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**Giving A Voice For The Voiceless :
Community Radio In Australia**

by

Kalinga Seneviratne

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Community Radio is the third sector of the Australian broadcasting industry. From a small beginning in 1972, today there are over 100 community or public radio stations around the country and it is the fastest growing free-to-air broadcasting sector in Australia. Community radio stations have been growing at the rate of 10 to 15 a year during the last 5 years and there are around 60 aspirant groups waiting for licenses at present.

Australia's three-tier broadcasting sector include the commercial sector, the government funded Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) and the community broadcasting sector which comes under the umbrella of the Public Broadcasting Association of Australia (PBAA).

While community radio has been operating under the PBAA banner for almost two decades, community television is yet to be introduced in Australia. Last month (February 1993) the government gave the go ahead for community television on a trial basis for at least one year and a permanent service is due to begin in Sydney and Melbourne around July 1993.

While community television groups have had to fight long and hard for almost a decade to get the go ahead from the government, the community radio experience in Australia has been a great success story which is been grudgingly admitted by the rest of the broadcasting industry only now. The very success of community radio has triggered a campaign in the last couple of years by the commercial radio sector to get the community stations out of the FM band.

Community radio operates without the restrictions or the restraints often applied to radio stations whose business is to either make profit for its owners by presenting advertising as a major component of their programming format or to satisfy a more national agenda within a clearly defined "professional style and standard" and government budgetary restrictions.

This paper will focus on why the commercial and the government radio sectors have been unable to provide access to the airways for independent voices especially from indigenous and ethnic migrant groups, and how the community radio sector has been able to provide exactly that.

Media Ownership in Australia

It is not an exaggeration to say that Australia has one of the most concentrated media ownership structures in the world. It is most accute in the newspaper industry where just two organizations control almost the entire metropolitan dailies and suburban newspapers. Rupert Murdoch's News Ltd owns about 70 percent of these and the Fairfax group (recently taken over by the Canadian Conrad Black) most of the rest.

In television just three companies among them control almost the entire metropolitan commercial market with the government-funded ABC and SBS providing two other national channels. The smaller regional commercial TV stations are either owned by subsidiaries of the large metropolitan companies or are dependent on them for the supply of programs.

In radio, again four companies control a large chunk of the commercial radio market especially the highest rating metropolitan stations. The commercial radio industry has however been in a state of flux in the last couple of years and many major radio stations have changed hands recently or in the process of being sold off.

In the magazine publishing business the concentration of ownership among the top circulation magazines are not any different to the newspapers. Kerry Packer's Australian Consolidated Press controls 47 percent of the market while News Ltd has 26 percent of the market.

Packer owns Australia's biggest commercial TV network, the Channel Nine, which has an audience reach of over half the market. He also owns a string of radio stations and an attempt to buy into the Fairfax group in 1991 was thwarted by complications in the cross-media ownership laws.

The domination of Packer and Murdoch in the Australian media and the way they have been able to extract concessions from the Bob Hawke Labour government in the 1980s prompted media analysts to dub the Minister for Communications as the "Minister for the Mates".

Referring to how the Labour government has bent rules to accommodate these two men, leading Economic writer Max Walsh wrote in the Fairfax press in June 1991:

"A national media dominated by two men would be the antithesis of what any fully-functioning democracy should accept. It is no exaggeration to say a media duopoly would simply be a temptation to institutionalised corruption and the undermining of our political system".

Referring to News Ltd's domination of the Australian newspaper industry, leading media analysts Paul Chadwick says: "It has gone from being one of three roughly equal competitors in the Australian press to being the dominant player, with only an enfeebled Fairfax for competition. As a result, News may become more arrogant, more overbearing in the exercise of its political influence".

Former commercial and ABC radio journalist Stafford Sanders, now the Operations Manager of PBAA's national satellite program distribution service COMRADSAT says: "In the general climate of increasing concentration of ownership in TV, radio and the press, particularly in the commercial sector, the only shining light in those three areas is the proliferation of community radio. In community radio the trend is going the other way. It's the only area in the mass media where you can see a very tangible development towards diversification of involvement and access to media".

The Structure of the Australian Radio Industry

Commercial Radio

Following a period of unsustainable hyperactivity in the late 1980s, the ownership of the Australian commercial radio sector has been going through a phase of much needed rationalisation and recovery in the 1990s.

In 1992, there were 38 metropolitan and 107 regional commercial radio stations in Australia. The ownership of these were shared by 28 different companies, but four of these - Hoyts Media, Austereo, Australian Radio Network and Wesgo - owned a network of metropolitan and regional stations from which they could reach around half the national radio audiences.

In the mid-1980s the Labour government's deregulation of the financial sector and the liberalisation of media ownership limits contributed greatly to the escalation of prices of major metropolitan stations, where Sydney's 2GB and 2DAY-FM stations were sold in 1989 for a reported price of A\$ 28 million and A\$ 82 million respectively. But, last year stations of a similar stature could command prices in the range of A\$ 2 million to A\$ 8 million.

Thus gone are the days of highly-leveraged, multi-station acquisitions involving tens of millions of dollars. In return, we have the picture of a single station being sold to local interests at a relatively modest price. In many cases these radio stations have been bought by former radio operators who took advantage of the inflated prices of the late 1980s to make substantial profits.

Lois Randall, a Researcher at the Communications Law Centre in Sydney has recently completed a study of localism and networking in commercial radio, and found that the trend in the 1990s is towards syndicated programs.

Randal found that music programs, talk shows, sports and even live talk-back programs are widely syndicated and these are slowly creeping in from the mid-night to dawn time-slots into evening and weekend programming. To fill up a night shift with a live DJ, it will cost a country station about A\$ 25,000 a year, instead they can run a syndicated satellite service to fill up the same time slot for as little as

A\$ 5,000 a year. This low cost of syndicated programs are becoming a real threat to localism in commercial radio, especially in country areas.

Government Funded Public Radio

The government funds in full two networks - the ABC network and the SBS's EA stations. Both the networks are managed by independent government appointed Boards.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC): The ABC receives about A\$ 525 million a year from the government to run both its national radio and television services, plus its international broadcasts through Radio Australia and the recently launched international television service to Asia ATVI.

The ABC provides five main radio services across Australia on 403 transmitters. They have a metropolitan radio station on the AM band in each of the six state capital cities plus Canberra, Darwin and Newcastle. There are regional radio studios and outposts in some 40 regional centres around Australia, but these are not independent regional stations, but mainly relay stations for nationally networked programs with some local contents (programs) added depending on available resources. Regional outposts also act as news bureaus for the national networks.

Radio National, is a nationally networked service which mainly comes out of the ABC headquarters in Sydney. There is also a national network devoted to music (mainly classical) and performances with the call sign ABC-FM. Over the last three years an ABC youth network has been gradually established called the Triple Jay, which concentrates on youth music, culture, news and information programs.

ABC has more than 70 newsrooms in Australia and overseas and many of their overseas correspondents double up as reporters for the Television network as well. ABC has overseas bureaus in some 14 countries.

The ABC sees itself as the only independent authoritative news provider in the electronic media in Australia. While ABC Radio provides some comprehensive top-quality news and current affairs programs around the clock, its concepts of programming "style and standards" are increasingly being seen to be too mono-cultural and Anglo-centric, especially when taking into account the changing ethnic composition of the Australian society.

While ABC's attempts at trying to reflect this cultural diversity in their programming and recruitment has been rather half-hearted and tokenistic, over the last three to five years they have made a concerted effort to train Aboriginal broadcasters and create some limited access to the airways for them. This has been largely due to pressure from Aboriginal groups themselves and training money made available by the government on top of ABC's regular budget.

ABC now has a regular Aboriginal program produced by Aboriginal broadcasters themselves on the metropolitan network, Radio National and Triple Jay network.

Special Broadcasting Service (SBS): The SBS was established in 1978 to takeover and run the two ethnic radio stations already established in Melbourne (3EA) and Sydney (2EA). The EA stations were established in 1975 and have been run mainly on a volunteer basis until then.

The SBS has an annual budget of just over A\$ 60 million provided by the federal government, to run its national television channel (introduced since 1980) and the two EA stations. The radio budget is about A\$ 12 million.

The EA stations broadcasts in some 63 different languages and the amount of time each language is allowed to broadcast per week is decided on language speaking migrant population ratios provided by the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs.

The audience penetration of 2EA and 3EA of most language communities are very high, even though the material that go to air tend to be fairly old fashioned, non-controversial, politically passive or downright repressive in terms of political debate. Though the radio programs may have been sometimes boring and unstimulating, it nevertheless attracted audiences for its usefulness in providing settlement information, local, world and homeland news (usually from the big wire services) in their own language and for nostalgic reasons.

By the end of 1993 SBS Radio plans to launch a new national radio network broadcasting to all capital cities via satellite. The programs are to emanate from the 2EA studios in Sydney and it is made possible through extra allocation of funds by the federal government. For the first time SBS Radio plans to broadcast programs in English which according to their Senior Project Officer, Raymond Moti will "reflect the diversity of Australia's multicultural society and the different socio-economic and cultural attitudes within Australia."

So far SBS Radio has geared its services towards providing settlement information and cultural maintenance to new migrants, this English language service is aimed at meeting the needs of second and third generations migrants. Many of them have an interest in their cultural heritage but are more fluent in English.

All broadcasters and journalists on the two stations are now paid staff on contract. Over the last three years the network has been gradually "professionalised" by turning employment contracts from casual hourly basis to salaried graded full and part-time contracts.

Community Radio: The election of the Labour Party government led by Gough Whitlam in 1972, was the catalyst for the community radio movement. The Whitlam Labour government was the first non-conservative government to be elected in more than a generation and they were swept to power with a clear reformist platform aimed at developing grass-root participation in the social and democratic process.

The first signs that the old order in broadcasting was at last changing came during the same year, when the Whitlam government issued a licence under the Wireless Telegraphy act, for the University of Adelaide to start Radio 5UV. This was the first radio station to broadcast in Australia which came neither under the ABC umbrella nor the commercial radio sector.

By 1974, enough community interest has been generated in community access public radio to justify the setting up of PBAA, which set out consciously to encourage the development of non-establishment broadcasting, giving a radio voice to community groups hitherto denied one.

The number of public or community radio stations have gradually increased since the formation of PBAA and currently there are 118 licenced community radio station broadcasting around the country.

The PBAA has three kinds of membership - full, associate and affiliate. The first category applying to organisations which already hold broadcasting licences, the second to those organisations which intend to apply for one and the third to bodies which support the aims of the PBAA, but do not themselves intend to broadcast. The PBAA fulfills a valuable role as the advocate for the sector and representing concerns of individual stations and groups.

Australia can rightly claim to be a world leader in the field of community radio. Perhaps there's no other country in the world where a strong independent sector has arisen where established state and commercially operated systems were already in existence.

The 118 community radio stations are spread through all states and territories of Australia - in capital cities, country towns, big city suburbs, and remote Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, agricultural and mining communities.

The stations vary from large university or community owned operations serving one to three million population, with paid staff approaching 20, to little stations with 10 watt transmitters, entirely volunteer operated and serving as few as 2000 people.

Some stations have a charter to provide specific kinds of programs like specialised music, multilingual programs, aboriginal programs, christian programs, educational services or even radio for the print handicapped. Others are to respond to any need in their communities which the established services are not meeting adequately at all. Community radio is essentially a service for the community by the community, whatever the mix of programs it offers.

Because Australia has a fully funded national broadcasting service (ABC and SBS), community broadcasting sector does not receive massive government funding, although it continues to lobby hard for more government assistance, particularly to help community broadcasters to equip themselves better. In 1991-92, the community radio sector received a mere A\$2.9 million from the Government.

Community radio is non-profit and non-commercial, thus it cannot broadcast conventional advertising. Most stations are funded by listener subscriptions, regulated sponsorship announcements, selling of airtime to community groups, community fundraising ventures, donations, limited government subsidies and the efforts of volunteers. The educational oriented stations are mainly funded through annual grants from the universities where they are located, and their Board of Directors are usually appointed by the universities themselves.

Though most of the community radio stations are always short of money, a positive result of this is the high degree of independence they exercise from both government and major commercial interests. For those who believe in freedom of expression, the closest they could come to the ideal, should be Australian community radio.

The community radio sector employs around 300 people and is supported by over 30,000 volunteers. It has over the years become the current and future breeding ground for many radio presenters, editors, technicians and so on.

In fact, ABC Radio no longer has a fully-fledged training program, because the community radio sector provides enough trained and experienced broadcasters to fill ABC's vacancies when and if they occur. Even there's scores of ex-community radio broadcasters now working in the commercial sector. As the Executive Director of the PBAA Graham Forsaith put it: "We trained these people for no cost to either their employer, the taxpayer or the private sector".

The latest survey conducted for the Federal Government and PBAA by a leading audience research body estimated that around 2.5 million people over the age of 14 years listen to community radio during any given week.

The Constraints of Mainstream Radio for Aboriginal and Ethnic Voices

There is hardly any Aboriginal or Ethnic broadcasters in the commercial sector - if there is, it will be very hard to distinguish them, as they will sound and talk exactly like a conservative Anglo-Celtic Australian.

The ABC has a number of Aboriginal broadcasters who have come through their special Aboriginal training program, but many of them have found that there are too many restrictions and restraints on their freedom of expression and it is difficult to get access to non-Aboriginal programs on the network, unless these programs are produced for broadcast on regional stations where there is a significant Aboriginal community.

Many highly skilled and experienced radio broadcasters of ethnic backgrounds have found that ABC's concept of "style and standard" has been a formidable barriers as far as their access to the ABC's airways is concerned, because unless you have an "Australian" (Anglo-Celtic) accent, you are judged to be "unprofessional".

ABC applies a peculiar brand of program standards where an "ethnic" accent is okay if you are the person being interviewed, but the same accent is deemed to be not of broadcasting standard, if you want to be the interviewer, the presenter or the narrator of the program.

I have experienced these barriers at the ABC for many years. Let me give you one typical example. Last year, I produced an eight-part series on non-Christian religious practices in Australia, which was funded by the government's Office of Multicultural Affairs, as part of their program to create access to the Australian mainstream media for ethnic broadcasters.

ABC's Radio National refused to broadcast it saying that it's not upto their style and standard. The manager of Radio National suggested that if I allow one of their Anglo-Celtic producers to present the programs he may consider broadcasting it. The narration is less than a fifth of the program and most of the people I have interviewed for the program were either of Asian or Arabic backgrounds, as the series covered Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism in Australia. He didn't however find any problem with the accents of those interviewed in the program.

Radio Australia broadcast the series in full - with my presentation - on their Asian and Pacific shortwave service and later indicated to me that they may consider repeating it this year. I have refused to allow ABC to use an Anglo presenter to broadcast nationally, thus the series is now been transmitted nationally on the Community Radio network's satellite service.

A similar incident took place in 1986 when I offered a series to the ABC on the relationship between rich and poor countries. It was funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs under the International Year of Peace grants program. ABC refused to broadcast it giving exactly the same reasons as above.

It was broadcast on the community radio network and later received an United Nations Association of Australia's "UN Media Peace Award" for the series. It competed with ABC nominations for the award and beat them to it.

Meanwhile the SBS network which was set up as a government funded broadcasting service specially geared to serve the ethnic migrant communities in Australia is not any better in their application of programming standards, though the discrimination here tend to be more political than racial.

The early years of ethnic radio under the reformist Whitlam government held much promise, and the conservative government of Malcolm Fraser continued this support and even established the SBS to put ethnic broadcasting on a more structured path.

At the same time, there were many checks build into the SBS management structure which made it almost impossible to do any programming with political contents.

Prof Andrew Jakubowicz, a former SBS Board member says: "When SBS was established, there was a weeding out of all pro-Labour activists who have been part of the early round of volunteer radio. Conservative people of non-English speaking background (ethnic) were brought in, where this was necessary, to head up the language programs on radio. From the early days there was a close connection between many of the coordinators of the radio programs and the more conservative wings of the particular ethnic communities".

Prof Jakubowicz says that one decision was taken early on which was to have fairly important consequences. That was the notion that even though the radio stations were to be seen as the voice of ethnic Australia, the programs itself were to be language based, not nationality or ethnicity based. This allowed the management to clamp down on most political contents especially when the communities come from countries where nationalist or ethnic conflicts exist.

The SBS Radio management has always had a fairly dictatorial attitude towards its broadcasters. They have been helped by the fact that it is the only broadcaster where the ethnic programs makers will be paid for their work.

Last year they used a new staff restructuring scheme to get rid of some long standing broadcasters who were showing signs of independence and assertiveness. They were replaced by newly arrived migrant broadcasters with professional experience in their home countries. This resulted in the station going off air for over three weeks when many of the staff who were served with quit notices went on strike claiming that the SBS management was planning to appoint a passive workforce, not experienced community broadcasters.

Towards Democratization of the Media

Aboriginal Community Radio

"Lot of our people have been very cynical, when you speak of media to Aboriginal people. Very cynical, because of misrepresentation, the distortion, the blatant lies that are projected" said Aboriginal broadcaster Tiga Bayles in a keynote address to a media conference at the University of Western Sydney in 1990.

He said further: "Information is power. You think about it. How is this system operating? Its not on information. Most government departments like social security, withhold information from you. It leaves you powerless. Alternative media can be a vehicle for empowering the powerless. It has to be. That is what the ultimate goal is. That will eradicate ignorance, by way of information and education".

Today, Bayles is heading the Brisbane Indigenous Media Association (BIMA) which is launching in April Australia's first Aboriginal owned community radio station in a state capital city. In 1992, Bayles was elected as the Vice-President of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) at their Mexico congress.

The cornerstone of the rapidly developing Indigenous media sector is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community radio. It is the fastest growing special interest sector in Australian public broadcasting.

Margaret O'Shane, the coordinator of Catherine Community Radio in the Central Australian outback told the first "Media and Indigenous Australians" conference in Brisbane in February '93: "When the whiteman came they took our children away, breaking up families and herding them into missions with other language speaking people and introducing an alien culture and language, effectively breaking up our traditions and values".

"With the advent of radio and television, there was no longer a need to take them away, because what you now have is another tool right there on our doorstep and handy to break down our culture and our values".

"Our ties with the land come hand in hand with our language and culture, and Aboriginal media plays a very important role in this maintenance" and she went on to explain how Aboriginal community radio is gradually being expanded into Aboriginal communities in the outback.

"What we are saying now is that its okay to speak our language and we are encouraging our elders to come forward with those traditional stories and pass them on from Dreamtime, using modern technology to maintain our oral tradition" O'Shane explained.

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody in 1991 recognised the impact, both positive and negative, that the media has had on perceptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (TSI) people. The report made a number of recommendations emphasising the fact that it is important to provide avenues in the media for Australia's indigenous people to have a public voice which would raise their self-image.

Aboriginal and TSI community groups with the support of the government's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) have used this report as a basis to demand increased government funding and support to set up indigenous media groups around the continent. Community radio is at the forefront of these schemes.

In May 1992, a national conference of Aboriginal and TSI broadcasters decided to set up the National Indigenous Media Association of Australia (NIMAA) as their own community broadcasting peak organisation. At the same time they were of the view that it should be set up at an arm's length from the government, because the existing government media organisations ABC and SBS's attempts to reflect Aboriginality in program and employment policies did not sit well with the notion of self determination.

ATSIC has already agreed to assist in the setting up of NIMAA by funding a secretariate and the operations budget, in return for a hand in framing its corporate plan. They have also recognised NIMAA's long term goal of developing an independent and fully-funded indigenous media sector in the Australian broadcasting environment.

The first fully Aboriginal owned community radio station to be set up in Australia was 8KIN in Alice Springs. The Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) which was set up in 1980, was granted a radio broadcasting licence in 1984. Upto 1992 it was the only licenced Aboriginal public broadcasting service in Australia.

8KIN broadcasts in 7 Aboriginal languages into four states in Australia. They have outlying FM transmitters in 3 Aboriginal communities and it is carried into other states on shortwave transmitters, as well as piggy backing on the satellite-fed television signal of Imparja TV, of which CAAMA is the major shareholder.

CAAMA has its own news and current affairs unit and they also translate and broadcast information from ATSIC, Social Security department and other government bodies. Except for a few programs they take from the national Public Radio News service in Melbourne, most of their programs are locally produced with music forming a bulk of thier program contents.

As CAAMA has grown so has their collection of locally recorded Aboriginal artists. Today Aboriginal musicians are gradually making an impact on the national musical scene with groups like Yothu Yindi and Coloured Stones making it to the national pop charts. It is mainly due to CAAMA and other Aboriginal community radio programs that these groups have been able to come into prominence. The Northern Territory Education Department has established a joint-project with CAAMA to broadcast Aboriginal studies programs to over 55 schools in the territory.

About 40 indigenous groups are producing programs for non-Aboriginal community radio stations around the country. The number of hours of Aboriginal and TSI programming on community radio has increased from 59 hours a week in 1984 to over 200 hours in 1992. This is in addition to the output from 8KIN in Alice Springs. The PBAA received A\$ 310,000 from the government last year to fund Aboriginal programming in the sector.

In the 1991/92 financial year ATSIC supported five established Aboriginal and TSI media centres around the continent with grants totalling A\$ 2.46 million. These included the CAAMA, the Western Australian Aboriginal Media Association (WAAMA) in Perth, Torres Strait Islander Media Association (TSIMA) in Thursday Island, the Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Media association (TAIMA) in Queensland and the Top End Aboriginal Bush Broadcasters Association (TEABBA) based at Batchelor in the Northern Territories. A number of other indigenous media groups including BIMA in Brisbane have been funded to the tune of A\$ 785,000 to produce programs for broadcast via the ABC transmissions.

A scheme designed to increase the range of Aboriginal broadcasting is the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) which was set up in 1988 on the basis of a two year, capital only funding proposal agreed by the government. The philosophy behind the scheme is to give Aboriginal and TSI people access to and control of local television and radio services in their own communities.

BRACS provide facilities with capacity to receive and re-transmit satellite delivered radio and television services, as well as to produce and broadcast local radio and television programs.

BRACS is also acting as a regional communications catalyst, where geographically or language-linked groups of BRACS communities are forming regional media associations. A prime example of this is TEABBA in the far north of the continent, which was formed in 1989 and their membership includes a number of far-flung BRACS communities.

TEABBA operates a regional multi-lingual service in 12 languages using an ABC transmitter. Part of the programming is provided by BRACS communities, acting as correspondents, telephoning in local stories which are then broadcast over the whole area.

ATSIC took over funding of the scheme in 1991 and allocated A\$ 16,000 to each BRACS community to employ a part-time operator. This year the funding has been channeled through ATSIC regional councils and the annual allocation being over A\$ 1.6 million to cover repair, maintenance and operation of the units.

At the Brisbane conference, Aboriginal broadcasters strongly criticised government's meagre funding resources allocated to the BRACS, even one delegate suggesting that the ABC staff must be put under similar wage and working conditions, if the government thinks that is cost effective broadcasting.

The success of Aboriginal community radio has given rise to a growing belief throughout the broadcasting industry that Aboriginal and TSI issues should be presented by Aboriginal and TSI peoples themselves, reflecting not only Aboriginal and TSI contents and perspectives but also their presentation styles.

Under the new broadcasting legislation passed by the federal parliament last year there is now a lot of scope for obtaining licences for what is called special interest broadcasting. The Department of Transport and Communications in Canberra has indicated that sixteen Aboriginal and TSI broadcasting groups have already indicated their interest in applying for community radio broadcasting licenses. BIMA, TAIMA and Waringarri Media in the Kimberleys in Western Australia have already been granted broadcasting licences.

Many of these groups are currently sharing air-time in other community radio stations or are using ABC or SBS transmitters to broadcast into their communities. There is considerable capital costs involved in moving from this to broadcasting on your own transmitter, using your own call sign and increasing your broadcast hours as well. The capital costs itself average about A\$ 750,000 in making this move.

Recent initiatives taken by two indigenous media groups provide examples of how Aboriginal and TSI broadcasters can use new technologies and the new broadcasting act to deliver radio services to wide areas without using expensive transmitters.

Using the provisions of the new Broadcasting Services Act, Umewarra Media in Port Augusta in South Australia and TEABBA have both sought to become licensed as Open Narrowcasters, rather than seeking fully-fledged Community Broadcasting licences. TEABBA has already been given the approval by the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA).

Umewarra applied to erect its own mini-transmitter to deliver a signal that comfortably covers a 20 kilometre radius. The cost of such a transmitter is only A\$ 15,000. TEABBA however opted for satellite delivery gaining access to the Imparja TV transponder and installing CODEC (using coder and de-coder for digital transmission) equipment at both ends - Imparja and TEABBA - which gives them access to the optical fibre ISDN (Integrated Subscriber Digital Network) from TEABBA base at Batchelor in Northern Australia to Alice Springs in Central Australia. It pays a rental to Telecom Australia to secure a 24 hours-a-day connection. The total capital outlay for this system will be not more than A\$ 27,000 with the annual rental for the connection being less than A\$ 20,000 a year.

The International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples 1993 is expected to act as the catalyst for Aboriginal and TSI people in Australia to set in motion their long-term goal of an independent, fully-funded broadcasting body.

The first step in this direction is the setting up of a secretariate for NIMAA. Some proponents of this body see it as a National Indigenous Broadcasting Service (NIBS), like the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) which was established to cater for Australia's ethnic immigrants.

Among the arguments put forward by ATSIC in a discussion paper released by in January 1993 as justification for the establishment of a NIBS is that, if the SBS was established to provide a radio and television service for immigrant Australians and if the federal government supports an independent broadcasting sector for ethnic Australians, it should equitably support an independent broadcasting sector for indigenous Australians.

Ethnic Community Radio

Community Radio in Australia had its beginning basically as a response to the ethnic migrant communities' need for access to broadcasting services. One of the first public access radio stations was Melbourne's 3ZZ which began transmitting in May 1975, under a Whitlam government directive to ABC to set up a community access station. A substantial part of the programming was in languages other than English.

Though it lasted only two years before ABC withdrew funding from the station, the 3ZZ model acted as a basis for the development of ethnic community radio.

Today there are 57 community radio stations around Australia providing over 800 hours a week of ethnic radio programs in 75 different languages. Five of these stations in Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and Sydney are full-time ethnic broadcasters run by non-profit ethnic community groups.

PBAA describes Ethnic Community Radio as a social policy success story and they point out that it costs a tenth of the annual budget of SBS radio in Sydney and Melbourne. If produced by SBS at government rates, the 800 hours plus per week of programming will cost A\$ 42 million.

Last year, the PBAA's funding arm the Public Broadcasting Foundation (PBF) received a total of A\$ 1.19 million from the government to fund ethnic programming in the sector. It distributed this money to 54 stations, for over 600 hours per week of ethnic programming.

Unlike Aboriginal programming, ethnic community radio is predominantly funded by ethnic community groups themselves. Many of the programmers buy air-time from community radio stations and raise sponsorship money from ethnic businesses to pay for this and other expenses. Most program makers are volunteers.

Ada Hulshoff, the former Executive Director of PBAA and now an ABC Radio executive was one of the earliest ethnic broadcasters on Brisbane's ethnic radio 4EB. She says: "In the case of ethnic programming, the subsidies pay for only about 30 or 40 percent of the costs of running stations or programs. The ethnic communities provide the other required funding out of their own pockets. Ethnic communities have been very solid and loyal in supporting their ethnic broadcasters financially".

Ethnic community radio is largely recognised today as radio in languages other than English whose programming contents could include news and current affairs - especially homeland news otherwise not available from other sources, settlement information, language and cultural maintenance, sports, music and the arts.

Most of the full-time ethnic broadcasting stations have allocated set times of the day for different language groups. Thus like, SBS radio, these stations do not have a set audience who listen to the station throughout the day. They may switch on for their particular language program only. Audience research has shown that where there is ethnic public radio, an average of 6% of households tend to listen to it.

Ethnic community radio along with SBS stations have been largely successful in filling a vacuum in Australian broadcasting vis-a-vis providing a service in their own language for new migrants. In the last few years community radio has become the ideal medium to address another shortcoming in the Australian media. That is the lack of access for migrant broadcasters to the Australian mainstream media, particularly for those who do have a good command of English .

For anyone with such a background, after a few months in the field it becomes apparent that racism is entrenched and institutionalised in the Australian media structures, especially in their recruitment practices and as already explained, in the judgement of broadcasting style and standards.

Even the community radio sector is not immune to such attitudes and practices. There are number of English language news, current affairs and other community information oriented programs produced for national networking by the sector, which are funded and thus the producers are paid for their labour. None of these programs are produced and presented by a migrant broadcaster. This does not mean that such talent is not available.

For almost a decade now, I have been challenging this Anglo hegemony in the broadcast media in Australia. I have found community radio a very useful ally in this process.

In 1980 I began a weekly program on Sydney's Radio 2SER-FM on Buddhism, which was broadcast in English. I was the only broadcaster at that time in the station presenting an English program with an ethnic accent. The programs were sponsored by Asian Buddhists living in Sydney, but it was targetted at an Anglo-Australian audience.

I started the program mainly because the Australian media was projecting the countries of Asia as if in the backwaters of civilization, at a time when increasing numbers of Australians were copying and adopting Asian customs and lifestyles based on things like Yoga and Buddhist meditation.

Over the years I have produced hundreds of such programs which always presented the subject matter from a non mainstream (ie: Anglo-centric) perspective. Since April last year, I have been producing a weekly one-hour program called "Voices from the South" along with a team of broadcasters who were born in six different Third World countries - Mauritius, Pakistan, Malaysia, Korea, Papua New Guinea and Kenya. We call it the "unfiltered voice of the two-thirds world". The program takes a weekly look at the Third World and global issues like GATT, the UN, etc from a Southern perspective.

From April (1993), the PBAA has offered to transmit a half-hour version of it each week on their national satellite transmission COMRADSAT. Thus it will be the first time that an English language program produced entirely by a team of ethnic broadcasters will be networked nationally.

The above two examples I hope will give an idea of how the volunteer based access oriented community radio model has the potential to assist in the breaking down of racial and social barriers, if you are equally determined to challenge and bring down these barriers.

Today community radio has become the battle ground where increasing numbers of ethnic broadcasters who are fluent in the English language are challenging the Anglo domination of the airways, especially in the news and current affairs field.

If not for community radio, I have no doubt in my mind that I would never have become a broadcaster in Australia. It is my role in community radio that opened avenues for me to enter the fields of journalism, media research and the academic area.

Why Is Community Radio A Threat To Some?

The rapid expansion of community radio in the 1980s have attracted a wide range of admirers as well as critics. One of the tags community radio always had to fight against was the view that it was unprofessional radio that nobody listens to.

Commercial radio sector launched an offensive against community radio in 1990 when they argued against the allocation of FM frequencies to community stations.

The Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters (FARB), which represents the views of the commercial radio sector said that commercial radio is the most popular of all the media in Australia and FM has overtaken AM as the frequency of choice among listeners. They pointed out that in Sydney only two commercial stations were on the FM band compared with 16 community stations.

What they did not say, was the fact that the community stations got the FM band at a time when no one wanted to broadcast on it. FARB offered a formula where commercial licensing fees could be used to fund community radio if they transfer the FM frequencies to commercial broadcasters and abide by some sponsorship rules. The PBAA did not take up the offer.

Harry Ledowsky, the head of one of Sydney's highest rating AM commercial stations made an outrageous attack on community radio when he said: "The FM band has 13 self-indulgent and unlistened to stations, funded by the government totally cluttering up a band that the commercial radio industry has to pay millions of dollars to be on". He suggested that AM stations should buy these frequencies from the community stations at A\$ 1 million each and hand over their AM equipments to them as well.

These attacks on community radio prompted the federal government to commission an audience survey to judge the popularity or otherwise of community radio, and perhaps to everyone's surprise, it found that every week at least 2 million Australians listen to community radio. This killed off the debate for the time being.

It's not only commercial interests that feel threatened by opening up the airways to community broadcasters. Even some so called community organisations are undermining the sector.

Australia's ethnic communities' political structure is such that each state has an Ethnic Community Council which in turn is a member of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA). This creates an ethnic elite who speak on behalf of all ethnic communities. These councils are funded by federal and state government grants, which pay for their premises in state capital and a small staff.

These so called "peak community bodies" are mainly controlled by conservative 'community representatives' who are more interested in being photographed with political leaders rather than representing the grassroots.

A good example of this is the fact that, FECCA has been a strong supporter of the SBS and they have been campaigning for increased funding for that network, at a time, when most ethnic broadcasters in the community radio sector are asking for increased funding for their sector as it begins to expand. Recent events have indicated that SBS's bureaucratic management structure do not stand up well to the idea of community oriented broadcasting.

Thus while new ethnic community radio stations were being set up in Melbourne and Sydney, FECCA began a campaign asking for an extra frequency for SBS Radio in Sydney to accommodate the increasing need for ethnic programming. With elections looming, Prime Minister Paul Keating announced in December at the annual FECCA congress that the Labour government will fund the establishment of an extra SBS radio frequency. This has angered most of the ethnic community radio broadcasters who stand to lose the most by such a service. Many are asking the question - whom are the FECCA elites representing, the community or themselves?

This is a good example of how community radio is slowly eroding the very basis of elite community structures and how conservative elements in the community are still trying to undermine the sector.

Even in Aboriginal broadcasting such misgivings are being expressed by increasing numbers of Aboriginal community radio broadcasters about the role of ATSIC, which has been encouraging the government to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on Aboriginal broadcast training programs run by the ABC.

Many Aboriginal broadcasters argue that their broadcasting units must be given the money to train their own people, not send them to an elitist organisation like the ABC whose training officers cannot relate to the needs of the Aboriginal communities.

The Future

Dramatic changes are going to occur in the Australian broadcast industry in the next few years, due to a combination of factors arising from the introduction of new technologies and the implementation of the new more 'de-regulated' broadcasting legislation.

Hulshoff argues that the introduction of new technologies will have a great impact on the radio sector with much greater number of specialised services available to specific audiences. This in turn will create a "blurring" of the clear demarcation lines currently existing between commercial, national and community broadcasting services, and she believes that others will emerge.

Hulshoff sees this blurring effect occurring particularly in the ethnic broadcasting sector where commercial ethnic radio services become more firmly established, alongside the more regulated SBS services and the current community sector. "Not only will the distinctions blur" she says, "increased competition for ethnic audiences is likely to change the existing services quite dramatically".

According to Hulshoff, new technologies will offer greater opportunities for special interest as well as minority audience broadcasting, as the technology will be friendlier and cheap to run - if you want to do it cheaply. But, where she finds a danger for greater diversity in the broadcast media is government regulations.

"Obviously, if they decide to adopt a real estate look alike system of spectrum management, selling off spectrum to the highest bidders, or the government decides to impose licensing fees or market entry conditions, which are likely to be prohibitive to non-commercial broadcasters, then minority audiences -in particular - are likely to miss out" says Hulshoff.

Over a decade of community radio has helped to create a large pool of broadcasters -particularly from ethnic and Aboriginal backgrounds - with the skills and experience to establish these new services. It is they who will be most motivated to set up these services, because institutionalised racism in most other parts of the media has kept them out of the mainstream media.

Both the ABC and the SBS will come under increasing pressure to radically re-focus their programming values and management practices. rather than a 'from the top of an ivory tower' attitude to community broadcasting, they will need to change their "style and standards". Otherwise, if government funding erodes, these organisations and particularly SBS radio will become increasingly irrelevant to the community.

I believe, even if the new technologies kill off the "free-to-air" structure of community radio, the sector can take credit for creating a whole new culture of making radio cheaply and efficiently, which will give those community broadcasters of today, a great advantage, if they wish to establish their own subscription or special interest radio services.

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