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SBS's multilingual dilemma: global media, "community languages" and cultural citizenship

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Abstract

The increasing complexity of the multilingual environment, in large part resulting from globalising media trends, is creating new challenges for multilingual media. This article explores forms of citizenship, issues of 'community' and transnational media use through the case study of the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), Australia's multilingual and multicultural national public broadcaster. SBS was developed as an element of Australian multicultural policy in a response to political pressures of a diverse society. It now needs to engage with contemporary forms of identity and increasingly sophisticated media use trends to maintain its relevance.

Introduction: Multilingual media as a resource for cultural citizenship

Media, particularly public media, are constitutive of contemporary forms of citizenship. As Sonia Livingstone (1998: 197) observes, "people's status as media audiences is a crucial way they participate as citizens." International broadcasting has in recent years undergone major shifts in both technological and social uses and applications. Audiences and taste cultures have become increasingly atomised, dissolving "mass audiences" and triggering alarm about the eroding impact of the fragmentation of the public sphere on contemporary citizenship (see, for example, Habermas, 1989; Tomlinson, 2011; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2008). Concurrently, national demographics have become more complex and diversified through globalisation-related trends such as migration, newly generated identities and affiliations and transnational ties which have thrown "traditional views of naturalised citizenship ... into confusion" (Miller, 2007: 54).

Increasingly complex cultural diversity has generated a series of political and policy challenges aligned with uneven levels of civic and social participation. Miller describes this as a:

... crisis of belonging...a population crisis of who, what, when and where. More and more people are seeking to belong and more and more people are not counted as belonging (2007: 1).

Central to cultural citizenship is the notion of belonging, a force that "joins people together and informs their actions" (Calhoun, 2007: 286). Cultural citizenship is concerned with "inclusion and exclusion, bringing together culture (production of meaning) and citizenship (belonging, membership, rights and responsibilities)" (Stevenson, 2003: 4). One way in which these processes of inclusion and exclusion have been managed in culturally heterogeneous liberal democracies is via multicultural policy and the recognition of linguistic pluralism.

Multiculturalism was first introduced as official state policy in Canada in 1971 and later adopted in many other liberal democracies, where it took various forms as a practice for the "state management of minorities" which sought to be stable and "morally defensible" (Kymlicka, 1995: 26). As Kymlicka has also noted,

... the term 'multicultural' covers many different forms of cultural pluralism, each of which raises its own challenges ... Generalisations about the goals or consequences of multiculturalism can therefore be very misleading (1995: 18).

Some of these differences can be attributed to differing contexts of diversity and immigration. In Canada, multiculturalism sits alongside bi-nationalism – in which an "uneasy tolerance between the French and the English" provides an existing source of cultural pluralism (Kymlicka, 1995: 14). In the USA, large racially/ethnically constituted groups (such as African Americans and Latinos), represent significant divisions within society, and racial politics often focus on differing levels of socio-economic advantage. In many European contexts – such as the UK, France and the Netherlands – cultural diversity is linked to a legacy of imperialism with large migrant communities from former colonies. In Germany, some groups have been conditionally afforded residence as 'guest workers', extending to generations of Turkish residents, for example, who experience precarious

or partial access to residency rights.

Australian immigration has largely constituted a form of 'social engineering', building a larger, permanent, population and a skilled, or at least able-bodied, workforce (see Jupp, 2002). The "more British than Britain" aspirations of the White Australia Policy were therefore, continually compromised in the post World War II quest for more workers and residents. Australia was quickly becoming one of the most diverse national populations in the world (Jupp, 2002), with an Indigenous heritage augmented by successive waves of immigration. By the mid-1970s, following the official end of the White Australia Policy, it had become evident to policy makers that immediate integration into Australian cultural life was not an inevitable, or easy, step for most migrants. Australian multicultural policies were implemented in 1975 to redress the socio-economic disadvantage associated with non-English speaking backgrounds and to recognise officially the continuing diversity of the Australian population – an acknowledgement that prior policies of assimilation were unsustainable. Australian multiculturalism today retains an emphasis on citizenship and participation in its civil society.

Christian Joppke (2004) has tracked a retreat from multiculturalism in various contexts, including among the previous 'standard bearers' of multiculturalism in Europe (such as the Netherlands and the UK). This development Joppke notes, is due to multiculturalism's perceived failure to change the socio-economic status of migrants, lack of popular support, and to perceptions that it enabled certain groups (namely Islamic religious communities) to reject the liberal standards of contemporary democracies. Australia however, has been less inclined to follow suit according to Joppke, although the policy was dismissed as "mushy and misguided" (Gordon & Topsfield, 2006: 2) under the conservative Howard Government while it was in power (1996-2007). In 2010 and early 2011, several major nation-states (Germany, France and the UK) dismissed multiculturalism as having 'failed'. In contrast, the Gillard Labor Government (elected in 2007) recommitted to a federal multicultural policy during its second term in early 2011, citing the 'genius' of Australian multiculturalism in facilitating a socially cohesive society (Bowen, 2011) in the context of Australia's existing cultural diversity and an economy tied to continuing immigration.

The Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), Australia's 'second' public broadcaster, has been one of the most visible, and obviously multilingual, products of Australia's multicultural policies. SBS commenced operations as a small-scale radio experiment in 1975, extended to television services in 1980 and online in 1991. As a national public broadcaster operating under a public charter, SBS has a role in Australian nation building. As a multicultural media service, it has a role in pluralising the public sphere, offering a vision of Australia in which diversity is a 'naturalised' part of the national self-image. In this article I will focus on the programs in languages other than English on SBS Radio, as these services offer a useful case study to explore the new challenges and contexts for multicultural and multilingual policy in a globalised environment.

In the context of increasingly diverse societies, a crucial part of the practices and structures of inclusion or exclusion relates to language. Stevenson notes that cultural citizenship is linked to "whose language is given public acceptance" (2003: 23-4). The 'public' element of this proposition is crucial, ensuring that cultural and linguistic difference is not relegated to the home but promoted in the public sphere. Michael Clyne described the history in Australia of English speaking "monolinguals using other people's languages as an instrument of *exclusion*", whereas he saw the possibilities for "*inclusion* – legitimating and valuing Australia's multilingualism" (2005: x: emphasis in original) and signaling that it is acceptable in the public domain (Clyne, 2005: 97). SBS Radio provides a case study of some of the challenges facing these practices of inclusion (and containment) in multilingual policy and services.

According to Ang, Hawkins and Dabboussy, "language is one of the most intimate assets of cultural identity and social communication ..." (2008: 57), and as such plays a vitally important role in the enhancement, or curtailment, of social belonging and participation in multicultural society. Data on measures of social wellbeing from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) General Social Survey evidence that, "factors of language and culture can limit social participation in life in Australia" (ABS, 2008b). Statistics from the last Australian population census, conducted in 2006, reveal that more than 160 other languages' (besides English and Indigenous languages) were spoken in Australian households (ABS, 2008a). More languages with fewer speakers are now in use in Australia than ever before. In 2006, according to the ABS Census, more than 16 per cent of Australians spoke a language other than English in the home (ABS, 2008c).

Toby Miller describes the counting of citizens via a census as a process of recognition of these citizens as part of the social sphere, which marks them as "deserving of aid and inclusion" following which, "their well-being [is] incorporated into collective subjectivity as a right, a problem, a statistic, and a law ..." (Miller, 2007: 42). This process forms a "technology of government" (Flew, 1997: 50) through which the inscription of citizens constructs them as subjects of evaluation, calculation or intervention and framed as a social policy 'problem'. The concurrent recognition and categorisation of citizens are central to the processes of determining individual and collective rights within liberal-democratic nation-states.

Access to relevant media resources is, increasingly, understood as a crucial cultural 'right' of citizenship (Murdock, 1999); appropriately, media policy, particularly as it relates to public service media, is tied to concerns of democratic participation and citizenship. However, traditional models of public institutions, including public broadcasters, have been criticised as failing to address demographic complexities and uneven levels of access to these cultural rights (Jakubowicz, 2007; McClean, 2008). As Liza Hopkins notes, "because participation depends on capacity, which is distributed unevenly in heterogeneous societies, passively expanding citizenship to all does not necessarily lead to inclusion for all citizens or to full citizen participation" (Hopkins, 2009: 21). Citizenship rights must be supplemented by 'minority' or group-differentiated rights in a framework of social justice and equity in culturally diverse societies (Kymlicka, 1995: 6), a key principle underpinning multicultural policies. Kymlicka (2001) argues that minority rights must not be seen as a deviation from ethnocultural neutrality but as a response to majority nation building. Public broadcasting has been strongly associated with the modernist project of nation building, regarding audiences as citizens for whom participation requires access to knowledge, rather than as consumers placing "market value" on informational needs (Livingstone, 1999).

Theorists have emphasised the role of public broadcasting in developing the "common knowledge" of shared cultural significations – public information, political developments and major events – in constructing national citizenship (see, for example, Scannell, 1989). Traditional public broadcasters have however, been criticised for only facilitating exclusive forms of sociability which rely on culturally dominant social capital (see Born, 2004; Hall, 1993; Morley, 2000).

The public broadcasting 'goods' – quality programs, good information and the inclusion of people in democratic society (Costera Meijer, 2005) – provide crucial foundations for cultural citizenship, defined by Miller as aligned with "the right to know and to speak" (2007: 35). Contemporary citizenship has an intrinsic relationship to media use, as the processes of "bonding and community building" fostered by media (Hermes, 2005: 10) are key to practices of belonging, participation and representation. When the resources for these forms of bonding are limited or exclusive, the result can be alienation and disengagement (Madianou, 2011).

The notion of media as a resource which audiences can relate or respond to in multiple ways recognises audience agency. As Barnett notes:

Thinking about media requires a networked conception of socio-spatial power, one that works less through realising predictable effects of prescription, and more by providing *resources for action* whose appropriation is liable to considerable variation in effects (Barnett, 2003: 100; emphasis added).

Understanding media as resources for action, highlights the importance of multilingual media. The resources framework foregrounds issues of access and empowerment through media transmission of information and "common knowledge" (Murdock, 1999), without assuming a set of knowable responses from audiences. Audience theory tells us that audiences use and make sense of media in individual and creative ways (see, for example, Bird, 2011; Hall, 1997; Madianou, 2011; Ruddock, 2001). We cannot assume that the intention of programmers is carried through to the everyday media consumption practices adopted by audiences. Audiences can critique, reject, parody, recommend, celebrate or re-purpose media content according to their own needs and preferences. Studies of cultural difference in media reception indicate that cultural diversity adds layers of complexity to the meaning generated through media texts (see, for example, Gillespie, 1995; Liebes & Katz, 1993). It is important however, not to confuse this agency in interpretation and consumption (held by audiences) with power over the construction and presentation of media sources (held by media institutions and policy makers – Morley, 1992).

SBS represents a formal and institutional recognition of the internal linguistic diversity of the Australian nation. Its multilingual services provide opportunities for Australians to access linguistic diversity amidst an otherwise monolingual 'mindset' in the national context (Clyne, 1991; 2005). SBS is held up as an example internationally of an "impressive achievement" in multilingual media (Edwards, 2004: 185). However, fracturing audiences and increasing complexity of language and media use are posing new challenges to the SBS model. A discussion of these issues and some of the dilemmas surrounding SBS Radio's programming schedule (under review in 2011) evidences many of the complexities associated with providing services for multilingual populations in contemporary multicultural societies. Before I enter into this discussion however, I will describe the problem of group representation in heterogeneous societies, as well as challenges to citizenship in the context of transnational affiliations.

'Communities' and complexity in multiculturalism

Charles Taylor described multicultural policies as part of a "politics of recognition" whereby the equal worth of all cultures is recognised in diverse societies (1994:36). This is symbolically important, however it does not operate outside material structures. As Iris Young noted:

... claims for cultural recognition are rarely asserted for their own sake. They are part of demands for social inclusion and equal economic opportunity, where the claimants deny that such equality should entail shedding or privatising their cultural difference (2002: 106).

While recognizing the elements of "fairness, equal opportunity and political inclusion" inherent in this kind of identity politics (Young, 2002: 107), it is important to keep in mind that political alignment with a cultural or linguistic grouping does not generate (or emerge from) identical or equivalent perspectives or experiences on the part of social activists or those they (claim to) represent. This is a key challenge in the use of concepts of culture and multiculturalism, described by Madianou as a paradox, in which "the irony of stressing difference as a means of refuting primordialist perspectives is that one reproduces the same ideology one purports to question" (2011: 447).

The creation of multilingual radio services in Australia foregrounded community rights, based on shared ethnic or linguistic identity, as central to the realisation of inclusive multicultural citizenship. This kind of approach privileges a bounded notion of 'communities', whereby representation and identification are assumed to be relatively straightforward – a process in which "it is assumed the community exists and merely needs to be empowered" (Little, 2002: 3). According to Gerd Bauman, it turns migrants into "pseudo corporate 'communities'" and sets up competition between groups for resources (1999: 123-124). Miranda Joseph also warns against 'fetishising' community and notes that the term is used to connote forms of unity and identity that can be exclusionary and is dubious as an organising principle for social change. She notes, however, that community generates the "strongest of passions" and that "community is one of the most motivating discourses and practices circulating in contemporary society" (2002: xxx).

Bauman describes this contradiction in practice in his analysis of the dual discursive competencies required for living in a complex multicultural society. He describes how in Southall, London, minority groups are complicit in reifying their own 'communities' for the purposes of competitive services allocation, while concurrently engaging with contextual (and processual) identifications which challenge those reified constructs (Baumann, 1999; see also Madianou, 2011). In this formulation,

identities are understood as strategic and contextual 'identifications' or self-understandings (see Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). This is not to say that identity means nothing; it is simply to say that it means different things in differing contexts and is relationally constructed and applied. Self-identification and categorisation by others (particularly institutions) are not, however, one and the same thing (see Brubaker & Cooper, 2000: 15), and may not easily align with one another. Further, self-identifications are not necessarily consciously chosen, as Calhoun notes:

... we cannot understand group membership as always simply, consciously chosen, and if it is produced in part by larger webs of social relations and distributions of opportunities, it is enabling as much as constraining (2007: 299).

This notion of concurrent empowerment and containment runs through much critical analysis of multicultural policies and services. State-based policies for "managing minorities" and developing forms of pluralist citizenship and participation are aligned to traditional models of citizenship, governing the relationship between individuals and the nation-state. Transnational ties, influences and allegiances are currently challenging these understandings as the world becomes more globalised. These trends, intimately related to multilingual media use, are explored briefly in the following section.

Transnationalism and national citizenship

Transnationalism, it is often claimed, is undermining conceptions of nation-states and, with them, national audiences (Fraser, 2007; Madianou, 2011; Vertovec, 2009). Turner and Tay assert that traditional understandings of broadcasting which conceive of media as "addressing a national society and culture, and fundamentally connected to the governance of the nation-state" are "increasingly anachronistic" (2008: 72). As broadcasting becomes "disaggregated from the activities of the state" it is increasingly market driven, which "presents a number of challenges for those who believe that aspects of this former role were fundamentally useful to democratic politics" (Turner & Tay, 2008: 74). Christina Slade and Irene Volkmer have explored such concerns in their analysis of uses of transnational media by contemporary audiences, claiming that the public sphere has been fragmented into a set of linguistically differentiated "sub-national publics in self-referential spheres" (2007: 73). Their work focuses particularly on trends in Europe, but similar concerns about the impact of transnationalism have gained currency in Australian public discourse (see, for example, AAP, 2011). UK-based research evidences how warnings about the fragmentation of civic life through transnational media carry, in the context of the "war on terror" and security cultures, the additional signification of "home-grown terrorism" via 'radicalising' influences (Gillespie, Gow, Hoskins, O'Loughlin, & Zverzhanovski, 2010).

We cannot assume however, that transnational media is any less cosmopolitan or any more alarming than its local counterparts. Aksoy and Robins note that panics about retreat from local cultures or assertion of 'uncivil' cultures around transnational media cast audiences as "passive and susceptible to the influence of their 'national' media system" (2000: 344). They challenge this assumption, arguing that the negotiation between differing national media products encourages "thinking around issues of belonging, identity and culture" which opens up more reflexive possibilities for self-understanding (2000: 356). Madianou adds that access to transnational media can "accelerate processes of cultural change", encouraging audiences to become more cosmopolitan (2011: 449).

However, Nancy Fraser (2007) has noted that there is a problem in the increasingly popular idea of a "transnational public sphere". She asserts that "the concept of the public sphere was developed not just to understand communications flows but to contribute to a critical political theory of democracy" in which public opinion as a political force holds authorities to account and ensures that the "actions of the state express the will of the citizenry" (Fraser, 2007: 45). Thus, Fraser claims, "a public sphere should correlate with a sovereign power" to have political efficacy (2007: 45). The public sphere must be grounded in citizenship and an accountable political environment to ensure political influence for its participants. This is still primarily how we make change in our daily lives. It is through the pressure of public opinion that changes are made to legislation or regulations affecting, for example, requirements for skilled migration, or housing conditions for international students – issues recently debated in Australian media, holding leaders responsible for the conditions experienced by many transnationally-linked residents in that country.

Transnational media cannot always be assumed to limit its users' participation in local media or local civic engagement. Steven Vertovec (2009: 82) claims that the unprecedented levels of transnational ties among immigrants (variable within and between groups) are not necessarily a challenge to national integration. Vertovec cites recent research by Jayaweera and Choudhury (2008) indicating that engagement in political spheres internationally can tend to create greater confidence for local engagement. Hopkins, in her analysis of media use by Australian Alevi Turkish speakers, further notes that it is not "necessarily the case that engagement with transnational media comes at the expense of local content" (2009: 21). The contemporary reality of media use is that this is not a zero-sum game. Adrian Athique notes, "what most characterises the contemporary media as a discursive force in our society is its multiple sources and its intertextuality" (2008: 38). Media discourses intersect with one another in complex ways as audiences become increasingly sophisticated in their use of a range of locally-and globally-sourced information and entertainment. There is still, however, an important role for national public media in linking the "working through" of identities and self-understandings facilitated by transnational media (Aksoy & Robins, 2000: 345) with the political efficacy and agency of media aligned with national citizenship (see Fraser, 2007).

Madianou asserts that, "when transnational audiences choose media from within their country of residence, this is often a statement about their citizenship and desire for participation in public life" (2011: 450). However, she describes a "closing off" that can occur when local media fail to represent cultural difference in inclusive ways. She says of her studies of national and transnational media users in Greece, "although my informants expressed openness and reflexivity in their narratives about identity, when they were confronted with 'closure' in the media, they adopted an essentialist 'closed' discourse themselves" (Madianou, 2011: 451). The reflexivity described in transnational media uses by Aksoy and Robins (2000), then, has a

relationship to the forms of sociability facilitated by local media. Openness in self-understandings is facilitated by inclusive media in countries of residence and citizenship that allow for more agency in practices of belonging and identification. I will now explore how the limitations of community representation, the problematic categorisation of community languages and new challenges posed by transnationalism, relate to my case study: the shaping of, and political justifications for, the SBS Radio schedule.

The SBS Radio schedule

SBS commenced operations in 1975, in the form of experimental radio stations that provided government information in the languages of Australia's largest migrant communities (eight languages in Melbourne and five in Sydney). It was founded in response to a powerful "ethnic political lobby", and developed over time in ways that were "indexed to" official state multiculturalism (Nolan & Radywyl, 2004: 54). SBS's public Charter mandates an orientation to diversity and multilingualism as central principles of its services. SBS Radio has steadily increased its services from the early multilingual public broadcasting experiment, as representatives of more language groups sought to have their language included in the schedule to the current 68 language programs. With this figure, SBS lays claim to being the most multilingual broadcaster in the world (SBS, 2011).

The SBS Radio schedule is broadcast over two locally transmitted analogue frequencies (in Melbourne and Sydney/Canberra/Wollongong) and a national analogue frequency for more geographically dispersed audiences – with 63 per cent population reach across Australia (SBS, 2009-2010: 42). All of these services are now replicated on digital platforms and via audio streaming and podcasts online. SBS radio services start broadcasting at 6am daily with an hour-long English-language news and current affairs program (also from 5pm), and then broadcasts "in-language" news and information programs, changing language hour-on-hour, until 11pm when music and overnight programming takes over.

The language programs are separately tailored to each "community language" audience. The programs draw from a common editorial framework and an approximate division of each hour of airtime to major local and international news. However, they also cover major stories from relevant 'homelands' – additional coverage of the Middle East in the Arabic and Hebrew programs, for example (McClellan & Cullum, 2003). The programs also cover stories of special interest to speakers of particular languages in Australia. Three programs highlight this approach: first, in April 2011, the Turkish and German programs collaborated on a radio documentary exploring differing experiences of Turkish immigrants to Germany and Australia (questioning why multiculturalism has been proclaimed a 'failure' in Germany but a success in Australia). Second, the Hebrew and Arabic programs that covered Marrickville local area council's aborted bid to adopt the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign against Israel (the subject of a political row about a position adopted by the Greens Party in local and federal politics). The third was the Cantonese program that ran talk-back about Amy Chua's controversial bestseller *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, questioning whether the style of strict Chinese parenting that she advocates has a place in multicultural Australia.

SBS Radio's "in-language" programs have, over time, provided a significant resource for their audiences, creating links to services in settlement, employment, health and education. In addition to these practical settlement-and-services building blocks for citizenship, SBS multilingual broadcasting facilitates more participatory models of engagement via talk-back and community engagement activities which offer a national 'hearing' for otherwise marginalised perspectives. As Ang et al. (2008) point out:

Language specific programs are used not only for practical community support and ethnic cultural maintenance; their role is to educate listeners to become more cosmopolitan, multicultural citizens by increasing their ability to function as informed participants in a plural, liberal democratic society (2008: 68).

This role provides crucial support for belonging and participation in multicultural society. SBS Radio's language program schedule has, however, failed to keep pace with changes in language use. Far more languages are now spoken in Australia than at the time of SBS's inception (Brown, 2011b). Ex-Managing Director Shaun Brown publicly noted in 2011 that SBS "significantly under-serve[s] major or growing language communities ... [and] ... at the same we do little or nothing for new, high-need language groups" (quoted in Bourke, 2011: n.p.). The SBS Radio schedule is a balancing act, in which the five language groups with the most speakers in Australia (Italian, Greek, Cantonese, Vietnamese and Arabic) have two hours of programming per day and smaller groups are allocated less airtime, down to the smallest (such as Lithuanian and Bulgarian), which have just one hour of programming per week. SBS also broadcasts, in two hours per week, an 'Aboriginal' program in English which includes small amounts of Indigenous languages, of which there are over 180 in Australia (see ABS, 2008).

The "high-need" groups referred to by Brown include speakers of languages rapidly growing in use in Australia due to new patterns of humanitarian settlement, such as Dinka (from Sudan), Khmer (from Burma), Oromo (from Ethiopia) and Tigrinya (from Eritrea – Clyne, 2005: 7). Newer language groups could not be accommodated in SBS's current services without curtailing or removing programs for other language speakers – changes that are resisted by representatives of language groups currently on the schedule. Consultations concerning SBS Radio programs conducted in 2008 revealed a "stand-off" between advocates of the inclusion of newer language groups emerging through humanitarian settlement and those who emphasised the issues associated with ageing, including isolation and "reversion to language" trends (De Bot & Makoni, 2005) amongst smaller groups of European language speakers, such as Yiddish, who have been in Australia, and on the SBS Radio schedule, far longer. In 2011 SBS conducted a review of the radio schedule (the results of which are not available at time of writing – June 2012). The allocation of airtime in such a review is described in the SBS Codes of Practice in the following terms:

1.4.2 Allocation of Airtime for Community Languages – Radio

SBS Radio is a multilingual and multicultural broadcaster with a direct role in serving Australia's language

communities. In recognition of this role, the allocation of airtime to particular languages on SBS Radio is based on factors such as the size of the community speaking a certain language and other criteria which are reviewed from time to time in consultation with communities (SBS, 2006: 10).

A review involves the use of a range of data, various stages of consultation, and the negotiation of political compromise between groups with an interest in which languages may gain, and which may lose, hours on the radio schedule. I will now outline some of the complexities for SBS in working with these factors, including: the size of the communities of language speakers (counted via the national Census), the 'other criteria', and the processes of consultation with communities.

"Communications needs" and multilingual diversity

A key data source used by SBS in allocating airtime to language groups is the ABS Census of all Australian households, which is conducted every five years. Since 1976 the ABS Census has included questions about language use in the home and, in 2001, a question on ancestry was included. The construction of subsets of the Australian populace through groupings of language speakers or ancestry has made a policy issue of the needs and wellbeing of these groups. Additional data characteristics measured by the Census aligning with factors of need for in-language services include: English language proficiency, recency of arrival, socio-economic profile, ageing and dispersal of language speakers. These factors can be combined and weighted in multiple combinations to identify and understand "high needs" groups. Such 'needs' may weight recency of arrival, humanitarian settlement and socio-economic disadvantage for Dinka speakers, for example, or issues of dispersal, ageing and reversion to language for Dutch speakers. This process can help make sense of the data, but requires a suppression of the internal diversity or complexity of groups of language speakers and contains sets of assumptions about the relationships of these characteristics to the need for particular media services.

SBS, from its origins, has navigated a policy context that intersects between media use and a range of other social, cultural and civic needs and factors. Recent arrivals to Australia, such as the Karen speakers who have fled violence in Burma, may have little or no local media available in their language, while longer-standing groups, such as Khmer speakers from Cambodia, still rely on SBS for their only in-language media access to local information. Language speakers who are ageing along with the profile of speakers of that language, such as Estonians (who as a group have experienced high levels of "language transfer" to English use and, therefore, have lower rates of language maintenance in younger generations) use 'their' SBS program to counter social isolation (Census Applications, 2008). Material circumstances continue to generate the need for in-language information and services, even if their uses and contexts are highly variable.

Just as the notion of 'communities' can be problematic, as we have seen, 'community languages' has long been a vexed descriptor (Kalantzis, Cope, & Slade, 1989). In a sense it could be argued that SBS Radio has created "language groups" by the nature of its service and classification. Its Arabic language program, for example, addresses an Australian national Arabic-speaking audience (with links to around 22 countries of origin) through its fourteen hours a week. The Arabic program is intended to cater for a national, geographically dispersed Australian Arabic-speaking audience which brings together, among many others, long-settled Lebanese Australians in Sydney's Lakemba and newly arrived Iraqi refugees in Shepparton in regional Victoria. In constructing a set of language-based services, SBS Radio has formalised certain groupings as audiences for its language programs which include individuals with different identifications, backgrounds and media preferences.

Individuals who are not native language speakers may also use the language programs and, in fact, may not speak the language "in the home". For example, Danielle Kemp, former Executive Producer of the French program, felt that her program should not be understood in terms of a community language as she counted among her audience the many students of French, Francophiles and intermarried families – generally not conceived of as part of "language communities" – who tuned in (McClellan & Cullum, 2003). Notions of contextuality and relational identity required by a more nuanced concept of contemporary self-understandings (as advocated by theorists such as Brubaker & Cooper, 2000) are however, difficult to translate into inclusive or accountable 'universal' public media services and generate some difficult policy challenges for an organisation like SBS. Given the complex and competing 'needs' within the language environment, how can SBS act, making changes and delivering useful services, while maintaining an understanding of the complexity of 'communities'? And how can a 'communities' framework maintain relevance in the face of the fragmentation of contemporary audiences?

Consultation and the ethnic lobby

In multilingual Australia, SBS has significant administrative power in 'naming' and affirming community languages as worthy elements of the national broadcasting project through their inclusion in the radio schedule. Of course, the allocation of airtime to languages in the SBS Radio schedule has never been a matter of simple recognition: elbowing out a space for individual languages was a highly politicised process. According to Ang et al. (2008), ethnic communities place importance on being represented on the SBS Radio schedule as SBS is seen as the "cornerstone of Australian multiculturalism":

SBS plays a central role as conduit for the symbolic recognition of multilingual Australia. As a national public broadcaster it has the power not only to represent but also to validate community languages and their associated ethnic communities – hence the importance ethnic community organisations place on having their language included in the SBS schedule, especially SBS Radio (2008: 61).

SBS's services were developed in the context of "ethnic lobby" groups organising collectively to demand inclusion in public life, and whose demands were then subject to:

... the vicissitudes of a policy process, in which unequal power relations serve to determine the variable resources available to groups competing to exert influence over institutional arrangements and practices (Nolan & Radywyl, 2004: 43).

The legacy of SBS's relationship with ethno-politics has had significant implications for SBS's radio services. Consultations with community groups on proposed changes to SBS Radio's schedule tend to be political and highly fraught. In "speaking for" a language or cultural group, community representatives often align themselves with the conservatism of the "ethnic group model" (Nolan & Radywyl, 2004). The representatives have an investment in reflecting "their community" as unified behind a single position – in this case, usually a determination to maximise the airtime allocated to their language in the radio schedule. If the process of consultation requires satisfying existing "community stakeholders" through relatively unchanged service delivery, however, in the context of media and social transformation the radio services do risk losing relevance for changing multilingual audiences. The existing model does not allow for generational change, new forms of professional or transient migration, or increasingly complex media use trends on a range of platforms – including satellite and online – which are breaking down categories of "community audiences", if indeed they ever existed (see Madianou, 2011). Many speakers of languages other than English currently residing in Australia do not align themselves (particularly in their media use) with self-understandings tied to particular ethnic groups or 'migrant' experiences (Ang, Brand, Noble, & Sternberg, 2006). It is now time to rethink the SBS multilingual model to take account of new forms of audience.

Fragmenting audiences and the role of SBS

A crucial factor in SBS's dilemma is defining its public value in the face of diversifying competition. There is now a range of media services in languages other than English accessible in Australia – including community radio and television, satellite television and web-based content, as well as multiple forms of print media. SBS is not by any means the only source of news and information in preferred languages for many communities. In the context of more available alternatives and diversification of platforms, the SBS Radio schedule looks increasingly like a dated patchwork based on old-style "appointment listening" when compared with new 24-hour language services and satellite-sourced television news. Some have claimed that in the new, transnational media environment of increased access to multilingual services and information, there is no longer a need for national in-language services (Sheehan, 2007). Others have critiqued SBS as "out of touch" in comparison with localised services such as community radio (Meadows, Forde, Ewart, & Foxwell, 2008). SBS's response to these criticisms has been to emphasise its public broadcasting credentials (quality, accessibility and universality) and the importance of national/local Australian perspectives in multilingual content (SBS, 2009). The latter highlights the promotion of civic participation, aligning SBS with official Australian multiculturalism based in unifying citizenship. SBS Radio's language programs are based on a "nationalist perspective, focused on Australia, rather than a diasporic one, focused on the homeland" (Ang, et al., 2008: 68), providing resources (such as linguistically appropriate information, services and reportage of the local political context) for participation in Australian public life. This orientation is a key distinction between SBS Radio and 'transnational' in-language media or some community radio services that involve substantial rebroadcasting of 'homeland' content.

The distinction between local and transnational media has become a key argument for continued funding for SBS, which warned of the creation of 'digital ghettos' through the National Broadband Network's facilitation of access to online content if Australian multilingual and multicultural content is not sufficiently supported (AAP, 2011). SBS has emphasised its role in making local news and information, the "common knowledge" of shared references and crucial links into civic participation, available in languages other than English. The principle that SBS asserts is that all Australians, regardless of their capacity in English, have a stake in Australia's public life and its future (SBS, 2007). These assertions privilege the universal and unifying models of national citizenship that, as we have seen, many theorists are now calling into question. I argue that there is still an important role for multilingual media in developing a pluralist vision of the "imagined national community" and more inclusive models of citizenship generated in the public sphere. These engagements with a national public sphere remain important for political agency tied to local or legislative outcomes. However, these ideals offer little if audiences are not engaging with the resources provided to and for them.

New understandings of multilingual audiences

In order to develop relevant media services it is important to recognise that audiences are not naturally formed around content or services in preferred languages. Audiences may be as likely to form around interests or subcultural or generational groupings as they are around languages in their media uses. Audiences are however, as little reducible to a set of consumption practices (as grouped by marketing categories) as they are to 'communities' with knowable attributes. An engagement with new understandings of audiences would require SBS to think differently about its programming and the need to understand the "sophistication of some of these post-national audiences, which are at once globalised and highly specialised" (Hopkins, 2009: 24). Language is one medium by which to reach audiences – albeit an important one which carries its own signification and modes of identification – but it is not in itself the whole 'message'. The message of inclusion and recognition carried by a multilingual broadcaster in a culturally heterogeneous society is important and symbolically powerful, but this takes us only a small part of the way to exploring the value of multilingual services. They must contribute meaningfully to the intersecting resources offered by media across linguistic as well as local and national lines.

Bearing in mind the new opportunities for (most) audiences to access multiple sources of information and linguistically diverse content, I would argue that the cornerstone for SBS multilingual programming can no longer be that SBS creates or broadcasts content in multiple languages, it must be what SBS and its audiences do in and with this content. This kind of new approach is evidenced in SBS's pilot "virtual community centres", the first of which is in Mandarin, aggregating a weekly Australian current affairs program, *Mandarin News Australia*, and content from a range of sources in Mandarin on an online social media platform. This platform enables comment, interaction and recommendations between participants, with an emphasis on issues relevant to younger, web-literate Chinese Australians. The distinction between the programming tied to access-and-equity frameworks and a more contemporary understanding of how the platform may be useful to audiences, highlights the difference between a service-based culture and a clearer understanding of media-literate audiences with access to "local, national, geolinguistic, regional and global media" (Tay & Turner, 2008: 80). The former privileges social policy frameworks which imagine knowable responses to policy problems (Miller, 2007), while the latter engages with 'ungovernable' publics via content and forms that

are understood to have "variations in effects" (Barnett, 2003: 100). They also carry different forms of measurement, the first oriented towards reporting, community representation and compliance, and the second towards research and more contemporary understandings of audience engagement.

Conclusion

While multilingual and multicultural policies act as an agent of top-down authority in the construction of particular categories of citizens, they simultaneously offer a source of individual and collective empowerment and new forms of citizenship. Participatory citizenship remains an important source of political agency, even in the context of increasing transnational ties. Despite the limitations of traditional 'community' frameworks in recognising heterogeneity and contemporary identifications with language, Australian multilingual public broadcasting resources remain important. According to Little (2002), protection of communities (however flawed the concept) is important in the context of pervasive market discourses in modern life. A purely market-based approach to language audiences would almost inevitably lead to market failure in addressing the needs of multilingual communities as, "not every niche is a marketable niche" (Costera Meijer, 2005: 30). Multilingual media are crucial cultural resources required to render "citizenship rights substantial rather than nominal" (Murdock, 1999: 8-9). In the case of SBS Radio, the resources include symbolic recognition, access to information and services, and opportunities for new forms of social and civic participation. However, in the context of a fragmented digital media environment and fluid contemporary identifications, the audience framework on which these resources are based is losing relevance. The community rights model has provided an important intervention in Australian media policy to fund and support multilingual services. There is now, however, a need to rethink the ways that multilingual services address their audiences and find new approaches to program for them as sophisticated media users.

The pressures surrounding SBS Radio reflect many of the tensions around broadcasting, audiences and civic participation internationally. Formal structures of inclusion go some way towards addressing the 'crises' facing public institutions and citizenship in increasingly pluralised liberal democracies. Despite their limitations, culturally and linguistically specific resources for participation, whatever platform they utilise, can create new opportunities to "know and to speak" (Miller, 2007) – crucial foundations for cultural citizenship. Strategic engagement with the frameworks of 'communities' (aligned with representation, advocacy, and access and equity) and 'audiences' (aligned with changing media habits, preferences, generational shifts and subcultural groupings), while recognising the problems inherent in each of these concepts, can create new possibilities for responding to cultural diversity in policy and programming. The challenges facing public institutions in meeting the needs of an increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse society require ongoing critical reflection – work which has become more important than ever as national contexts become more diverse and globally networked.

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