



**Diversity in Action Project
Think Tank Series
Seminar Room, Aberfoyle House, Magee Campus**

Wednesday 25 April 2007

ETHNIC MINORITIES AND THE MEDIA

Introduction

This is the second in a series of Think Tank events and is part of the work being undertaken by INCORE's Diversity in Action project. The project commenced in December 2006 and is funded by CRC for a 16-month period. The purpose of the DiA project, which has a particular focus on the North West area, is to help build the capacity of Northern Ireland's minority ethnic sector. The Think Tank series will therefore provide the opportunity for focused discussion on issues particularly relevant to the minority ethnic community sector, with a view to taking recommendations forward, generating ideas and influencing policy.

The theme of the second Think Tank was around Minority Ethnic Communities and the media. The aim of the event was to provide the opportunity for participants to discuss issues such as the role of the media in their portrayal of the minority ethnic sector and the impact of this.

Roisin O'Hagan welcomed all attendees to the event, and introduced Deirdre Donnelly, Radio Foyle and Catherine Reilly, Metro Eireann. Deirdre has been a presenter on Radio Foyle for 4 years and has worked on the general programmes section of Radio Foyle. Catherine is the Deputy Editor of Metro Eireann, Ireland's first and only multi-cultural newspaper.

Deirdre Donnelly, Radio Foyle

Deirdre began her talk by drawing comparisons between media work in Northern Ireland and the work she carried out whilst working in radio in Lancashire. Lancashire was very much a multi-national and multi-ethnic society, although Northern Ireland has recently experienced a lot of community changes, particularly with the increasing ethnic diversity as a result of greater numbers of ethnic minority peoples moving to Northern Ireland. Radio Foyle, as part of the BBC, has celebrated diversity and has endeavoured to cover good and bad stories. Deirdre highlighted the incident a couple of years ago when Polish workers in NI were being attacked. She pointed out that Radio Foyle dealt with this differently - rather than just reporting the incident, Radio Foyle endeavoured to encourage a lot of debate and discussion around the topic. Deirdre pointed out that in the past, many members of the minority ethnic community were very reluctant to represent their community 'on air'. However, Radio Foyle has come full circle on this and members of the minority ethnic community do not feel the same fear or reluctance to come forward. Radio Foyle,

particularly the Newsroom, has tried to balance the reporting of attacks and the reporting of positive stories. They have built relationships and work closely with schools in the area that would have a lot of pupils from different cultures, such as Strathfoyle and Oakgrove.

Deirdre focused on the power of the media and made reference to the BBC programme which featured a Portuguese family, and in particular focused on their young son and his experience of living in NI. Deirdre also referred to the BBC Spotlight programme which often deals with hate crime issues and racial attacks. The BBC has tried to highlight the difficulties which members of the minority ethnic community have to face. Deirdre asked the questions – Could the media do more? Do they want to do more? Are they committed to doing more? She pointed out that in this particular case, the BBC can answer yes to these questions.

The minority ethnic community have become more proactive in their approach to the media. She quoted the example of SEEDs who have been more than helpful in providing speakers who have gladly participated on air. Recently Deirdre's 9-line programme produced a particularly successful feature which focused on members of the Iranian community who were invited on air for 40 minutes. The discussions were very worthwhile and the programme received a large amount of telephone calls and texts in response. Another recent example is that of the first Think Tank event which the DiA project organised around the participation of the minority ethnic community in the electoral process which again featured on the 9-line programme and Radio Foyle were able to include a representative from the Polish community so that listeners could hear her views on the upcoming elections. This demonstrates the immense progress which has been made.

Deirdre spoke about the recent launch of Global Eye (a 2-page feature in the local City News) and described this initiative as a step forward in welcoming members of the minority ethnic community into NI society.

Radio Foyle also responded to the recent newspaper article which described Belfast as the race hate capital of Europe. They invited members of the minority community to take part in the 'vox pox' programme and honest discussions took place with members of the Belize, Japan and African communities.

Deirdre reiterated Radio Foyle's commitment to diversity. Indeed Radio Foyle have reassessed the way in which they portray members of the minority ethnic community and that it is not about merely making gestures. Members of the minority ethnic community from this area know that the door is open but it is up to Radio Foyle to be inclusive in different ways. It is artificial for Radio Foyle to focus on for example the Polish community and produce a feature on being Polish; this makes the Polish community feel different. We need integration. Recently Radio Foyle within their 'Breathing Places' programme, which focuses on 'transforming places for people and wildlife' and SEEDs were the first to respond. It is through these initiatives that members of the minority community can get to know nationals and vice versa.

Deirdre highlighted the need to improve our contacts lists. Members of the minority ethnic community have great ideas and can speak on a range of topics not because they are non-nationals but because they are knowledgeable on a particular topic. In order for Radio Foyle to progress in the next few years, Deirdre felt a greater commitment in terms of the community was required. For example Radio Foyle should have a dedicated producer from another country and a network of people from other countries, providing Radio Foyle with stories. Deirdre highlighted that the recent figures on homophobic attacks has decreased. Radio Foyle had a role to play

in this. One of their programmes featured workers from the Rainbow Project (a local community group which supports and empowers gay and bi-sexual men) and this made people more aware of the issues. This shows how radio can be a powerful medium for changing people's attitudes and making people more aware. Radio Foyle looks forward to changing people's attitudes.

Catherine Reilly – Metro Eireann

Metro Eireann, Ireland's first and only multicultural newspaper was set up in 2000. Its slogan is 'Many Voices: One Ireland' and its aim is to represent as many voices as possible in Ireland.

Metro Eireann was established by two Nigerian journalists: Chinedu Onyejelem and Abel Ugba. They came to Ireland in 1990s, met at a book launch in 1998/99 and had the same idea to set up a paper aimed at all immigrants to Ireland. They initially faced a lot of barriers, particularly financial as they found it difficult to obtain funding. Eventually they got a loan from an enterprise centre of 2,500 Irish punts and with help from The Irish Times and many volunteer students they got the publication up and running. The publication started off as a monthly issue until October 2006, but is now distributed weekly. Metro Eireann are currently supported by Communicorp and the Irish Times. Their main revenue comes from subscriptions and advertising. The newspaper is for all immigrants, north and south and for anyone interested in cultural diversity such as NGOs, Government representatives, and community workers.

Metro Eireann is made up of the following sections:

- A Northern focus page – this needs to be developed further as Metro Eireann do not as yet have anyone based in the North;
- Filipino/African/Polish/Indian sections of the paper which are published in English – Metro Eireann aim to do more in foreign languages in the future;
- Specific features – such as Insight; interviews; schools focus; entertainment; world at home and meet the boss;
- Sports section – featuring Brian Kerr SARI league (Sports Against Racism); My club (GAA), martial arts; weekly sports interview;
- Galway focus page – this is a new section which focuses on new immigrants to the Galway area;
- The paper has many high profile contributors such as: Shalini Sinha, Roddy Doyle, Conor O'Clery, Brian Kerr, Marie Mulholland, Simon Coveney.

With regard to promoting the paper, Metro Eireann endeavour to do this through many ways such as:

- MAMA Awards - These awards honour individuals or groups who create cross cultural understanding and co-operation in Ireland and celebrate initiatives which promote and celebrate cultural diversity in Ireland.
- Ethnic Entrepreneur of the Year Award.
- Writing competitions

Metro Eireann have various other initiatives and improvements in the pipeline such as:

- A language section
- Improve on advertising

- Increase countrywide contacts and contributors
- Produce more sports and features sections
- Increase their knowledge about ethnic minorities

Catherine pointed out that Metro Eireann is contacted often by the mainstream media asking to be put in touch with immigrants. Catherine felt that there is a definite lack of engagement between members of the minority ethnic community and the media. The media should have direct contact with the minority ethnic community, as there is a danger that if you are putting a person who works in the media in touch with someone, then you never truly know their motives.

Catherine commented on the language used by the media. In particular, the term 'non-nationals' which she felt is a bit disrespectful as everyone has a nationality. All too often it is the shock news that sells papers – we cannot change that but it can be counteracted. Catherine gave an example of the recent story of a Nigerian born soccer player who was awarded an Irish passport – this was a positive news story because of the human interest.

There are also English language issues which come into play. For example some members of the minority ethnic community are unable to speak sufficient English to secure jobs and this is disadvantaging their career opportunities. The Government is not doing anything to improve their language skills and Catherine recommended that immigrants should be provided with the opportunity of taking English language classes.

Catherine felt that RTE Radio is more developed than TV. RTE Television scrapped their Mono programme which focused on immigrant issues. RTE also have very few presenters from a minority ethnic background. Catherine concluded that the BBC has a much more developed commitment to promoting diversity.

Question and Answer

- The question was asked of Catherine Reilly, who is the audience for Metro Eireann?

Catherine Reilly responded that the majority of Metro Eireann's audience are nationals who are interested in diversity. However there are quite a large number of non-nationals, particularly Africans, who purchase the paper.

Eddie Kerr, SEEDs informed the group of Global Eye which is a 2-page feature in the local City News produced by members of the minority ethnic community. This publication is distributed to 40,000 houses. The paper takes a proactive stance and aims to challenge the negative media headlines. Eddie commented that there is a need for a 2-way process – we need to inform the indigenous population about the ethnic minorities and the ethnic minorities need to talk to each other and meet each other. Global Eye aims to counterbalance the negativity, is a point of information and a social contact. Society is changing and instead of 'these people are stealing our jobs' attitude, we need to focus on 'these people are contributing to our local economy' attitude.

Catherine highlighted the importance of Metro Eireann for everyone. It is crucial for Dublin and the rest of the country. Metro Eireann have a lack of

resources at the moment and possibly could do more to promote the paper; however a lot of progress has been made.

- Has your work (Radio Foyle and Metro Eireann) included issues to do with Irish Travellers?

Deirdre commented that she is not aware of any travellers' stories featuring recently, particularly in the newsroom, but there will soon be a feature on Radio Foyle on First Communion. A couple of years ago, they did a story of a cross community group working with the Travelling community. Radio Foyle also produced a feature where a member of the Travelling community spoke about arranged marriage. In terms of commitment, the BBC has a broad commitment – they have core values and must reflect diversity.

Catherine commented that Irish Travellers are included on the news remit of Metro Eireann. Metro Eireann have featured the Travelling community in their work, for example, they recently carried a feature on an Irish Traveller who grew up in England and put himself through college. They also recently covered a news item on a Gardai and Travellers 'stand-off'. Metro Eireann are trying to dedicate specific pages to the Travelling community but are limited because of advertising and lack of funding.

- What is your policy for promoting positive reports on the minority ethnic community and are you proactive in approaching community leaders for their opinion on diversity issues?

Deirdre commented that, over the last year, there has almost been a revolution on how Radio Foyle has sought out members of the minority ethnic community and how ethnic minorities have sought out Radio Foyle. Now members of the minority ethnic community contact Radio Foyle on a daily basis to advise of events in their community and of issues which are affecting them. However, although it has improved immensely, it is still a little superficial and dialogue does need to increase. In contrast to NI, for example in Lancashire there have been generations of multicultural living. Therefore, producers are 'inside' the communities and their weekly review will always have a multi cultural content. Within the BBC, their contributors have always had to reflect religion and gender – that is the way it has always been. The BBC are now trying to look at things in a different way. It is not automatic yet, and it is early days yet for it to be an instinct. We still tend to think in terms of Catholic and Protestant but it is changing and Radio Foyle has changed fundamentally. Because there are so many ethnic minorities in the area, they are driving us. The momentum is now – we need to see the urgency of issues in the community. We need to see the negative and the positive – we do not want to create ghettos again. The media plays a major part in this and the media needs to create the challenge for the community.

- Who influences who – to what extent does the media influence society and vice versa?

Catherine commented that she had spent time in Ballymena which had received a lot of negative publicity about racial attacks. Catherine's experience was that there was a great feeling of positivity about the area – she met with many people from the Chinese and Portuguese communities and the feeling was that there was a very unbalanced view coming through

the media. NI is making a big effort to welcome ethnic minorities into the community and journalists need to reflect this. The media does dictate an image of society rather than the other way round. However, there is a danger of being patronising and condescending. It's about confidence building and accessibility - building the skills for people to speak. The community and media have a responsibility to tell the stories of the minority ethnic community.

Deirdre commented that it is still early days for NI - the traditional way in NI is to tick the box and say, yes we've covered the Chinese New Year. It's no longer outside the core of our community, its right at the centre of it. In terms of peoples' ethics and intentions, there is a desire to do this and to get out into the community. Out and about reporters get ideas, but Radio Foyle is short-staffed. If Radio Foyle had more staff on the ground, there would be many types of stories emerging from the minority community and people would embrace diversity. Deirdre referred again to the homophobic issues – by highlighting this issue, the media was able to open up discussion and debate. Progress has been made but we have a long way to go.

Dr Gail Baylis – University of Ulster, School of Media, Film and Journalism

Gail began by analysing the effects of what photographs can portray. There is no such thing as a positive or negative photograph. How is the picture taken? What is in it? How is it used? What is the context? - are all aspects which need to be considered whilst analysing the effects of the photograph. Once the photo is taken, there are various further stages: production, post production, extra post production. All of these stages affect how we view an image. Therefore, it is not just how a photographer takes a picture, but what is done post production, for example a filter can totally change an image or pictures can be cropped and enlarged, thereby giving an unfair representation.

Gail showed an example of a picture from the Daily Telegraph which included Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness and how by cropping the photograph this actually distorts the image. Gail also showed an example of a picture that was taken of a group of black people mourning the death of a family member and how the headline can totally change peoples' perceptions. Editorial decisions are taken before we see a photograph - for example, where in the newspaper does it appear – on the front, inside, is it a large image, how is it anchored, what will the headline/caption be. All of these decisions will effect our perceptions. We are generally drawn to a photograph first, then we read the headline, the headline directs us and we are influenced by it. On their own, photographs cannot communicate huge amounts. Once the headline/caption is added, we read it differently and it takes on a new meaning. Headlines can make a photo move from potentially positive to negative associations. If we try to produce a positive image, in terms of an ethnic group or ethnic culture, then you run into the danger of stereotyping. Gail showed various examples: the Guardian weekend feature which showed numerous people who work in the food industry in Britain. The feature tried to portray diversity, and also provided narratives from the people featured in the photographs but was it fracturing identity?

Another example which Gail illustrated was a recent photograph featured in Global Eye: 2 boys (one from Belize and one from Iran) who were on the beach writing their names in the sand and the water was washing their names away – the inference of this image was that the wave of diversity brings new beginnings.

The key to remember is that photos can always be controlled and manipulated, and that image is a very powerful thing.

Question and Answer/Discussion

- Some of the participants felt that the Guardian was at fault with its focus on Belfast being the racist capital of Europe. It gave the impression that racism was new to Northern Ireland. That is not the case – racism has always been here. It is important to focus on the attacks but also to look at them from an historical perspective. In trying to do good, the papers can portray the wrong message.
- Gail had mentioned stereotyping in her presentation - is there any time when you would want to stereotype?

Many ethnic minorities want to hold on to a core sense of who they are – in this case stereotypes are not dangerous. An image can also serve as a transitional phase.

An additional comment was made that people do tend to cluster, to find solace in their own community. Some move from one country to another and they need to form a sense of community. Migration is a big issue and we should support the people who move between countries. Journalists can focus on an issue such as multi-occupancy of flats and hot-bedding and portray it is a new phenomenon, when in fact it has been in existence for many years.

It was also pointed out that headlines do not necessarily influence our reading of a picture. The reader should not be underestimated – it is dangerous to believe that people cannot filter information. People can reject a headline but generally a headline does influence how you read an image – it anchors it. Sometimes a headline and image can be put together in order for the paper to be deliberately provocative. Newspapers can have a political agenda.

- Participants highlighted that some of the key issues surrounding the media and their portrayal of the minority ethnic community include: Who are the media actually communicating to? Are they speaking to the established community? How do they communicate? Is their approach to diversity critical?

It was pointed out that people do have preconceptions – for example, some audiences may be surprised when they hear members of the Chinese community speaking in broad Belfast accents. Media coverage can change these perceptions and can make the reader take notice.

- Is NI ill-equipped to deal maturely with people from other countries?

It was pointed out that feedback is needed from non-nationals as to how the media could make a difference. The media need to let people know that ethnic minorities are contributing to a more productive society.

People are too quick to put non nationals in boxes, to stereotype them instantly when they see their complexion and hear their accents. However,

by identifying people as non-nationals, then you run the risk of giving them labels and creating divides – this can lead to them feeling like outsiders.

When the media refers to ethnic minorities, there are all kinds of connotations. The media need to look at things thematically rather than by country or by group. The media should start to think about the language they use, for example using language such as ‘racist attacks on Poles’ – this is lazy and the media need to try to develop a more sophisticated language rather than putting people into boxes. The media have a social responsibility to get the facts right.

Roisin O’Hagan thanked all the participants and speakers and pointed out that notes from the event will be made available on the INCORE website.