

BROADCAST IN COLOUR

Cultural Diversity and Television Programming in Four Countries
by Harvey May

Australian Film Commission
Creative Industries Research and Applications Centre, Brisbane, and
Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy, Brisbane.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines cultural diversity policies and practices and their impact on television programming in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia, with a focus on drama. The study looks at the relationship between multicultural history and policy, and the developments made in the representation of a culturally diverse population on each nation's television screens. For the USA, the UK and New Zealand, past and recent research, as well as policy, on the issue is presented along with professional perspectives gained from industry publications, press releases and other sources. In the case of Australia, the above methods are complemented by a survey of casts on Australian commercial drama programs and interview material with industry stakeholders. The report sets out the overseas successes for an inclusive portrayal of cultural diversity and how these broadcast industries have managed cultural diversity in the work of producing television.

A clear thread running through recent approaches (both policy and production) to the portrayal of cultural diversity is that of an everyday or mundane multiculturalism. In the production context, this means no longer presenting drama stories or characters with an exclusive focus on cultural background or the problems of being from a culturally diverse background. However, this doesn't mean programming is devoid of a culturally diverse presence. Rather, there is the likelihood that lead actors from culturally diverse backgrounds will play roles which are not dependent on, or related to, their cultural background. In the broadcasting policy context, the UK and New Zealand demonstrate that it is possible for policy to take a more active role not only in ensuring a more equitable portrayal, but also in assisting the type of portrayal. In the case of the USA, decades of civil rights action and strong lobbying from minority groups for equity in the broadcasting workplace has seen the solid establishment of a variety of 'everyday' roles for African American actors, as well as the formation of programming for 'black' audiences.

The measures for ensuring the promotion of cultural diversity on television explored in each country offer the Australian industry and policy environment a number of possibilities for improving cultural diversity on our own screens.

KEY FINDINGS

The USA

- A large distinct minority group in the USA (African Americans) has been able to establish significant organisational processes and resources for addressing a range of equity issues – including their representation on television. This has flowed through to other minority groups for claims to equity measures. However, Asian and Latino populations are still underrepresented in casts.
- Until recently, broadcasters in the USA were compelled to monitor the cultural diversity of their employees. This 30 years of monitoring resulted in well-established practices for culturally diverse casting.
- Although grass roots civil action and resultant constitutional challenges have been responsible for much policy in the direction of cultural diversity and broadcasting, constitutional challenges to Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) rules by broadcasters have also resulted in the suspension of EEO rules for monitoring and affirmative action.

The United Kingdom

- The UK has made considerable efforts in the area of EEO policy since the mid-1990s. Compared to other European nations, the UK represents a model of 'best practice' for achieving improvements in culturally diverse program production and representation. Monitoring of equity measures in broadcasting organisations for improving diversity has been recently introduced. However, the participation of actors from culturally diverse backgrounds in television programming still lags behind the social reality.
- At the executive level, the BBC and Channel Four (C4) have made commitments and set targets for increasing both culturally diverse programming and culturally diverse work places.
- The BBC and C4 have also committed to making cultural diversity a part of all programming, moving away from notions of culturally diverse programming as a separate or special division. This includes espousing a philosophy of everyday portrayals of cultural diversity as opposed to highlighting or focusing on themes of cultural diversity.

New Zealand

- Although television in New Zealand is highly deregulated, state-supported local content continues to play a role in constructing a culturally diverse, though predominantly bicultural national identity. This reflects the recent history of Maori self-determination and the incorporation of Maori culture with the mainstream.
- State-subsidised local programming, such as drama, children's TV and documentary, is required to be sensitive to and incorporate Maori culture. Unlike most subsidised local programming in other countries, such content in New Zealand must also address mainstream audiences and have a probability for market success. This has led to portrayals of cultural diversity in drama which do not prioritise cultural backgrounds or overly concentrate on issues-based stories. A Maori presence on New Zealand television has become an everyday experience, rather than an exception which draws attention.

Australia

- The proportion of actors, in ongoing roles, from culturally diverse backgrounds has improved considerably since the early 1990s. Based on findings in this research, performers from culturally diverse backgrounds represent 23 per cent of total sustaining cast members – up from an estimated 2 per cent in 1992. A significant reason for this improvement is the number of second generation immigrants taking up acting as a career. This is due in part to their participation in post-secondary drama courses.
- Australian actors born overseas in non-English speaking regions are very poorly represented in casting on commercial drama – only 3 per cent.
- In 1992, there were no Aboriginal actors appearing in sustaining roles. In 1999, two Aboriginal actors were cast in sustaining roles.
- According to the 1999 survey, there were no actors of South East Asian background working in sustaining roles in any program which was broadcast in the latter half of 1999. However, more recent research in 2001 (see paragraph below) shows this situation has improved, with at least two actors of South East Asian background working as leads.
- It was established through interviews with key production personnel that the television drama production industry is aware of and attempts to improve the portrayal of cultural diversity. However, internal and external constraints placed upon them and an alleged dearth of actors from some cultural backgrounds, led to continuing problems for actors of some backgrounds.
- An updated casting survey of actors appearing in main and guest roles in thirteen drama productions was carried out from mid-May to early August in 2001.¹ Of the thirteen programs surveyed, ten were broadcast on commercial television networks, with two screening on the ABC and one on SBS. Of all actors surveyed in main and guest cast across both commercial television and the two public broadcasters, 26 per cent were of culturally diverse backgrounds. The percentages of casts from culturally diverse backgrounds on commercial and public service broadcasters were very similar. Considering main roles and guest roles separately, actors of culturally diverse backgrounds occupied 20 per cent of main roles and 28 per cent of guest roles. This confirms anecdotal evidence from the 1999 research that actors of culturally diverse backgrounds are more likely to obtain work in guest roles, rather than in lead roles. Indigenous participation fell from 3 per cent in 1999 to 1.1 per cent in 2001.

The research demonstrates that the three countries other than Australia have made significant improvements through explicit programs and policies which address cultural diversity and television. However, it is also clear that such attention to cultural diversity is framed within the demands of meeting market expectations and program success – both commercially and critically. The report establishes that carefully considered involvement in, and attention to, cultural diversity in policy and program production at all levels, can yield valuable results for all stakeholders.

¹ Marion Jacka, *Cultural Diversity in Australian Television Drama*, 2002.

1. CHARTING THE WATERS

Introduction

On most nights on Australian network television, it's very likely that one comes across a mixture of programs which are distinguished by their genre and, in particular, by their country of origin. Australian content rules dictate that 55 per cent of programs broadcast between 6.00am and midnight on commercial stations are Australian product. In addition, the three commercial networks (Channels 7, 9 and 10) are obliged to broadcast minimum amounts of first release drama. As prime time programming is usually expensive to produce, it is almost exclusively shown in the evenings. The two public service broadcasters (the ABC and the SBS) also produce local programming across a range of genres, as is typical for public service broadcasters (PSB). However, watching TV in Australia also means watching TV programs made elsewhere. On commercial stations, it is most likely that programs from the USA will dominate viewing on certain nights. If public broadcasting is the preferred choice, then Australian fare will most likely be complemented by programming made in the United Kingdom on the ABC (the comprehensive PSB), and with more 'exotic' fare on the SBS (the multicultural PSB). New Zealand programming hardly features in Australian schedules, although it can also now count as local programming for the purposes of satisfying the content quotas on Australian commercial television.²

When viewing television from the United States and the United Kingdom in particular, there is the tendency to see their programs as presenting a greater cultural diversity compared with Australia. This can be attributed, for example, to the prominence of African American actors in American police dramas, the wide diversity of medical staff characters in *ER*, the clear presence of non-Anglos in *The Bill*, and a range of Maori performers in New Zealand's *Shortland Street*. In non-fiction programming, one also glimpses a range of culturally diverse news anchors, entertainers and show hosts in the USA and the UK not seen on Australian television outside the SBS. This study attempts to go beyond such anecdotal evaluations in terms of assessing cultural diversity on TV by examining television broadcast policy and practice in the United States, England and New Zealand. This comparative research is followed in chapter 5 by an analysis of cultural diversity on Australian commercial television drama. Chapter 5 also includes the results of a casting survey of actors working in drama and prolific extracts from interviews with actors, writers, producers and casting directors on the issue of cultural diversity and commercial drama.

The choice of the USA, the UK and New Zealand for comparison was also based on their distinctive approaches to broadcasting regulation which have had profound effects upon the business of broadcasting – be it commercial or public. The United Kingdom, for example, shares a dual broadcasting system with Australia in that a well-established public broadcasting system exists alongside a commercial sector. New Zealand's television landscape consists of a transformed and corporatised public broadcaster, where state support for local programming is facilitated by a funding agency, which provides assistance to programming broadcast on both public and commercial stations. However, as a state-owned enterprise, the public broadcaster in New Zealand is required to return a dividend to the government. The United States has a predominantly commercial system with only a very minor role for PSB. The four countries are also significant for their histories of immigration. The ways in which each nation has dealt with ever increasing diversity in a broad sense has had an impact upon how that diversity ends up on the small screen.

Immigrant Countries

The United States, New Zealand and Australia share two profound characteristics of contemporary social development. The indigenous populations in the three countries experienced near total eviction by colonising settlers. Predominantly, European immigrants made up the principal numbers of such settlers. However, the United States stands alone in its ability to evoke immigration as a powerful nation-making symbol. Any such comparable myth with regard to a 'nation-making

2 For an explanation of the regulations governing local content rules see: Australian Broadcasting Authority, *The Broadcasting Services (Australian Content) Standard 1999*.

experience³ is not so evident in Australia's and New Zealand's no less significant immigration histories. Australia developed a state-interventionist, or governmental, approach to managing the social, political and cultural spheres of immigration. It also defined immigration's social consequences and management under the term multiculturalism. Endeavours to improve cultural diversity on television have mostly been framed through policy rather than legal process, as in the United States. In the USA, multiculturalism as a social and cultural consequence of immigration and slavery has its roots in different places. The most significant is minority civil action of the 1960s against social inequalities – predominantly in the African American community. This led to, among other things, affirmative action programs for participation and employment.

New Zealand shares with Australia an overwhelmingly British history and legacy of colonisation. Nonetheless, there are keen differences between Australia and New Zealand. Like Australia and the USA, New Zealand has an indigenous 'minority' population. However, unlike the USA and Australia, in New Zealand it is the indigenous Maori population who are central to negotiating cultural diversity and not the various migrant groups. As a consequence, the relationship between the dominant European society and the indigenous population has seen the establishment of a not unproblematic biculturalism involving the Maori and Pakeha.⁴ Mirroring the advance of black politics in the USA, a reassertion of political rights resonating from the Treaty of Waitangi (1840), has seen a 'Maori revival' since the 1980s, which has flowed over into a noticeable television presence.

In contrast to Australia, New Zealand and the USA, the status of cultural diversity in the latter half of the twentieth century in the United Kingdom has evolved from the movement of people to the UK from former English colonies or dependent states, such as the Commonwealth Caribbean, Africa and the Indian sub-continent (migrants from this region are referred to as Asian in Britain). As the 'mother country', contemporary Britain itself has not experienced the displacement of an indigenous population, although assertions for independence expressed by Wales, Scotland and Ireland certainly come to bear. Rather, the 'relatively unorganised and voluntary'⁵ arrival of 'coloured'⁶ migrants seeking better life chances from 1948 onwards, fractured any impression of a racially and culturally homogenous Britain (aside from those conflicts of independence surrounding Wales, Scotland and Ireland, of course). By the 1970s, a series of Race Relation Acts and Commissions began to redefine the politics of citizenship and belonging in the UK. The 1970s was also the location of black protest and radicalised groups who were not dissimilar to Black Power in the USA. The late 1990s saw Britain take the lead in European contexts for Equal Employment Opportunity and affirmative action strategies, which are also being applied to the television industry.

Policy and Industry Contexts

How have broadcast policy makers responded to the challenge of late twentieth century migration and the concomitant expectations that multicultural policies promise? And what have been the responses of the mainstream production industry to better reflect their audiences and thus attract significant demographics within those markets? The relationship between regulatory obligations for equity and the portrayal of cultural diversity with the 'real world' business of program production are a key feature here. The tension between the two is well illustrated in the following example from the United States which is known for its 'quota' system of proportional employment.

Legislative obligations for achieving proportional employment bring about a range of responses. The view that such measures amount to brute quotas is one such response. It is not uncommon to perceive a cynical criticism expressed by media commentators with regard to explicit measures for representing diversity. As an example of such critique, the following extract is an editorial piece from the *National Review* in the United States, which ran an ongoing competition to 'find the best use of

3 J. Highham, 'The Movement of Peoples, 1788-1989' in G. Withers, *Commonality and Difference*, Allen Et Unwin, North Sydney, 1991.

4 The terms biculturalism and Pakeha have fluctuating and contested meanings through recent New Zealand history. Spoonley (in D. Pearson, *A Dream Deferred*, Allen Et Unwin, Wellington, 1990) has defined Pakeha as New Zealanders of a European background whose cultural understandings have been shaped by their location in NZ and membership to the dominant group.

5 Z. Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992, p.12.

6 The term 'coloured', while imbued with social prejudice, is significant for it was the skin colour of what was a relatively small number of Commonwealth Caribbean migrants in the early post-war years which initiated issues of national belonging, citizenship and the expression of a British multi-racial society.

multicultural to mean "good" or "worthy". The winner on this occasion sent in the following press release from Disney for an upcoming TV movie – bracketed text belongs to the *Review's* editor:

Disney's newest *Cinderella* passes multicultural muster with flying colors. The title role belongs to singer-actress Brandy [who is black]... Her prince is Paolo Montalban, a newcomer of Hispanic descent. Milk-skinned Bernadette Peters has the role of the wicked stepmother whose two haughty daughters are played by white and black actresses [Ugly Sisters under the skin, presumably]. Whitney Houston is the fairy godmother, Jason Alexander is the Prince's loyal steward – Lionel, and Whoopi Goldberg gets to be Queen Constantina. 'We hope that this *Cinderella*, as we approach the millennium,' says co-producer Debra Martin Chase, 'is reflective of what our society is today.'⁷

The *Review's* editor goes on to add:

Not quite. The Ugly Sisters—oops, sorry, haughty daughters, should surely be white and Asian. But the new Disney *Cinderella* is a brilliant reflection of what multiculturalism itself means in our society, ie: a monocultural fairy tale involving people of different races and ethnic groups – so, congratulations and the usual bottle of bubbly to Mr Rood.⁸

The light-hearted sarcasm in the above article reflects an attitude that taking explicit measures for improving cultural diversity is somehow discreditable and hardly worth the effort on the part of a 'not to be trusted' commercially driven industry. Transferring this example to Australia however, it is doubtful whether a telemovie rendition of *Cinderella* could, or even would, muster such a diverse cast in the first place. Proportional representation and a Disneyfication of multiculturalism are not the only rationales to explain why such a colour blind *Cinderella* is more likely in the United States. For one thing, the establishment of culturally diverse performers in the USA has a longer history than in the comparable countries – more of this in chapter 2. The significant market value of names such as Brandy, Whitney Houston and Whoopi Goldberg also carry the security of likely success for a production. Only in the last ten years have a pool of actors from culturally diverse backgrounds attained the 'star' status necessary to play leads in racially non-designated roles in the USA. In their comprehensive study of ethnicity and the media, Shohat and Stam⁹ make the valid point that for a film to be considered 'economically viable', the demand for 'universal' stars, who are mostly white, highlights the relationship between racism and capitalism. The question could be asked – would Disney have pursued a culturally diverse cast without the ratings confidence of such well-established and successful performers of culturally diverse backgrounds? And as the *National Review's* editor quips, how does the presence of a culturally diverse cast in this production of a European fairy tale describe multiculturalism? Whether the suspension of disbelief required to take pleasure in a fairy tale is also required for audiences to accept such a diverse cast as the one above is debatable. Take the weekly hospital drama *ER* for instance, which also contains a diverse cast yet is a critically acclaimed ratings winner. Aside from cynical responses to arbitrarily diverse casting, one finds agreement among acting guilds, policy makers and sections of the production industry that non-traditional casting is nevertheless more desirable than wall-to-wall casting of performers from Anglo backgrounds.

The above example of *Cinderella* and the fondness for critics in attacking noticeable episodes of cultural diversity in casting, may only end up contributing to the difficulties that performers and creative stakeholders face in establishing better casting practices. Cultural critics, in particular, are more likely responding to the 'hair trigger sensitivity' which surrounds the issue of representation and cultural diversity. As occasional viewers, they may often be unaware of the pragmatic rationale behind such casting or may not gain the full meaning of it the way audiences, who have formed long-term attachments and more sophisticated understandings to particular long-form television dramas, do. The question needs to be asked of such critics, exactly how many and how often does one have to see a black *Cinderella* before they are no longer a token measure.

In Australia, the casting of Aboriginal actors in mainstream TV drama brings with it a number of concerns for the actors and program producers alike. This is partly due to the lack of Aboriginal faces on commercial TV in the past, especially in roles which were not directly related to their cultural

⁷ Disney press release quoted in J. O'Sullivan, *National Review*, 13 October 1997, Vol. 49 Issue 19, p.8.

⁸ J. O' Sullivan.

⁹ E. Shohat & R. Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism in the Media*, Routledge, London, 1994, p.190.

background. In the daily serial *Breakers*, for example, actor Heath Bergersen played a predominantly non-ethnic-specific role, which was not written or conceived of as an 'Aboriginal character'. The show also included a young gay character and other actors of culturally diverse backgrounds, such as a young female Asian journalist. It is worth noting how such casting in an Australian soap may be viewed as somehow too conspicuous without the 'worthy' multicultural credentials an ABC or SBS series would carry. In any case, the 'burden' on Bergersen's character manifests itself among cultural critics and with his own people who may interpret his role in different ways. Bergersen comments on his role on the show:

With feedback, most Aboriginal people are happy that there's an Aboriginal actor in this series. Some do say, 'well look you're the only blackfella there'. When I was doing *Sweat*, I thought and felt a little bit that I was a token blackfella – but even then it really was all right. Even *Ocean Girl* was OK. But with *Breakers*, my background is definitely not a problem. The good thing about *Breakers* is the different people are just there in the neighbourhood – like when you walk down the street. I remember when I'd see another Aboriginal on the screen – it makes you happy, you know 'there's a blackfella!' I remember when Aaron (Pederson) was doing *Gladiators* and the first time I saw him I said, 'Hey man! Shit it's an Aboriginal' and someone else said 'Yeah, I think he's from the Territory'.

On the one hand, Bergersen's comments illustrate a perception of continuing Aboriginal invisibility on our TV screens.¹⁰ On the other hand, his remarks also demonstrate the powerful argument of many in the casting industry that the unambiguous presence of indigenous actors serves as a role model for aspiring actors. His comments also give insight to the sense of community felt by indigenous people, a sense of community made all the more intimate due to their shared sense of exclusion from elements of the mainstream with which they may wish to link up. At a more personal level, Bergersen was offended at the suggestion that his role was tokenistic, as such statements call into question his professional integrity – and that of his people. But more vexing are questions of what might be an 'appropriate' portrayal for an Aboriginal character and whether such a question is not redundant in the first place. While stereotyping can be negative, it would also be unhelpful to write such roles as only 'positive' ones. Related to the cry of tokenism, there is the danger of critics seeking out justifications for their assessments based on institutionalised categories of stereotyping and good or bad portrayals. Shohat and Stam label such criticism procrustean and illustrate the point in the context of the historical stereotyping of blacks in the USA:

The critic forces diverse fictive characters into pre-established categories. Behind every black child performer the critic discerns the 'pickaninny'; behind every sexually attractive black actor a 'buck'; behind every corpulent or nurturing black female a 'mammy'. Such reductionist simplifications run the risk of reproducing the very racial essentialism they were designed to combat (emphasis added).¹¹

In addition, one could question the appropriateness of criticism aimed at a minority performer's role when that role is valued as significant, not only for the progression of the performer's career, but as a site of expectation and hope for others in their community. Bergersen's continuing role as Rueben on a series such as *Breakers* allows for multiple readings of his character over time. For example, one mundane story line has Rueben going to the gym to achieve a better looking body with a gay mate one week (they both give up), but a few weeks down the track in a different plot, Rueben tries to help out a Koori friend having problems with drugs. A drama such as *Breakers* may at different times, ignore *or* explore the cultural histories of the diverse characters in it – as such, a show would with any of its characters.

Multiculturalism and Cultural Diversity: Slippery Terms

Not only do the terms multiculturalism and cultural diversity signify different things in each of the countries, the terms are also very much contested within research contexts. Multiculturalism in Australia is mostly understood as the emergence in the 1970s of government programs to aid in the settlement of recently arrived migrants and an acknowledgment of the contribution that migrant

10 See J. Hartley & A. McKee, *The Indigenous Public Sphere: The Reporting and Reception of Aboriginal Issues in the Australian Media*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, for a recent study of how Indigenous Australia is represented, understood and reported across a variety of media texts and genres.

11 E. Shohat & R. Stam, p.199.

cultures make to Australian life. It also applies to the educative role of the state in promoting acceptance in the wider community of the reality of a multicultural society. Reducing multiculturalism to notions of government programs for community tolerance alone will unavoidably lead to a critical stance. Such criticism is usually an extension on the themes of multiculturalism as spice and seasoning which brightens up the mainstream, or multiculturalism as paternal control. While there is some validity in these critiques of multiculturalism, they allow little room to move, and commit multiculturalism to a destiny of gloom and failure.

The term 'cultural diversity' is able to signify more than the simple reality of a multicultural society. For one thing, multiculturalism at the level of official discourse was, and perhaps continues to be, a concept associated with immigrants of non-English speaking background. In the initial stages of multicultural policy, this was indeed the case and indigenous peoples were thought to be outside this domain. However, in the late 1980s and beyond, the umbrella of multicultural policy now covers, not unproblematically, 'all Australians', including Aboriginal Australia. Both pragmatically and politically, indigenous groups see themselves as having very particular needs for achieving equity and are uniquely the only non-immigrant community in the country. So, cultural diversity may assume the inclusion of indigenous groups without the misconception that multiculturalism carries. In addition, cultural diversity moves beyond ethnicity to embrace multiple and co-existing categories such as sexuality, disability, religion, class and gender.

In the United States, a critical multicultural perspective takes multiculturalism away from connotations of liberal pluralism and tolerance towards a discourse of empowerment and institutional transformation, based on constitutional challenges. While multiculturalism is not universally understood this way in all four countries, both Australia's and the UK's variety of multiculturalism do contain institutional facilities for addressing structural inequalities. However, unlike the United States, more explicit regulatory measures for improving equity in Australian workplaces are mostly confined to the public service, with private industry subject only to anti-discrimination law. At the level of broadcasting in Australia, this means one can refer to codes of practice and guidelines which, to varying degrees, promote non-discriminatory practices for the portrayal of a culturally diverse society. The foundations of such measures in Australia and the UK are based in official multicultural and race relations policy, while in the USA and New Zealand, advocacy politics has played a larger role.

This is not to say that multicultural debate should be about measurable outcomes, whether they be the result of civil action or policy measures. Multiculturalism also denotes ways of *thinking* about racism and can either be viewed as being implicated in the preservation of racism or working against it. Espousing the former analysis, critics view multiculturalism as enabling the dominant (ie, white) culture to fetishise a 'corporate-managed United Colors of Benetton pluralism'.¹² This is associated with notions of multiculturalism linked to the enjoyment of exotic food, clothes, art and so on. This evaluation of multiculturalism deems a consumer approach to ethnic diversity as doing little to transform inequalities at the institutional level. According to this analysis, the status quo is maintained while a façade of safe engagement with immigrant groups screens their marginalisation. In the Australian context, Hage expresses it thus:

While the dominant white culture merely and unquestionably exists, migrant cultures exist for the latter [white cultures]. Their value [migrant cultures], or the viability of their preservation as far as White Australians are concerned, lies in their function as enriching cultures. It is in this sense that the discourse of enrichment contributes to the positioning of non-White Australians within the White Nation fantasy.¹³

The above observation of multiculturalism as a hegemonic United Colors of Benetton is persuasive. However, it assumes that this brand of multiculturalism is the dominantly understood variety among 'White Australia', a group which of itself is no homogeneous or transparent community. While it is true that multiculturalism at times continues to be understood and promoted as uncomplicated enrichment, an alternative analysis is possible. Indeed, critics such as Hage provide the framework for considering multiculturalism in a more constructive sense. While continuing to acknowledge the importance of policy for bettering the life chances of immigrants, multiculturalism at the official level can also signify

12 E. Shohat & R. Stam, p.299.

13 G. Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, Pluto Press, Annandale, 1998, p.121.

that an immigrant presence in Australia *is* the mainstream, is *not* marginal and is *not* problematic.

In previous decades, immigrant and indigenous groups were indeed presented in the media as variously exotic or problematic. The problematisation of multiculturalism may stem from early policy, which framed the migrant presence as a set of social dilemmas requiring attention. This attitude transferred to stories on television drama, which occasionally dealt with a multicultural narrative in either one-off episodes or extended guest appearances. Programs such as *Prisoner*, *GP* and *A Country Practice* ran episodes with predominantly guest cast members, which focused on the difficulties, misunderstandings or prejudice surrounding life as an immigrant. And, on a few occasions, one would also see attempts to grapple with Aboriginal Australia. Very often, such guest roles would be written as problems to be teased out or solved. Conflict is, of course, the staple of television drama and so the occurrence is hardly surprising. However, what was exceptional was the lack of roles which allowed a more mundane representation of multicultural and indigenous experience. This extends to notions of non-stereotypical casting, whereby a diverse cultural and linguistic background (DCALB) member of cast is *not* employed on the basis of their cultural background. Non-specific casting practices in the case of actors from culturally diverse backgrounds presents an 'everyday' multicultural reality.

My position understands official multicultural policy and discourses of cultural diversity and equity as *enabling* devices, for the progression of bottom-up rather than top-down possibilities for a heterogeneous community. I accept that such analysis again falls into the trap of marking out immigrant or indigenous groups as places of extraordinary cultural symptoms. However, this brings us back to articulating a denotation of 'everyday' multiculturalism which avoids the spectacular. Hage offers the following insight to an everyday multiculturalism based on what he believes to be a mainstream multicultural society, particularly in a place like western Sydney:

While we are talking, a Lebanese woman has picked up the daughter of her Anglo neighbour and taken her to school with her own daughter. Another meets up with her Indian and Greek friends for a session of gym in the swimming pool in Mount Druitt. Other parents from all sorts of backgrounds are meeting after school and watching their kids play football or soccer – and sit together and talk ... It's not news, it's very boring. But this is the dominant form of everyday life in Sydney today.¹⁴

The idea of a mundane or boring conception of multiculturalism may at first seem provocative and absurd at the same time. It flies in the face of much of the motivation, support *and* success for multicultural events, arts, writing and audio/visual product based on the 'non-boring' nature of Australia's cultural diversity. But in the realm of daily and weekly long-form television dramas based on the comings and goings of our neighbourhoods, cities, cop shops, hospitals and schools, a less than always spectacular presentation of culturally diverse Australia moves us on from exceptionalism to mainstreaming.

Such a mundane theory of multiculturalism has its limits. Aside from the conflict with the marketable notion of multiculturalism based on diversity as commodity, a boring multiculturalism appears at odds with more fashionable discourses of global identities. The last decade, in particular, has seen a re-evaluation of the imperialist paradigm, especially in relation to the once assumed dominance of Western media. The exchange of people, cultures and their media across national boundaries as well as hybrid identities formed by such movements challenges mainstream television broadcasters to serve a diffuse cosmopolitan audience. An everyday multiculturalism, which favours cultural diversity as part of the mainstream, could be construed as flattening out cultural difference through a de facto conformity to the dominant. However, once again, this assumes the non-permeability of the mainstream to be transformed by diversity and places cultural diversity permanently at the fringes.

So what are we left with? On the one hand, the United Colors of Benetton approach to multiculturalism commits culturally diverse groups to a performed ethnicity and an unwitting expectation from the mainstream, including the state, that cultural maintenance is an acceptable foundation for a multicultural reality. Such an attitude to television programming would envisage an embalmed portrayal of cultural diversity. A cosmopolitan analysis of diversity and programming may move beyond celebratory 'difference' (as in a liberal-pluralist approach), to hybrid identities offering a dispersion of meaning and identity, which are fluid and conflicting. However, there is also the risk

of a cosmopolitan approach being 'doomed to mere aesthetic spectatorship'¹⁵ or more critically, simply sentimentalising the Other. The notion of a mundane or boring multiculturalism, however, may best fit our focus for the 'every-days of our lives' portrayal of society in mainstream programming. The desire for non-ethnic specific casting, for example, sits well with Hage's description of day-to-day life in western Sydney. However, this does not exclude examination and analysis of issues surrounding 'colour', hybrid identities, or cosmopolitan energies, which relate to cultural diversity and programming. And importantly, analysis of institutional practice and policy intervention (or lack of) must also feature in order to examine sites of transforming practice in programming and cultural diversity.

The next three chapters deal directly with television programming and cultural diversity in the USA, the UK and New Zealand. These chapters employ a combination of policy analysis and reviews of previous research on cultural diversity and television. Industry perspectives are also presented, along with examples of programming in the three countries. Such an analysis provides insight into the state of play in these countries and attempts to clarify the working contexts which underpin the portrayal of cultural diversity and television in these nations. How each nation has dealt with cultural diversity, within their cultural, economic and social fabric is also examined in order to better understand their differences and similarities with respect to cultural diversity and television.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to Australia, starting with a history of policy and research related to the issue of cultural diversity and television. This is followed by presenting the results of a casting survey carried out in 1999. The research involved a comprehensive survey of actors working in commercial drama, in order to assess the number of leading actors from culturally diverse backgrounds appearing in such shows. A two-week content analysis of programming was also carried out to determine if actors from culturally diverse backgrounds were playing roles that were either specific to their cultural background or non-ethnic specific. In order to help explain the results of this research, interviews with key industry production personnel and actors were carried out. Excerpts from these interviews provide an exceptional opportunity to try to understand the reasons for both improvements and continuing black spots in the portrayal of cultural diversity on Australian commercial television. The methodology of this chapter differs from the preceding three chapters. While survey work and extensive interviews were possible in researching the Australian context, this was not practical for the overseas countries. Nevertheless, a valuable amount of information on cultural diversity and television from both policy and industry perspectives was collected from overseas sources, making informed comparison possible. This research is presented in the following chapters.

15 B. Robbins, 'Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism', in P. Cheah & B. Robbins (Eds.), *Cosmopolitanism: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1998, p.4.

2. THE UNITED STATES: AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, 'QUOTAS' AND DIVERSITY RIGHTS

Power to the People: Multiculturalism in the USA

The settlement of America by European immigrants has a lengthy history in comparison to Australia and New Zealand. While the percentage of overseas-born in the USA at any one time over history has never surpassed 15 per cent, the number of people who identify with a particular ethnic origin is significant. The main ethnic groups of migrants residing in the United States are: 55 million who claim German descent; 50 million English; 45 million Irish; 30 million African Americans; 26 million Italian and French; 24 million Latino; and 4 million Asian.¹⁶ Quantitatively, it is estimated that in twenty to thirty years, the USA may approximate a 'majority minority' society, meaning that the category non-white will make up more than half of the population.¹⁷ On a more political and ideological basis, the hegemony of a dominant white and middle class America has been open to fissures for some time.

Post-Revolution America began to witness the emergence of an ideological republican-based identity, founded on shared visions for a strong, diverse, yet individualistic, America. Immigration was seen as an integral part of the development in a 'United' States. A continuum of immigration history which lasted into the twentieth century, conceived immigration as belonging to the myth of the USA as an unbounded society. However, from World War I onwards, the integrity of a boundless culture was undermined. During the 1950s and 1960s, black politics, combined with the civil rights movement, drew attention inexorably to the status of minorities in the USA.¹⁸

Until the 1960s, a taken for granted assimilationist attitude existed towards immigrants in the United States. In later years, a philosophy of cultural pluralism somewhat replaced the 'melting pot' and the term has similarities with Australian multiculturalism of the 1970s. However, institutionalised programs for managing immigration such as those in Australia were not apparent. From the Kennedy era onwards, a notion of multiculturalism grew out of the civil rights movement, which accorded affirmative action to the black community and then to other minority populations. Prior to the 1960s, the explicit discrimination of blacks had been challenged in the famous *Brown vs Board of Education* action which saw the Supreme Court put an end to segregated schooling, and thus created the constitutional foundation for equal opportunity.¹⁹ The impetus for the ensuing civil action of the 1960s is generally considered to be unrest amongst urbanised blacks in ghettos and a forceful awareness among the black community for equal rights.

Affirmative action was intended initially only for the black population but, as it is based on social equality and not on cultural recognition, it was extended to women, Hispanics and other minority groups. Affirmative action should not be confused with the application of explicit quotas in the workplace – a common misconception. This is particularly relevant in the area of casting where equality is thus reduced to a purely quantitative measure. The quality of opportunity is of paramount importance, as is the recognition of minority cultures and the facility for them to control both recognition and representation. Criticisms of American multiculturalism begin with questions about the effectiveness of affirmative action, which in the black community has been seen to benefit the middle class African American.²⁰ The reality for many in the black community has not meant parity in life chances. The vision of the Huxtables in *The Cosby Show* offers contradictory interpretations of black America in this context.²¹ While being criticised for presenting a fantasy of middle class

16 R. A. Gutierrez, 'Hispanic Diaspora and Chicano Identity in the United States', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 98: 1 & 2, 1998, p.212.

17 N. Williams, 'Multiculturalism: Issues for the Twenty-First Century' in L. L. Naylor (Ed.), *Cultural Diversity in the United States*, Bergin & Garvey, Westport, 1997, p.28.

18 J. Highham, p.7.

19 M. Hogan-Garcia, 'African-Americans as a Cultural Group' in L. Naylor, 1997, p.150.

20 M. Wieviorka, 'Is Multiculturalism the Answer', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21: 5, 1998, p.904, and B.K. Fair, 'America's Equality Promise: Can You Tell Me Where it's Gone?', *Journal of American Ethnic Studies*, 18: 4.

21 For an examination of 'for and against' arguments of the *The Cosby Show*, see Justin Lewis, 'The Power of Popular Television: The Case of *The Cosby Show*' in *The Media Studies Reader*, T. O'Sullivan & Y. Jewkes (Eds), Arnold, London, 1997, pp.91-100. For an analysis of the show's success in global markets and an examination of 'blackness and international audiences' see Timothy Havens, 'The biggest show in the world': race and the global popularity of *The Cosby Show*, *Media, Culture and Society*, 22, 4, pp.371-391.

American meritocracy for black Americans, *The Cosby Show* was also considered innovative in the way it de-ethnicised the Huxtable family. The show presents a connection between affirmative action of the 1960s with contemporary contradictions:

In the late 1980s and early 90s, shows such as *Cosby* ... presented the refreshing possibility that racial authenticity could be negotiated rather than assumed – with the 'success' of integration and affirmative action in the 1960s and 70s, unusually large numbers of African Americans had been granted economic mobility.... this 'buffer' caste, although only a small fraction of the total African American population, experienced a certain, strange inclusion, one that blurred established notions of race.²²

The Huxtable family as a 'buffer' caste present an alternative to the usual associations of blacks with crime, poverty and hip hop. However, the life of the Huxtables is far removed from practices such as racial steering where blacks are shown only in housing located next to other blacks (this practice complements the 'White Flight' of the 1960s and 1970s where whites abandoned the metropolis for the suburbs).

While links can be made between the social movements for equality of the 1960s and the representation of blacks in the 1990s, current debates around multiculturalism now focus on the cultural. From the 1970s onwards, an era of benign neglect and, in some cases, reversal of socially transformative policy has taken place.²³ A neglect of structural analysis has been replaced by a move toward issues of identity and culture. The turn to identity politics has been questioned as a transformative tool and the symbol of multiculturalism perceived as diluted and ambiguous. Allegations that cultural diversity has become 'corporate multiculturalism' is one perceptible discourse in the US:

While the new economic utilitarian rationale for diversity lent broad legitimacy, it further compromised the significance of diversity as a symbol of – or lever for – progressive social change, and the meaning of the advocacy of cultural diversity shifted dramatically away from social equity issues.²⁴

The claim that all Americans are now multiculturalists²⁵ mirrors the change in Australian policy which puts forward a multiculturalism 'for all of us'. The danger being that minority claims for structural equity are submerged into the mainstream and cultural diversity is emptied of any political connotation. However the fashion of critical multiculturalism in the USA has enabled groups such as Mexican-Americans, Native Americans and 'Others' to explore a renewal of culture and identity and foster the promotion of social change. Our challenge for placing contemporary American multiculturalism into a framework for examining television programming and cultural diversity, lies in its fusion of civil history and resulting affirmative action, with the progression of identity politics and questions of representation.

Policy Contexts

Broadcasting in the United States is regulated by an independent government body known as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Such bodies in the United States make policy as required from instruction handed down by Congress. While the USA promotes free market forces in most industries, in some areas, independent authorities demonstrate that the government believes 'normal market forces in a capitalist economy generally promote their self-interests, and may not protect the interest of the general public.'²⁶ Broadcasting is considered one such industry of public interest under the Communications Act. This key notion of protecting the public interest in broadcasting in the USA has meant that minorities may stake a claim for their interests in both ownership of, and representation in, television broadcasting. Decisions made by the FCC can be appealed in the courts and may be contested on the grounds of poor conduct by the FCC, a lack of due process and, importantly in the USA, decisions may be challenged if they are in conflict with the Constitution. At

22 K. B. Zook, *Color by FOX: The FOX Network and the Revolution in Black Television*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1999, p.2.

23 D.J. Downey, 'From Americanization to Multiculturalism: Political Symbols and Struggles for Cultural Diversity in the Twentieth-Century American Race Relations', *Sociological Perspectives*, 42: 2, 1999.

24 D.J. Downey, p.262.

25 N. Glazer, *We Are all Multiculturalists Now*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

26 J. Walker & D. Ferguson, *The Broadcast Television Industry*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, 1998, p.71.

the other end of the policy making process, the FCC are at times pressured for 'favourable' treatment by the television industry through their lobbying and self-regulatory body, the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), and by various public lobby groups. Public action against stations over children's TV in the 1960s resulted in the term 'petition to deny', whereby a station licence renewal would be challenged by advocacy groups over certain matters (similar to Australian Broadcasting Tribunal hearings in Australia during the 1980s). Although this avenue of dispute diminished as deregulation took hold in later decades, it served as a stimulus for change in the representation of minorities in the civil rights era. However, issues concerning the representation of blacks in particular were being raised in the 1950s, a decade before the rise of the civil rights movement.

Amos n' Andy was a signpost in relations between minority communities and broadcasters over issues of portrayal. Billed as the first all-black network show in 1951, its 'stereotypical' representations received condemnation from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), but the program remained on air for many years despite losing its sponsor. After the public protest surrounding *Amos n' Andy*, an unforeseen consequence was that black characters were avoided for the next decade. When they did return in the early 1960s, they featured as 'saintly or heroic figures with little sense of place or heritage'.²⁷ This changed by the mid-1960s when social realism replaced the superficial portrayals of previous years. As a consequence, black characters became ghettoised as criminal and lower status, though in this context they were often portrayed as the repressed overcoming hardship. Nevertheless, this did not endear the television industry to the civil rights movement who recognised the power of television in communicating pessimistic messages about minority communities. After the passing of the *Civil Rights Act* in 1964, the New York Ethical Culture Society began the first national monitoring of blacks in television as a device for indicting networks over the lack of and type of representation. Two years later, a coalition of civil rights groups filed the first 'petition to deny' as a regulatory measure against a Mississippi station for discriminatory hiring practices. Monitoring played a vital role in the case and two years later in 1966, the USA Court of Appeals ruled that the FCC had to grant a hearing on the matter.²⁸ As a consequence, the watchdog monitoring method was repeated by Hispanics, women, gay groups and the Screen Actors Guild (SAG). By 1968, enough pressure had mounted for the FCC to issue a new policy and rule that would link licence renewal to a station's performance in EEO practices.

Over a period of 30 years, the FCC's equal opportunity rules were interpreted as enabling content diversity by increasing the chances of minorities to work in the sector. The FCC also stated that its inclusivity requirements in hiring made 'good business sense and benefited employers because they [the requirements] increase an employer's chances of obtaining the services of the most talented people'.²⁹ The FCC's measures go beyond the symbolic in terms of policy, with consistent enforcement of monitoring and reporting efforts (broadcasters are issued warnings if they are late in filing such reports with conditions placed on licensees for failing to conform). The FCC cite the following results in support of the rule: in 1971, women constituted 23.3 per cent of full-time broadcast employees and minorities constituted 9.1 per cent. In 1997, women constituted 41 per cent and ethnic minorities 20.2 per cent of employees. Congress also expanded the FCC hiring rules to include the cable TV industry in 1984 and to multichannel video programming distributors in 1992, endorsing a mandate for diversity in emerging media as well.

The FCC's EEO requirements were in place until 1998, when they were deemed unconstitutional in a case involving the Lutheran Church, who protested the FCC's finding that the Church had made inadequate efforts to recruit minorities at two of its stations. An inconsistency in the rule with the Constitution was established by the Lutheran Church, in that discriminatory hiring based on gender, race, colour, religion or national origin was deemed unconstitutional – and this applied to positive discrimination as well. Over the years, an interpretation of the ruling had led to the practice of 'de facto' affirmative action in order for broadcasters to safely approach their licence hearings, as well as to avoid deleterious attention from the NAACP, the SAG and other advocacy groups. This was the foundation of the so-called and much maligned 'quota system' of proportional employment.

An explicit and enforced quota system has never existed in American broadcasting, despite popular

27 S.R. Lichter, L.S. Lichter & S. Rothman, *Prime Time: How TV Portrays American Culture*, Regnery Publishing, Washington, 1994, p.354.

28 K. Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time, Advocacy Groups and the Struggle over Entertainment Television*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1989.

29 FCC, *Notice of Proposed Rule Making MM Docket No. 98 – 204 MM*, Docket No. 96-16, FCC, Washington, 1998, pp.2-17.

belief to the contrary. The FCC would simply consider the employment data ('minority-hire filings') and other relevant matters at licence renewal time and compare this with local labour force figures. If results were unsatisfactory, a more detailed analysis would be carried out with a worst case scenario being remedial conditions placed on the broadcaster such as extended reporting and perhaps a shorter licence renewal. However, when such measures were to be applied to the Lutheran Church, their subsequent appeal resulted in the court identifying the FCC rules to be an imposition of 'racial considerations' for the purposes of employment. The FCC maintained that its sole purpose in EEO rules was to 'foster diverse programming content' and that such diversity was a 'compelling motivation'. However, the court held that even assuming the compelling nature of program diversity as stipulated under the 1934 Act, the Commission had introduced 'no evidence linking [the employment of] low-level employees to programming content'. This decision undermined, in the words of the FCC, 'the proposition that there is any link between broad employment regulation and the Commission's avowed interest in broadcast diversity'. The FCC continue to believe that affirmative action efforts do not constitute discrimination as 'white males suffer no cognizable harm in being forced to compete against a larger pool of qualified applicants'.

The FCC case appears particularly strong, given that in 1996 Congress amended Section 1 of the Act to give the FCC regulatory powers to ensure the availability of communications services to all people of the United States, without discrimination on the basis of race, colour, religion, national origin or sex. As FCC figures have shown, without the EEO rulings, the 'availability' of services to all people may not have been ensured.

As well as the hiring rules, the FCC has had policies which enhance minority ownership of the media as an instrument for ensuring diversity. These separate policies to the minority hiring rules were also contested in the 1990s through the courts in various cases.³⁰ However, the courts affirmed the Commission's judgement on one occasion that there is a nexus between rules fostering minority ownership of broadcast stations and the statutory goal of fostering diversity of viewpoints.³¹ And finally, precedent was established in a ruling where 'Circuit recognised the Commission's authority to enforce both 'affirmative action' and anti-discrimination rules in the licence renewal context to advance its public interest mandate to foster diverse programming'.³²

These conflicting legal precedents over minority hiring contributed to uncertainty over the formulation of new FCC equity rules in the late 1990s. As a consequence, the FCC called for hard evidence in a 1998 proposal for *Rule Making* which would demonstrate the relationship between women and minority hiring with the production of culturally diverse programming content and whether various job positions exert influence on programming decisions. This lack of factual analysis in the past illustrates the FCC's difficulties with trying to regulate for social and cultural aims, rather than regulating for more easily determined economic or technical factors. Conflicting perspectives and analytical gaps over its social domains when it comes to diversity on the screen collide with more tangible economic domains of ownership and control. Napoli's³³ analysis of the situation is that 'these gaps are largely due to an analytical orientation that consistently fails to investigate and account for the social and political consequences of policy decisions with the same empirical rigor as for economic consequences'. The failure to link minority status and job position with content outcomes led the FCC to design new EEO rules which would continue its constitutional responsibility in the area of content diversity while trying to maintain equity goals without resorting to the encouragement of discriminatory hiring practices (including positive discrimination).

In January 2000, the FCC released new rules for broadcasters and cable systems to 'court' minorities through so-called 'outreach efforts' in their job vacancies. The rules came into effect in April, with

30 The minority ownership preference rules received much criticism in the 1990s, as they were abused by large companies for profit and tax avoidance. After deregulation amendments in 1990s, companies such as Murdoch's FOX were able to broker *quid pro quo* deals with government to gain favourable changes in ownership rules for investment into minority interests. Indeed, the higher 'homes coverage per centage' for minority controlled broadcasters (30 per cent rather than 25 per cent) and better tax breaks saw Murdoch expand into the market. The FCC has questioned the wisdom of allowing greater media concentration in order to foster program diversity.

31 This was, of course, to be then contradicted in the Lutheran Church case. See A. Hammond, 'Measuring the Nexus: The Relationship Between Minority Ownership and Broadcasting Diversity After Metro Broadcasting' in *Federal Communications Law Journal*, 51, 3, pp.627-637, May 1999.

32 Bilingual Bicultural Coalition on *Mass Media v. FCC*, see note 31 above: A. Hammond.

33 P. Napoli, 'The Unique Nature of Communications Regulation: Evidence and Implications for Communications Policy Analysis' in *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 43, 4, p.571.

critical comment from broadcasters that the new measures were too arduous, and from advocacy groups for being less intense than the pre-1998 rules. The new requirements would apply to stations with more than four employees and offered two options. Option A: a licensee sends their job vacancy announcements to any organisations requesting the vacancy and the station selects from and participates in a variety of outreach opportunities such as job fairs, internships and interaction with educational and community groups. Option B: the licensee designs their own outreach recruitment program which would also require them to keep data on the sources, race, ethnicity and gender of applicants.³⁴ Broadcasters suggested that publishing their vacancies on the internet would suffice as the new rules would 'bury them under paperwork' and that these rules also constitute de facto quotas because licence challenges could be based on 'whether stations are doing enough to reach minorities and women.'³⁵ The FCC rejected such claims estimating that the new filings would take three hours per year and, while gender and minority employment figures must be kept, the data would not be considered at licensee renewal reviews. The NAB have argued this is overly optimistic but interestingly, cable operators have 'no beef with the rules'.

After less than one year of operation for the *new* EEO rules, the Court of Appeals for Columbia 'vacated' the entire FCC's EEO outreach rules in January 2001. The FCC have consequently suspended all EEO rules relating to the two options for promoting diversity and asked for a review to retain Option A (detailed above). In this latest appeal, the Court found that Option B outreach measures in particular continued to represent 'race-based classification' for employment, which did not 'support a compelling governmental interest and was therefore unconstitutional!'³⁶ Beyond the latest constitutional challenge of the rules, broadcast stations have found the reporting requirements of the latest EEO rules more intensive than the pre-Lutheran case EEO rules. While the FCC's efforts for promoting diversity are now in limbo, networks continue to pursue diversity in the workplace with the same measures as before and have received legal advice to continue doing so.

In spite of their recently contested status, FCC rules are well advanced compared to Australia, not only in EEO efforts but also with regard to monitoring. The desire for comprehensive equity employment monitoring within the Australian commercial media has been suggested by advocacy groups for some years, with no success. Fears of a quota system by stealth are generally regarded as unwelcome across the industry in Australia, despite a lack of understanding of what the American FCC hiring rules and monitoring have actually meant. The revised FCC rules may present a model more acceptable to Australian licensees, however, implementation and adherence would be a matter for the Australian Broadcasting Authority rather than the legislature. The level of rigour in a self-regulated system would be the key issue. For the moment, however, any such debate remains theoretical with the Australian commercial broadcast industry adamant in their refusal to consider monitoring, let alone equity measures (see chapter 5).

Network Programming and Production: Historical Contexts

It was the black sitcom *Amos n' Andy* that brought a mostly black show to television in 1951. Though advocacy groups were unable to pressure CBS to remove the family sitcom, the show's initial sponsor (Blatz Beer) did eventually pull out. After *Amos n' Andy*, ethnic roles were once again consigned to single episodes. An exception to this was actor Desi Arnaz – co-owner of Desilu Productions and the character Ricky Ricardo on *I Love Lucy*. While a permanent feature on the show, Ricky's character set the tone for Hispanic representation as being of 'Latin' temperament and, therefore, prone to excitable outbursts in uncontrolled Spanish. Asian characters were rare in early years and it was only 'subservient roles ... that kept them from complete oblivion.'³⁷ However, with the advent of the civil rights movement, cast monitoring and FCC interest in minority participation, the late 1960s and early 1970s saw significant change. In the period of a decade, roles for blacks increased fourteen-fold although roles for other ethnic groups decreased. The range and quality also changed for blacks with starring roles in shows such as *I Spy*, *Mission Impossible*, *Julia* and *Mod Squad*. Previous features of black roles such as the use of slang and servile behaviour were no longer prominent. Racial issues were addressed in keeping with the era, though as noted below, the roles

34 B. McConnell, 'FCC issues EEO rules once again' in *Broadcasting and Cable*, 130, 4, January 2, 2000, p.10.

35 B. McConnell, 'EEOuch!: Stations want stay', in *Broadcasting and Cable*, 130, 8, April 24, 2000, p.19.

36 Shaw Pitman, *Communications/Broadcast*, Special Bulletin to Broadcasters, No. 01/03, February 2, 2001.

37 S.R. Lichter et al., p.337-339.

tended to over-compensate for past ignorance and stereotype:

(there) was a tendency to replace the old negative black stereotypes with new positive ones. Having discovered that blacks didn't have to be cast as valets and janitors, white writers turned them into James Bonds and Mary Tyler Moores [reference to the shows *Mod Squad* and *Julia*]. The frantic search for positive characters smothered individuality with good intentions.³⁸

This resurgence in black portrayal, regardless of its naivety, demonstrates the power of early advocacy groups to effect change, although the general disruption to social conservatism in the 1960s would also have played a role. At the networks, a particular department was put in place to consult and negotiate with audience groups to avoid unwanted attention over contentious content. While not initially connected to issues of representation, the establishment of network 'broadcast standards' and 'program practices' departments³⁹ were to play a significant role in how broadcasters negotiated the portrayal of minorities.

By the 1970s, standards and practices departments were previewing scripts in advance of filming in an effort to anticipate controversy. In some cases, consultation with advocacy groups or even the employment of 'technical consultants' and members of advocacy groups would be made in order to 'get it right' on issues that would be contentious (this practice was also viewed with some cynicism as the co-opting of minority interests). Over the decades, networks were able to form relationships with spokespersons or advocacy groups in many areas such as the gay movement, pro-choice, Indigenous Americans, ethnic groups and many others. The role of standards and practices, however, declined in the late 1980s as networks downsized and, in any case, the heady days of the 1960s and 1970s were over. After two decades of experimentation, not only did producers know what might be a problem, but issues-based stories had become somewhat exhausted. However, in 1971, the exploration of homosexuality, miscarriage, equality and race in the notorious *All in the Family*, set the pace for years to come.

The producer of the controversial and issues-based show *All in the Family*, Norman Lear, became known for his support of racial justice and a willingness to explore political issues in his shows (such as *Good Times*, *Sanford and Son*, *That's My Mama* and *Maude*). However, his *All in the Family* character, Archie Bunker, was an overt racist presented as a person to be derided. The show received a good deal of criticism for airing Archie's racist slurs: terms such as spade, spic, coon and coloured were common and would be impossible to utter in a comedy a few years down the track. An 'equal opportunity bigot', Archie was borrowed from the British series *Till Death Us Do Part*. Lear hoped that the likeable racist would present viewers with a non-preaching style anti-racism message. However, studies suggested that the show only served to confirm liberals' contempt for the Archie Bunkers of the world while conservatives found solace in identifying with him.⁴⁰ Lear's seminal comedy paved the way for several such black comedies in the years to come. *Good Times* and *Different Strokes* were both screened with some success in Australia and represented a white liberal approach to teasing out issues of race in a non-threatening manner. Later in the 1970s, blacks were joined by other minorities in lesser numbers in a range of shows: a Greek *Kojak*, the Polish *Banacek*, the Italian attorney *Petrocelli*. The expansion of lead and support roles also brought with it an expanded menu of characterisations, both flattering and unflattering. Alongside criminals of obvious non-Anglo descent (particularly Hispanic and then later Asian), characters such as Vinnie Barbarino, Freddy 'Boom Boom' Washington and Juan Epstein presented a combination of comic stereotype and liberal social consciousness. This period of 'pluralism without pain', reinforced critical multiculturalists' allegations against a liberal or soft multiculturalism, which avoids grappling with institutionalised racism by focusing on outbursts of individualised bigotry. The 1980s heralded an important shift in the production of minority programming with the arrival of shows made by blacks for blacks rather than the previous liberal content of white made shows with blacks in them.

38 S.R. Lichter et al., p.341.

39 Known as *standards and practices*, such departments were established after the controversy resulting from contest rigging on game shows in the late 1950s. Networks put the departments forward as a way of avoiding tighter regulation as was recommended in a Congressional report.

40 S.R. Lichter et al., p.345. Many years later, Norman Lear held a preview screening for Washington's Black Caucus of a comedy series about a Black congressman (*Mister Dugan*). The reaction was so critical, Lear withdrew the series for good, losing \$750,000 US dollars.

Racial Narrowcasting

In 1984, *The Cosby Show* premiered as a major series with significant creative input by blacks. Generating the highest ratings for a show since *Bonanza*, it remains a one-off in black programming in that the major networks were joined in later years by cable, FOX, WB and UPN who offered black audiences greater variety and more meaningful programming. In the 1990s, shows such as FOX's *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, *In Living Color*, *New York Undercover*, *Roc*, *The Sinbad Show*, *South Central* and UPN's *Moesha*, allowed black authorship with the following distinctive elements:

Autobiography, meaning a tendency toward collective and individual authorship of black experience; *improvisation*, the practice of inventing and ad-libbing unscripted dialogue or action; *aesthetics*, a certain pride in visual signifiers of blackness; and *drama*, a marked desire for complex characterizations and emotionally challenging subject matter [emphasis added].⁴¹

Kristal Zook's study of the FOX Network and black programming illustrates the double-edged sword of commercial interests and black television. FOX 'fostered a place for black authorship in television' in its youth orientated shows. However, after a short affair with such programming, FOX sought out 'white legitimacy' by cancelling many black shows and courting the mainstream with NFL football. In addition, Rupert Murdoch used minority broadcasting to 'manipulate infrastructures designed to balance the racially distorted playing field of media ownership' by taking advantage of tax breaks for minority enterprises and obtaining ownership concentration concessions which apply only to minority-owned stations. Zook argued the FOX programming strategy had little to do with social justice. Traditional network television was not overly appealing to blacks who, it was claimed, watch more TV than whites. Advertisers interested in targeting the black demographic were also interested in 'going after the more affluent young white urbanites who watch black orientated shows to keep abreast of the latest trends and styles'.⁴² Murdoch himself is quoted as wanting to 'hook the hip white audience'.

Nevertheless, shows such as *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* explored integration in a black post-civil rights America, taking 'the black upper class for granted, as had *Cosby*, it also wrestled frequently and openly with economic and cultural mobility'.⁴³ However, as FOX became more established as the fourth network, 'minority-heavy casts' in shows such as *New York Undercover* with its Latino/black leads, presented FOX with a dilemma if it wanted to be seen as more than a racial narrowcaster. *New York Undercover's* supportive white executive producer, Dick Wolf (*Law and Order*), was pressured in later series to make the show 'less ethnic', expressing that it was a case of FOX desiring to attract more white viewers, rather than an abandonment of the black audience. In spite of such economic motivation, FOX programming showed minority characters in dynamic contradictions within issues of race loyalty, and class disparity. Such stories and representations were not often found in prime time mainstream programming. As FOX withdrew from its black programming in the mid-1990s, two new 'networks', United Paramount (UPN) and Warner Brothers (WB) launched themselves with the same strategies as FOX had years earlier. Hoping to attract an abandoned audience, UPN and WB took on FOX staff and replicated their programming for a 'hip' audience. The two new networks hurt FOX and as the late 1990s came to a close, FOX held onto its black shows and was still the top-rated network among black and Latino audiences. However, as *Entertainment Weekly* suggested about the two new networks, 'the bigger UPN and WB get, the whiter they'll become'.⁴⁴

This is not to say that the big three networks contain nothing of value for minorities on TV. In a content analysis of minority characters in new season programs from 1966 to 1992, new black characters accounted for on average 6 per cent of casts in the late 1960s, 8 per cent in the 1970s, 12 per cent in the 1980s and nearly 15 per cent in the 1990s. From the 1980s onwards, black roles were 'in sync' with American census figures and then exceeded the 'real world population'. Asian and Hispanic roles on the other hand ran counter to census figures, with only sporadic new characters from these groups.⁴⁵ While such comprehensive quantitative analysis serves useful purposes for

41 K. B. Zook, *Color by FOX: The FOX Network and the Revolution in Black Television*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1999, p.5.

42 S.R. Lichter et al., p.56.

43 K.B. Zook, p.15.

44 Quoted in K.B. Zook, p.105.

45 B.S. Greenberg and L. Collette, 'The Changing Face on TV: A Demographic Analysis of Network Television's New Seasons, 1966-1992', *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 41, Winter 1997, pp.1-13.

identifying the presence or invisibility of minority actors, it is limited in its capacity to take into account the type of roles played by actors.

In research concerned with the type of roles actors play, analysis of prime time TV in 1992/93 found that on the whole, producers and writers 'challenge white preconceptions through their portrayals of minority individuals victimized by passive bias and active discrimination.'⁴⁶ The study found that 8 per cent of black characters in prime time were criminal – half that of white characters. Looking specifically at homicides over a period of thirty years, blacks on television were eighteen times less likely to commit murder than they did in real life, while Asian murderers were three times more prevalent on TV, than in reality. Whites committed murder at twice the rate on TV compared to their actual rates for homicide in the real world. What such content and demographic research presents is at odds with common beliefs that blacks are portrayed in a manner which reinforces established perceptions of them as anti-social.

A further study of blacks in high-rating TV entertainment shows found 70 per cent of characters were in professional or management positions. While this may seem a positive step, such a utopian reversal of the situation in real life employment for blacks has tended to make it difficult for black professional characters to mix with their on screen colleagues – the reasoning being that black characters in professional roles are less likely to be allowed to focus on the interpersonal (storylines focusing on their work instead).⁴⁷ An eight-week study in 1994 of intimacy and relationships between characters in the top network soap operas also showed that intimacy was far more prevalent between white characters than black, and that no scenes depicting interracial intimacy occurred at all.⁴⁸ However, research among Hollywood's executive and creative TV personnel suggest that overt discriminatory intentions are not evident. Polling 104 'influential' writers, producers and executives in the 1990s, it was found that the 'creative leadership (of television) represents an urban and cosmopolitan society'. Being mostly 'left of centre', the sample expressed significantly less conservative opinions than the general population, who were also surveyed at the time. Coining the term, 'limousine liberal', *Time* magazine commented on the contradictions of such well-off producers taking up political stories not usually associated with the medium of commercial television.⁴⁹ This has resulted in television drama that attempts to mediate social and political transformations from the perspective of white liberal America into the homes of what is commonly thought to be a conservative mainstream. At the same time it is worth noting that recent figures from the NAACP show that of 839 writers at the networks, fifty-five are black and they are mostly employed at UPN and WB (NBC having one, CBS two, ABC nine and FOX three). If we accept the proposition that television can have a 'substantive effect on the social context in which it operates',⁵⁰ then the portrayal of minorities in such stories over a long period of time is significant and necessitates ongoing evaluation.

Changing Times

Aside from the mostly academic research presented above, the Screen Actors Guild of America (SAG) and the NAACP have played significant roles in monitoring the place of minorities in American television. From its foundation years in the 1930s, the SAG concerned itself with inequalities and stereotyping on American screens. In 1947, a special resolution was passed that the SAG commit itself to issues of inequality. An anti-discrimination committee was established and meetings were held with producers, the directors guild and the writers guild with the result that an agreement was reached regarding the portrayal of blacks. Through the 1950s, the NAACP joined with the SAG to address issues of discriminatory casting. In the area of feature film production, the SAG was able to get minority hiring reports into actors' contracts in 1977 as a way of monitoring the features industry. However, it took several years to attain industry compliance, with the SAG writing in the threat of monetary penalties in contracts for failure to provide 'affirmative action' information.⁵¹ The

46 S.R. Lichter et al., p.61.

47 R.M. Entman & A. Rojecki, *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 2000.

48 S. Bramlett-Solomon & T. Farwell, 'Sex on Soaps: An Analysis of Black, White and Interracial Couple Intimacy' in *Facing Difference: Race Gender and Mass Media*, S. Biagi & M. Kern-Foxworth (Eds.), Pine Forge Press, California, 1997.

49 Quoted in S.R. Lichter et al., p.426.

50 P.H. Harper, 'Extra Special Effects: Televisual Representation and the Claims of the "Black Experience"', in *Living Color: Race and Television in the United States*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1998, p.64.

51 'Affirmative Action through the Decades with SAG' available at: <http://www.sag.org/diversity/diversehistory.html>, accessed 1/2/2000.

SAG have their own EEO department and support another advocacy project, the Non-Traditional Casting Project, which organises conferences and forums on inclusive hiring as well as maintaining an extensive national talent bank. The SAG also undertakes campaigns to raise the awareness of minority hiring, maintain their own talent directory and commission research on the topic of cultural diversity and television. A SAG research project undertaken in the late 1990s by George Gerbner⁵² looked at the roles for minorities on prime time and daytime TV between 1994 and 1997. The position of African Americans was confirmed to be that they were over-represented (at 171 per cent of their real-life proportion) and that Hispanic and Asian characters continued to be represented at less than half their statistical reality. This concurs with a 1996/97 analysis of network prime time which found Latinos comprised 3 per cent of roles and Asians 1 per cent (while in census figures the proportions of Latinos and Asians in the USA are 11 per cent and 4 per cent respectively). Native Americans were not featured at all.⁵³ As for the type of portrayal, Gerbner's research seems most upset by the lack of poverty on fictional TV with only 1.4 per cent of major roles cast as underprivileged, whereas American census data shows that 13 per cent of people live in poverty. He is also critical of ageism in both minority and mainstream casting.

More recently, the SAG released further research which confirmed the FCC's fears that with the absence of minority hiring rules in the late 1990s, advances made in the previous decades may come undone. For the first time since records were kept, all minority groups except Asian/Pacific saw decreases in their proportion of roles after 1997 (by less than 1 per cent though). Still of particular concern in the US, are the ongoing problems Latino actors face in securing roles. Now representing around 10 per cent of the American population, their representation hovers around 3 per cent of roles.⁵⁴ When Latinos are cast, it is still in 'servant type roles, like Jose the busboy and Maria the maid'. Similar to claims from Australian second generation DCALB actors, Latinos are frequently asked to speak poor English and perform their ethnic background in order to conform to a rather coarse portrayal. Hollywood executives claimed in the study that a combination of low pulling power of Latino themes at the box office or in the ratings, combined with a lack of Latino 'name' actors are the core reasons for the poor result. Such comments sustain criticisms by critical multiculturalists that key stakeholders (perhaps unintentionally) engage in discriminatory practices through a combination of ignorance and market-driven racism. With respect to African Americans, a recent report examined 384 episodes of 887 prime time series in late 1999 on ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, UPN and WB, finding an uneven distribution of black characters in situation comedy. UPN and WB took the lion's share of ongoing roles for blacks, even though the two networks produced less than a third of all programming. Every show on UPN featured a black regular, whereas the once black narrowcaster FOX, had none.⁵⁵ Such abundance of quantitative research in the United States has allowed organisations such as the SAG and the NAACP to manage high-profile media campaigns in support of their causes. After the drop in roles for minorities became noticeable and verifiable by 2000, the NAACP began a particularly intensive promotion targeting the networks over their new season of programs, which were demonstrably 'pale'.

The NAACP itself is the USA's oldest civil rights organisation. Formed in 1909, it works on numerous projects concurrently across a wide range of social justice issues, with a bias towards black America. In the second half of 1999, the NAACP made television casting its high-profile activity, charging the networks with a whitewash and threatening a national boycott which would see minority audiences tune out of prime time. This campaign gained significant media coverage in press and industry for many months as well as being reported in Australia. The following months in early 2000 saw agreements reached between the NAACP and networks. Even before the agreements, networks had attempted to calm the situation by quickly adding minority actors to existing shows and sending out memos to department heads to increase diversity.⁵⁶ There has since been some criticism of the

52 G. Gerbner, *Casting the American Scene: Fairness and Diversity in American Television*, available at: <http://www.sag.org/diversity/gerbner.html>, accessed 1/2/2000.

53 D. E. Mastro & B. S. Greenberg, 'The Portrayal of Racial Minorities on Prime Time television', *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 44,4, Fall 2000.

54 Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, *Missing in Action: Latinos in and out of Hollywood*, SAG, Los Angeles, 2000.

55 D. Hunt, *The African American Television Report*, SAG, Los Angeles, 2000.

56 J. Consoli, 'Good Posture: TV networks say all the right things to avoid NAACP boycott – but will they follow through?' in *Adweek*, 15/11/1999.

NAACP for not imposing more concrete terms in the agreements with goals being 'vague and difficult to enforce'.⁵⁷ However, from the distance of the Australian media environment, such agreements and their far-reaching impacts appear remarkable. All main networks will establish minority internship programs, make explicit minority recruitment drives, double their business with minority-owned companies and, of most interest, link executive remuneration to the fulfilment of diversity responsibilities. In a few months, production outcomes have also been tangible.

During 2000, CBS was producing a predominantly Latino series and NBC had a similar show with a mainly black cast. ABC was committed to deliver three shows with minority leads in them. The newer networks also committed to black and Latino shows, with FOX hiring a diversity executive and stating their development slate would look 'a lot different' to the previous couple of years. CBS was cited as the leader among the networks with the Stephen Bochco (*Hill Street Blues*, *NYPD Blue*) drama *City of Angels*. Conceived some time before the NAACP action, the hospital drama has black executive and creative staff with half the writing team African American and 70 per cent of the crew from minority backgrounds. Like most new shows, Bochco was concerned about its initial success. However, in *Angels'* case, the show was obviously going to be a test for culturally diverse programming in the market place. Happily for the production, the show gained high ratings in black households, only just behind *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* and so another season of the series will be made. The success of Bochco's diversity dramas possibly lies with their intentional yet unspectacular multiculturalism: 'black series [of the past] were always about being black as opposed to being just a straight melodrama that dealt with situations where the cast just happened to be black. Which is a big difference'.⁵⁸ A popular and culturally diverse show seen in many households is, of course, NBC's *ER*. Executive producer of the show John Wells deliberately kept a low profile in the recent NAACP action for although he is aware of his diverse cast, he believes the NAACP has a valid argument.

A show such as *ER* demonstrates the possibility of inclusive casting without resorting to obvious quota pressures. The program has won at annual NAACP 'Image Awards' where actors, films and television shows are nominated for their engagement with an 'ethnically' diverse USA. The recently screened series has a cast of fourteen main characters, seven of whom are from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Most significant compared to Australian shows of the same genre, two of these seven were born overseas. Ming-Na, as Dr Chen, was born in China and Goran Visnjic, as Dr Kovic, was born in Croatia and speaks with his natural accent – a rare occurrence in drama. In addition to these cast members is the non-disabled actress Laura Innes as Dr Weaver, whose disability has never been explained in the entire series in spite of newcomers to the *ER* being inquisitive. Such care in producing and writing has its critics. Asian groups have expressed frustration at seeing themselves only as doctors once again. *ER* also demonstrates the fact that while culturally diverse actors in the cast appear in very dramatic roles, a similarly dramatic show which is 'all-black' for example, does not feature on the networks. In addition to the disabled, shows in the USA also come under fire for not representing 'hefty eaters, middle-aged women, non-spunky seniors (and) blue collar workers'.⁵⁹ In spite of the intended humour here, this is possibly one reason why technologies such as DBS and cable have taken audience share away from the networks as they are able to offer more specialised programming. Some commentators see this as not necessarily a good thing: 'All-white *Friends* worlds on the major networks co-exist with all-black *Steve Harley* worlds on less powerful networks and cable'. While other electronic media have eroded the dominant position of network TV, and will continue to do so, network prime time TV remains the most contested and keenly observed location for measuring and discussing the portrayal of cultural diversity and programming in the USA. The three other countries' television landscapes reflect this situation as well.

57 R. Stodghill, 'Ending the Whitewash' in *Time*, 27/12/1999, p.141.

58 CBS President Leslie Moonves, 'Angels: Will it Fly?' in *Broadcasting and Cable*, 130, 2, January 2000.

59 S. Johnson, 'Pale by Comparison', *Chicago Tribune* Internet Edition, available at <http://chicagotribune.com>, accessed 30/8/1999.

3. THE UNITED KINGDOM: POLICY REMITS FOR DIVERSITY AND AN 'EVERYDAY' MULTICULTURALISM

Race Relations in the United Kingdom

The impact of World War II on the availability of labour in the UK led to shortages in manufacturing and industry. In Britain's case, the need for migrant labour extends beyond the war period to the previous century for various projects such as the East African Railways.⁶⁰ Unlike the USA, New Zealand and Australia, Britain's immigration has a relationship to its imperial past. This resulted in the arrival of migrants who were *already* connected to Britain. Both migrant and host had pre-established notions or direct experience of each other.

In the case of the British, these were mostly derogatory attitudes inherited from past generation's interaction with those from Commonwealth states, which viewed the Asian and African migrants in coarse stereotype. One can think back to the TV comedy *It Ain't Half Hot Mum* for an example of such colonial stereotype. The unplanned arrival of people from the West Indies in 1948 is perceived as the beginning of significant immigration to the United Kingdom. While Britain did not embark on the kind of strategic and mass immigration which Australia undertook, pockets of industry and state services did enter into a form of recruitment. One particularly evident location for this was the explicit recruitment of Barbadian and Jamaican immigrants to staff London's transport network. In addition to Caribbean migration, Asian immigrants from the Indian sub-continent and East Africa eventually made up the biggest proportion of post-war immigrants to Britain, who altogether now number around 8 per cent of the population.

With palpable discrimination against immigrants increasing through the 1950s and 1960s, action was taken by the government to tackle race-based inequity while at the same time, establishing barriers for further migration to the United Kingdom. With a liberal pluralist approach to cultural diversity, a 'race relations industry' was created, which included a Commission for Racial Equality, a Race Relations Board, community councils and research bodies. Like Australia, the 1970s also saw the appearance of second generation UK immigrants who had acquired their education in British schools. As is common in other post-World War II immigration countries, the next generation of migrants are typically involved in cultural interaction to a greater degree than their parents. Such cultural encounters may promote 'cultural fusion' between the mainstream and migrant culture and not necessarily in a one-way fashion. With the emergence of the second generation in Britain came the formation of organised interest groups which were willing to agitate for enhanced life chances and to protest acts of explicit racism. Such political activism of the 1970s was highly visible but also presented as militant. This civil action had connections with the civil rights movement and black power of the 1960s in the United States. Indeed, the term 'black' was also embellished with notions of pride and strength by coalitions of African-Caribbeans and Asians in Britain. The evolution of mainly young and politically active immigrant groups marked the 'coming of age of a new form of Asian political and cultural agency'.⁶¹ Around the same period, the somewhat ineffectual Race Relation Acts of the 1960s were replaced by the *Race Relations Act* of 1976, which is still current today.

The *Race Relations Act* allows complaints to be heard against direct and also indirect acts of discrimination. This means, for example, that requirements for employment, which would exclude people on cultural or 'racial grounds', are no longer a way for employers to limit their applicants to non-immigrant groups. Examples of this are conditions of dress, which are purely on cultural grounds, such as the wearing of a *hijab*.⁶² While not particularly strenuous in comparison with the United States' affirmative action legislation, the British Act is considered comprehensive by European standards. However, conscious of public sensitivity to the concept of positive discrimination, the British Act makes clear that affirmative action is not allowed:

60 Z. Layton-Henry, *The Politics of Immigration*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992.

61 A. Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Routledge, London, 1996, p.47.

62 *Race Relations Act 1976*.

An employer cannot try to change the balance of the workforce by selecting someone mainly because she or he is from a particular racial group. This would be discrimination on racial grounds and is unlawful.

There are also exceptions to the Act whereby a 'genuine occupational qualification' may override the above statement, as in the use of performers for particular roles (such as a black actor to play Martin Luther King). The Act was complimented by a new Commission for Racial Equality, which has broad applications relating to enforcement of the Act – and like multicultural policy in Australia – it seeks to promote 'racial' awareness and anti-discriminatory practice in the wider community. While such policy advanced the avenues to equity in comparison with the previous decades, the impact of Tory politics under Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s resonated with conservative anti-immigration debates reminiscent of Enoch Powell.⁶³ Avtar Brah (see footnote 61) views the 1980s for immigrant Britain as a time of continuing institutionalised racism and provocative measures aimed at discouraging further migration to Britain by Asian migrants. This period in race relations, termed 'the new racism', meshed with Thatcher's Britain of self-interest, nationalism and the re-establishment of 'boundaries of nationhood'.⁶⁴

The 1980s also saw minority debate focus on Muslim communities with Ayotollah Khomeini calling for the death of Salman Rushdie, who was judged to have committed blasphemy with the writing and publication of his novel *The Satanic Verses*. What the 'Rushdie Affair' highlighted for race relations in Britain was the position of Muslims and religion in a multicultural British society. As in Australia, the capacity for the state to embrace cultural 'difference' in multicultural policy, will at times be tested.

The mobilisation of ethnic groups at the level of politics has also contributed to transforming the 'overall public discourse' on immigration and race relations.⁶⁵ Events such as the debate surrounding Rushdie's book and a cultural renaissance of a hybrid Asian popular culture, contribute to the multicultural reality of urban Britain, where 27 per cent of London's Underground staff are from a 'minority' community, 23 per cent of Britain's doctors are born overseas and two-thirds of independent local shops are owned by 'ethnic' British.⁶⁶ The transformation of a domineering British cultural identity in post-imperial and post-colonial times is still contested at many levels. The prevailing class structure, for example, has seen the formation of a hybrid ethnic bourgeoisie, as comically portrayed in the TV show *Goodness Gracious Me*. Television sectors, both commercial and public, have made commitments to furthering the portrayal of cultural diversity, increasing participation in the media and attempting to better serve audiences. As a member of the European Union, Britain not only considers itself advanced in these areas, there is also agreement outside Britain that its achievements and approach to cultural diversity and the media are superior.⁶⁷ However, compared to the United States, Britain's accomplishments are not as noteworthy.

Policy Contexts

The Commission for Racial Equality first highlighted the lack of cultural diversity in British media in the late 1970s, however, it took the first half of the 1980s to gain acceptance for remedial measures from industry, the second half of the 1980s to see implementation begin, and the early 1990s for changes to become more apparent.⁶⁸ The BBC, realising profound changes were ahead in the media landscape, also began to formulate policy itself for addressing a multi-racial Britain in the 1980s. The BBC's enhanced efforts in the 1990s coincide with the arrival of *The Broadcasting Act 1990* for commercial broadcasters, which saw the replacement of the Independent Broadcasting Authority with the Independent Television Commission (ITC). Channel Four (C4) was made a non-profit

63 Enoch Powell was a conservative MP who in the 1960s demanded zero immigration and voluntary repatriation of migrants. Giving a speech in 1968 he foresaw 'rivers of blood' flowing in Britain as a result of immigration – the speech gained much publicity and a level of popular support at the time.

64 C. Husband, *'Race' and Nation: The British Experience*, Paradigm Books, Perth, WA, 1994, p.38.

65 R. Coopmans & P. Statham, 'Challenging the Liberal Nation State: Postnationalism, Multiculturalism and the Collective Claims Making of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in Britain and Germany' in *The American Journal of Sociology*, 105, 3.

66 Commission for Racial Equality, available at: <http://www.cre.gov.uk>, accessed 13/6/2000.

67 J. Ouaj, The European Institute for the Media, *More Colour in the Media*, European Institute for the Media, Utrecht, 1999.

68 C. Myant, 'Television and Racial Equality: How the Race Relations Act Has Helped' in *European Television: Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities*, C. Frachon and M. Vargaftig (Eds.), John Libbey, London 1995, p.41.

corporation and provision was made for a fifth terrestrial channel. Unlike our examination of American television above, the place of public broadcasting as well as commercial services needs to be considered as both maintain reasonably equal audience share and the status of the BBC is of course significant in British broadcasting.

Like the ABC in Australia, the BBC operates under a charter with a director-general as the CEO. The last few years at the BBC have seen two specific changes in human resources which have an impact on cultural diversity and programming. Under outsourcing policies of 'Producer Choice' and 'Extending Choice', the BBC were able to shed several thousand positions. Up until the late 1980s, the BBC was a traditional employer of long-term staff. Less than 1 per cent of these employees were from ethnic minority backgrounds.⁶⁹ The diminution of the BBC as an employer has reduced the chances for new-comers from ethnic backgrounds, as the BBC as a *state* employer was more aware of EEO policy than was the case in the independent sector. On the other hand, outsourcing was a way to theoretically engage with a diverse range of independents and so bring about new programming at a faster pace than would be the case in an overly bureaucratic organisation. Changes to the overall running of the broadcaster also came with the realisation that explicit policies were needed to address the lack of diversity in the workplace. An EEO department was established in 1988 with research also undertaken into the portrayal of minority communities with the conclusion that much needed to be done. And so the BBC set itself a target that ten years down the track in 2000, its workforce would include 8 per cent ethnic minorities, which is the statistical proportion of ethnic minorities in the wider population. Along with the setting up of multicultural units, the target for 8 per cent was achieved in 2000, however, it is only among the general workforce. Management is far lower at 2 per cent and of the 8 per cent in the general workforce, many positions are in security, cleaning and catering. As a result, the new Director-General, Greg Dyke, has made it a particular aim of his term to see general workforce diversity increase to 10 per cent, and more importantly, for management to double to 4 per cent. The Director also intends to see improvements made in culturally diverse programming by 2003, by linking executive financial bonuses to achievement appraisals in the area of diversity and programming.⁷⁰

While the BBC's efforts may appear tame in comparison with the USA, they are considered an imperfect 'best practice' model among the European Union member states. The European Institute for the Media recently conducted a comparative study of several member states' television and their response to cultural diversity. Its results confirm the BBC as the 'leading institution' for providing EEO in the media professions, however, there was criticism that areas of digital media and further redefining of the broadcasters mission have taken up an inordinate amount of resources.⁷¹ The BBC's establishment of specific multicultural units and setting of EEO targets lies in direct contrast to the French sector, for example, who refused to participate in the study claiming multicultural research to be an obsolete concept and even offensive.⁷²

Having similarities with Australia's policy guided approach to multiculturalism, as opposed to a constitutional challenge approach in the USA, principles for EEO in the UK are based on a number of parliamentary Acts: the *Sex Discrimination Act 1975* & *1986*, the above-mentioned *Race Relations Act 1976*, the *Equal Pay Act 1976* and the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*. In spite of such policy, with significant numbers of people who contribute to BBC programming being technically outside the organisation, monitoring and enforcement of EEO strategies presents problems. For a start, it was ascertained in the Institute's study that the most common method of obtaining a position in the sector was through informal and personal contacts. With an estimated 54 per cent of the film and TV workforce freelance and/or casualised, strategies for addressing the dynamics of such a workforce and minority employment are not apparent.⁷³ This results in 'exclusion by default' whereby outreach efforts are not widely available to minorities and the requirements of experience act to deflect minority application.

69 C. Myant, p.39.

70 Speech by Greg Dyke, BBC Director-General, at Race in the Media Awards, 7/4/2000.

71 J. Ouaj, *More Colour in the Media*, The European Institute for the Media, Utrecht, 1999, p.47.

72 The Institute express frustration over France's refusal to even engage with the study.

73 J. Ouaj, p.51.

In order to exert some control over issues of cultural diversity among its producers and freelancers, the BBC issue Programme Standards, which are considered to be part of the contractual agreement between the BBC and the production team. The standards refer to the use of language and portrayal regarding a number of areas including the disabled, women, ethnic minorities, sexual orientation and older people.⁷⁴ Audiences may complain to the BBC's Programme Complaints Unit if they believe there has been a breach in a Programme Standard. Beyond this unit, the complaint may be taken to a Governors' complaints committee for review. This year the BBC has also set out a range of goals in a document, *The BBC Beyond 2000*, with an obligation 'to reflect the nations, regions and communities of the UK to themselves and to the rest of the UK'. This is a similar policy for accountability to that which was employed in 1998 when the BBC made a series of 'promises' which would be evaluated in 2000. With regard to a 'promise' in 1998 to represent all groups in society accurately, the BBC introduced a *Diversity Database*, which gives program makers access to over 2,000 individuals and organisations who represent minority interests and backgrounds.⁷⁵ In a *Statement of Promises* for 1999, the BBC again set goals for reflecting a diverse United Kingdom, noting one year later in the *2000 Annual Report*, there was still stereotyping and under-representation when it came to minorities in programming.

ITV (commercial) stations (not including Channel Four) in comparison to the BBC have been somewhat slower again in addressing issues of cultural diversity and, as a consequence, lag behind in minority employment. This is in spite of statutory requirements under the *Broadcasting Act 1990*, which deal with EEO concerns. There are three conditions placed on broadcasters: 1) that non-discriminatory employment practices are followed; 2) that licensees review their job selection procedures at regular intervals and undertake monitoring; and 3) that a licensee provide to the ITC statements regarding the licensee's actions with regard to EEO policy. The Act does not offer guidance or impose codes upon licensees regarding the explicit representation of minorities on screen, nor does it refer to matters of 'integrated casting'.

Using its powers under the Act, the ITC conducted a review in 1997/1998 of ITV stations with regard to their performance in EEO policy. Admitting a 'lot more had to be done' and that progress was 'uneven' with the traditional Channel Three stations, the mean rate of employment for ethnic minorities was under 3 per cent.⁷⁶ Channel Three stations such as Carlton and London Weekend (LWT) had the healthiest figures of 6.5 per cent and 8 per cent respectively, while regional broadcasters had very low numbers of culturally diverse staff. This reflects the fact that minorities make up over 22 per cent of the population of Greater London while regional Britain has far fewer people from culturally diverse backgrounds. However, the European Institute for the Media make the point that even the London-based stations are well behind their community levels of diversity.⁷⁷ By the next review in 1999, the overall rate lifted to 3.5 per cent with Carlton and LWT making increases of a couple of per cent. 1999 also saw the release of data for management from culturally diverse backgrounds at 1.6 per cent, only half a per cent less than the BBC's figure of 2 per cent. Looking back on 1999, the ITC note that while women had moved to near parity levels in most areas, ethnic minorities were heavily concentrated in non-managerial and non-program positions. Several ITV-3 companies have also committed themselves to developing 'program portrayal policies' using screen analysis and monitoring of achievements compared to policy statements.

In comparison with the Channel Three ITV stations, Channel Four has displayed a superior commitment to cultural diversity in both the workplace and in its programming. Having a general 'ethnic minority' workforce of over 9 per cent, and 5.8 per cent being in program and management, it is the best performer on the UK scene. This is, however, hardly surprising, as at its establishment in 1982, the remit was 'to innovate and experiment, and to appeal to tastes and interests not generally catered for by ITV'.⁷⁸ Channel Four initiated a training scheme specifically for minority groups and has actively pursued culturally diverse programming. Since being transformed into a corporation in 1993, the channel has become responsible for securing its own advertising revenue rather than receiving a levy. There has been criticism since, that Channel Four has subsequently taken on an

74 BBC, *Producers Guidelines*, BBC, 2000.

75 BBC, *Our Commitment to You*, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/info/promises99/serv.shtml>, accessed 5/6/2000.

76 ITC, *Broadcasting Act 1990*, Section 38.

77 J. Ouaj, p.48.

78 J. Ouaj, p.50.

overly commercial outlook in raising income with the broadcasting of too many repeats and imported material with American black actors as a substitute for local, culturally diverse programming. In answer to these criticisms from the public, the ITC imposed a number of licence conditions on the broadcaster in the 1998 licence reviews: Channel Four was to increase production outside London; increase commissions of original product; limit repeat material; and broadcast three hours per week of multi-racial programs.⁷⁹ Like the multicultural SBS in Australia, the Channel Four remit easily finds the broadcaster in conflict with various minority groups (including independent producers), who become frustrated that their community is not being served.

The other ITV station, Channel Five, experienced a significant reduction in general staff from 'ethnic backgrounds' from 10.4 per cent in 1998 to 7.4 per cent in 1999. However, its management component is a comparatively reasonable 4.5 per cent. The other noteworthy feature of recent ITV monitoring is the inclusion of figures for women and the disabled. In the late 1990s, both the BBC and ITV made noticeable efforts to recruit disabled and engage with representatives in the formulation of policy. One final piece of policy related to cultural diversity and programming is an Equity Model Clause prepared by the British Actors' Equity Association. In 1999, British Equity developed EEO agreements with the BBC, ITV and Independent TV producers based on this model clause. The agreements with the three bodies commit them to developing and promoting policies for EEO employment, including non-traditional casting, and bind the organisations to monitoring the agreement clause and its operation.⁸⁰

The above assessment of policy in the UK illustrates two defining features for cultural diversity and television programming. One is the relative newness of policy discourse for EEO strategies in the UK, compared to the USA. The other feature is a heavy reliance on statutory bodies and organisational input for the creation of top-down policy, which has evolved from more established policy related to race relations. This doesn't however discount the contribution made by minority activists in the 1980s for a better deal. In comparison with Australia, the collection and publication of minority monitoring and EEO data in both commercial and PSB sectors in the UK presents yet another example of a broadcasting environment willing to open itself to some degree of scrutiny on the issue. While the ABC and the SBS in Australia do present EEO data, self-initiated research from within the sector is not apparent. The position of the commercial channels in Australia is one of silence, with the refusal to implement any explicit measures surrounding cultural diversity and programming. The Australian Broadcasting Authority, like the ITC, has undertaken research in the past on cultural diversity and programming. However, it remains a descriptive tool in Australia with no consequential follow up for policy change (see chapter 5). The European Institute for the Media observes that there is a 'remarkable difference' between what policy promises and what outcomes have been achieved. This reinforces the importance of considering the professional practice and attitude of media stakeholders in the production of programming 'at the coalface', if an informed analysis of the issue is to be made.

Programming Contexts

The character behind Archie Bunker in the seminal American family comedy *All in the Family* (discussed above) was no doubt Alf Garnett. Described as a 'legendary bigot' in the LWT show *Till Death Us Do Part*, Alf was played by actor Warren Mitchell who was meant to be laughed at, rather than along with, as was the case with Archie Bunker. However, as conservatives in the USA looked to Archie for confirmation of their racist attitudes, it was likely that British audiences also watched Alf with some degree of consolation.⁸¹ Also in common with the early American shows was the use of humour in *Mind Your Language* as a device for making fun with coarse stereotypes. As *Amos 'n Andy* had used exaggerated language and mannerisms to mock black Americans, the immigrant students at the English language school on *Mind Your Language* were repetitively the site of humour due to their lingual and cultural differences.⁸² The appearance of a sustaining black character on British TV came in 1972 with *Love Thy Neighbour*. In an effort to defuse the depth of racism in the UK, racist attitudes were shown

79 ITC, ITC Note No.29 'Channel Four', available at <http://www.itc.org.uk>, accessed 5/6/2000.

80 British Actors' Equity Association, *Clause (CC4), 1303 and 7* regarding EEO and the Independent Producer Agreement, BBC TV Agreement and ITV TV Agreement.

81 B. Mullan, *Not a Pretty Picture: Ethnic Minority Views of Television*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 1996, p.9.

82 C. Barker, *Television, Globalization and Cultural Identities*, Open University Press, Buckingham, 1999, p.78

as being more a matter of personal folly and possible in both the mainstream and minority culture. In the show, two couples are neighbours – one couple black, the other white. The men in each case are involved in an ongoing war of verbal abuse with each other while the two women are friends. *Love Thy Neighbour* is memorable for its frequency of slang – particularly the terms 'sambo', 'nig-nog' and 'honky'. However, it is the pejorative terms against the black minority which would carry the most resonance with what was, after all, a predominantly white audience.⁸³ Invoking coarse humour once again, Sergeant Major in *It Ain't Half Hot Mum* is also recalled for his rather scandalous attitudes to not only the local and 'servile' Asians, but to his regiment of performing 'lovely boys'. Other early drama such as *Crossroads* and *Coronation Street* failed to incorporate characters of culturally diverse backgrounds in what would have been urban and diverse communities (Manchester in the case of *Coronation Street*), though in 1984, black factory worker Shirley Armitage had joined the cast and the Asian actor Vikram Desai is a more recent regular on the show.

In 1984, the Commission for Racial Equality conducted a casting survey in light of the advances black actors had made in the USA. Their findings were that 5 per cent of British drama roles went to black actors (meaning both Asian and Caribbean) and that ongoing roles accounted for three of the sixty-two actors working on programs at that time.⁸⁴ A 2000 study of all programming genres across the main channels showed that while 7 per cent of appearances in UK programming were by people from 'ethnically diverse' backgrounds, these appearances were mostly by a small handful of presenters or single characters in dramas, such as *Coronation Street* and *East Enders*.⁸⁵ In 1985 when the Commission began promoting explicit EEO measures, the BBC serial *East Enders* arrived with its 'realistic' inner-London setting. The original cast and later additions to the show have included actors from culturally diverse backgrounds.

East Enders, like shows in the United States with diverse casts, relies on an explicit remit to include characters and thus actors of culturally diverse backgrounds. This goes contrary to some industry opinion whereby actors from culturally diverse backgrounds will find work *if* by chance they are explicitly written in by a writer or, more commonly, if they happen to be 'right' for a part. Programs such as *East Enders* combine policy for cast diversity with writing that attempts to take representation beyond one-dimensional characters. But even *East Enders* is open to criticism with claims that its diverse roles rely on well-worn characters such as Asian doctors and shopkeepers.⁸⁶ Of course, television writers and producers may point out that two-thirds of small shops in England *are* owned by Asians and one-quarter of doctors *are* from culturally diverse backgrounds, but the reaction from audiences is nevertheless problematic, as this comment from an African-Caribbean viewer demonstrates:

The thing is though, where I live, all the corner shops are owned by Asians. It is quite representative, you know, quite a true representation, but it is very stereotypical.⁸⁷

One significant difference between British shows such as *East Enders* and similar American series is that interracial relationships are not uncommon on British programs while they are very rare on American shows. In focus group audience research in the UK, the presentation of 'mixed marriages' was noteworthy by participants:

I think it's sad that you don't get black couples together, in America it's acceptable but over here you tend to have a black man with a white woman or vice versa ... it happens too often for it not to be deliberate.⁸⁸

Of course what this viewer perhaps fails to realise is that it is mostly unacceptable for 'mixed marriages' to be presented in the USA.

83 Andy Medhurst quoted in B. Mullan, p.9.

84 C. Barker, p.78.

85 Patrick Young, 'Blink and you'll miss these actors. Why? Because they're Asian', available at <http://www.mediaguardian.co.uk/mediaguardianstory/0,7558,376062,00.html>, accessed 9/10/2000.

86 C. Barker, p.82.

87 A. Sreberny, *Include Me In: Rethinking Ethnicity on television: Audience and Production Perspectives*, Broadcasting Standards Commission with the ITC, London, 1999, p.23.

88 B. Mullan, p.40.

At ITV, *The Bill* has been an enduring cop series which, like *East Enders*, has been given both credit and derision for its portrayal of cultural diversity. While two of Sun Hill's officers have usually been black or Asian, a number of villains and shady types are to be seen from cultural minority groups. Once again, there is a comparison to be made with the USA. A content analysis in 1996 of four weeks programming on all British terrestrial channels confirmed the portrayal of 'ethnic minority' characters involved in crime as actually being less than their white counterparts at 6 per cent and 8 per cent respectively. As in the USA, previous media discrimination and race-based news reporting around crime and colour, have led to a sensitivity among audiences when they see the portrayal of crime and minorities, even though quantitative analysis does not bear out their perceptions of minorities being overly represented in criminal contexts. A heightened sensitivity to seeing your community portrayed in crime may also be linked to *not* seeing your people in more mundane, middle class or professional roles combined with an attentiveness to *all* roles, which are related to your cultural background. One problem however with interpretive and textual analysis such as that used by the ITC in the UK, compared with the USA's wealth of quantitative research, is the method used for classifying characters and actors in such research. A 1996 study undertaken by the ITC⁸⁹ is an example.

The research examined the frequency and portrayal of ethnic minorities across all programming, regardless of where the program was made in both fictional and factual genres. The research does not define what counts as an ethnic performer, character, guest or presenter and relies on coding ethnicity by appearance only. As a consequence, those on television who may be from a culturally diverse background but who do not display obvious signs of their ethnicity are not included. The study is raised here, because the ITC research locates Australian television to be the least culturally diverse programming on British screens. In another audience research involving Asian British girls and soap operas, the representations of ethnicity in *Heartbreak High* are described as 'inherently racist' due to a lack of black and Asian leads as observed by the sample.⁹⁰ The accusation of racist casting is then given added weight with the predominance of white (though possibly non-Anglo) actors as further testimony as to the shows perceived lack of cultural diversity. Indeed, Australian researchers in the 1990s would most probably agree with the British results and would have likewise made anecdotal assumptions about the actors and performers they were viewing. Admittedly, the presence of South East Asian actors on Australian TV, who are easily noticeable, have been and still are at a low level. However, as a large percentage of Australia's 'ethnic minorities' are second and first generation European immigrants, such actors are not easily identified as being of culturally diverse backgrounds. If confident statements about the lack of culturally diverse actors on TV are going to be made by media researchers, they ought to be based on sound methods with an attempt to define ethnicity. This said, the ITC research does contain broad insights of value, with a figure of 6 per cent of people in UK produced programs from ethnic minority groups, compared with 13 per cent in American produced programs. The type of portrayal confirms the attitudes of audiences with respect to a lack of roles for minority professionals and successful characters in general. The British sitcom *Desmonds* (1989–1994) for example, revolved around the comings and goings in a black hairdressing salon and met with success, though its social setting was somewhat limiting in terms of showing a black professional class. In further ITC audience research, the American show *Cosby* was seen by one viewer as offering the sort of role models for black children not apparent on British television, yet was interpreted as an unrealistic fairy tale by another viewer.⁹¹ In more recent times, British shows such as *The Cops* and *This Life* have included more complex and multi-dimensional representations of ethnic characters where gender, social class and sexuality are at the forefront of the drama, with the character's ethnicity an incidental and unspectacular detail. Very recent audience research also suggests that a show such as *Goodness Gracious Me* operates along similar lines to *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* in giving minority communities a space for 'authorship' on TV, while at the same time speaking to a younger demographic which traverses the cultural backgrounds in which the shows are set.

Annabelle Sreberny's 1999 research for the Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC) offers a superior insight into audience perceptions for the portrayal of ethnicity on British television –

89 G. Cumberbatch & S. Woods, *Ethnic Minorities on Television*, ITC, London, 1996.

90 C. Barker, 'Television and the Reflexive Project of the Self: Soaps, Teenage Talk and Hybrid Identities', *British Journal of Sociology*, 48, 4, 1997, p.623.

91 B. Mullan, p.44.

particularly fiction programming. The study deliberately set out to avoid 'dealing with predominantly male community activists as 'representative' of minority ethnic opinion' and instead accessed a range of audience members with a focus on generational and gender variables.⁹² As a consequence, the views of young people and women make up the majority of participants who not only took part in discussions, but filled out media diaries as well. While all programming was open for discussion, viewers required no prompting by moderators in their discussions about drama and it was these dialogues which were the focus of the most spirited comments. Overseas programming was also included and, once again, *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* were criticised by young viewers for their apparent lack of ethnic minorities in the casts, while the presence of blacks in American programming was deemed encouraging. English series such as *The Bill* were noted as making attempts to include diverse characters, however, the portrayal was seen as mostly 'negative' and inaccurate as far as the presentation of young people from culturally diverse backgrounds. However, the BBC show *Goodness Gracious Me* elicited some of the most valuable comments. On the one hand this comedy received much positive commentary from young people for its deliberate employment of Asian stereotypes – of both young and old. On the other hand, some Asian audience members felt 'discomfort' at seeing themselves portrayed in some rather savage caricature, which was particularly heightened when viewed with parents or elders. White audiences interpreted the program as a sign of Asian 'self-assertion' and as an 'important cultural boundary-marker'. Overall, the show is considered innovative and a 'watershed in minority representation on British television'.⁹³

Production Contexts

The manner in which British programming is carried out has in recent years moved very much in the direction of Australian programming, in that shows are now commissioned to an independent production sector. In particular, the BBC and Channel Four contract producers for a variety of programs and station commissioners act as gatekeepers. A survey of independent producers who are involved with minority programming found the institutional doors to program makers very tightly shut to all program producers, let alone minority producers. The capital risk of programs is such that commissioning staff tend to go with well-established independents, who may have originated within the commissioning institution. Such arrangements are labelled 'sweetheart deals'⁹⁴ Such deals bring with them difficulties in ascertaining who is being employed and under what criteria at the executive level. The issue of participation by minority television workers is thus compounded in an independent sector, which relies on networking to get a job at lower levels in the production. This confirms the European Institute for the Media's impression that work in the industry is difficult to formally monitor for equity purposes. Aside from such informal processes, which obviously impact upon what does and doesn't get made, the channels have policy and management positions on the place of minorities in television program production.

The BBC created a new Multicultural Programmes Department in 1991 after merging its Asian and African–Caribbean units. This department of broad multicultural programming lasted only four years before it was decided to remain only with an Asian unit and place Caribbean programming in the hands of independent producers and mainstream departments within the BBC. While there has been criticism of this change among Caribbean producers, in-house producers of the Asian unit still walk a balance between the advantages of professional credentials the BBC bring to them along with the dread of being branded 'ghetto-programming'. The desire to be considered 'mainstream producers' rather than 'minority producers' underscores the benefits of dismantling the concept of 'special-ness' with multiculturalism. Yet at the same time, the producers interviewed were also quick to point out the virtues of a specialised program unit for delivering what the mainstream cannot. This was especially so with regard to special units providing a development environment, which when considering the 'tightly shut doors' of commissioners, seems to be a compelling argument for their continuance.

Channel Four has, since conception, been considered a site for multicultural programming. However, with its evolution to a commercial entity, there was the sentiment that it had failed in this area of

92 A. Sreberny, p.12.

93 A. Sreberny, p.33.

94 S. Cottle, *Television and Ethnic Minorities: Producers' Perspectives*, Avebury, Aldershot, 1997, p.138.

its programming production. Senior editors pointed out in the late 90s that the exact remit for Channel Four is to cater for interests not otherwise served – the mention of minority concerns is not explicitly mentioned.⁹⁵ However, as the ITC licence review resolved, Channel Four would now have to explicitly address multicultural programming as a licence condition. For the BBC, as a fully fledged public service broadcaster, such an overt guideline sits more comfortably with its universal service mission. However with Channel Four, the demands of both commercial enterprise and public service remit created a specific approach to the issue:

Here at [Channel Four] it's different. We're a commercial channel, still with a public service remit. And here, and in ITV, what's driving people is the recognition that, first of all, you know the general mission that we should cover properly. But also, we're a largely urban, pretty young channel. And large parts of the urban audiences in all the big cities are African–Caribbean or Asian. And so, if we're not reflecting and tapping into their agenda, we are going to see our audience sort of fall off the end. So it's marketing reasons. So the BBC has a social function plus a licence fee function; we've got a social function plus we've got an audience driven function ... if people stop watching, we can't get advertising.⁹⁶

As a consequence, Channel Four's idea of the place of multicultural programming and production falls into step with notions of mainstreaming and ending the compartmentalisation of multicultural agendas. This philosophy was reflected in a 1999 speech by the new Head of Channel Four, Michael Jackson, who 'suggested that the minority sector was outdated and a multicultural Britain needed no special slots for minority audiences'.⁹⁷ Some years earlier, interviews with BBC and independent minority producers had hinted at such an approach as a way of including representations of minorities which are at the same time both complex and ordinary. This, of course, relates to my notion of a mundane concept of multiculturalism as discussed in chapter 1. What is surprising in the case of British television production is that such an approach seems to have become official policy in the last year, among a wide variety of stakeholders including the BBC, Channel Four and independent producers.

A Remit for Everyday Multiculturalism

The BBC and Channel Four wish to de-problematise multiculturalism in their programming, in much the same way that Australian theorists have expressed the notion of a mundane or everyday multiculturalism. The BBC's Director–General expressed such sentiment in a speech made in April 2000:

I want a BBC where diversity is seen as an asset not an issue or a problem. For young people today British culture is already diverse and heterogeneous, multi-ethnic, multi-everything. For them multiculturalism is not about political correctness but is simply part of the furniture of their everyday lives.⁹⁸

At Channel Four, the Director of Programmes, Tim Garden, stated that multicultural programming policy was no longer about specific programs for minority groups, but about innovative programs 'for the mainstream reflecting society as it is, modern and cosmopolitan'.⁹⁹ The channel's commissioning editor of multicultural programs went on to say: 'There's sort of an old view of Britain and there's a new view of Britain, and I think the new view sees very much Britain as a hybrid society'. Describing the past state of affairs for multicultural programming as 'gloomy', Channel Four's multicultural program editor sees optimism ahead for the following reasons:

This time after many false starts, the issue [multicultural programming] isn't *just* being driven by the liberal ideals of fairness and equality but also by the politics of the licence fee and the big, economic issues of demographics and advertising [emphasis added].¹⁰⁰

95 S. Cottle, p.147.

96 A. Sreberny, p.91.

97 A. Sreberny, p.79.

98 G. Dyke, *The BBC: Leading Cultural Change for a Rich and Diverse UK*, Speech made at the Race in the Media Awards, 7/4/2000, available at: <http://www.bbc.org.uk/info/news/news233.htm>, accessed 5/6/2000.

99 A. Sreberny, p.91.

100 Patrick Young, 'Blink and you'll miss these actors. Why? Because they're Asian', available at: <http://www.mediaguardian/story/0,7558,376062,00.html>, accessed 9/10/2000.

Both Channel Four's and the BBC's invitations to producers in applying for program commissions are framed with attracting a broad audience, or market share in mind. At the same time, a producer should be 'daring and original' but also give more general themes a 'multicultural texture'.¹⁰¹ At the BBC, an executive producer expressed it this way:

I'd like to see these communities in all their aspects on the tele' ... not just when they're victims and villains but all the incidental stuff ... just let them find script-writers who know how black and Asian people operate, but don't turn them into issues every time they're on television. They go to Tescos, they make dinner, they do their homework, they draw pensions, they do all those really banal things everyone else does, so that's where they need to be shown.¹⁰²

At ITV the message is a little different, but it still reflects faith in an encompassing, though diverse, audience as the market to serve as David Liddiment, Director of Programmes at ITV, has stated:

Programs we make like *Coronation Street* will still be the lingua franca that brings disparate groups of people together to enjoy a common experience in an increasingly fragmented society ... There's no longer any need for single channels to try to meet mass and minority needs at the same time. We are now more responsive to our audience. Important minority programs are part of the mix, but they are more on merit than by regulatory dictate.¹⁰³

The shift to cultural diversity as good business sense is of course not new in multicultural policy, however, it has its critics. Allowing popular and market-driven formulae to dominate entertainment programming may close off spaces to important, though not necessarily 'difficult' minority programming. Independent producers expressed both hopes for incorporating their stories into the mainstream and at the same time expressed concerns over the opportunities to present realistic and truthful issues to that mainstream audience.¹⁰⁴ This unremitting dilemma over balancing the exceptional with the routine in the representation of minority groups on market-driven television is well articulated in the following comment:

There is a rather depressing synergy between the positive sense of becoming more hybrid that comes from the audience, followed by demands for more African–Caribbean and Asian faces across the range of media output, and rhetoric that seems to consign social responsibility simply to the marketplace.¹⁰⁵

It is no doubt attractive for program management to evoke the liberating discourses of hybrid identities and post-colonial states when defending mainstream multicultural programming, rather than relying on progressive liberal ideologies and minority politics. However, if less established minority actors, writers and producers do not see that there are precedents for their work, they will not see the worth in applying the dogged perseverance required to open the tightly shut doors of program funding. Likewise, monitoring of minorities in the British production sector is inadequate as it stands, due to the diffuse organisation of employment in television production. The suggestion for 'coordinated longitudinal research' involving broadcasters, independent production companies and the BSC would provide a more eloquent interpretation of the output made by both mainstream and minority production organisations. Intricate monitoring goes beyond the limiting uses of simple EEO data. Being able to analyse program 'volume and range' may point to remedial action required to promote complexity and depth of portrayal, as well as increased participation for people from culturally diverse backgrounds – rather than just meeting hollow EEO targets.¹⁰⁶ A multifarious range of diverse stories, which are able to capture the experience of diverse peoples without falling prey to 'burdened' representations, is the challenge for programmers, particularly in drama on mainstream channels. Such strategies need not be a call for quotas.

101 Channel Four, *Multicultural Programmes*, (producers notes), available at: http://www.channel4.com/producers_notes/multicultural.html, accessed 21/7/2000.

102 S. Cottle, p.53.

103 David Liddiment, *The Honourable Pursuit of Large Audiences*, speech given at the Royal Television Society, 1/7/2000, available at: <http://www.itv.co.uk/rts.php3>, accessed 13/6/2000.

104 S. Cottle, p.113.

105 A. Sreberny, p.117.

106 Cottle makes this criticism of casting and BBC EEO data from the mid-1990s, which presented only the general workforce figure.

The current juncture in post-World War II multicultural evolution in countries such as England and Australia may be in a transitory stage, where ethnicity experienced as immigrant is keenly divided by generational shift and class background. The needs and demands model of early multicultural policy has little application to second and third generation migrants whose everyday experience of social interaction may be far removed from their parents' struggles in the decades before. Changes in media diversity and availability coupled with second or third generation migrants' access to mainstream and alternative media may also be different to the recently arrived immigrants requirements for pragmatic information or homeland media. Such sliding understandings of what constitutes an immigrant identity make for the very challenges mentioned above in capturing the mundane *and* the exceptional (which we all experience), in the life of people from culturally diverse backgrounds. The recent research activity in the UK on the issue and the need for top levels of broadcasting management to mention such issues, demonstrates a willingness by UK broadcasters to: a) acknowledge that cultural diversity is an integral component of broadcasting policy which requires a considered response; and b) that symbolic or piecemeal approaches to professional practice are insufficient for enabling program production which consistently speaks to increasingly diverse audiences. Such challenges for industry and policy agents in the UK and Australia will be ever renewing, as the movement of people around the world continues beyond the post-war immigration era. The arrival of South East Asian refugees in the 1970s in Australia and, more recently, arrivals from former eastern European nations, continues the process of settlement, likely hardship and then a negotiated adjustment. This, of course, is in addition to considerable numbers of non-refugee migrants, who settle in a country for professional and family migration reasons.

But what of cultural diversity and television programming where two cultures predominate in the one nation? New Zealand's indigenous Maori and the European mainstream have in recent years, developed a tangible official and cultural accord. The impact of this development on television programming in a deregulated broadcasting environment is the focus of the next chapter.

4. NEW ZEALAND: BICULTURALISM AND TARGETED SUBSIDIES

Bicultural New Zealand

Unlike Australia, Britain and the United States, New Zealand's demand for immigrant labour in the post-World War II period was more easily accommodated by skilled migrants from northern European countries such as the Netherlands. Semi-skilled labour was to be found amongst Maori workers moving to urban centres, complemented by migrants from neighbouring Pacific Islands. So the significant transformation in demographics caused by immigrants from non-Anglo backgrounds was not apparent in New Zealand as compared to the other three countries. The lower numbers of mainly 'white' immigrants to New Zealand compared with the numbers and diversity of Australia's migrant program for example, meant that non-Pacific immigration received less political and policy notoriety as compared with Australia. What has been significant about New Zealand's history of cultural diversity is the relationship between the 'mainstream' and the Maori, where the indigenous Maori are the central 'minority' group while smaller immigrant groups are peripheral.¹⁰⁷ As a consequence, this chapter focuses mainly on the indigenous population for its examination of cultural diversity and television. Of course, minority immigrant history in New Zealand is by no means unimportant, however, the focus on cultural diversity in New Zealand has, in contemporary times, been more about a developing sense of biculturalism rather than multiculturalism. And, like Australia and debates around multiculturalism, New Zealand has also undergone an extended period of contestation over the issue of biculturalism.

New Zealand's early settlement by Pakeha was from a combination of exploration, trade and missionary efforts. While colonial settlement of New Zealand was mostly typical, Pearson notes that a vital difference in the case of New Zealand was that the 'raw edge' of imperial power was blunted in New Zealand's case. Maintaining a degree of autonomy, Maori were well organised in dealing with the settlers compared to colonial settlement in other countries. In the decades before mass settlement, it is arguable that an 'uneasy co-existence' was possible and that this has its effects today.¹⁰⁸ In the 1800s, it was assumed that Maori people would be assimilated into the mainstream. In spite of this, in 1840, the Crown made a treaty with Maori people – the Treaty of Waitangi. The compact establishes British sovereignty and authority over the administrative nature of land sales while reserving the traditional authority of the chiefs, guaranteeing them continued possession of land and treasures. However, a Eurocentric interpretation of the treaty in the century to come saw the Maori people lose much of their land and powers for self-determination.¹⁰⁹ In spite of this, Maori people maintained a sense of independence through a combination of resistance and collaboration. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the 1840 Treaty and a history of Maori autonomy became reflected in the resurgence of Maori political activity and accompanying 'constitutional' rights.

An emphasis on the relationship between Pakeha and Maori should not, however, negate the presence of significant Chinese, Indian and South Pacific Island immigration to New Zealand. Of importance is the intransigent political response in the early 1900s to non-Pacific immigrant groups who made up a small proportion of the population. The antagonism directed towards early Asian immigration by restrictive immigration policy also mirrors the response of the other countries under study. While access for Pacific Islanders to New Zealand in the past was more liberal due to legal and economic ties, their status in New Zealand was, and continues to be, a matter of contention and conflict among Maori and Pakeha alike. However, the defining component of cultural diversity continues to be focused on Maori-Pakeha relations. In the 1970s, the Treaty of Waitangi was examined with regard to its impact on the Crown and its institutions. Debate over land and fishing rights expanded to include a wide-ranging reappraisal of the place of Maori culture in New Zealand life. Alongside political agendas for creating a partnership based on the Treaty, Maori people also asserted a greater influence on the cultural life of New Zealand. Maori writers, artists and film

¹⁰⁷ R. Mulgan, 'Multiculturalism: A New Zealand Perspective', in *Multicultural Citizens: The Philosophy and Politics of Identity*, Centre for Independent Studies, St Leonards, 1993.

¹⁰⁸ D. Pearson, *A Dream Deferred*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1990, p.41.

¹⁰⁹ M. Williams, 'Immigrants and Indigenes: The Politics of Pluralism in Australia and New Zealand', *Meanjin*, 55, 4, 1996.

makers exercised a presence in the 1980s which contributed to the decline of colonial importance, in both economic and cultural areas of life.¹¹⁰

The combination of a less diverse non-indigenous population with a significant Maori population has given New Zealand the opportunity to define itself as post-colonial in a more unified manner than Australia. New Zealand's biculturalism is seen to be more instrumental for creating a sense of 'inclusion' in comparison with Australian official multicultural policy. The recognition of Maori as an official language and explicit equity measures combined with self-determination interests, forge something more than what critics would refer to as cosmetic multiculturalism in Australia. In addition, the constitutional type approach to Maori progress in terms of equity and self-determination have something in common with the United States civil rights movement. At the same time, it should be noted that in Australia, no one or two particular minority groups, including the indigenous, constitute the size or impact that Maori hold in New Zealand. An adverse consequence of New Zealand's biculturalism is the increased level of marginalisation for immigrant groups such as more recently arrived immigrants from South East Asia. Both Maori and Pakeha have expressed the desire not to emulate Australian multiculturalism. In the late 1990s, Asian immigration became a subject for debate instigated by racist statements from the nationalist New Zealand First Party, not unlike the One Nation party in Australia. Such episodes in New Zealand illustrate the 'keen tussle between multiculturalism and biculturalism' as 'competing frameworks of discourse' for cultural diversity in New Zealand.¹¹¹

Biculturalism in New Zealand functions in two major ways. The first is the adaptation of mainstream institutions for Maori needs. Sectors such as health and education may instigate provisions for addressing the particular needs of Maori people. The second implication of biculturalism is the development of specifically Maori institutions to 'share the authority defined in the treaty'.¹¹² Putting this implication into practice in the television industry, New Zealand's core funding body, NZ On Air (NZOA), expects that productions it funds will take into account the reality of New Zealand's cultural diversity. NZOA also supports an independent Maori funding agency focused on promoting Maori language and culture for broadcasting to Maori – and mainstream audiences. However, 'Pakeha identity' as part of that partnership is still not accepted throughout New Zealand, where its meaning is ambiguous and ideological. It can be employed by those involved in policy and intellectual debate who believe in 'reparative justice', to those who see it as an offensive label aimed at the 'white' intruder.¹¹³ In addition to this is the false notion that the Maori are a homogeneous people representing a unified Maori culture, which can amalgamate with a likewise integrated Pakeha culture. What New Zealand biculturalism demonstrates along with the other three countries' tussles with multiculturalism is the 'salience of political pluralism, material equality and cultural hybridity for contemporary democratic struggle'.¹¹⁴ On the one hand, multiculturalism and biculturalism can represent a hegemonic contrivance for the protection of the dominant group. Or, these disputed terms can also represent a cultural politics, which gives rise to strategies for equity, as well as 're-imagined' identities which inhabit both the private and public sphere.

Policy Contexts

In contrast to the UK's and Australia's varying degrees of broadcasting regulation, New Zealand is placed at the extreme end of a deregulated marketplace, while at the same time having limited local production and relying on program imports of high-cost production. This situation is not comparable with the deregulated United States which, by the nature of its enormous domestic markets, easily sustains high production volume and local content levels. In a recent ten-country comparative study of local content and broadcasting diversity, New Zealand was found to have an extensively deregulated market, second only to the United States.¹¹⁵ There are no legislative requirements placed

110 M. Williams.

111 D. Munshi, 'Media, Politics, and the Asianisation of a Polarised Immigration Debate in New Zealand', *Australian Journal of Communication*, 25, 1, 1998, p.109.

112 M.H. Durie, 'Beyond 1852, Maori, The State and a New Zealand Constitution', *Sites*, 30, 1995, p.35.

113 P. Spoonley, 'The Challenge of Post-Colonialism', *Sites*, 30, 1995, p.55.

114 A. Bell & G. McLennan, 'National Identities: from the General to the Pacific', *Sites*, 30, 1995, p.6.

115 *Local Content and Diversity: Television in Ten Countries*, A Report for New Zealand on Air, Wellington, June 1999.

upon broadcasters for local content or types of programming and no restrictions on foreign ownership. This has not however seen the disappearance of local programs in New Zealand. Local content increased by 265 per cent six years after deregulation and viewer 'choice' has been expanded with the addition of new services and longer transmission hours. Compared with the other countries, local content in New Zealand accounts for less than one-quarter of transmission time – well below the other nations. And while the total hours of local content did increase after deregulation, the *proportion* of local content in the schedule has 'barely changed' since 1989 and is continually under threat of diminishing. Likewise, increased consumer choice has not translated to enhanced content diversity.¹¹⁶

Such market competition has resulted in scheduling practices which see a flourishing of 'populist' programming made up of magazine, reality and repeat programs while innovative programming goes to late night slots.¹¹⁷ In such an environment it is perhaps surprising that high-cost programming is produced at all over more cost-efficient local shows such as sport, news and current affairs. Indeed, the broadcasters in New Zealand make predominantly these genres. More risky, minority and cost intensive programming is supported by NZOA, which was created at the same time as deregulation and acts as a counter measure for ensuring program production which might otherwise not be made a market-driven environment.

As the former public service type broadcasters TV1 and TV2 are now profit-seeking channels, a separate discussion of public and private broadcasters is redundant in contemporary New Zealand. While the five major terrestrial stations have decidedly marked program mixes, drama and minority programming is really dependent on the relationship between NZOA, the program producer and the broadcasters, rather than the close relationship between producer and network alone, as in the United States. In Australia, most commercial drama is outsourced to independent production companies, but state funding bodies are involved in public broadcasting programs and in the past have also supported commercial programming (for example, through the Commercial Television Production Fund). In New Zealand, NZOA has responsibility for explicitly promoting cultural diversity and television programming. NZOA has the responsibility for carrying out cultural policy tasks set out in section 36 of the *Broadcasting Act* to 'reflect and develop New Zealand identity and culture'. This is to be achieved by promoting programs about New Zealand, promoting Maori language and culture and ensuring that programs are of interest to women, children, the disabled, ethnic and other minorities. The 'special needs' nature of the Act, and the relegation of such programming to a singular body certainly seems in contrast to Britain's goals for a mainstreaming approach. However, this is not entirely the case.

As well as setting out the cultural mandates for NZOA, the Act also lays down certain matters to be considered in order to guarantee (as far as possible) that a program will be broadcast. Section 39 of the Act addresses prospective program makers in conjunction with section 36 to appreciate that funding will be connected to a program's potential audience and the likelihood of it being broadcast. There is an argument put forward here that minority programming, while sought after, will need to satisfy a 'mainstream' audience. The criticism is made that minorities then become 'part of the mainstream prime time programming, their faces and concerns become part of the public sphere of popular culture'.¹¹⁸ Critics of such a concept for cultural diversity and television programming suggest that the result of 'mainstreaming the margins' is that minority programming suffers a flattening out of content to more acceptable, mass audience sensibilities. Bringing 'marginal' faces, stories and drama to the 'centre', under the pressures of a state-funded agency with market considerations in tow, may lead to programming of the 'exotic fare' genre.¹¹⁹ However, such attitudes to mainstreaming should also take into consideration the desires of minority program makers and actors, who may hanker for such mainstream opportunities, as well as the wishes of minority audiences who may not be so enthusiastic for 'minority' programming (see below). This is not to say that complex stories and provoking programs should be absent from TV schedules, but the quarantining of state-funded minority programming to 'non-popular' and 'risky' programs alone

116 *Local Content 1999 New Zealand*, NZOA, Wellington, 1999, p.2.

117 G. Lealand, 'Regulation – What Regulation? Cultural Diversity and Local Content in New Zealand Television', *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy*, No. 5, May 2000.

118 A. Bell, 'Mainstreaming the Margins: The Nation in the 1989 Broadcasting Act', *Sites*, No 30, Autumn 1995, p.114.

119 J. Roscoe, 'Documenting the 'Immigrant Nation': Tensions and Contradictions in the Representation of Immigrant Communities in a New Zealand Television Documentary Series', *Media, Culture and Society*, 22,3, 2000, p.257.

contains the risk in itself of delegating minority programming to the exceptional, problematic or indeed – the special interest. The dilemma facing cultural diversity and local programming in New Zealand stems from the fact that there is no equivalent public service broadcaster to guarantee a space for 'risky' and challenging programming. The very limiting size of the domestic market also makes it unlikely that commercial interests would occasionally commit to overly innovative programming. This doesn't mean such programming is entirely lacking on New Zealand screens, but media commentators and innovative program makers have grounds for anxiety.

New Zealand on Air

With NZOA-funded (or previously funded) shows representing only 20 per cent of local content, treating it as the principal site of study for culturally diverse programming has its limitations. For a start, the broadcasters themselves produce more than 80 per cent of local programming made up of news, current affairs, entertainment and sport. Exactly how and in what manner cultural diversity presents itself in the 80 per cent of station-made local content is difficult to know. Nevertheless, NZOA demonstrates a model for promoting culturally diverse programming in a market-driven environment.

Genres on NZ television such as children's, Maori, ethnic, arts and documentary programming are independently produced and almost 100 per cent subsidised by NZOA, with drama subsidised at 60 per cent.¹²⁰ Station-produced entertainment and information programs such as *Gone Fishing*, *Changing Rooms*, *Behind the Wheel* or the talent show *Get Your Act Together*, account for a large portion of non-news local content, and while they may not overtly 'explore' cultural diversity, they nevertheless reflect a version of the nation's culture. Unfortunately, studies examining the level and type of portrayal in such popular shows, similar to research in the USA, have not been undertaken in New Zealand. EEO figures for the composition of broadcasting and production workplaces are not as readily at hand in New Zealand as they are in the UK and USA. However, NZOA do have EEO requirements stipulated as part of their funding support and NZOA themselves have a robust research agenda which covers extensive content analysis and audience research. Minority (Maori) producer and industry perspectives have only recently been reviewed and will be monitored over the coming years.

NZOA cite as critical the task of encouraging broadcasters 'to maintain a sustained commitment to programs reflecting New Zealand identity, cultural diversity and regional mix'.¹²¹ With a yearly budget of around NZ\$87 million, it is not surprising that in its 1999 annual report, there are uncertainties over whether previous levels of production support can be maintained. During 1998, seven hours of first-run NZOA-supported drama were screened, though 182 hours of combined first-run drama/comedy were screened in total. In 1999, total drama/comedy hours were slightly less at 179, although the stripped serial *Shortland Street* on TV2 (a NZOA pedigree), would account for a fair block of these hours. On TV1, the period drama *Greenstone*, a detective series, and the first two 30-minute Pacific Island dramas made to date, *The Overstayer* and *Matou Uma* had made their premieres, thus signifying a multicultural rather than strictly bicultural New Zealand. TV3, on the other hand, virtually withdrew from commissioning drama or comedy. In spite of such sparse production activity, New Zealand's biculturalism is to be observed.

NZOA have a dual strategy for supporting Maori culture by both the funding of an independent Maori agency, Te Mangai Paho, and the funding of 'mainstream' projects which feature Maori talent. While its legislative commitment to Maori programming is 6 per cent of funding, it has supported the area to levels around 12–14 per cent. The agency Te Mangai Paho 'concentrates on the promotion of Maori language broadcasting initiatives for a Maori audience' while support for 'mainstream' projects 'helps to increase Maori presence in the mainstream media and present Maori language, culture and issues in regular programming' to a wider audience.¹²² NZOA also expects that all program makers include Maori language, culture and viewpoints where relevant across *all* programming. In 1999, TV1, 2, 3 and 4 all screened distinctive Maori shows including two youth series (*Mai Time* and *Pukana*) and a couple of documentary projects, making a total of 196 hours of first-run Maori programming. In a 1999 audience research of 750 viewers, over 80 per cent of

120 *New Zealand Television and the Future of Local Content*, NZOA, Wellington, 1998.

121 *Mission Statement, Statement of Purpose, Strategy and Critical Tasks*, NZOA, available at: <http://www.nzonair.govt.nz/statement/mission.html>, accessed 23/5/2000.

122 *Maori Broadcasting*, NZOA, available at <http://www.nzonair.govt.nz/annual98/maori.htm>, accessed 23/5/2000.

people were aware of NZOA's function in promoting Maori culture and identity, the same level of awareness for its function to promote New Zealand identity and culture.¹²³ Last year, NZOA decided to re-evaluate its policies with regard to the mainstream component of its Maori television programming. The key objectives of the new strategy are to 'enhance the on-screen outcomes of mainstream Maori programming ... improve the broadcast experience for Maori practitioners [and] to develop and maintain understanding of relevant Maori issues, as well as relationships with Maori'.¹²⁴ The review identifies some of the problems faced by minority producers, which are similar to those identified in UK research. The review sets a series of goals or 'action points' and, importantly, timeframes for their implementation.

Some of the most important action points are: appointing a Maori executive producer to act as mentor; creating guidelines for non-Maori producers to undertake mentor relationships; bringing Maori programming into prime time by holding discussions with broadcasters; introducing a 'Maori Quota' for prime time; and instigating a regular and diverse schedule of meetings and consultations with Maori stakeholders. There are also formal criteria laid down for what constitutes a Maori Project with the criteria closely resembling a creative elements test. A Maori project should have a core Maori creative team; where a non-Maori company is involved, a Maori executive producer/mentor should be attached; the subject matter should be relevant to Maori culture; and there should be a balance of positive and non-stereotypical subjects across the quota range. While such policy is promising and includes evaluations against undertakings, it ultimately represents a small proportion of total programming, and may not overcome the issue of Maori programs' absence in prime time. After all, it is finally up to broadcasters to decide and consequently control what gets broadcast and when (the implementation of a prime time Maori quota notwithstanding).¹²⁵

Maori programming combined with activities in documentary and drama, place NZOA as either a compensatory, or complimentary measure, contained by the necessities of commercial enterprises. Deregulation has entrusted a singular body to be the televisual 'guardian of the "national imaginary"',¹²⁶ in a country which clearly claims its bicultural status as preferable and apart from multiculturalism. In a nation of around four million potential viewers, where an import such as *ER* costs NZ\$6,000 per hour compared with local drama at 50 times that cost, the efforts of NZOA may be crucial in promoting New Zealand's distinctive cultural diversity on TV. Perhaps NZOA can be viewed as providing assistance for culturally diverse programming in a high-risk market, as it tries to leverage prime time opportunities for 'marginal' product. Such programs and the creative teams behind them will at least have a chance to extend their skill base while 'negotiating' a cultural space, with their programs finding an audience. And from audience research carried out by NZOA,¹²⁷ it would seem that audiences are beginning to value local drama as long as it is high quality, recognisable and culturally safe – hence the term 'negotiated'.

Audiences, Programming and Production

New Zealand audiences seem to have suffered a quality crisis in past years with their drama if NZOA's recent audience survey is any indication. While the vast majority of New Zealanders wish to see more local content, there are certain barriers hindering audiences from watching New Zealand drama. In the past, poor acting, low production budgets, an unpolished look and a lack of emotional impact were cited by respondents as reasons to tune out of local drama. However, this has changed more recently with the screening of dramas displaying higher production values (*Duggan*, *Greenstone*, *Jackson's Wharf*), which would be more familiar to audiences used to American, Australian and British product. This is a noteworthy point as, later in the study, it is revealed that audiences value high quality in local drama over and above seeing New Zealand culture, if local content is being discussed. British drama is rated as best followed by American, with Australian drama receiving mixed comments.

123 *Information and Opinion Monitor*, Market Research Report, NZOA, Wellington, 1999.

124 *NZ On Air's Rautaki Māori*, NZOA, available at <http://www.nzonair.govt.nz/rautaki.html>, accessed 23 May, 2000.

125 Broadcasters TVNZ accepted in 2000 the NZOA requirement that Maori documentaries would also be shown in the same prime time slot as their usual high-rating documentary series. There were fears of a drop in ratings for Maori related programs – which did after all eventuate (thanks to Roger Horricks for this information).

126 A. Bell, 'An Endangered Species: Local Programming in the New Zealand Television Market', *Media Culture and Society*, 17, 1995, p.192.

127 *Attitudes to NZ on air-funded TV Programming and Local Content*, prepared by Colmar Brunton Research for NZOA, Wellington, 2000.

Production values such as 'flat sound' and 'bad acting' in New Zealand shows are mixed with a feeling of cultural cringe for New Zealanders seeing and hearing themselves (one participant stating overseas actors are 'better looking'). Similar to the situation in Australia some years ago, the dominance of 'polished' overseas product in New Zealand created such an overwhelming 'norm', that a shock of the familiar would be experienced at hearing a New Zealand accent on a drama program.¹²⁸ However, with the advent of international co-productions and the improvements in local drama, the case of a distinctive New Zealand look and sound (albeit cringing) has diminished, as the following comments illustrate:

'*Jackson's Wharf* looks and sounds Australian. The cop with the big round hat looks Australian, not New Zealand.'

– Male European

'I thought *Jackson's Wharf* was Australian the first time I saw it.'

– Female European

And it works the other way as well:

'Some Australian ones [dramas] almost have a New Zealand feel to them. Like having Jay [Laga'aia] in *Water Rats*.'¹²⁹

– Male Maori

The above comments hint at a broader trend in countries such as Australia and New Zealand, where there is now a blurring between the local and the international in audiovisual product, as overseas production units, actors and their respective genres locate elsewhere for pragmatic and creative reasons (programs and films such as *Sheena* or *The Piano* in New Zealand and *Farscape* or *The Matrix* in Australia being examples). Aside from debates about Americans chasing a weak currency with limited benefits to the host nation, such programming challenges notions of what constitutes 'the local' and prompts the question of whether such debates may not be continually running behind current trends in any case. An issue for cultural diversity and programming in New Zealand is whether local diversity becomes subsumed into off-shore productions, as well as being muted in local drama due to the internationalising of audience taste. However, according to the NZOA audience research, New Zealanders display a fairly typical attitude for viewers everywhere in *preferring* well-made local content over imports and attaching meaning to the portrayal of a local cultural diversity.

The representation of New Zealand's ethnic diversity and having well-known actors are high on the list of priorities for audiences. Related to questions of cultural identity, participants have high regard for fictional characters to be role models, whether it be children's, mainstream or culturally diverse programming. There seems to be a 'fine line' for New Zealand audiences between what represents a fair and 'acceptable' portrayal, and the representation of minority groups in negatively reinforcing roles – even though such portrayals are recognisable to audiences. While not exclusively a television program, the film *Once Were Warriors* was found to be hurtful and upsetting for some Maori, as a portrayal of their people. Likewise, Pacific Islander participants were not pleased to see an Islander in a cleaning role on one show, despite them accepting that this is a common experience in real life. On a more encouraging note, there was comment from culturally diverse groups that instances of minority representation gave pleasure for the simple, though powerful reason, of being included: '*Shortland Street* had a Fijian girl on getting an operation. Back in Fiji they loved it, it's something you can relate to!' (Male, Pacific Islander).¹³⁰

Overall, participants believed that some degree of proportional representation of New Zealand's ethnic minorities in television programs would be acceptable, an attitude not widely held in the other countries. When it came to specific Maori programming, New Zealanders of European background had contrasting sentiments ranging from resentment to enjoyment and interest (with older participants less enthusiastic about such programming). In comparison, some Maori have an understandably keen interest in specific programming, while other Maori would prefer such programming to be a part of the mainstream for all New Zealanders to have access to (Maori specific programming as well as some mainstream programs do not sub-title Maori, making it difficult for non-Maori speaking European and Maori alike to engage with such programs).

128 R. Horrocks, 'Strategic Nationalisms: Television Production in New Zealand', *Sites*, No 30, Autumn 1995, p.92.

129 *Attitudes to NZ On Air-funded TV Programming and Local Content*, p.12.

130 *Attitudes to NZ On Air-funded TV Programming and Local Content*, p.23.

A mainstream program of the nature preferred by some audiences is the drama series *Street Legal*, funded with NZOA support and screened on TV2. Not only does it star *Water Rats* veteran Jay Laga'aia (from Pacific Island background), but it casts him in the role of a confident and successful lawyer (a criticism of minority audiences was the scarcity of successful characters in local drama). Adopting the philosophy of character first, ethnicity second, Laga'aia says of his part:

He's a lawyer first and Polynesian second. That's why you won't find tapa clothes hanging up in his office. You'll just find diplomas and a hard attitude ... we make no excuses for the fact we sometimes speak like Islanders, because we are.¹³¹

Street Legal is set in what was originally a working-class area of Auckland, populated by Pacific Islanders, which has since transformed into the ubiquitous café precinct. The show is reminiscent of inner-city dramas made in most countries, in that as a show's location moves to a city's centre, the more cosmopolitan and hence culturally diverse it becomes. Set in a very different New Zealand landscape but of cultural significance, the mainstream drama series *Jackson's Wharf* went to a second series.

The 20-part drama recalls comments made by audiences for their desire to see recognisably New Zealand locations – meaning the sort of places New Zealand has become well known for as a tourist destination. The global marketing of New Zealand landscapes has long been a valued commodity across a range of markets and is now increasingly embraced by commercial and state program makers for the better or worse. The local significance of a New Zealand 'heartland' is expressed by Jo Tyndall, former NZOA CEO:

It's set in a small town, and there is a strong sentiment that in New Zealand, in one way or another, we all come from a small town – where there are simpler times, stronger values and a sense of community ... it embraces and showcases the things we hold near and dear about ourselves as New Zealanders.¹³²

This sentimental longing for the untainted small town is not exclusive to urban bound New Zealanders, as the producers/creators of *Blue Heelers*, *Seachange* and *A Country Practice* attest to in Australia. And like Australia, it is a yearning for a past and way of life experienced by both European descendants and indigenous alike. *Jackson's Wharf* attempts to be inclusive, as John Barnett, managing director for the show's production company, Southern Pacific states:

The cast is reflective of New Zealand society. About a quarter of the cast are Maori or Polynesian and a large number of stories are based around the fact that *Jackson's Wharf* was settled by the Jacksons in the 1800s but Maori have been living there for much longer ... NZOA look to see that drama meets requirements for programs to be reflective of New Zealand society.

Like all dramas put forward to NZOA, as a significant stakeholder they anticipate the inclusion of Maori and other minority elements in story and cast. This requirement does not operate as a quota at de facto level or otherwise. The inclusion of Maori talent in particular has in the last years become very much part of the 'everyday' for producers and audiences in New Zealand television. This can be traced back to the history of Maori claims for social and political rights based on the Treaty of Waitangi and government recognition of those rights. The depth of inclusiveness resultant from the Treaty is still very much contested at many levels, however, policy efforts have had their consequences. Such outcomes of policy-funded drama for an inclusive New Zealand are to be found in another program produced by Southern Pacific and originally funded by NZOA: *Shortland Street*. This serial has left an enduring mark on New Zealand television and presents an interesting study in subsidised local content within a commercial marketplace.

Now in its ninth year, the medical 'soap' *Shortland Street* was initially funded by the then recently-formed NZOA as a risky foray into long-form drama. In 1991, New Zealand youth had mostly overseas programs to watch for the lack of local ones. At the time, young audiences preferred overseas programming with research showing they had reservations about warming to local actors combined with a reluctance to hear local accents.¹³³ In order to combat negative expectations,

131 'The Right Stuff', J. Laga'aia interviewed in *The New Zealand Herald* (E.G. Supplement), 6/7/2000, p.5.

132 J. Tyndall, *Jackson's Wharf – Drama from Heartland New Zealand Will Be Back*, Press Release, NZOA, 30 April, 2000.

133 R. Horrocks, p.93.

Shortland Street adopted a mixed genre or hybrid approach to the soap opera, taking American influences and imbuing the program with distinctive New Zealand attributes, including a cast which reflected the country's cultural diversity. Early criticisms of shaky acting and unreal storylines on the show were merely typical of the reception for most new serials, which can take two years to become established. By the mid-1990s, young audiences showed a dramatic change in attitude toward the show and its longevity attests to this support. But even more revealing for this study is the fact that NZOA progressively reduced funding for the show after four years, as it became more successful, thus making it a stand alone independent production and obviously a profitable one.

Such success was not expected when it was conceived. Considered 'a most controversial initiative' for NZOA at the time, its good intentions in the direction of launching local youth drama were met with a cynical response from those who saw it as a 'sellout'. There were comments that an 'Americanised' soap was hardly the type of project a public service type funding body should be investing in and the show's anticipation of commercial success was also unpopular with those who conflate state funding with exclusively anti-commercial programming.¹³⁴ Nearly ten years down the track, the impact of *Shortland Street* and the initial support from NZOA is described as pivotal by South Pacific Pictures managing director John Barnett:

The creation of NZOA gave South Pacific the opportunity to make *Shortland Street*, which created the talent necessary to make *Hercules* on a day-to-day basis, which created the confidence for American studios to back Peter Jackson's considerable talent into *Lord of the Rings*, which convinced Sony to listen to the New Zealand producer and director of *Vertical Limit*, and locate here.¹³⁵

In the case of *Shortland Street*, NZOA not only allowed the show to build an established audience, it gave the production company the initial boost required to go on with the show, which has since produced a range of successful local programming. The show not only provided ongoing technical and creative training for a small New Zealand industry, but it has been the starting place for a large majority of New Zealand actors, who have progressed to both national and international projects at home and overseas.¹³⁶ Barnett estimates that 50 per cent of crews on the company's productions are Maori or Polynesian. He concedes that there is a shortfall in minority writers, producers and directors but that NZOA, with the New Zealand Film Commission, have programs which have helped to address this. As for actors on the show, no hard data exists for New Zealand programs but a cursory viewing of the show demonstrates a diversity of faces not seen on many other serial programs produced in the region (of particular significance is the presence of two continuing roles played by *Australian* actors of Asian background!). Barnett also believes that finding suitable actors from Maori and Polynesian background has become easier than locating actors of European decent. This is in direct contrast to the sentiments of Australian producers who claim that there is still difficulty in getting access to a range of actors from culturally diverse backgrounds (see next chapter). Barnett believes the reason for the ease of access to minority actors in New Zealand may be due to their 'tradition of oral performance, an emphasis from funding bodies to achieve better representation and the commercial recognition of the size and diversity of various demographics'.

In NZOA's 1999 audience research, *Shortland Street* seems to have become well accepted across a range of demographics beyond the youth audience. A cross-section of Maori, other ethnic minority and Pakeha viewers felt the show had come a long way drama wise, dealt with contemporary issues and looked more professional. This is due in part to the show's long-standing policy of diverse casting and its setting in multicultural Auckland. Not only popular with Maori and Pakeha audiences in New Zealand, the program is watched with enthusiasm throughout the Pacific Island region in places such as Fiji and the Cook Islands. For the show's producers, explicitly including cultural diversity through cast and script in *Shortland Street* was not motivated by NZOA policy or good intentions alone. The idea of building in cultural diversity as a market advantage need not be viewed with mistrust or hostility, if it is implemented by informed and sensitive knowledge. Barnett sees the cultural diversity in *Shortland Street* as 'setting the show apart from overseas programs and helps our veracity in the New Zealand market'.

¹³⁴ R. Horrocks, p.99.

¹³⁵ J. Barnett, *The Future of Broadcasting*, paper delivered at Broadcasting Symposium, 31/8/1999.

¹³⁶ 'Shortland Street 2000', *Onfilm*, June 2000, p.17.

A program such as *Shortland Street* challenges established ideas about the role state funding can play in programming which must operate in a market-dominated environment. The balance of trying to promote a nationally diverse culture in television production with the pragmatics of market demands is obviously fraught with hardship and grief. However, *Shortland Street* demonstrates the capacity of a dedicated funding body to step in at the crucial development phase in order to make a space for programming, which is either too risky for a small market to try, or simply not there. The fact that *Shortland Street* is popular, culturally diverse, pro-social and profitable confirms the possibilities for assisted programming in a deregulated market. The success of *Shortland Street* should not be attached to criticisms of New Zealand's television landscape in general, which acquire validity if broadcasting sensibilities are offended by a reliance on imports and local replicas. However, the exceptionality of *Shortland Street* as being the one show to 'occupy a central place in the New Zealand consciousness'¹³⁷ presents the danger of placing all one's eggs in the one basket. With the abolition in 2000 of direct licence fee funding to NZOA, a show such as *Shortland Street*, let alone less commercial product, may be prevented from evolving. While this doesn't entirely endanger the somewhat inclusive nature of New Zealand's bicultural broadcasting environment, the superior example of a show such as *Shortland Street* rests on the kind of support that a body such as NZOA can provide. While state-supported programming is unlikely to eventuate on commercial television in Australia, the policy requirements for cultural diversity in NZOA programming has demonstrated that such stipulations are not toxic for market success.

Unlike the mostly unprotected drama production sector in New Zealand, Australian drama is supported by quotas for local content on commercial channels in addition to the commissioning support of the public broadcasting sector. Considered to have a moderate level of broadcast policy regulation and a reasonably successful production industry, a multicultural Australia might be expected to have first-rate credentials when it comes to cultural diversity and television programming. Yet as audience research in the UK illustrated, the perception there of popular programming from Australia was that it was the least 'ethnic looking' of all. Media critics, past research and ethnic groups in Australia stated exactly this in the early 1990s. However, as 2000 approached, anecdotal evidence and a feeling amongst some groups, suggested the situation had changed in the last years. The following chapter explores cultural diversity and television programming in Australia with a focus on the commercial television production industry.

5. AUSTRALIA: THE SHIFT TO CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Multiculturalism in Australia

Prior to significant post-World War II immigration, non-British migration to Australia had consisted mostly of Chinese gold seekers and 'Coolie' labour. Except for several abandoned attempts at restricting non-European immigration in the period from the 1850s to the 1880s, migration to Australia was basically unrestricted. This was in keeping with the British empire-building philosophy of the free movement of labour.¹³⁸ By the time of federation in 1901, the new commonwealth government had introduced the *Immigration Restriction Act*, which was to mature into the White Australia Policy – a policy which survived fully intact until the late 1950s. Following World War II, Australia required additional labour to assist in the growth of industrial business. In factual terms, immigration provided 50 per cent of Australia's labour force growth from 1947 to 1973.¹³⁹ As a consequence, Australia's overseas-born population has risen from 9.8 per cent in 1947 to 23.3 per cent in the late 1990s. If we include second generation immigrants with at least one parent born overseas, the figure rises to 41 per cent (though a large majority of these originate from English speaking countries).

In the initial period of assimilationist immigration, consensus for immigration had to be created – in the era of multiculturalism, the consensus had to be maintained. By the 1970s, the lure of an Australian modernity with its culture of hard work, consumerism and homogeneity was becoming difficult to sustain in light of Europe's 'economic miracle'. Over the previous years, a weakening of the White Australia Policy had also taken place in order to maintain numbers, resulting in the arrival of migrants from more diverse origins. Following the previous Whitlam Labor government's initiative, the Liberal Party pursued an official policy of multiculturalism and with the 1978 Galbally Report, multiculturalism was defined as an inherent component of Australian society.

This initial expression of multiculturalism was one of cultural maintenance with the addition of programs aimed at addressing hardships faced by immigrants. Although social justice concepts were to be applied in the 1980s with respect to furthering the 'life-chances' of certain minority groups – particularly under the Hawke-Keating Labor government – the focus in the Galbally Report promotes multicultural awareness and education for the community as a whole. One of the commitments to multiculturalism in this era was the creation of the broadcaster SBS. Initially established as a multilingual radio service, SBS television has become 'one of the major public broadcasters in the world dedicated to both the reflection and the propagation of multiculturalism'.¹⁴⁰ While the SBS offers an intriguing example of cultural diversity and television programming, it is not focused upon in this study due to its uniqueness and arguable status as a niche broadcaster. Nevertheless, the SBS demonstrates the nature of multiculturalism in Australia as a state or governmental enterprise and in some ways, supports the thesis of multiculturalism being conceived of as exceptional rather than mundane.

Since the expansion of the SBS' services in the 1980s, multiculturalism as a policy revolved around the *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* which was released in 1989 and received mostly bipartisan support throughout the Labor years. The Agenda has three domains, roughly being the promotion of social harmony, a 'fair go' for all and the harnessing of human resources. The notion of a fair go for all remains a strong rhetorical icon of Australian social life and the government's strategies on social justice in the Agenda were significant in this direction. However, the Agenda's cautious emphasis on private and community expressions of cultural practice within carefully defined limits is a progression of earlier policy which is mindful of Australian law, the constitution and citizenship rights. Important for this research is the Agenda's emphasis on providing equal opportunity in the workplace. This has evolved to a trade and industry informed philosophy which complements EEO strategies in a social justice agenda. The authors Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis'

138 B. Cope, S. Castles, M. Kalantzis, *Immigration, Ethnic Conflicts and Social Cohesion*, NLLIA, Sydney, 1995.

139 S. Castles, B. Cope, M. Kalantzis, M. Morrissey, *Mistaken Identity: Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism in Australia*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 1992.

140 S. Cunningham, G. Hawkins, A. Yue, T. Nguyen, & J. Sinclair, 'Multicultural Broadcasting and Diasporic Video as Public Spherules' in *American Behavioural Scientist*, 43(9), 2000, p.1535.

notion of 'productive diversity'¹⁴¹ describes the combination of Australian multiculturalism as cultural and global market resources, to be managed for improved workplace outcomes. Essentially, productive diversity views cultural diversity in a constructive economic sense. The cultural diversity of Australia's working community is no longer a problem to be smoothed out, but is seen as a positive resource, providing more creative possibilities for cultural development, and enabling the development of products and services better able to compete globally.

At the end of the 1990s, a conservative government placed in jeopardy the gains made in citizenship, cultural diversity and social reform, with the dismantling and defunding of various agencies and measures committed to multiculturalism. A damaging, though thought-provoking race debate with the election of Pauline Hanson to Federal Parliament was a reminder that tolerance for a multicultural reality is not a given, and that Australia is yet to come to terms with the advent of Asian immigration. Added to this is the stalling of the reconciliation process with Aboriginal Australia, also a symptom of disavowal politics by the current government. In spite of these gloomy assessments, anecdotal evidence in the late 1990s pointed to an increase in the presence of actors from culturally diverse backgrounds on commercial television. Indeed, the casting survey carried out in 1999, and reported below, confirmed the improvement in casting for a culturally diverse Australia. However, mirroring concerns for Australia's engagement with Asian Australia, there was a noticeable lack of faces from non-European backgrounds.

Cultural Diversity and Commercial Drama in Australia

Research of the 1990s illustrated an incongruity between cultural diversity in the Australian community with the representation of that diversity on commercial television screens. Australian drama in particular received much criticism for its seemingly 'Anglo' portrayal of Australian society. Most of this earlier research was based on program content analysis and critical approaches to studying the media. The research presented here examines policy and industry developments of the 1990s related to cultural diversity combined with new research undertaken within the commercial drama television industry. In order to determine the status of cultural diversity and commercial television drama at the end of the 1990s, a casting survey of all Australian commercial drama programs broadcast in 1999 was carried out. This was complemented by interviews with industry personnel and a two-week content analysis of programming to examine the stories and type of portrayal. The latter half of this chapter explores the issue further through industry interviews in order to explain both improvements made in the previous years, and the obstacles faced by some groups in gaining a place on our popular drama programs.

Background

In 1992, the Communications Law Centre (CLC) prepared its report¹⁴² for the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA, formerly known as Actors Equity) into the representation of non-English speaking people in Australian television drama. The CLC report came shortly after research into ethnicity and the media carried out by Philip Bell¹⁴³ and during a period of research activity carried out by researchers at the University of Technology, Sydney.¹⁴⁴ At this time, it was estimated that less than 2 per cent of available roles were for performers of culturally diverse backgrounds and there were no continuing roles for indigenous performers on commercial television drama. In the period 1992 to 1995, a number of additional and significant events unfolded. The Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) was established in 1992 to administer the new *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* (BSA). Initiating a scheme of co-regulation, the ABA facilitated the self-regulation of the various media industries – and this included commercial television.

A Code of Practice for commercial television operators was also drafted in this period (1992–1993) with input from the networks, guilds and advocacy groups resulting in the Federation of Australian

141 B. Cope & M. Kalantzis, *Productive Diversity: A New Model for Work and Management*, Pluto Press, Annandale, 1997.

142 Communications Law Centre, *The Representation of non-English Speaking Background People in Australian Television Drama*, CLC, Sydney, 1992.

143 P. Bell, *Multicultural Australia in the Media*, OMA, Canberra, 1993.

144 H. Goodall, A. Jakubowicz, J. Martin, T. Mitchell, L. Randall & K. Senevirante, *Cultural Pluralism and the Media: A Report to the Office of Multicultural Affairs*, OMA, Canberra, 1990.

Commercial Television Stations (FACTS) *Code of Practice*. After a period of sustained lobbying on the part of the MEAA, ethnic groups and the Communications Law Centre, a set of *Advisory Notes* relating to the portrayal of cultural diversity were finally released by FACTS in August 1994. There continued to be a level of dissatisfaction expressed by most of those involved in the cultural diversity debate, however no changes relating to cultural diversity were included in the revised 1999 FACTS *Code of Practice*.

Research Context

One of the most significant studies in the area of multiculturalism and the media is the 1994 book *Racism, Ethnicity and the Media*,¹⁴⁵ which researched cultural diversity across a broad range of issues within print and broadcast media, advertising, the SBS and children's media. The core methodology was analysis of particular media in order to reveal 'media practices as well as their social context'. In addition to program analysis, audience surveys, interviews with media industry workers and public seminars were also undertaken in the research. Around the same period, four additional research projects were completed and published: 1) *The Representation of Non-English Speaking Background People on Australian Television Drama*,¹⁴⁶ a discussion paper prepared for Actors Equity by the Communications Law Centre; 2) *Next Door Neighbours*,¹⁴⁷ a report for the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) regarding a series of discussion groups held with ethnic groups about media representation; 3) *The People We See on TV*,¹⁴⁸ from the Australian Broadcasting Authority; and 4) *Multicultural Australia in the Media*¹⁴⁹ for the OMA. The four projects do not have similar methodologies, so comparison between the studies is difficult. Nonetheless, they all reported the lack of participation for actors of culturally diverse backgrounds and an impoverished representation of Australia's cultural diversity.

Aims

The casting research reported here updates the studies undertaken in the early 1990s concerned with the portrayal of cultural diversity on television. The research is the first study to carry out a comprehensive survey of actors as well as focusing on industry professional practice related to casting for commercial television drama. While industry perspectives inform the research to a significant extent, the relationship of the study to broadcast policy and the *Broadcasting Services Act* is also important. One of its ten Objects, *BSA Object s.3 (e)* is 'to promote the role of broadcasting services in developing and reflecting a sense of Australian identity, character and cultural diversity'. This wording is also to be found in the Object of the *Australian Content Standard* (1999) which prescribes amounts of first release drama for commercial television amongst other things. Both the *BSA* and the *Australian Content Standard* express the desire that broadcasters facilitate the development and representation of cultural diversity in the community through their programming.

Local drama programming, in particular, has been identified as a very popular media form through ratings success, and importantly, audiences consider it to be very effective in 'presenting and promoting cultural diversity'.¹⁵⁰ The results of this study thus allow for an evaluation of the commercial broadcasters' performance with regard to meeting Object 3 (e) of the *BSA* and the Object of the *Australian Content Standard*. The industry indicator of employment for DCALB actors reported here is taken as an important measure of movement towards this policy goal.

The core component of the study was a casting snapshot of Australian commercial drama series and serials that were produced in July–October 1999. The focus was on sustaining cast, or those members of the cast who regularly appeared in the program. The programs surveyed were: *Water Rats* and *Stingers* broadcast on the Nine Network, *Blue Heelers*, *All Saints* and *Home and Away* broadcast on the Seven Network, and *Neighbours* and *Breakers* broadcast on Network Ten (as of week beginning November 8, 1999, *Breakers* was no longer screened on Ten). While it was

145 A. Jakubowicz, (Ed.), *Racism, Ethnicity and the Media*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1994.

146 CLC, 1992.

147 B. Coupe, A. Jakubowicz & L. Randall, *Next Door Neighbours*, OMA, Canberra, 1992.

148 S. Nugent, M. Loncar & K. Aisbett, *The People We See on TV: Cultural Diversity on Television*, ABA, Sydney, 1993.

149 P. Bell, 1993.

150 S. Nugent, M. Loncar & K. Aisbett, 1993, p.5.

considered desirable to survey guest cast, this proved difficult due to the transitory nature of these performers on set. However, a repeat of the 1999 casting survey had been recently completed at the time of writing, and this focused on guest cast appearing in dramas on both commercial and state broadcasters, as well as lead actors on ABC and SBS dramas.

As an additional indicator of the portrayal of cultural diversity on commercial drama, a two-week content analysis of the seven programs surveyed was undertaken in September 1999. This was deemed necessary to determine if actors from culturally diverse backgrounds were playing roles that were either specific to their cultural background or non-ethnic specific. It was also an opportunity to monitor story lines which were concerned with Australia's cultural diversity. Semi-structured interviews with the programs' respective casting directors and other key production personnel provided insights and some explanations for the quantitative data.

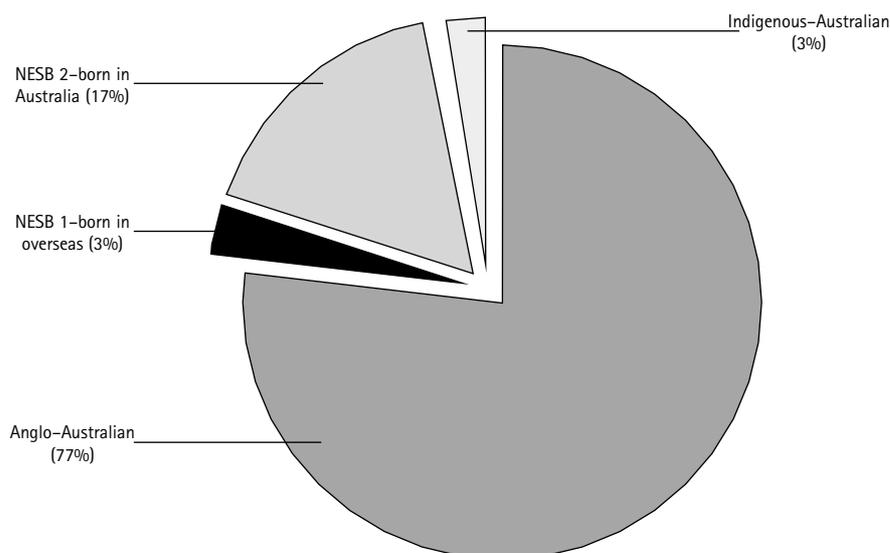
Casting Snapshot Survey – Method

A questionnaire survey was administered to cast on-site at the productions concerned in 1999. With assistance from the MEAA, four weeks were spent visiting Sydney and Melbourne to oversee the administration of the survey to as many performers as possible. Actors of culturally diverse backgrounds were divided into three groups for the purpose of the study. NESB 1 for those actors born overseas in an NESB country, and NESB 2 for those actors born in Australia with one or more parents born in an NESB country (generally referred to as second generation immigrants). Actors of Aboriginal or Torres Straits Islander background were given the opportunity to identify themselves as indigenous in a separate question. Actors were also given the opportunity to write their own comments on the issue of casting for a culturally diverse Australia. Survey responses were received and processed up until December 1999. Interviews were also conducted up until this time. Questionnaire responses were coded for conversion to SPSS software for analysis.

Casting Snapshot Survey – Results

From a possible total of eighty-eight actors, the ethnicity of sixty-five performers was established. Fifty (77 per cent) were of English speaking background, thirteen (20 per cent) were of NESB background, made up of two NESB 1 (3 per cent) and eleven NESB 2 actors (17 per cent). Two performers (3 per cent) were from Aboriginal background (see Chart A below).

Chart A: Ethnicity of Actors



The two most significant results compared with MEAA research from the early 1990s is the presence of Aboriginal performers in sustaining roles (up from none to 3 per cent) and a total NESB presence

of 20 per cent, compared with 2 per cent in the previous decade. The NESB outcome requires some discussion. It is significant that only two (or 3 per cent) of the actors were born in non-English speaking countries, according to the current research. ABS data for 1998¹⁵¹ shows that the comparable percentage for this group in the Australian community is approximately 14 per cent. Clearly, those born overseas in non-English speaking countries are not well represented on Australian commercial drama. A more positive result is that for NESB 2 actors. According to the ABS figures, Australians who have one or both parents born in a non-English speaking country (NESB 2) made up approximately 11 per cent of the total population in 1997. Thus the 17 per cent figure in this survey represents a better than statistical approximation of these second generation immigrants than occurs in the community.

Table A provides three comparisons for performers of culturally diverse backgrounds: 1) the results of the 1992 MEAA survey; 2) the current survey based on a response rate of 74 per cent; 3) the statistical representation of these groups in the general population.

Table A: Comparison of Studies

Group	1992 MEAA Survey*	1999 Survey	General Population
NESB 1	2%	3%	14%
NESB 2	–	17%	11%
Indigenous	0%	3%	2%

* The figure of 2 per cent in the MEAA research represents both NESB 1 and 2.

Table A demonstrates the continuing poor representation of NESB 1 actors born overseas working in drama, as compared with this group in the general population. The remaining two groups fare much better. The other significant data collected was the actual countries NESB performers came from. Table B (below) shows the regional origins of NESB 1 and NESB 2 actors.

Table B: Family Background by Region

Region	Mother	Father
Pacific	1	1
Western Europe	1	3
Eastern Europe	3	3
Mediterranean	2	1
Middle East	0	1
Scandinavia	0	2

The research shows that no sustaining actor was from an Asian background. This compares with an Asian-born (NESB 1) population in Australia of 5 per cent and an estimated Asian NESB 2 population of 2 per cent. Aside from debates about whether the mainstream can acknowledge and accept an Asian presence, the research would seem to support the notion that it is children from the longer established migrant groups who are able to negotiate the profession and industry, in order to achieve the level of sustainer. The possible reasons for this are discussed later.

Content Analysis

The seven programs in this study were recorded for a two-week period from 13/9/1999 to 24/9/1999 and represented a fairly typical two weeks. No NESB 1 or 2 sustaining cast member was involved in a role which referred to their ethnicity. There were, however, four NESB guest roles across the seven shows, which were related to the ethnicity of the actor, that is they were ethnic-specific roles. There were also several guest roles played by NESB actors which were non-specific. With respect to the roles played by the two Aboriginal actors, no reference was made in the programs to their cultural background – ie: they played non-specific parts in their respective programs.

On the one hand is the total lack of reference to sustaining actors' ethnicity or cultural background,

151 ABS, *Australia Now: A Statistical Profile*, available at: <http://www.abs.gov.au>, accessed 29/11/1999.

in spite of the fact that all seven programs have sustaining cast of NESB background. The ethnicity of these actors was never referred to in the analysis period. However, when it comes to guest roles and guest cast, one finds that stories are more likely to be ethnically based. Results of the 2001 follow up casting survey, which included guest cast, indicated that about 28 per cent of actors in guest roles are from a culturally diverse background, whereas 22 per cent of actors in lead roles are from culturally diverse backgrounds.

NESB actors noted in interview and commented in writing that they do not wish to have their ethnic background foregrounded. They desire to play non-specific roles:

Once an actor of non-Anglo background plays a role that is say, 'the typical Italian guy' for some time, the industry will only see him as that character.

– Female DCALB actor, *Breakers*

I find that the casting of non-Anglo characters fails to understand that the character lives and operates in the same world as the Anglo characters. I am an Australian of Italian background – that is an incidental matter in the course of my life, but in roles I play, that background is often everything.

– Male DCALB actor, *Stingers*

To not be cast any differently from Anglo background actors is what a multicultural society is.

– Female DCALB actor, *Neighbours*

It should be remembered that the great majority of DCALB actors surveyed are second generation Australians and the overwhelming non-specific nature of roles for DCALB actors accords with their wishes. Such a portrayal also reflects the cultural integration of second generation migrants into the wider community to various degrees. The connection between these actors' sentiments with the concept of mainstreaming and the lack of lead Asian actors is discussed below, as well as why guest roles are much more likely to utilise such cultural elements as accent, attitude and appearance in order to engage with a multicultural story.

Industry Perspectives – Aboriginal Portrayal

This research shows that since the early 1990s, there has been a noticeable increase in the participation of actors from culturally diverse backgrounds in Australian commercial television drama. In particular, there has been an increase in the number of Aboriginal performers. Not only were there two sustaining roles for this group on commercial drama, but they were of a non-specific nature. In the case of actor Aaron Pederson who stars in *Water Rats*, the actor progressed from magazine programs with the ABC to co-presenting the program *Gladiators*. After appearing in mini-series screened on commercial television and other shows, Pederson was seen back on the ABC in 1998/99 for his detective role in *Wildside*, which led to his leading role as Detective Michael Reilly on *Water Rats*. Pederson is keen to present indigenous people as filling 'everyday roles in society and at sophisticated levels'.¹⁵² He situates his role on *Water Rats* as being an 'important breakthrough for his people' and recognises that it 'was a big move for a commercial network to cast an indigenous actor in a mainstream role (and) a very positive one'.¹⁵³ Pederson's level and type of experience, as well as his excellent acting, was cited by writers, producers and casting agents as an important and desirable factor for all performers, regardless of cultural background, in gaining work on commercial television drama.

Actor Heath Bergerson, the other Aboriginal actor in a lead role, had a history in theatre and television series before working on *Breakers*. While Bergerson's character occasionally had story lines concerned with his cultural background, the actor was consulted for these stories and was pleased with his role and portrayal in the program:

It was all up to me anyway, what the stories about Reuben's past should be. The writers didn't really have any sure idea for his background. The writer rang me up and we spent an hour on the phone and she got some ideas from our yarn. It came out pretty good in the episodes. They also showed the Stolen Generation – you know, real Australian history. They put everything in there. There was one story though. When a mate rips off fifty dollars from the flat and I get caught putting it back – I react by taking off and

152 T. Johnston, 'Aaron Joins the Rat Race', *Sunday Herald Sun*, 4/4/1999, p.2.

153 'Aaron's a Rat', *New Idea*, 20/3/1999, p.23.

so it looked like I was the thief. Aaron (Pederson) did phone me up and thought I shouldn't have let them do that story. He reckoned the stealing idea and Aboriginals took us back to the early days. But I know the character and how the audience would be feeling. They'll feel sympathetic for Rueben, they already know he's a good guy and done the right thing. But Aaron's good – asks if they're looking after me on the set.

Both indigenous actors declared the importance of getting an indigenous presence on the screen as a way of communicating to their own people and program makers that Aboriginal performers need not play culturally specific roles. Until Bergerson's previous ongoing role in *Sweat* in 1996, no Aboriginal actor had made it to the beginning credits of a television series or serial.¹⁵⁴ Opening credits are reserved for the main ongoing cast. Guest cast, regardless of duration on the show, are relegated to the end credits. The fact that in 1999 there were three drama programs on TV with indigenous actors in the main cast went some way to dispelling the notion of Aboriginal characters being on the peripheral (Aaron Pederson also starred in the ABC drama *Wildside*). Their representation in multiple and familiar drama narratives with professional challenges, relationships, sex, and personal crises bolsters their 'arrival' as main(stream) characters. The fact that two shows (*Breakers* and *Wildside*) also grappled with issues related to the actor's cultural background demonstrates a confidence by both actor and program to not be afraid of visiting the 'dreaded' cultural identity issue. While the number of indigenous actors is proportional to their representation in the population, there is the danger of an Aboriginal presence disappearing off our dramas once again, with the departure of just one or two actors. On this basis, it seems reasonable that industry and training institutions take explicit measures to make opportunities available to aspiring and experienced indigenous actors alike. As revealed below, drama schools in Australia seem to have done exactly this, and not for equity reasons alone.

Industry Perspectives – Casting and Acting

For Indigenous and NESB actors, the research suggests that sustainer level work opportunities exist, but actors are unlikely to have an accent or be from an Asian background. There are several possible reasons for this situation, aside from any implicit or explicit prejudice on the part of program makers and networks. Nevertheless, *all* casting directors interviewed were unanimous in the belief that there had been a significant increase in the number of tertiary trained acting graduates from culturally diverse backgrounds throughout the 1990s:

In the last five years there has been a noticeable increase in actors from non-Anglo backgrounds graduating from the acting schools. Theatre has played a part, but the schools have understood the need to encourage young actors with potential from a variety of backgrounds to train.

– Ann Robinson, Casting Director for Mullinaris

I think the drama schools like QUT, NIDA, Nepean [University of Western Sydney] and so on have opened their eyes to the opportunities of having an 'ethnic mix'.

– Kim Saville, Casting Director for Faith Martin & Associates

The drama schools' reasons for having a diverse cohort are principally motivated by two considerations. Firstly, different plays and stories obviously require a mix of people in gender, personality and actor preference for certain roles. Secondly, the potential marketability of the students is important when it comes time to securing an agent and eventual work in the industry. Having a diverse range of graduates translates to a greater choice for agents, who also seek to fulfil a range of choices for their clients. Acting is certainly not like most professions when it comes to employment. Opportunities for work are obtained through a mixture of traditional and non-traditional requirements for any one job. Unlike most professions, appearance, voice, and personality at auditions (the acting equivalent of the job interview) will be very important, in addition to having experience and reputation. Dianne Eden, former head of QUT's Acting Department, and her team must, like other acting schools, choose a small fraction of hopefuls each year for the three-year degree course:

The only way to achieve an excellent graduate is to pay enormous attention to the intake. If we can't honestly say we think that with training an applicant has a chance of getting an agent and breaking

154 I am indebted to Alan McKee's insights on the topic of Aboriginal representation in popular television. See: A. McKee, 'Marking the Liminal for True Blue Aussies: The Generic Placement of Aboriginality in Australian Soap Operas', *Australian Journal of Communication*, 24,1,1997 and "'The Aboriginal Version of Ken Done...'" Banal Aboriginal Identities in Australia', *Cultural Studies*, 11,2,1997.

into the business, we don't take them on: we won't lie! Integrity for an acting school must begin at these intake auditions, not at the end of the course. This is not a comfortable process because we are playing God with their young lives during the auditions – but we rely on our experience and our love of the profession to make these decisions. This concept of *marketability* is not driven by soapies wanting handsome little bee-bop boys and girls. It is driven by the knowledge that *if* they are skilled enough, they will eventually get a job, probably on film or television. The students can be pretty, they can be big, thin, ugly, short, tall, Italian or Icelandic or indigenous, anything. They have to offer something strong, interesting, and reliable – and they need to demonstrate a disciplined professional attitude. It's a tough, tough industry, run by even tougher people.

Training institutions have, by de facto, given the Australian film and television industry much of the cultural diversity now apparent on our screens. One may wonder how less diverse looking programs and films would be without their contribution. Tony Knight, head of acting at NIDA, describes the changes which have come about by taking an *active* role in changing what was once a largely Anglo domain:

We've always been aware that we needed to make more of an effort – particularly with Aboriginal students. And it had to be in consultation with indigenous people and with the University of New South Wales about what we could do. The biggest difference that came though was when Michael Leslie was running the school in WA associated with WAAPA [Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts]. What was wonderful about Michael's school was that it was a stepping stone – it was a valuable place and it was our main source of getting indigenous people into *our* school. It's not like we do a reverse discrimination ... look, to be absolutely honest, there has been some of that and I'm not ashamed of doing it, and saying it. These students are disadvantaged. They do not have the same advantages that the mainstream may have. But it's not just indigenous students, it's students from Asian and other backgrounds as well. I've been doing this job for a long time, back in the late '70s it was pretty Anglo-Saxon. But slowly you started to see the influence of Greeks and Italians. So the effects of multiculturalism gradually started to have *their* effects. And that has steadily grown. In any one year there is a huge mixture of ethnic backgrounds in our intake.

Graduating from an acting course or training in theatre is one method of finally getting a 'gig' on television. Of course, many working actors have used other methods such as crossing over from advertising and modelling or in rare cases, have been 'discovered'. In all cases, the reasons behind hiring an actor in the 'tough industry' of television are not clear and do not readily function as explanations why one group or another fail to be represented on our screens. Actors themselves are very aware of the pressures placed on them for conforming to socially constructed concepts of attractiveness and personality. The demands of an industry, which can lean towards outward appearance for employment criteria, further complicates the issue of casting and cultural diversity. Tony Knight adds:

The beauty myth still operates in the industry, of course. But regarding our intake, we don't look at that at all. It's not relevant. It would be silly to say it doesn't exist, however. But that's a pressure that comes from *outside*. Particularly from television – not so much film and theatre. I guess all the television shows have it, whether somebody is 'sexy' or not. And that changes as easily as fashion. You do run along side it but you don't pay too much attention to it. I find that whole beauty thing a bit of a horror actually. Someone will be passed over for a role and some else will be cast on their looks.

Outside the acting schools, the casting profession is well aware of the issue of cultural diversity as well as the hardships faced in getting female actors into a range of roles. In fact, there was general agreement among casting directors that in some ways, women and older actors face more discrimination in the industry than those of culturally diverse backgrounds:

There will be an *endless* search for a man in a role for which there is no concrete reason that it has to be a man, and then someone might finally suggest 'what about a woman'. If we honestly want to reflect our society and workplaces as they appear on TV, then you have to ask – 'why can't this role be a woman?'

– Ann Robinson

Strong roles for women – where is that being discussed or debated within the industry? It goes for older actors too. Youth seems to be the priority for the networks. Older actors in Australia feel their experience is not respected. Think how different it is for old footballers! In many shows there is the

feeling that our more experienced actors are playing 'second fiddle' to the often inexperienced younger ones. Look at the UK and the USA, where a greater range of actors are accorded respect and reverence.

– Jan Russ, Casting Director for Grundy Television

One group in the community who are noticeably absent from our screens are actors from Asian background and actors from culturally diverse backgrounds who speak with an accent. The question needs to be asked: are these groups missing from training opportunities and are they being discriminated against in the industry? The relationship between the drama schools and the lack of actors with accents or Asian actors could be explained because DCALB students of the acting schools will predominantly be young second or third generation migrants from European background, who will most likely speak with no accent. As Asian immigration is more recent than the wave of post-war European immigration, it is likely that the proportional number of young second generation migrants from Asian background will be *less* than their non-English speaking European counterparts. This is certainly the situation in the wider community where first generation overseas-born migrants of Asian background significantly outnumber their Australian-born children, whereas the second and third generation children of post-World War II migrants now outnumber their overseas-born parents.

There is a tension within the industry though, when it comes to explaining the lack of Asian actors on-screen, particularly in non-specific roles. Personnel associated with casting point out that the available pool of experienced actors from Asian backgrounds is smaller than for some other DCALB groups. Advocacy groups and actors from Asian backgrounds are vigorous in their rebuttal of this argument. The several experienced second generation actors of Asian background interviewed related a continuing lack of opportunities even at the audition level, compared with their Anglo-Australian colleagues. Upon finally gaining an audition call-up, they are often asked to perform their ethnicity, such as playing the role of a recently arrived migrant, who speaks with a coarse accent.

The issue is complicated further when one realises that producers and network executive producers (EPs) constantly seek an alchemy for success in casting, whereby the program they are developing will be that elusive hit show. And so they may screen-test up to 300 actors for 10 available roles, taking into consideration a range of ambiguous factors aside from acting skill, in order to have a 'balanced cast'. Such factors as the body shape, appearance and personality of short-listed cast may be endlessly pondered in the hope of achieving the right look for the show. Whether an 'Asian look' is acceptable in the balance of a lead cast among key industry stakeholders is a vexing question.

Based on the results of the casting survey and comments from South East Asian actors, it would appear the industry is still to come to terms with an Asian presence. While there seems to be debate in the industry about the number of available actors from culturally diverse backgrounds, the chances for significant employment rely upon a number of factors aside from how many qualified actors there are to choose from at any one time. A set of complex and subjective circumstances also come into play such as being 'right' for the role, having the 'essence' of the character, and particularly in television, having 'good looks', which a network marketing department can utilise. But the point was also made, that actors of Anglo background might *also* complain of not being cast for reasons of age, gender and appearance. In interviews with several Asian background actors, there was also cautious agreement that in some Asian communities, acting and creative careers in general are not highly valued, making acting a less likely career for children of Asian parents. Annette Shun Wah has had a range of professional experience in radio, television, writing and feature films. Annette is quoted at length here as her insightful comments are from the perspective of someone who has experienced professional success, critical acclaim and also frustration, over a period of more than 20 years working in the media:

When I was growing up, many young Chinese and other Asian youth would come to me and talk to me about this stereotype of Asian people studying very hard and getting a job as an accountant. Now this is partly the way it actually is because your parents want you to get a good job. They want you to be financially secure. And that is their major aim so you won't go through the struggles they went through. That can dissuade you from a creative career, because a creative career may be seen as a waste of time – it's not a real job. So there is that. There probably also isn't the respect for a creative career. With migration, the position of scholars and artists got changed around with merchants. With Chinese, the ones who were most looked up to were the ones successful in business – the merchants. And of those,

some became the community leaders. So that pattern has remained. The encouragement is to enter professions that are well rewarded financially. I can speculate that Cambodian and Vietnamese first generation migrants who have children here – it may be even more difficult for them as they are still going through the financial struggle of finding a future. So for those people struggling, certainly an acting career may be unforgivable. *Having said that* – there are the already trained actors and directors who come here. For them, it must be very difficult as they have the skills, and they cannot use them. People do put up cultural networks in order to do work but that's tough. You know, kids have come up to me and said that by seeing me succeed it had inspired them to go on and do what they wanted to do. That is wonderful when they say that.

Shun Wah's comments about the cultural pressures for taking up acting mirror those of Heath Bergerson, where he recalls his delight at seeing Aaron Pederson on *Gladiators* and then the pleasure his people got from seeing him on *Breakers*. The importance of role modelling for young people presented by instances of seeing themselves on TV is a potent justification alone for the industry to actively adjust its skew from DCALB European actors of second or third generation and recruit more Asian actors into programs. Agents made the valid point that there needs to be an expectation that the roles are there for actors of culturally diverse backgrounds. However, all this aside, while there may be a smaller pool of Asian actors available, there are most certainly more actors available than the number of Asian sustainers appearing on television. After getting an agent a couple of years ago (not an easy task), Shun Wah has had very few screen tests and of the few roles offered, they have required her to perform her ethnicity in minor parts as a waitress with an Asian accent on every occasion. The kind of portrayal that not only corresponds to the reality of Asians living in Australia, but also makes for better drama is well expressed by her here:

The issue though, is that it isn't just a factor of a face on the screen. If you're talking about multiculturalism and television programming, there needs to be a sensitivity for the culture. A background and philosophy in the role should become apparent in these roles cast for Asians. The characters need to be interesting, multidimensional characters living in Australia. And that is almost non-existent. And that possibility is a really rich seam for people to plunder in order to come up with interesting characters and plot lines.

From the casting profession's point of view, there are, of course, pressures from their clients, who in television drama are made up of a program's producer and network EPs. The involvement of these stakeholders was described as them having 'ultimate control' in the casting process. One may construe this to mean having a final say, or perhaps more significantly, a definitive control over the program and casting. For example, in the mix of a lead cast for a series, out of ten actors, the network will be looking for at least two star names to hang publicity on, with the marketing department joining in on the process. Other cast members are usually at the discretion of the producer with final approval always resting with the network. In casting for roles which are not 'ethnic specific', it is up to casting directors to put forward and then audition a range of actors. It is here that the casting profession has the opportunity to encourage colour blind casting, but all good efforts must eventually pass through what can be an arduous decision making process, influenced by a number of interested parties. All casting directors had varying perceptions on the availability of DCALB actors and the reasons for the continuing difficulties faced by some groups:

We used to cast *GP* and it was our commitment for there to be at least one NESB actor per episode, scripted or not. In many shows that *has* been the case. There has also been an increase in Italian and Greek background actors over the years, but there has been a limited access to actors of other backgrounds. The reason might be a cultural one related to the education process and their family life. I would suggest, and I hate to suggest it, that a highish percentage of all actors come from middle class backgrounds. The immigrant parents of children from the 1950s and '60s were interested in their children getting a better education and particularly a professional education. This is now reflected in our broad Australian middle class life, but you don't get a lot of representation from the middle class ethnic groups in the acting fraternity. However, if you take into account the small percentage of 'working actors' that there are in the late 1990s, then there are a well-represented and diverse range. In addition to that, the indigenous area has had a significant commitment from several avenues. And I think that's healthy.

– Maura Fay

A hypothetical situation was put to all casting directors that a script called for a major guest role for a lawyer named Samantha Lee. The writer obviously intending that she be from an Asian background, though the role and story had nothing to do with her ethnicity. They were asked how they would cast this role and would it be a difficult one to fill. All believed that a suitable actor could be found and that they had cast such roles in the past few years, but if a client called for a sustaining role to be filled by an Asian actor, the point was then made that a production may prefer a seasoned TV actor. With a smaller pool of Asian actors to choose from, there were also concerns about meeting other criteria (such as 'look' and 'essence') which may be brought to the decision process by a range of people. If a consensus cannot be reached, it may not be a difficult decision to abandon the original idea for an Asian actor and resort to the less demanding task of casting an actor of European background. On one commercial TV medical series, it was related that two lead roles were written for an Asian ambulance driver and a South American doctor. However, by the time casting was complete, the roles had gone to actors of Anglo–Australian background.

From the *working* European DCALB actors' perspective, actors from these backgrounds expressed less culturally-based concerns than their Asian colleagues. The sheer difficulty in obtaining *any work*, however, was mentioned by all actors, regardless of cultural background. Actors provided a number of insights into the profession, which add further dimensions to understanding the industrial complexity of what ends up on our screens. The following comment is from a young DCALB actor who got an ongoing role on a serial shortly after graduating:

When I got a call back for another audition, I wanted to find out more about the role and I did the same when I eventually got the part. Nine times out of ten I was told 'you didn't get the part because of your acting, you weren't cast just on your performance, we liked your personality'. They liked the real me.

Other actor perspectives on the profession indicate a range of biases in the industry and actors displayed various approaches to dealing with the system. Jason Chong displays a pragmatic attitude to the profession and the casting practices which relate to his cultural background:

All you can hope for is to go from job to job. You can't expect a career as an actor in Australia. I don't put judgment on those roles that come along and that have an ethnic specific element to them. I ask, is this good material and is the character strong. I have in the past played the 'Asian bad guy'. I've done that twice and occasionally they ring up and ask if I would be interested to do that again. It's how the system operates. *All* actors are put into a box regardless. Look at Gary Oldman – he's an Anglo, but with his Englishness the Americans think, 'Oh yeah, he's the over the top evil Englishman'. Even Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise are always asked to do the 'leading man thing'. However, I would like to see more faces on screen that reflect the diversity we have in this country and not just in supporting roles, but in the lead roles.

Meme Thorne gained an ongoing guest role in the Network Ten series *Above the Law*. Describing herself as European–Asian background, she played the role of a Filipino housekeeper. The producer of the show, Hal McElroy, had a Filipino actress in mind to play the part, however, as noted above, such decisions often change in the pre-production process. Meme's character is also culturally problematic as she played a role that might be considered 'stereotypical':

For my part, Hal asked how I might want to change or inject story lines into the role. It is unusual I think, that an actor can offer them ideas and that they are open to it. About Sunny, my role in the show, you see I also know the backstory. She is in fact a psychologist who can't get work in her profession in Australia and so she is taking up this cleaning work. In reality, it can be very hard for professionals from other countries who migrate to Australia to practice their profession. I am going to make sure that her professional background comes out. I need that for myself. I am in fact pleased that the role is going to evolve, the fact that I do play a Filipino cleaning lady who will then develop into this more complex character. But I do have contradictory feelings about this part. On the one hand, there is a part of me that enjoys the challenge, the fabulous challenge of mastering the accent of a Filipino. Also a gig means work. I need the work. Now, politically, I in fact talked myself out of a possible role with Bruce Beresford on *Paradise Road*. I said at my screen test that I felt the roles should be filled by Vietnamese actors. So of course I didn't get the part. But when it comes to needing and wanting the work, the situation isn't easy.

The inner conflict for actors to balance their professional aspirations with the opportunity to simply get paid employment must also be recognised. Jeremy Angerson is an actor of Singapore–Swiss–Javanese–Irish background. He takes a sanguine attitude to his experiences in the industry and he has the last word on acting contexts:

I've played a Vietnamese street-kid, a 'retarded' Italian, a Tibetan prince and everyday roles on soaps and series. I took an optimistic approach young and that was: I can get the parts that others can't. So it balances itself out. I feel lucky that I can cross boundaries. My experience is that if any prejudice is in this industry, it's from your work pedigree. So if you've done *Neighbours* or *Home and Away* – then you are conditioned in the eyes of those who hire you to do certain parts. I can say with some confidence that I've lost parts because I've been a part of programs that elitists may think of as unsavoury. But I also love playing non-specific roles. I was born here and I feel Australian. Even my humour is Australian. Just getting a job these days, it's a fucking joke how hard you have to work to get a role. When you do win a part you have *literally* fucking won it. You can feel proud just to be working and working consistently. I take my hat off to those people who do because it's rare.

Industry Perspectives: Writing Contexts

A significant number of actors commented on survey forms, or at interview, that writers have something to answer for when it comes to the lack of decent roles for performers of culturally diverse backgrounds. However in discussion with several experienced television drama writers, it became evident that this was an oversimplification. While it is true that writers are key contributors to a television program, like casting directors, they are also at the mercy of the production process when it comes to making an impact. Writers interviewed for this research represented a politically progressive cohort operating at a distance and in some remoteness from the production machine. On the one hand this allows them a degree of independence in the initial creative process, however, this varies tremendously from program to program. Even in expensive series, once a script is in, characters may be changed after writing without the writer's input and writers all mentioned having good and bad surprises when finally seeing the show on TV. And, of course, once scripts reach the final edit, they are sent to the network for approval. Before a series script reaches the network (for approval) it has undergone a couple of months of plotting, story and scene breakdown meetings followed by final edits. Chris Hawkshaw has written for many of the programs covered in this research and illuminates the difficulties for writers in the process:

Well, writers are pretty much at the bottom of the food chain. If there's going to be resistance for a role from above, writers have got no hope. We can try, and we could try harder. But in the end it won't be just up to the writers as too many people have a say in each script – and particularly when it leaves our hands. If a character is deemed to be getting in the way of the story, seen as too unpopular with an audience, or difficult to cast, it will be changed to fit the story.

Script producer Jo Horsburgh moved through the ranks over a period of years from serials writer to script producer on *Water Rats*. As the head of the writing team on a production (not attached to the network), she is well placed to comment on the writing process. She comments about non-specific roles being written in during the writing process:

Yes, that happens all the time and then it depends on the availability of actors. It's funny but it's not an issue. The big problem in the past was that it was all very well to say you wanted a character of a certain background, but depending on the level of the role (guest or lead), the bottom line is you want the best actor. If they audition and a) they weren't good and b) you couldn't sell them – the director is always going to go for the better actor. Time is so short you can't workshop people. But I think over the last decade, we have people from more backgrounds having had greater experience. They've been noticed and come through.

Kevin Roberts wrote on the last three series of *Heartbreak High*, the inner-city school drama with a noteworthy multicultural cast. The show was originally bought by Ten, who were interested in having a youth series with multicultural credentials. Ten subsequently lost interest in the show,¹⁵⁵ which was eventually picked up by the ABC as an acquisition. The show is an example of laying foundations for cultural diversity in the initial phases of production, which then continues on through the production process:

155 For an industry insight into the early episodes of the show, see D. Wilding, *Aids and Pro-Social Television*, unpublished PhD thesis, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, 1998.

If you don't have a multicultural cast at the outset, what tends to happen is that the writers come up with a one-off stereotypical multicultural story. Then you can understand executive producers saying 'well not another bloody ethnic story'. If the cast is diverse and there from the beginning, then there is less chance that they will be written in a stereotypical way. If your cast is part of the multicultural neighbourhood, then race-based stories won't have to be the focus. Just bringing in an Asian character for a guest role may mean they won't be treated the same as 'ordinary' characters on the show.

This notion of the ordinary, the everyday or 'mainstreaming' with respect to multiculturalism has been explored throughout this research. It is interesting to note that many Australian creative personnel, including actors, think this is the way forward in popular drama. This does not mean that characters are emptied of their cultural background nor should it signify that the 'mainstream' can only mean a dominant Anglo male. Predominantly issues-based drama of the variety made popular in the 1980s and early 1990s have lost favour, though characters are still, of course, going through topics related to community and personal crises (some of the dramas studied have dealt with Aboriginal issues in the late 1990s for example). Although *Heartbreak High* consisted of a cast from various cultural backgrounds, overt 'ethnic' stories were avoided. Scriptwriter Kevin Roberts adds:

We went the other way in regards to highlighting the cultural diversity of the characters. We thought that if we were to do a race-based story it should occur only once in every series [forty episodes]. What we did deliberately is to think these kids are just kids – not focus on their cultural background. If we did do a race-based story we really gave it some thought. Mostly, we wanted to ignore the fact of their cultural background.

Regardless of inclusiveness of casting and an attached 'everyday' portrayal of cultural diversity, marketing concerns are also a site of influence when it comes to deciding on the 'look' of a show. It was pointed out above that marketing can have an influence on the final choice of actors for a program. When a cast is in place, a small number of the regulars will usually be the focus of ongoing promotion. According to Kevin Roberts, in the case of *Heartbreak High*, which was very successful in Europe, overseas and local promotion converged on three particular actors:

I can tell you that the press interest in our Asian or black actors was considerably less than the publicity our Anglo actors got. I think that also reflects the situation. There is an image that advertisers want. As an example, at the film festival in Monaco, the three actors invited were the Anglo actors from the show and were the ones who attracted the most publicity everywhere. This sort of issue demonstrates the depth of the problem.

Advertisers may assume that a predominantly Anglo demographic is their only market and so networks may work towards satisfying these expectations. Jo Horsburg brings up the issue of audiences and their reaction to cultural diversity on screen, which on one occasion in the past, confirmed a racist element in the audience:

The only time a negative thing happened was on *A Country Practice* when the show had an Asian female doctor, I think it was the early '90s. She had a romance with one of the regulars and they kissed. The network as well as the production house was inundated with hate mail. None of us had ever experienced it before. People involved in the show were horrified.

Other key players in the industry also related stories about occasionally violent reactions from audiences when confronted with stories or scenes portraying interracial intimacy, though all were from some years back. Asked whether this reaction from an audience had an effect on approaching such stories in the future, Horsburg comments:

I don't think there was a conscious effort not to do it again. Very soon after that we had a story about an Iranian refugee. That was an issue-based story, a different kind of story. But we didn't deliberately move away from that kind of writing. Script departments in my experience are always far more progressive than society at large. Before I worked in television, I thought they must be racist and sexist, then you go into script departments and you find them very forward-thinking. I went to *Neighbours* in 1988 or 1989 for work experience as my first job and got the shock of my life. It was so feminist, so green, so political. And if you watched it carefully, all these issues would be worked out in the show. Writers have good intent, but there are all sorts of reasons that may stymie things.

The issue of interference from above is one raised by people within and outside of the industry. Anecdotes circulate about past transgressions and one network will be considered worse than the other for their conservative outlook. Publicly and officially, network heads obviously reject claims of discrimination in casting or in the portrayal of cultural diversity. The networks are obliged to comply with the FACTS *Code of Practice*, which contains clauses on racial vilification and how program content is to be classified. Networks also refer to audience demands as well as community standards as aspects they take into consideration when it comes to deciding what will and won't make it on to the screen. Nevertheless, a recent anecdote from Denise Morgan, a writer with 30 years' experience, gives insight into the issue of network 'input':

'I won't touch rape, by and large, because I think there is a group of people out there who find it titillating and so unless I can hit it from a different approach, I steer clear of it. So I wanted to try a story where one of the male cops on a police series is raped – just going about his social life, crossing a park, unable to defend himself and he's raped. Well that script got all the way through producers, story editors and the script producer. The trouble started with a director who found it terribly uncomfortable and rather than him saying 'I can't work on this, I'll do a different episode' the actor became concerned and then the others got all strange about it too. It went as far as the network EP, but they didn't come back to the scripting department. Eventually it was pulled and this is after the script had been released as ready to shoot. So I re-wrote the script into something else again. In fact, I think the original episode could have been an award winner for the actor, it was a gutsy thing, especially because he was a man, and he was also a cop.'

Most of the writers interviewed believed that while network resistance to thorny or innovative material, such as in the example above, was still an issue, there was also encouragement along the production process for more culturally diverse looking drama. Sean Nash, a writer-creator for drama noted the following:

On the one hand I think there is a resistance in network television towards multiculturalism. But on the other hand, I created and actually shot a pilot for Channel Seven in 1996/1997 and one of the characters in that was an Anglo-Chinese girl, played by Ling Hsueh Tang, who was on *Breakers* and now appears on *All Saints*. Likewise, we deliberately created a character played by Aaron Pederson as an up-and-coming guy in the Customs Service with an Aboriginal background. The reason I mention that is because as much as I thought there would be 'discussions' to keep them in, nobody batted an eyelid. The only concern was, let's make sure we can cast these roles with the calibre of actors that we want.

The above comments demonstrate the variety of experiences and complexities in the industry regarding the portrayal of cultural diversity. Writers, program creators and other key creative personnel in the industry will often take an active role in trying to address the lag between how society is portrayed on television and how it really is. Tony Morphett is the original creator of programs such as *Water Rats*, *Blue Heelers* and, more recently, *Above the Law*. He also has an impressive list of film and television writing credits and he talks of his own desire to effect change:

You just keep doing it. I often write in ethnic characters, sometimes they get in and sometimes they don't. You've got to keep trying. At the end of the day I want the screen to look like the street. I don't want 1950s Australia – I lived in 1950s Australia and I prefer the Australia we have now. Writing is a collaborative process and at the end of the day, you do what you can do.

The collaborative relationship in the making of a program means that there are constraints placed on each party to achieve individual wants, but comments from writers illustrate that making the effort to effect change is an important step if they wish to write for contemporary Australia. As writers often write 'what they know', it was suggested that more writers from culturally diverse backgrounds need to be supported into the industry. This would also see more interesting and multi-dimensional characters of diverse backgrounds, which Annette Shun Wah believes are so necessary.

Industry Perspectives: Producer Contexts

The majority of television series such as *Water Rats* and *Stingers* produced in Australia are not made by the networks, but in a sense commissioned out to independent production companies. These

companies are mostly made up of a group of principals, who are often involved in creating the concept and pushing it through to a pre-sale with one of the networks. Overseas sales have become critical for producers to recoup their production costs as network pre-sales no longer cover 100 per cent of the cost of a series. The serials are somewhat different as their longevity usually means there will have been a number of producers over a period of time, taking responsibility for the show. Network script and drama executives will work closely with both series and serial production providers, looking out for the network's investment. Network approval aside, producers were unanimously identified as having the most input to the cast, stories and 'look' of a show. Hal McElroy was previously a film producer and, with his brother Jim, produced such films as *The Cars That Ate Paris*, *Picture at Hanging Rock* and *The Last Wave*. Hal later moved into popular television drama and he makes no apologies for creating a show such as *Blue Heelers*, with its nostalgic country values:

It's a perfectly human, legitimate desire for things to be easy, simple, uncomplicated and rewarding. For there to be heroes and for villains to be captured in the end. That's been there through the ages so I make no apology for doing it today. The fact that it's popular reflects the fact that it's what audiences desire.

However, he acknowledges the need for there to be a mix of programming and a mix of cast on television:

We had written in a character in *Water Rats* who was Italian – this is many years ago now. I was directing the screen tests and thought, 'Fuck, I've seen this character a thousand fucking times before – this is getting boring'. I wanted to think of another way. Anyway, one part of the script was that this Italian character's family is involved in the fish markets. So I went to the markets and there were a lot of Islanders, as well as Greeks, Asians and so on. So I said to Tony Morphett and John Hugginson (co-creators) 'guys why don't we just forget Italian and think Maori'. They loved it and so we ended up with Jay Laga'aia.

Hal McElroy prefers to cast a range of actors and is not a devotee of the beauty myth on TV shows. In creating a cast, he prefers to have a balance of men and women who do not all conform to the ideal of 'attractive':

A network usually becomes risk averse if it is doing very well. So often, a network's attitude to casting is, frankly, if it's a girl she should be blonde and ideally have large breasts, if it's a man he should have plenty of hair and be muscular. So as a joke, I said to them (network executives): 'you're fucking hairists, you want everyone to have a big fucking shock of hair'. Anyway, they have a white bread middle Australian view, an old fashioned view of what audiences want to see on television.

McElroy went on to produce *Above the Law* for Network Ten,¹⁵⁶ who were interested in exploring a contemporary series, which included a culturally diverse cast. Creators Tony Morphett and Inga Hunter were also pleased to be able to write a show which reflected and explored a diverse urban culture. Mirroring their preferences, *Breakers* producer Dave Gould also sought to create a more contemporary representation on the daily serial:

From inception, there was a desire on this show [*Breakers*] to make it more 'real' in terms of the world that we now live in – with warts and all. Rather than go for what has in the past been a sort of sanitised or nostalgic take on Australian life. Part of that contemporary reality is clearly the cultural mix of this city [Sydney] that we live in. Having established that from the start it became part of the palette that we painted with. It was not something that we sat down at story conferences and tried to find story lines based on ethnicity – but we did look for stories based on emotion, character and human nature. And part of that palette to paint with was cultural diversity.

Breakers presented itself as a culturally diverse show, set in an appropriately cosmopolitan part of Sydney (Bondi Beach). Its British-born creator, Jimmy Thomson, was impressed by Bondi on visiting the famous suburb with his wife, while looking for a house to purchase:

We were spending every weekend down there and looking around. I became aware of the diversity of people on Campbell Parade and you would see your Jamie Packers and your Kate Fischers and you would

¹⁵⁶ In production during 1999/2000, the show rated poorly and was not continued. However, Hal and his wife Diane recently produced the innovative series for SBS, *Going Home*, which has a majority of cast from culturally diverse backgrounds.

see Mum and Dad and the three kids – people from all sorts of backgrounds. I remember specifically there was a Brazilian couple, they just looked so elegant and so cool, but behind them would be mum pushing the pram and dragging two more kids, while dad's gone to get the ice-cream kind of thing. On the beach these people became equal, that was the feel that I got. Although they came from totally different backgrounds, totally different aspirations, when we got to Bondi, they became equal. That appealed to me a great deal, being an old-fashioned socialist. That was the idea behind *Breakers*.

The two other serials on TV at the time in 1999 were *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. In previous research into television and cultural diversity, *Neighbours* has often been offered up as the shame of 'white' Australian drama. In the casting survey however, the proportion of second generation DCALB actors on the show was actually quite healthy.¹⁵⁷ Grundy Executive Producer for *Neighbours*, Stanley Walsh, like the show's long-term casting director Jan Russ, were aware of the criticisms. In reply to disapproving comments on the show's cultural make-up, both pointed out that the show does represent a particular location both socially and geographically. In addition, when the show was conceived of more than 15 years ago, it was unashamedly set in a suburb which represented a nostalgic Australia. The claim from critics that nowhere in Australia in the last few decades could look like Ramsey Street is not substantiated by cultural demographics in capital and regional cities apart from certain parts of Sydney and Melbourne.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Stanley Walsh had this to say about the show:

I can understand critics' reaction. I mean the show was like that and still is to a certain extent. I mean they picked a particular suburb in a particular area that is reflective of the community around that sort of suburb at the time. There has been an ethnic mix on *Neighbours* from time to time and it will continue to happen from time to time. You won't find as broad an ethnic mix in *Neighbours* as you would in *Heartbreak High* because the shows are set in different territories, suburbs and locations. It's not a policy decision of ours that we don't have as broad a mix as *Heartbreak High*. It's more a question of 'do we believe it in this area or location'?

The success of *Neighbours* in England is also a contentious issue among some critics, who see *Neighbours* as offering British audiences a vision of a pre-Coloured Britain but set in the colonies. Such analysis is difficult to maintain in light of audience and ethnographic research, which shows the program being popular among young Asian viewers in England, not to mention the continuing success in the UK of the culturally diverse serial *East Enders*. Stanley Walsh proposes the following analysis for its success with British audiences:

One of the reasons the British like *Neighbours* is that England is dark most of the year, it's raining and it's a miserable place. Now in *Neighbours* we have ordinary working people who live in homes that have three bedrooms, a kitchen, two bathrooms, rumpus rooms and garages and maybe a swimming pool. They look to be ordinary people. Now that's the sort of fantasy that they can accept about Australia, because a lot of people *do* live in homes like that here compared to England, where they *don't*. And so it's a bit of escapism with generally positive stories. My basic philosophy is: would I like to have these people in my home five nights a week?

Both Stanley Walsh and Russell Webb,¹⁵⁹ producer of Australia's other 'soapie' *Home and Away*, believe a 'permeating multiculturalism' is preferable to an obvious placement of cultural diversity. This doesn't mean *Home and Away* ignores issues related to race. Episodes about racism, the Stolen Generation and Pauline Hanson have all been produced. A plot line in *Home and Away* surrounding the Stolen Generation garnered 15 phone calls from the audience – when a single phone call is unusual – and only one call was abusive. Russell Webb's inclination towards the representation of cultural diversity in Summer Bay is expressed thus:

I think it is most important that there is cultural diversity but that we don't have to explain it ... in fact we try to cast out of character sometimes.

A range of stakeholders articulated the notion that a contrived representation of cultural diversity is

157 A breakdown of ethnicities on individual shows was not done to protect the identity of actors and to avoid an unhelpful comparison across shows.

158 A perusal of census data confirms that significant urban areas of Australia are overwhelmingly white Anglo/European.

159 Interview material with Russell Webb relating to *Home and Away* was kindly made available by Nadya Stani, interview conducted 28/1/2000.

doomed. One writer joked it might be useful to even go against type and 'write for a Vietnamese school boy who hates doing his homework'. This hints at an avenue writing and casting are yet to fully go down in Australia, with Aboriginal and particularly Asian roles (that is, strongly against 'type' and non-specific). In the USA, *The Cosby Show* is the extreme result of this tactic, but as mentioned in chapter 1, there have been criticisms of the show for presenting a successful middle class black family as the achievable norm, against which other blacks are then judged. However, we are far from having to face this dilemma in Australia, with Aaron Pederson's roles in *Water Rats* and *Wildside* the only obvious examples to date of non-specific casting for an Aboriginal lead. As far as ongoing Asian roles are concerned, Ling Hsueh Tang has recently featured in two programs. In *Breakers* she was cast as a studious journalist and on the medical drama *All Saints*, she makes regular appearances as the ward's intern. While both these roles are hardly against type, they are the beginnings of non-specific portrayal for Asian actors in ongoing roles.

Industry comments that programming lags behind the social reality are most apparent with the representation of our Asian community. Almost 60 per cent of recently arrived migrants to Australia, who had been employed before migrating, had been working in professional, managerial and administrative positions. 70 per cent of these professional migrants coming to Australia are from non-English speaking countries. Of this professional class of migrant, 37.4 per cent were from Asian regions.¹⁶⁰ Such statistical analysis adds weight to the argument that it really is time for a greater variety of roles to be made available for recently arrived migrants and their children. Refugees who face considerable issues upon settling in Australia now account for a tiny fraction of the immigration intake. In more recent years, immigrants to Australia are much more likely to be middle class and have formal qualifications. The era of continually problematising the 'ethnic' presence in drama is over. However, this has translated to making more recent immigrant groups simply invisible or falling back to weary typecasting. There is another issue at stake here and that is the long history of Asian discrimination in all four countries studied. This should also not be discounted. The concluding section of this report attempts to grapple with the issue of mainstreaming in the Australian context and what it means for Australian drama to be considered 'sliced white bread', in spite of the results of the casting survey.

160 C. Inglis, 'Middle Class Migration: New Considerations in Research and Policy', *The Future of Australian Multiculturalism*, G. Hage & R. Couch (Eds.), The University of Sydney, Sydney, 1999, p.49.

6. CONCLUSION

Social Morphing or the Mainstreaming of Australia's Cultural Diversity

It would appear that improvements in the participation of actors from culturally diverse backgrounds have been due in part to a permeating of second generation migrants into the acting profession. In previous chapters, it was noted that in the UK and New Zealand, the practice of locating cultural diversity more in the mainstream, as opposed to specialised programming, has gained acceptance by policy makers, broadcast management, producers and audiences. This is in spite of the danger that a policy-led move into mainstreaming may benefit those actors and program makers who represent, or are able to represent, an expression of the dominant norm. In the case of serial drama, this norm is likely to be young, articulate and attractive actors. But what of Australian commercial drama, where a total lack of such policy, mainstreaming, EEO or anything else, has all the same resulted in a healthy participation for culturally diverse actors of second generation.

Obviously, actors of European background have benefited more than others from the effects of bringing cultural diversity into the mainstream. The claim that a show such as *Neighbours* is the realm of the blonde and blue-eyed Aussie is not as straightforward as it seems. The interrogation of 'whiteness' in Australia has not been as robust as in the United States. However, Jan Larbalestier¹⁶¹ takes the position that in Australia over time, there has been a process whereby previously excluded collectivities have experienced inclusion into an imaginary and centred 'white' Australia. Essentially, they have moved from a 'supposedly non-white category to a white one'. This of course occurred officially with the White Australia Policy as northern European immigrants became scarce and so southern European migrants were expediently granted 'white status'. If we apply this 'social morphing' to the evolution experienced in cultural diversity and television drama, we can see that a similar though unofficial morphing has taken place. Ten years ago, the small presence of actors from culturally diverse backgrounds were signalled as 'non-white' by their problematised representation. Over the years, their presence has become *less* obvious, despite their significant *increase* in participation in the industry. Academics, media critics and the media itself contribute to actors' 'white surrogation' by continuing to view a range of DCALB actors as 'white', though this word is rarely uttered, when they brand the programs they appear in as being overwhelmingly 'Anglo'.

There is a contentious issue here, which is unable to be settled. Almost all of the DCALB actors interviewed already consider themselves part of an everyday culturally diverse Australia and wish to be cast that way. The research accepts its bias towards actors of second generation background. However, even if more recently arrived DCALB migrants were given opportunities in the industry, casting them in roles which foreground their ethnicity is neither appropriate nor likely. But the fact remains, there are still Australians who are beyond the limits of social morphing, unable to join an *expanding* mainstream. A creative-based solution to the problem, to expand the potential of Asian representation, was suggested above by Annette Shun Wah. Writer-director Tony Ayres expresses it this way:

No matter what their background, non-Anglo roles become in some way middle class and white through assumptions about who they are. Or on the other hand, their particular ethnicity becomes the issue.

What is lacking is a complex and grounded way in which culture is integrated into identity – which is the way people live it. Identity is either the issue of the episode or it is invisible as acceptable middle class.

Tony's point above reflects criticism of the animated Disney representation of Pocahontas. Leigh Edwards sees Disney's Pocahontas as the creation of a desirable 'multi-ethnic babe', who has been homogenised into a new category of non-white 'brownness', united by Western values and capitalism.¹⁶² In the case of Australian soaps, the assured place of 'bee-bop girls and boys' (including culturally diverse ones) is an enduring symbol of much serial drama and unlikely to change. More helpful than Edwards' criticism above and what Tony Ayres and Annette Shun Wah are hoping for, is a more complex representation of cultural diversity through expanded creative horizons. For

161 J. Larbalestier, 'What is This Thing Called White? Reflections on 'Whiteness' and Multiculturalism', *The Future Of Australian Multiculturalism*, G. Hage & R. Couch (Eds.), The University of Sydney, 1999.

162 Leigh Edwards, 'The United Colors of Pocahontas: Synthetic Miscegenation and Disney's Multiculturalism', *Narrative*, 7, 2, (May 1999).

commercial television programming, this need *not* translate to a crucifixion of middle class portrayals, but the current situation leans on the side of representations, which willingly embrace cultural diversity, but still on the terms of the mainstream, though an admittedly expanding (rather than homogenising) one.

Interviewees were familiar with the notion of improving the portrayal of cultural diversity and were sympathetic to the obstacles faced by actors from culturally diverse backgrounds. At a conscious level, key stakeholders did not think that policy interventions, previous lobbying or academic research surrounding the issue of cultural diversity had provided any significant impetus for transformative casting practice in the production of commercial drama. Two producers expressed the opinion that it was an awareness of multiculturalism as an encompassing social actuality which had spurred change at the level of professional practice. A wealth of examples provided in interviews demonstrated an industry keen to improve the portrayal of cultural diversity. However, despite the fact that writers may often write into drama series both ethnic specific and non-specific roles, by the time such roles pass through casting and network approval, compromises are sometimes made. It seems the attempts to create roles for culturally diverse characters are often stymied for various reasons – known and unknown.

As networks do have 'ultimate control' of programming, regardless of whether it is an independent production or an in-house one, a commitment from them to cultural diversity would send a message to the production industry as a whole, that cultural diversity is to be given serious consideration in all production. In the USA, all major television networks have made agreements with a coalition of minority interest groups to improve the employment levels for minorities. Measures include setting and meeting equity targets, providing minority fellowships in various professions across program genres within the industry and, perhaps importantly, linking the attainment of diversity measures to management bonuses. At a policy level in Australia, it may be time for community and advocacy groups to renew vigour in lobbying the ABA and FACTS to include a section on cultural diversity within the *Code of Practice* for commercial television when the code next comes up for review. Such a measure may be deemed unpopular in industry and policy environments where regulatory intervention for the portrayal of cultural diversity is considered unworkable. Aside from direct regulatory intervention into the issue of cultural diversity, a dilution of the long-standing dominance on the TV landscape by the current three networks may also provide inroads for more diverse programming. If producers have opportunities for accessing funding in an expanded domestic market, 'ultimate' control would at least no longer reside among the few. However, in the current situation this research has demonstrated that the question of cultural diversity and programming has been pursued more successfully in the other countries than in Australia.

APPENDIX

Acronyms

ABA	Australian Broadcasting Authority
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BSA	Broadcasting Services Act
BSC	Broadcasting Standards Commission
C4	Channel Four
CLC	Communications Law Centre
DCALB	Diverse Cultural and Linguistic Background
DG	Director-General
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
EP	Executive Producer
FACTS	Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
ITC	Independent Television Commission
MEAA	Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NAB	National Association of Broadcasters
NESB	Non-English Speaking Background
NIDA	National Institute of Dramatic Arts
NZOA	New Zealand On Air
PSB	Public Service Broadcasters
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
SAG	Screen Actors Guild
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
UPN	United Paramount Network (cable TV network in the USA)
WAAPA	Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts
WB	Warner Brothers (cable TV network in the USA)

ABOUT THE SCREEN INDUSTRY, CULTURE AND POLICY RESEARCH SERIES

The screen industries in Australia have been well served by high-quality research and information services established over some considerable period of time. They have underwritten policy development, provided government, industry professionals, journalists, students and the general public with accurate and well-organised data, and been highly regarded internationally. In addition, the industry is also served by lively journalism in periodicals and dailies.

However, there is a need for well-written and well-presented research which takes a longer-term perspective, and which addresses issues of direct relevance to those who participate in, analyse, commentate on, or study the industry. This Screen Industry, Culture and Policy Research Series is designed to address this need.

Each report in the series will review trends over a longer period or a wider framework than usual or possible in other information sources for the industry. Reports will bring substantial international comparative perspectives to bear on issues affecting the local industry. The series will seek to add value to debates central to the screen industries.

The series is a collaboration between the Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy, CIRAC (Creative Industries Research and Applications Centre) and the Australian Film Commission. Each have ongoing commitments to providing relevant research services to the industry and the community.

The Australian Film Commission (AFC) is the Commonwealth Government's primary development agency for the film and television industries in Australia. It provides support through a range of measures. These include commissioning and publishing research into issues affecting film, television and interactive media in order to encourage informed debate, analysis and policy development.

Creative Industries Research and Applications Centre (CIRAC), the research and applications component of the new Creative Industries Faculty at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), was launched in 2001 to contribute to the research and applications needs of the creative industries locally, at a state level, nationally and internationally.

CIRAC aims to:

- map the growth and dynamics of the sector to show the extent and value of the creative industries in Australia and overseas;
- assist the growth and diversification of creative applications in the new information economy, providing know-how and facilities to partners from government to micro-business;
- produce both creative intellectual property for commercialisation, and cutting-edge industry-oriented research; and
- contribute to the development of a creative industries precinct, working with co-locating partners.

The Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy was established in July 1995 under the Australian Research Council's Research Centres Program. It is located at Griffith University in Brisbane.

The Key Centre aims to establish a theoretical, organisational and institutional basis for ongoing nationally coordinated provision of high-quality teaching, research and consultancy activities. These are intended to:

- lead to an enhanced understanding of cultural and media policy institutions and processes;
- serve the policy needs of the Australian cultural and media industry, government, non-government and community sectors; and

- provide the basis for exporting academic services by placing Australia at the forefront of international research and training in these areas.

Other Titles in the Series



Broadband Media in Australia – Tales from the Frontier Marion Jacka

Australia is on the cusp of broadband entertainment with emergence of broadband Internet content services via the computer and the introduction of digital television leading, potentially, to multichannelling and new interactive television services.

Marion Jacka's report explores the threats and opportunities posed by digital convergence for Australian audiovisual content providers. The report assesses progress with the establishment of new broadband entertainment services and the kind of content provided by these new services. It describes new

media content development by established film and television production companies and by specialised new media companies.

The research represents the first comprehensive coverage of recent developments in new media production in Australia. It draws on published Australian and international sources as well as interviews with key industry personnel in Australia.



Maximum Vision: Large-format and special-venue cinema Scott McQuire

In *Maximum Vision*, Scott McQuire analyses the increasing popularity of large-format and special-venue cinema and discusses the key issues facing these sectors in their quest for continued expansion. This is absorbing reading for anyone interested in the future of cinema.

- There is a growing interest in the commercial potential of the large-format medium, and a new endeavour to attract a broader audience to the giant-screen 'experience'.

- Image size and quality is at the heart of the appeal. This is both a strength and a burden.
- Beyond current debates about whether large-format production should be oriented towards 'education' or 'entertainment', 'documentary' or 'fiction' is a range of issues to do with the changing nature of LF exhibition and marketing.
- Other models for large-format exhibition include destination cinema for predominantly tourist markets and an emerging trend for multiplex developments which combine LF and mainstream. These developments reflect the growing importance of special-venue cinema, including 'film ride' simulators in theme parks and urban entertainment complexes.



More Long Shots: Australian cinema successes in the 90s Mary Anne Reid

In this sequel to *Long Shots to Favourites*, Mary Anne Reid profiles the financing, marketing and distribution of three successful Australian feature films of the mid to late 1990s:

- *Love and Other Catastrophes* was the quintessential 'low-budget/no-budget' feature. Its story is a cautionary tale as well as a guide to financing your own film.
- *Muriel's Wedding* was one of the 'event' films of the '90s. How and why does a breakout hit happen? It almost didn't in this case, says director P.J. Hogan.

- And through *Kiss or Kill*, Reid explores the viability of the 'specialist' release and the role of diversity in a robust national cinema.

Using interview-based case studies with the principals and their Australian distribution agents, Reid discusses the pros and cons of different financing models, along with the often arduous job of procuring distribution deals.

A fascinating and important book not just for filmmakers but for anyone interested in Australian cinema.

Contact the AFC or CIRAC for further information about the series.

Professor Stuart Cunningham,
Director, Creative Industries Research and Applications Centre (Series Editor)

Catherine Griff,
Policy Advisor, Australian Film Commission