

Inside SBS – A picture of the Outside

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An analysis of ethnic media would not be complete without looking, or listening to the ethnic airwaves.

Guy Spigelman spent a day inside SBS radio studios.

SBS radio provides a vital service to the ethnic communities. In over 66 languages, SBS broadcasters are unique agencies of information. They address issues of concern to all Australians and of specific concern to their communities. In a typical one hour slot, you will find a summary of the day’s news; a report on a communal festival; a studio guest giving insight on a current national debate and a talk back segment to sum it all up.

If you ever meet an SBS radio broadcaster you will find a person who simultaneously is an important part of their community and a reflection of it. As Sydney station manager, Raymond Motti says, “the broadcaster is in tune with sensitivities and information needs of the community.”

Multilingual confusion

The reporting of the race issue has varied over the last two months greatly between the different programs on SBS. There is a marked split between the shows broadcasting to older, more established communities and the shows broadcasting to newer communities.

Broadcasters from the older community groups stressed the importance of having ‘no editorial opinion’ in relation to the race debate. Instead a measured, more distanced approach has been adopted. For newer arrivals and those directly

affected by the debate, countering racism is not an issue of editorial opinion - the race issue is tackled head on. According to Raymond Motti, one of the roles of SBS, implied in the charter is “to combat racism and at the same time bring a cross section of views from the whole community.”

Philippe Tanguy, from the French language program makes the point that “later migrants have come to a multicultural society.” There is almost a fascination with the outburst of intolerance as many of his listeners, who come from France, the South Pacific and Vietnam, have not witnessed nor experienced such prejudice since their arrival to Australia.

Some broadcasters from established communities present the perspective of the migrant who has adjusted to mono-cultural Australia and feels part of it in an awkward sort of way.

Head of the Serbian language service, Ken Gavrilovic, told INFOCUS that his community is not subject to racist abuse currently, and reports the issue “very objectively”. He also points out the right of Hanson to be heard and supports the Prime Minister’s re-dawn of freedom of speech contention.

A gap between older and younger elements of the community exists, according to Alex Catharios from the Greek program. Young people are more passionate, with one studio guest calling on “leaders to shut her (Hanson’s) mouth.” Older members of the community are more restrained as they remind listeners of their own experiences upon arrival. Catharios disagrees with his Serbian counterpart and believes that there should be some controls on comments which vilify.

The Dutch program put to air a series of

discussions on the race issue with an expert in cross-cultural relations from Holland. The expert said that Australia was healthier for having this debate and gave a measured warning of potential problems if the debate got out of hand. His prediction was that the whole race issue would die pretty quickly.

When pressed on the point, Matilda Swift from the Dutch program conceded that older migrants tended to lean to the right, responding favourably to populist views.

I put this contention to Tony Palumbo, head of the Italian language service, his response: "In Italy we have our own Pauline Hansons."

The Pasquarelli factor seems to have affected the Italian community (John Pasquarelli is Pauline Hanson's adviser). Apparently Hanson has turned up at Italian community events and has given a talk at an Italian club in Melbourne, which sparked controversy within the community and between different Italian language media agencies. This has formed part of the focus for SBS Italian radio coverage.

Majida Saab from the Arabic service was surprised to find that one or two of her talkback callers were so racist "to the point of vilification." The majority of the callers have strongly condemned the views of Hanson and are disappointed with the way that Howard has dealt with the issue. "Listeners feel that they are being attacked, that all migrants are under attack," Saab said.

Local Korean newspapers have seen their sales jump as the front pages headline Hanson and racism. Yung J Joo from the Korean program has tried to calm down some of the strong community feeling in his broadcasts. Joo says that the blue collar workers have been feeling racism and are particularly vocal in their anger toward Hanson and the government. Joo has tried to give the debate historical perspective and said "the media has given too much space for Hanson's comments."

"I'm all for freedom of speech, it just seems that

Pauline Hanson has it all," said Francis Lee of the Cantonese program. Lee has covered the debate through news items, community leaders responses and academic appraisal. While primarily focussing on effects to the Chinese community, ample time has been given to discussions concerning the wider implications for Australia.

There is bewilderment and anger in the Chinese community and according to Lee, much of it is directed at John Howard. "The Asian community wanted to forgive Howard after his 1988 comments but his period of grace has finished. We see the Prime Minister strongly criticising the Asian newspapers, rather than criticising Hanson's comments."

Guy Spigelman compiles Infocus.