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Australia's community radio: Connecting Asian youths to the homeland and beyond

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Abstract

This report is a qualitative case study that focuses on Australia's community radio audiences. Building upon the first study of Australia's community radio audiences, Community Media Matters, it looks at the reasons why Asian youths in Melbourne who are also volunteers in community radio tune in to Asian community radio programs on a regular basis. In the context of diaspora studies and media reception theories, this report argues that these programs aid Asian youths in maintaining their homeland cultures. It demonstrates how Asian community radio essentially assists this demographic in socialising with people of various ethnicities and encourages them to feel a sense of belonging in Australia, in line with the sector's aims of fostering multiculturalism in a globalised world.

Introduction

Ethnic radio programs form a prominent presence in Australia's community radio sector today. According to a recent CBOOnline survey, 47 percent of community stations in Australia broadcast a total of 2,207 hours of ethnic programming per week during 2007-2008 (CBOOnline, 2009: 9). The survey also revealed that community information such as community events and interviews was broadcast on behalf of 223 ethnic groups around the country (CBOOnline, 2009: 7). Asian radio programming is undoubtedly partly responsible for these large figures as there are countless Asian radio shows in Australia. For example, Melbourne's community youth station SYN 90.7 FM broadcasts Korean, Mandarin and Japanese programs while 3CR 855 AM broadcasts an Indian program presented by the Tamil Association of Australia on a weekly basis. 2RRR 88.5 FM in Sydney airs an hour-long Asian-focused program every Wednesday. 2CR China Radio Network 152.075 MHz in the same state is an entire station dedicated to producing Mandarin and Cantonese shows. Brisbane's only multilingual station 4EB 98.1 FM produces at least 6 Asian programs per week, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese and Thai language programs. The largest ethnic community radio station in Australia, Melbourne's 3ZZZ 92.3FM, puts to air around seven radio shows presented in Asian languages each week.

Asian programming is indisputably highly sought after and in fact necessary in Australia. There is no shortage of an Asian audience. Recent statistics show the number of Asian-born residents in Australia has doubled to more than 2 million over the last decade (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). The 2006 Census revealed that around 8 percent of the population is of Asian ancestry (Census, 2006). Community radio programs are tailored to niche audiences including Asian ethnic groups that lack representation in mainstream media (Meadows, Forde, Ewart and Foxwell, 2005: 172). With a substantial proportion of the population comprising residents of Asian descent, it is not surprising community radio in Australia constantly produces programs that are inclined towards Asian perspectives while endeavoring to provide a platform for this minority group to express their voices. In this paper, the term 'Asia' will refer to

countries located within the North, South or South-East Asia geographic region. 'Asian' will refer to a person of Asian ethnicity or descent, namely a person whose parents are descendants from countries in Asia. 'Homeland' and 'motherland' will refer to an individual's country of origin or ancestry. For example, Japan is considered the homeland of a person who is of Japanese ethnicity *and* whose descendants hail from this particular country. For a person who defines oneself as Chinese-Malaysian, his homeland will be considered as Malaysia and not China given he has family in the former country. The term 'home' will be regarded as the country which the individual identifies mostly with and feels most at ease residing in today.

Listening to ethnic community radio assists minority communities in Australia in connecting with different cultures. The first study on Australia's community radio audiences *Community Media Matters* reveals 'cultural empowerment' is a recurring theme among those who listen to ethnic community radio (Meadows, Forde, Ewart, and Foxwell, 2007). The study found local ethnic radio audiences tune in to community radio to listen to news about their communities in Australia and keep themselves informed of events in their homelands abroad. According to these audiences, community radio enables them to maintain their languages and cultures, reminds them of words they have forgotten and assists them in practicing speaking their native languages (Meadows et al, 2007: 77). Another reason these audiences tune in is to listen to ethnic music and this also aids them in maintaining cultures. Those who do not understand the words to ethnic songs admitted they are still happy to hear such music and welcome this diversity over the airwaves (Meadows et al, 2007: 80-84). Interestingly enough, the study also found minority groups see ethnic programs as a way to connect with the broader Australian community, aiding them in integrating and adapting culturally to the country (Meadows et al, 2007: 79). Thus, ethnic audiences in Australia are seemingly open to learning about new cultures from community radio and more often than not embrace multiculturalism in society.

My research investigates the relationship between Asian residents in Australia and Asian community radio. I look at the extent to which Asian community members – who are also community radio volunteers – tune in to Asian community radio programs to obtain news about their homelands and learn about, and perhaps even adopt, other Asian practices or languages within their lives in Melbourne. Since ethnic community radio is a means to bridge cultural gaps as argued in *Community Media Matters* (Meadows et al, 2007), my report aims to extend this idea by exploring whether audiences of Asian ancestry find community radio useful in helping them socialise with their peers of different ethnicities. The last part of this report discusses how Asian community members feel at 'home' in Australia by listening to Asian community radio. More importantly, my report explains and attempts to justify why such results were obtained with respect to literature surrounding diaspora and media reception studies.

In addition, this paper focuses on Asian youths who tune in to Asian radio programs as young people constitute a considerable proportion of the local community radio audience. According to the latest McNair Ingenuity national research survey on Australia's community radio audiences, more than a quarter of those aged 18-24 listen to community radio in a typical week (McNair Ingenuity Research, 2010: 22). My research will undoubtedly prove invaluable as qualitative studies are few in comparison to quantitative studies pertaining to community radio audiences. Moreover, *Community Media Matters* was published in 2007 (Meadows et al, 2007). Thus, my research on Asian community radio audiences is timely to fill the missing literature while discovering the sector's appeal in today's globalised society.

Diasporas and fluid identities

Diasporas strive to maintain close affiliations with their homelands even after having left for a considerable amount of time. Diasporas entail what Appadurai (1996) calls 'deterritorialisation', namely the movement of people and spreading of cultures around the world. According to Hall, diasporas have an 'endless desire to return to 'lost origins' despite constituting a place in their 'New World' (1993a: 236). More often than not, diasporas create 'imagined' communities to fulfill their longing to connect with the motherland (Anderson, 1991). In other words, migrants and ethnic minorities in society are often keen on preserving their heritage, traditions and customs despite being geographically distant from the motherland.

It is not uncommon for diasporas to possess complex identities. Sinclair and Cunningham argue diasporas redefine their cultural identities in hybrid terms:

Displaced cultures selectively adapt to host cultures, intermingling and evolving to form a regenerative 'new' culture, related to, but yet distinct from, both the original home and host cultures (2001: 8).

Hall echoes this, arguing cultural identity 'belongs to the future as much as the past' and that diasporic identities are never static, but 'constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew' (1993a: 225-235). Although diasporas are seeking a return to the past, there is the possibility they take up new or unfamiliar cultural practices in their present day modern lifestyles. In line with this idea, Bhabha (1994) has notably coined the term 'third space', an 'in-between' site that provokes complex hybrid identities within individuals as a result of the domains of cultural differences that they experience in the past and present. With reference to Bhabha, Sinclair and Cunningham write that hybrid subjects such as diasporas negotiate 'cultural difference in a performative interplay between home and host' and seemingly at times learn local mannerisms to adapt to the host country (2001: 9). They further suggest hybrid identities are cultural strategies for diasporas, serving as 'active forms of resistance to domination and marginalisation' within society while allowing them to retain connections with their homelands (2001: 9). Hence, such amalgamated new identities, comprised of distinct personas of the home and the local, assist diasporas in settling and residing in the new land or host nation comfortably.

Identity construction through the media

Maintenance of homeland identities is constantly aided through listening to community radio. Community radio, with various programs dedicated to discussing ethnic cultures, is an outlet where ethnic minorities can turn to to satisfy their longing to connect with their motherland. Its programs are inevitably 'spaces of regroupment', spaces where ethnic minorities are able to come together and express their cultural identities freely among themselves (Fraser, 1990: 68). As Shi argues:

For displaced subjects, media provide points of identification by marking symbolic boundaries, re-linking cultures to places, and by fulfilling the desire for memory, myth, search, and rediscovery (2005: 57).

As such, Asian diasporas are likely to perceive Asian community programs as beneficial within their livelihoods in the host land as the shows enable them to learn more about their heritage and keep in touch with events in the homeland. This is no surprise as audiences are known to situate themselves within specific identities when actively engaging and connecting with media texts. Drawing upon ethnographic research of British families, Morley argues that watching television is 'an active process of decoding and interpretation' (1992: 76). He further claims the 'modes of address' of media 'construct our relation to

the content of the program, requiring us to take up different positions in relation to them' (1992: 84). Hence, individuals arguably position themselves within certain mindsets or even identity positions when engaging or interacting with specific media texts.

Community radio constantly broadcasts diverse viewpoints and represents marginal interests. Through ethnic community radio programming, social equality and cultural tolerance are fostered as minority perspectives are brought to a wider public sphere and shared 'across lines of cultural diversity' over the airwaves (Fraser, 1990: 69). As such, it is highly probable ethnic community radio audiences often warm towards programs about cultures and lifestyles unfamiliar to them. They may even adopt foreign traditions within their livelihoods or learn new languages from listening to such programs. However, with respect to audience reception studies, this remains to be conclusively demonstrated. What is more certain is that community radio listeners of the same ethnic background or who possess analogous experiences, such as having resided in the same country, tend to identify with programs encompassing elements familiar to them. As Morley argues, our responses to media messages are related to our social backgrounds (1992: 80). In line with Lacanian theory, identity is always constructed on the basis of 'Us' and the 'Other' (Moore, 1992: 139). Our sense of self is defined in relation to those around us, especially those who are different in terms of ethnicity and languages spoken. For example, a radio program about Chinese cooking that is broadcast in Mandarin might be easily understood by a listener of Chinese descent who is fluent in Mandarin but not as easily by someone of Indian ethnicity who does not have a good grasp of the language. Also, an individual who has had negative encounters with a particular ethnic group and holds grudges against them may be unwilling to learn about that particular race. In short, these factors can discourage one from engaging with different cultures through ethnic community radio programs. On the other hand, one might enthusiastically tune in due to personal interest or the individual's desire to learn about the 'Other'. After all, 'particular genres appeal to particular audiences' (Moore, 1992: 153), and this paper now explores how this is so with respect to Asian community radio programming in Australia.

Methodology

This report makes use of the case study method to explore the attitudes of Asian youths who are community radio volunteers towards Asian community radio. Yin (1994) writes that a case study design is useful in answering 'how' and 'why' questions of a study. According to Tellis (1997), the case study approach for qualitative research tends to be selective, focusing on one or two issues fundamental to understanding the system being examined – the system in this paper being Asian community radio listeners. For extremely detailed qualitative studies – such as this paper – that utilises the case study method, an appropriate sample size can amount to single figures (Marshall, 1996: 523). Such small sample sizes for qualitative research has attracted much criticism that claim the results obtained tend to be overly general and as such are neither feasible nor applicable in real life (Tellis, 1997). However, Yin has refuted this issue of generalisation, arguing previously developed theory is often 'used as a template against which to compare the empirical results of the case study' (1994: 30-31). For this paper, all interpretations derived from results collected through interviews are supported with existing literature in the field of diaspora and media reception studies, thus giving credibility to my arguments.

Four young people aged 20-25 of Asian ethnicity were selected for this study. I met these participants while volunteering in community radio and it is worth noting they are volunteers themselves. One might point out the biases arising from selecting participants who are community radio volunteers. For instance, these participants might deliberately compliment programs they have worked on or speak highly of their

community radio listening experiences. As volunteers, it does not necessarily mean their reasons for listening to community radio are not valid. In defense, I assume participants have a clearer perspective of the aims of community radio and hence should be able to provide concise, genuine reasons for tuning in. Moreover, as part of the codes and practices of community broadcasting, the sector actively encourages listeners to get involved in its stations' operations (CBAA, 2008). Every listener is potentially a volunteer. Thus, coupled with the need for this study to be completed within a specific time frame, selecting community radio listeners who are not volunteers for this study would be challenging and time consuming. In addition, participants are either former or current listeners of Asian community radio programs, having tuned in or presently tune in at least once a fortnight. The constant tuning in to ethnic community radio fundamentally indicates there are specific reasons as to why participants listen to these programs regularly, and this proves they are more or less able to provide legitimate, compelling results for this study.

The selection of a former listener of community radio as a participant in this study can be justified, albeit questioned. One might suggest this particular participant stopped listening to Asian community radio because its programs no longer appealed to her and as a result she may very well provide unfavourable comments about community radio, skewing results. However, this is not the case. The participant made it explicitly clear she no longer tunes in to Asian community radio programs solely because shows that pique her interest are broadcast during times she is unable to tune in. Moreover, the participant stated she has vivid accounts of listening to community radio in the past. This makes her claims essentially valid, even just as interesting as the other participants' who are current listeners of Asian community radio.

In addition, all four participants were selected on the basis of constituting second-generation Asian-Australians or having resided abroad from their homelands for an extended period of time. They have either lived in Melbourne all their lives or for at least five years and are familiar with the surrounds of the city. Participants have previously or are currently undertaking education at tertiary level. Jenny is a Thai international student who has lived abroad Thailand for more than ten years. Daniel and Sally are Australians of Korean and Indian-Malaysian ethnicity respectively. These three participants listen to Asian programs that are each broadcast half in English and half in an Asian language on youth community station SYN at least once a fortnight. Emily, an Australian of Chinese descent, was a frequent listener of community station 3ZZZ's Mandarin program up until 2009 and now only tunes in to SBS Radio's Asian programs.

Each participant was asked to participate in a 90-minute, one-on-one in-depth interview at a time and place of their convenience. These interviews were conducted in April and May 2011. In-depth interviewing, also known as ethnographic interviewing, is known to assist researchers in understanding the unique experiences of particular groups of people (Stage and Mattson, 2003: 97). Listening to community radio is usually a private activity, excluding company, so adopting the in-depth interview approach over the focus group research method is more appropriate as participants might be shy and unwilling to explain their personal reasons for listening in front of others. Furthermore, previous studies argue that listeners feel as if they are listening or interacting with a close friend when tuning in to community radio (Meadows et al, 2008: 23). Thus, I chose to maintain a conversational tone during the interviews as such informality often aids researchers in garnering respect from participants (Spradley, 1979). On the whole, these factors should inevitably encourage participants to share intimate details on their reasons for tuning in to Asian community radio.

Maintaining homeland cultures

Participants tune in to Asian community radio to access information about their homelands in order to maintain and discover more about their cultures. Emily, as a previous listener of 3ZZZ's Mandarin program, stated she was 'curious' to know more about her heritage and tuned in to this program to learn about Chinese culture and keep abreast of news in China. Daniel listens to the Korean music program 'Korean Come Back Home' on SYN to conveniently keep up with popular music back in his motherland Korea, saying, 'I don't have to search for pop music' online. As such, participants tune in to community radio to connect with their cultural roots and keep themselves informed of current events in their homelands.

Asian community radio fulfills one participant's desire to sustain a livelihood infused with ethnic traditions in Melbourne. This participant, Daniel, seemingly feels at ease with the presence of unique homeland elements around him in the host land, buoyed by SYN's Asian community radio programs. As Appadurai writes, citing Anderson, diasporas live in 'imagined' worlds where they seek to create states of their own (1990: 13). Daniel mentions he grew up in Korea for 8 years and is used to abiding by Korean customs. It is no surprise then that Daniel chooses to articulate the native Korean lifestyle as much as possible in Melbourne: he partakes in various Korean traditional celebrations throughout the year and speaks Korean with his family and friends of Korean descent. After all, he is emphatically accustomed to living according to Korean customs and conventions. 'Korean Come Back Home' reproduces the prominent Korean popular music scene in Melbourne by playing the latest 'K-pop' songs over the local airwaves and Daniel is further able to closely acquaint himself with conventions in his homeland, especially current entertainment trends, by listening to this program. He remarks that Korean pop music played on this program on SYN is 'a different kind of genre' of Korean music from what he mostly listens to and also mentions he is 'not alienated' by this variety of Korean music on SYN and continues to avidly tune in regularly. This demonstrates he is open to engaging with different forms of Korean culture. In line with Appadurai's notion of diasporas creating 'states of their own', for Daniel it is a matter of incorporating as many homeland elements as possible in Melbourne to recreate an 'authentic homeland atmosphere' – à la replicating aspects of life in Korea as closely as possible in the new land. As such, 'Korean Come Back Home' on SYN serves to inform him of what Korea is like today, aiding him in maintaining his ethnic culture while satisfying his desire to know more about the Korean entertainment industry. Hence, given Daniel's strong 'Korean outlook' on life and keen interest in Korean music, this Asian community radio program is a natural addition to his livelihood.

One participant expressed dissatisfaction with a particular Asian community radio program but still appreciates its broadcasts. Daniel says at times on 'Korean Come Back Home', some Korean phrases spoken on-air by its non-Asian presenters are not grammatically correct. This makes him aware that he is actually 'in Melbourne listening to a Korean radio show' and not in Korea listening to a Korean radio program. With respect to Morley's argument of modes of address, Daniel is positioning himself as a native Korean – Korean is his first language and he learnt it while growing up in Korea. His desire to connect completely with the homeland through community radio is unsuccessful. However, Daniel hardly shows any concern at this and routinely tunes in each week, saying he is happy with the way the program is. This can be explained with respect to diasporas' changing cultural identities. As Hall writes, there are differences which constitute 'what we really are' and 'what we have become' (1993a: 225). Daniel experiences the displacement felt by diasporas: he is aware of his Korean ethnicity through the Korean program on SYN but its limited Korean vocabulary reminds him that he is based in a 'foreign' land. As diasporas like Daniel can never fully go back home, they make do with what is available to satisfy their

desire to connect with the homeland as they themselves have made the decision to live permanently in Australia in the first place. Today, it is generally known that an Anglo-Saxon monoculture reigns dominant in Australia, especially within core social institutions (Jamrozik, Boland and Urquhart, 1995: 8) and this Anglo-Saxon superiority tends to be an unspoken corollary (Colic-Peisker, 2008: 74). Hence, it is not surprising Daniel chooses to be grateful for the mere presence of a Korean radio show targeted at young people like himself in Melbourne, even saying 'I feel proud' of SYN's 'Korean Come Back Home'.

Two participants do not tune in to community radio to connect with their homeland. Jenny does not currently listen to Thai community radio programs as according to her, 'there are no such programs'. To her knowledge, Sally is not aware of any Malaysian radio programs in Melbourne and stated that if the programs were broadcast in Malay, she probably would neither understand nor tune in. However, both admitted to keeping up to date with news in their homelands from SBS's radio programs and the Internet. It is interesting to note that there is actually a Thai program on Ballarat station Voice 99.9FM and a Malaysian program on 3ZZZ, both broadcast in Victoria. Both these programs are not aimed specifically at a youth demographic like programs on SYN but strive to appeal to the wider community in general and this is most likely why Jenny and Sally have not heard about them. After all, within the Australian community broadcasting sector, 'the presence of a community public sphere does not necessarily encourage equal access for all members of the community in question' due to contrasting interests among the public and not all perspectives can be accommodated within a finite number of programs (van Vuuren, 2006: 381).

Improving ethnic languages and socialisation skills

Community radio programs do not only inform participants of news and current trends in their homelands but also assist them in improving their native languages. They are invaluable in facilitating communication among those who speak the same ethnic language. Emily found it easy to learn Mandarin – a language she almost considers her mother-tongue right after Cantonese – from listening intently to the Mandarin program on 3ZZZ a few years ago. She says:

Reading and listening are very different. Because, when I have to read, when I read Chinese, yes I can read Chinese but it just takes a lot more concentration...and sometimes, you know I just want to sit down and listen.

Similarly, Jenny recalls listening to a couple of Thai programs on community radio some years ago when they were briefly on air. She prefers someone proficient in Thai 'to read (Thai) out to me' as it is much easier for her to reacquaint herself with the language. This demonstrates how meticulous both Emily and Jenny are in learning to speak their mother tongue. More importantly, it shows how Emily is attempting to speak her mother tongue like a native Chinese person living in China while Jenny a native Thai living in Thailand with the aid of community radio. Language is one of the central markers of ethnic identity; people such as ethnic minorities 'take pleasure in using (their) language' and often self-identify with speakers of their language (Kymlicka and Patten, 2003: 15). Both Emily and Jenny use Mandarin and Thai respectively to communicate with family who only speak these languages, and so it is no surprise they seek to improve speaking their mother tongue as fluently as possible. Moreover, every individual 'has a culture, or some culture, although they can lose it if it is not maintained' (Sinclair and Cunningham, 2001: 7). This is the case with Emily, and she puts it this way with Cantonese, her mother tongue, and also Mandarin with respect to Asian community radio:

I speak English every day, but Cantonese, the only time I get to speak and listen is at home, so I'm trying to learn as much as I can. Obviously I don't go to Chinese school anymore, there's no other way I can use Chinese, not even for work.

Conversing in their mother-tongue on some occasions and speaking English during others clearly shows participants transitioning between different identities. Asian community radio provides opportunities for Emily to practice speaking Cantonese and Mandarin while Jenny Thai so they are able to converse more efficiently with their families on the same wavelength. When tuning in to Asian radio programs, these two participants are assuming – or at least attempting to assume – the positions of native homeland residents who speak the above mentioned languages fluently. Additionally, both say they communicate with their Australian colleagues in English at work. In these instances Emily and Jenny put themselves in the shoes of English-speaking, working professionals in Australia, diverging from their ethnic affiliations. After all, diaspora 'involves negotiations across boundaries and between particular spatialities' (Anand, 2009: 106). Such transitioning between identities seemingly assists diasporas in making the best of different situations in everyday life. In line with this proposition, Emily admits to speaking Cantonese and Mandarin instead of English while holidaying in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Hence, with the aid of Asian community radio programs, she is able to adopt a hybridised identity and sustain both local and global connections, feeling more at ease wherever she is in the world.

Participants pick up the basics of Asian languages unfamiliar to them and learn about different types of ethnic music from listening to Asian community radio. This in turn assists them in socialising with people from diverse backgrounds. Both Jenny and Sally say they constantly learn about Asian pop music from SYN and bring up what they hear on-air with their peers of varying Asian ethnicities who are extremely interested in this genre of music. As a result of constantly listening to Korean pop songs on SYN's 'Korean Come Back Home', Jenny says she 'can now sing some of the songs' during Korean karaoke nights in Melbourne with her friends. Sally says she learnt basic Mandarin greetings and phrases from listening to SYN's Mandarin music program 'Mando Meltdown' and uses them with her friends who are familiar with the terms to have a good laugh. Daniel has learnt Japanese greetings such as 'Konichiwa' from 'The Japanese Pop Show' on SYN and shares what he hears on the program with friends he has known since high school when they get together.

Such influence of foreign ethnic cultures on participants' livelihoods serve to enhance their social lives in Melbourne. These foreign elements are embedded alongside their traditional cultural practices in their everyday lives and it is worth noting participants go beyond occupying what Bhabha terms the 'third space'. Sofield's notion of an 'interstitial fourth space', an in-between space where global cultures collide in an interconnected world today, seems to be more applicable (2001: 103). Building upon Sofield's concept, I want to suggest participants of this study occupy a 'global fourth space' where they straddle homeland and non-local foreign personas within their identities. Daniel, Jenny and Sally all take the time to rediscover their heritage and keep up to date with events in their homelands in some way while learning about different Asian cultures instead of local, Australian culture through community radio. Interestingly enough, all participants admit Asian pop is not their favourite genre of music but as discussed above, still use it as a basis to establish common ground with their friends. In addition, Daniel, Sally, and Jenny all state they would like to work in Melbourne upon completing their studies. Thus, it is no surprise participants actively incorporate what they hear on-air into conversations with their friends of Asian ethnicity. This is ultimately a means for diasporas, for Daniel, Jenny and Sally, to get along with their peers and have engaging conversations with them while combating feelings of social alienation that

may arise due to minimal homeland presences in the host country. As Hall writes, for diasporas, more often than not 'there is no going "home" again' (1993: 362). For participants, there are slim chances of living life as it is in the motherland in the new land and it is up to them to make the most of opportunities in the latter place. It makes sense for them to enhance camaraderie among their peers and establish a solid circle of friends locally in the present day as it will most likely benefit their social life in the long term in Australia, the country where they plan on residing in the future.

Expressing cultures and feeling at 'home'

Asian community radio not only assists participants in improving their mother tongue and aiding in enhancing their social lives but also functions as a platform for several of them to engage in in-depth discussions about different cultures. Emily neither calls in nor participates in online forums of Asian community radio programs. This can be attributed to the fact that she works full time. She explains, 'I feel tired after work. It needs extra effort'. In contrast, the other participants are university students sans the pressures of full time work and accordingly have time on their hands to constantly interact with community radio programs. This is evidenced from Daniel, Jenny and Sally saying they tune in to SYN and message in to its Asian programs at night as a break from studying.

Community radio, with its range of ethnic programs and diverse audiences, is a space where participants are able to confidently share their perspectives with other Asian community members and partake in well-rounded discussions about different Asian cultures. For instance, participants listen intently to fellow listeners' opinions that are broadcast as opposed to solely messaging in their own thoughts to community radio programs and ignoring other listeners' – who are presumably Asian – points of view. Sally tunes in to 'The Japanese Pop Show' on SYN and says, 'I usually just sit and listen to what others have to say. When I feel strongly about something, I add my two cents worth about Japanese bands'. Daniel also messages in to this program and 'Korean Come Back Home', constantly building on what others have said. He says, 'I don't rebut others' opinions'. This is not surprising as people of Asian ethnicity frequently stress the quality of group membership over individual self-interest in their everyday lives (Healey, 2009: 338). In addition, diaspora is 'an entity whose very existence is a product of interactions across cultures...there is always more than one culture' (Anand, 2009: 107). Participants are essentially community members of Asian descent who value belonging to a group that listens to SYN's Asian radio shows. Apart from sharing their opinions, they are willing to accommodate their fellow listeners' contrasting cultural views in order to facilitate thorough discussion pertaining to the Asian music industry. This in turn creates a space where everyone's opinions matter. Thus, participants are able to confidently voice their perspectives while learning about various cultures and ethnic music from Asian community radio programs.

On the back of this collective spirit, participants of this study feel a strong sense of belonging to the local Asian community from listening to Asian community radio. More specifically, this feeling comes from interacting with other regular listeners whom they have never met face-to-face on Asian radio programs' online forums. Referring to fellow listeners whom she has never met but exchanges ideas with on the Facebook page for 'Korean Come Back Home', Sally says, 'I feel like I know them'. Similarly, Daniel frequently leaves comments on this page as well, sharing his points of view with other listeners whom he has never seen before in real life. He sums it up:

I have become familiar with their names on Korean Pop's Facebook page. I feel in the same group, the *same situation*...like James (listener of SYN's Korean and Japanese programs who is of Chinese

descent). Judging from his participation on the Facebook pages, it seems like we know each other for a long time.

This can be attributed to the idea that one who is of Asian heritage tends to empathise with and gravitate towards individuals of Asian ethnicity as opposed to those of non-Asian background. It closely echoes Raymond Williams' notion of 'structure of feeling' which he writes concerns the 'meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt' (1977: 132). He later refers to this phrase as the culture of a period or generation that does not need to be learned and operates 'in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activities' (2001: 64-65). McConachie explains Williams' argument in simpler terms, writing 'structures of feeling' designates the emotional bonding below the conscious level as a result of collective experiences by a particular group (1998: 36). In other words, an individual tends to feel a sense of connection with one who possesses similar experiences. Based on this argument, it can be asserted that community members of Asian descent naturally relate to other people of Asian ethnicity given that each person has origins or descendants from Asia and possess similar Asian cultural values. This is the case with participants of this study. As Daniel emphatically says, 'I am attracted to Asian cultures. I am Asian' and Jenny feels 'part of a family listening' to 'Asian Pop Night'. Moreover, all participants suggested they could 'learn more Mandarin' to understand SYN's 'Mando Meltdown' better when asked if they were to regularly listen to this program that is broadcast predominantly in Mandarin, ultimately showing a strong desire on their part to understand their Asian counterparts despite the language barrier. Hence, several participants feel connected to their local albeit 'imagined' Asian community by listening to Asian community radio, bonding over a common interest of Asian cultures. After all, diasporas often mobilise 'a collective identity' not only in regards to the imagined homeland but also 'in solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries' through common experiences (Cohen, 2008: 7).

Although these on-air interactions are in a sense 'imagined' as one does not actually meet listeners face-to-face, they assist participants in integrating into the wider community in reality as briefly suggested earlier with regards to socialisation through community radio. Hall writes that diasporas possess a sort of collective 'one true self', 'hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed "selves"'; this true self provides a stable frame of reference and meaning in everyday life for diasporas (1993a: 223). This 'true self' undoubtedly pertains to diasporas' ethnic or cultural identity. In the context of this study, the 'one true self' of participants is arguably referred to as their ethnic affiliated personas. For example, this 'true self' emerges when Daniel and Emily reflect on their own cultures and attempt to position themselves as native homeland citizens while listening to SYN's Korean program and 3ZZZ's Mandarin program respectively. Such 'imagined' states experienced by participants are indisputably each unique and isolated from everyone else as only they themselves are able to comprehend and revel in such states. By encouraging them to engage in dialogue with fellow listeners about other cultures as discussed above, Asian community radio draws participants out of these exclusive 'imagined' homeland zones and interpolates them to pay attention to actual activities and genuine opinions within their immediate local communities.

This stepping out of 'imagined' zones on participants' part is a significant factor in encouraging them to call Australia home. Ethnically Asian community members are often 'consistently "Othered" by white Australian society' and seen as contradicting dominant Australian character, posing a problem for social cohesion (Ang, 2000: xiv; Khoo, 2003: 15). However, based on participants' responses, these notions are significantly side-stepped in the context of community members of Asian heritage who listen to

community radio. Asian community radio assists in bridging the cultural gap between these participants of Asian descent and their non-Asian acquaintances, interpolating the former to feel a sense of belonging to the country. As Jenny notes about Korean Come Back Home, 'anyone (Asians and non-Asians alike) can tune in'. Daniel says he is 'proud' that Korean music and culture has 'some place' in western societies such as Melbourne. Sally admits even her Australian friends of non-Asian descent listen to the same Korean and Japanese programs that she tunes in to on SYN, and they talk about these programs and Korean music regularly among themselves. As such, participants are able to partake in a communal public sphere in Australia with the assistance of Asian community radio. On-air cultural ideas are taken off-air by participants of Asian heritage and shared whole-heartedly with community members of non-Asian descent, instigating conversation between both groups. More importantly, this demonstrates that participants of Asian ethnicity are able to express their voices freely in Melbourne sans discrimination and essentially regarded as equal citizens by their Anglo-Saxon Australian community members. Thus, for participants of this study, listening to Asian community radio is more than just simply about learning Asian cultures: Asian community radio is a space where minority voices are heard and participants are welcomed, accepted and respected for who they are regardless of background. It is a space within Australian society that perpetuates cultural tolerance both on-air and off-air. This ultimately gives each participant the assurance to call Australia their home and the self-confidence to be, as Daniel slowly but assertively describes himself, an 'Australian citizen of Asian ethnicity'.

Conclusion

This small case study has shown that selected young people of Asian ethnicity who are volunteers in community radio tune in to Asian community radio programs for a number of reasons. Participants tune in to Asian community radio to keep informed of the latest news and music releases from their homeland if there are ethnic programs broadcast at convenient times and provide relevant information about their homeland. They learn to communicate in their mother tongue more fluently and pick up the basics of different Asian languages from these programs and this assists them in enhancing camaraderie among their friends. These two findings are consistent with results from *Community Media Matters* which found ethnic audiences avidly tune in to community radio to hear music from their motherland and listen to their native languages spoken on-air to maintain their cultures (Meadows et al, 2007). In addition, several of the participants in this small case study enthusiastically message in to Asian community radio programs and interact with fellow listeners, in turn learning to understand other Asian cultures better. For these participants of Asian ethnicity, community radio is a space where they are able to share their opinions freely and it aids them in feeling a sense of belonging to Australia. Again, these findings echo conclusions from *Community Media Matters* that suggests community radio provides marginalised ethnicities with a voice – a sense of cultural empowerment – in society and contributes to broadening the notion of democracy in Australia (Meadows et al, 2007).

Amidst a globalised society today, there are undeniably myriad ideas and cultures in every corner of the world. A global culture is known to be 'here and now and everywhere' (Smith, 2003: 279) and it is no surprise a variety of cultures instead of only a single culture is infused within the livelihoods of participants in this study. In line with Hall and Morley's arguments that audiences are active respondents to media texts, participants do not assume an identity consisting of homeland and local (Australian) personas, subverting Bhabha's 'third space'. They seemingly occupy what I have suggested is a 'global fourth space' and adopt identity positions comprising of homeland and non-local foreign cultures as a result of listening to Asian community radio. In other words, participants favour incorporating Asian over Australian cultural practices alongside their homeland traditions within their everyday lives. As

discussed, at times participants speak in Mandarin and Japanese with their friends instead of conversing with them entirely in English or Australian vernacular.

This study has suggested ethnically Asian youths who are both current/former listeners and volunteers in community radio possess complex identities. Participants position themselves within different identities depending on their circumstances. This is in line with Straubhaar's (2010) idea of 'multilayered identities', identities that are layered with transnational cultural elements and formed through one's interactions with the media. Straubhaar (2010) writes these individuals 'increasingly identify with multiple cultures at various layers or spaces' and their identities are frequently subject to change and become hybridised over time. In addition:

Diasporic identities are at once local and global. They are networks of transnational identifications encompassing 'imagined' and 'encountered' communities (Brah, 1996: 192).

As evidenced from discussions above, participants align themselves with their ethnic heritage when tuning in to community radio to learn about their origins and keep informed of events in their homeland. With respect to the proposed 'fourth space', they adopt a more 'global identity' when socialising with their friends of various ethnicities. Thus, for participants, different identities are assumed at different times in order for them to make the most of each context or situation. Overall, multiculturalism is fostered to a large extent through Asian community radio: participants in this case study are not only extremely proud of their ethnic cultures but at the same time are also enthusiastic about understanding other cultures around them in their local community. This is consistent with *Community Media Matters*' findings that claim community radio listeners constantly put aside their personal tastes and preferences in acknowledgement of other interests and cultures so as to connect with diverse members of the community and maintain community spirit (Meadows et al, 2007), thus giving credibility to my arguments. However, the results of this small case study may only hold true for Asian ethnic groups who listen to Asian community radio. It has yet to be demonstrated that community radio audiences of other ethnicities are actually interested in listening to a variety of community radio programs so as to engage with other cultures. There is no certainty that the Italian, Greek or Spanish communities in Australia feel 'European' and are willing to connect with other European ethnicities through community radio programs. This is an area worth exploring in future research pertaining to community radio's ethnic audiences.

This case study on Asian youth community radio listeners who are also volunteers in this media sector has its limitations. Once again, it is important to note that only four participants were selected to participate in this study. This small study, collecting only so many responses from these four participants, could have yielded overly general results. However, with theoretical backing, it is fair to say these findings have their merit. Nevertheless, this is another area where my research can be improved upon. Increasing the sample size significantly and/or interviewing participants who are not volunteers in community radio for a similar study will most likely garner more precise results. There are also other ways of extending the findings of this paper. As suggested above, further studies about community radio could focus on investigating the reasons specific ethnic groups, be they the Chinese or Italian diasporas in Melbourne, tune to ethnic radio programs. Each racial group is generally known to abide by different customs and possess contrasting perspectives on life, and as such varying results will most likely be obtained. Moreover, my findings show that Asian community radio cultivates multiculturalism within Australian society and it will be interesting to explore whether this is in fact the case in different regions

around the world.

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