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ADJUDICATION NO: 26/A /2016

NAME OF PROGRAMME: SOLID GOLD WTH ALEX JAY
DATE OF BROADCAST: 9th JULY 2016
BROADCASTER: 702
COMPLAINANT: RAJPAL

COMPLAINT

Inappropriate and offensive mention of an event that is historically sensitive.

APPLICABLE RULE

The following clauses of the BCCSA Code of Conduct:

- 12. (1) Broadcasting service licensees are entitled to broadcast comment on and criticism of any actions or events of public importance.**
 - (2) Comment must be an honest expression of opinion and must be presented in such manner that it appears clearly to be comment, and must be made on facts truly stated or fairly indicated and referred to.**
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ADJUDICATION

- [1] The Registrar of the BCCSA received a complaint regarding a presenter's mention of a historical event that had occurred on that particular day in history.

[2] **The complaint reads as follows:**

“I am an avid 702 Solid Gold Listener. This Saturday and Sunday programme are my opportunity to relax and rejuvenate for my roles of mother, worker, wife, domestic. I almost never miss the shows as the music is therapeutic.

So, image my total amazement and shock and then disgust at hearing Alex J, during his show on the 9th July 2016 give a jovial tribute to, and acknowledge the arrival of the missionary Georg Schmidt to the shores of South Africa.

Had the DJ given an appropriate tribute, an accurate tribute, a historically sensitive tribute, hearing this horrid name may have been less offensive. The Jews would never pay tribute to Hitler in any way other than acknowledging the devastation he caused, so why should a prominent South African radio station pay tribute, in a celebratory fashion, to a man who colonised my family, my father’s people?

Surely the BCC and SAHRC should hold all media houses accountable for this kind of negligence? Or, is it blatant disregard for the first people, and real history of South Africa? This kind of behaviour should be nipped in the bud as it perpetuates the fairy tale and glorifying of European arrival; and continues to hide the true injustices South Africa’s first people were subjected to, and still experience today.

I firmly believe a code of conduct should ensure media houses do not honour, the architects of human destruction such as, George Schmidt.

I trust I got my message across despite feeling very angry. I look forward to your response.”

[3] **The Broadcaster’s response was as follows:**

“The complaint refers to a segment during the Solid Gold Show, wherein the presenter usually reads out some of the historical events, birthdays and deaths that occurred on that particular day in history. The segment is not aimed at discussing the merits or otherwise of the events that happened on that particular day. This is just a mention of the event and does not necessarily mean that the presenter endorses it or is agreeing with the merits of that event in history.

The presenter made mention of the fact that on that day (9 July) in 1757 the German missionary Georg Schmidt arrived in Table Bay. According to the entry in South African History Online, he was the first Protestant Missionary to establish a mission station in South Africa (see: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/georg-schmidt>) . It was in this context that the presenter thought it may be a historical trivia worth mentioning on his show. It is also worth noting that in mentioning the historical event, the presenter presented a very sarcastic tone throughout his mentioning of this event, particularly when he mentioned that the missionary arrived on our shores to “save us all”.

We reiterate that the presenter did not discuss or debate the merits or otherwise of a historical event on the show. It was just a brief mention not a “jovial tribute” to the missionary. The main focus of the Solid Gold Show is the music that is played.”

EVALUATION

- [4] The Complainant contends that the presenter paid tribute to the missionary Georg Schmidt – an alleged “architect of human destruction” – by acknowledging his arrival in South Africa. The material was presented in an allegedly insensitive, offensive and historically inaccurate manner, which disregarded the feelings of the “first people” and “real history” of South Africa by glorifying the arrival of Europeans and ignoring the ensuing injustice, which continues to the present day.
- [5] The Respondent argues that the item formed part of a music programme, and consisted of a mere “mention” of a historical event, which was not meant to be discussed or debated. Moreover, the information about Schmidt was presented in a “very sarcastic tone”, particularly when the presenter made reference to missionaries “saving” the people of South Africa. As such, the item was “just a brief mention” and not a “jovial tribute” to the missionary, as claimed by the Complainant.
- [6] I listened to the clip, which consisted of a piece of historical information which, whatever one’s view, cannot simply be wished away. It may in any case be argued that Georg Schmidt was, in the context of the time, far from being a villain. Various historical accounts show that he was a missionary, and that there was a redeeming side to his activities; indeed, the Dutch authorities were suspicious of the motives of a man who refused to dismiss the local people as unworthy of salvation through baptism. Schmidt founded Genadendal, which, during the presidency of Nelson Mandela, achieved recognition by becoming the new name of the official residence of the President of South Africa. Thus, no lesser figure than Mandela paid indirect tribute to Schmidt. Of course, the context has changed over the past twenty years, and there have been growing – and understandable – calls for decolonisation, and active hostility to the agents of colonialism (missionaries might be included among these). It is not clear, though, that Georg Schmidt himself is regarded as a villain, and whether he might elicit a broad reaction of disgust and anger, such as that displayed by the Complainant.
- [7] The item is a conventional piece that appears in many forms of media, including broadcast and print media, generally introduced in the form of “On this day ...”. It is

impossible to wish away the figures of history, however villainous their actions may be deemed. In today's climate, a missionary figure like Schmidt might well be regarded as contentious, and his actions offensive. However, to accuse the broadcaster of offensiveness is inaccurate and inappropriate. It is the broadcaster's duty to inform, whatever the matter, and in this case the historical figure is a noteworthy one. Clearly, the manner and tone of presentation indicates that the presenter and his colleague were well aware of the contentious nature of the missionary. Indeed, they clearly signalled this by their jocular introductory reference (a goalkeeper "saving" a ball): "On this day, the first missionary arrived in SA," the presenter states, and goes on to say that the intention was "to save us all". Light banter follows as he asks, "We did OK didn't we?", and remarks on his colleague's reaction, "Why are you raising an eyebrow?", thereby expressing doubt as to the truth of the claim that South Africa in fact "did OK" in the aftermath of missionary activity. There is nothing here that glorifies European arrival in South Africa, as the Complainant claims. Indeed, the jocular tone questions whether missionaries did in fact "save" South Africans, and the ironic tone of the presenters subtly hints that the opposite may be true, i.e. that missionary arrival precipitated the "injustices" that the Complainant refers to.

- [8] If the "reasonable man" test is used, the Complainant's argument fails to convince, as the item is a conventional format that is widely used ("On this day ..."), and which inevitably focuses on historical figures whom some may well find undesirable. The item does not deliberately set out to offend, it amounts to brief but fair comment on a matter of historical fact and public interest. To argue otherwise would be to deny the Broadcaster's right to freedom of speech – a "hard-won" right, as is frequently argued by the BCCSA. Furthermore, it should be noted that mere offensiveness is not prohibited by the Code.

After consideration of the facts before me, I find that there is no contravention of the Code and the complaint is not upheld.

**DR L GILFILLAN
COMMISSIONER OF THE BROADCASTING COMPLAINTS COMMISSION**