs as well as for KCR. Most of these volunteers were involved in producing weekly magazine programmes for the station, dealing with topics related to their NGO work. These individuals, based on their interview responses, could be considered an exception to the rule that volunteers thought that their main task was to gain information through day to day interactions and through subjective involvement with the community. They had a more systematic approach to gathering information, closer to that of journalists in more mainstream media institutions.

Several of the interviewees not associated with NGOs (to whom I refer as the ‘general’ volunteers) said that having the ‘NGO-based’ volunteers on board gave



KCR more credibility because it becomes possible for the station to talk knowledgably about the issues that their organisations deal with. They referred, as an example, to the two representatives from The Rainbow Project (TRP, an NGO which supports gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people) who produce Talking Pink. It was felt that their presence in this show allowed KCR to speak with authority about discrimination against sexual minorities. So, despite the emphasis on the importance of 'subjective' knowing as a way of defining their credibility as community representatives, these KCR members still seemed to feel that the more 'structured' and intentional way of knowing of the NGO-based volunteers offered credibility of a different kind.

The three interviewees who fell into the 'NGO' category said that their work with the NGOs assisted them considerably in gathering information for their KCR programmes. One mentioned that the work she did for the NGO gave her contacts with and information about people in the community who could be useful sources of information for programmes. Two others said that, as a result of their work at NGOs, they were able to learn informally about how radio 'worked' in terms of its interaction with the audience and methods through which journalists (they did not say 'mainstream media journalists' or 'community radio journalists') can gain access to information. However, even they argued that the origins of their commitment to KCR could be traced to incidents within their personal history and that their work at KCR was informed by this history. In one case, such incidents involved gender and racial discrimination; in the other two, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation as they came of age (Interview transcripts 3 & 5). While many of the volunteers were prepared to speak in broad terms of Katutura and Khomasdal as victims of (racial) discrimination, this was one of the few times that volunteers spoke in detail about personal experiences of discrimination.

Two volunteers working at KCR through The Rainbow Project said that their knowledge of the problems faced by gay people because of victimisation started with their own experience, but was intensified through their work with the NGO. One of these volunteers said that, through KCR, she had also become aware of the reasons some people became 'homophobic', and how such people too were capable of changing their minds. This, she said, was through dealing with callers on KCR radio programmes who rejected 'homosexuality' (Interview transcript 3: 12-13). Unlike most of the general volunteers, these interviewees expressed more awareness

of conflict within – and to an extent, with - the community. They not only described themselves as empathising with and feeling a sense of social responsibility for struggle and hardship because of their own backgrounds, but also as survivors of abuse that members of the community have inflicted upon them. There is, within herein, an acknowledgment of the power relationships that exist within a given community, and the way that they themselves are caught up within such relations.

In contrast to the general volunteers, the three NGO-based volunteers described a process of disciplined and formal choice in deciding whom to interview or have as guests on talk shows or magazine programmes. These volunteers often talked about a process of ‘brainstorming’ before drawing up a list of topics to be covered within the next month, week or year, as opposed to the general volunteers who more frequently said community members ‘came to them’ with information. Natasha described the process as follows:

...we brainstorm [topics] with the organisation’s staff and the director. But I have almost carte blanche to decide when it comes to the programme because I’m doing what’s supposed to be done, I guess, and I’m doing it with the mindset and the attitude that’s very much in line with the aims of the organisation. (Interview transcript 5: 5).

Most interviewees who talked about brainstorming said the process mainly happened within the NGOs. Other members of the KCR volunteer team did not seem to have much involvement in such processes.

We can see, then, that the NGO-based volunteers’ production and research strategies were more logical, disciplined and probably based on a more coherent agenda than that of the general volunteers. Thus we could classify it as intentional learning about the target community, rather than purely situated knowledge of it. One could argue that this approach allowed the NGO volunteers to develop more insight into the community’s living conditions, based on systematic research. They may also establish reference points that allow them to become more able than the general volunteers to interpret the information they gather in context of broader trends and patterns within the community and broad debates in society. It is possible, however, that the NGO volunteers would also miss certain sources of news and information if they were to exclude the more organic or situated networking process that the general volunteers engaged in. This may be through missing

insights from members of the community that don't fit into the frame of reference from which their organisation operates, or simply because the NGO-based volunteers are seen as less available to members of the target community than general volunteers, who are present at the station most of the time and not busy with other duties. Although they did sometimes allude to organic networking, my sense was that the NGO-based volunteers gave it far less importance than the general volunteers did.

I have argued earlier that the community knowledge of the NGO-based volunteers may represent a 'hybrid' type, based on (1) a degree of subjective identification and empathy and (2) disciplined structured research into the issues their programmes tackled. However, as I will argue in Section Two of this chapter, both the NGO-based and the general volunteers may have gaps in their knowledge because of their different approaches to knowledge about the target community and they would benefit from engaging in dialogue with each other on this issue.

## **4.2 Group Discussion**

In the previous chapter I explained that the second stage of my fieldwork consisted of a group discussion with those volunteers whom I had interviewed and who were still on the staff, as well as other volunteers who had expressed their interest in participating. The discussion was organised in sections: a clarification exercise, designed to get the volunteers to provide information on their self-definition; a set of questions on group identity; a set of questions on the vision and mission of the station; and finally a discussion around KCR's programming schedule. In general, conceptualisations of what it meant to be a member of the Katutura and Khomasdal community and of the KCR volunteer group were more nuanced than in the individual interviews. It seemed as though, through interaction with the group, participants became more conscious of their different subject positions within the community, and of the possibility of exchanging ideas and experiences. In interpreting the discussions around these questions, I have grouped responses that pointed to (a) more nuanced and complex approaches to the conceptions of volunteer identity and community than those that emerged during the individual interviews and (b) new themes, that were unique to the context of the group discussion

#### 4.2.1 Examples of Increased Nuance and Complexity

##### 4.2.1.1 Hardship as a Criterion for Describing ‘The Community’

In the group context, participants continued to talk about the Katutura and Khomasdal community in terms of the suffering its residents experienced (both presently and in the past). The discussion that resulted was, however, more nuanced than had been possible in the context of the individual interviews. Several participants now took issue with the idea that all residents of the township were ‘suffering’, ‘poor’ or ‘disadvantaged’. One instance of such discussion took place during the clarification exercise; some participants mentioned that for them, poverty, or at least being able to live without luxuries, defined the experience of a typical Katutura resident (Group discussion 2007: 5-6). I suggested that they talk about the different parts of Katutura they were from. One of them, Vicky, said she was from the informal settlement of Hakahana, on the edge of Katutura. One of the other participants seemed surprised and asked confirmation that she was really from there. I asked her if she thought living in the informal settlement had affected her outlook on reporting the community. She said:

Yeah. Because there, there’s a lot of suffering. There’s a lack of water, there’s a lack of electricity. Poverty is there, and it’s a bit tough to be there as a young person. But somebody who stays in Luxury Hill, even though it’s in Katutura, won’t really have those problems (Group Discussion 2007: 6-7).

In this way Vicky was able to introduce into the group discussion the argument that it was not simply the case that the whole of Katutura was suffering from poverty, crime and moral degradation, even though this idea had been mentioned throughout the narratives about Katutura that the group had employed up to that point. This confirmed the sense that I had formed that some people have a more nuanced understanding of different levels of (or even lack of) hardship within the Katutura community.

The issue of traditional African moral values being present or absent in the target community’s life also became visible within the group discussion, having barely been mentioned in the individual interviews. Some participants felt that the poverty and hardship in the township could be ascribed to a lack of these values.

One participant, who grew up in the small town of Okakarara in North-eastern Namibia, said:

Okakarara is a town where some of the things happening in Katutura lately – crime and increasing violence, rape and things like that – were very scarce kind of happenings. And the way we were raised up – how to treat each other and get along in the family, also created how I try to treat people today (Group Discussion 2007: 4).

Others contradicted this by saying that they had grown up in Katutura or Khomasdal, and had also been taught strict moral values. (Group discussion 2007: 4-5). Shortly after this discussion, one participant drew attention to Katutura's name, which means 'we have no place to stay' in the Otjiherero language, and said that it was coined after forced removals in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Group Discussion 2007: 4). One can infer, from the way these two ideas were juxtaposed, that perhaps Katutura's history was being constructed here as one in which the idea of traditional existence, based around a communal, almost village identity, was transformed into a poor and sometimes violent place through the actions of the apartheid government. Allied with this was, for a few participants, a feeling of pride in Katutura people having lived through the worst of the past. Bob said, "Even though our people are the victims of apartheid segregation, we are still proud to be from this place" (Group Discussion 2007: 5). It was as though overcoming obstacles put in people's way by the authorities was a source of community pride, and a way to identify oneself a 'member' of this 'community'. It would seem that, within the context of the group discussion, description of the community began to operate differently from the individual interviews. Here, people were offered different kinds of subject positions; some more passive – such as being 'victims' of external aggression, now or in the past – others more active and empowering – such as being able to overcome these obstacles and forge a new common identity based on this 'resistance'.

#### 4.2.1.2 Experience of Hardship as a Criterion for Representivity

Another concept that was dealt with in a more nuanced fashion, within the context of the group discussion, was that of being able to identify, as a volunteer with the 'issues' faced by people in one's target community. Participants explained, for

example, that one can relate to such issues because one is familiar with them from elsewhere. The experience of living in Katutura can be understood, in other words, by people who had lived in other 'locations' around the country (Group discussion 2007: 5). As one member of the group put it:

Wherever I should go... I never live in the fancy houses in town... I live in the location. The location is more just like Katutura with another name (Group Discussion 2007: 5).

For this participant, it seems as though the 'typical Katutura experience' relates to experiencing and surviving poverty and hardship, as opposed to the supposedly more prosperous life 'in town'. For him, then, the distinction between town and township, familiar from apartheid days, was still very much alive. One could say that, within group discussions of the Katutura community, a deeper discourse became visible, whereby a 'typical community' is seen as 'a place like Katutura' - that is, a 'place of hardship' and possibly a 'poor black community'.

We have already seen, in context of the individual interviews, that being representative of the station's target community was defined by 'coming from' that community; identifying with the suffering of people who lived there and in some cases belonging to an NGO working with a particular group of people within the community. Within the group discussion, the distinction between this last group and the status of non-NGO volunteers became an important point of focus. Some participants suggested that NGO volunteers were representatives in a different way, as they were closer to a specific section of the target community (Group Discussion 2007: 12-13, 18-19) and were likely to have more specific expert knowledge in certain areas. For example, one of the participants said that the volunteers from TRP would have a "better understanding of the problems and needs of gay people" (Group Discussion 2007: 28). The group argued that the two categories of volunteers tend to have different approaches with regards to the aims of the programmes that they produce (Group Discussion 2007: 11-12). In particular, the perception appeared to be that volunteers with NGO affiliations would represent 'very specific groups', whereas general volunteers felt compelled to be more generally representative of all interests within the Katutura and Khomasdal community. As Paul, one of the general volunteers put it:

If you're working for a specific NGO, for example TRP ... your main objective and aim is to advance the cause of that institution. Whereas, if you're on radio all the time, you have to touch on all topics and many causes. (Group Discussion 2007: 12, 19).

Alice, one of the NGO-based volunteers, also suggested that, through having more 'time on their hands', the 'full-time' volunteers were more 'dedicated' to the station because the NGO-based ones also had other duties at their organisations (Group discussion 2007:18). At the same time, it was suggested that the NGO-based volunteers brought expertise on specific issues into the station. The example of the TRP (on issues relating to sexual minorities) and the feminist organisation Sister Namibia (on women's rights) were cited. Bob, a general volunteer, suggested that the expertise to talk about these issues attracted listeners to the station, "even those who are not from Katutura or Khomasdal" (Group Discussion 2007: 17, 18). One can see, therefore, that in this part of the discussion, the volunteers seemed to become more conscious of (or expressed more clearly) the differences that existed between them – whether in their status at the station (as full time or NGO-based volunteers) or in their role in the broader community (for example as richer or poorer people) – and the implications of these differences for the diverse kinds of roles they played as volunteers.

#### 4.2.1.3 'Knowing About the Community' through Personal Experience

Participants said that the qualities of subjective identification and personal involvement were important to their relationship with members of the target community. This perhaps suggested, once again, that they thought situated everyday knowledge of the target community was more important than an intentional process of learning about that community. They argued that their own social categorisation allowed them to identify with the majority of people within the target community, because they themselves were all 'black', were mainly young, and were earning little money – "working for peanuts" as one of them put it (Group discussion 2007: 11). However, in context of the group discussion, the volunteers began to acknowledge some of the complexities of such personal identification. Some suggested, for example, that certain kinds of knowledge and ways of speaking

were required when addressing certain topics. There was also a feeling among some of them, especially and mainly the general volunteers, that they did not always have this knowledge and that this hampered their representation of some groups within the target community (Group Discussion 2007: 28). It was strongly felt that a person without specialist knowledge of a certain group's issues should not present a show about such a group, because such a person did not know the right terminology to use, the right questions to ask, or what to say on air. One participant pointed out that by using the wrong type of language, the presenter in question might unintentionally offend listeners. He gave this example:

There was one time when I was interviewing someone on AIDS and I said 'the killer disease', and the person was offended, and only later I got to understand why they are offended, because it does not necessarily kill, you are giving the wrong idea; it's not a killer disease, it's just like any other disease (Group Discussion 2007: 28).

This participant said he was now reluctant to 'touch' some of the specialist shows on such matters as women's empowerment and sexual minorities (Group Discussion 2007: 28). These discussions showed more subtlety than had been demonstrated in many of the individual interviews. In the interviews, most of the volunteers had simply said they represented the target community because they were 'from there'. In the group discussion, however, more of them acknowledged the practical problems of representing certain groups within their community and indicated that, despite their legitimate close identification with the target community, their representation of it was sometimes negatively affected by lack of specific kinds of knowledge. Some seemed to hint, as well, that their reporting might be improved by a systematic process of intentional learning and research as well as discussion amongst volunteers from different backgrounds.

#### 4.2.2 Themes that were Unique to the Group Discussion

##### 4.2.2.1 Representation and the Radio Station Hierarchy

Volunteers who were interviewed individually felt they did represent, to an extent, KCR's target community and generally gave a range of examples of their personal



involvement with that community, to support these claims. What emerged in the group discussion was that, despite this level of involvement, many volunteers felt the station management and board often did not take their concerns seriously.

It seems significant that, when asked about how they would define their shared identity as KCR volunteers, the group related the question mainly to the position of volunteers within the organisational structures of the station. At first, it seemed the group was satisfied with these structures. One participant said that there was a 'family' atmosphere amongst the KCR volunteers and added that there was a degree of harmony and a willingness to compromise and work together (Group Discussion 2007: 11). Although families may, of course, be as conflict-prone as any other human institution, for this participant, describing the volunteer team as a family implied harmony and consideration. Several participants also said that they all had a desire to learn from each other (Group Discussion 2007: 11). However, as the discussion progressed, the participants began to refer to ways in which some groups at the station acted towards others. Several participants referred to what they perceived as an unsatisfactory relationship between the volunteer group and the Board of Trustees. It was their impression, they said, that the board of KCR was unwilling to listen to the KCR volunteers. One participant noted that he barely knew any of the board members (Group Discussion 2007: 12-13). Issues relating to money were also identified as a cause of tensions between different groups at the station. It was felt that the station's management was less likely to listen to the volunteers if the issue that had been raised involved money (Group Discussion 2007: 10). For many of the participants, then, there was a tension between the perceived 'family' atmosphere of the volunteer team and the perceived unwillingness of broader structures within KCR, personified by the board, to listen to and interact with the volunteer group (Group Discussion 2007: 12-13). Thus, it can be said that, although the volunteers claimed in the individual interviews (and in some extent earlier in the group discussion) to represent the community, they felt that this representation was not acknowledged all the way through to the governing structures of KCR.

#### 4.2.2.2 Volunteerism and the Balance between Rights and Responsibility

Within the individual interviews, volunteerism had been framed primarily in terms 'service' – focusing on what volunteers 'give' to the community by 'representing' it.

In contrast, within the group discussion, the participants made a point of also drawing attention to the individual rights, needs and wants of the volunteers. What became acknowledged, within this discussion, is that a group of people ‘inside’ a radio station cannot effortlessly represent those ‘outside’ in the community, without their own personal considerations complicating the relationship between the two. Participants spoke of the need for volunteers to consider career paths outside community broadcasting. A number of the participants saw volunteerism as something one only does for a certain time – as a stepping stone to better-paid careers in the media (Group discussion 2007: 9). Lukas, who was a full-time general volunteer at KCR, explained that for him part of the ‘stepping stone’ function of volunteerism was that it provided him with skills and knowledge about broadcasting that he could later trade elsewhere (Group Discussion 2007: 9). Within this approach, volunteerism is not only defined by representation of and service to the community; it also serves as vehicle for providing people with the skills and experience that they need to pursue their own career paths.

Another way in which the personal needs of volunteers emerged, in this discussion, was through reference to the significance of payment (or the lack of it) to the definition of volunteerism. In general, the participants agreed that being a volunteer means not being paid the same salary as one would earn at a commercial enterprise. They felt strongly, however, that at least volunteers own costs should be covered and, if possible, they should be paid a small amount towards living expenses (Group Discussion 2007: 8-9). This position was often contrasted with that of NGO-based volunteers. One participant explained that individual ‘general’ volunteers were often struggling financially while those working for NGOs were “sometimes paid nice money” by the NGO (Group Discussion 2007: 18). As mentioned before, tensions between the volunteer group and the board had been expressed and some volunteers felt that they were not paid very much because the board made decisions about the station’s budget and, since they did not interact with the volunteer group much, were unaware of volunteers’ financial conditions (Group Discussion 2007: 8, 12). Some of the general volunteers said that they were not employed elsewhere, and that the small amount of money paid by KCR, intended as a transport allowance only, was allowing them to survive in hard times. However, they understood that they were not going to earn the full salary of a commercial radio station employee (Group Discussion 2007: 8-9). Sam, for example, said,

You receive something at the end of the month, but that's not a salary ... What I get here is peanuts compared to what I could get [at another radio station]. But I just like to come here, to give my free time, instead of just doing nothing. (Group Discussion 2007: 8).

What the group discussion around these topics seems to suggest is that participants recognised that the realisation of the idea of a team of volunteers representing the community out there is not a simple, direct process. It is significant that the volunteers recognised that the quality of their representative relationship with the community depended on issues such as their position in the radio station hierarchy and whether the different parts of the radio station 'listen to' each other.

## **Section Two: Implications of the Data for KCR's Representativeness**

In this section I will explore the implications of the themes I uncovered in Section One on the research problem. It will be remembered that the aim of this thesis is to explore to what extent members of a community radio station can incorporate the idea of different and complementary kinds of knowledge about the community into their vision for the station's activities. In order to consider the significance of my findings for this exploration, I will refer to the four criteria that, as I described in the theory chapter, are necessary for a communication medium to operate as a Habermasian 'critical public sphere'. Each of the subsections that follow will apply one of these criteria to an assessment of the volunteers' conceptualisation of their station's target community and of their own identity as volunteer representatives of that community and tease out the significance for the research question. The four criteria stated that (a) a media institution should recognise the existence of dissident discursive spaces; (b) a media institution must distinguish itself from the state and the market; (c) it is necessary to challenge some distinctions between public and private; and (d) listeners should be addressed as citizens, not consumers. My discussion of each criterion, in the light of the interviews and group discussion, will reveal the important role played by knowledge of the community - both the kind that one can develop through systematic research and the more subjective knowledge that many volunteers invoked.

### 4.3 Recognising the Existence of Dissident Discursive Spaces

The first criterion referred to in Chapter One states that the media cannot function as a ‘critical public sphere’ unless it acknowledges the existence of smaller spaces within a national ‘public sphere’ where marginalised, poor and generally non-influential people express their views. We saw that, within literature about community radio, it is often argued that this sector should provide a platform to these ‘dissident discursive spaces’ (Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998: 20-26; Van Vuuren 2006).

I have pointed out that, during the individual interviews, virtually all the volunteers described the ‘community’ in terms of the hardship that residents faced, and often contrasted it with the supposed ‘good life’ in ‘town’. Although this was modified in the group discussion, it was still a starting point for some of the participants’ contributions to that discussion. Such description seems to imply that Katutura and Khomasdal residents as a group are poor and marginalised and therefore any forum in which they express their views can be seen as a dissident discursive space. However, not all of them seemed to be as aware as they could be of dissident discursive spaces and marginalised groups within Katutura and Khomasdal, and this should be of concern. Clearly, Katutura and Khomasdal residents are generally ‘on the periphery’ of Windhoek’s social and economic life, but clearly, too, distinctions may have to be made. Reporting on a shack-dweller telling members of a street committee about her problems may show a commitment to covering dissident discursive spaces; reporting on a wealthy Katutura businessman expressing himself at a council meeting probably would not.

In the individual interviews, while most volunteers did recognise the existence of certain clear-cut minorities, such as gay people, fewer mentioned more subtle distinctions such as income levels across Katutura. Also, fewer volunteers mentioned men as a group which had relative privileges over women. In the group discussion, there was, however, more discussion around distinctions within the target community. It was, for example, pointed out that some members of this community, such as the residents of Luxury Hill, were perhaps not a marginalised group, at least not economically and that there may be exploitation of poorer residents of Katutura and Khomasdal by the richer ones, as well as those living ‘in

town'. This would suggest that volunteers are open to negotiating or re-negotiating concepts that they may have of the whole 'township' as a 'place of hardship'.

It is evident that some volunteers were less conscious of such nuances, and that awareness only emerged within the context of group interaction. This suggests that not all volunteers have had exposure to, or may be able to get access to, large numbers of dissident discursive spaces (such as perhaps, shack dwellers' committees and organisations, trade unions, grassroots women's groups). Were they able to, it is safe to assume that their awareness of the marginalisation of certain groups within Katutura and Khomasdal vis-à-vis others would increase. I would propose that for these volunteers awareness of, and access to, dissident discursive spaces would only come about through disciplined research into the target community. One of the goals of such research would be to identify discursive spaces and establish procedures through which they can be accessed.

It was, however, noticeable during my fieldwork that the volunteers from NGOs such as The Rainbow Project and Sister Namibia tended to be more aware of the complex network of sub-groups that made up the station's target community. One might suggest that this knowledge of dissident discursive spaces is in part due to the NGO volunteers having engaged in more systematic research and intentional learning than the general volunteers at KCR. In fact, some of the general volunteers seemed to assume that it was the exclusive task of the NGO volunteers to represent such subgroups, while their own role was to address the station's target community more generally, without drawing so much importance to differences within it. One could argue that such an approach can lead to the formation of 'ghettos' within the programme schedule, where, for example, gay people only feel addressed by KCR when the Talking Pink show is broadcast. It also may lead to general volunteers unintentionally excluding members of such groups from their definitions of 'normal' community members, whom they are responsible for addressing during the rest of the schedule. However, while NGO members might be receptive to some dissident discursive spaces, especially within their field of work, it may be that they are relatively unaware of others.

Therefore, discussion and sharing of community knowledge between the general and NGO-based volunteers would be a productive starting point for a process of increasing specific and detailed knowledge of the target community. This sharing of knowledge would have to be supplemented by further research aimed at

discovering dissident discursive spaces that fall outside the NGO-based volunteers' areas of expertise.

#### **4.4 Distinguishing KCR from the State and the Market**

The discussion on the possibilities of 'going national' and on KCR dealing with issues that other radio stations 'feared to touch' showed that volunteers saw a critical role for KCR and distinguished themselves clearly from commercial broadcasters. In the individual interviews, a number of volunteers also contrasted their work with that of the public broadcaster, the NBC (which is still largely controlled by the Namibian state). Especially in the individual interviews, KCR volunteers were often sharply critical of the state authorities' poor performance with regard to such areas as job creation, health care provision and education. This shows, to an extent, that they did understand the relationship between the station and the state as one of independence and that they were therefore able to comment critically on the state. However, as mentioned elsewhere, the volunteers often offered less critical commentary on the market and the abuses committed by private business (although this was not entirely absent). This may suggest that some volunteers do not see the station as positioned critically in relation to the market. It is, however, quite possible that they are simply not so aware (having not done detailed research into the matter) of the impact of exploitation within the market.

With regard to the critical public sphere criteria, these findings suggest that the volunteer group at KCR may be somewhat limited in terms of its representation of groups that are vulnerable to economic exploitation, but less limited when it comes to representing those marginalised by the state authorities. There is no evidence to suggest that there was reluctance to investigate economic issues because of fears of harassment or a stated belief that private businesses were doing nothing wrong. Here, again, we see the important role played by knowledge of the community and its social experiences, in the station's ability to meet the criteria of a critical public sphere.

Volunteers need to be well informed in order to identify and report on issues like exploitation and corruption in the private sector. This may indicate that the role of a critical check on the power of the state and the market, although it is one that the volunteers aspire to, is not yet one that all volunteers are able to meet in practice. The findings seem to indicate that while KCR does have a shared vision to be 'a

voice apart' from the rest of society and offering critical commentary on it, the lack of shared and systematic knowledge makes this difficult to achieve, particularly where economic matters concerning private business are concerned.

#### **4.5 Questioning Distinctions between Public and Private**

In Chapter Two we saw that, for community radio to operate as a critical public sphere, it needs to challenge certain definitions of what is private. Only by doing this it will be able to serve those who are disadvantaged by power relations in such 'private' spaces. During the individual interviews at KCR, volunteers raised issues like domestic violence and sexual abuse of women as 'problems' which needed to be resolved by the community and by state authorities. This seems to indicate that they did not see these topics as 'private' and thus unavailable for public discussion on radio, even though some sections of society have traditionally seen them in this way. However, while volunteers saw power relations within the home as requiring public attention, many did not view power relations within the private sector in the same light. If economic problems were raised, they were almost entirely expressed in terms dealing with economic aggregates, terms that might be used in a national budget, like 'poverty' and 'unemployment'. It seemed that some volunteers had not thought of, or did not see as an issue, the exploitation that often takes place in 'private' economic spaces, such as privately owned businesses, or on farms near Windhoek, which draw casual workers from Katutura. Once again, one can say that detailed, systematic knowledge of the target community would enable many volunteers to challenge these conventions, as they get to know more people who possibly suffer because of the lack of public intervention in these areas. One way of bringing such systematic knowledge into the station is clearly through the involvement of NGOs. It is possible that the involvement of NGOs such as Sister Namibia has already heightened volunteers' awareness of the need to question public-private boundaries in the home/family environment, for example to combat domestic violence and to ensure that children are brought up to challenge gender stereotypes. It may also be that low presence of trade unions and other workers' advocacy organisations amongst KCR's partner organisations has contributed to the volunteers being less aware of the challenges to the public-private divide in the 'business world'. If the volunteers internalised the understandings of these

organisations they might be able to challenge the distinctions between publicly and privately owned firms in order to question exploitation wherever it occurs.

#### **4.6 Addressing Listeners as Citizens, not Consumers**

There are, in my opinion, three ways in which members of a community radio station can, and should, interact with their audience as citizens. Firstly, in a general sense, all journalists should engage their audience as citizens, that is, as people who have an interest in contributing to the social processes described in a journalist's work (Harwood & McCrehan 1996; Van Vuuren 2006). Secondly, citizenship should define the way volunteers see their own relationship to their target community. That is, they should see themselves as 'citizens who represent other citizens' (Harwood & McCrehan 1996). Thirdly, and more unique to community radio, citizens have certain rights to 'ownership and control' of a radio station (Bonin & Opoku-Mensah 1998: 20-26).

The data collected at KCR confirms that volunteers see their audience as citizens and their own role as helping these citizens take control of the life of their local community. This was evident from their raising many social issues that define the 'community' as a 'place of hardship'. Frequently this was accompanied by suggested ways in which community members could alleviate this hardship through collective action.

We saw in Section One of this chapter that the research participants saw their relationship with their target community as one based on subjective identification and personal involvement. One could argue that such an approach is based on a notion of citizenship at the local level. Furthermore, in this notion of citizenship, the community radio volunteer is also a citizen, who, through advocacy work, is involved in the government of the target community. Thus, it could be argued that volunteers see their role as 'citizens who represent other citizens'. That is, they do not only facilitate people getting involved in changing their target community, they ARE such involved people and want to enable others to become involved in citizenship activities in a similar way.

At the same time, some volunteers seemed to lack knowledge relating to certain social structures and problems which may exist within the target community. In the group discussion, at least one participant, to the agreement of several others, said he felt unable to do certain types of reporting, such as on HIV/AIDS related



issues, because he did not know the right kind of language to use, as a result of not having in-depth awareness about the subject. This suggests that some volunteers only act as citizens within certain areas of community life and thus only feel comfortable bringing their activism into the station when it come to issues with which they are familiar.

In the volunteers' discourse, the dimension of giving community members 'ownership and control' rights over the station seemed to be much less prominent than the other two dimensions of 'citizenship'. It was not frequently mentioned, for example, that the community members might have the right to control how the volunteers produce content, or hire and fire members of the management team through an AGM. Another serious issue that was raised with regard to giving listeners 'ownership and control' was the perception that the volunteers' representivity is not carried through into the station's management structures. The volunteers felt that at times they, as 'representatives' of the target community's wishes for the station, were not 'listened to' as much as they should be. It would be difficult, within the limits of this thesis, to investigate how far these perceptions are accurate. However, the mere fact that there is a perception that the board and management are not talking to the volunteers is worrying, since it suggests that there is some animosity between the two groups, both of which are designed to give listeners 'citizenship rights' over the station.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have looked at the way in which the KCR volunteers perceive their own role, as a group within the radio station, in engaging with the station's target community. We saw that the volunteers have the potential to contribute, in their work, to the realisation of the four criteria which I have argued are crucial for the establishment and maintenance of a Habermasian 'critical public sphere'. To summarise: volunteers do have the ability to recognise subaltern counter-publics, although this is less so when it comes to subaltern spaces within Katutura and Khomasdal, especially for the general volunteers. Most volunteers also distinguish between KCR, the state and the market, although they may not have sufficient knowledge to act as a critical check on these institutions, especially on the market. Volunteers are also open to challenging traditional public-private distinctions, but

this seems to be truer in relation to the home than the privately owned workplace. Finally, the volunteers seem to think of their target community as citizens and themselves as 'citizens who represent citizens'. However, it is less clear whether some volunteers see the community members as owners and controllers of the station, as some doubts were expressed over the ability of the station structures to allow the community, through the volunteers, to 'own and control' the station.

One can see, therefore, that, based on the data, it appears that KCR is not entirely ready to fulfil the criteria for being a critical public sphere. For this to process to be carried forward, in my view, a number of principles have to be understood. First is the need to recognise the importance of systematic knowledge and intentional learning on the part of the volunteers. In the context of KCR, the research I have done suggests that many volunteers perceive that they lack detailed, systematic knowledge of the target community. This would suggest a need for those members of the volunteer group who have gained systematic knowledge into the community to share it more widely, and for the volunteer group as a whole to undertake further systematic research into, and intentionally learn about, the target community. The second principle that needs to be acknowledged is the importance of a systematic acknowledgement of the volunteer group's knowledge (both from the situated experience of having lived in the community and having been a community activist and from systematic research they may have conducted) and authority within the structures of the station. Some volunteers seemed to say this does not exist at present. Creating such a process would allow volunteers both to share the knowledge they have gained and to feel that their work in acquiring this knowledge about the community was not in vain, but that it has contributed to the overall knowledge of the radio station. This brings me to the third and final necessary principle: the importance of an editorial space within the station in which volunteers can confront the different interests they represent and struggle through to shared visions about what they do in programming. In this editorial space a shared body of knowledge about the target community could be developed. It could be developed from multiple sources, including systematic research into the target community, insights gained from volunteers' everyday lives in different neighbourhoods and informal learning about the target community through volunteers' journalistic and activist work. Ideally, then, such a body of knowledge

would be one that acknowledges and accepts the reality of differences in, for example, attitudes concerning social issues and priority areas for social action.

Such shared knowledge would, indeed, be necessary for the goal of volunteers having a shared vision of their relationship to the target community. A body of knowledge that recognises difference would also be necessary for having a vision that acknowledges different ‘publics’ within the community. I would argue that, while KCR’s volunteers may be ready to create such a shared body of knowledge, it does not exist as yet. Bringing it into existence would require the recognition of the three principles listed above: the need for systematic knowledge and intentional learning, the need for acknowledgement of the volunteer group’s knowledge and the need for an editorial space within the station in which volunteers can confront the different interests that they represent. If these principles were acknowledged and put into practice – a long-term process in itself – they would doubtless be a powerful force in enhancing KCR’s relationship with its target community.

1. Pseudonyms have been used in a number of places to protect the identity of volunteers.

## **Conclusion**

In drawing together the arguments presented in this thesis, this conclusion begins by restating the research question and outlining the theoretical framework I drew upon to address it. Secondly, it explains what the key conclusions of my research were, based on the data from the fieldwork. Thirdly, it discusses what their relevance might be for the operation of KCR as a radio station, and finally, it outlines areas where there might be need for further research.

The research question in this thesis asks “what are the central concepts that typically inform volunteers’ knowledge of their target community, and how do these concepts impact on their perception of how they have gained this knowledge, and how they justify their role as representatives of this community?”. It also seeks to tease out the implications of these conceptualisations for the volunteer group’s ability, within the radio station, to function as a critical public sphere at a local level.

In addressing this question I needed to sketch a theoretical background explaining both why the mission of community radio is critical to the media functioning as an institutional space for public discussion and decision-making, and why actually-existing community radio movements often fail to live up to the objective of truly being such institutional spaces at a local level. I found that key elements of the vision of most community radio stations were present in critical discussions of Habermas’s theorisation of the public sphere. From the available literature, I identified four criteria that a media institution should meet in order to function as a ‘critical’ version of such a sphere. I proposed, firstly, that media practitioners would only succeed in contributing to the establishment of a critical public sphere if they acknowledge the existence of subaltern counter-publics within their daily practice. Secondly, their production of such media should operate independently from the interests of state and the market. Thirdly, they should be prepared to question traditional public-private distinctions and finally, they should address their listeners as citizens, not consumers. I argued that, in order to fulfil each of these requirements, media practitioners need to have sophisticated knowledge of the communities they represent. I then illustrated that these criteria in fact inform the classic model of community radio. However, I argued that the practice of implementing this model falls short because of certain problems in the way that the concepts of community and knowledge are defined and provided a way

of distinguishing between approaches to knowledge, separating those based on systematic investigation and documentation from those based more on direct, everyday experience. I argued that part of the problem is that the concept of volunteerism is often only understood in terms of the first kind of knowledge: it is assumed volunteers know the community merely because they are 'from there'.

The context chapter provides a necessary practical background against which one can answer that question about KCR. In particular, I showed that KCR's mission statement is along the lines, more or less, of both the classical model of community radio and the critical public sphere. I also posed that question of how, in practice, KCR does implement these ideals, and noted that there have been problems, which were often related to how volunteers' role at the station was conceptualised. It can also be argued that, at times, limited conceptualisations of community knowledge may have limited KCR's ability to implement its ideals.

The data from KCR suggests that the volunteer team was capable of meeting all four 'critical public sphere' criteria. However, in each case, this potential was not fully realised; often because issues relating to the conception of the volunteers' knowledge of the community had not been addressed. Almost all the volunteers recognised, for example, that Katutura and Khomasdal constituted a subaltern counter-public within the context of the broader Namibian political and economic landscape. Not all of them were, however, able to acknowledge the various marginalised and excluded groups of people within the two townships, or the 'dissident discursive spaces' through which people belonging to these groups may make their opinions known. Likewise, many of the volunteers agreed that KCR should, in its programming, be positioned critically in relation to both state and market. However, they didn't always acknowledge the kinds of issues that need to be addressed in order to fulfil such a critical role. Many volunteers also acknowledged the importance within KCR's programming of issues such as domestic violence that are situated within the traditionally 'private' space of the home, and suggested that they, as public representatives, had a right to address these issues. This suggests that they were aware of the need to question traditional public-private barriers, but this questioning was far less vigorous when it came to other 'private spaces', such as privately owned business institutions. Finally, volunteers' personal involvement in and subjective identification with the target community suggests an understanding of the listeners as citizens, not consumers. However,

volunteers did not acknowledge all the issues that would need to be addressed to achieve such citizenship in reality. This was true to some extent when it comes to seeing citizens as democratic controllers of local social and political institutions, but more so when it came to providing mechanisms for citizens' participation in the control of the radio station itself.

It is my conclusion that much of this failure to fully achieve the criteria for a critical public sphere can be put down to a lack of detailed, systematic knowledge of the community. Many of the volunteers instead seemed to be relying on practical, situated knowledge as their only or main frame of reference. This was particularly true of the 'general' volunteers, who worked for KCR on an individual basis; the NGO-based volunteers did seem to have some intentional knowledge of the target community, at least where their NGO's field of operation was concerned, as well as the situated knowledge of being community activists that the general volunteers tended to stress.

However, the views of the volunteers should not be seen as 'cast in stone'. The group discussion, in particular, seemed to allow some volunteers to begin to re-think their understanding of issues within the community. There seemed to be evidence that volunteers did not have enough discussions on sharing their knowledge of the target community with each other. Volunteers were open to new ways of conceptualising their relationship with their target community, including representing previously neglected groups where rival discourses about the community might be formed. It emerged in the group discussion that the role of the volunteers might not be fully acknowledged within the station as a whole. These last two points seem to suggest that KCR volunteers recognise the need to develop and expand their shared vision for their relationship with the community.

Taken together, the findings of this thesis seem to suggest a need, firstly, for sharing of knowledge across the different sections of KCR, and secondly, for the volunteer group as a whole to undertake further systematic research into the Katutura and Khomasdal community. The NGO-based volunteers may have gained a kind of knowledge that the general volunteers do not necessarily have. Through working as professional activists, they seem that have considerable knowledge of specific social issues. Some NGO-volunteers live in Katutura and Khomasdal and see themselves as having the same kind of 'experiential' knowledge as the general volunteers. On the other hand, others have, through their NGO work, been able to

move out of the poorest areas of Katutura and Khomasdal. Therefore they may not have the same kind of 'experiential' knowledge of hardships in Katutura and Khomasdal as some general volunteers do, who still live in the poorest areas.

One can also say, however, that the general volunteers' situated, everyday knowledge is not sufficient. Some volunteers said in the group discussion that their lack of specific knowledge on certain social issues limits what they feel able to address on the air. As will be discussed below, the exact process through which this might take place would depend on KCR volunteers and management, but some suggestions can be offered.

Recommendations that could flow from this research include that an organised process of building shared knowledge about the target community would be vital to filling 'gaps' in volunteers' knowledge. One proposal for beginning such knowledge-sharing would be regular editorial meetings in which all volunteers could talk strategically about their vision for the station and share their understandings of the target community (or the publics within the target community they represent). Currently, from what could be established, such discussion at KCR does not go far beyond straightforward matters of programming choices. The KCR board, which is composed of seasoned journalists and community activists, should also be involved in this process, or at least, acknowledge its relevance for the station.

It may be that sharing the knowledge that the volunteers already have of the community, although an essential first step, may not be enough for KCR to operate as a fully critical public sphere. During the process of capturing how volunteers describe the community, it became clear that most volunteers lacked knowledge about the community in certain areas. Thus, it may be necessary to embark on a process of generating more detailed shared knowledge about certain areas of the target community. One example of such an exercise is the community-mapping project described in Harwood & McCrehan (1996). This would involve the volunteers drawing maps of areas in their community, then analysing these maps in terms of what was included and what was left out. The process would entail a process of visiting areas of the community, gathering data, redrawing the maps, and adding such information as gathering places and contacts for possible stories. These maps would then form a resource that all members of the media organisation can consult (Harwood & McCrehan 1996).

It became clear during my research into KCR that the NGO volunteers made an impressive difference to the station's knowledge base and that the station should expand on this strength – through deliberately bringing in more of these kinds of volunteers and encouraging them to draw on their professional knowledge. It may also be able to draw on the knowledge contained in surveys and similar documents drawn up by the NGO community. For example, during 2007, the Shackdwellers Federation of Namibia (SDFN) was compiling a detailed survey of people living in informal housing, their conditions of living and their rights (or lack of them) to the land on which they lived (Muller 2007). This survey, and even preliminary results from it, would be a very valuable resource for a community radio station like KCR. If KCR had a shared vision for the station that valued difference, these and other NGOs might add valuable information on additional counter-publics within the target community. This would allow KCR to use their unique discourse to add to the richness and diversity of its broadcast content. However, it is obvious that this strength could only be realised if it operated in context of a process of building shared knowledge within the station, based on the foundations suggested in this section.

The research presented in this thesis is only a preliminary investigation of community perceptions among volunteers at KCR. It also analyses in straightforward terms what these perceptions imply for the station's ability to have a vision of the community that includes the representation of divergent groups within it. Further research may be able confirm or adjust its findings as well as add to our understanding in a number of related areas.

The most obvious of these areas would be to assess the impact that a more structured process of information sharing and, possibly, structured research into the target community, would have on KCR's content and its function as a 'local public sphere'. Because of the necessity of getting buy-in from all stakeholders for such a complex project, researchers conducting such a project may want to situate it in the genre of participatory action research (PAR). PAR is a genre of research where the research subjects play a significant role in the research design and are considered the main beneficiaries (Servaes 1996: 19-20). Such a project may wish to take cues (as this one did, to some extent) from the approach taken by Davidson (2004) in his study of Radio KC in Paarl, Western Cape, South Africa. That study identified a number of strategies for 'mapping' the perceptions of community among members



of a community radio station and involved station members visiting communities to find out more about these neighbourhoods and observed the effect of the study on the station's output. It may also take from the approach of Harwood & McCrehan (1996) who developed community-mapping strategies chiefly within the 'public journalism' movement in the United States.

Another interesting area of research would be to conduct a similar study to mine some years later. Like many community radio stations, KCR has a relatively high turnover of staff. Volunteers tend to leave the radio station to seek paid employment after a few years, often in the mainstream media (Thibinyane 2005). Thus, it would be interesting to see whether or not the same patterns were repeated with another group of volunteers. If they were, it might indicate that the responses were indicative, not only of the understandings of a distinct group of volunteers, but also perhaps, of broader trends and discourses within the Namibian, or at least 'Katuturan', society.

It should be remembered that the community radio movement in Namibia, of which KCR is a part, continues to develop. One particular area of interest may be the KCR news team. This team, producing ten-minute bulletins three times a day, was only a fledgling part of the station when my study (which does include some news team members) began, but continues to expand its coverage. It has even broken a few stories ahead of the mainstream media. It may be interesting, thus, for a future study to focus solely on community knowledge within this important part of the station's volunteer group.

A further possible area of research might relate to interviewing a different group within community radio stations about the same kind of topic addressed by this thesis. I spoke chiefly to volunteer producers, but other studies could focus on other critical groups of decision-makers, such as the board and the management team. Such a study could once again ask respondents how they would describe the station's target community, and how they understand the relationship between the volunteer producers (or themselves) and the community. Not only would this give context to a study like the one presented in this thesis, but, if conducted at KCR, it may allow one to put some of the allegations made by some volunteers about not knowing the broad members into a clearer perspective.

Finally, a number of other community radio stations exist in Namibia. These include campus stations like University of Namibia Radio, as well as community of

interest stations like the Christian station Radio Ecclesia, and a few other geographical community stations (Kruger 2005). Similar case studies could be conducted at these stations. Such studies would be useful for comparison purposes so that one can judge how far the characteristics of KCR are 'typical' of Namibian community radio.

Community radio remains a valuable addition to the media landscape of a developing democracy such as Namibia. At the same time, it has proved difficult for community radio practitioners in many parts of the world to translate the vision of community radio into practical action. One of the reasons for this has been the lack of a shared body of knowledge about the target community at station level. I argued that three needs should be recognised before this can happen at KCR. These are the need for systematic knowledge and intentional learning, the need for recognition of the volunteer group's knowledge and the need for an editorial space in which volunteers can confront the different interests that they represent. My research appears to show that awareness of these needs, although not entirely present at the moment, could be created. However, the development of a shared body of community knowledge at KCR will require an organised process with the input and hard work of the volunteer group, the station management and, perhaps most importantly, the target community.

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**Appendix 1: Individual Interview Guide**

Individual Interview Guide (Suggested questions for interviewer)

Estimated time per interview: 30-45 minutes

- Tell me a bit about yourself and where you're from.
- How did you come to join KCR?
- Please give a brief description of the Katutura & Khomasdal community.
- What do most people in Katutura & Khomasdal have in common?
- What are the most serious problems people in Katutura & Khomasdal face?
- How do you know that these problems are serious/ important?
- What sort of things should be done to make Katutura & Khomasdal better places?
- What do you think KCR's role as a broadcaster should be?
- What are you, personally, doing to bring this about?
- How does your background make you especially able to do this?

## Appendix 2: Focus Group Discussion Guide

### Group Discussion Guide (one hour and 30 minutes)

- Beginning (five minutes). Explain that this is an interactive discussion. ‘All should participate. There are no right or wrong answers.’
- How do we define ourselves? (20 minutes).
  - \* Put up the following signs in corners of the room: Agree, Disagree, Strongly Agree, Strongly Disagree.
  - \* Ask people to walk to different corners based on their responses to the following statements: ‘I am a typical member of the Katutura and Khomasdal community’, ‘I am a typical volunteer at this radio station’, ‘I am happy with all aspects of this radio station’s work’, ‘The programmes on KCR mirror my life experience’, ‘I fit in as long as I keep quiet’
  - \* Ask people why they agree/ disagree with the statements.
  - \* Have an assistant take a picture or indicate numerically how many people are in each group.
- ‘What does this imply?’ (20 minutes). ‘What impacts are our different ages, genders, etc, going to have on our reporting?’ ‘Which parts of the community are the people in this room from?’
- How can we have a shared vision? (20 minutes). ‘Can we represent everyone here despite our differences? Can we claim to represent even those not represented amongst us, and, if so, how?’
- Practical issues (20 minutes). Examine the programme schedule. ‘How does it cater for us including our differences? How might it cater for these differences? Who does it leave out, and does that matter?’
- Ending (five minutes). Thank everyone for participating, etc.

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