

# **Australian Commercial Television, Identity and the Imagined Community**

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## **Synopsis**

This thesis is an examination of the way contemporary Australian commercial television corporations manipulate narratives of Australian national community. The television networks' representations of community, and their places within it, have changed considerably since the turn of the century. They have mutated as each network has been forced to adapt its corporate image to a changing economic environment - a result of the increasing prevalence of the global information network, new forms of digital technology and casualisation at all levels of the workforce. This thesis negotiates these changes by examining a set of interdisciplinary theories that could provide illumination as to why these changes have occurred and what possible effects these changes may cause in the future.

This thesis examines the various theories of nation and community, applying them to an analysis of the methods used by media corporations to manipulate national narratives, predominantly through their news bulletins and station promotions. It is an attempt to open up new theoretical ground for the discussions and analyses of contemporary Australian television studies.

**Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains work that has not previously been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed: 

Date: 5.3.2009

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# Introduction

This thesis is intended to serve as a preliminary investigation into the idea that the Australian commercial television corporations' manipulations of national narrative, a business strategy that has been successful in the past, is becoming less successful as a result of the rise of new media technologies. This thesis surveys the complex threads of theory that contribute to this idea; it engages with theories of nationalism, history and globalisation before attempting to find instances where these theories are relevant to the operations of Australian commercial television corporations, particularly through analysis of news bulletins and station promotions.

Australian commercial television corporations manipulate narratives of Australian community identity, which they use to try and win ratings and, thereby, make profits. Traditionally this has been a reliable business model for these corporations. However, this thesis argues that the advent of digital convergence, around the year 2000, is forcing these television corporations to rapidly change many of their key business strategies, including the manipulation of national narratives. This thesis investigates various methods Australian commercial television corporations have used to virtualise their viewers in the past, and examines some of their strategies for coping with change. In this sense, the thesis is an examination of theories of community identity and the methods used by media corporations to convert this identity into units of value.

"Audiences" and "demographics" are imaginary. They are part of a type of economic reasoning that converts people into virtual units of value. However, it often seems that both television corporations, and the individual viewers themselves, assume that the representation of the "audience" is an accurate representation of the actual society. As the basis of most modern societies is the political construct of the nation, my analysis of Australian commercial television representations is based on Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" theory. While this is not to be considered the definitive theory of nationalism, I believe it is particularly useful in this case given the virtual nature of the audience.

Australian commercial television broadcasters construct a virtual nation based on their representations of the world and their own place within it. James Carey (2002:40) describes this as the “ritual view of communication”. In describing news media, Carey argues,

We recognize, as with religious rituals, news changes little and yet is intrinsically satisfying... like a Balinese cockfight, a Dickens novel, an Elizabethan drama, a student rally, it is a presentation of reality that gives to life an overall form, order, and tone. (41)

There is an enormous, complex array of socio-political influences that contribute to Carey’s “overall form, order, and tone”. However, this thesis focuses on the idea that television corporations attempt to portray their place as central to the maintenance of “overall form, order, and tone”. They recycle myths and norms, maintaining the status quo on a national scale because this has been in their best interests: they are large corporations and they need stability to maintain high levels of profit.

Conceptually, this thesis attempts to combine Michael Schudson’s (2003:182) two views of news content generation: the “cultural” and “organizational”. By attempting this combination, this thesis will be able to negotiate both the symbols of community and the political economy of media corporations, without resorting to the reductionism of choosing one view over the other. As it attempts to deal with the political economy of corporations, the thesis is not limited to an examination of the news. The chapter on methodology will go into greater detail regarding these matters. At this point, however, it seems safe to assume that the strategy of presenting the impression of a secure and unchanging environment to the television audience is vital to the success and continued growth of a corporation that tries to sell its product by recycling myths and norms.

As a result of digital media convergence, this thesis argues that this stable environment is becoming harder to achieve. Australian television corporations appear to be struggling to adjust. This is not to say that they will go out of business. As Jenkins (2006:13) points out,



“history teaches us that old media never die – and they don’t even necessarily fade away”. Rather, they will need to adapt their business model and strategies of audience representation.

If we continue using Carey’s “ritual view of communication”, accepting that the media in general have traditionally used representations of the nation, society and culture which appear to be based on recycled myths and norms, it is reasonable to think that this recycling must involve constant modification to suit contemporary events. It is logical that, for this model to be effective, the content must seem to be in tune with its contemporary society. For this reason, television representations draw images from various levels of imagined community. Anderson used the term “imagined community” to describe the first phases of nation formation. I have used it to describe the various layers of fragmentation to which members of large communities can now feel like they belong. Any community that is large enough that an individual would never be able to meet all the members in person has to be imagined. In this sense, a person living in Sydney or Brisbane (or anywhere in Australia) will feel that they are a part of a Sydney or Brisbane “imagined community”, as well as a New South Wales or Queensland “imagined community”, an Australian “imagined community”, perhaps an Asian “imagined community” and, increasingly, a global “imagined community”. Contemporary televisual representations consist of imagery taken from the rhetoric that surrounds these levels of imagined community, combined with traditional Australian historical narratives.

Analyses of Australian television representations based on these theoretical ideas have been done before. Graeme Turner’s *National Fictions* (1986) and *Making it National* (1994), Toby Miller’s *Technologies of Truth* (1998) and Philip and Roger Bell’s *Americanization and Australia* (1998) are examples. While this thesis adopts a different methodology, it draws from these works and attempts to focus their ideas on Australian television as it is now, near the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Audiences are declining and television broadcasters have to find new strategies for keeping their businesses profitable. Most industries have to get used to change and have well-developed innovation strategies to cope. However, television has been the pre-eminent form of media in developed societies for the last fifty years. For the majority of this time it had little or no competition from other forms of

media. This meant that there was almost no need for it to change, as profit flows seemed secure. Now, however, they are being forced to adapt to survive (in one form or another). For this reason, this thesis attempts to maintain a focus not only on the contextual analysis of television representations of community, but also upon television's determinative political economy by examining the corporate manoeuvres that have been occurring to meet the needs of a changing industry.

Each of the Australian commercial television broadcasters is a large corporation, each with its own corporate identity. Each tries to brand itself with this identity and communicate it to the viewers. However, as their businesses start to lose profits to new forms of media, each corporation is trying to adjust its branded image to impress the viewers and construct new audiences. These manipulations in turn affect the content of their representations of the imagined community.

In summary, this thesis attempts to open up new ground for the discussion of television corporations' business strategies as media technology changes and conceptions of nationalism adjust to the pressures of the information society. As a starting point, it delves into the various theories of nationalism, the dominant political community structure of our time, finds themes that recur in most of the theories of nationalism, and carries them throughout the rest of the thesis. This thesis does not offer up any definitive, scientific truths. Rather, it seeks to draw attention to the complexity of the changes that are occurring in the contemporary Australian television industry.

## **Theoretical Sources**

Apart from the work of Benedict Anderson on nations and nationalism – and from the works of media scholars such as Turner, Miller and Ang – this thesis draws heavily upon the theories of the sociologist Manuel Castells and the historian Hayden White. Anderson's "imagined communities" provides the political theoretical basis for analyses of the virtualisation of large groups of people. It shows that the nation and nationalism are not

simply based on historical error or malignant fabrication, but rather are creative acts which people use to cope with life in a modern, industrial, capitalist world. The imagined community replaces God as the central element in people's lives and provides the sense of sacred continuity, which humans appear to need (Anderson, 2000:9; Gellner, 2001:56-8; Hayes, 1960; Chatterjee, 1993).

This sense of continuity is given narrative form in history and White's ideas about narrative and historiography are the starting point for my analyses of the processes of image recycling and adaptation that maintain imagined communities. The Australian media scholars supply the application of these theories to the Australian nation and its popular culture. Castells inspires my analysis of the global context in which these community and media processes take place. His ideas about the way the world has changed in the last thirty years are particularly influential for my chapters about Sydney and the representation of globalisation.

Amongst other theoretical resources, I have used Foucault's writings about the nature of power, William Connolly and Jurgen Habermas on legitimacy, Zygmunt Bauman on community and identity, Alison Broinowski on Australia's relationship with Asia, Tom O'Regan on Australian television history and Tom Nairn, Eric Hobsbawm and Ernest Gellner on the nation and history.

### **Australian Television**

Historical background is very important to conceptions of community. Given the topic of this thesis, it is important at this stage to provide a brief overview of Australian television history. This will serve as a backdrop to the chapters which follow.

The corporations which won the first Australian television licences were, for the most part, dominated by existing mass media companies (Turner and Cunningham, 2000:17) and the conservative Liberal Party government of the early 1950s was convinced that they were the best people to run the new medium. Yet most of the executives involved had little idea about

the capabilities of television and no idea how it worked (Hall, 1976:23-26). This was not because television came as a surprise to Australia. The concept of television was very familiar to Australians long before its introduction in 1956. Existing forms of media had been reporting on television's international development and growth since the 1920s. Different governments had differing views on how the infrastructure should be set up, how the commercial structure should operate and what the technical specifications should be. Nowhere in the world could a television industry simply spring up in isolation and operate without any form of international influence, or any established media regulation.

As Raymond Williams points out in *Television* (1974:16), broadcasting arrived in the world via the radio. It appeared after World War One, at a time when information technology was very specialised:

The press for political and economic information; the photograph for community, family and personal life; the motion picture for curiosity and entertainment; telegraphy and telephony for business information and some important personal messages.

In this environment it was hard to define the social functions of broadcasting and this created controversy and some level of confusion which has continued until this day. Television, and all our ways of thinking about it and using it, grew out of this confusion. Given this, it is easy to understand how the majority of television's early executives would have gone through a long period of trial and error before getting their business plans right and making a profit. In fact, Sir Frank Packer is probably the exception to the rule, perhaps because television was a side concern for him (Griffen-Foley, 1999).

The delays and licensing debates that characterised the early history of Australian television set the trends for the way the medium would develop in this country and still have some ramifications today. In this sense, Australian television is very much a creolised, culturally specific version of an international phenomenon, which, again, makes the present study worthwhile.

## **Thesis Structure**

The following is a guide to each chapter's content and how it links to the content of the other chapters.

Chapter One is a short chapter describing the methodology used in this thesis. As stated above, this thesis simply attempts to delineate the bases for further discussion, rather than offering any scientific truths. This chapter is a justification of this approach.

The new media forms of the information age pose a threat to broadcast television. This threat is discussed in Chapter Two. Television audiences have been declining for a number of years and this trend is now becoming a major influence on the commercial television networks' business strategies. Nine and Seven are slowly beginning to adopt Ten's tactics of representing the local as more important than the global. They are also trying to find ways of merging media forms through deals with online companies like MSN and Yahoo!. These matters have become increasingly urgent for the networks in the context of revised media ownership regulations. This chapter highlights the fact that the changes that are currently occurring in broadcast television reflect the pervasive changes that have occurred in society since the information technology revolution began. Television is belatedly trying to bring their representations of identity into line with the changes that have taken place in their viewers' lives.

The first step in drawing out the complexities of the issues discussed in Chapter Two is the survey of the various theories of nation and nationalism which occurs in Chapter Three. These theories are an appropriate starting point for the further discussion of contemporary community and its interrelation with commercial broadcast television because a sense of belonging to a nation, being a "naturalised" member, is one the strongest foundations of post-Enlightenment conceptions of identity. The main ideas raised in this chapter – the imagined community, the sacred nation, historical continuity, historical error and ethnicity – reappear consistently throughout every part of this thesis. For this reason, the theories reviewed in this

first chapter lay the groundwork for what follows in the rest of the thesis. This is not to say that all of these ideas about the nation necessarily agree with each other. Rather, it is within the contradiction and conflict of these theories where the useful concepts for analysing contemporary community lie. From the early Enlightenment political philosophies of Kant, Hegel and Fichte, through the historical analyses of Renan and the Marxist interpretations of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, to the disastrous nationalism of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the controversy surrounding the nation is self-evident. In fact, many 20<sup>th</sup> Century theorists rejected the nation as a concept, seeing it only as a source of division and war. This chapter introduces the theories of large community identity which continue throughout the thesis.

The theoretical discussions in Chapter Four are an attempt to link the theories of nation and community to the media, in a specifically Australian milieu. It is an investigation of Australian history, historicism, narrativity and media studies. Similar in thematic content to Turner's *National Fictions* (1986), in this chapter I have tried to use the ideas expressed in that book to construct a theory of the way television corporations attempt to build their audiences through representations of community identity. Commercial television broadcasters seek to create an identity for themselves within the national community and do so by representing both the community and their own place in it. They create a historical narrative of Australian values, culled from a variety of sources, and give it the appearance of being something universal and taken for granted. They represent themselves as the guardians of these values. To demonstrate this process, Chapter Four borrows from the work of Hayden White, Graeme Turner, Eric Hobsbawm and Manning Clark. It also analyses *Our Century*, a historical documentary screened on The Nine Network to celebrate the Federation of Australia. This chapter goes on to examine the style of the narrative myths of Australian-ness and draws out how that style changes based on context.

The discussion of style and context leads into Chapter Five, which is a survey of the Australian commercial television networks' representation of Sydney as a 21<sup>st</sup> century global city. The practical example of Sydney is used to introduce notions of "locality" to the previous chapters' discussions of nation and community. It investigates questions such as,

how does local community relate to national and how does television negotiate the difference between the two? The example of local community which this thesis uses, Sydney, occupies both “place” (that is, the locales where people live) and “space” (the virtual zone where global information flows influence our culture). Commercial television corporations base their marketing and identity-building around the idea that they are local organisations which know how to deal with the global. Yet, as parts of large media corporations, everything about their operations has to be responsive to the global flow of capital. Their corporate structures and work patterns are completely globalised. The local is only ever considered as part of the broadcast content. This chapter investigates the tensions this creates as both the television broadcasters and their audience seek to negotiate their existences as part of a city in the information age. To do this it tries to define the “global city” and, using the work of Manuel Castells, examines Sydney in the light of this definition and the social fragmentation associated with it. It goes on to show how television broadcasters re-enforce the importance of the “local” – their imagined “local” – by, at times, scaring the audience. I use the example of crime reporting and show how it pushes some members of the community to the margins of representation. This chapter commences the analysis which demonstrates that television’s representations of narrative identity (their strategy for increasing profits) have become significantly disconnected from actual occurrences in Australian society.

Chapter Six concerns itself with Australian television’s representations of the next layer of imagined community, the international region. Australia’s history abounds with narratives of isolation. This is because the nation has historically been represented as European. Geographically, however, Australia is much closer to Asia than Europe and, in this sense, has never really been physically isolated. For this reason, Australian culture has struggled to come to terms with an internal contradiction: it imagines itself as part of Europe while it exists as part of Asia. An analysis of this contradiction is a very important step to include in any investigation of Australian nationalism or its representation. It is a vital part of the Australian context. Australian television has constant difficulty in representing this contradiction, which, again, is one of the defining characteristics of the Australian imagined community. In this chapter I draw on the work of Alison Broinowski, which has been very influential in

discussions of Australia's relationship with Asia. I also provide some concrete examples by way of the televisual representations of events such as Schapelle Corby's trial in Indonesia and the 2004 South-East Asian tsunami. While these representations are not to be considered definitive, they do serve to illuminate the theoretical argument.

This focus on the immediacy of Australia's context within its international region leads into Chapter Seven's discussion of the global as an imagined community. The advancing speed of information flows has changed the nature of time and space. As many theorists have pointed out, the nature of national borders has changed and a great deal of representational rhetoric about the world becoming smaller place has resulted (Castells, 2001; Stehr, 2004; Virilio, 2002; Wark, 1997). However, the economic changes that have occurred all over the world have a powerful impact on everybody's actual daily lives. In this sense, there is another contradiction present between the way television represents the global and the way globalisation is changing people's lives. Again, I use the work of Manuel Castells to come to terms with these pervasive changes. In the contemporary context, theories of globalisation are a vital element of any discussion of nationalism and its representations.

While Chapters Three to Seven attempt to open up the theoretical grounds of the discussion, Chapters Eight, Nine and Ten offer some concrete examples by which to illuminate complicated aspects of theoretical nuance. These three chapters are organised according to the commercial structure of the Australian television industry. Chapter Eight starts with The Nine Network. Nine has maintained its identity over a number of years, perhaps because of the strong personality of its long term controlling influence: Kerry Packer. This shows the power that a media magnate can wield. Nine was the number one Australian television network for the majority of the history of Australian television and developed most of its business strategy in accordance with its market leading position. This chapter demonstrates the oligopolistic nature of the Australian television industry and demonstrates how The Nine Network has represented its position within the Australian community. By emphasising its number one position for many years, Nine implied that it had a mandate to define an Australian identity.



Seven maintained its second place market position for many years and operated successfully by being almost competitive with Nine. In early 2005 this began to change as Nine started to lose some of its audience to Seven. By the end of 2005, Seven had overtaken Nine and, for the first time in the history of Australian television, returned higher quarterly profit figures. The change in market positions occurred not because of some innovative programming strategy, but rather because Seven chose the right time to copy Nine's identity. Nine built its market leading identity on news, sport and current affairs and, as Nine experienced a news and current affairs lull, Seven appropriated Nine's techniques and has since consolidated its ratings lead. In this sense, Seven is reinforcing Nine's representation of Australians as being focussed on news, sport and weather.

The tenth chapter draws on Network Ten. Ten currently appears to have a different business plan to the other networks. It is content to remain in third place and sell its advertising space based on the impression that it reaches a more specific target audience. It focuses on splitting its overall audience up into demographics, and claims that it is more popular with younger viewers, who are supposedly more inclined to spend money on consumer goods. It also concentrates far more on local issues and images in its news bulletins and also does not seem to take news and current affairs as seriously as the other networks. In doing this, Ten is representing the Australian imagined community as fragmented rather than as a homogenous nation. This is perhaps a reflection of the way society has changed in general in the information age.

# **Chapter 1**

## **Methodology**

This thesis is an interdisciplinary theoretical study that attempts to open up new ground for the discussion of television corporations' business strategies as media technology changes and conceptions of nationalism adjust to the pressures of the information society. It seeks to draw attention to the complexity of the changes that are occurring in the contemporary Australian television industry through a discussion of various socio-political theories.

Chapter Two of this thesis attempts to diagnose the current status of broadcast television in Australia. The aim of this chapter is to develop a contextual basis for the theoretical analyses which follow it. Chapters Three to Seven are surveys of various theories of community and ways of describing large groups of people, such as the media audience. The television market relies completely on finding ways of describing and homogenizing large groups of people. These chapters serve the purpose of examining how these theories relate to the idea of a media audience and how they link into each other. Chapter Three is the most important in terms of providing the theoretical groundwork from which the rest of the thesis springs. This chapter investigates the concepts of the nation and nationalism and highlights five ideas that recur throughout each chapter of this thesis: the imagined community, the nation as sacred, the historical continuity of the nation, the error inherent in that historical consciousness and the role of ethnicity in the nation.

Each of Chapters Eight, Nine and Ten examines an Australian commercial television network, focussing on particular issues that relate to the networks' corporate identities and representations of the Australian national community. In other words, the aim of these last three chapters is to throw an empirical light on the theories which preceded them.

I have chosen Australian television as the subject of my thesis for a variety of reasons. I live in Australia and have been exposed to its television on an almost regular basis. However, more than this basic level of contextual interest, television can still tell us a great deal about

the state of society. The technology of the medium may be swiftly becoming obsolete but its cultural effects will not wane as quickly. More importantly, the corporations which operate broadcast television will not simply disappear. It is, in fact, these corporations which this thesis is concerned with: their business strategies and their use of narratives of community identity. It is more likely that their businesses will converge with those of other media producers. Free-to-air television has already become just one of the many media options that the consumer rapidly switches between. However, this dwindling degree of importance cannot rule them out as a subject worthy of analysis. Also, to date, their strategies involving the appropriation of nationalist imagery and narratives remain the same.

In his book, *Watching Television Audiences* (2000), John Tulloch explores the methodological issues facing media studies at a time when post-structuralism has provided a legitimate critique of any aspiration towards empiricism and the scientific method. Engaging in a specific set of “objective” procedures is no longer enough to claim insight into “the truth”. Representation “of lived experience is highly problematic methodologically. Notions of validity, generalisability and reliability become even more problematic” (2000:12). While it may still be worthwhile, in some circumstances, to engage in “social scientific” (McQuail, 2001:51) forms of media research, these techniques privilege the meta-narratives that a contemporary critique of nationalism must question. A pluralist analysis seems more appropriate in an examination of the contemporary community’s fragmentation. As Pierre Levy (1997:70) puts it, “In a situation in flux, official languages and rigid structures do nothing more than blur or mask reality.”

However, this is not to say that this thesis “prioritizes cultural plurality and invention for their own sake” (Adam and Allan cited in Tulloch, 2000:15). Rather, I borrow from gender theorist V. Spike Peterson’s (2005:503) constructivist, interdisciplinary techniques to critique the fluctuation of social structures that are adapting to change (as opposed to disappearing): the political economy of commercial television; narratives of national identity; the hegemony of globalisation. Therefore, the few textual analyses that do appear in this thesis are used to highlight contextual concerns relating to specific elements of the national community or the

political economy of the media, rather than general attributes of either. They are an attempt to cast an empirical light on complex theoretical issues, rather than a claim to a proven hypothesis.

John Hartley (1992) tells us that television is a “dirty” medium: “television texts do not supply the analyst with a warrant for considering them either as unitary or as structurally bounded into an inside and outside” (22). This thesis’ *raison d’être* is television’s “dirtiness”. It does not attempt to raise a wall of objectivity between the viewer and the medium because that would effectively negate any theoretical discussion of the virtualisation of the audience before it had even begun. Rather, this thesis attempts to untangle each of the threads of theory and argument which appear to enclose contemporary television, and follow them where they lead. Or, as García Canclini (1995:2) puts it, “we need nomad social sciences capable of circulating through the staircases that connect those floors – or better yet, social sciences that redesign the floor plans and horizontally connect the levels.”

The interdisciplinarity of the approach taken in this thesis also serves as a means to avoid creating a subject/object dichotomy between television and its audience. Thus, while this thesis draws on the media theorists mentioned in the Introduction, it also borrows something from the gender studies tradition in its efforts to bridge divides between academic disciplines. As mentioned above, Peterson (2005:503) describes this approach as “constructivism”: “Constructivism recognises that agent and structure are not categorically separate (as in a positivist binary), but interact to construct social reality”. Its strength is that it recognises the “intersubjective meaning systems” that construct social reality. For Peterson,

Constructivism is thus crucial to feminist (and other critical) interventions as it significantly expands the terrain of inquiry and provides an important “bridge” across epistemological divisions. To address an expanding agenda and critical commitments, feminists draw on a variety of approaches... and currently favour heterogeneity and pluralism over adherence to any single paradigm. (504)

Similarly, the subject of this thesis requires a theoretical approach based on heterogeneity

rather than the “adherence to any single paradigm”. The television industry is changing and new combinations of theories may be required to discuss these changes.

The theoretical grounds for this thesis must be interdisciplinary because its object is, as media theorist Néstor García Canclini (1995) would put it, part of a “hybrid culture”. This label indicates not only the cultural movements described by theories of postmodernism, but also the political and economic questions they raise. In cultures that reject promises of utopias and progress,

is it worth it to promote crafts, restore or reuse historical patrimony, to continue to accept massive numbers of students into the humanities or disciplines tied to obsolete activities of elitist art or to popular culture? Does it make sense – personally and collectively – to invest in extended studies in order to end up in low-paying jobs, repeating tired old techniques and knowledge...? (1)

What value do the aims and techniques of modernity have in a hybrid culture? In the contemporary world, can the academic disciplines of the humanities, in isolation, describe anything accurately?

García Canclini describes the problem thus:

Just as the abrupt opposition between the traditional and the modern does not work, so the cultured, the popular, and the mass-based are not where we are used to finding them. It is necessary to deconstruct that division into three levels – that layered conception of the world of culture – and verify if its hybridization can be understood using the tools of disciplines that are studied separately. (1995:2)

As Raymond Williams (1974) points out, stylistically, television occurs in specific cultural contexts. While its technological demands provide some basis for critiques of an international style, particular local characteristics make analyses of national television industries worthwhile. Large parts of my thesis are devoted to the analysis of local television styles, and

how they reflect narratives of community, in contrast to global trends – and while a great deal of media scholarship has been done already on the “local” versus the “global”, I have given the issues involved a complex theoretical framework rather than a simplistic binary opposition.

## Chapter 2

### New Media or Self-Reflexive Identities

In May 2006, accounting firm Merrill Lynch released a research report which claimed that the Australian commercial television networks are steadily losing advertisers to other forms of media. According to John Lehmann and Lara Sinclair (2006) of *The Australian* newspaper, the analysts were claiming that,

Australian free-to-air television networks have been slow to react to the growing threat of digital technologies, putting the value of their businesses at serious risk... Underlining the threat, figures... showed online advertising revenue surging 65 per cent in the March quarter, compared with flat revenue growth across traditional media.<sup>1</sup>

The report also showed that Seven and Ten were under more serious threat than Nine. Nine's parent company, PBL, was more comfortably placed because it has successfully diversified into the casino industry as well as online and pay-TV businesses, while Seven and Ten's revenue models are still mostly based around selling advertising space on broadcast television. The article in *The Australian* suggests that,

television networks' advertising and audiences were under threat from not just online publishers but also the expected growth in internet protocol television, personal video recorders and pay television... "This business model (free-to-air television) has been slower to respond to the emerging threats", the report said.

It pointed to a 9 per cent decline in commercial TV audiences between 2001 and 2005, which included a hefty 17 per cent fall in the advertiser-friendly 16 to 39-year-old demographic... With broadband speeds expected to increase, making digital media more attractive, the report predicted the drift of advertising away from TV would speed up over the next four years.

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<sup>1</sup> Lehmann, J. and L. Sinclair (2006) "TV networks losing ground as adverts and audience drift to digital media" in *The Australian*, May 2 2006, <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0.20867.18995714-7582.00.html>, accessed May 2 2006

There is some evidence that the Australian commercial television networks are aware of this threat to their businesses. The methods they used in the first half of 2006 to re-focus their identity imagery are part of this. They know they are competing with forms of media which are much more able to target specific markets than they are, so they are trying to construct themselves in the public's mind as servants of localised consumers. They have also all tried to come up with ways to make it seem like the television audience is able to participate in a feedback loop. Most of the new forms of media which are competing with free-to-air television are strongly interactive and the television networks are trying to make it appear as though they can offer the same level of engagement.

Seven began in 2004 with "listening posts" set up in various shopping malls around the country.<sup>2</sup> These were cubicles which had a camera set up in them so that shoppers could sit down and inform Australia of what they thought was the latest big issue. Seven moved on from that with the white board it uses in its morning news program, *Sunrise*. Viewers are encouraged to email the show outlining topics which they think the *Sunrise* team should chat about.<sup>3</sup> The producers pick out the emails they like and write the issues up on a white board that sits to one side of the set.

Less obviously than Seven, Nine has been seeking interactivity for just as long, using SMS polls as often as it can in its current affairs programs. However, Nine has also had the most success in parlaying its television identity onto the internet with 9MSN. This joint venture with Microsoft has given Nine access to the Hotmail email website, allowing it to gain a foothold in the online advertising industry.

Seven tried a similar approach in a deal with AOL but it failed for various reasons. Network Ten also failed in an internet venture with a website called *Scape*.<sup>4</sup> After losing money in this

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<sup>2</sup> <http://seven.com.au/news/7listens>, accessed February 3 2005.

<sup>3</sup> <http://seven.com.au/sunrise/about>, accessed May 23 2006.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.villageroadshow.com.au/press\\_releases/pdf/Scape\\_to\\_Cease\\_Ops.pdf](http://www.villageroadshow.com.au/press_releases/pdf/Scape_to_Cease_Ops.pdf), accessed May 23 2006.



attempt, Ten has seemed reluctant to try again. It maintains its website (as described in Chapter Eight) and uses SMS voting in reality programs to give it a semblance of new media credibility. As the Merrill Lynch report suggests, Ten does seem to be losing ground, despite the high profile online presence of Big Brother.

## Yahoo!7

An interesting example of the networks' attempts to adapt to new media was initiated in early 2006. On January 30, the Seven Network merged its online efforts with Yahoo!, and together they became "Yahoo!7". For the first part of 2006, the only manifestation of this agreement was the appearance of their website, which is basically a blend of both companies' old websites. Apparently they will be pursuing a business plan similar to one already in operation between the United States based Yahoo! and Donald Trump's reality TV show, *The Apprentice*. This program uses an increasingly popular marketing technique known as "branded content". When a product or service is featured in *The Apprentice*, Yahoo! finds ways of selling it on their website. According to Paul McIntyre (2006):

last year Yahoo! signed an unspecified "multi-year" agreement with the show's producer, Mark Burnett Productions, which also created *Survivor*. Yahoo! is not looking to pipe old shows to users over the internet but rather to repackage, reformulate or create entirely new online content linked to broadcast shows. And it also wants to sell advertisers' stuff.

US brands such as Hanes and Pontiac have sold merchandise directly online after their paid appearance on Trump's reality program. In the case of Pontiac, 5000 viewers had reserved a Pontiac Solstice on Yahoo! the same evening the show featured it. Hanes experienced similar sell-outs of the T-shirts that appeared on the show.<sup>5</sup>

This is what "Yahoo!7" intends to do in Australia. They will try to create some sort of

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<sup>5</sup> McIntyre, P. (2006) "Seven, Yahoo! trumpet their new venture" in [www.smh.com.au](http://www.smh.com.au/news/technology/seven-yahoo-trumpet-their-new-venture/2006/02/01/1138590567564.html), February 2, 2006, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/technology/seven-yahoo-trumpet-their-new-venture/2006/02/01/1138590567564.html>, accessed Feb 24, 2006

convergence between the internet and television by constantly trying to construct new ways of selling products online, whilst also drawing revenue from advertising both on television and on their website. On a superficial level, this plan should work even more effectively for them than it does for Yahoo! and *The Apprentice*; the internet company has signed a deal with the television station rather than the producer of a show. In this instance it is the institutional convergence that matters a lot more than content convergence, the format of which will probably change from show to show.

The new company launched their website on the same day they launched their new name. In their press release they outlined their plans:

The new Yahoo!7 feature-rich homepage has gone live today ([www.yahoo7.com.au](http://www.yahoo7.com.au)) and offers users access to a vast array of content offered by these two leading media companies. Highlights include new sites for flagship shows such as *Sunrise*, *Lost* and *Desperate Housewives*--examples of the kind of new offerings the combination makes possible.

Further opportunities to realise the potential for integration brought about by this alliance will be revealed in the coming weeks and months. Yahoo!7 will seamlessly integrate Yahoo!'s products and technology with Seven-owned content to create a media and entertainment experience rich in video and locally relevant content. Yahoo!7 will be able to add, enhance and create experiences around Seven's content enriching viewer's experiences through personalisation, communities and user-generated content.<sup>6</sup>

It is clear from this that both companies are very aware of their own weaknesses. Seven knows that it is losing the younger demographics to new forms of media entertainment that deliver individualised information, while Yahoo! knows that it can't produce the kind of big budget content that will guarantee more people keep coming back to their site. At the same time, the ideas expressed in this press release are limited. An "interactive" home page,

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<sup>6</sup> The press release is available at [http://www.sevencorporate.com.au/uploads/files/1138585381359\\_0.6128006964381489.pdf](http://www.sevencorporate.com.au/uploads/files/1138585381359_0.6128006964381489.pdf), accessed February 25, 2006.

websites for popular programs and advertising synergy are not new ideas and do not do much to change either company's revenue models.

Further on in Paul McIntyre's (2006) article, Ryan Stokes, Yahoo!7 board member, makes it clear that they don't want to seem like an imitation of 9MSN, the Nine Network's internet alliance. According to Stokes, "Yahoo! isn't MSN. It's not our competition. Yahoo! is very much more about the human experience and engaging with information, communication and entertainment". Yet, based on the appearance of the two websites, their functions and services are exactly the same. Both offer email, news, advertisements and websites for their television content, weather and other sundry items (for example, stock prices or star signs).

In neither case is content genuinely shared between the two media forms. For example, there is no scope for Yahoo!7 to screen the Seven Network's programming through the internet and there is no way for Seven to bring any of Yahoo!'s services to the television screen. This makes both partnerships seem like marketing tokens: all the companies involved are aware of ideas about convergence but have no developed idea about how to combine broadcasting and narrow-casting before the switch to digital. In theory, convergence between a broadcast company like Seven and an online entity like Yahoo! could stave off the dangers of a changing media environment; any potential threats from new technology could be handled by both companies working together and sharing resources. It is unlikely that a large corporation like the Seven Network would allow itself to fade away, and being allied to a company like Yahoo! would seem to be the perfect solution when major changes do take place.

However, trouble for both companies could still possibly lie in their business plans, which are basically the same. Television has to create a mass audience to convince its advertising clients that it can deliver their messages to the most people. New media corporations like Yahoo! have a tougher job; they have to both create "masses" – for the same reasons as television – while fragmenting them to deliver subscriptions and convince their advertisers that they are catering to niche markets. In this sense, companies like Yahoo! are trying to be virtual broadcasters.

These attempted partnerships may be an acknowledgement that their imagined audiences and demographic fragmentations are actually made up of people. They are unpredictable human beings whom market research analysts cannot actually categorise. If younger generations are turning away from television because the internet offers more variety and individuality, it is difficult to believe they would bother to patronise a large corporation's website rather than a small independent, for the same reasons that they have turned off their television sets.

## **Time**

One of the most basic reasons why commercial television is losing its audience is because "liveness", under the control of a newsreader, is no longer its sole domain. The marketing of commercial television in Australia would have us believe that nothing has changed. Nine and Seven's (and to a lesser extent, Ten's) marketing identities still revolve around news and current affairs. They still present themselves as being able to inform their audiences reliably, through their newsreader, about the major issues of the day. They still try to create an intimate link between the newsreader and the viewer, based on the idea that the newsreader is welcomed into the family living room to relate the information directly, with a meeting of gazes. The newsreader is still constructed as someone who is talking to the individual live, as though conversing with a public.

However, the new forms of media (for example, the internet or cable and satellite television) are pervasive in society, and becoming prevalent in most Australians' lives. According to Castells, the permanently "live" new media network

radically transforms space and time, the fundamental dimensions of human life. Localities become disembodied from their cultural, historical, geographical meaning, and reintegrated into functional networks, or into image collages, including a space of flows that substitutes for the space of places. Time is erased in the new communication system... (2000:406)

Again, commercial television in Australia would have its audience believe that nothing has changed. Its approach to new media seems to be one of denial; the equivalent of blocking its ears and sticking its head in the ground. The Nine Network, for example, has been very slow to make any significant changes to its old-fashioned, “winning” formula. Perhaps there has been some validity in this approach given that the largest part of the Australian population is middle aged, though it is by no means a useful long-term strategy. While new media is changing the way people live their lives, Australia’s commercial television networks stay with their tried and tested methods of reinforcing social norms and mores through their news bulletins.

Meanwhile, new media forms are much more “live” than television could ever be. They are also able to update more regularly which means that they are much more able to satisfy the audience’s demand for the instantaneous delivery of information. Also, parts of the internet in particular are more successfully targeted to the individual, creating a far greater impression of intimacy and “liveness”. For example, the television audience now has a choice. It can find out about the latest insurgency strikes in Baghdad on the evening television news, as related by a journalist unable to leave the hotel because the cost of insurance would be too high. This journalist is probably employed by one of the large media corporations, which means their reportage may be influenced one way or another by the variety of interests which are usually at stake in large corporations. Or, the audience member can become an internet user, log on to the independent blog of someone on the ground in the streets of Baghdad and experience a representation much more direct and immediate, without as much suspicion of excessive filtering.

The independence of this hypothetical blogger points to another one of the Australian commercial television networks’ mistakes in coming to terms with the threat of new media. They try to ally themselves to large internet companies. As mentioned earlier, these online firms use the same business models as television broadcasters. That is, they generate revenue by creating demographics and selling advertising space. These are the reasons why an “audience member” might become a “user” do not apply to companies like Yahoo! and

Microsoft. They aren't independent and they aren't targeted to the individual.

While internet ratings often show that the most popular websites are either those connected with these large online media companies or with existing large media corporations, there is no reason to believe that the audience for these sites are those who have switched off their televisions. It is much more likely that the people who go to these popular websites are the same people who have remained the solid core of the television audience. It is the people who go to other, independent sources of information who are affecting the television industry.

Part of the Australian commercial television networks' response to their declining audience numbers is to do as Network Ten has done and re-focus on the local; to cast themselves as the embodiment of place. Seven's Sydney news set now has a backdrop of the Sydney CBD, as does Nine's. They are trying to create the same impression of familiarity that people associate with landmarks. They have tried to become part of the local milieu, distancing themselves from their previous images of global omnipotence. However, their techniques of audience creation still involve recycling national narratives, norms and myths. It is possible that this still works in winning older viewers but it could be argued that it will make younger audiences increasingly difficult to construct. This is not because the young are naturally rebellious, but rather because they have been born into the information age, with its new modes and techniques of communication.

Television programming has always operated with a linear, sequential understanding of time. Programs come one after the other in a set schedule, at certain intervals. This schedule is determined by the broadcaster rather than the audience. It is mapped out so that it flows through the audience's days and lives, with the hope of interacting with them as their existence unfolds. For example, prime time is when people are supposedly getting home from work and relaxing. Content is scheduled in order to catch the viewers early in the prime time zone and hold them throughout the night. Generally, this means gameshows are broadcast at 5:30pm to capture an audience for the 6pm news. Then follows a current affairs program, then a soap opera. After the soap is often some sort of lifestyles programming, followed by a

drama. The idea is that the commercial television broadcaster can convince advertisers that their audience has been consolidated and will stay with that channel throughout the evening.

This scheduling is also a large part of the reason why television corporations have been seen as a cohesive force in society. The imagined community can supposedly be regulated by this flow. Large numbers of people may not know each other, but they know they are part of the same nation because they can watch the same news bulletins at the same times. However,

this linear, irreversible, measurable, predictable time is being shattered in the network society, in a movement of extraordinary historical significance. But we are not just witnessing a relativization of time according to social contexts or alternatively the return to time reversibility as if reality could become entirely captured in cyclical myths. The transformation is more profound: it is the mixing of tenses to create a forever universe... (Castells, 2000:463-464)

In the network society, time itself has changed. Again, we see a contradiction between the world of information flows and the world of localities. Time is local, whereas the space of flows is timeless. According to Castells (2000:460), "research in physics and biology seems to converge with social sciences in adopting a contextual notion of human time". The measurement of time has always been relative, depending on where you are standing. While the television's representation of time may not necessarily have expressed this, the audience had no particular need for it to be expressed. Now things are changing. People still measure their days by the sun rising and setting as their lives gradually wind down. However, as stated above, the audience which is switching off their television and turning to new media forms demonstrates that the television audience is part of the space of flows, the "forever universe" (Castells, 2000:464) where time has no direction.

This change in the nature of time has come about because there has been an

acceleration of "just about everything" in our societies, in a relentless effort to compress time in all

domains of human activity. Compressing time to the limit is tantamount to making time sequence, and thus time, disappear... Capital's freedom from time and culture's escape from the clock are decisively facilitated by new information technologies, and embedded in the structure of the network society.

(Castells, 2000:464)

Castells provides examples of how time has been transformed by information technology in the network society. The first, and possibly foremost, has been the global restructuring of capitalism. Stock exchanges are electronically interlinked and distance is no longer a barrier to trade. In fact, instantaneous international business transactions no longer have any barriers at all. The speed of these transactions has increased to such an extent that capital flows constantly around the world at all hours of the day, from one side to the other in seconds. It never sleeps. The major exchanges – London, New York and Tokyo – cover all the time zones. There is also a lively trade in future time. New financial products predicting the future of investments have become very popular “as everybody bets on and with future money anticipated in computer projections” (466). Of course, the market for this speculation affects the outcome of the speculation itself and the future effectively ceases being future. Time is dissolved.

Time in the space of flows also changes the way people work. As a result of the excessive flows of capital, companies are striving for much more operational flexibility and people's working lives are becoming more casualised and fragmentary. Their health, family planning, social life and leisure time are also shaped by these changes. This means that time in the space of flows is changing the patterns and cycles that make up the basic biological structure of people's existence. The need to respond to instantaneous global flows necessarily disregards any sense of local need or existence. For example, if there is a financial crisis in New York, London or Tokyo it doesn't matter if it's the middle of the night in Sydney – when most people would normally be asleep. A response is needed.

However, these transformations of time only apply to local “place” in the sense that they are forced upon it when it has to interact with the space of flows. This “*timeless time*” is only the



emerging, *dominant* form of social time in the network society, as the space of flows does not negate the existence of places” (Castells, 2000:465). To the extent that people’s lives occur unaffected by the network society, time still follows its normal course. Factory workers, for example, are still ruled by the clock. However, their livelihoods could vanish if some vague capital flow forces the closure of their employers during the middle of the night, when everyone involved is sleeping.

Virilio (2000:38) sees the changes taking place in time as characterised by speed:

The “chronological” movement of past, present and future must now be associated with phenomena of acceleration and deceleration, “movement of movement”, speed changes akin to the phenomena of illumination, or the exposure of the extension and duration of matter to “daylight”...

He argues that time is now measured in relation to what type of light source is illuminating the object. The light of the sun is the traditional measure of time and illuminates everything as far as the physical eye can see. Photons bounce off objects back to our eyes at the universe’s limit speed, the speed of light. Where things speed up is when illuminated objects from further away than the eye can see are brought to our eyes by the light of the screen.

### **Resistance?**

To those potential viewers who are turning away from television, commercial television networks will always seem to be a central part of the space of flows because it has been its main source of light. This makes it something to be resisted. Those who grow up in the network society are very much aware of the contradictions that exist between the global space of flows and the local place. This knowledge drives their distrust of traditional social narratives, such as the myths about an Australian way of life, which television constantly recycles in its content. They are aware that their participation in an audience is valuable and they are willing to use this awareness to gain leverage in the space of flows.

The audience has internalised its own existence as a unit of value. This self-reflexive identity has also been part of the transformation of time in the network society. In his book *Pluralism* (2005), William Connolly draws the distinction between clock time and durational time. For Connolly, “clock time is coordinated with a schematic experience of space” (98) and is still a critical part of experience, given expression by

closely coordinated train schedules, punch-in clocks, plane departures, class starting times, track records, prescribed lunch breaks, the twenty-four-second rule in NBA basketball, and pub hours. (97)

He goes on to describe the way people talk about time with spatial metaphors – for example, looking forward to the future - reinforcing Castells ideas about clock time applying to the space of place. However, Connolly avoids assigning a determinative external logic of time, such as “timeless time”, as an alternative to clock time. Instead he suggests the idea of “durational time”, which seems to be more of a self-reflexive dialogue with life experience. He makes this suggestion because, for him, pluralism is much more prominent in contemporary life and traditional ideas of time have been unable to adjust:

Rationalism and classical empiricism, diverging from each other in notable ways, nonetheless concur in building upon the results of operational perception rather than plunging into the activity of life as perception itself crystallizes. As a result, advocates of each come up with images of space, cause, time, morality and politics that work reasonably well with stable relations set in persisting contexts. But each functions poorly in a setting pluralized by significant differences of collective memory... (2005:98-99)

“Durational time” encompasses not only events and actions, but also memory and the trace of influence. Connolly uses the example of two people talking to each other. Each thought or idea that crosses between the two people is accompanied by another set of images, memories and speculations that occur to both of the people internally and independently of what is taking place externally. In this sense, past and future exist simultaneously in each person’s perception, creating a protracted present, which “could not be without protraction. It would be

an empty instant, like the flick of a second on a Timex” (100). This is a conception of time as the flow of becoming. It questions belief in tradition, cause, meaning and morality. As Connolly (114) puts it:

The dominant image of morality is bound to a progressive image of time. Any attempt to complicate the image of morality eventually runs up against the objection that it contradicts the way we *must* think about time if we are to be moral beings, or more fundamentally, if morality is to make sense *as* morality.

Morality, in the dominant Kantian sense, is a universal truth, the recognition of which humans must progress towards. Once it is recognised, humans are obligated to live by it as a law. This is a vision of historical progress, the virtuous person making a journey from a sinful beginning toward a moral future. However, this conception of existence encompasses two worlds: the real and the ideal. Humans are not ideal so the ideal morality can never be achieved. History progresses in futility. For Connolly (2005:115-116), Kant accounts for this tension by claiming that people should act “as if” history is morally progressive:

The very logic of morality makes it incumbent upon us to project the possibility of indefinite historical progress toward moral fulfilment, says Kant. But because we are embodied beings straddling two worlds, not “holy” beings subsisting entirely in one, we must admit that the gap will never be overcome, either by individuals or by universal history.

The tendency towards social fragmentation that many theorists perceive in contemporary society may have resulted from a recognition that acting “as if” a conception of morality was true is not good enough. The result is that people now seem to find a source for their moral belief in diverse places, making any sense of universal past and future (or progress between the two) impossible. People now find the bases for their moral identities in their life experience – an experience that they have witnessed unfolding as though from the outside, self-reflexively. Which means that people are increasingly operating in durational time rather

than clock time.

This is where Connolly's theories intersect with sociologists' like Castells and Giddens. As argued above, self-reflexivity is now the dominant influence in identity construction.

Durational time is that which is experienced by self-reflexive identities. Past and future are still seen as distinct under certain operational regimes, but people have the flexibility to also construct their own thoughts and experiences as legitimate measurement of time. This is where large media corporations may strike difficulties in constructing their audiences.

Television in particular, as argued above, operates within the traditional conception of clock time and its content adheres strictly to a traditional notion of morality. It is inseparable from its set schedule and recycles myths and norms, which are represented as having been settled upon at some stage in the past. It is based on a vision of morally progressive history.

As such, television is not as popular with younger audiences. Older identities, people who grew up before the information technology revolution, may have a greater sense of moral stability. They are comfortable being told what they should fear and how they should decorate their gardens. People born into this current era, however, have more of a regard for the plural, or fragmented, nature of contemporary existence.

Baudrillard (1983:28-29) described the "mass" as

dumb like beasts, and its silence is equal to the silence of beasts. Despite having been surveyed to death (and the constant solicitation, the information, to which it is submitted is equivalent to experimental torture on laboratory animals), it says neither whether the truth is to the left of to the right, nor whether it prefers revolution or repression. It is without truth and without reason. It has been attributed with every arbitrary remark. It is without conscious and without unconscious.

An awareness, even an indirect awareness, of the arbitrary nature of the "audience" may equate to a feeling of resentment towards the television's standard operational practices. If this is the case, one of the possible results of this resentment could be the steady decline in

television audiences. The media is currently discussing this in terms of viewers switching to more interactive and attractive digital media, but it is probably more accurately the result of an outmoded business plan. Television's method for making money is to construct the viewers as an audience and people no longer always see themselves as a unified mass. The key words in that last sentence were "see themselves". The legitimacy of "seeing yourself" as whatever you choose now means that being lumped into an audience will not always appeal. This means that free-to-air television will not fail entirely, but it will lose its dominance and making alliances with large companies like Yahoo! and Microsoft will do nothing to prevent this.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Imagined Community: A Theoretical Study**

This chapter is a survey of the theories of nation and nationalism. It is intended to serve as a theoretical underpinning for the rest of this thesis. Contemporary conceptions of community and identity are based on being a part of a nation. This chapter is a review of the main attributes of the nation and nationalism; its imagined basis, its sacredness and its use of ethnicity and the appearance of historical continuity in its attempts to conceal its historical error. These attributes recur throughout this thesis. While some of the theories of community shift between local, regional and global, these attributes of nationalism remain the same. As Turner (1994:120) explains:

following Benedict Anderson, Philip Schlesinger describes nationalism as the fundamental social process through which modern collective identities are formed... but emphasises that this process must always be the subject of contest and negotiation.

As a national community is too large to be dealt with as a group of individuals, commercial television broadcasters are forced to virtualise it and treat it as an “imagined community” (Anderson, 2000). The attributes above make this imagined community manipulable. Modern collective identities shift and mutate based on who is describing them and what their purpose is in their description.

The nation and nationalism are concepts that are taken for granted by many people. For one thing, it is often simply assumed that the nation is both universal and particular at the same time; universal in that the world is thought of as divided neatly into separate and distinct nations, particular in that each person on the planet is born into a nation which is carried around with them for the rest of their lives.<sup>7</sup> Things are done in the name of the nation, sporting teams represent the nation, we have a national “way of life”, and a national debt, and

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<sup>7</sup> The “naturalised” aspect of nation membership is discussed by Elie Kedourie in *Nationalism* (2000); Ernest Gellner in the “Nationalism” chapter of *Thought and Change* (1965) pp. 150-151; and Ernest Gellner in *Nations and Nationalism* (2001).

we live in a nation state. This indicates a high level of public confusion over a subject that is often taken for granted. There is little evidence, either in the media or otherwise, of people pausing to question the nature of the concept (or concepts) themselves. This may be because like the word “culture”, “nation” and “nationalism” have many diverse layers of meaning.<sup>8</sup>

When the word “nation” is used it is often unclear which sense of its meaning is being expressed. It could mean the geographical location where you were born or your ethnic heritage. It could depend on the language you speak or whether or not you’ve been “naturalised” (a particularly loaded word to use as a description of someone becoming a citizen). Symbols which have come to represent a “national way of life”, “national character” or “national spirit” are bandied about in the media seemingly without any inclination to try to understand what they actually refer to. It can sometimes seem as though people regard it as unnecessary to decide how the nation came to imbue its members with its spirit or even decide what that spirit is or consists of.

Even today it seems obvious that a person “must have a nationality as he must have a nose and two ears” (Gellner, 2001:6). While the crumbling edifices of other grand narratives are being bulldozed on a nightly basis, most people have turned a blind eye to nationalism and allowed it to remain standing.

### **The Academic Study of the Nation**

Since the late 1970s, there has been a resurgence of academic interest in the nation. For most of the twentieth century, nations and nationalism were frowned upon by most scholars as being on a par with “racism, sexism and ageism” (Poole, 1999:2) as forms of unreasoned prejudice. In fact, many members of the Marxist left saw nationalism as a historical mistake that would inevitably run its course and stop causing trouble.<sup>9</sup> Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined*

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<sup>8</sup> The complicated meaning of the word “culture” is discussed by Raymond Williams in *Culture* (1981) pp. 10-14, and in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1983) pp. 87-93.

<sup>9</sup> Works where these views are discussed include, for example, Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (1995) or the “Demonising Nationalism” chapter in Tom Nairn’s *Faces of Nationalism* (1997).

*Communities* (2001; first published 1983) and Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* (2001; first published 1983) began to turn the tide in the early 1980s and the work of Anthony Smith, Tom Nairn, Eric Hobsbawm, Leah Greenfeld and others has continued to show that there is a great deal of space for a better theoretical understanding of the nation.

However, academic thought in this area still lacks any real critical accord or set of accepted definitions.<sup>10</sup> It has produced many different ways of describing nations and nationalism, usually depending on the particular discursive background of the scholar and the actual events occurring in the world at the time.

Nationalism has variously been regarded as a positive force because of its atomisation of the world and a negative force because it usually defines itself in opposition to the Other, or because it prevents international class unity.<sup>11</sup> It is possible to see nationalism as a confrontational social system, which has spread throughout the world and caused enormous pain and suffering.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, it can be read as the raw material grounding the construction of identity, emancipation and self-determination. Nations and nationalism have been variously described as products of industrialisation and modernity, ahistorical attachments which stretch back into antiquity or the effect of ethnic kinship. The diversity of these various schools of thought ranges from those almost diametrically opposed to those differentiated by minute theoretical nuance.

This could be a result of the fact that the study of nationalism has moved in fits and starts. Rather than the long and sustained interest that would seem appropriate for such a pervasive political phenomenon, most of the literature available has been produced since the late 1970s and was largely sparked off by studies that began to appear in the 1960s, such as Elie Kedourie's book, *Nationalism* (2000; first published in 1960), Ernest Gellner's influential chapter, "Nationalism", in his book, *Thought and Change* (1964) and Miroslav Hroch's

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<sup>10</sup> Benedict Anderson's introduction to Gopal Balakrishnan (ed), *Mapping the Nation* (1999), discusses this lack of accord particularly well.

<sup>11</sup> For example, E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (1995).

<sup>12</sup> For example, Micheline R. Ishay's introduction to *The Nationalism Reader* (1995) pp. 1-19.



comparative study of the social composition of small European nationalisms, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* (1985).<sup>13</sup> Before this few scholars dedicated whole works to the study of the nation. Carlton Hayes and Hans Kohn are the notable exceptions to this with their work between the world wars.<sup>14</sup>

Given that the one thing all scholars of nationalism agree upon is that it has existed for at least two centuries and has had vast influence over world politics during that time, it seems odd that throughout the modern period relatively little has been written about it as a subject in and of itself, particularly as so much has been said about it in relation to one nation or another. Despite this, it must be mentioned that most of the theorists of the nation and nationalism have acknowledged that Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant, Hegel and Fichte may have influenced the way nationalism is perceived or performed. Kedourie (2000:12-23) believed that one of the main traits of nationalism was its adherence to Kant's concept of self-determination. Kant's philosophy held that morality is based on the "categorical imperative", a law of morality that came from within an individual rather than from an outside source, that is, God or society. The only way for an individual to be virtuous was to follow this internal moral law, which responded to no sense of reward or punishment.

While Kant believed in God he also believed that the categorical imperative was not determined by God. He believed that the only way an individual could be free was if they made their own autonomous choice to follow the categorical imperative. Having made this choice they automatically became morally virtuous because they were free to choose what it meant to be virtuous. Even though this places the individual at the centre of the universe, Kant maintained the existence of God by saying that the categorical imperative requires perfection of us and perfection would not be conceivable without the existence of the perfect being, God.

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<sup>13</sup> The 1985 English language publication contained results worked out in two books, published in Prague in 1969 and 1971.

<sup>14</sup> For Hayes, *Essays on Nationalism* (1966) *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism* (1968) or *Nationalism: A Religion* (1960). For Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background* (1969) or *Prophets and Peoples: Studies in Nineteenth Century Nationalism* (1961). Both Hayes and Kohn traced modern nationalism to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, though with slightly different interpretations of the phenomena. Kohn saw the centuries before the French Revolution as the long incubation period of the inevitable appearance of modern nationalism. They both saw the division of the world into nations as something natural, objective and inevitable.

Kant maintained these philosophical ideas in his political writings. If the only way for an individual to be free and good was self-determination then autonomy is the essential end of politics, no matter how it is attained: “one state, as a moral person, is considered as existing in a state of nature in relation to another state, hence in a condition of constant war” (cited in Dahbour and Ishay, 1995:38). The goal of the categorical imperative was permanent peace but Kant was sceptical as to whether this could ever be achieved. The moral struggle of trying to achieve it was more important. The idea of constant struggle and war remains very influential, particularly in television’s portrayal of the nation and even in its own internal dynamics, and it will be analysed in greater detail later in this thesis.

As Kedourie pointed out in *Nationalism* (1960), this will to autonomy is one of the hallmarks of nationalism, regardless of how the nation is situated within the state. Gellner (2001:130-134) disputes this connection between nationalism and Kant. He agrees that a nationalist would believe their nation had to be self-determined but argues that Kant believed in autonomy of the individual and that neither the nation nor the state was implicated in this.

Hegel and Fichte followed on from Kant’s ideas and can be considered important influences on the development of nationalism (if not the understanding of it).<sup>15</sup> Hegel refused to put any credence in Romantic nationalism (the myths and folk memories of an ethnic group). He believed in a universal spirit which was embodied in the state. As with Kant, freedom was still self-determined but only if the individual was subsumed in the whole, because “the worth of individuals is measured by the extent to which they reflect and represent the national spirit” (cited in Dahbour and Ishay, 1995:84). Hegel goes on to define the “national spirit”:

The universal which emerges and becomes conscious within the state... is what we call in general the nation’s culture. But the determinant content which this universal form acquires and which is contained in the concrete reality which constitutes the state is the national spirit itself. (85)

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<sup>15</sup> John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (1994); Gopal Balakrishnan, *Mapping the Nation* (1999); Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (2000).

This spirit is the state's motivation in all its functions and is completely separate from the individual and the contingent. This view of "national spirit" is very popular in contemporary media and is used constantly by both producers and those who wish to use the media for their own ends. For Hegel and his followers this was a stage in the development of what they saw as World History and the nation served as way of organising a populace for war.

However, as Hegel (echoed by many of the theorists of nationalism) pointed out, the owl of Minerva only begins its flight with the onset of dusk. In other words, a historical phenomenon must have come to an end for it to be accurately analysed; until then it will go on changing and developing. Some theorists have predicted the demise of nations and nationalism in the increasingly global and networked society in which we live but there is no actual evidence that this is anywhere close to happening yet. If anything, nationalism is growing stronger. Political leaders have seized it and are using it to fill the rhetorical hole left by social policy while the public is only too willing to latch onto it as a source of identity in a fragmenting world.<sup>16</sup>

## **Creation and Error**

The term "imagined communities" comes from Benedict Anderson's book of the same name. While other writers had identified the dependence of the development of a nation on a literacy-based high culture, Anderson was the first person to explicitly develop the idea that this high culture makes the nation function as an "imagined community".<sup>17</sup>

In the book *Imagined Communities* (2000), he argues that in any community larger than a primordial village (where social contact is face-to-face), a community member would never be able to meet all the other members and must therefore imagine them. Within the context of other theories of nationalism, the interesting point about using the word "imagined" is that

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<sup>16</sup> Examples of this argument appear in Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (2001) and *The Power of Identity* (2002); Ghassan Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism* (2003); and Alain Touraine, *Beyond Neoliberalism* (2001).

<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that the "imagined community" is not the defining theory of nationalism. Leah Greenfeld (2003), for example, makes compelling arguments in favour of seeing the development of the nation as a process of particular historical political change.

others have used words like “fabricated” or “delusional”. As Poole (1999:10) points out:

too many theorists - especially liberals and Marxists - had dismissed the nation as a collective illusion or form of false consciousness, as a pathology unworthy of serious engagement, let alone sympathetic attention. The term “imagined community” provided a way forward.

By arguing that a nation is founded in creative imagination rather than false consciousness, Anderson is saying that it has more in common with religion or kinship than ideology. He argues that the nation offers the kind of spiritual justification for all the sickness, suffering and death in the world which religion offered in the pre-industrial world. In other words, much like religious doctrine, the nation and nationalism give the world a narrative shape and meaning.<sup>18</sup> Television and the media in general have found these narratives particularly useful. This will be explored further in Chapter Four of this thesis.

Anderson uses the cenotaph as evidence of this. These symbolic tombs show the nation’s concern with death and immortality (previously religious concerns) and are “saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings” (Anderson, 2000:9). They have the intimacy of the sacred but also represent the anonymity of modernity. The tomb of the unknown soldier is given sacred significance in modern nations because it is empty. It represents both a heroic death for the nation (without individual details to disrupt the narrative flow) and the promise of people (members of the nation) existing in the future to commemorate that death. This future existence is very important. A monument is intended to commemorate the past by being sturdy enough to exist in the future. This narrative of a national future allows the state to constantly re-invent its legitimacy and power. As Toby Miller (1998:28) puts it:

the state articulates the nation as a spirit-in-dwelling that gives it legitimacy, but that it also reserves the right to name and monitor, for nations are always coterminous with systems of government. This is a paradox. Even as the nation is manufactured, it is said to be an already existing, authentic essence of statehood and peoplehood.

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<sup>18</sup> Nationalism as religion is also explored by Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (2001) 56-58; Carlton Hayes, *Nationalism: A Religion* (1960); and Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, (1993).

After the Enlightenment, when rational secularism took the place of religious faith, a “secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning” (Anderson, 2000:11) was required and, Anderson argues, this was achieved in the nation, which is usually considered to be (paradoxically) both new and historical. The identification of the nation as a political phenomenon can be traced to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, but it is usually said to represent a “nation” which stretches back to an immemorial past as well as seeming to continue forever in the future.

Rather than the typical view of “disenchanted” modernity, Anderson provides a creative alternative which allows for a constant re-imagining, or what Balakrishnan (1999:204) calls “spontaneous ideology, impervious to theoretical debunking”. There is no coherent doctrine to refer to so the nation can be recontextualised each time it is “imagined” and, again, seem to stretch not only into the past but also into the future. The catalyst for this “imagining” is media. Anderson (2000:4) argues that nationalism and the concept of the nation developed mostly as the result of “the spontaneous distillation of a complex ‘crossing’ of discrete historical forces” which gave rise to print capitalism and the spread and legitimisation of new print languages.<sup>19</sup>

This means that, for the most part, the media is the sphere in which these imaginings can be given form. For example, while none of the people in Sydney will ever meet all the other Australians (or all the others who dwell in Sydney) the majority of them will share a common bond in their consumption of media. For broadcast media like television to exist and thrive, media corporations need to reach the widest range of people possible, inform them that they are their market and sell advertising space based on their “market share”. Given this, it doesn’t seem like such a coincidence that the nation became a dominant political force around the same time print-capitalism was developing towards prominence.

Anderson (2000:4) argues that “nationality or... nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are

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<sup>19</sup> Similar theories were formulated by earlier writers, notably Harold Innis, *Empire and Communications* (1950) and Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), though with different emphases.

cultural artefacts of a particular kind”, which came into existence towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As newspapers and novels became popular and increasing numbers of people learned to read and write in the language of their particular community, a market was created. In order for the newspaper producers to reach the widest range of this market they:

created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars...  
print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build the image of  
antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation. (Anderson, 2000:44)

### **Modernity vs Primordialism**

Anderson’s positioning of the development of the nation as a political force at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of modernity opposes the nation’s image of its own antiquity and places him in line with a number of other influential theorists who position nationalism in the same time frame. There have been quite a few writers who have argued against the idea of the ancient, continuous nation. Gellner, Breuilly, Kedourie and Nairn, amongst others, have argued that there was no traditional nation around which nationalism arose - ethnic, transcendental or otherwise. Instead, they drew their conclusions from the socio-political circumstances of the rise of nationalism.

For them, nations and nationalism arose as a result of the social processes brought about by the industrial revolution, which are still at work today. Anderson, and other writers such as Hobsbawm and Ranger, began “the recent trend in much of the scholarly work on nations and nationalism to emphasize, not just their wholly modern bases, but their peculiarly constructed and imagined quality” (Smith, 1992:3). They situated the development of the nation firmly in the Enlightenment period and drew on the history of print media and capitalism to explain how and why nations came to exist in their current shape.

These theorists argue that, contrary to popular assumption, any particular nation cannot trace

its current subjective self back beyond the industrial revolution, but that it is a vital characteristic of a nation that it try. Some theorists have called this urge to invent history “primordialism”.<sup>20</sup>

Primordialists see the nation as a deep-seated “blood and soil” type of bond between its members, rather than as “a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century” (Kedourie, 2000:1). They prefer the idea of a strong current of sentiment that implies attachment to a pre-existing nation with accepted ideals, norms and practices. They believe nations are separate and distinct historical units which, in some cases, correspond to particular ethnicities and stretch back into antiquity. Tom Nairn calls this the “spell” of nationalism.

There is a range of people who tend to be lumped together under the “primordialist” banner. Most of them “argue that ethnicity is a kind of kinship in which an essence of the nation is eternally present and ready to emerge under the right historical conditions” (Eley & Suny, 1996:105). For them, nations have blood ties that stretch back beyond (and independent of) the political construction of nationalism; they believe nations were merely sleeping during the centuries before industrialisation, waiting for the right moment to awaken into their full power.

As Anderson points out, these views uphold certain ideals of national character and patriotism that are manifested by the tomb of the unknown soldier. Primordialists believe that their particular nation has associated character traits, which each member of the nation strives to uphold. These traits are built on “the belief in truth and in the possibility and necessity of its transcendental grounding” (Schoolman in Connolly, 1993:xii). They don’t change as society changes and it is the role of patriots to defend them against change and, when they do seem to have changed, struggle to bring them back into line with the transcendental truth.

This idea of universal truth is a key feature of the primordialists’ view of the nation. During the Enlightenment, key concepts like republicanism, democracy, progress, liberalism and

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<sup>20</sup> Examples include, Tom Nairn, *Faces of Nationalism* (1997); Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism*, (2003); *The Nationalism Project* (<http://www.nationalismproject.org>, accessed 20 Feb 2004).

socialism were understood to have global relevance; they were thought to be self-evident and universal. People were trying to understand the world in these terms and when histories were written, the historians used these universal concepts to give the past a neat sense of chronological order.<sup>21</sup>

A sense of the sacred, as mentioned earlier, is one of the reasons for the appeal of primordialism. Another may be its neatness as history. Among nationalism's early devotees and creators, historians were the driving force.<sup>22</sup> Historians made the first attempts to beat a path for providing an assessment of the nation's impact and an understanding of its existence. Tony Bennett (1995:141) goes so far as to say that national identity occurs for "occupants of a territory that has been historicized and subjects of a history that has been territorialized. But of a history which is made rather than given".

The nation is "profoundly 'historicist' in character: it sees the world as a product of the interplay of various communities, each possessing a unique character and history, and each the result of specific origins and developments" (Smith, 1992:58). Nationalist sentiment usually tends to imply a strong linear sense of cause and effect which is used to reach into the past and imagine these founding principles or universal truths. The nation's use of history is analysed in more detail in Chapter Four.

This is a point of intersection with Arendt's (1982:5) criticism of Kant's political philosophy, in that "if judgement is our faculty for dealing with the past, the historian is the inquiring man who by relating it sits in judgement over it". This means that historians tend to give shape and reason, or narrative, to the past where it might not exist. This narrative is created by judgements determined solely on the individual subjectivity of the historian, which is considered reliable because that individual is "the historian". The idea of judgement implies a dichotomy where something is either one thing or the other; it "reposes on a double identity:

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<sup>21</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory* (1975). This is an idea which I cover in greater detail in Chapter Four.

<sup>22</sup> Proponents of this view include, Anthony D. Smith, *Ethnicity and Nationalism* (1992); Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism* (2003); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments* (1993); and John Breuilly deals with these ideas more in terms of historicism in *Nationalism and the State* (1994) pp. 56 – 64.



of the thinking subject, and of the concepts it creates and to which it lends its own presumed attributes of sameness and constancy” (Massumi in Deleuze and Guattari, 2002:xi).

It is in nationalism’s reliance on the judgement of history where we find the source of narratives which have been variously called the intrinsic moral order, state philosophy, representational thought or the category of the sublime; an inherent order of absolute truth, judgement of which Kant believed was “a peculiar talent which can be practiced only and cannot be taught” (Arendt, 1982:4).

As Arendt points out, a universal truth which can only be judged by someone who has an inherent talent obviously opens the doors to antagonism between truth and opinion because “every claim in the sphere of human affairs to an absolute truth, whose validity needs no support from the side of opinion, strikes at the very roots of all politics and all governments” (Arendt, 1982:4).

### **Historical Error**

Ernest Gellner goes further than questioning the nature of judgement and calls the nationalist use of history a fabrication. For Gellner “nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist” (1965:168). Where some historians described the nation as a sleeping giant waiting to be revived by the rise of modernity, Gellner saw an invention based on political expediency. Yet, he pointed out, it seems so obvious to most people that attachment to a nation is a universal truth. He argued that most people believe everyone is born into a nation and someone who is not would be considered a dangerous freak. For Gellner, this is “the very core of the problem of nationalism” (2001:6).

One of the earliest expositions of the idea of nationalism’s dubious relationship to history appeared in a lecture which Ernest Renan delivered at the Sorbonne in 1882. In his speech, entitled “What is a Nation?” (cited in Dahbour and Ishay, 1995:143-155), he spoke of the nation as consisting of a combination of common memories of the past and a collective will to

consent in the present. For Renan, a nation was both a legacy of great deeds, which a distinct group of people remembered in common, and a willingness to share an identity or set of norms and practices because of this history. Defining a nation depended much more on “the fact of sharing, in the past, a glorious heritage” than on “common customs posts and frontiers”.

At first this seems almost like a primordialist point of view, but Renan also believed that historical error is an essential factor in the creation of a nation (cited in Dahbour and Ishay, 1995:143-155); that misapprehension or forgetting of the actual facts of the past is the only way to allow the development of a cohesive national history. This point is echoed by most of the later theorists, such as Gellner, Anderson and Nairn, who view nationalism as a modern construction. The combination of this reconstituted history with the willingness to sacrifice and the “daily plebiscite” of consent to this shared past is crucial to Renan’s conception of the creation of nations. He was strongly opposed to any attempts to define the nation through ethnicity because he believed that nations “are not eternal. They had beginnings, and will have ends” (154).

However, while Renan recognized the historical error at the basis of nationalism, he characterised it as a collective forgetting. Rather than a deliberate distortion of history or a misrepresentation of it, members of a nation must simply forget certain parts of it. His use of the word “forgetting” seems to imply an innocent mistake rather than the almost malignant fabrication which can be read into some of the later theorists’ views on the same topic. If this idea is applied to our contemporary media, this type of creative misunderstanding of history occurs often. One example, the Nine Network’s *Our Century*, is analysed later in this thesis.

Renan believed that the will to consent which is a nation’s basis came from a shared understanding of a constructed history. He gave five examples of the type of idea that these constructed histories came from: ethnicity, language, religion, community of interest and geography. He also showed that any detailed historical investigation into each of these areas led to historical error. For example, a nationalist has to forget times when their ancestors

conquered a new land and didn't bring any women with them to breed. They also had to forget the times that the conqueror adopted "the faith and often the speech of the vanquished" (Gellner, 1987:7) in order for the new nation to will itself into existence.

Renan did not see this in negative terms. His personal view of nationalism was based more in contingency. "Nowadays" wrote Renan, "it is a good, and even a necessary, thing that nations should exist. Their existence is the guarantee of liberty, which would be lost, if the world had but one law and one master" (cited in Dahbour and Ishay, 1995:154). Renan's nation was "a soul, a spiritual principle" rather than a contrived method of drawing together a power base determined by race, language, religion, geography or military necessity. This also appears to prefigure some of Anderson's later work, as mentioned above.

Gellner's work on nations and nationalism accepted Renan's will and culture thesis up to a point and then used it to develop a more extensive set of theories. He elaborates on the idea of a nation willing itself to exist by saying that the nation is a product of nationalism and not vice versa. He parts with Renan in explaining where the will to collective amnesia comes from. For Gellner it had more to do with the machinery of coercion than a daily plebiscite.

Gellner defined nationalism as "primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent" (2001:1). That is, nationalism had to be first experienced and then acted upon to form a nation. Gellner believed that the majority of people began to experience feelings of nationalism because they began to identify with culture for the first time.

### **Spontaneous Ideology**

Anderson, a Marxist, wrote *Imagined Communities* (2000) at a time when China, Vietnam and Cambodia, socialist states, were at war with each other. During these wars there was talk of sacred national interests and very little said that had anything to do with socialist ideology. Anderson sees this as a trend in all the revolutions since World War II; each one "has defined

itself in *national* terms - the People's Republic of China, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and so forth" (2000:2), rather than adhering to Marxist doctrine which calls for an international proletariat. This led Anderson to argue that there is a need for a fundamental shift in the way the left has conceptualised the nation and nationalism.<sup>23</sup>

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nationalism seemed to be something that was mainly preached by conservative forces, and at the far right, fascists. For most of the socialist left the nation was either a historical divergence or a political necessity which needed to be dealt with.<sup>24</sup>

Obviously, this did not happen. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century cultural difference and antagonism were associated with enormous brutality and death and, as Anderson (2000:1-4) noted, even began to take over from Marxist doctrine in communist states. Most dogmatic Marxists saw this as an "accidental departure from 'what should have happened'" (Nairn, 1997:48), as though something had gone wrong along the way and led to an upsurge in nationalism when it was supposed to be dying its painful death. They tended to believe that people would some day soon get over nationalism and finally behave as Marx predicted.

These days, when many people see the nation as irremovably merged with the state, the debate between internationalists and nationalists still goes on.<sup>25</sup> Tom Nairn is one of the nationalists who believe a nation is "the least bad answer, or in any case inevitable" and opposes what he calls the "new international pessimism" (267). He argues that the alternative to the "Balkanisation" of nationalism is an internationalism that is closer to empire than equality. The wealthier countries in the world "make internationalism their own by a sleight of hand which seems perfectly natural when one happens to be holding most of the good cards" (272). He makes the point that there are far more democratic nations around the world today than ever before and the number of dictatorships is dwindling. As Gellner pointed out,

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<sup>23</sup> This need was also spotted by a number of other authors in various guises, including Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power and Socialism* (1980) and Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nationalism and Communism* (1964).

<sup>24</sup> Examples include Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (1995); Tom Nairn, *The Faces of Nationalism* (1997); Andrew Vincent, *Nationalism and Particularity* (2002).

<sup>25</sup> Interesting discussions of the "nation-state" can be found in Andrew Vincent, *Nationalism and Particularity* (2002) pp. 35-61 and Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (2001) pp. 1-7.

nations are inherently egalitarian and Nairn believes the continued prominence of the nation meant that “nuclear winter and the untimely extinction of humanity were no longer threatened; but there may be some fighting” (1997:22).

The contrasting view is typified by Eric Hobsbawm.<sup>26</sup> A historian, he seems unhappy about the fabricated history that is inherent to nationalism. He sees it as an empty space which can too easily be filled by ethnic politics. He is careful to point out that if ethnicity “becomes political, it has no special affinity for ethnically labelled politics” (cited in Balakrishnan, 1999:258). In the post-1989 world, which is increasingly becoming a “network society” where people feel their identities fragmenting for various reasons, “the obvious fall-back positions are ethnicity and religion, singly or in combination” (261). Then, ethnic separatism – which, like any form of separatism, requires frontiers - can become nationalist separatism because these are the frontiers that already exist.

This leads to xenophobia and nations defining themselves in opposition to that which is outside of them. When Hobsbawm claims that the nation is in decline, this is not the type of nation he is talking about. He draws a distinction between what he sees as “the current phase of essentially separatist and divisive ‘ethnic’ group assertion” (1995:170) and the 19<sup>th</sup> century combining of nation-state and national economy which was a necessity of industrialisation, as well as the post-colonial, emancipatory nationalism of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For Hobsbawm, the surge of sophisticated writing on the nation and nationalism in the last twenty years is a sure sign that the owl of Minerva has flown.

As Miroslav Hroch puts it, nationalism is something to hold on to when traditional institutions such as the church are taken away. It works as a replacement for mechanisms of integration in a disintegrating society; “when society fails, the nation appears as the ultimate guarantee” (cited by E.J. Hobsbawm in Balakrishnan, 1999:261).

## **Ethnicity**

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<sup>26</sup> For example, in E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (1995).

In recent years there has been a convergence in two previously distinct fields of research: nationalism and ethnicity. This led “to the realization that they were, both as empirical realities and fields of study, intimately related” (Smith, 1992:1). The Australian nation is a prime area where this intellectual convergence of nationalism and ethnicity can prove useful. There is a continuing strand through Australian history of identifying the nation with a racial type which I will explore in greater detail in subsequent chapters of this thesis. This involves a vision of the ethnic characteristics of an “Australian” which clearly does not include certain types of people. The former Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, was very clear on his views about Asian immigration in the 1980s and his initial tolerance of Pauline Hanson and One Nation made it even clearer.<sup>27</sup> This followed a long history of the “White Australia” policy which clearly associates ethnicity with national identity. This association is born out in broadcast television.<sup>28</sup> Yet how this association came about and how the appropriate ethnic characteristics were decided has more to do with socio-political forces than any sentimental attachment to a transcendental national ideal. Even the most superficial glance at Australian history shows an enormous array of twisting bloodlines. Most of the people who arrived in Australia in the first hundred years of European colonisation brought no records of birth or descent. Again, this is a case of the historical error of nationalism. However, in the case of Australia this error may be more of an imitation rather than part of a process.

Anthony D. Smith uses Hugh Seton-Watson’s distinction between “slowly emerging, continuous nations (and states) in western and northern Europe, and the later ‘nations of design’, created by and in the era of nationalism” (1997:192) to show that nation formation in its initial, early modern form was unforeseen and accidental.<sup>29</sup> States were formed around dominant ethnic communities and gradually formed “national states”. In other words, the processes that eventually resolved into the formation of nations at about the time of industrialisation, stretch back to the medieval era.

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<sup>27</sup> Hanson was the leader of the One Nation political party, a populist political movement which achieved some success in the 1990s.

<sup>28</sup> Australian commercial television’s representations of Australian ethnicity will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Six.

<sup>29</sup> The original formulation of this idea can be found in Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States* (1977).

Smith believes that over emphasising the modern grounding of the nation implies too much discontinuity in history.<sup>30</sup> He argues that it is necessary to study the cultures of pre-modern communities to understand a contemporary attachment to a nation. He is trying to follow a middle path between the modernist and the primordialist by developing a theory of *ethnie*, or ethnic community and symbolism, “that will bring out the differences and similarities between modern national units and sentiments and the collective cultural units and sentiments of previous eras” (1993:13).

That is to say, while some elements of an ethnicity may be historically inaccurate, or even completely fabricated, this process of reconstructing history has been occurring in ethnic groups for centuries. There are several *ethnies* that have endured for millennia as identifiable communities while their cultural character has undergone contingent change.

While this is true for the early modern nations, it is questionable whether the process remains the same for later “nations of design”. Most of these types of nations came about through deliberate political will and they did so in imitation of the earlier “continuous nations”. In these cases, the theory of the *ethnie* must be re-thought. This may require research into the person or group who provided the political will to nationhood in the first place and an examination of where their own particular interests lay.

## Typology

An interesting feature of Smith's *ethnie* idea is the acceptance in its conception of a typology of nations. That is, rather than trying to analyse all nations based on definition or one set of conditions, it explores the idea that there are different types of nation, each with its own preconditions for existence. This is probably most evident elsewhere in Hroch's study of uneven development. The process behind formation, and then identification with any particular nation, can vary enormously depending on social or political circumstances,

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<sup>30</sup> Leah Greenfeld's work also encourages an appreciation of historical continuity.

geography or time period. The question is still, why does “the nation” appeal to so many people in different contexts?

Elie Kedourie’s work attempts to demonstrate similar ideas and answer the questions raised by the popularity of nationalism. He focuses on religious determination as a means of studying the variety of nations, preferring a diffusion model. He takes early 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany as a starting point for European nationalism and argues that it was spread through the rest of the world by intellectuals. As nationalism diffused throughout the world it mutated to suit the conditions it found itself in. Like Hroch, Kedourie (2000) regards nationalist movements as filling a void left by the decline of religion and traditional beliefs.

Other theories have developed variations on this theme. In the 1940s, Hans Kohn saw the centuries before the French Revolution as a “long period of incubation” (1969:vii) for the inevitable appearance of modern nationalism. Kohn and Carleton Hayes, his contemporary, saw the division of the world into nations as something natural, objective and inevitable. Nations, in all their variations, were “the irrepressible desire for ‘freedom’, were the irreducible sources that ultimately would require self-government” (Eley & Suny, 1996:4). In recent decades some theorists have pointed out that this “freedom” does not apply to a significant proportion of the nation’s members; that is, women. According to V. Spike Peterson and Anne Sisson Runyan (1999:193):

In all its forms to date, the construction of the nation has rested on constructing women as ‘the markers, reproducers and transmitters of the nation’ (Pettman, 1996:62). This makes women central to nationalist projects but ensures that they are given little political space to redefine what those projects could or should be...

Cynthia Enloe (1993) in particular critiques the fact that Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* “left masculinity and femininity unexplored” (231). She argues that most analyses of nation formation usually completely ignore the role of women and that nations are often formed at the expense of women. She also examines “the ways in which men have used



nationalism to silence women" (229). Women were usually left out of the centralised education that led to initial imagined communities and are often severely mistreated by soldiers in the name of a national cause. Also, women's resistance to forces of nationalism can have a significant influence on the way a nation develops (232). Australian television's representations of the nation are usually very paternalistic and this will be explored further later in this thesis.

There are also a number of works concerned with post-colonial nationalism. Kedourie, for one, found a number of interesting cases in Africa and Asia where colonially educated intellectuals imitated European nationalism only to suffer from discrimination against them by colonial administrators. Their nationalisms developed through imitation and resentment.<sup>31</sup>

Partha Chatterjee (1993) concerns himself with the resentment part of Kedourie's formulation: anti-colonial nationalism. He splits this concept into two: the material domain of the state and politics and the spiritual domain, which comes to be occupied by the "imagined community" of the nation. Chatterjee argues that the spiritual domain must be fully formed before any political resistance can occur against the colonial state. So while the principles of nationalism were in imitation of the European original, the particular details were defined in opposition to the coloniser.

In *Imagined Communities*, part of the argument behind Anderson's central thesis is that the Creole communities of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century new American states (for example, Brazil or the USA) developed "early conceptions of their own nation-ness - *well before most of Europe*" (2000:50). According to Anderson, this is usually explained, particularly in the Spanish colonies, by a combination of improved trans-Atlantic travel, a tightening of control from Madrid and the new ideals of the Enlightenment. However, he doesn't accept this explanation and looks deeper for the nationalist impulse.

To do this he examines the administration of the colonies in the centuries leading up to the

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<sup>31</sup> Kedourie negotiates these ideas in Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (2000) and Elie Kedourie (ed), *Nationalism in Asia and Africa* (1970).

development of nationalism. Through a combination of geography and the economic policies of the metropole, each administrative unit began to develop independent politics and came “to be conceived as fatherlands” (53). This is because the various colonial administrations were mainly staffed by creoles. To be able to work in the administration they required the same education in the language-of-state as the Spanish born administrators but, because they were born in the Americas, they were not allowed to rise through the ranks beyond a certain height. This must have seemed highly irrational to them. Their differentiation was not even an ethnic one; their lineage was as “pure” as anyone born in Spain. They were discriminated against purely by the accident of the location of their birth.

The early spread of creole newspapers in Spanish America, which the creoles were happy to read but the Spanish born officials living in the same streets refused to touch, constitutes another agent to aid the spread of nationalist ideas. Resentful and educated, the creoles could read about the Enlightenment in any Spanish newspapers they could pick up, or even make visits to the metropole and be exposed to the modernisation of Europe. They could then carry these ideas back to the colony, the periphery, and write about them in newspapers which the majority of the colony would read. Following Hroch’s model, we could then predict that a national movement would be sparked amongst the intellectuals and those with time to engage with print media. These people would then stir up nationalism in the majority of the people (who were workers or those who didn’t have time or enough education to read newspapers). Then the nation would become a political principle and the struggle for power would ensue.

In this case, the question of the popularity of a national movement or the concept of the nation is explained by Anderson’s placement of the nation in the realm of the imagination. The sacred connotations of this give the nation a sense of continuity with the declining, traditional forms of religion. The people in the colonies would have been feeling alienated from religion for the same reasons they felt alienated by the administration: creoles rarely became bishops. In combination with the Enlightenment’s elevation of rationality over the spiritual, the church was losing the power to create identity in people. By emphasising the nation’s “spiritual” or “sacred” qualities, Anderson’s theory shows how people can feel such passion and pride for a

nation. People are willing to give up their lives in the name of nation because it provides a basis for their identity and allows them to feel that they come from something greater than a mere human.

Anderson's demonstration of the centrality of print-capitalism provides a means for the diffusion of the abstract, spiritual concept of the nation and, again, the "imagined" nation permits recontextualisation. The nation can be appropriated and given new meaning as many times as people feel the (usually political) need to imagine it.

Also writing about Latin America, Néstor García Canclini (1995) uses postmodernist theory to critique this "sacred" nationalism, or any fundamentalist account of identity. He argues that most Latin American countries entered modernity without the accompanying phases of modernization. Many groups were left out of their burgeoning literate public spheres. For Jesús Martín Barbero (2002), these groups were caught in the tension between universalism and particularity; a tension which he regards as the defining feature of contemporary nationalism. Democracies are left with a choice

between the universalism inherited from the Enlightenment, which excludes whole sectors of the population, and the tribal differentiation affirmed in racist, xenophobic segregation – a choice fatal for democracy. (629)

García Canclini argues that the creoles who were originally discriminated against by Europeans imitated this behaviour by discriminating against various indigenous groups and it is only now, under the influence of postmodernism, that the continent's hybrid history can be accurately accounted for. Previously separated cultures – high and low, literate and ignorant, democratic and enslaved – can be critiqued equally. Postmodernism "facilitates revision of the separation between the cultured, the popular and the mass-based" (1995:9) upon which modernity was based.

## **The Imagined Community**

Sitting down to read a newspaper brings the realisation that, in your isolated state, you are sharing the same communication as a large number of other people whom you will never meet or see. You know that you have, in being able to read the newspaper, something in common with this large number of (not known to you but not anonymous) people. This is not just an ability to read a certain written language but also a realisation that you share ideas on cultural norms, practices and values; also, that you live within the geographical reach with which the newspaper limits that culture.

Anderson argues that this sense of an encompassing, underlying culture was impossible before the rise of print-capitalism. This had a lot to do with the elevation of the vernacular. The invention of the printing press assisted the demise of Latin as the language of state, religion and the literate because the newspaper was a valuable commodity. Publishers wanted to increase profits and therefore needed to sell papers to more people than could read Latin.

In achieving this goal print media formalised the multiple languages of different groups in various countries and made them understandable in the print context. Before these events occurred dialects could vary from village to village. Inter-village communication was usually possible but it wasn't effective enough to justify it being printed and certainly wasn't effective enough to form a nation. Anderson argues that:

the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation. (2000:46)

In terms of nation formation this places a great deal of importance on the ascendancy of the vernacular. Through print media, national movements (or nationalisms) were able to express themselves through whatever happened to be the most popular language at the time in a particular geographical zone. As Deleuze and Guattari wrote in *Thousand Plateaus*, "there is

no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language within a political multiplicity” (2002:7). John Breuilly stresses this point in particular; for him nationalism is a “political argument designed to mobilize, coordinate and legitimise support for the capture of state power” (Smith, 1997:186). In other words, a political design gives birth to an imagined community which gains concrete expression and narrative in a newspaper.

Italy is an interesting example of this. National movements arose around the liberal national ideology of self-determination. Prior to unification there was a well-established cultural elite with a national literature and an administrative vernacular and this served as the basis to a claim of nationhood, despite the fact that the majority of the people couldn’t speak the national language. It was estimated that, at the moment of unification, only 2.5% of the population spoke the language of state, “while the rest spoke various and often mutually incomprehensible idioms” (Hobsbawm, 1995:38).

This is an example of a late nineteenth century type of nation formation. The political will to a nation existed before the unified vernacular. This may seem to detract from Anderson’s theories on the importance of print-capitalism, however, the nation still requires a national vernacular to maintain itself even if it is constructed after the fact. As Hobsbawm puts it:

It has even been argued that popular spoken Italian as an idiom capable of expressing the full range of what a twentieth-century language needs outside the domestic and face-to-face sphere of communication, is only being constructed today as a function of the needs of national television programming. (1995:10)

Narrative also plays a large role in drawing together the nation (as mass media audience). This is obvious in the case of the novel, but the history and continuing development of the newspaper, and television news, also relies on narrative, as is demonstrated by the fact that “news accounts are traditionally known as *stories*, which are by definition culturally constructed narratives” (Bird and Dardenne, 1997:333).

In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson (2000:22-36) examines the necessity of narratives in selling the product of the growing printing industries and thereby drawing together the market/audience/nation. Writing and reading is a linear practice. On a micro scale that means you have to read the words in the correct order for meaning to be obtained; that is, in English, left to right across the page, paying attention to punctuation. On a macro scale, a traditional plot or narrative can only work if you read it in the correct order. Traditional narratives take bits of information and reveal a bigger picture if read in the appropriate sequence.

The ability to read and write affects the way we structure thoughts, with the result that literate people began to philosophise in a linear fashion (Ong, 1995). So, when they thought of the past they began to think in terms of “history” rather than memory.<sup>32</sup> Now that things could be written down in books (which have a longer shelf life than memory), readers stopped thinking of the past as something that happened to them ten years ago and started thinking of a “history” as something that happened to their community ten years ago as a result of something that happened to their community twenty years ago and so on (Anderson, 2000:9-46).

Added to the influence of this narrative history is the fact that the characters within narratives, whether in novels or newspapers, are embedded within a social milieu. This is a setting for the story and the characters to take place. Involved in this are any number of characteristics of the social organism from language and accent to geographical landmarks. Once the newspaper reader (or any other media audience) recognises the social milieu of the text, they realise they are part of the narrative. They are then able to imagine all the other people who are also part of the narrative and feel a sense of belonging which can be equated with nationalism (9-46).

### **Spontaneous Ideology**

The ideas, images and narratives of nationhood have always been in a state of flux. Every

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<sup>32</sup> Memory and history are discussed in Hayden White’s analysis of Nietzsche in *Metahistory* (1975) pp. 346-356. A more detailed analysis of these ideas follows in Chapter Four of this thesis.

reiteration has changed these ideas in many varied and tiny ways. They have represented as many different ideas as the people who have beheld them. The reception and reproduction of these images is part of a self-perpetuating cycle of repetition and modification that forms a pedagogy of media literacy. These images originate in the commonality of “our past” and become part of folk/mediated history because of their repetition and modification. This is the “spontaneous ideology” of the nation (Anderson, 2000). Its relationship to history is flexible at best and therefore it can mutate to cope with contingent circumstances. An example of this is the recent turnaround in the political identification of the nation.

Early nineteenth century liberals tended to follow Adam Smith’s lead in taking the concept of a “nation” for granted and failing to analyse it accurately beyond its economic functions.<sup>33</sup> For them the nation was important only as far as it was a nation-state, which gave individuals economic advantage. The role of the nation-state was to give the individual security in the international free market through legislation involving property and contract law, monopoly of currency and public finances (Hobsbawm, 1995:28-29).

Soon it started to occur to liberal economists that the interests of the nation and the individual were not the same. However, the advantages of a national economy were undeniable and unstoppable. The nation-state existed and it regulated the economy to its best advantage or rather, the advantage of those members of the nation who had the biggest stake in the economy: the rich. Economists liked the idea of a world market but were not inclined to dismiss the nation and its public finances.

One thing free market liberals and Marxists have in common is that they are both traditionally internationalist. As mentioned above, the followers of Marxism thought of internationalism as the fast, rational path to an international proletariat and thought of nationalism as an accidental derailment of this “progress”. Political conservatives tended to exemplify primordial ideas of the nation and put these nationalist ideals above all others. They believed

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<sup>33</sup> Adam Smith uses the word “nation” for a territory that a group of people lived on. As mentioned above, the lack of early intellectual engagement with the nation is acknowledged by most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century theorists of nationalism. Eric Hobsbawm explores this area particularly well in *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (1995) pp. 14-45.

their nation had a right to be richer than all the others and their political and economic concerns were largely guided by self-interest. Fascism was the most extreme version of this approach.

However, if we consider the same issues from the 1990s on, we can see that a change has occurred. Many left-wing activists have become defenders of the nation. They are trying to defend cultural difference and national economies from the onslaught of global capitalism. They see the independent nation as the only thing standing in the way of the global, internationalised “free” market, which basically serves the rampant self-interest of the rich. The free market is now, of course, evangelised by many political conservatives. It is unclear whether this represents some sort of radical break or whether it is simply the continuation of the processes of modernisation. The actual political positions may not have changed much while the concept of nation and nationalism has repositioned itself completely.

The economic conditions that have come to prevail in the world should be ideal for the dream of internationalism (proletariat or otherwise) to become a reality. The revolution in information technology has made freewheeling international trade a thing of ease. Yet, since 1989, nationalism and separatism has thrived. Nairn sees the current rejuvenation of the nation as a continuation of the logic of industrialization:

It arose from the conditions of generally and chronically uneven development – the only kind which capitalism allows. The only kind, and the kind which has finally, definitively established itself since 1989 as the sole matrix of further evolution. (1997:66)

He goes on, citing Gellner’s earlier work, to argue that nationalism serves a vital role in “resisting over-centralized and monolithic development” in that it provides fragmentation and disintegration. Without the resistance of nationalist separatism some form of empire would take over.

This idea is given interesting expression in the final chapter of the revised edition of *Imagined*



*Communities* (2000). As mentioned above, Anderson argues that the origins of the nation and nationalism lie not in Europe but in the New World. He believes “it is an astonishing sign of the depth of Eurocentrism that so many European scholars persist, in the face of all the evidence, in regarding nationalism as a European invention” (2000:191).

For Anderson, our contemporary version of nationalism was invented by creoles in the 18<sup>th</sup> century because of the new conceptions of time and history brought about by the convergence of print technology, capitalism, cartography and travel technology. This convergence allowed the people living in the peripheral colonies to think of themselves as living parallel to those in Europe. Once this parallel conception of time could be achieved, the traditional ties of subordination that bound the colonies to the empire disappeared. These conditions, in combination with the vast distances between centre and periphery, meant that when the time for resistance came, the creoles didn't try to keep the empire intact by replacing the old centre with a new one. Rather, they created a new centre which could exist in parallel with the old one. This is where Anderson sees the birth of nationalism: in nationalist resistance proving victorious over imperialism.

As this survey has shown, theoretical debates on the nation and nationalism can be very complex and recent events may herald a change in the way people write the narratives of nationhood. Where, previously, borders were clear lines defining the nation (within) and the global (without), we are now witnessing

a partial denationalising of what has been constructed historically as national and hence an unsettling of the meaning of geographic borders. Critical to this argument is the thesis that global processes also take place at subnational levels, hereby disrupting the notion of mutually exclusive domains for the national and the global. (Sassen, 2005:523)

This, once more, affirms the importance of the narratives of nationalism. Borders have become porous so they are re-enforced by re-adapted historical narratives of inclusion and exclusion. As Martín Barbero (2002) points out, this is a simulacrum:

a representation without the very reality that it represents, deformed images and distorting mirrors in which the majority cannot recognize themselves. The exclusionary forgetfulness and the mutilating representation are at the very origins of the narratives... (635)

## Chapter 4

# Meta-Aussie: Theories of Narrative and Australian National Identity

*When we seek to make sense of such problematical topics as human nature, culture, society, and history, we never say precisely what we wish to say or mean precisely what we say. Our discourse always tends to slip away from our data towards the structures of consciousness with which we are trying to grasp them... (White, 1978:1)*

This chapter attempts to demonstrate how television corporations use the narratives of nationalism, described in the previous chapter, to gain ratings and profit. It begins by examining the links between nationalism and history: the connection between abstract concepts and empirical events. It goes on to investigate the inevitable ideological shaping of history by historians and explores, with particular reference to Australian historical narratives, how proponents of a national identity exploit this ideological story-telling. The chapter concludes by offering ideas on how the representation of nation and history sway the balance of power and legitimacy.

Contemporary narratives of the nation and national society are still most explicitly given voice through television. While broadcast television is in decline, television corporations persist with the central strategies of what appears to have become their traditional business model.<sup>34</sup> Television corporations try to build their audiences by positioning themselves as integral parts of a narrative of national society. Previously solely through broadcast television and now through various convergent forms of media, the most effective way of achieving this position is by fostering the idea of a national identity. This is usually done through re-telling historical narratives.

The driving force behind feelings of cohesiveness in imagined communities is a conception of

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<sup>34</sup> The decline of broadcast television will be discussed in greater detail in following chapters. A journalistic analysis of broadcast television's sliding profits was made in *The Australian*: "TV sector profits slide, report shows", "Media" section, October 4 2007, <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,22526921-30540,00.html>, accessed October 6 2007

communal history. For example, if a nationalist is asked what makes them feel connected to their nation, the answer will invariably concern identification with a tradition (cultural, ethnic, linguistic or other) and a solidarity in some form of historical continuum. As pointed out in the previous chapter, among nationalism's early devotees and progenitors, historians played a key role in supplying a narrative upon which nationalists were able to base their ideologies, rhetoric and passions. They created a sense of cultural or ethnic continuity which still forms the basis of the way people think about the past today. Nationalists are able to use this continuity to imagine the existence of a unity of tradition that flows from a starting point long ago, through the present and on into the future, which contains the raw ingredients for the concoction of subjective identity. As such, this imagined body of tradition holds enormous power for the nationalist and is to be defended at all costs, whether from other nations "outside" or from inquiring minds "inside".

The sentimental connection that commercial television corporations have traditionally attempted to inspire in their viewers works in the same way. They endeavour to create a tradition which centres on them as community benefactors. For this reason creating a sense of their place in Australian history is a central part of the narrative commercial television corporations try to instil in the audience.

Historians made the first attempts to evaluate the impact that early nationalism was having on European culture, thereby providing not only a historical context and justification but also the creative force necessary for its perpetuation. While it is important to realise that these sentimental feelings of attachment are based on an imagined historical continuum, that doesn't mean that they can be dismissed as an illusion which humanity (whether imagined as community or audience) will eventually see through. Their creative properties give them power. The imagined community in all its aspects is a creative force, which television corporations try to harness.

The culturally dominant conception of the historian is of a person who stands outside of politics, looks on objectively and then delivers measured, scientific interpretations of events,

in a style not unlike the television newsreader. This “tradition” really only came into focus in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and was then backdated to include influential accounts of the past from antiquity. Even though this conception of the historian has since been widely questioned in the academic world, judging by the emphasis the Australian media have placed on the “History Wars” since the early 1990s, it still holds sway over some percentage of the population of Australia (Macintyre and Clark, 2003). Academic scepticism of positivist historical assumptions has yet to filter out to the rest of the nation.

This misconception holds that the historian should be an apolitical observer and that “good” history is that which can be shown to have not taken sides. The connections between nationalism and history provide a good example with which to criticise this idea. According to Smith (1992:58), the nation is:

profoundly “historicist” in character: it sees the world as a product of the interplay of various communities, each possessing a unique character and history, and each the result of specific origins and developments.

Nationalist sentiment is usually based on an invented chronology that draws a line from the present back into the past and identifies foundational events, long after the events have come to pass. These founding principles become universal truths, or grand narratives, that justify the sentimental attachment to the nation.

Eric Hobsbawm (1999:6) describes this relationship between history and the nation very strongly: “history is the raw material for nationalist or ethnic or fundamentalist ideologies, as poppies are the raw material for heroin addiction.” He believes that the historical past is essential for the existence of nationalist ideology and that if an appropriate past has not been written then it is very easy to just make it up. As a professional historian, Hobsbawm leaves it at this; the idea of fashioning history to suit ideology is offensive to him and an abuse of history, but he is still comfortable with the idea of verifiable historical fact. He departs from the popular view of historians in that he believes they are political actors and he realises that

the profession of history can cause harm if used irresponsibly. To him historians “have a responsibility to historical facts” and it is their duty to criticise “the politico-ideological abuse of history” (1999:7). He sees the role of the historian as protecting the past from those who seek to create the foundation myths of nationalism and other ideologies as they are formed.

Another theorist of nationalism, Tom Nairn (1997) tends to have a similar view of the relationship between history and nationalism, although he arrives at a different conclusion from Hobsbawm. For Hobsbawm, the historical misuse inherent in nationalism is responsible for disharmony, international tension and war. When two people disagree about interpretations of historical fact, they fight. However, for Nairn, while nationalist historiography can be divisive and potentially dangerous it can also unite people and create identity in a fragmented world. Nations are a comfort to people in need of something to hold on to in cultures where their traditional cornerstones of belief and tradition have failed them. For Nairn, this possibility supersedes any of the claims of the “truth” of historical facts. People having something in common is more important than the accuracy of historical record.

Some writers have argued that modern academic history came about as a result of the rise of nationalism rather than vice versa. Benedict Anderson leans this way when describing the way American colonies imagined themselves operating simultaneously with their European metropolises around the time the French Revolution introduced a new calendar:

The cosmic clocking which had made intelligible our synchronic transoceanic pairings was increasingly felt to entail a wholly intramundane, *serial* view of social causality; and this sense of the world was now speedily deepening its grip on Western imaginations. It is thus understandable that less than two decades after the Proclamation of Year One came the establishment of the first academic chairs in History. (2000:194)

Whichever came first, modern academic history or the nation, the relationship has shaped the way culture imagines itself despite an awareness from early on that its claims to truth were doubtful. As discussed in the previous chapter, Renan (cited in Dahbour and Ishay,

1995:143-155) showed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that nations are based on historical misconception or inaccuracy. If this was a satisfactory account of the illusion of nationalism then we could assume that “good” history (professional, responsible, accurate, true) is possible but nations are based on “bad” history (inaccurate, mistaken, false), or the way Renan describes it, history that seems to have innocently made some mistakes somewhere along the line. However, if we don not accept Renan’s account, and we think rather that it is impossible to stand outside of the culture that one is a part of, then we can see that there is an “irreducible ideological component in every historical account of reality” (White, 1975:21).

That is not to say that every historical account is deliberately shaped by its producer’s ideological bent. Rather, it occurs at the level of discursive trope when the writer attempts an explanation of past events. It is the nature of history to take a range of events and find commonalities which draw them together and form a narrative so that the reader can comprehend what happened and why. It is within the choices made while constructing the narrative that ideology plays a role. As Hayden White puts it:

...even those historians who professed no particular ideological commitment and who suppressed the impulse to draw explicit ideological implications from their analysis of past societies could be said to be writing from within a specifiable ideological framework, by virtue of their adoption of a position vis-à-vis the form that a historical representation ought to take. (1978:69)

In this sense the forms of historical representation the writer chooses to use, or their particular method of interpreting fact, reflect the ideology of the society in which they live. Literary choices prefigure and are the bases of representations of historical events. Hayden White calls these choices “metahistory” and describes a deep structure made up of poetic choices, which lies beneath the surface of historical consciousness.

### **Television and National Narratives**

To win ratings and maintain profits Australian commercial television corporations not only

try to represent particular identities for themselves, but also try to provide their audience with an identity. They do this by presenting a narrative of “the way Australian society is” based on a historical account of its past. As Turner wrote in *National Fictions* (1986:9), “narrative... has a cultural function of making sense of experience, of filling absences, of resolving contradictions”. These corporations try to supply the narrative for Australians to make sense of the world. Usually this relationship, between marketer and consumer, would probably be less complicated. That is, a commercial entity normally tries to create an identity for itself, often associating itself with a national identity, in order to sell its product to the public.<sup>35</sup> However, commercial television broadcasters have traditionally been different.

Television corporations have, since World War Two, occupied a strange place in most societies. While they are simply companies, they have also appeared to be something more. They have an unusual status somewhere between the state and the populace.<sup>36</sup> The Marxist theorist Louis Althusser categorised them as part of the “communications ideological state apparatus” (1977:137). He positioned them as one of the forces in society that maintain the power of elites and reinforces the legitimacy of the state. However, this is a slightly simplistic view of the place of television broadcasters in contemporary society: it presents an image of incontestable power and a one-way relationship between broadcaster and audience that bears little relationship to reality.

The nature of the medium itself allowed television corporations to communicate vast amounts of information. While control of the distribution of information is not the sole key to a privileged place in Australian society, it is certainly respected as one of the bases of the modern state and the nation.<sup>37</sup> The importance of state-based centralised education demonstrates this, as does Anderson’s (2000) conception of the nation as an imagined community.<sup>38</sup> As Turner (1994:12) puts it:

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<sup>35</sup> Susie Khamis explores the interesting relationship between Australian culture and Vegemite in Khamis, S. (2004) “Buy Australiana: Diggers, Drovers and Vegemite” *Journal of Australian Studies*, Issue 80.

<sup>36</sup> Julianne Schultz provides an interesting discussion of the media’s institutional status in a democratic political system in Schultz, J. (1998) *Reviving the Fourth Estate*.

<sup>37</sup> This argument appears in Anderson, B. (1991) *Imagined Communities*; McLuhan, M. (2002) *The Gutenberg Galaxy*; Innis, H. (1999) *The Bias of Communication*; Carey, J.W. (1988) *Communication as Culture*.

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of the importance of state-based education in the modern nation, please see, Gellner, E.



the print and electronic media... are crucial mechanisms through which the national consciousness can be constructed. This is something new nations such as Australia have recognised for many years. While Australian governments have gradually relinquished their interest in managing the development of the nation's print media... they have made assiduous use of "state-funded image production" as a deliberate strategy of nation formation...

Bell (1998:93-94) also regards television as central to imagining the nation:

it is possible to understand "Australian television culture" as a more-or-less coherent process, by which the nation is intersubjectively imagined, through which sub-cultural conversations are enacted which constantly define and redefine who is watching and listening.

Yet, television is a competitive industry. A commercial television corporation's privileged status was never taken for granted, but rather something fought for and defended as the foundation of profitability. To do this each television corporation has had to convince its audience to watch their programs, continuously trying to legitimate their status. They also have to convince themselves and their advertising clients that their system for measuring audience approval (the ratings) works. This is another level at which the audience is imagined. To achieve these goals they use the representation of a communal past to tell the people who they should be and what they should like.

### **Imagined Community and Discourse**

When Anderson used the term "imagined community" to describe the nation, he was attempting to revise the discursive trope theorists had been using to speak and write about this cultural phenomenon.<sup>39</sup> He used new words to talk about an established discourse and thereby

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(2001) *Nations and Nationalism*, pp. 35-38; Althusser also lists the education system as one of his ISAs in *Lenin and Philosophy* (1977:137)

<sup>39</sup> Hayden White provides the definitive discussion of discursive tropes in White, H. (1985) *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*.

provided a new structure of consciousness with which to make sense of large-scale communities. Where previous theorists of nationalism had written about historical error and fabrication, Anderson wrote about imagination and creation. This helped make sense of the fact that in the early 1980s nationalism was still apparent; it had not disappeared as some theorists thought it would. Anderson's theory provided a space in which to comprehend the nation's ability to survive by constantly re-imagining itself.

This re-imagining occurs through the mass media. As discussed in the previous chapter, an imagined community is large enough that its members will never be able to meet all the other members face-to-face and must therefore imagine them (Anderson, 2000). They do this through their shared media literacy and the individual conception of a shared history. That is not to say that each of these people have distinct imaginings of what the rest of the nation is like. Their understanding of their imagined community is shaped by the discourse of the nation and history, which is rooted in the serial apprehension of time as something that can be measured by a calendar or a clock. The community has a past which runs chronologically into the present. The details of this abstract community, and the interpretation of its past, are shaped by the various discursive tropes which compete for the media audience's attention.

### **The Profit Motive**

The driving purpose behind commercial television is the profit motive. To maximise profits the media corporations that control commercial television broadcasters need to find ways of "accurately" imagining an "audience", as representative of who the viewers are, and what they want to watch. Measuring an audience is no easy matter and the accuracy of any system is always open to criticism. The number of people who own television sets is so great that it makes impossible any accurate method of accounting for what they watch. To increase the chances that the media corporations' programming will reach the consumers, Australian television corporations try to capture what they think of as the public spirit or community identity. They condense, simplify and package it, and then present it attractively enough to draw the audience's attention. To this end, rather than simply emphasising the fact that the

corporations are part of the community (which could be achieved in any number of ways from charity to behind-the-scenes-style exposure of the industry and those who work in it), they instead seem to paint themselves as leaders of the community and often also its spiritual consciousness. They portray an image of the television corporation as looking down at the world and its cultures as though from outside and, usually, above. In this way the television is positioned as the intermediary necessary for people to be able to cope with the world.

Each of the Australian commercial television networks represents reality and, their position in it, in different ways. That is not to say they are simply producing a variety of fictions and passing them off as reality. It is more that they choose different ways of telling the same story; they choose different styles for representing not just history or the past but rather “the *social matrix* experienced as an extension out of the past” into their present (White, 1978:68). They do this to compete for what Mannheim called, “control of the collective unconscious” (1937:30). Mannheim used this phrase to describe the aim of political ideology. He argued that collective myths make life bearable for those whose lifestyles do not require individualistic decision-making. For example, while “the merchant, the entrepreneur, the intellectual, each in his own way occupies a position which requires rational decisions concerning tasks set by everyday life” (31), which they make based on self interest, for the majority this is not the case, as “their modes of behaviour are regulated to a certain extent on the basis of myths, traditions or mass-faith in a leader” (32).

Commercial television corporations try to interpret these myths and traditions and contribute to them for their own benefit. In some senses all advertising does this but large media corporations tend to go a step further in their publicity campaigns and paint their position in Australian society as necessary to the continuation of anything from politics and security to the nuclear family and moral values. This is particularly explicit in the early media myths of the press as “fourth estate” and the existence of a paternalistic, educated “middle-class public sphere”. Very rarely do media outlets admit to their status as commercial entities rather than social benefactors.

## **Constructed Audiences**

In today's Western nation, the dominant medium is television. Already formed nations deconstruct and re-imagine themselves largely around shared television literacy. This is not to say that the television audience and the national imagined community are one and the same. Rather, audiences are constructions. They are given attributes that are pieced together from perceived characteristics of various levels of imagined communities. These attributes are constantly changing because, like nations, multiple television audiences can be said to exist within one geographic nation and differ from one another considerably. All the actual, individual viewers have the same basic literacy of the medium itself but use different tropes for interpreting the content, so, when constructing television audiences, the broadcasters often switch between different modes of rhetoric to create a sense of unity – to convince the viewers that they are the “audience”. Sometimes these audiences are given the appearance of identifying themselves as “nation” and sometimes as a local “region”. Each constructed audience's style of describing what the words “nation” and “region” represent vary significantly in accordance with whatever the local situation might appear to be.

For instance, each of the Australian commercial television networks represents itself as having a connection to local regions. The next chapter is an examination of this marketing strategy with regard to the city of Sydney. This is an attempt to give the impression that they are a significant part of the local milieu. However, they can only do this through the use of national discourse. While they give the appearance of being local, the norms and narratives they recycle are national. Also, their corporate structures are either national or global, which means they have little, or no actual commercial interest in local issues.

Each local area in Australia has particular characteristics that make it distinctive. For this reason, television broadcasters adopt a flexible approach to representing community. Australia is often represented as a united nation, with a certain “way of life”. However, television corporations also often presents the impression that there is no unified national

imagined community but rather a series of local audiences, each with a different set of ideas about what makes up the nation. These representations change according to the context of the televisual content. These local audiences can also be broken down into demographics based on class, age, income and many other variables depending on the discourse you use to describe the audience, or using Anderson's trope, the way you imagine them. They always have enough in common to be considered part of the nation, but also have enough difference that they remain distinct. They can be differentiated in any number of ways and these differentiations can change rapidly. For example, New South Wales and Queensland can be represented as distinct adversaries during interstate sporting events, while the populace of each state is lumped together as Australia in an international news story about a foreign war.

### ***Our Century* and Our Historical Identity**

An interesting example of a historical representation structured in accordance with a predetermined literary concept, informed by obvious ideology, is *Our Century*, a 26 episode television series which first screened on the Nine Network in 1999. I have chosen to do a brief textual analysis of this series because of its genre and context. Firstly, its genre could be reasonably described as "history documentary". The series is designed to re-tell the story of Australian history to a broad television audience. The fact that it is a television series, produced by a commercial television producer, is a significant element in understanding this program's genre. While superficially educational, the show must entertain as large an audience as possible, in order that it be profitable. Secondly, the contemporary social context of this program was the centenary of Australian federation. The show was produced as part of the federation anniversary celebrations and it attempts to tell the narrative of Australian history under this rubric. Also, and most importantly for my argument, this program became part of the Australian school syllabus. While this program is an isolated example, its existence in its context demonstrates one Australian commercial television corporation's strategies during this "landmark" moment in Australian history.

Patricia Kelly, author of the *Our Century Teacher's Notes*, claims *Our Century* tells the story

of “Australia over the last one hundred years” (1999:1). Hosted by television personality Ray Martin, it uses archival footage to justify all the myths and stereotypes that are traditionally held up as representing the “Australian character” and packages them as “historical truth”. Even the use of Martin may tell us something about the ways in which Nine’s corporate identity (itself discussed in greater detail in chapter eight) is reflected in the structure of *Our Century*. As Bell (1998:201) argues,

Australian television (especially on commercial networks but not exclusively so) has continued to represent itself and its audience-constituents as privatistic, domestic and consumerist. Ray Martin is about as “political” as Channel 9 ever becomes. It invariably represents its viewers as vicarious consumers of politics.

In this case, the viewers are represented as vicarious consumers of their own history, sold to them by Nine’s serious “Martin” persona. The program uses the mythic imagery of mateship and the outback to draw vague, generalised conclusions about a posited Australian national character. It claims that Australians have a “unique way of looking at the world and themselves” and describes home ownership as the “Great Aussie Dream”, while sport is the “national obsession” (Kelly, 1999:6).

It is fair to say that most people would not recognise a television program as historical “truth” and, when faced with this program, may simply have considered themselves entertained rather than educated. However, the *Our Century Teachers’ Notes* (Kelly, 1999), which were packaged with the videos of the series when they were distributed to schools, do lend some weight to the idea that many people in Australian society took this series as a serious and educationally worthwhile examination of Australian culture and accepted its positing of an Australian national identity.

As a result it is appropriate to question the ideological motivations of its producers. The *Teachers’ Notes* claim the series is

A LOOK TELEVISION/FILM AUSTRALIA NATIONAL INTEREST PROGRAM PRODUCTION  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE NATIONAL FILM AND SOUND ARCHIVE FOR THE NINE  
NETWORK AUSTRALIA (1999:2 [their capitals])

On the cover page, under the title, there is a classification section which reads, "Subject area: General interest and all key curriculum areas (including studies of society, Australian history, english [sic], media, civics & citizenship)" (1). The producers are clearly trying to present *Our Century* as a reputable historical document which should be part of what children learn about their society in their formative years. Yet, as stated on page 2 of the *Teachers' Notes*, this "national interest program" was produced "for the Nine Network Australia", a company not normally associated with the production of educational history.

As stated above, one of the most important factors in maintaining the idea that any community is glued together is a sense of shared history. This sense has to be reinforced over and over again whether the community is considering itself local or national. In a community so large that it has to be imagined, this can only be done through mass media. A simplistic understanding of this concept would probably imply a potential power to influence ideas about the nation and win audience favour. This was perhaps, the reason why the Nine Network produced this series. It produced an unsophisticated, clichéd representation of Australian history with the intention of monopolising some idea of national identity and using it to solidify their audience, creating an association in their minds between Nine and an Australian spirit or tradition; creating a narrative of Australian identity which included Nine, while at the same time increasing its profits.

The idea of capturing the narrative power of national identity has a long history in Australia. A brief survey of some themes that reoccur in Australian history demonstrates some of the ideological choices made by historians; ideological choices which can have as much social influence as popular television programs. As Pascoe puts it:

Images of the past portrayed by film-makers, novelists and journalists may have had a greater impact on

popular consciousness, but a nation's conception of itself is fashioned not only by the myths, traditions and stereotypes of popular culture but by its historians' selective interpretations of past events.

(1979:3)

Examining some of these selective interpretations can also illuminate the decisions made by readers who put these histories to use in contemporary society. This is particularly the case when people try to identify a common Australian character and identity or when television corporations try to sell their product by promoting their identification with local culture.

### **Selective Interpretations**

Attempts to describe a unified Australian sensibility, or set of characteristics, vary enormously depending on the describer's ideological background. Conceptions of Australian history have been fought over by a variety of historians and their words have been interpreted by an equal variety of politicians and other public figures in attempts to capture a sense of national identity. As a result, "Australian-ness" is often narrated as something that is hard to define but which definitely exists. It is often characterised by indecision, an indecision which the first Europeans may have felt when they arrived. They were migrating to a penal colony at around the same time as the idea of nationalism was really taking hold at home, in Western Europe. As Western culture was shifting to new ways of organising itself, the new arrivals in Australia were being thrown into a strange, hostile land whose inhabitants had very little in common with them, and forced to construct a community around a prison.

The stories of national identity during the following century, before Federation, generally seem to be characterised by an absence. As Wesley (2000:175) argues, nothing happened that could provide any sense of unified nationhood. The separate colonies were operating under substantial democratic self rule and the British had learnt from various experiences to be very lenient with their colonial territories. The main events of this period are either characterised by commercial success, and a gradual spread to all areas of the continent, or by genocide and destruction.



In the lead up to Federation, people like Henry Parkes tried to spread their vision of Australia (colonial peripheral of the mother country), create a national sentiment, and use it to their political ends. Parkes is usually written about as a man who believed firmly in the monarchy and the ascendancy of the British Empire and this was the basis of much of his political rhetoric.<sup>40</sup> Manning Clark began volume five of *A History of Australia* (1981) with an account of Australia's centenary celebrations in 1888, as sanctioned by Parkes. The ceremony included the unveiling of a statue of Queen Victoria and speeches by notable English aristocrats. No actual Australians were involved in the ceremony. It is clear that the Australian identity Parkes and his allies were trying to create was built on historical ties to the British Empire.

Obviously, there was resistance to this reverence for Empire. Other political views fought to get a share of the national sentiment. *The Bulletin* for one was extremely vociferous in its criticism of anything British (Macintyre and Clark, 2003:32), and Henry Lawson, whose writing contributed a great deal to the myths associated with Australian national identity, once enjoined, "call no biped lord or sir and touch your hat to no man" (40).

Australia only began to imagine its nationhood as being self-contained at a time when the rest of the world was beginning to see through the meta-narratives of modernism and wonder what comes next (Clark, 1980:268). As Gellner and others were starting to analyse the nation as a mode of discourse that only emerged during the Enlightenment period, the Menzies era was coming to an end and books such as Donald Horne's *The Lucky Country* (1971) were being published.<sup>41</sup> According to Clark, Australia was shaking off its dependence on England as the mother country and beginning to evaluate itself.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> This impression of Parkes appears in Clark, M. (1981) *A History of Australia Vol. 5* and Macintyre & Clark (2003) *The History Wars*.

<sup>41</sup> *The Lucky Country* was voted one of the most influential Australian books of the twentieth century in a 1999 *Sydney Morning Herald* poll.

<sup>42</sup> Pascoe (1979:98) analyses other, ideologically different, historians, who were writing at the same time as Clark, who believed that nothing ever changed in Australian culture. In contrast to Clark, these "organicist" historians tell the story of Australian culture as though it is "a merry-go-round, set in motion at some point in the past" (98). However, Clark's work seems to have had a more lasting influence on Australian culture, if not historiography.

On first glance, the images of Australian national identity and their usage seem to have remained consistent throughout their history. Politicians and marketing firms still invoke complex areas of social interplay such as the outback, the military past, sport and leisure and security and isolation to find some sort of purchase with the people. They reduce these issues to simple series of dichotomies so that something or someone can either be defined as for or against, one of us or an “other”, good or evil, right or wrong.

At least twice a year Australians are bombarded with images of World War One, and to a lesser degree, World War Two. In the week or so leading up to both Anzac Day and Remembrance Day, the media makes a large number of references to what many people perceive to be the birth of our nation. Since the late 1990s there have been various news and current affairs stories on the topic, as well as lifestyle television shows on the Kokoda Track, and steady coverage of the thousands of young Australians who make a pilgrimage to Gallipoli every year to attend a dawn service. The subtext of each story echoes Manning Clark’s (1987:16) description of reactions to the first Anzac Day as “secular religion”. In Australian culture, the word “Anzac” is used to try and conjure up sentimental images of who we are and where we come from. The World War One veteran is one of the most potent symbols in our culture and is used to personify all the cultural ideals and myths that are taken for granted as being Australian.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Social Function of National Identity**

It is this almost spiritual sentimental attachment that various groups in the nation try to mould to their advantage. As Richard White (1981:ix) points out:

National identities emerge to serve a social function. While the intelligentsia create the images, they do not work in a vacuum. The most influential images are those which serve the interests of a broader

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<sup>43</sup> The power of the war memorial in society is emphasised by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*. They lend a spirituality to the idea of nationalism which magnifies its sentimental attachments and makes the imagined community seem more than just the people in it.

ruling class, on whose patronage the intelligentsia rely. Every powerful economic interest likes to justify itself by claiming to represent the “national interest” and identifying themselves with a “national identity”.

In the case of this thesis’ textual analysis of *Our Century*, the Nine Network seems to have cut out the intelligentsia and gone direct to shaping national identity itself. The timing was perfect for this sort of myth-making as they could capitalise on the build up to the millennium.

During 1999 there were countless media stories regarding the approach of the year 2000 and Nine wanted to create the impression in the audience that they could reliably tell them what had happened in Australia since Federation in 1901. *Our Century* was their attempt to take extremely complex events for granted and turn myths into a justification of their economic power.

For example, the series portrays Federation as a simple starting point. In the same way that any novel needs a beginning, so does Nine’s history of Australia. Despite the huge variety of stories about Federation, children taught using *Our Century* will see it solely as the beginning of a nation. In reality, it can represent many things to many people and years of negotiations took place before it could happen. *Our Century* seems to portray these years as a vacuum that existed “pre-Australian nation”, with little explanation as to how an Englishman could be Governor General, a point that many other historians have dwelt upon in one way or another. According to Manning Clark (1981:381), “The whole [Federation] ceremony stank in the nostrils. Australians had once again grovelled to the English”. Another view can be found in journalist John Pilger’s book *Secret Country* (1990) where, trying to give the Australian nation a narrative birthplace, he compares the Empire-based Federation with the ANZAC landing at Gallipoli, where “for every 500 yards gained, at least a thousand Australians were lost. The bodies were piled four feet deep” (141). At the time it was reported in the Melbourne *Argus* that Australia had “in one moment stepped into the world-wide arena in the full stature of great manhood... on the anvil of Gallipoli was hammered out the fabric of what is destined to be our most enduring national tradition” (142).

While Pilger's views could usually be assumed to disagree with Nine's, again we see the same images of Australian national identity, the difference being a matter of interpretation based on the ideology which prefigures the historical writing. He contrasts his view with what he conceives of as the traditional idea of Anzac Day, as portrayed in the *Argus*: a day celebrating a glorious fight for a cause we believe in. It posits our side as the "good guys" and presents World War One as a catalyst of our national character, an idea that has been repeated ad infinitum in the media since. It seems to be an almost sado-masochistic idea that "war existed to provide suffering and pain, which the individual or the nation must overcome in order to reach a higher plane" (Williams, 1999:254). Again, this view of the Australian nation has more to do with the political bent of the *Argus* than with any actual national spiritual essence. However, as with all other versions of national identity, this view was contested at the time - predominantly by the anti-war Labor movement - and ever since. Pilger's view is nothing new. He is simply telling a version of the story which he feels is being neglected by whoever he imagines possesses the power in society at the time of his writing.

A more celebratory example of historical narrativity appears in *The Lucky Country*, where Donald Horne wrote that the Australian

national festivals are Anzac Day, Christmas and New Year. Anzac Day is the Festival of the Ordinary Man; Christmas the Festival of the Family; New Year the Festival of the Good Time. (1971:20)

Or, in his book *Our Republic*, Tom Keneally re-imagines the story when he asks the question,

Can it really be claimed that all those who fought and perished - or simply perished, as half the AIF deaths were from disease - that all these lads took that dark path to defend and honour the crown? (1993:6)

He goes on to say that he doesn't believe they were "post-Whitlamite Republicans", preferring to indicate they were something else, which he calls Imperial Federalists, neatly constructing a poetic narrative with which to generalise the past. The fact that the ANZAC is

the first Australian image/myth he deals with in a book that is an argument for a republic, shows the importance in Australian culture of gaining power over the ANZAC's rhetorical presence.

## **The Australian Love of Sport**

Sport has played a similar role in Australian culture and, like the Anzac, is now used to denote Australian-ness to the extent that the first six links on the *Personal Links* page of ex-Prime Minister, John Howard's website ([www.pm.gov.au](http://www.pm.gov.au))<sup>44</sup> connected, in 2005, to various forms of sport site (St. George Rugby League Club, Baggygreen.com etc). Sporting analogies are used for anything from describing policy decisions to advertisements for products. Australians have long identified sport as a passion common to the majority of the population. Henry Lawson once said that in Australia "Sport is God" (Clark, 1987:6). It is one of the dominant themes in *Our Century* and the actual social effects of this myth are becoming increasingly apparent. While Australia's success at recent Olympic Games is often represented as being the natural result of our national character, it is more accurate to see it as a consequence of disproportionate government funding of elite sports. Yet, the myth persists and while it persists, sport dominates television programming.

For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a great deal of rhetoric around the Australian pursuit of pleasure. Australians tried to imagine themselves as people who would rather enjoy their leisure than do any hard work. One of our early statesmen, Alfred Deakin, and his wife, decided to set a different example:

that pleasure-loving was not the greatest good in life. Ignoring the reminder in the *Bulletin* that there was no real living in the existence mapped out for Australians by the "gloomy apostles of purityranny", Mr Deakin set an example to his fellow Australians: he worked in his office on Melbourne Cup Day. (Clark, 1981:287)

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<sup>44</sup> Accessed February 2 2005.

Clark uses this story to lead into a section about the “age of the common man”. He begins by telling the story of C.J. Dennis, a popular poet whose words helped create the imagery which John Howard used in contemporary society for such events as his 2001 campaign launch: “A vote for your local Liberal team member protects our borders and supports the Prime Minister’s team”. These words paint a picture of the Prime Minister as not only the paternal captain of a sporting team, but also the incumbent champion, who is trying to persuade the sport obsessed voters that he is one of them. This is also why many of his appearances involved cricket games.

However, as Miller et al (2001:1) point out:

sport is so central to our contemporary moment’s blend of transnational cultural industrialization and textualization that it does more than reflect the global – sport is big enough in its effects to modify our very use of the term “globalization”.

That is, professional sport has been one of the more significant factors in the recent phase of globalisation. Australia does not have a monopoly on devotion to sport and the representation of sport-loving as a particularly Australia national trait only moves Australian identity closer to a homogeneous, transnational identity. In this case, the very things that political and commercial interests use to try and separate Australian-ness as distinct from “others” draws it closer to those “others”.

It is also interesting that while Howard borrows many of Dennis’s “common man” themes, Dennis himself was a socialist who “had an utter loathing for the ‘practices of unrestricted capitalism’ ... he despised all those who fawned on members of the English governing classes” (Clark, 1981:288), an interesting contrast with Howard, a right wing monarchist. Once again, this demonstrates the inherent historical error of conceptions of national identity and shows that representations of an Australian national identity may be created for political means.

## Isolation

Like sport and the Anzac, one of the most obvious threads that knits together the football jersey of Australian national identity (as represented by *Our Century*) is the idea of isolation. Geoffrey Blainey's *The Tyranny of Distance* (1968) was devoted to tracing the effect that isolation in a vast land has had on every aspect of Australia's development and, as the *Teachers' Notes* (Kelly, 1999:6) points out, episodes nine, ten and eleven of *Our Century* are devoted to variations on this theme:

### 9) *Going Places* (Airdate: 6.30pm, 18 April 1999)

Our famous tyranny of distance was, for many, the challenge of the century, as we strove to build the roads, planes and trains that would bring Australians together.

### 10) *Conflict* (Airdate: 6.30pm, 25 April 1999)<sup>45</sup>

Isolated at the bottom of the Pacific, Australians felt that conflict would always be fought far away – until the Japanese landed in New Guinea and their submarines attacked Sydney Harbour.

### 11) *Invaders* (Airdate: 6.30pm, 2 May 1999)

Over the century, Australians adopted a more protective attitude to the country's natural environment, especially against the many animal and plant pests introduced by European settlement.

Episodes ten and eleven draw out the next step from themes of isolation – security, which is as much on the political agenda now as it was in World War Two (when the nation was actually invaded) and at the height of the White Australia policy, becoming part of the vast interplay of hype and rhetoric surrounding globalisation. It also raises issues of power and legitimacy which again come back to the idea that an economic entity, in this case a commercial television corporation, can gain power over a supposed “collective unconscious” (Mannheim, 1968:30).

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<sup>45</sup> Anzac Day

## Power

Sole control of the “collective unconscious” does not seem possible. It is something that is competed for but impossible to gain in any unified sense because a unified collective unconscious is itself impossible. Rather, it is a narrative figure propagated by those with power in a community who compete for the most convincing claim to its existence. For this reason, it is the way it is contested by various parties which becomes important. It is the style of narrative representation which gives the commercial television corporation some sort of identity within the community, not the details of their interpretation of social fact. As Hayden White puts it, paraphrasing Barthes:

What is “imaginary” about any narrative representation is the illusion of a centered consciousness capable of looking out on the world, apprehending its structure and processes, and representing them to itself as having all of the formal coherency of narrativity itself. But this is to mistake a “meaning” (which is always constituted rather than found) for “reality” (which is always found rather than constituted). (White, 1987:36)

A demonstration of this narrative imagination can be perceived in the way commercial television broadcasters have traditionally advertised their news bulletins. These advertisements focus on portraying a sense of national interest. That is, the idea that the news producers know what interests the nation. They typically represent their television corporation as having an identity capable of making sense of the world in its entirety and serving up its essence to the viewer in their thirty-minute news program. They are telling a story based on a perception of the community’s social history, in a particular way, to build feelings of social cohesiveness in the group of people which they imagine as their audience.

The television audience, as an imagined community (whether national, regional or global and whether imagined by the media producer or the audience member), is a construction. Its abstracted cohesiveness is built on various conceptions of history, the representations of which are ideologically prefigured by their producers (in this case, the producers of network



news advertisements). The audience and the media form a contingent assemblage in which various elements compete for the perceived power to define the assemblage's discursive trope and thereby dominate the market. The assemblage is made up of the various ideas being conceptualised (and those conceptualising them) in this process, as those ideas are put on the television screens of Australia: historical ideas about Australian national identity and cultural meaning; statistical ideas about marketing and executive guesses about the best way for a media corporation to make a profit. This assemblage is contingent because it is constantly liable to change, depending on circumstances (that is, ideas about national identity can fluctuate in relationship to media profits).

Each commercial television channel takes part in a power struggle to win a greater share of the audience, which results in a larger share of the advertising market, which gives them greater profits. They do this using marketing strategies designed to secure for themselves a sense of legitimacy in the populace. These strategies have to be constantly revised because power is not stable. No one entity can ever possess all the power in a society; power is relational. It "is never anything more than a relationship that can, and must, be studied only by looking at the interplay between the terms of the relationship" (Foucault, 2003:168). In other words, in a network of power relations some parts will have more power than others. The less powerful try to get more power and the more powerful try to maintain their positions. In terms of the legitimization of television corporations, the "interplay between the terms of the relationship" can be observed through their use of social and historical discourse.

Foucault draws a useful distinction here between the idea of history simply recording the relations of power and the idea that "the relations of force and the play of power are the very stuff of history" (169). He described this as "a historico-political continuum" and posits a continuity between historical narrative and the management of the state (170). As Turner (1986:81) puts it:

the insistence on the importance of the metaphysical meaning of literature and film is usually accompanied by an insistence on the comparative unimportance and ephemerality of ideology (usually

dismissed as political didacticism). The work of Althusser on ideology, and of Foucault on the role of discourse in constructing reality, encourages us to see this as a discourse which privileges its terms in order to naturalise particular political realities, specific power relations, or the status quo.

This is also a key point in Gramsci's conception of hegemony. He posited two major superstructural levels interconnected in an industrialised society, "one that can be called 'civil society', that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private', and that of 'political society' or 'the State'" (1971:12). "The State" allows the dominant social class to exercise power throughout society by oppression or legalised violence while "civil society" allows it to exercise power through hegemony.

As Gramsci points out, it is the work of the "intellectual" (whether they realise it or not) to operate the subaltern function of civil society, that is:

The "spontaneous" consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is "historically" caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (1971:12)

This Marxist conception of power can be applied to commercial television in Sydney. Seeking power, they use history to create prestige. Ownership of the means of television production costs enormous amounts of money and there is always a lot of mutually beneficent interaction between media proprietors and government. Foucault may have argued that other forms of power have gained greater dominance and that media is now too fragmented to be part of a superstructure. The audience has the agency to create change in television programming, though this also seems to be dependant on narratives of historical prestige, the agency dependant more on new history producing voices rather than a revision of the ideology of "authentic history".<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Also, the audience's power to turn off the television has recently been accentuated. Audience numbers have been declining, for various reasons, since the late 1990s (as will be discussed in chapter nine) and this could also be an indication that the media's power is not hegemonic.

This idea is particularly interesting if one examines the recent struggles over an Australian sense of identity; a struggle which seems, on the surface, to constantly supply television corporations with new narrative ground to win legitimacy, but may prove, on deeper analysis, to be simply fuelled primarily by various media outlets' need to win the audience – the media institution's version of the will to power.

The idea that history is contested is itself part of historical discourse. Part of thinking about any style of history is analysing the writer's method, background or ideology and deciding how much faith to put in their view. If a piece of writing passes the various tests of authenticity, then it supposedly becomes historically accurate, or deemed acceptable by the state. In a modern, industrial state, this means it has been accepted as fit for the state-based education system. A change has appeared in this process in recent times in some Western cultures whereby the history deemed acceptable by the state is now open to contestation. In Australia, this development has been labelled the "History Wars" (Macintyre and Clark, 2003:1-13).

### **White Australia**

For example, one view of contemporary Australian culture which gets aired regularly portrays an open, egalitarian and tolerant culture which embraces people from other lands. This is part of a romantic telling of Australian history where the good people came to this land, triumphed over adversity and welcomed the underdogs from other places. For example, there was a public sphere chorus of outrage when Pauline Hanson first voiced her racist policies, as though she was contravening our natural national ethos. Yet, in 1888 the *Bulletin*, always a staunchly left wing publication, warned workers of ethnic invasion and

vilified the Chinese in cartoons and articles as the members of a "yellow race" which threatened to "overwhelm them and blot them out". The nation... was being "slowly eaten up by imported vice and leprosy and by all kinds of moral and physical uncleanness from the Flowery Land". (Clark, 1982:16)

Via the White Australia Policy, this sentiment is traceable through the 20th century, past a short and limited multiculturalism and on to Hanson and the one million Australians who voted for her. Yet, as Ghassan Hage points out, an Australian will become incensed when called a racist:

the Prime Minister [John Howard] has publicly declared himself “offended” on many occasions; he even went as far as being “outraged” once when faced with the term “racism”. More offended by it than by the sight of the dehumanising concentration camps he has used to cage third world-looking asylum seekers. (2003:x)

Hage’s ironic account fits nicely into what Howard and his ilk describe as the bias of their History Wars enemy:

One of the more insidious developments in Australian political life over the past decade or so has been the attempt to rewrite Australian history in the service of a partisan political cause. (Howard in Macintyre and Clark, 2003:1)

Previously, historical images used to represent national identity have appeared in the social discourse as a centre for the nation. They were perceived to be a core which was constantly contested and constantly changing, but seemed a solid foundation upon which a narrative of nationhood could be built; a narrative that various sides of politics could get together to discuss and refine. Now, the History Wars seem to signal a lack of faith in the process itself rather than just the images. It is more than the standard negotiation around historical “fact”; it is a questioning of the social discourse of which history is a part.

Whether they’ve been thought of as ahistorical, universal truths or contingent concepts, the images that signify national identity have had their uses. Now, the fragmentation that the History Wars implies calls into question not just the images of nationalism, but the concept of being able to base any sort of community imagining upon a representation, historical or

otherwise. The idea that we can sum up a culture and give it an overall ethos, character or identity is rapidly losing credibility, as the 2001 census showed. The number of people born in Australia is on a downward trend, the divorce rate is going up, the percentage of homes where English is the first language is going down and the prevalence of Christianity in the population is going down. All while the population constantly increases. It is becoming increasingly difficult to posit the statistically average Australian.<sup>47</sup> Yet, television corporations still heavily promote ideal forms like sport and the Anzac.

After the information technology revolution, in the current informational society, images and ideas that represent Australian nationhood seem to have become decentralised. Their role in Australian life has changed because the people receiving them no longer have a unified identity. They are the electorate/nation/market and images of national identity have joined the rest of the global clamour for attention. Even their status as images has changed. They are national identity/marketing ploy/political campaign/etc. They can be used to win elections, sell products, tell stories and legitimate media personalities. No longer do they have an important role for binding people together under one flag because there are too many questions over the legitimacy of the flag. Identity has undergone a politicisation which “calls these sources of self-confidence into question while identifying an element of cruelty in established identities where only virtues were previously thought to reside” (Connolly, 1991:151).

These consequences are part of the pervasive change engendered by the information technology revolution (Castells, 2001) and also a result of the specific awareness of media producers “that audiences are not gullible consumers who passively absorb anything they’re served, but must be continuously ‘targeted’ and fought for, grabbed, seduced” (Ang, 1996:10), a view which seems opposed to the oppressed audience of hegemony. It is rather, an awareness that the media audience, and the nation, have become fragmented. This allows for a space whereby marketers, advertisers or publicity producers (in this case television

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<sup>47</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, “A Snapshot of Australia” - <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@census.nsf/4079a1bbd2a04b80ca256b9d00208f92/7dd97c937216e32fca256bbe008371f0!OpenDocument> - accessed 26 April, 2005.

corporations), can use the relational nature of power to their advantage.<sup>48</sup> The protagonists of the History Wars believe that by controlling the images of national history they can control the narrative of the nation, thereby enhancing their prestige and power. Yet Foucault's analysis of power tells us that it can only ever be in dispute, making this a war that can have no winner.

The idea of History Wars is perfect fodder for the press and non-commercial media because it can be served up as a battle between two competing sides.<sup>49</sup> The commercial television corporations then use the space this debate opens up. Once again, the fragmentation of the population is swept aside and complex issues can momentarily be made simple. Foucault's relational power is reduced to a Socratic dialogue. The audience is presented with a picture of a simple debate between two competing sides, euphemistically described as a war.

On one hand there are historians who identify "Australian-ness" with a triumph over various difficulties. Their version of events tells of a group of underdogs sailing around the world to land in an inhospitable land and making the most of it, despite all the odds; carving out industry from harsh landscape and climatic conditions, forging a nation in the heat of adversity, from an empty land which was next to useless - a very clear narrative which structures events into history. Things occur and then someone puts them together in a certain order and in a certain style to tell the triumphant story of the birth of national way of life. In the later half of the twentieth century, this narrative was identified with the politically conservative elements in Australian society. It was the view of conservative Prime Minister, John Howard, who often espoused this version of history while in power. He went to great rhetorical lengths to proclaim that this history should be protected against people who disagree with him.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> An article appeared in *The New Yorker* on 28 March 2005 under the title "The New Pitch: do ads still work?" which detailed the current desperation of advertising agencies in the face of media audience fragmentation. A prime time television slot is not the guaranteed mass audience that it was in the 1960s.

<sup>49</sup> A Factiva database search of Australian newspapers for articles about "history wars" revealed 207 since 1998 (accessed 26 April, 2005).

<sup>50</sup> A number of his speeches typify this. His 1996 Robert Menzies Lecture is an excellent example, available at <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~victorp/liberals/nsw/howard2.html>

The more progressive side of politics is identified with a different type of historical narrative. It is typically represented by the work of Henry Reynolds, for example. Reynolds writes that Europeans invaded a working civilization and set about destroying it. He describes his book *The Other Side of the Frontier* (1982:1) as “an interpretation of the Aboriginal response to the invasion and settlement of Australia during the hundred or so years between the late C18th and the early C20th” which, he writes, is at odds with Blainey “who argued that Aborigines reacted to the sudden appearance of whites with the ‘calm apathy’ of a people who had lived so long in isolation ‘that intruders were inconceivable’” (22). Blainey drew a distinction between what he has called the “black armband view of history” as typified by Reynolds or Manning Clark and the “three cheers view” in an article “Goodbye to All That?” in the *Weekend Australian* 1-2 May (1993:16). He tried to assume the position of a responsible writer of “good” history which took the middle path between triumphalism and the armband. Blainey and Reynolds have since become emblematic of the battles waged by either side of Australian politics to seize the public’s historical imagination and thereby the sentiment attached to the nation.

Manning Clark believed that a national identity was something tangible which could be discovered and analysed if the culture was honest enough with itself. He wrote that “we Australians have trouble identifying ourselves, in saying what we are and what we are coming to be” (1980:216), although in much of his writings he intimates that the roots of an Australian national identity lie in constant obeisance to the British. Again, in this he is giving history a particular narrative slant with which many people could identify. A cultural dependence on Britain which was thoroughly contingent for many years can therefore be cast as part of a sentimental national characteristic, good or bad depending on your political point of view, and put to a politically expedient use. In the same sense, rather than a “no” vote in the 1999 republic referendum demonstrating an attachment to Britain in an Australian national identity, it is more logical to conceive of it as a political victory for those who use the rhetoric of conserving historical cultural ties.

In the epilogue to his *A History of Australia* (1987), Clark writes:

immigrants from Europe and Asia helped deliver a mortal wound to the Giant of British philistinism.

Grovelling to the British almost disappeared... Australians no longer apologised for the way they

talked, the way they walked, or the way they behaved. (499)

For a while, Clark and the progressives held sway and this view of the Australian nation seemed to be true. Paul Keating was taking Australia into Asia and away from the cult of traditionalism. Reconciliation was on the agenda. Australia seemed like a tolerant, liberal place full of people willing to make changes. The conservatives, however, fought back with a series of blows which culminated in the 1999 constitutional referendum.

## **Legitimacy**

The History Wars are a symptom of a crisis of legitimacy. Economic powers, such as the media corporations, seem to have become more aware of the theoretical advantage of having control over the narratives of Australian culture. They have become much more obvious about taking part in this struggle and the question of legitimacy has become increasingly confused. One of the results is the current paranoia about security, in which the government and all the media are fully complicit.

An interesting analysis of security and legitimacy could begin with an examination of the media's coverage of David Hicks. Hicks is an Australian man who was found fighting for the Taliban against the Americans. At the time that it happened, elements of the Australian press reported the story closely and the word "traitor" was often used, but there remained some sense of ambivalence, as though the press was going through the motions because the concept of being a "traitor" seemed so unusual and outdated.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Examples include, "Traitor lays legal minefield" in *The Australian*, 13 December, 2001; "Anti-terror laws require clarity" in *The Australian*, 13 December, 2001; "War on Terror, the Life: blue-eyed boy who was into drugs and the Devil" in *Adelaide Advertiser*, 13 December, 2001; "Australian terror fighter may face justice in US" in *The Age*, 13 December, 2001; "Australian journey to heart of darkness" in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 December, 2001.



The same elements in the Australian media continued to repeat the United States' rhetoric of "evil-doers" and "terrorists" but the idea of "treason" and "traitors" itself seemed somehow outdated and they soon became unusually even-handed in their Hicks reports. This raises questions not only about the legitimisation of economic power in national narratives but also the state itself and the nature of moral belief. The world seemed to have moved beyond the traditional ideas of both extreme love of nation and its opposite, treason. Yet, not knowing any other way of describing the events and their participants, the media had to fall back on old words and the beliefs they implied.

In *The Augustinian Imperative: A Reflection on the Politics of Morality*, William E. Connolly (1993) explores the philosophy of intrinsic moral order as described in the philosophies Augustine, Hobbes and Kant. He uses the story of Job from the Bible to critique the way society constructs deviance. Job, a very virtuous and devout person, was inflicted with hardships by god. His friends believed in a just and beneficial god who ruled the world and saw all; they refused to believe god would punish Job unjustly and therefore accused Job of wrongdoings that he wasn't revealing. Job's friends could not console him "because their investment in the vision of a moral world order drives them to accuse him for suffering" (4).

The security of a moral order lies in protecting it against contingency. To Job's friends, Job must have sinned or God would not be causing him to suffer. To believe that Job hadn't sinned and that he was being punished for no reason would be to annihilate the concept of judgement and destroy the intrinsic moral order.

The newspapers had to call Hicks treasonous because they must adhere to society's normative moral order to reach the widest market possible. Whether the people who actually write the stories believe them or not is irrelevant. To maintain their market position they must seem to adhere to an intrinsic moral order. The same goes for a democratically elected government: to maintain the people's belief in their power they must win legitimacy by appearing to adhere to the intrinsic moral order. This also applies to the commercial television networks. Their status as mass media means that their ultimate goal of profit can only be achieved by gaining

the largest possible market share. The only common denominator for a market that size is the nation and the mass media outlet therefore has to justify itself in relation to this imagined community. It has to win legitimacy.

This is particularly easy to pick out in the advertisements for news bulletins, the commercial television broadcasters' flagship programs, and station promos. Since 2001, they tend to imply that in a world that is falling apart, where security is a serious issue and terrorists or natural disaster may strike you at any moment, their news team will provide you with informed knowledge and comfort. As the Nine Network put it in one of their ads, they "will keep it together".

In 2006 the Australian networks appeared to be using this "fear" tactic less, but they still imply that they make sense of the world for the viewers. An analysis of these advertisements tells us what we already know about a commercial television corporation: that they are trying to sell a product by creating a particular vision of society. However, this is obvious and I think it would be obvious to most of the people who see the advertisements. Not many people would take the advertisements' messages completely at face value, that is, that the news anchor actually runs the world. This raises the question of why do these television corporations bother spending money on this advertising when its message is clearly ridiculous?

Nietzsche argued that the same question could be extended to any sort of historical writing. He argued that the form is metaphorical and could not be seen as containing any sort of truth (1977; 1990; White, 1987). For Nietzsche, the fact that historical consciousness is largely poetic (or mythic, as he put it) was not necessarily a drawback. He believed that humans need metaphor to alleviate the pain of life. Without the play of images, the suffering of knowledge of mortality would be too depressing to continue with. By imbuing metaphor with truth humans are able to deceive themselves into believing in absolutes and turn a blind eye to the finality of death.

For Nietzsche, it was very important to have some sort of awareness of this. He did not object to the deliberate forgetting as much as being ignorant of it - of not acknowledging it and being aware of its purpose. By realising the aesthetic nature of truth the human can revel in life affirming metaphor and the creation of images. The opposite, complete belief in the existence of universal truths, embodied in the twin poles of Western culture, Christianity and positivist science, denies life and enslaves thought.

If these ideas are applied specifically to news bulletin advertisements, we can see the possibility of some value in the metaphorical world it creates. The ludicrous image of the newsreader as the being who “keeps it together” is clearly a metaphor which very few people would imbue with any sort of truth. By the same token, most readers would also probably choose to ignore the ridiculousness of this part of the mythic imagery of the advertisements and place a great deal of truth in the other elements of their narratives - the emotional and corrective. For example, the Nine Network has traditionally tried to scare their audience by highlighting the instability of the world, our vulnerability to attack and the need for strong leadership. These are concepts people could draw out of any advertisement for Nine’s news bulletins and install in their minds as accurate representations of the reality of the world “out there”.

Commercial television networks try to sell their news bulletin by adopting a certain style of talking about the Australian nation and its people. They are giving the viewer a narrative framework for hanging their understanding of the world and its past, which revolves around information mediated through television. It is this idea of a narrative historical discourse which is the basis of an imagined community. With the realisation “that narrative is not merely a neutral discursive form that may or may not be used to represent real events” (White, 1987:ix) comes the realisation that the historical narratives which underpin imagined communities are contested. Commercial television corporations use these community narratives to compete for control over how the viewers imagine themselves. Either way, there is a sense of creation and not just of forgetting and ignorance. This relates strongly, again, to the idea of an imagined community; a community based not on mistaken history and

deception but on the aesthetic creation of metaphor and imagery.

## **Chapter 5**

# **The Space of Place: Theories of “Local” Community and Sydney**

In an effort to define the study of communications, James Carey (2002:44) wrote:

problems of communication are linked to problems of community... For the ordinary person, communication consists merely of a set of daily activities: having conversations, conveying instructions, being entertained, sustaining debate and discussion, acquiring information.

While this view was originally published in 1975, the definition of communication for the ordinary person seems to have changed little. However, this chapter will argue that the nature of the community around “the ordinary person” has changed significantly. Australian commercial television corporations are struggling to cope with that change and find new ways to market their product to all levels of the public.

Imagined communities can be created on many levels. This chapter focuses on the creation of a more “localised” version of an imagined community, using Sydney as an example.

Benedict Anderson originally formulated the “imagined community” as a description of the process of nation formation but in this chapter I use it to show how people negotiate and represent the “space” they live in as opposed to the “place”. “Space” is the imaginary landscape of nationalism and global institutions whereas “place” is the actual location in which people’s lives occur. Therefore, this chapter is primarily concerned with the nexus between the virtualised - or “space” - conception of community and the “place” conception of community, made up of physical landscapes, constructions or objects. This nexus is very important to marketing businesses of all kinds, particularly television corporations. This chapter discusses the nature of the “global city” and its community, the ramifications of local community transformations for television corporations, and the relative inadequacies of the traditional tactics of building audiences.

Since the information technology revolution of the mid-1970s, representations of “space” have fragmented and this has had an impact of “place”. Mediated communication has changed the nature of time and space, compressing the world into a virtual “global village”. At the same time, people have reacted to these changes by embracing the familiar, the local. Both “place” and “space” exist simultaneously within people’s lives and commercial television tries to represent them both as a unified whole; that is, to present the audience with a representation of an “imagined community” that exists somewhere between the purported “global village” and the various physical signifiers of a local place. For this reason, this chapter surveys some of the theories that examine the distinction between the local and the global. This is a subject that has been explored many times in media studies, however I will draw this distinction using particular first-hand examples from Sydney.<sup>52</sup>

Television corporations try to unify and consolidate their audience by finding common threads and themes that run through that particular imagined community. They take these images and ideas and recycle them, placing themselves in the middle of everything as benefactor, guide, entertainer and father figure. As John Fiske (2003:277) puts it:

A culture of power is a culture of representation. The intellectual, ethical, religious discourses of power may well tend towards high art (great representations), and their more economic, pragmatic ones towards industrialized art (mass representations), but both rely on their ability to produce representations of the world and, more importantly if less explicitly, of themselves in the world...

This is not a new technique. Television corporations have been doing this for decades. What has changed is the nature of the city (or the local region), the structure of the community and the technology that distributes the representation. According to the theorists of the information age, large cities like Sydney have become inextricably linked to the global economy; they are nodes in a global information network.<sup>53</sup> Smaller locales, if they are

<sup>52</sup> Examples of works that discuss the media’s role in globalisation and localisation include, Parks and Kumar (eds) (2003) *Planet TV: A global television reader*, New York University Press: New York and London, and Allen and Hill (eds) (2004) *The Television Studies Reader*, Routledge: New York and London.

<sup>53</sup> An important discussion of global cities is Sassen, S (1994) “A New Geography of Centers and Margins: Summary and Implications” in LeGates and Stout (eds) (1997) *The City Reader*, Routledge: New York and London. Others include Robertson, R. (1990) “Mapping the Global Condition: Globalization as the Central

anywhere near a city like Sydney, become sub-regions (or hinterlands) of that city. The structure of society has changed greatly as a result. The gaps between different socio-economic strata have become wider and harder to cross. As Sassen (1997:70) puts it, cities become defined by margins and centres. They become contested space:

the city concentrates diversity. Its spaces are inscribed with the dominant corporate culture but also with a multiplicity of other cultures and identities, notably through immigration. The slippage is evident: the dominant culture can encompass only part of the city. And while corporate power inscribes non-corporate cultures with "otherness," thereby devaluing them, they are present everywhere. (72)

The widening gaps between socio-economic strata make the television corporations' mission of market building and consolidation – putting people into demographics and audiences – much more difficult. The Australian commercial television corporations need to find new ways of unifying and centralising their audience, yet, because of the oligopolistic nature of the industry, they keep trying the same old techniques and tactics.

They use their newsreaders as their embodiment, their direct link to the viewers, apparently in an effort to give the audience a sense of identification with their corporate identity. One of the most common ways they do this is by using fear. They scare the audience by constantly constructing representations that threaten the viewers in their local places. In the past, theorists, Stanley Cohen (1973:9) most notably, have described this technique as the creation of "moral panic". Television corporations create moral panics to instil an image of the viewer's dwelling place as a target, in an attempt to make the audience insecure. News bulletins tend to give the impression that the local area is being overrun by crime and that the viewers need to watch the news to find out if they are safe. Again, this is something television corporations have done for years but now that the need for change has become apparent, they do not seem to be able to adjust. Towards the end of this chapter, I will examine the possible consequences of this type of moral panic on the contemporary audience, because it highlights the ways in which television corporations have failed to respond to the changes globalisation

has wrought at the “local” level.

## **The Global City**

The idea of the global city began to appear in sociology literature in the early 1980s (Friedmann and Wolff, 1982; Friedmann 1986). Although the concept has occasionally been criticised, it has come to be widely accepted. Since the mid-1990s, Australian media outlets have often described Sydney as a “global city”.<sup>54</sup> The meaning of this phrase can be interpreted in a number of different ways based not only on the many academic texts which have tried to delineate the idea of globalisation, but also on popular appropriation of the concept. People say that global cities are those which are plugged into the information economy, jacked into a purported information superhighway – but there are a variety of ways to interpret such buzz phrases. The problem in defining the “global city” is that once the word “globalisation” passed into the vernacular it took on a range of different usages, some of which have very little connection with a definable academic discourse. When people use this term to refer to Sydney it can often mean something completely different for each person. Indeed, marketing companies have adopted the term for its popular, buzz value and have shifted the actual words even further out of context. Commercial television corporations in particular appear to be in a position to gain from applying the “global city” tag to a city such as Sydney, the accuracy of this labelling depending on the definition of the term. By exaggerating the global importance of the “local” in news items, for example, television corporations may consolidate their audiences by making their programming central to the construction of a sense of community. Television news broadcasts position their imagery and advertising campaigns as being based on a local identification.

Academically, Sassen (1991) developed the category by describing New York, London and Tokyo as first rank global cities. In *The Rise of the Network Society* (2001) Manuel Castells

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<sup>54</sup> An interesting analysis of this appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on February 9 2005. Lisa Pryor’s article, “City’s growing pains risk global status”, comments on a report by the NSW Chamber of Commerce which claims “Sydney may be one of the best places in the world to live and run a business, but our ageing infrastructure and transport system has not kept pace with the growing population and changing work and life patterns”; <http://www.smh.com.au/news/National/Citys-growing-pains-risk-global-status/2005/02/08/1107625210557.html?from=moreStories>, accessed May 11 2006



details a number of definitions for the global city. His analysis uses empirical data from a number of large cities around the world. His theory describes their existence in space and time as structured around the flow of information rather than the permutations of industry. Sydney is not one of the cities he analyses. Its population is still too small to be an important node of the information economy network, but it does display some of the characteristics described by Castells. Therefore, while Sydney might not meet Castells' definitions of a nodal, "global city", it certainly is a conduit for the international flow of information.

Various other researchers have produced lists of cities which can be described as "sub-global". Sydney is usually part of these lists.<sup>55</sup> Also, it would seem obvious that while local regions and cities are usually considered geographical zones, both the international region and the "globe" (of globalisation) are socio-political economic constructions. That is to say, Australia may or may not be part of Asia, regardless of where the various countries involved are physically manifested, and the "globe" only includes those countries developed enough to take part in the global information economy. Even classification of the "local" region can no longer simply be determined by geographical means.

### **The Space of Flows**

Castells commences his discussion of the global city by saying that the perceptions of the social meaning of space and time held by most people are "based upon socio-technical structures superseded by current historical experience" (2000:407). In other words, people still think of contemporary social space as being a set of experiences and definitions which have actually become a thing of the past. The world has moved on to a new way of being and a major portion of the people on the planet are struggling to keep pace and come to terms with the changes. We can see this in the way people think of the places where they live. In Australia, for example, there has traditionally been a supposed dichotomy between the "city" and the "country". These words, and their apparent mutual contradiction, have represented a particular discourse about the way Australians live their lives.

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<sup>55</sup> For examples, please see: Daly and Stimson, 1992; Friedmann, 1986; Knox and Taylor, 1995; O'Connor and Stimson, 1995.

There is a particularly Australian narrative style at work in representations of these local imagined communities. This discourse also encompasses the mythology surrounding country (or outback) life in our society. As discussed in the previous chapter, prominence is often given to narratives of the “bush”, which tell Australians how important non-city areas are to a supposed “Australian way of life”, creating the idea that the mainstay of any valuable national characteristic is out in the countryside. Many Australian cultural archetypes and images are still based on a rural existence.

Yet, at the same time, demonstrating Castells’ point, people take their understanding of cities for granted. It seems obvious that a city is first and foremost a geographical zone. Most people in Sydney would consider it common sense that the city has a centralised structure: Sydney radiates outwards from the Central Business District, located next to the harbour, where the commercial activity and the night-life takes place and different socio-economic groups of people live in various areas. Part of the common sense of this understanding of Sydney is the idea that all these areas are part of the one city. There are different zones within this one city and they work together to support each other. The industrial areas are in the south and the west, where the more working class type of people live. The professional side of industry is located in centralised office space in the CBD, through which all the public transport is routed. The people who work there usually try to live closer to the city or to public transport. Services extend to every part of Sydney and are available to everyone who lives there. These factors unify Sydney as a city unto itself. It exists independently as a whole unit, and as a space which unites its inhabitants in their occupancy of it.

Castells argues that this mode of thinking about cities has been superseded. Cities like Sydney now fall into the category of “dual city” (Castells, 1989:172). As Chris Nash (1999:3) puts it:

this divide has now become a commonplace of both the academic and Australian government planning literature... Global Sydney has different characteristics from non-global Sydney, and indeed from the rest of Australia... In absolute, relative and trend terms, global Sydney has greater wealth, higher

incomes, lower unemployment, higher real estate prices, better telecommunications infrastructure, better public and private transport facilities, greater participation in 'producer services' industries and in employment related to international trade in goods and services.

Previously it would seem obvious that people who dwell within one city relate more directly to anyone else who lives within the same city, rather than with someone who lives elsewhere. A supposed local spirit or vernacular would unite these people. However, now it is apparent that a person who lives in one part of Sydney is far more likely to have cultural ideas, beliefs, practices, and even language, in common with someone who lives in the corresponding socio-economic zone of a foreign city, rather than with someone who lives in another part of Sydney.

These changes seem to imply consequent mutations in the nature of community, but not in the ways that seem most logical. As Castells puts it:

it appears to be obvious that advanced telecommunications would make locations of offices ubiquitous, thus enabling corporate headquarters to quit expensive, congested, and unpleasant central business districts for custom-made sites in beautiful spots around the world... Or, to use another example on a different social domain, home-based electronic communication was supposed to induce the decline of dense urban forms, and to diminish spatially localized social interaction. (2000:408)

However, these changes have not taken place. Dense urban forms are growing rather than declining (Castells, 2000:408; United Nations Population Fund, 2007). Advanced telecommunications may have the capacity to allow people to work from home and live wherever they want, but people are choosing to work in an office in the city and live close by. As Castells (408) puts it:

while working at home part-time seems to be emerging as a mode of professional activity in the future, it develops out of the rise of the network enterprise and of the flexible work process... not as the direct consequence of available technology.

That is, the urge to work from home will come from the continued casualisation of the workforce rather than the capabilities of the telecommunications technology.

This is because the global, informational economy is based upon a range of advanced services which can all be reduced to knowledge generation and information flow. The location of these services can be characterised both by dispersal and concentration. They have increased their share of the employment market and GDP of most countries in the world. Indeed, “they are pervasive, and they are located throughout the geography of the planet, excepting the ‘black-holes’ of marginality” (Castells, 2000:410). Yet, at the same time, there is a concentration of the upper echelons of these services in a few cities in a few countries. These are centres, or hubs, which dominate information flow and the origination of knowledge. For example, New York, Tokyo and London dominate international finance. Other cities serve as nodes for other forms of trade. Yet, the

global city phenomenon cannot be reduced to a few urban cores at the top of the hierarchy. It is a process that connects advanced services, producer centers, and markets in a global network, with different intensity and at a different scale depending upon the relative importance of the activities located in each area vis-à-vis the global network. (411)

Thus, we have a network structure of hubs, nodes and subregions. Each is connected to the others and these connections constantly change; it is flexible and cities constantly compete with each other to move up the hierarchy of importance. This structure is not just international but also replicates itself on a local level. As Cappelin (cited in Castells, 2000:411) puts it:

the relative importance of the city-region relationships seem to decrease with respect to the importance of the relationships which interlink various cities of different regions and countries... New activities concentrate in particular poles and that implies an increase of disparities between the urban poles and their respective hinterlands.

Concentration and decentralisation of these advanced services occurs instantaneously. Therefore, the location of these high-level centres does not actually matter. The most important thing is the versatility of the network:

The global city is not a place, but a process. A process by which centers of production and consumption of advanced services, and their ancillary local societies, are connected in a global network, while simultaneously downplaying the linkages with their hinterlands, on the basis of information flows.  
(Castells, 2000:417)

These self-replicating networks are built of flows of information, people and capital. This “space of flows” is the dominant spatial logic of Australian society because it is inextricably linked to the global information economy. Yet, as mentioned previously, it is something the majority of people struggle to conceptualise. People think of their locale as “place” rather than “space”. Castells (2000:446) argues that the “space of flows” is dominant because it is the space of the managerial elites:

The fundamental form of domination in our society is based on the organisational capacity of the dominant elite that goes hand in hand with its capacity to disorganise those groups in society which, while constituting a numerical majority, see their interests partially if ever represented only within the framework of the dominant interests.

The changes which Castells’ theories outline could result in a dominant elite which enforces its representations of the global upon the local. This could happen politically as well as spatially. Under the Howard government (and, indeed the Labor government which preceded it) workers’ rights to organise (spatially or symbolically) were being removed at the same time as cross-media ownership laws were being loosened. At a figurative “mass” level, government policy is tightening the reigns on individual freedom. On another level, in accordance with the spatial logic of the space of flows, dominant interests are being served by the loosening of regulation.

Inhabitants of a city have things other than literacy and media in common – landmarks, streets, public places, cultural institutions. However, when a city is represented as a *global* city, as a place in relation to a larger space, as a node in the global information network, then the community and its context has to be imagined. The ideas of globalisation and global networks are themselves metaphors, abstract constructions that help the human mind establish a foothold on comprehending the complexity of a global system of information flow that is beyond any individual's control or agency.

In other words, the people who live in the city share the concrete experience of their surroundings but have to imagine their community in relation to globalisation, which is itself a confusing concept, no matter how apparent and inescapable. It is also, in terms of positioning the television audience, limited. The audience in Western, developed countries is positioned by the media as the centre of the universe. It is encouraged to feel that things the media reports to them are the “important” things, importance only being conferred by relevance to them. So, while we perceive events in the rest of the world impinging on us because of globalisation, we rarely get to see our position in relation to them.

Again, imagination implies creativity. The global city constantly re-imagines and re-represents itself. This presents us with a situation in which the inhabitants of Sydney still identify strongly with the place where they live but are also increasingly aware of (or unable to ignore) events that are brought to them via global information flows. It is out of these almost contradictory, and almost complementary, senses of community identity, that the Australian commercial television networks have to construct an audience; an audience which competes for the highest ratings in Australia's biggest city. They have to present the Sydney audience with a station identity, usually through their news and current affairs programming, which can encompass both the local and the global.

## **Fragmentation and Crime Reporting**

The divide between regions of the same city seems to be growing. The chances of someone from the western suburbs of Sydney wanting to travel to the eastern suburbs appear to be decreasing. According to Castells (2000:446):

elites are cosmopolitan, people are local. The space of power and wealth is projected throughout the world... the elites form their own society, and constitute symbolically secluded communities, retrenched behind the very material barrier of real-estate pricing.

In this sense, the space of flows segregates different sections of society and causes fragmentation. Real-estate prices in Sydney do this rather effectively on their own, but they are helped by the hierarchical structure of the space of flows. Lower management mimics the elites, even though they are shut out by them. This level of the hierarchy segregates itself from those below it, and so on. The gap between the rich and the poor grows wider and all the social groupings become more insular.

Despite this, television corporations need to try and target the largest audience possible. To do that, they need to unite these segregated social groups with the idea that they all belong to the same city. Even though the main focus of their marketing may be the lowest socio-economic grouping – those who can afford television but can't afford to get the social capital needed to develop interests further than the television – they still need to at least create the illusion that everyone in the society is watching and paying attention. The fragmentation of the information economy makes this difficult. In response to this difficulty, television corporations seem to be relying on their traditional technique for uniting an audience: the use of fear.

Erich Auerbach, whilst discussing the influence of Joyce and Proust's use of reflected consciousness and time strata, makes an interesting comparison between a novel's conception of time and a film's:

a concentration of space and time such as can be achieved by the film (for example the representation, within a few seconds and by means of a few pictures, of the situation of a widely dispersed group of people, of a great city, an army, a war, an entire country) can never be within the reach of the spoken or written word. (Auerbach, 1991:546)

The interesting part for us is the phrase “a great city”. In a few sequences the television screen can create a very intense impression of a place or a space. This gives it a great deal of influence in the creative process involved in the individual’s imaginings of community and identity. The television news uses this to its advantage in trying to force the audience to identify with it. Quite often they do this by attempting to create a “need” to watch the television. Television corporations try to convince the viewers they need to watch so that they will be aware of any imminent dangers. They try to boost ratings by trying to scare the audience into thinking that the world is a frightening place and that their place will suffer directly as a result. With reference to the news media, John Hartley (1992) argues that,

The news is organized around strategies of inclusion and exclusion from “our” community; strategies which not only distinguish our nation and its leaders or representatives from others, but which separate out various values, types of action or classes of persons who, although they may be in the home community, are treated as “foreign” to it.

Much of this “inclusion and exclusion” is determined by moral panic and the creation of fear. In their attempt to unite their audience, television has for a long time tried to create the impression that society is becoming worse, that things are getting out of hand. In actual fact, “Australia was a less violent society at the end of the twentieth century than it was at the end of the nineteenth or eighteenth centuries” (Graycar, 2001). The murder rate is lower now than it was in 1901 and much lower than it was during the nineteenth century. Other forms of crime have also decreased.



However, Hallin (2004:15) argues that crime reporting has become even more sensational and alarmist in recent years as a result of the commercialisation of news and current affairs:

in many cases journalists will present themselves as spokespersons for the common citizen, expressing opinions on behalf of the latter... Often the news takes a populist tone... With commercialisation, the news agenda tends to shift away from politics and towards lighter topics, including... sensational topics like accidents and crime.

It seems likely that television's tactics have caught up with it and that parts of its audience have become aware of its techniques, particularly in light of the fact that society has not fallen apart; all its dire warnings about crime and social decay have proved wrong and are proved wrong everyday. Certain demographic segments of the audience seem to be becoming more media-aware (Turner, 2005:82-4). Usually because of various television satires, but also through sheer repetition, younger viewers often give the impression that they are much more alert to the techniques and tactics broadcasters use to influence people. The creation of fear may still draw audiences from older demographics, but it could be a significant reason as to why television audiences are declining.

The way we represent the past, the style of discourse we use, inevitably becomes the way we look at the present. As Auerbach put it, "a change in our manner of viewing history will of necessity soon be transferred to our manner of viewing current conditions" (1991:443).

Traditional narratives of historical storytelling have changed along with the nature of the community. Tales of past news events in "local" places have become good material for dramatic representation: *Blue Murder* (1995), *Chopper* (2000) and *Underbelly* (2008) are all very popular re-tellings of news accounts of actual events. Often it is the dramatic representation that is remembered as history, rather than any of the few forms of primary evidence. Two of the mainstays of the national community are present: historical consciousness and historical error.

As Nietzsche points out, humans are not a fixed form; they change constantly with the times

because “there are no eternal facts, nor are there any absolute truths” (1994:15). As subjugated histories gain influence, the power of mainstream history becomes fragmented and leaves a space for changes in the way we represent “place” in the context of “the space of flows”. It is up to news corporations to develop a strategy that would be better able to cope with these changes.

## Chapter 6

### Whenever it Snows: Australia and the Asian Region

*Cause you always complained about roaches and rats*

*Cicadas and cane-toads and flies*

*Snakes in the dunny and dogs on the bed*

*Weren't the only things that you despised*

*And you say that we're so isolated*

*But we've got Indonesian radio*

*And it's a fantasy world I've created*

*Where you promised to be there whenever it snows<sup>1</sup>*

The song lyrics quoted above make an important point about the way Australia relates to the rest of the world: while Australia has often seen itself as remote and isolated, Asia is not that far away. Just as snow in northern Queensland, where the narrative of the song is set, is a fantasy, so is the idea that Australia is simply an isolated outpost of Western Europe. Yet many Australians and Asians, when imagining their various levels of community, manage to create a world where the West and the East can exist in the same place simultaneously while maintaining all their traditional differences. This chapter is an attempt to unravel the nuances that exist in the Australian community's relationship with Asia, and the ways in which commercial television attempts to turn this nuance into market gain.

At various times since imagined communities (in Anderson's terms) started to form in the years leading up to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, they have operated on larger scales than just the nation. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, countries invaded other countries, colonised or conquered, and effectively expanded the zone in which their imagined communities existed. The Cold War in particular was very influential in expanding the scope of imagined communities by creating tactical regions (Liu, 2003,xiii). While the nation is still a prominent force in any part of the globe, the post-World War Two superpower conflict divided a variety

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<sup>1</sup> The song, "Whenever it Snows", is performed by "Tex, Don and Charlie" and written by Tex Perkins and Charlie Owens.

of nations into two alignments, democratic or communist. Once the Cold War ended, and the information economy began to fasten its grip on the planet (Castells, 2000:2), the tactical importance of these regions stopped being their *raison d'être*. They have now come to see themselves, and relate to themselves and each other, as trading blocs (Castells, 2000:111).

For as long as commercial television has existed in Australia, news and current affairs has had to deal with, and interpret, regional issues. This has been particularly confused for Australia because our position in the world has never been clear.<sup>2</sup> Are we an outpost of Europe and the West, which just happens to exist in Asia's part of the world? Are we part of Oceania? Or, are we part of Asia, whether our culture likes it or not? Each of these options has varying political issues attached to it and so they have been contested repeatedly for more than the last sixty years. Australia's commercial television has had to find ways of representing (imagining) our imagined community's context within these larger imagined communities. They have needed to find ways of negotiating this minefield so that they could please their audiences whilst not going too far; Asia is not that far away and what gets said about it in the Australian media has often found its way to Asian ears and offended enough people to affect Australia's position within the region.<sup>3</sup>

This complex relationship has become even more complicated since the Cold War ended. Not only does an Australian commercial television corporation need to keep up the balancing act it has maintained in the past, it is also now likely to be owned by a parent corporation with serious commercial interests in Asia. The Nine Network provides an interesting example of recently complicated ownership. For many years, Kerry Packer was a distinctive character at the helm of PBL, the Nine Network's parent company. Now Nine is jointly owned by Consolidated Media Holdings (which was previously part of PBL) and the private equity

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<sup>2</sup> There are several works that examine Australia's relationship with Asia which bear out this point about both Asian and Australian confusion regarding the place of Australia in the region; not least, Horne, D. (1964) *The Lucky Country*; Goldsworthy, D. (ed) (2001) *Facing North: A Century of Australian Engagement with Asia*, Melbourne University Press; FitzGerald, S. (1997) *Is Australia an Asian Country?*; Broinowski, A. (2003) *About Face: Asian Accounts of Australia*.

<sup>3</sup> In her book, *About Face* (2003), Broinowski describes many examples of when this has happened, such as, the deterioration of Australia's reputation as a result of the White Australia Policy (111-112), the variety of effects caused by coverage of Pauline Hanson (168-177) and the reportage of Paul Keating's comments about Dr Mahatir (35,160).

managers CVC Asia Pacific. What was once Kerry Packer's media empire now places more emphasis on gaming, through another subsidiary company, Crown.<sup>4</sup> While the day-to-day running of the Nine Network may not always be effected by this new corporate structure, broad company strategy would have to answer to a new range of demands. As television delivers representations of the world in which the audience/community exists, it seems reasonable to assume that any portrayals of the local economic region and its cultures could influence various corporate outcomes. For this reason, it is possible that the ways in which Australian commercial television deals with the narratives and traditions of its audience, constructed out of the Australian imagined community, have needed to adapt to accommodate the region.

There were a number of prominent news events in 2005 which demonstrated the complexity of the processes of televisual representation and its adaptation. These news events featured members of the Australian nation being forced to come to terms with the geographical region in which they live. Each story involved Australians culturally stepping out of the West and into Asia, while geographically being not very far from home. I will adopt Bacon and Nash's (2004) approach to analysing Australian commercial television's strategies in reporting these events. They draw on Bourdieu's field theory to describe the power relations behind a news event. They

conceive of the production of news as a sub-field of cultural power and therefore contestation, in which the terrain of conflict includes both the material production process, particularly with respect the allocation of staff and resources in time and space, and also the symbolic repertoire... The object of the contest is to determine the final form of the media representations. The conduct of the contest might involve actors and resources drawn from the four fields of social power: political, economic, coercive and symbolic. (22)

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<sup>4</sup> For a break down of the corporate structure, please see: [http://www.pblmedia.com.au/About\\_Us.htm](http://www.pblmedia.com.au/About_Us.htm). For an analysis of the current state of PBL's Macau plans (as of February 24 2006), please go to [http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/common/story\\_page/0,5744,18252973%255E643,00.html](http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,5744,18252973%255E643,00.html), accessed February 28 2006. An older and more detailed analysis exists at <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/06/13/1087065029818.html>, accessed February 28 2006.

This view allows for a relational view of the news-making process between journalist and source without entirely discounting larger patterns of social force. This flexibility is crucial in analysing the contemporary television industry as it copes with immediate feedback and competition from the internet. Both the complexity of this field and its importance to the future of Australian commercial television corporations is demonstrated by this chapter. In the context of the arguments about globalisation in the preceding and succeeding chapters, it is clear that the complexity demonstrated by this chapter will increase as information flows increase in speed.

This chapter will take the South East Asian tsunami as the first of these media events. The Australian public seemed very willing to contribute money to the relief effort while occasionally expressing frustrations about the cultures and governments involved with distribution of the funds. I will argue that both this generosity and frustration were exacerbated by Australian commercial television's rush to exploit the tragedy and claim news-providing supremacy. This chapter will also consider the reportage of events surrounding Schapelle Corby as she faced the death penalty for possession of a drug which a large proportion of the Australian public usually considers almost harmless.<sup>5</sup> This refrain continues with stories about the Bali Nine, Michelle Leslie and Van Nguyen appearing to test the Australian media's patience. At the same time, the Australian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister at the time, engaged in diplomatic tough talk, in what seemed like an attempt to hide their desperation to attend the East Asia summit.

Once again, the historical flexibility that is so necessary to the existence of a nation can be seen in Australia's relationship with Asia. There is evidence of both a strong historical consciousness in representations of this relationship, as well as continual historical error. As Broinowski (2003, 1-14) has pointed out, the relationship between Asia and Australia has gone through many ups and downs, wavering from positive to negative and back over a number of years. In this chapter, I will examine the strategies behind the use of isolation as a

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<sup>5</sup> The Australian Government's Department of Health and Ageing provides statistics of estimated Australian drug use at [http://www.drugs.health.gov.au/campaign/media\\_stats.htm](http://www.drugs.health.gov.au/campaign/media_stats.htm), accessed on March 5 2006. In 2004, 33.6 per cent of the population aged 14 years and over had used cannabis in their lifetime.

framing narrative for these representations whilst attempting to untangle some of the commercial interests that play into this type of representation. To accomplish these tasks I will discuss current theories of regional economics, the differences between public and private sector perceptions of regionalisation, differing social conceptions of law and crime and, finally, commercial television's shift towards portraying Southeast Asia as the second front in the War on Terror.

## Isolation

One of the most consistent elements in considerations of Australia as a nation is isolation. This theme runs through many of the textbook histories of the country and appears repeatedly in films, novels and art.<sup>1</sup> Wide-open spaces, deserts and the massive, empty "outback" are repeatedly used to characterise Australia. The characters in these narratives are lost in the overwhelming space that surrounds them. It seems to be part of the mythical Australian tradition that has endured from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century of genuine isolation.

This feeling of isolation perhaps sprang from the early days of Australia being a convict settlement. Criminals were shipped to Australia so that they would be completely and utterly removed. As Ghassan Hage puts it,

because of its distance from the "mother country" and because of its geographic location, Australia's early settlers, or at least those who had the power to shape the identity and culture of the settlements, constructed Australia as an isolated White British colony in the heart of a non-European (read also uncivilised) Asia-Pacific region. (2003:52)

There were a few "settlers" who saw the potential of a new colony and chose to come to Australia for commercial gain before the 1850s. However, either because the majority of people felt isolated, or because loneliness reads better than optimism in a novel or a poem, the narratives of isolation were the ones that took hold.

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<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps most eloquently expressed in Geoffrey Blainey's *The Tyranny of Distance* (1982).

Narratives of isolation have been reinforced over the years both in Australia and in the region. Isolation appears in quite a few Asian narratives of Australia. When ex-Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohammad, proposed his East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC) in the early 1990s, he came up with a number of reasons why Australia could not join. Amongst the accusations were old grievances about Australia displaying a colonialist-style condescension towards Asian countries and also criticism of Australia's poor human rights records in its treatment of aborigines. However, he also claimed that geographically Australia wasn't an East Asian country, that it formed a continent on its own (Broinowski, 2003:35-37).

Another reading of Mahatir's views shows that he was trying to keep out those he saw as Western (Australia and the US) to bolster Asian pride and make his people feel more confident in their commercial dealings, a process many commentators have called Asianisation (FitzGerald, 1997:39). In doing this he was giving voice to a common Asian view that Australia can be associated with the European colonial powers against whom the Asian nations had to rebel to gain independence. Thus, Australia's isolation myths are reinforced not only by those who feel strongly connected to Europe, but also sometimes by the nearest region we could join. Mahathir, and Asian politicians like him, try to represent Australia as being a small, backward country and a regional leftover from colonial days. In that sense, Australians are a long way from home. As Broinowski puts it,

By calling Australia "small"... critics in the region... can condescend to Australia in the way they were long condescended to by their Western colonisers. Indonesian military leaders have often dubbed Australia the "appendix" of the regional body: small, ignored until it hurts, unnecessary, and easily removable. Excise Australia: who cares? By labelling Australia "a continent on its own", an "outsider", and "far away", Asian leaders are able, on the one hand, to reinforce their own putative regional solidarity and, on the other, to ensure a media response from Australians, who can be relied upon to agonise publicly about being "the odd man out". (2003:36)



Geographically isolated from Europe, Australia is still culturally isolated from Asia.

Information that circulates in one country can affect the politics of a group of others. It can be assumed that Mahatir's politics in this regard may have been influenced by a combination of colonial history and the information he received from Australian media. For Asian leaders like him it is easy to emphasise the differences and then call for people he says are like him to unite. This, in turn, has the effect of making many Western people uncomfortable. The idea of Asianisation could almost be characterised by

the tension it creates, both between Asians, partly because it is probably the beginning of the real deciding game in how Asian states are going to come together politically and who will dominate, and also between Asia and the West, because... the West does not like Asianisation or fears it or denies it or simply finds it extremely difficult to comprehend. (FitzGerald, 1997:40)

### **Schapelle's Nightmare**

In *The Tyranny of Distance*, Geoffrey Blainey, conservative ex-Prime Minister John Howard's historian of choice, describes the development of ideas about Australia's relationship to its geographical region:

In geography England and her Antipodes were far apart, but the Antipodes developed the kind of community one would expect to find within a few miles of Lands End. Nearly all their people spoke English, conformed to British political and social customs, obeyed or disobeyed most of the laws which Britons obeyed, and were subjects of the British monarch... Australia and New Zealand depended so much on Britain, were in most senses imitations of Britain, that their geographical position near the end of Asia's tail and near the islands of Oceania seemed irrelevant. (1982:314)

The Nine Network's special presentation, *Schapelle's Nightmare: The Untold Story*, is the perfect illustration of the negotiation between old rhetorical ideas of Asia's irrelevance to Australia and the more pragmatic attitudes that have become necessary as the world changes

around this sensitive relationship, a relationship which Broinowski describes as “a marriage of convenience, or a shotgun relationship. In either, the downs are always likely to outnumber the ups” (2003:2). In the context of this chapter, and this thesis, my analysis of this program is an illustration of the complex field in which the Australian reportage of an Asian news event takes place, particularly when an Australian is involved. The complexity of this contested field is a vital consideration in analysing Australian commercial television corporations’ strategies for coping with the advances of digital media.

Schapelle Corby is an Australian who is serving a 20 year sentence for importing a 4kg bag of cannabis into Bali, Indonesia. She was sentenced on May 17, 2005 and is currently serving her sentence in Kerobokan Prison, Indonesia. She was arrested in 2004 but the media only really began to focus its attention on her when her trial started. Commercial television broadcasters in particular, appeared to concentrate on elements of Corby that would make her attractive to their perceived audience (Lambert, 2007). That she was a beauty school student was repeated many times despite the fact that she dropped out of the TAFE course years before, and images of her showing emotion and crying dominated the coverage of her trial.<sup>1</sup> Public sympathy for Corby found ways of expressing itself outside the mainstream media. As her trial reached its climax it was often reported in the media that Australians were asking for the return of money they had pledged to help Indonesian Tsunami victims.<sup>2</sup> “Free Schapelle” graffiti appeared in some Queensland towns and a number of rival pro-Corby websites appeared.<sup>3</sup>

The producers of the Nine Network’s special presentation did everything they could to play upon this public sympathy and make the viewer empathise with Corby even further. In almost every element of this program there was an implicit assumption that Corby is not guilty and

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<sup>1</sup> Newspaper examples of the “beauty student” tag can be found at, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/World/Corby-confessed-over-cannabis-prosecutors/2005/01/25/1106415600890.html>, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/World/Downer-takes-up-Corbys-case/2005/03/04/1109700663520.html> and <http://bulletin.ninemsn.com.au/bulletin/site/articleIDs/7B2CB5563DBB1425CA2570D200042FB1>. All sites accessed on February 24 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of calls to boycott Indonesia and demand the return of charitable donations can be found at, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200505/s1379723.htm> and <http://smh.com.au/news/National/Diplomats-put-on-backlash-alert/2005/06/02/1117568321759.html>, both accessed February 24 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Examples include <http://www.schapelle.com/>, <http://www.schapellecorby.com/>, <http://www.schapellecorby.net/> and <http://www.releaseschapelle.com/>, all accessed February 24 2006.

is, instead, prey surrounded by voracious aliens. The title of the program itself positions Corby as the innocent victim; the use of her first name, Schapelle, rather than her whole name, gives the viewer permission to peer into her dreamscape and identify with the “nightmare” she is living. It also sounds like a typical late 20<sup>th</sup> century Australian name. It seems like it would be hard to assume she came from anywhere other than suburban Australia.

The structure and format of the show was similar to current affairs programs. There was an anchorman, Mike Munro, who occupied a chair in front of a set that was painted in black and red slashes. He interviewed various people with tangential associations to the case. The eerie music fit perfectly with the nightmarish set and the black and white slow motion recreations of airport events lent a sense of realism to the story being told. A dramatic voiceover was used to add a sense of gravitas but only served to make the whole show more reminiscent of a movie preview.

The producers seem to have used every element they could think of to achieve a narrative positioning of the isolated Australian victim, painted in contrast to the Indonesian victimisers, with the television audience cast as an outraged sympathiser and even saviour. The studio audience were given handsets so that their opinion on whether Corby was guilty or innocent could be monitored throughout the show and represented graphically as a worm; the audience at home was invited to participate in a phone poll – as though either of those things could make any difference to Corby’s situation. It allowed the audience to participate without feeling impotent, which contributes to the ease of viewing necessary for most commercial television content. If the audience felt outraged and powerless then they may have switched channels or actually done something about the problem they considered themselves faced with. Statistically it worked, the show winning the ratings for its timeslot easily.<sup>4</sup>

One of the driving elements in the narrative construct that frames this program involved making the Indonesians appear to be evil and callous, or at least incompetent and corrupt.

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<sup>4</sup> “Schapelle’s Nightmare: The Untold Story” won its slot with 1,397,000 viewers and was 17<sup>th</sup> overall for the week – <http://www.pbl.com.au/media>, accessed December 12 2005.

Overly simplistic representations, such as those contained within television news (and special presentations), paint law as moral truth rather than contingent regulation. In the eyes of television, any differing systems of law must be unjust. This was how Nine attempted to represent the Indonesian legal system in the Corby special. There were constant references to “vital evidence that never made it to trial”, as well as reductive assumptions made about what they referred to as the “harsh Indonesian judicial system” and the “filthy” Balinese prison conditions which Corby has to endure. These representations are the descendants of the traditional Australian political tough-talk about Asia; in this discourse Asian values are irrelevant to Australia and Asian culture is backward.

Indonesia, in particular has fared poorly in the Australian media for many years. FitzGerald argues that Australia focussed for too long entirely on building ties with China at the expense of relations with the rest of Asia. As he says:

bridges to Indonesia, which screamed for attention, were in the early 1980s barely on anyone’s agenda, and the whole relationship was then allowed to slide into a state of neglect which was extraordinary given that Indonesia is our closest neighbour, and a very significant country. (1997:33)

Australian representations of Indonesia have predominantly been superficial. For example, portrayal of the authoritarian rule of President Soeharto was predominantly negative, occasionally for ideological reasons and occasionally for the corruption that the dictator and his family were involved in (Broinowski, 2003:120). Soeharto himself was caricatured more than represented. For many Australians then, Indonesia is a completely foreign place, utterly incomprehensible. This may be a reason why Australia saw Indonesia as a military threat for many years. For the Indonesians this just proved that Australia still feared the “yellow peril” of the White Australia policy (120).

Ghassan Hage considers fear, or paranoia, a major part of contemporary Australian nationalism. While he thinks this “nationalism obsessed with border politics... where ‘worrying’ becomes the dominant mode of expressing one’s attachment to the nation”

(2003:47), has spread around the world because of uncertainty about new global economic systems, he also argues that in the Australian case in particular, it is built into nationalism. One of the foundations of the Federation of Australia in 1901 was bipartisan approval of the White Australia Policy. As Hage puts it:

Around the time of Federation, when Australia was moving towards becoming an independent nation, many Australians worried that by weakening the country's links with Britain their fears of being "swamped" by Asians would become a reality... It meant that Australia was peculiarly – and characteristically, as history has shown – timid for a nation about to gain its independence. This timidity gave birth to the foundational White Australia Policy. (2003:52)

Historically, Australia has found it very hard to avoid suspicion of Asia and Asia has responded with a healthy cynicism about Australia. Of course, these things take place on a broader level than the average person's lives. In fact, the paranoid nationalism Australia exhibits today is based on a contradiction that the White Australia policy could never have coped with. While the media and politicians display the traditional Australian distaste for Asia, the workings of international capital and information flows ensure that Australians welcome Asia into their cultures in increasing amounts on a daily basis. Politicians have separated rhetoric and action completely for the sake of economic stability and their own careers.

Economic stability was also something Soeharto provided for Indonesia. As far back as the 1960s, Soeharto was pushing regional economic integration along the lines of the European model (Dosch, 2003:35). Indeed, this may have provided some of the impetus for Australian criticism of his regime. As he put it, in a speech to the Indonesian House of Representatives in 1966,

If one day an integrated South-East Asia can be established, this part of the world may stand strongly in facing outside influences and intervention from whatever quarter it may come, be it of an economic

nature, or a physical-military intervention. (35)

Soeharto, like Mahathir, thought Australia was an outside influence which should be associated with the European colonisers they had struggled against for years.

For these politicians, who believed in the strength of Asian culture, it seems likely that it was not just the physical memory of the European colonisers which made them wary of Australia. There are other subtly lingering cultural effects which would also cause them pain. The Indonesian national language is an interesting example. As Benedict Anderson (2005:87) points out, their European colonisers, The Netherlands, were not concerned with education. The teaching of the Dutch language in Indonesian schools “only began there at the start of the twentieth century – after three hundred years of Dutch meddling in the archipelago”. Too busy exploiting Indonesia, they hadn’t bothered with schools. As The Netherlands became more democratic, and Dutch replaced Latin as the language of the administration, nationalist pressure was brought to bear on the colonies. By the 1920s there was a small Dutch speaking elite who began to agitate for a new Indonesian nation, speaking the language of the metropole, looked down upon because of their birthplace or race and irritated by the limits placed upon them. Then the Japanese swept all before them and put an end to administrative Dutch in Indonesia. However, for centuries a pidgin form of Malay had been used for inter-island trade and, once this vernacular’s press became popular, this pidgin Malay became the “Indonesian language” (87).

As with any nationalist around the world, an Indonesian’s passion for their nation rests on flawed purity. As Anderson points out in *Imagined Communities* (2000), a nation forms around a vernacular press, so the issue of an imagined community’s language is a very important one. Therefore, it is important not to underestimate the extent to which a post-colonial nationalist might resent the coloniser. This resentment is then picked up by the sensitive Australian media and representations of Indonesia continue in a negative spiral. This in turn affects the representations of the region involved in media stories about Corby and others, as media corporations seek to create representations of this complex field of

interaction between event and reportage.

## **War on Terror**

### **The collapse of Soeharto's regime in 1998**

created a radically changed political environment in the archipelago. The strongman's resignation left a weak democracy in which there was intense political competition between the new president and a Parliament which had a newfound and intense sense of empowerment. Strong central government also broke down as the provinces clamoured to redress the historical legacy of overcentralisation... (Abuza, 2005:46)

This divisiveness and its detrimental effect on the Indonesian economy left the door open for fundamentalists to form various anti-Western groups (Abuza, 2005:47-48). This in turn led to the terrorist bombings in Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia. In the eyes of the Australian media, this has made Indonesia in particular, the second front in the War on Terror. The predominant themes and narratives that recur in Australian representations of Indonesia are now more than just suspicion of their government and the vague wariness of those who are "not like us". They are now narratives of fear; worse still, a fragmented fear because the "enemy" is decentralised and not represented by a nation. Instead, it is easier to represent this "enemy" as a characteristic of a region.

Historically, Australia's view of Asia has reflected its identification with European colonialists. Australians (and Asians) do not see Australia as being post-colonial in the same sense as the countries of Southeast Asia are post-colonial. Broinowski (2003:11) points out that Asians find it very hard to forget the "European colonialists' arrogant dismissal of their cultures as second-rate, decadent, and amoral". The White Australia policy shows us that Australians subscribed to the European colonialists' views for the majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century at least, and there is a great deal of evidence that many of them still do. Donald Horne describes Australian xenophobia and racism as:

a kind of herpes of the human spirit... Looked at in one way, Australia seems to have a predisposition to this form of skin rash. For the thirty years or so from the mid-1960s onwards, the condition seemed inactive: it was still there but there were no public eruptions. This peaceful period came from careful nursing, but it ended in the late 1990s. (2003:5)

Pauline Hanson's successes from 1996 through to the end of the millennium showed that there is still a large segment of the Australian electorate who do not like Asians. Hage argues that Hanson's rise was a symptom of a global tendency that arose in the mid-1990s to "worry" about one's nation. He believes that this "paranoid nationalism... has now become the dominant cultural form of expressing one's belonging to the nation" (2003:22).

Geoffrey Blainey's anti-Asian immigration statements in 1984, and John Howard's in 1988, opened the way for this kind of paranoia and discrimination to become a legitimate part of the public sphere once again.<sup>5</sup> The media seemed united against Hanson in the 1990s and castigated Howard for not even attempting to criticise her. Journalists and reporters were outraged and very worried about what Asia's reaction to Hanson would be. However, not much happened. Hanson declined as a political force mostly as a result of her own mistakes, and Asia has had other things on its mind. There were changes in the governments of several key countries, Hong Kong was de-colonised, the Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister was arrested and put in gaol, there was an economic crisis that affected most of the countries in the region and China confronted Taiwan. Compared to these things "a resurgence of racism in Australia was almost a 'non-issue'" (Broinowski, 2003:169).

Perhaps this lack of reaction allayed Australian journalists' fears enough that racism suddenly was not such bad content anymore. Certainly, Prime Minister Howard and his Treasurer rival, Peter Costello, seemed to be competing with each other to make increasingly xenophobic

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<sup>5</sup> An interesting discussion of Blainey's statement can be found in Nguyen To Tran's statistical analysis, "Immigration and crime: Do Asian immigrants bring more crime to Australia?" at [http://apseg.anu.edu.au/degrees/pogo/discussion\\_papers/PDP05-16.pdf](http://apseg.anu.edu.au/degrees/pogo/discussion_papers/PDP05-16.pdf), while Howard is quoted at <http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/stories/s720443.htm>. Both accessed February 25 2006.



public statements.<sup>6</sup> In February 2006, Australian newspapers also reported a statement made by Liberal Party backbencher, Danna Vale. She said that if abortion is allowed to continue, Australia will become a Muslim nation, the clear implication being that she sees this as a negative outcome. The immigration minister, Amanda Vanstone, then reassured Vale that everything was going to be fine because Australia does not really take all that many Muslim immigrants.<sup>7</sup> None of these public statements by the Australian government seemed to get under the media's skin as much as Hanson's statements ten years previously. It could be argued that racism and xenophobia have become a "non-issue" in the Australian public sphere once again.<sup>8</sup>

### The Complex Field

Yet even in *Schapelle's Nightmare: the Untold Nightmare*, Nine's melodramatic, alchemical reconfiguration of real events into televisual gold, the traditional rhetoric of Asian irrelevance occasionally showed hints of the complicated reality. To give themselves some form of credibility, the producers of *Schapelle's Nightmare: The Untold Story* had to call upon an expert in Indonesian law. Mike Munro, the program's anchorman, introduced him with the words:

We are now joined by Tim Lindsey, Professor of Asian Law at Melbourne University. And unlike most, he hasn't condemned the Indonesian legal system. In fact, he believes it's been a fair and proper trial.

Even before Professor Lindsey is introduced, Mike Munro is passing judgement on his opinions; the words "unlike most" make any statement about the fairness of Indonesian law

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<sup>6</sup> On February 23, 24 and 25 their rivalry for leadership spilled onto the front pages of several newspapers. Costello made statements about Australia's core character being Anglo-Celtic and condemned "confused, mushy, misguided multiculturalism". He said that Muslims should change their beliefs when they came to "our" nation. Howard, obviously sensing that Costello was trying to capture his mainstay voters, then said that Costello was putting it mildly. An example of this series of statements can be found at, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/live-here-and-be-australian-howard-declares/2006/02/24/1140670269194.html>, accessed February 25 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Amanda Vanstone's response to Vale appears at, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/muslim-nation-not-possible-vanstone/2006/02/14/1139679564587.html>, accessed February 25 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Few journalists seemed to pick up on the incongruity between Vanstone's statement that Australia does not take many Muslim immigrants and Costello and Howard's clear implication that they are fighting a battle against the Islamic hordes who seek to change our national way of life.

sound like it is unique, unusual and open to debate.

The expert goes on to relate his reasons for not condemning the Indonesian legal system. He gives the viewer a clear historical perspective of their legal system which, Professor Lindsey appears to be saying, is obviously rational and “not inherently unjust” because it is descended from European judicial systems. Whether what he said was edited to cast this spin or he wasn’t given enough time to develop upon what he was saying, the meaning implied for the Nine viewer was that everything is ok because the system is postcolonial - it wasn’t developed independently in Asia. The message for the audience was that while they might not be using the British system, at least it was European.

Munro then tried to corner the academic into saying that, while the corrupt Indonesian legal system does indeed presume innocence until guilt is proven, the chief judge in the case was clearly mixing the two up and giving Australians everywhere cause for concern. The academic, to his credit, ignored the main thrust of Munro’s question and pointed out that the system itself has safeguards against one judge’s potential biases swaying the outcome of a trial. He admitted that while Indonesian courts can often be corrupt, that usually only happened if there was a lot of money involved, and in Corby’s case there was not.

This encounter is significant. While both views represented are Eurocentric, one (the academic’s) is prepared to treat Asia as relevant, rational and civilised. Mike Munro, and indeed every other element of the program, still conveyed the more superficial and conservative Australian conceptions of Asia, but an alternate view was allowed through.

The complexity of the relationship between Australia and Asia was borne out in more news events in 2005. Inevitably, most of this coverage was focused on “isolated” Australians who had gotten themselves into trouble. Michelle Leslie caused a particularly interesting reaction in the media. Initially there was concern that yet another attractive young Australian woman had been arrested on drugs charges in Bali. Some of the sympathy that the Australian media

poured out for Schapelle Corby seemed to have carried over to Leslie, though not all of it.<sup>9</sup> She did not seem quite so isolated. She quite clearly has a lot of Indonesian friends and looks slightly Asian herself. This sympathy dissipated when she seemed to get off lightly and the media began to insinuate that her conversion to Islam was some sort of stunt. Despite the fact that her family made statements saying she had been a Muslim for quite some time before she was arrested, the media kept on attacking her, mostly on the basis of the clothes she was wearing.

This may not have been the case if she had received the death penalty.<sup>10</sup> Van Nguyen did receive the death penalty and the Australian media's treatment of his case points once more to the complex, fluctuating nature of the relationship between Australia and Asia. Nguyen was arrested at Changi Airport in Singapore on his way to Melbourne from Cambodia. He was carrying 396 grams of heroin. There was an enormous outpouring of sympathy for Nguyen from the Australian media, even though, being a Vietnamese immigrant, he did not fit the media's mould for a normal Australian – although it should be noted that the media coverage did not really commence until October, 2005; he was sentenced to death in October, 2004 and arrested in 2003.<sup>11</sup> There were calls for Prime Minister Howard to do more, to try and get the government of Singapore to commute the sentence. In the end nothing could be done for Nguyen and Australians, particularly on talkback radio and in letters to the editor, began to call Singaporeans barbaric.

The Bali Nine were still considered good media content in 2006, returning to Australian

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<sup>9</sup> For examples of Michelle Leslie newspaper stories, please refer to, <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=3853>, a Muslim woman's discussion of Leslie's clothing; <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/leslie-conviction-likely/2005/10/20/1129775884464.html>, the *Sydney Morning Herald's* trial reportage, accompanied by a picture of Leslie in a burqa; <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/lose-veil-buy-stilettos/2005/11/20/1132421549249.html>, a story about what Leslie bought when she went shopping on her first day of freedom. These stories are actually quite reminiscent of the media's treatment of not only Schapelle Corby but also Joanne Lees and Lindy Chamberlain. When there is a woman involved her clothes and appearance come first; the details of what the story is actually about are a minor concern. All websites accessed on February 25 2006.

<sup>10</sup> The maximum penalty Leslie could have received was 15 years in prison.

<sup>11</sup> For example of the media coverage please refer to, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/indepth/featureitems/s1520853.htm>, the ABC's Life of Van Nguyen timeline; <http://news.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=75297>, a Nine Network story on Nguyen's mother being denied one last hug, although another Nine story, <http://www.news.com.au/story/0,10117,17423680-26618,00.html>, claims that polls show Australians were divided evenly over whether Nguyen should die or not.

television screens as their trials concluded and they were sentenced. Arrested in 2005, there was never the outpouring of sympathy for them which other cases received. These nine Australians were arrested in Bali with quantities of heroin strapped to their bodies and perhaps what they did seemed so stupid that few people felt compassion for them. The Nine Network certainly did not.<sup>12</sup> A week after the arrests they paid the parents of Michael Czugaj, one of the Bali Nine, to go visit their son in the Balinese gaol with Nine Network cameras accompanying them. Czugaj's parents then made their son confess to his crimes on national television. The Nine Network also went to extraordinary lengths to maintain their exclusive access and ensure that Czugaj and the other Bali Nine members did not talk to any other networks, even smuggling him out of prison because of an alleged toothache so that they could interview him at a dentist's surgery. Once again they broadcast his self-incriminating words.

Just as they had with Schapelle Corby, the Nine Network placed an enormous emphasis on this story and did their utmost to tell the Australian television audience that they were producing the best coverage. Nine's tactic here seems to have been to show the audience that they can witness Czugaj's plight close up through Nine. Nine describes the people involved in broad archetypes – Corby as the beauty student, Leslie the Muslim model, the Bali Nine as gullible mules – and if the public seem to be sympathetic, they create the illusion that Nine is part of the victim's struggle. The aim is to first make the victim an embodiment of the "normal" Australian, then make the audience believe that Nine is synonymous with the "normal" Australian.

However, Nine discontinued this approach with the Bali Nine, presumably because most of the polls taken showed that the public did not really care what happened to them. When their sentencing made them newsworthy once again the Nine Network didn't bother with exclusives. The two instigators of the drug smuggling plan were given death sentences and the mules were given life sentences.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The ABC program *Mediawatch* broke this story, <http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/s1357607.htm>, accessed February 25 2006.

<sup>13</sup> The fact that the two who received death sentences were not white Australians, while the others were, could

In an article entitled “Trial by media in Bali”, published in *The Age* on February 23, 2006, journalist Paul Kalina asks, “is the media less sympathetic because the public is, or is the public reflecting the sentiment propagated by the media?”<sup>14</sup> He goes on to discuss the statistics that showed popular opinion was against the Bali Nine and seems naively surprised by the conclusions to be drawn about news selection. He quotes senior ABC radio reporter Jon Faine as saying,

This gives me no pleasure at all, but part of why Van Nguyen was such a big story is an Australian had not been executed in an overseas prison for many years. That’s no longer the case. Each time someone is executed in a foreign prison the media cycle has just moved one more notch from the novelty factor that made Van Nguyen such a big yarn.

I say that against my own interests. It gives me no pleasure, frankly, to confess to why a story becomes a story . . . The more times someone is sentenced to death and then executed in a foreign prison, the less column centimetres and air time will be commanded.

Once again, this demonstrates the complex web of relationships between media, particularly mainstream commercial media, information source and audience.

Continuing with the Nine Network as an illustration of this point, it was the only commercial television station to obtain an interview with her and, while Seven also broadcast her sentencing live, Nine was the only station which produced a lavish special presentation; an hour long program with special sets, recreations, guests, music and a studio audience.<sup>15</sup> When the Bali Nine event happened so soon after Corby, it was only logical for them to try the same things again, except this time they were even quicker off the mark. Again, they spent money so that they could say they were the market leaders for news and current affairs. Executives at

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also be a reflection on the fluctuating relations between Australia and Asia.

<sup>14</sup> It appears at <http://theage.com.au/news/tv--radio/trial-by-media-in-bali/2006/02/22/1140284077873.html>, accessed February 26 2006.

<sup>15</sup> The Nine Network’s Corby exclusivity is emphasised repeatedly during *Schappelle’s Nightmare*

Nine tried to guess what the public wanted to see and they were wrong. The Bali Nine stories soon disappeared. Contributing to the complexity of this relationship is the public's trained anticipation for what to expect from commercial television and its representations of Australia as a nation, the Nine Network's (and any mainstream media outlet's) unending attempts to work out what the public actually want, as well as whatever preconceived notions that any of the network executives and program producers might have in their minds. Each one of them could have had slightly varying opinions about the relationship between Asia and Australia that they simply assume is the generic Australian opinion, parts of which may find ways of appearing in the program - that relationship being just one facet of the range of issues covered in one simple special presentation about Schapelle Corby.

To make this relationship between television corporations and their consumers comprehensible, the commercial television corporation constructs an imagined community called "the audience". This imagined community is imbued with attributes borrowed from other imagined communities: the city, the nation, the region and the globe. The consumers of television (usually a very high proportion of the population of a nation), and potential advertising clients, are then convinced to imagine themselves as being "the audience". They are encouraged to believe that "the audience" is synonymous with "the nation".

### **News Narratives**

Reports of these news events still worked to a tried and tested formula for audience construction: one of *us* stranded amongst all of *them*, any representation of *them* being set up purely to show *us* how different *we* are from *them*. Television often uses representations of "other" cultures in an attempt to define "our" culture. As O'Regan (1993:96) points out, "Australian national identity is... refashioned in a mix of independent and interdependent arrangements in the Asia-Pacific region".

2005's fluctuations in the mutual identification process between Asia and Australia took place in the shadow of the other, larger, worldwide news narratives that have been slowly telling

themselves over the last few years. The “War on Terror” gave these stories of Australians in Asia a new facet that hadn’t appeared in representations of the region before. As mentioned earlier, the fear of terrorism now played a strong role in Australian narratives of Asia.

Globalisation has made previously solid national borders permeable. While we still need passports to go from one country to another, the likelihood of us making that trip has increased. As Xiangming Chen (2005:3) puts it, “state borders, which on maps define political boundaries, no longer draw the line in people’s lives they once did”. They also no longer pose as much difficulty to international crime and terrorism. While economies around the world have become electronically linked,

criminal activities and Mafia-like organisations around the world have also become global and informational, providing the means for stimulation of mental hyperactivity and forbidden desire, along with all forms of illicit trade demanded by our societies, from sophisticated weaponry to human flesh.  
(Castells, 2000:2)

It is interesting to note that the majority of media stories about Australians in Asia in 2005 related somehow to illegal drugs. Castells (1998:166) argues that the global criminal economy,

the networking of powerful criminal organisations, and their associates, in shared activities throughout the planet, is a new phenomenon that profoundly affects international and national economies, politics, security, and, ultimately, societies at large.

It is many times the size of other large industries (some estimates put the annual profits of the global drug trade at US\$500 billion, larger than the global trade in oil) and that, because stock exchanges are now so closely interlinked, a great proportion of the global economy now depends on the money laundering of organised crime (Castells, 1998:169). This fact would be very hard to deal with for commercial television, which operates on the principal of giving the public what they think the public wants. This means they have to show the audience the

narratives and themes, which have, over the years, become the key to the hearts of many members of the Australian commercial television audience. These include: crime does not pay, working hard and owning your own home is admirable, Australia is a Christian nation, Australia is a white nation, and illegal drugs are bad. These narratives become confused when a “vulnerable” young Australian woman like Schapelle Corby gets arrested for a drug crime in Asia.

To negotiate this confusion the commercial television networks had to fine tune the style with which they used the traditional narratives. Normally drug busts are reported in a very triumphant manner, the capture of criminals and their illicit substances is the story of a great success. In Corby’s case, they maintained that drugs were extremely bad but represented her as an innocent who had either been framed or duped. A comparison between Corby’s representation and Michelle Leslie’s shows that the media will treat women in these situations as either innocent or corrupt with nothing in between. At one end of the scale they are the virgin, and at the other, the whore. Added to these basic narratives of women and gender roles, nationalism creates further dramatic tension in these media stories. They become Australian feminine archetypes trapped and helpless in a foreign land, with all the fears and images the word “foreign” conjures. Rarely was Schapelle Corby mentioned in the media without being labelled “Australian”. Her nation becomes an issue because it adds to the drama; it ensures that the audience will understand and perhaps empathise with the media’s isolation narratives.

## **Fear**

Deepening the drama still further is the intertwining of crime and terrorism. Tamara Makarenko (2005:170) calls this intertwining “the crime-terror continuum”. While criminal and terrorist organisations have had relationships since the early 1970s,

it was not until after 1991 – as a result of the end of the Cold War, an intensified period of globalization and developments in global illicit operations – that the relationship between these two entities grew in



importance. (2005:171)

Chen analyses these developments as having a lot to do with the nature of borders at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. They have become more porous, particularly as the result of disruption:

While former Iraqi army officers guide anti-American Afghan veterans into Iraq across the rugged desert, militants disguised as Iranian merchants or religious pilgrims carry illicit drugs, weapons, and explosives into Iraq to fuel the guerrilla campaign. (Chen, 2005:3)

Just as legitimate corporations have eliminated borders and gone global, organised crime and terrorism has defeated space and time. Castells (1998:174-179) lists money laundering, trafficking in body parts, trafficking in women and children, smuggling of illegal immigrants, trafficking of nuclear material and weapons trafficking as the main activities of transnational organised crime, apart from drugs. Criminal organisations, who built their capital on the drug trade, are making increasing amounts of cash selling their wares to the highest bidder, often terrorist groups.

A problem of such insoluble scale is impossible for commercial television news to represent; it defies all the traditional narratives that they usually employ to tell stories.<sup>1</sup> In this problem the nation counts for nothing and crime inevitably wins. They have to focus on specifics and recycle motifs: "Asia is not like us", "Schapelle is innocent and Leslie is a liar". They do this so the audience can cope with the news and not become overwhelmed and turn off the television. They represent the larger scale problems by presenting us with vague fears like terror or immigrant invasion, in a similar way to the presentation of local crime (as discussed in the previous chapter). This vague fear is vital to Hage's notion of paranoid nationalism: "'Worrying' clearly denotes the prominence of a dimension of fear about the fate of the nation that is only minimally present in the affective practice of 'caring'" (2003:22).

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<sup>1</sup> For more detailed discussions of mainstream news narratives, please see, Schudson, M. (2003) *The Sociology of News*, pp. 177–93; Bird, S. E. and Dardenne, R. W. (1997) "Myth, Chronicle and Story: Exploring the Narrative Qualities of News," in Dan Berkowitz (ed.), *Social Meanings of News*, pp. 333–50. Nick Lacey's *Narrative and Genre* (2000) contains an overview of theories of narrative and media. Denis McQuail's *Reader in Mass Communication Theory* (2002) also has useful material on news and narrative.

Since the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, the commercial media has presented us with the vague threat of terror. It has been characterised by the term “War on Terror”. Few actual enemies are named and those that are seem more like safe scapegoats. This vague fear has been introduced to Australian representations of Southeast Asia, particularly since the 2002 Bali bombings. There was terrorism in Southeast Asia for many years before 2001 but there is a much greater awareness of it now and even a global focus on Southeast Asia as a second front in the war on terror (Abuza, 2005:38).

### **Paradise Lost**

This threat has cast a shadow on Australian representations of Southeast Asia. The narratives now seem to contain themes of paradise lost. What had once been the middle-class Australian’s happy holiday ground - where they could shop for bargains, get cheap drugs, party with other middle-class Australians and generally exploit the locals - was now quite dangerous. In *The Yellow Lady* (1996), Broinowski traces the idea of Asia as the exotic orient, the place where Westerners could go to experience an “alternate” way of living, which was constructed in opposition to 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Australians adopted this idea of “the far east” as the opposite of their own place and therefore a good place to go when you felt the need for a looser moral structure. Broinowski calls this “Australia’s Far East Fallacy” (1996:26). She also ties this into the idea of Asia as “Adventure Zone” for the young white male, which is then connected to Asia as “Illicit Space”, an “adventure zone for adults in which civilised norms of Western male behaviour could be abandoned and taboos breached” (1996:50). These ideas still linger in Australia’s representations of Asia, although, as mentioned above, they have undergone mutations.

The Bali bombings could be responsible for some more lasting changes in Australia’s representation of Asia. The media picked up on the paradise lost theme and expanded upon it. Many of their representations of Asia now concern terrorist threats and organised crimes. Stories about getting arrested and put in an Asian prison have also had an effect on these

representations, becoming a more central part of the average Australian's daily narrative scene, but they have appeared before and may fade from the audience's mind only to appear again at some stage in the future<sup>1</sup>.

Another view is that these changes in the narrative representation of Asia in Australia may have something to do with a type of economic optimism. The current shifting dynamic between nation and region could be linked to changing visions of national development. According to Geoffrey Blainey (2001:2), in the last thirty years Australia has given up on its dreams of a large, sustainable and profitable population with wealth for all. Australians now know that this dream is environmentally impossible. Early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century fantasies of becoming a second United States, with a large population spread out across the vast inland, have given way to popular suspicions that even 20 million is unsustainable. Meanwhile, Asia has taken up the dream; they have the populations and the natural resources to develop their economies and, in time, compete with the United States. As their economies prosper, their populations grow and the standard of living (for some) improves.

If Blainey is right, this leaves many Australians in a bind. The networking of global society (Castells, 2000:29) has increased their knowledge about other cultures and how they are linked to them, yet they desperately need to hold on to some mythical sense of isolation; some postcolonial geographical myth whereby Australia can be simultaneously located both at the far end of the Far East and right in the middle of the Western World. A good example of this type of attitude can be seen in John Howard and Alexander Downer's tough talk about signing the ASEAN non-aggression treaty.<sup>2</sup> Many times they both tried to give the impression that Australia either didn't need to sign or that, if they did sign, it was only as a bargaining chip to get into the inaugural East Asia summit. They were clearly trying to carefully negotiate the rough water between the traditional Australian ideas of Asian irrelevance and Australian regional dominance (the local US sheriff), and the obvious knowledge that Asian

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<sup>1</sup> They were given a concrete, recyclable narrative form in, for instance, the mini-series *Bangkok Hilton* (1989).

<sup>2</sup> Levett, C. (2005) "Downer signs contentious ASEAN treaty" in [www.theage.com.au](http://www.theage.com.au), Dec 11 2005  
<http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/downer-signs-contentious-asean-treaty/2005/12/10/1134086848152.html> accessed Dec 12 2005

economies are growing and that Australia needs to try and hang on to the tiger's tail. They needed to both sign the treaty, acknowledging a notional regional equality, and show their constituency that they were separate and above Asia.

## **Insularity**

At the start of 2005, the Asian tsunami dominated the news. After the bare facts were reported in the first week or so, much of the remaining coverage over the next few months seemed to be devoted to how much Australians were willing to help. The same thing occurs in *Schapelle's Nightmare: the Untold Story*. The main focus of the entire special presentation was the verdict of the audience. Early on, Mike Munro interviewed Liz Hayes, the *60 Minutes* journalist who interviewed Corby in prison. While footage of Corby was shown and Hayes gave some vague impressions of the prisoner's state of mind, the majority of what Hayes and Munro discussed was about what they thought the "average Australian" was thinking. Add this to the phone-in poll on whether Corby was innocent, and the studio audience's worm, and it becomes clear that Nine wanted the story to be about their audience rather than Schapelle Corby.

Australian commercial television corporations present their audiences with a very particular picture of the world. In it Australians are placed at the centre; everything that happens in the world happens only in relation to Australia and what Australians think. Australia and Australians are good, just and fair and other countries are often not. In this picture, Australia is still the lucky country; still closely related to Europe, still very grateful to the US for World War Two and still very white. This in turn influences the audience, both by its content and its mode of delivery.

As Moran (cited in Moran and Keane, 2004:4-5) points out:

National television systems inevitably produce cultural effects. Subjecting the population within a given territory to the same type of service helps to produce notions of equality and commonality. Moreover,

instituting expectation of rhythms of service further ties national populations to the same flow of content.

No matter what your background or individual thoughts, a regular television news bulletin gives you not only the impression that you are part of an imagined community, but also the impression that it is telling you what that imagined community thinks.

This relationship between the television, the audience and the narratives and myths surrounding their global region is very complex. As television corporations are forced to change their business plans, and their representations of Australian community, they may need to find new ways of representing this complexity. At the moment, their representations, as analysed in this chapter, can still be characterised by the main themes associated with the dominant political logic of community: the nation and nationalism. That is, the sacred nation with a homogenous ethnicity and a recycled historical narrative of continuity in direct contrast to historical fact: a white Australia, isolated, independent and insulated, an entity unto itself.

However, as communications systems force disparate cultures into increased levels of contact with each other, it is possible that Australian commercial television broadcasters will not only have to adapt their representations to stay in touch with community sentiment, but also be forced to change their business plans to compete in the new media environment.

## **Chapter 7**

### **The Space of Flows: Theories of Globalisation**

The theories analysed in the previous four chapters of this thesis tend to point to a conflict between the new form of globalised, network society – brought on by advances in information technology and the continued conglomeration of companies into increasingly large corporations – and the simultaneous surge in the expression of local, collective identity.

While it has been asserted that the world is shrinking into a global village and the nation-state becoming obsolete, people are regrouping around nationalism, religious fundamentalism and the cult of tradition (Castells, 1997:6). This conflict is bought on by the internal contradictions that now appear at every level of society. There is a contradiction in the nation: it is based on a historical misapprehension yet its representation inspires great faith and loyalty; there is a contradiction at a city/regional level between the representation of the local and the experience of place; there is a contradiction at an international-regional level between the representation and politics of race and the actual hybridisation of cultures; and there is a contradiction on a global level between the imagining of community and the increasing urge to search for individual identity.

This chapter examines these theories and ideas in relation to a “global” imagined community. It is important, at this stage, to recognise that the word “global”, in the context of globalisation, does not connote “the planet”. Describing something as globalised does not necessarily refer to the entire Earth. It merely refers to those countries which are developed enough to have telecommunications systems. Therefore, the word “global”, when used in a television representation, refers to a segment of the planet, a socio-economic stratum which has access to international flows of information. In reality, the information flows of the developed world have a massive negative impact on the non-developed countries, but that is not to say that these countries are privy to the information or have a say in its creation. Some theorists see these processes in terms of power relationships, arguing that more powerful countries can control the representation of the less powerful (McNair, 2006:106). Other theorists see this view as a flawed version of cultural imperialism (106-107), as many cultures

have legitimately embraced Western cultural production.

However, these theoretical arguments often focus entirely on a transmission view of media (Carey, 2002:40), where content and reception are the only considerations in the analysis of a power relationship. An analysis of the political economy of these relations would show that, even taking Al-Jazeera and CCTV into account, the power of media production is one-sided and information flows one way. While it may be true that many non-Western cultures enjoy this flow of media content and certainly do not resent it, it is also true that the one-sided nature of this relationship fosters a potential cultural ignorance in the Western media audience which can have serious political consequences.

If an Australian television news bulletin has “global” news that includes a story about a non-developed country, then it is likely that it will have come from one of the developed world’s news agencies.<sup>1</sup> The Australian television viewer would rarely hear the voice of those outside the global flow of information through their television. Yet, the television news bulletin represents the global as though it included the whole world. It shows the viewer an image of a worldwide information transferral system with the newsreader of that bulletin at the controls. In effect, it tries to instil in the viewer an imaginary world, where the viewer is central to events which the news bulletin interprets for them. It creates the idea that watching the television news will educate the viewer about world events and that this education is something worth possessing. Indeed, they try to create the impression that this knowledge is something that the viewer needs, that it could somehow affect the decisions the viewer may make during the course of a day and have an impact on the two poles of contemporary life: identity and community.

Along with these televisual representations, the viewer can now turn to the internet to explore global news. This is one of the contradictions that is forcing television corporations to adapt their business model: the viewer is now potentially much more knowledgeable than ever before. The community has easy access to news alternatives. Even if they are not widely

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Yahya R. Kamalipour’s online resource for global news lists news agencies at <http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmm/news.html>

taken up, it indicates the possibility of a shift in the power relationships between the television corporation and the community.

## **Identity and Community**

In a previous chapter I described the way the processes of globalisation and localisation engendered by these global information flows cause fragmentation in the television audience. This fragmentation has a tremendous impact on the perceptions and representations of identity and community. For Castells (1997:6),

identity is people's source of meaning and experience... the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or related set of cultural attributes, that is/are given priority over other sources of meaning. For a given individual, or for a collective actor, there may be a plurality of identities. Yet, such a plurality is a source of stress and contradiction in both self-representation and social action.

This is because the idea of identity, or the search for it, has become fashionable and people to try to find it in as many places as possible, leading to a confusion between the process of identity formation and the performance of roles. Castells (8) argues that roles are determined by the rules and structures of institutions and organisations within society. For instance, one could be a worker, husband, father, musician, golf player, churchgoer, smoker, gambler all at the same time. These are the functions of a social actor, while identity is its organisation of meaning. Castells (8) argues that the source of this meaning construction is the complex interplay of socio-cultural forces such as history, geography, power apparatuses, collective memory and personal fantasy. He proposes three forms of identity building: legitimising identity, resistance identity and project identity.

Legitimising identities are generated by the dominant institutions of society and are based on the logic of perpetuating these institutions' dominance. A good example of this kind of identity could be a patriot. The patriot organises the meaning of the roles they play in society



based on their pride in the nation. They believe there is such a thing as a national way of life and national attributes. For example, Australians who think it is part of a national way of life to love sport may negotiate the relative levels of importance of the various roles they play. A husband, father, worker, smoker, drinker, rugby fan may regard watching a televised rugby match between Australia and New Zealand as being more important than reading a bedtime story to the kids. This negotiation is justified on the basis of their perception of an Australian way of life, which is, in turn, justified by the dominant institutions of Australian nationalism. It is the people with legitimising identities who are targeted by commercial television. Regarded as the mainstream and the majority, their norms are easy to perceive and recycle.

Legitimising identities can often take on an odd form in Australia. It sometimes seems as though the dominant institutions in Australia deliberately attempt to convert people into resistance identities. For example, popular media figures often try to adopt the position of rebelling against “the elites”. It could be argued that talkback radio hosts and conservative politicians seem to do this the most often, despite their socio-economic status. Their position and power in society could be interpreted as conferring upon them elite status, yet they attempt to convince people that they are resistant to an imagined elite. It is almost as though the dominant position in Australia is resistance and, even if there is nothing to resist, the appearance of resistance must be given.

In contrast, actual resistance identities originate in those devalued by the dominant institutions of society. These are usually the people who would be labelled “un-Australian”. They negotiate the organisation of their roles in reaction to the norms of the dominant institutions. If it is the norm to love to watch sport they will place sport lower down on their list of priorities. It is this type of identity that is most likely to form the basis of a collective resistance to the dominant institutions. It can often develop essentialised boundaries of exclusion based on history, geography or biology. Ethnic nationalism is an example of this, as is religious fundamentalism. Castells (1997:9) describes this as “the exclusion of the excluders by the excluded”.

Project identities occur when a social actor constructs a new identity in an attempt to redefine their position within society and, in the process, redefines society as a whole. That is, the new identity projects itself onto society. Castells (1997:8) uses the rise of the feminist movement as an example and points to the ways it restructured all of society through its influence in the work place and family life. History is retold so that previously subordinated narratives rise to the surface and spread their influence. Evangelical Christians could represent a project identity in progress. Their goal is to convert as many of the unbelievers as they can before judgement day so that they can safely get into heaven. Their view of historical context is completely different to the mainstream's while not necessarily resisting it. Their project will be complete when their goals are achieved and the world is transformed as a result.

These three main forms of identity can shift and change places. Each one can transform into the others. The main point is that this method of theorising identities demonstrates that identity cannot be considered outside of its historical context. The period which concerns my thesis is the information age. Representations of individual and community identity confront us every day through the television, while images informing people how they should live are everywhere. The knowledge of this abundance has a persuasive influence over the process of identity formation. Giddens (cited in Castells, 1997:10) argues that in late modernity, identity is not a distinctive trait of the individual but rather a self-reflexive project and that

one of the distinctive features of modernity is an increasing interconnection between the two extremes of extensionality and intentionality: globalising influences on the one hand and personal dispositions on the other... The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options... Reflexively organised life-planning... becomes a central feature of the structuring of self identity.

For Giddens, the world of late modernity (which some other theorists call postmodernity) is one in which the individual is overrun by a bewildering array of choices and has to construct

an identity from a global diversity of options because the traditional mainstays of identity have failed. People have lost faith in the mainstream churches and careers have become casualised. Also, culture is no longer bound by geography and nation, so the diverse peoples of the world seem to be becoming more similar. People are no longer told by large institutions, or God, how to behave so they have to decide for themselves, as though from outside, reading their own story.

Commercial television plays a considerable part in this process. It shows the audience that the globe is at their fingertips. Satellite technology allows the viewer to see instantaneously things that occur on the other side of the planet. The television is still the main medium for providing people with the raw material for their cherry-picked identities. As the architecture critic Charles Jencks (1987:1) puts it:

the Post-Modern Age is a time of incessant choosing. It's an era when no orthodoxy can be adopted without self-consciousness and irony, because all traditions seem to have some validity. This is partly a consequence of what is called the information explosion, the advent of organized knowledge, world communication and cybernetics.

Other theorists have also commented on these trends in the process of identity formation, describing it as fragmentation. That is, the self has become fragmented because there is no longer a trusted central institution or system around which identities can form, or be seen as inherent and essential. Identity has become contingent and the societies upon which it depends have opened themselves up to the vagaries of global capitalism. Jameson (1993:71) argues that in postmodernity the “shift in the dynamics of culture pathology can be characterized as one in which the alienation of the subject is displaced by the fragmentation of the subject.” Global capitalism is no longer easily comprehensible in terms of the subject having any sort of relationship with the product of its labour. Casualisation of the labour force ensures this. Workers who bounce from one position to another, and often from one career to another, no longer care enough about the product of their labours to become alienated.

According to Bauman (1997), identity in this period “tries to reconcile itself to a life under conditions of permanent and incurable uncertainty”.

Castells (1997:11) agrees with the main lines of this argument but draws some distinctions when it comes to the individual’s freedom to choose autonomously:

the network society is based on the systemic disjunction between the local and the global for most individuals and social groups. And, I will add, by the separation in different time-space frames between power and experience... reflexive life-planning becomes impossible, except for the elite inhabiting the timeless space of flows of global networks and their ancillary locales... the search for meaning takes place then in the reconstruction of defensive identities around communal principles.

This is an interesting idea upon which to base an analysis of television programming. Since the mid-1990s there has been a perceived demand for lifestyles programming. Many of the most consistently popular Australian television programs during this period have had something to do with tending a garden, cooking a meal, choosing a holiday destination, decorating a house or fixing a pet. Shows such as *Getaway*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *The Great Outdoors* and *Backyard Blitz* still achieve consistently high ratings, although they started to slip out of the very highest brackets of ratings around late 2004. Each of these shows has a website with ancillary information available in the form of “factsheets” which people download and then apply to their own lives.

The popularity of these programs demonstrates Castells’ ideas about the stratification of culture in the information age. The elites who occupy the timeless space-of-flows, have access to the cultural capital needed to construct their identities while their tastes are replicated by those further down the hierarchy. The logic of the network society ensures that, in contrast to the emancipatory suggestions of Giddens, only the elites have access to the global network and any information that comes to those lower down the hierarchy is filtered through the elites first. Again, these levels of the network society are not limited by geography. The hierarchy works on a global scale so that people in different countries may

have more in common with each other than with someone who lives on the other side of the same city.

Competing with lifestyles programming is the ongoing global television trend towards large-scale, expensive, dramatic productions such as, *Lost*; *24*; *Prison Break*; *Carnivalé*; *Desperate Housewives*; *The Sopranos* and *Six Feet Under*. These are television programs made with cinematic production values. They transcend the traditional conventions of television, presenting the audience with a new style of entertainment. In 2005 and 2006, the Australian commercial television networks (The Seven Network in particular) developed a new programming strategy which combined a focus on these imported dramas supported by locally made variety programming. They combined expensive imports – and they will always be imports, Australians never being willing to spend enough to make such dramas – with cheap, easy to make programs that somehow allude to local traditions. For example, the top ten television programs in ratings week 14 of 2006 (April 2 – 8) were:

1. Dancing with the Stars
2. Desperate Housewives
3. Where Are They Now?
4. House
5. Seven News – Sunday
6. Thank God You're Here
7. Lost
8. Today Tonight
9. National Nine News – Sunday
10. 60 Minutes<sup>1</sup>

## Community Contradiction

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<sup>1</sup> Figures are from "Crunching the numbers" in *The Australian*, April 13 2006.

Castells does not deny the non-elites of the information age all freedom in choosing identity. He takes refuge in the idea of new defensive communities built around resistance identities. He says that people have the freedom to choose to resist the dominant institutions of society and can reconstruct themselves into communes based on perceptions of primary identities. Yet Castells' (1997:12) theory may not be as applicable to Sydney and Australia as it has been in other parts of the world. Describing the Catalan nationalists as formations of "communal resistance" seems reasonable but it is hard to imagine any Australian resistance identity ever having the same sense of purpose. While this type of social group in Australia might represent their "community" as a social actor with a resistance identity, they seem to obey the same network logic as the rest of society. That is, elites filter the global information flow to those lower on the hierarchy.

I would argue that any so-called "community" which paints itself as being resistant to the norm is inevitably simply part of the legitimising process like everybody else.<sup>2</sup> In 1992 John Mollenkopf cited several "neo-Marxist analysts" – Piven, Cloward, Katznelson *and* Castells – in "How to Study Urban Political Power":

While these analysts differ over how the state co-opts movements that challenge urban governments, they share the idea that this process is a central feature of urban politics in advanced capitalist societies. (1997:262)

That is, the mainstream absorbs any form of collective resistance identity because the network structures of globalised capitalism are inescapable. However, as previously mentioned, it seems important in Australian culture for any social group to base its rhetoric of community on being outside the mainstream. The myths of "Australian-ness", detailed in previous chapters, all revolve around independence, individualistic character and disrespect of authority. Australians seem to rejoice in the idea of their community being somehow rebellious.

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<sup>2</sup> Religious cults, or any other small social group that tries to disassociate itself from society, may be seen as minor exceptions to this statement. It is worth noting, however, that these groups are usually characterised by their breakdowns and self-destruction.

Perhaps one of the reasons why the mainstream is particularly able to absorb the resistance identity in Australia is because all senses of actual community have to be imagined. In *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (2001), Zygmunt Bauman discusses the contradictions which I have identified as the theoretical basis of this thesis. He says they are based on a false sense of community and claims they occur because:

you may stay happy, or at least stay happy blissfully and without worry, only as long as you keep your innocence: as long as you just enjoy your happiness while staying ignorant of the nature of the things that made you happy and not try to tinker with them... (2001:8)

Ignorance is bliss. Bauman argues that the real sense of the word “community” is a group of people with not just things in common but a “common understanding” that “comes naturally”. Not merely a consensus, which indicates compromise amongst differently minded people, but a “reciprocal, binding sentiment” that is a starting point rather than an end result. He uses Goran Rosenberg’s concept of a *real* community being a “warm circle”:

it has no room for cold calculation and rote-learning of whatever society around, frostily and humourlessly, presents as “standing to reason”. And this is exactly why frost-bitten people dream of that magic circle and would wish to cut that other, cold world to its size and measure. Inside the “warm circle” they won’t have to prove anything, and whatever they do may expect sympathy and help. (2001:10-11)

This is what commercial television does for its viewers every day: cuts the cold world into a community’s size and measure. The fact that this happens every day makes it seem like the community – whether it’s a nation or a city, a region or a globe – really exists. It makes the community seem real and tacit, rather than imagined and contingent.

Obviously, the “warm circle” community is impossible in a capitalist world. Capitalism is based on competition between every entity in it. However, up until late capitalism (or the

information technology revolution), institutions still existed that allowed the pre-industrial community a space to exist in the modern world: unions and churches, for example. Now that capitalism is globally dominant, real communities are hard to find and may no longer exist at all. People seem to be aware and unaware of this simultaneously. In Australia in particular, there is a widespread rhetorical yearning for the Australia of the 1950s, implying that this is accompanied by the knowledge that community cannot exist anymore. Yet, there is also a great deal of talk about national attributes, ways-of-life and unification under the flag, as though the “warm circle” were alive and well.

Bauman claims that identity has become a “surrogate of community” (2001:15) and quotes Jock Young as saying, “just as community collapses, identity is invented”. As people feel a lack of “community” they start trying to develop or search for their “identity”. It is like a paradise that looks attainable but is constantly just out of reach. Bauman’s conclusion on identity and community is that:

neither of the two is available in our rapidly privatized and individualized, fast globalizing world, and for that reason each of the two can be safely, with no fear of practical test, imagined as a cosy shelter of security and confidence and for that reason hotly desired. (15-16)

This produces the confusion of people constantly talking about their community – its importance, its defence and its consolidation – while being extremely individualistic in their search for a unique, stable identity.

Anthony Giddens also points to this sort of social phenomena in *The Third Way* (1998). For him, politicians around the world have tapped into this global rhetoric of identity and community and used it as the basis of policy. Leaders “link unfettered market forces to a defence of traditional institutions, particularly the family and the nation” (12). Giddens identifies the contradictions inherent in this political stance. There is an obvious tension between the conservative belief in traditional values, such as the family, and the radical embrace of the free market and globalisation. He believes that this has come about because of



the fragmentation of the subject. His solution would be a re-evaluation of the nation “in a cosmopolitan world” (129). He believes a strong national identity can stave off fragmentation, but it needs to be a cosmopolitan national identity. That is, nationalism should be fostered so that the self-deceptive belief in a national community can grow stronger. Conservative politicians traditionally embrace the nation and nationalism as the cornerstone of their policies, but now there are also New Labor parties around the world attempting to follow the rhetoric of this so-called “third way”, as they adjust to a world without a strong socialist power.

Some writers, such as Callinicos in *Against the Third Way* (2001), believe that these New Labor governments have, in practice, embraced the free market and adopted the same policies as the neoconservatives. That is, he is against the narrowing of politics – the lack of choice faced by voters around the world as a result of many leading politicians adopting roughly the same political philosophies.

In *The Postnational Constellation*, Habermas (2001:xviii) also “dispenses with any naïve trust in the rhetoric of a ‘third way’ beyond neoliberalism and social democracy”. These theories, policies and their contradictions place a large question mark over the legitimacy of the democratic state. When voters are left solely with a choice between politician’s personalities rather than policy direction, then the voters are simply determining which face will be appearing more often on their television screens; they have no actual power. In 1984, William Connolly (1984ii:5) wrote that legitimacy is the question of which set of “conventions deserve our allegiance”. If there is no genuine diversity of political options, what value does a vote possess?

### **Legitimacy and the State**

To maintain power, the one thing that a government needs most of all is to seem legitimate to the people. Habermas (1984:145) believes that it is a primary requirement of a state in that

“legitimate power has to be available for administrative planning”. Indeed, one of the triggers of the Enlightenment period was what Habermas has called “the crisis of legitimacy” (134). That is, there was a clash between the idea that the legitimacy of the state was inherent or conferred by God, and the idea that it was based on social convention. Jean Jacques Rousseau (cited in Connolly, 1984ii:1) characterised the Enlightenment’s solution to the crisis of legitimacy as seeing beyond the contradictions:

the social order is a sacred right that serves as a basis for all others. However, this right does not come from nature; it is therefore based on convention. The problem is to know what these conventions are.

For Rousseau there was a need to identify and change the conventions that put God in place as the inherent centre of the world. However, what the Enlightenment thinkers put in God’s place was merely more master narratives, which have become the conventions and contradictions that people have to deal with in late modernity.

For Habermas, “crisis suggests the notion of an objective power depriving a subject of part of his normal sovereignty” (Habermas, 1984:134). That is, exterior forces, such as the pervasive forces of globalisation, compel the questioning of a state’s legitimacy. Three of the crises that he suggests face late capitalism are the ecological balance (using up finite resources), the anthropological balance (people having problems forming identity and complying with legitimacy) and the international balance (nuclear war).

Modern states gain legitimacy through separating “expressive symbols (which create a universal willingness to follow) from the instrumental functions of administration” (Habermas, 1984:146). This would, perhaps, be a politician’s reason for using the rhetoric of family values while simultaneously adopting radical economic policy: modern states are complicated and beyond the scope of one unifying sense of ideology. The politician may say that the voters exist to elect governments rather than understand governance and consent to genuine policy, and would prefer to win their approval by recycling expressive symbols that they can easily understand while leaving the complicated business of globalised economics to

the experts or, rather, market forces. The result of this is that the political system takes over the tasks of ideology planning. This is, again, a demonstration of Giddens' critique of the "tension" created by politicians when they talk about "traditional values" while pursuing radical free market economics. This tension may not have a direct and instantaneous effect on the voters. They vote for the politicians who make them feel the most stable and if the "traditional values" rhetoric seems convincing then they will feel stable enough to proceed with their search for identity. However, this tension can occasionally show up in news stories when governmental rhetoric and policy have difficulty coinciding.

This sort of news story provokes the crisis of anthropological balance mentioned above. An interesting example of this is, once again, the David Hicks treason case. Hicks was detained in Guantanamo Bay, a US prison located in Cuba, for a number of years and, in 2006, was still waiting to be charged with an offence. He is an Australian citizen but the Australian government had done little to help him. With all their talk of Australian values, such as egalitarianism, disrespect of authority and mateship, the Australian government refused to display these attributes in their policy regarding Hicks. It seemed that they did not want to risk confronting the United States. As a result, Hicks has remained in the news for years. The attitude and tone of news stories regarding Hicks has wavered from the original outrage at an Australian committing treason and fighting for the Taliban, to support for a man doubtfully imprisoned on foreign soil, to a sort of bored neutrality.

Previous to the information technology revolution, the David Hicks story may have affected the anthropological balance in Australia and entailed a crisis of legitimacy because "in a highly structured order, people tend to be pulled simultaneously by one wish to identify with established norms and another to evade or resist onerous claims made upon them" (Connolly, 1984i:222). In other words, in a stable and unified society, people are more willing to question established norms, and resistance is much easier to organise. However, contemporary social fragmentation appears to make the anthropological balance of the state less of a threat to legitimacy, as Australian people now treat the search for their individual identity as more important than a coherent state. This is, again, part of the paradox which runs

throughout contemporary life: while this intrinsic moral order seems to be gaining strength in the mediated public sphere, fragmentation and multiplicity is occurring at every level of society.

While the ecological balance is also causing a crisis of Australian sovereignty and legitimacy, the other threat that falls within the scope of this thesis is the international balance. Obviously, nuclear war is less of a threat now than it was, but the idea of a crisis of international balance could be just as easily applied to the way the global economy has taken a large proportion of autonomy and power out of individual states' hands. Globalisation is just as much about power relations as is a nuclear weapon. If you have access to the means of producing information content, you have the power of representation and you can represent another culture to its detriment. The damage done is not as physical and immediate as atomic war but it can be as lasting.

Robertson (1997:23) quotes Giddens in arguing that "the development of the sovereignty of the modern state from its beginnings depends upon a reflexively monitored set of relations between states". The first time this system of reflexive monitoring between nation-states became global was during the process of treaty-making after World War One. According to Robertson, "Giddens's argument that the development of the modern state has been guided by increasingly global norms concerning its sovereignty is... of great importance" (1997:23). This means that, to a certain extent, the legitimacy and sovereignty of a state is determined externally on an international level. Once again, the power relations of globalisation, just as much as the power relations of war, can cause a crisis in the legitimacy of the state.

## **Programming War**

According to Matt Buchanan (2002) of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, one of the most important skills a television programmer must possess is an "accurate" perception of who makes up the audience and what they want to watch:

they know where you live. They know when you are at home. They know what you earn and what you spend it on. They know your age and what paper you read. They know every thing about you but your name.

Of course, they don't actually know any of these things. They have vague ideas based on market research, surveys and people-meters, which give them a rough idea of who makes up the audience. They do know that different people respond to different types of programming and they spend their time trying to divine which program will work for certain demographics. One of the most important things this tells us is that "it does not make sense... to see televisual discourse as a basically unified text without essential internal contradictions" (Ang, 1996:26). When analysing the relationship between television and its audience, it is necessary to acknowledge that the appeal of television changes from moment to moment and from person to person. While the decision to consume television and taste in programs may be socially determined, on a more detailed level, two people may watch the same program for different reasons and one viewer may watch different programs for different reasons. Despite this, television corporations construct the idea that they are broadcasting to a unified community.

The audience has been a point of much contention throughout the relatively short history of media theory. In the early transmission models, "audience" was merely the word at the end of an arrow. The modellers imagined a homogenous "mass" which could be successfully swayed one way or another. Other perspectives see the audience as a market, actively influencing media content, or as a range of demographics that can be broken down by place, medium, content or time. Ang (1996) argued that media institutions don't actually care who or what the audience is, as long as they can prove they exist.

One of the most important aspects of television programming is that it is a war: a war for an audience that does not actually exist outside of a media corporation's marketing rhetoric. The broadcasters are constantly trying to outdo each other in the ratings so that they can increase

demand for their advertising space. Yet, this is not the sort of war that most people would assume would be fought for such high stakes. This is the sort of war that Jean Baudrillard wrote about in *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (1995). The Australian television industry is an oligopoly so the war for ratings is figurative only; it is an image that has replaced the real. Each of the networks is afraid to make any real changes to the way they operate their businesses or the way they produce programming. While they constantly talk about what changes they are making to fight the ratings war, and sometimes make superficial changes to their marketing identities, it is merely the appearance of change; the industry itself remains the same.

A particularly interesting demonstration of this was the international “programming war” that occurred during the 2003 Iraq War. Many media outlets used the rhetoric of battle to characterise this industry competition. On April 13 2003, a story appeared in *USA Today* entitled, “Who won, and who lost, in the media battle” (Johnston, 2003). It goes on to detail, in a rather ecstatic way, which media outlets and personalities benefited from their coverage of the war.<sup>1</sup> On April 2 2003, an article appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* under the headline, “Pay TV channels lead the ratings charge as free-to-air viewers retreat” (Dale, 2003). Its rhetoric is less celebratory but it does announce that “the pay TV channels Sky News and BBC World have been the biggest media beneficiaries of the war in Iraq” because their audiences had doubled in Sky’s case and trebled in BBC World’s. Either way, it is apparent that the television industry regards an actual war as mere fodder for its imagined programming war over its imaginary audience. This thesis has, so far, tried to position the imaginary audience as real viewers in local contexts – in the globalised network society’s space of flows, that means either people in cities or people living in situations that exist only in relation to cities. According to Paul Virilio (2002), the city and war are one and the same.

## Space and Place Revisited

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<sup>1</sup> Toby Miller’s “Financialization, Emotionalization, and Other Ugly Concepts” in *Global War – Local Views*, Nohrstedt and Ottosen (eds.), pp. 263-273, details the extent to which the US media rejoiced in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Miller finds the source of this bias in economic and structural bases rather than pure patriotism.

The close relationship between the city and war could explain part of the television industry's close affinity to international conflict. In the developed world, cities are the source of commercial television's revenue. Another part of the attraction may be the time tested television technique of scaring the audience. However, the extent to which communications technology and modern warfare are now interlinked seems to suggest that television is not just happy to broadcast war, but is also implicated in its creation.

In his book, *Desert Screen* (2002), Virilio posits three eras in the development of war. The first places the emphasis on weapons of defence. People built walls around their cities which were strong enough to turn back attacks. If the enemy wanted to kill you, they had to break your defences. The second era was dominated by weapons of destruction, which were used to render defences useless. This era reached its limit with the atomic bomb. The third era is logistical and is characterised by weapons of communication where the speed of information is the key element.

For Virilio (2002:5), the development of cities is coterminous with war. Even though there were tribal conflicts and battles before the city came into existence, "we must await the rise of urban civilization for real war to emerge from the historical development of the city" (6). People came together in increasingly larger groups for their mutual protection and built fortifications around their dwellings to keep the enemy at bay. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, "when the ancient Greeks speak of the *nomos* – nondelimited, unpartitioned... the pre-urban countryside... they oppose it not to cultivation which may actually be a part of it, but to the *polis*, the city, the town" (2002:481). In other words, cities imposed an order, or stratification, on people that did not occur in their countryside villages. This order allowed people to think in terms of "space" rather than "place". A city's relationships extended outwards in a hierarchy that placed other cities first and local villages second. In other words, distance between places mattered less than the common urbanised space.

Cities stopped building walls around themselves when industry expanded to the extent that the city needed more room to move. At the same time, weaponry which could break down the

walls was developed. Once a nuclear weapon could destroy a whole city, strategies of deterrence and information became the most important weapons. The development of informational defences, which deal primarily with the “space” of a city, can be seen in a number of places around Australia. In Sydney in particular, quite a few headlands (North Head, Inner Middle Head, Outer Middle Head, Steel Point, Green Point) have abandoned gun emplacements and lookouts. These were widely considered vital anti-ship defences by the general population of the city until they were dismantled in the 1950s. In *Bunker Archaeology* (1994), Virilio says that before he took an interest in the abandoned bunkers of the Atlantic Wall, they simply blended into the background, forgotten relics of total war, a war that drew all of a country’s resources into feeding it.

It’s hard to see even that in Sydney’s abandoned bunkers. As a reminder of total war, they are a symbol and nothing more. While the bunkers in Europe once had a genuine purpose, those in Sydney were always there as a symbol of a developing global “space of flows”. The idea that the efforts of the whole country’s industry had been sunk into these powerful mechanisms of defence, which would keep the enemy at a safe distance, doesn’t quite seem realistic, especially in comparison with the very real threat that caused the Germans to erect the Atlantic Wall. They knew the Allied forces would try storming the beaches at some point. While Sydney’s guns could undoubtedly do serious damage to any ship that might draw up too close to the harbour, for any fleet to have gotten that close the American and British navies would have had to have been defeated first and Sydney would have been doomed either way. These fortifications have a very tokenistic feeling about them.

They operate as symbols of the third era of war. Instead of acting as a warning to the enemy not to try and get too close, lest they unleash the full power of Australian industry, they operated as a reminder to the people of Sydney that they should get behind the war effort, even if it was concentrated on the other side of the world, and particularly if the Japanese were threatening the Australian mainland. In a sense, the speed of communication technology had imploded the geographic space of the oceans. The news from the European war, and then the news from the Pacific, borne by electromagnetic waves, made the war seem immediate. It



made the distance which an invading fleet would need to cover seem insignificant. Few would consider the gun emplacements strategically important in a military sense today. However, they do have some uses. The abandoned tunnels at the Maroubra rifle range are, for example, extremely popular with Satanists. The walls are lined with evidence of arcane rituals as well as non-Satanist graffiti making fun of them. The area also proved useful as the location for the motorcycle battle in *Mission Impossible II* and the lightless tunnels are home to a large number of bats.

However, if Sydney's abandoned bunkers are an early example of war's third era, a more recent example was to be observed on the Gladesville Bridge from late September 2001 until some time in 2003. Security guards patrolled the bridge, symbolically protecting motorists from the scourge of international terrorism, which has never posed any real threat to Sydney. The guards wore blue uniforms and carried walky-talkies, ambling back and forth across the bridge all day and all night. Many of the passing motorists waved to the guards but they were oblivious, intent on their duties.

The Harbour Bridge and the Opera House were also constantly guarded in this manner, although Stephen Foster, Associate Professor of civil and environmental engineering at the University of New South Wales, was reported as saying, "the Harbour Bridge might be a nice emotional target but it would take an awful amount of energy for terrorists to weaken its key members". For him "the tunnel and the Anzac Bridge - a cable-stay bridge - were easier targets". Foster's expert opinion appeared in an article by Jonathan Pearlman (2002) in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The article went on to say that

the security firm, City Eastern Security, contracted by the Roads and Traffic Authority, is patrolling the Harbour Bridge footway and public access areas at a cost of \$1.7 million a year. The bridge will as usual be the focus of New Year's celebrations, including a fireworks display. The Opera House is also the focus of increased security following the Bali bombing.

This article appeared at the beginning of a subtle media build up to New Year's Eve 2002,

during which the Harbour Bridge's effectiveness as a terrorist target was often pointed out. Security was tightened on the night, bags were searched and trains were scoured for explosives. The fireworks were less colourful, less widespread and no longer appeared on any of the city's skyscrapers. On the night, television news reports told the audience that Sydney revellers were in a more subdued mood than was usual but were bravely celebrating despite the threat of terror.

There was similar evidence of the third era of the city/war in the Opera House "breach of security" on March 18 2003, during which, as reported in *The Australian*, NSW Premier Bob Carr

admitted security around the Opera House was inadequate after two anti-war protesters painted the slogan No War on the Sydney icon. Two men were arrested after they scaled the largest sail of the Opera House this morning, daubing the large slogan in red paint. Mr Carr said he had requested a report after today's security breach at the city icon and the implications of the breach.

It was not only the politicians who were using a city place as a symbol of national space in conjunction with a message of war. The protesters used this era of communications to spread their message across the nation. The Sydney Opera House exists in place and space simultaneously. It is a place at the end of Macquarie Street in Sydney, while simultaneously, because its image appears on everything from postcards to United States produced television shows like *Lost*, a symbol of the Australian nation. The protesters recognised this and used the same tactics that a terrorist would use to get their message across. They picked an appropriate place and used it as a giant television screen, much like the World Trade Center in 2001.

These are not just symbols and examples from the communications based "war on terror", but from the "network society" itself. The guard who walks back and forth across the Gladesville Bridge has no real chance of stopping a well-planned attack. Neither does the guard who patrols the Harbour Bridge, who, according to experts, doesn't even have to be there. This is

because

geographic localization seems to have definitively lost its strategic value and, inversely, that this same value is attributed to the delocalization of the vector, of a vector in permanent movement – no matter if this movement is aerial, spatial, underwater or underground. All that counts is the speed of the moving body and the undetectability of its path. (Virilio, 1998:47)

In other words, if you have certain logistical skills and capabilities, and you want to attack a bridge, it doesn't matter how many people guard it. Just as the guns guarding Sydney Harbour would have proved ineffectual against a Japanese fleet that had already defeated the Americans, security guards cannot secure bridges.

Terrorism has the age-old advantage of surprise. Since World War Two, weapons development has focused on eliminating surprise with technologies of detection and surveillance. The war in Iraq is a good example of this. It was no surprise at all when the Americans invaded. Iraq was attacked by information of American supremacy well before the invasion actually came. Lessons were learned from Blitzkrieg, Pearl Harbour and the bombing of Darwin. The American build up to war was extremely well publicised so that Iraqis had time to organise their submission. Media and information technology are now inseparable from war. As Frank Webster (2003:57) puts it:

war itself is changing, increasingly being what one might call Information War (for those most able to wage it), by which is broadly meant saturation with information and communications technologies... In this milieu, media play an integral and vital role in the conduct and even the commencement of war.

What the Americans did not realise is that submission was just the first step of Iraqi resistance. Terrorists/freedom fighters can circumvent the new technologies through good planning, organisation and effective communications. The era of logistics and communications is not the sole property of new technology. Logistical skill and vectors of communication can also serve as defensive weapons. Just a few years ago, a couple of people

climbing the Opera House and painting something on it would be regarded as vandals. Now they are regarded as potential terrorists who have “breached security”.

The presence of the security guards and the “security breach” spin of the media show us a society aligned with a certain set of strategically valuable information vectors. Taken on face value, the information is useless (security guards on bridges) or absurd (“security breach” at the Opera House) but they also operate as a kind of rhetorical deterrence. Any potential threat is countered by a potential defence. This creates a catch-22 situation where only the possibility of offence is needed to ensure defence. In fact, if offence is a possibility but undetectable, then, in order for the defence to be effective, a detectable offence must be created.

This is why the “war on terror” exists; the threat is undetectable, so the threatened declared war on a feeling. This is “pure war”, where there doesn’t have to be an enemy fleet sailing through the heads or planes dropping bombs on us. There doesn’t have to be an enemy or even battles for a continuous state of war to exist. According to Thussu and Freedman (2003:1), “by calling for a ‘war on terrorism’, the United States has initiated an open-ended and global conflict – one that can be directed against any adversary, anywhere in the world”.

It may have even become redundant to think in terms of war and peace. This is how the television coverage of war has made the television industry implicit in the creation of conflict. Governments know that commercial television corporations regard war as tremendous content. As Thussu (2003:124) puts it, “television news requires visual impact and a dramatic story, and on this measure, wars and natural disasters score more highly than peacetime events”. Representations of war can be used to create fear in the audience, provide spectacular footage and allow for all the myths and norms of nationalism and patriotism, which are the bedrock of broadcast television’s content, to be recycled more rapidly. Therefore, a good way to create and maintain a mandate is to constantly reinforce the idea of threat, invasion and battle.

### **Conflict and contradiction**

Once again, the theories of globalisation and community demonstrate the legacy of the nation and nationalism: the nation's legitimacy is continuous and sacred but flawed because of historical error. In the current climate of the information age, this has led to increasingly complex layers of globalised imagined community which must, along with the imagined communities of the city and the region, be taken into account when analysing the viability of any media corporation's business plan.

## **Chapter 8**

### **The Nine Network and Imagined Communities**

The next three chapters of this thesis are a discussion of various examples of the observable expression of the theories explored in the first part of this thesis. I have given structure to the presentation of these examples by devoting one chapter to each of the three Australian commercial television networks. The theoretical cornerstones of the nation and nationalism continually reappear: the sacred nation; historical continuity; historical error; ethnicity. Each chapter contains instances where the Australian commercial television corporations have tried to increase their profits by creating a space for themselves in the cultural fabric of Australian society. These are cases where they try to present themselves as definitively “Australian”. This analysis will draw on research into each network’s corporate culture as well as recent programming decisions and strategies in the ongoing “ratings war” between the networks, to demonstrate that the theories discussed in the first five chapters have relevance in considerations of Australian people’s day-to-day media consumption.

This analysis will also demonstrate that each network often appears to apply different interpretations of the same strategies, agendas and discourses, and that these interpretations shift and mutate, although only within the closed system of the oligopoly. In other words, they seem to trade and copy tactics from each other rather than try anything new. They operate within the same discourse of “national identity”; that is, that there is such a thing as “national identity”, a set of traits to which, they each tell the viewers, they hold the key. They often represent themselves as deciphering and reinforcing the “nation” on behalf of the viewer. As Hartley (1992a:207) puts it, in relation to news media, television corporations see their audience as

an “imagined community”; in the case of popular (or monopoly) outlets these readers or viewers are assumed to be coterminous with the nation or state, and they are encouraged by each newspaper or TV channel to see the news as part of their own identity, while the news strives to identify with them.

However, as discussed in Chapter Four, they each use different discursive tropes. While the discourse is the same, they each have their own style for imagining the Australian community. The content and style of these different representations are, to some degree, driven by competition for ratings, although, as I will discuss further on, the nature of the Australian commercial television market necessitates only minimal competition (Tiffen, 2002:35-47). Also, it is important to recognise that the tactics each network can use to win the “ratings war” are increasingly limited. The three networks have to work within the distribution framework of network affiliations with international producers – and the inherent vagaries of the international market, government policy constraints and the limitations of their own corporate cultures.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter is concerned with the Nine Network and the ways it seeks to place itself into the cultural life of its viewers, providing a system of images to influence the way the audience imagines their community. Even within the aforementioned limitations, each of the commercial networks has a great deal of room to create its own distinct image of what Australia is and many varied ways of selling that to the audience, in accordance with its particular business plan. In this chapter, I will examine the way Nine embodies its representation of itself and how it imagines the community in its flagship, the six o’clock Sydney news bulletin. Many theorists have examined the way television news acts as a social moral guardian, reinforcing norms and constructing a dichotomy between those “inside” the nation and those “outside” it.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, the news is the embodiment of the theories of narrative, nation and nationalism I discussed in the previous chapters. It serves as an efficient way of dispersing the narrative imagining of a nation with a historical past. The viewer is assumed to be aware that our nation stretches back into the past and at some stage developed the norms and customs which the news takes for granted today.

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<sup>1</sup> A general overview of these issues is provided by Given, J. (2000) ‘Commercial networks: Still the ones?’ in *The Australian TV Book*, Turner, G. and S. Cunningham (eds), Allen and Unwin: Sydney.

<sup>2</sup> Example of such works are, Carey, J. (1989) *Communication as Culture*; Cohen, S. and J. Young (1981) *The Manufacture of News*; Hartley, J. (1992a) *The Politics of Pictures*; and Postman, N. (1985) *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.

In particular I will critique advertisements for the Nine Network's nightly news bulletin, which feature their newsreader as a focal point. In this instance, Nine appears to take a great deal of pride in the fact that it achieved overall ratings dominance for a number of years and it places a great deal of faith in the role its news programming plays as the focus of its ratings efforts. For many years, Nine boasted of being "still the one" and focussed its marketing imagery on its news and sport programming. The embodiment of this effort is the newsreader. This shows a definite strategy in terms of representing how Nine thinks the viewer perceives of an Australian imagined community. For the most part, this chapter uses examples taken from the Sydney news bulletin. As I have stressed in a previous chapter, the imagined community can be perceived on many different levels. While a Sydney bulletin may have certain characteristics that mark out as Sydney-oriented, the broader business strategy behind the news, making the audience identify with the nation, remains the same.

For many years, Seven's marketing strategies appeared quite similar to Nine's, although they reported less advertising spending.<sup>3</sup> For a great deal of the history of Australian television, Seven was number two in the ratings so it didn't need to spend the amount of money needed to defend first position. Ten followed along in a general sense and spends even less effort advertising its news because its focus is elsewhere, reflecting its younger target demographic.<sup>4</sup>

Nine's Sydney news bulletin traditionally focussing on the single male anchor was copied from the American approach to news bulletins and their marketing. This is not the only attribute Nine has borrowed from the United States. Many of its slogans and show formats have been directly copied from America. This was no accident. Nine deliberately copied what it thought of as a successful model (Barry, 1993:283). However, while many would automatically assume this is a negative thing for Australian culture, Bell (1998:11) argues that this could be an example of "creolisation" rather than Americanisation:

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<sup>3</sup> While Nine's advertisements seemed to appear more often than Seven's it's difficult to measure the true cost of these marketing campaigns for their parent companies. Media corporations have become so diverse that costs can be completely divergent for the same levels of advertising. For example, Ten owns an outdoor advertising company while Seven and Nine are part of companies that own a number of magazines.

<sup>4</sup> Advertising spending trends are summarised at: <http://www.nielsenmedia.com.au/industry.asp?industryID=3>, accessed August 10 2005.



all cultural products... are, by definition, *contextual* and *intertextual* (referring to, incorporating, other texts). Their meaning is open to contextually-distinct interpretation ("reading"), that is, to *dialogue*. Indeed, the process of interpretation can be thought of as itself dialogical, with each reading constituting a new (dialogical) text. (11)

Lastly, this chapter will examine the influence of Nine's ownership. For the majority of Nine's existence, it has been controlled by the Packer family. While the Packers have tried to maintain a low profile, the whole family has become infamous for their tough (if successful) management techniques. While it is only logical to question the extent to which a proprietor can have an active influence over a massive institution like a mass media corporation, Kerry Packer is the likeliest of all the media moguls to have had a firm control of operations.

### **The Newsreader and The International Influence**

The most consistently publicised stars in Australian commercial television have, for many years, been news presenters. While personnel from among the range of other performers, whether dramatic actors, comedians, hosts or commentators, may occasionally shine with a brighter light, the news presenter is usually only briefly eclipsed. Each network's publicity machinery will ensure that the newsreader's face remains a constant on our screen. Raymond Williams states that the role of news presenter was something that was developed for radio and then inherited by television in its early stages:

In the early days of radio there was virtually absolute dependence on existing press agencies for the collection of news. Techniques of broadcast presentation were at first the simple transmission of news agency dispatches read by "announcers" who were assumed to be at once authoritative and neutral, though the real "authority" and "neutrality" were those of the agencies. (2003:40)

Williams goes on to remark that personal identification with newsreaders was only introduced during World War Two as a security measure in case there was a German invasion and radio

stations were captured. Before that the announcer was “an anonymous authoritative (ruling-class) voice” (42). He goes on to draw a distinction between the style of British and American television news broadcasts. At the time he was writing (1974) British television news generally avoided more than the minimum of personal identification with the newsreader, preferring to present images pertaining to the story rather than the personality relating it. In contrast, the Americans allowed the camera to linger on the “anchor” and his team, who told the audience what happened with a “studied informality” (43), allowing the audience to associate the news, the news bulletin and gradually the entire network with the newsreader as star.

Even the names of the bulletins reflected the contrast in styles between British and American television news. On one side of the Atlantic there was *BBC TV News*, the British audience expected to treat the newsreader as transparent – as a thoroughly neutral and unbiased channel for the news (Stephens, 2007:277-8). The delivery of the news was a service provided by the broadcasting corporation as a whole. In contrast, American news bulletins were often even given titles using the “anchor’s” name. While their news bulletins also used the style developed for radio, the emphasis was always placed on the onscreen “talent”. For example, in the early 1950s CBS-TV had *Douglas Edwards with the News*, which was a fifteen minute program, broadcast five nights a week. It was produced and directed by Don Hewitt who went on to create *60 Minutes*.

According to Hewitt (1985:18), in those days “most of the jobs in TV didn't pay a whole hell of a lot, so there wasn't a hell of a lot talent around to compete with... the gang that would eventually make the move from radio still looked down on television”. Despite this, the audience was given the impression that it was the newsreader who could make the news understandable. He was the only person who could decipher what had happened and translate it into the language of the people at home. It might seem obvious to some these days that the newsreader is simply someone who looks and sounds good on-camera, an authority on nothing. In the early years of television, the construction of the “anchor” as star had to be very deliberate. Hewitt’s admission that there was no “talent” (whatever he means by “talent”) in

television demonstrates that television producers had to impose the authority of their inadequate presenters upon the viewers. To win them away from radio news, they made the audience believe and trust in the television news bulletins by making the host the star.

A change of anchorman helped television achieve dominance over radio, as *Douglas Edwards with the News* became *The CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite* and the news presenter became the main point of physical identification with the broadcaster.<sup>5</sup> NBC had the *Huntley-Brinkley Report* with Chet Huntley and David Brinkley from 1956 to 1970. ABC generally took a more British attitude, at least with the titles of their bulletins, perhaps to contrast themselves with their higher rating competitors – *ABC Evening News*, *World News Tonight*, *20/20* and *Primetime* amongst the names they have used. This attitude only went as far as the title of the bulletin though, ABC having many newsreading stars.

The *BBC TV News* style, however, was not only apparent in the name of the bulletin but also in the content. They had a different approach as to what constituted “the news” and how it should be presented. As journalist Michael Cockerell (*BBC News Online*, 2005) put it:

When BBC TV News began... Winston Churchill was prime minister. The Old Man called television a “tuppenny ha’penny Punch and Judy show,” and never gave an interview, claiming it had no part to play in the coverage of politics.

To an extent, the BBC itself seemed to concur. It had no political editor, only a “parliamentary correspondent”. The corporation’s hierarchy thought the word “political” was itself too political, and it wanted to be above politics.

Cockerell seems to take this to mean that BBC TV was not particularly interested in government rather than that they wanted their news to be unbiased, worried that the word “political” might make them seem partisan. Either way, this style of “news” seems antithetical to us today and it didn’t last long after commercial television was introduced to Britain with

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<sup>5</sup> This information comes primarily from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CBS\\_Evening\\_News](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CBS_Evening_News) and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NBC>, both accessed Aug 10 2006, although it is confirmed in more circuitous ways by Hewitt (1985) and Cronkite (1996).

ITN in 1955. After this, the British style of news presentation gradually began to change, becoming much more like American television news. This may mean that British news became Americanised but it may also mean that television simply works more effectively as a medium when personalities are the focus of content.

Stylistically, Australian television appeared to be both independent and derivative. According to O'Regan:

Australia's television culture is distinctive but shares much with British, US, Canadian and New Zealand systems. Its distinctiveness is best understood as a point somewhere between two seemingly opposed positions: Australian television as a particular *invention* of television and Australian television as simply an *imitation* of the transnational form of television. (1993:xx)

In terms of news presentation, Australia seems to have adopted the American approach that has subsequently become a perfect example of the "transnational form", to which O'Regan refers. News bulletins around the world now focus on the "anchor" and try to sell their program using their newsreaders' star qualities. Again, this may be a requirement of the medium or it may be an example of Americanisation or diverse creolisations. As mentioned above, in the early years of Australian television the Nine Network sent their young executives to the U.S. to learn American ways and bring them back to Australia (Griffen-Foley, 1999). This may have been because the American system was primarily commercial and Nine's interests lay in learning how to make profit out of the new medium. The British television broadcasting system had developed as a government monopoly, its programming not displaying any regard for profit or even for popularity. As Australian television was starting, the British had only recently branched into commercial broadcasting.

The style of news presentation in Australia, therefore, developed with much greater resemblance to American news. The middle aged, middle class, male newsreader became the commercial network star. The networks identified their news bulletins with its anchors and began to use them as the embodiment of their marketing imagery.

As the American style grew into an international style, it gradually began to mutate, although with the fundamentals intact. The American ABC's news bulletin tried a female newsreader, Barbara Walters, in the mid-1970s and, with much more success, in the mid-1980s. Following this, the anchorman has often become the anchorwoman, with similar results in Australia to those in America. That is, it is something that the third placed network (ABC in the USA and Ten in Australia) experiments with to make their advertising clients feel like they have a market niche. In fact, the idea of the "market niche" seems to have become the most important factor in news presentation style. Each commercial network has developed its own sub-style for presenting their news bulletins (always contingent upon location, availability and fit).

In Sydney, Ten portrays its news bulletin as a family hour. The male and female presenters are the parents, the uncle does sport and the children do the weather. They make light of the news and try to have as much banter between themselves as possible. They smile as much as they can. At times, Seven takes part of this approach and mixes it with some of Nine's style. Its newsreading family is more patrician and reserved but a family nonetheless. They have male and female newsreaders although their main marketing angle is currently Ian Ross's seniority and experience. In Sydney, Nine is predominantly adhering to its traditional formula. Their bulletins are focussed on one serious, white, male newsreader. Though he is younger, he still adopts a fatherly attitude to the audience and the news.

These stylistic changes have occurred as demographics become more important than overall ratings and market research has become more effective (Given, 2000:38). This is also why changes have been superficial and limited. The networks tinker with their presentation formats but they never really make any genuine change to their news presentation, mainly because there is no need. The market does not demand it and the new importance placed on demographics and market research is a realisation of this fact. The commercial television market in Australia is an oligopoly. It is a market in which a limited number of sellers follow the lead of a single major corporation, which, in the case of Australian commercial television,

can increasingly be regarded as whatever is doing well in U.S. television. Whether it is a case of Americanisation, internationalisation or creolisations, by far the majority of ideas that appear in Australian television come from the United States. Nine has been particularly willing to directly copy U.S. television. The Nine Network's slogan, "still the one" was used by ABC (U.S.) in the late 1970s. Its news bulletins have been the closest of the Australian networks to the U.S. style. They have had programs called *Wide World of Sports*, *Monday Night Football*, *60 Minutes* and *Sunday*, also taken from U.S. television. According to Paul Barry:

In all these copycat operations, [Kerry] Packer was said to be the initiator and driving force. "I want one of those," he would tell his television producers, pointing to a successful American product. He would then get it, right down to the titles, content, and even the set. (1993:283)

Nine have been the most blatant in copying programs from America, although even when the other commercial channels have come up with their own ideas or used concepts from other countries, most of the marketing concepts and techniques Australians use have originated in the United States.

Free market ideals about competition do not apply in an oligopoly such as this because it is in the best interests of the members of the oligopoly for competition to be friendly. As long as they maintain the status quo, each member can go on making a lot of money. Once a corporation grows too big and achieves a monopoly it risks losing favour with the consumer and attracting the attention of government legislation. Oligopolies simply require maintenance rather than innovation. This is why not much changes in television. News maintains the same formats, police and hospitals dominate drama and the cooking/lifestyle/reality/gameshow cycle continues. The commercial television networks in Australia have clearly grasped this and adapted their business plans to suit. Ten is content to mine its 15-39 demographic seam while running third overall. Seven was content, for many years leading up to 2005, to promote its new dramas and the fact that it was gaining on first place, while Nine maintained overall ratings dominance. These postures are sold to advertisers who are happy to believe that they

are being offered some sort demographic niche. This means that any changes need only be minor and simply give the appearance of a “ratings war”.<sup>6</sup>

The news anchor remains the star and the network which comes first overall – Nine for many years – needs to show least appearance of change. Therefore, Nine (and now Seven) have stuck with their “winning”, patriarchal formula. The only times when change seemed viable have been when Seven (traditionally second place) came close to beating Nine’s news ratings. When this began to occur consistently at the beginning of 2005, Nine dismissed its middle-aged newsreader Jim Waley and hired the younger Mark Ferguson to anchor its bulletins: a change whose superficiality directly reflects the nature of the oligopoly. The Nine news style did not change. It simply altered the appearance slightly to make it seem like it was moving with the times. Commercial television corporations use this strategy of creative inactivity at all levels of their business and it is no surprise that it shows in their choice of newsreader. The newsreader is the corporation’s connection with the audience.

The newsreader as network embodiment came about perhaps because of the “live” factor. As Robert Stam (in Kaplan, 1983:26) points out, “liveness”

is important, for television, unlike the cinema, allows us to share the literal time of persons who are elsewhere. It grants us not only ubiquity, but instantaneous ubiquity. The telespectator of a lunar landing becomes a vicarious astronaut, exploring the moonscapes at the same time (technically a fraction of a second later) as the astronauts themselves.

In this sense, the audience is being led through the news, in the moment, every day on a regular, programmed schedule. It has been this ubiquity that has allowed television to weave itself into the cultural fabric of the audience’s day-to-day existence and become an important part of their lives. The viewer knows that they are hearing these stories as the anchor is telling them. This, and the newsreader’s gaze, usually comfortingly paternal and personal, creates an intimacy between newsreader and viewer. This feeling could not occur if the viewer thought

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<sup>6</sup> As mentioned earlier, when Seven overtook Nine in 2005, it did so by copying Nine’s tactics. Nothing new really happened and the oligopoly was maintained.

the news bulletin was in some way pre-recorded. It would simply seem like a packaged piece of entertainment – just another reality show/crime drama. It has been its “liveness” that has given the news its intimacy and importance. It has allowed the news to engender in the audience an increased sense of the imagined community to which each viewer belongs, or to which they imagine they belong. News bulletins have traditionally made the viewer feel like they are an important part of that community and given them a pleasurable narcissistic feeling that the newsreader is speaking directly to them.

News producers are aware of this and structure their content accordingly:

television’s “liveness” guarantees other gratifications. Live transmission makes possible real, as opposed to fabricated, suspense. Will the space mission get off the ground? Will the assassination victim survive? Unlike the cinema, television has to *tell* us, by superimposed captions, whether it is live or recorded... Although live transmission forms but a tiny proportion of programming, that tiny portion sets the tone for all of television. In the news, the *part* of direct transmission - the anchor’s report, conversations, occasional live special events - metonymically “contaminates” the whole of the news. (Kaplan, 1983:25)

The newsreader always greets the viewer at the beginning of the program as though the familiarity the viewer feels is reciprocated; the anchor comments directly to the viewer in between stories and most importantly, reads out the news directly into the camera as though they are looking the viewer in the eye. As Stam, again, points out, “news programs are designed, on some levels, to enhance the self-image of His or Her Majesty the Spectator” (cited in Kaplan, 1983:24). They reinforce the viewer’s place in the community by giving them bad news about what is outside it, meaning anything that transgresses societal norms. This refers not simply to events and people that are outside the borders of that nation and seem foreign, but also those within who do not adhere to what is expected of them socially: people who are the targets of what Stanley Cohen calls moral panics.



According to Cohen,

a moral panic occurs when, a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerge to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people. (1972:9)

It is a situation where the mass media attempts to define what our cultural values are by what is outside them. News bulletins do this simply to create a social narrative in which their presence is necessary to the maintenance of law and order in the nation. By reporting on crime and ensuring that the people who commit the crimes are represented as “criminal” first and “citizen” a distant second, they simplify society so that it seems like they can summarise the day’s events in their thirty or sixty minute bulletin. They concentrate negative news into a dose that is frightening enough that people panic and need to anchor themselves with media imagery. The news “anchorperson” then becomes someone who represents their “national way of life” to them. The anchor becomes a symbol of a set of social values that are assumed to pre-exist contemporary times, but which in actual fact are simply being reinforced and adapted to maintain a pre-existent balance of power.

However, according to many theorists, new media has brought about changes that could potentially affect both the status of the newsreader and the nature of moral panics.<sup>7</sup>

“Liveness” is no longer the sole territory of television. The information technology revolution of the last twenty or thirty years has had an enormous affect on the way audiences consume communication.<sup>8</sup> It is common sense to point out that there never really was a mass audience of the type criticised by some communications scholars – an undifferentiated whole, open to ideological manipulation. As long ago as 1977, Umberto Eco argued that

one thing we do know is that there doesn’t exist a Mass Culture in the sense imagined by the

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<sup>7</sup> This is most affectively argued by Postman in his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985) and Castells in *The Rise of the Network Society* (2000)

<sup>8</sup> And people have started to use the plural for audience.

apocalyptic critics of mass communications because this model competes with others (constituted by historical vestiges, class culture, aspects of high culture transmitted through education etc.). (cited in Castells, 2000:363)

What did exist while these critics were imagining their homogenous audience was mass media as a technological system of distribution. While it may not have been able to convert the audience en masse to adherence to a dominant ideology, it was the foundation of our processes of communication. Culture is communication. As Castells points out, “the media, and particularly the audio visual media in our culture, are indeed the basic material of communication processes. We live in a media environment and most of our symbolic stimuli come from the media” (2000:364). Other theorists have pointed out that television has been central to the media environment for approximately the last fifty years. It has been the framework for all the mass processes that take place in our society: politics, business, sport, art or others.

The process of reinforcement, adaptation and manipulation of social values is drawn into sharp relief when the news media’s desire for sensational content is caught out overriding the accepted standard of ethics. An interesting example of this occurred in March 1993 when four children were kidnapped by three men and held at a house in Cangai. A siege ensued and several news media outlets interviewed the men and their hostages while the siege was taking place. It was Michael Willesee’s interview for Nine’s *A Current Affair* which drew the most criticism. He “extracted detailed confessions to murder from two of the men and interviewed both children” (Hurst and White, 1994:86). Nine and Willesee were criticised for many reasons, amongst them the idea that their reporting could lead to the glorification of the offenders by giving them a national media platform (which also may have led to copycat crimes), the probability of prejudicing police negotiations, the potential exposure of the child victims to yet more (and perhaps future) trauma by interviewing them on live television and the possibility of prejudicing future court proceedings (86-87).

However, all this attention amounted to very little. Despite the fact that the entire incident

made obvious the fact that the news media gather content to suit their own desires rather than from any concerns for public safety, the audience still seems to respond to the way they make the world seem like a disaster waiting to happen. Even though “Australians have voiced disquiet about the methods and motives behind media reports of crime and violence for more than 150 years” (Hurst and White, 1994:82), the formula for television news bulletins has changed little.

Mike Munro was one of the Nine Network journalists involved in the 1993 Cangai siege coverage. The helicopter he was in twice entered the zone cordoned off by police while the children were still held hostage. The possibility of the rotor noise scaring the captors into harming the children is undeniable. Nonetheless, Munro defends himself, reported later as saying, “the media had a responsibility to get as close to the scene as possible” (in Hurst and White, 1994:94). He is far from the only journalist ever to have been in this situation and used the public’s right to know as a defence, although it is instructive to follow his fortunes as an employee of The Nine Network.

Having worked on such Nine current affairs programs as *Willesee*, *60 Minutes* and *A Current Affair*, Munro is also the host of *This is Your Life*. In January, 1999, Ray Martin left Nine and Munro replaced him as the host of *A Current Affair*. Munro was dismissed by Nine in 2003 to make way for the return of Martin and reportedly languished until 2005 when he started work as the newsreader for Nine’s new 4:30pm *National Nine News Afternoon Edition*. His career certainly hasn’t appeared to suffer inordinately from the criticism levelled at him over his part in the Cangai siege. It would not be too unrealistic to speculate that this episode may even have been the type of thing that earned him some respect at Nine. The Nine Network has a particular reputation for taking their news bulletins very seriously. They have constructed themselves over the years as having built their success upon a foundation of news and sport (the development of this attitude is something I will return to later in this chapter). While Munro has had his peaks and troughs, his ruthless attitude to journalism and the creation of moral panic does make him seem at home at Nine.

He was seemingly rewarded again in 2005 when he was called upon to host Nine's special presentation about Schapelle Corby, *Schapelle's Nightmare: the untold story*. As discussed in Chapter Six, Corby's arrest and incarceration was a very hot issue in the first half of 2005 and Nine vigorously defended their leadership in the reporting of her story. He is, once again, an anchor.

The term "anchor" in itself gives a sense of the importance of the news presenter to this televisual discourse. It "connotes weight and seriousness, symbolic figures who will keep us from going adrift on a stormy sea of significations" (Stam in Kaplan, 1983:26). Historically, CBS claims the word "anchor" was first used by producer Don Hewitt to describe Walter Cronkite's role in broadcasting Democratic and Republican conventions.<sup>9</sup>

They are the faces who speak directly to the viewer. All other news bulletin reports or appearances have to go through them. Remote reporters (pre-recorded or live) thank the anchor for permission to speak and the weather and sports can only proceed once the anchor has introduced them. As Gerald Stone puts it in his book about the Nine Network, *Compulsive Viewing* (2000),

these days news is regarded by all networks as the most crucial single area of programming – the glue that traps and holds an audience to the rest of the nightly schedule. Stations are prepared to spend small fortunes promoting their newsreader as the first point of contact with the community: the one face people can trust, the one voice that promises reassurance and empathy in an uncertain world. (2000:283)

Nine wasn't the first television station in Australia to make the news bulletin the focus of programming or make news presenters its biggest stars. Initially, before networking, when Nine was simply TCN Sydney, Frank Packer insisted that newsreaders remain anonymous: "give them a by-line and they'll ask for more money" (cited in Stone, 2000:284). This attitude only started to change when Nine leased the exclusive rights for television transmission on the

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<sup>9</sup> This information appears in [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CBS\\_Evening\\_News](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CBS_Evening_News), accessed August 16 2005, while various versions of it appear in Hewitt (1985) and Cronkite (1996).

new Sydney – Melbourne coaxial cable in 1963. At that time, Frank Packer owned both TCN Nine (Sydney) and GTV Nine (Melbourne) but the only way for them to share programming was to fly film reels to each other. Colin Bednall, managing director of GTV Nine, with the help of Rupert Murdoch (for a short time a TCN board member as part of a deal for rights to American programming), persuaded the TCN board that spending the large amount of money for the lease was a good idea. GTV had already established the prestige of news programming and their main newsreader, Eric Pearce, was a star (284). The technological advance of the coaxial cable made the first Australian television network possible by allowing the two Nines to share programming at will. According to Nigel Dick:

The ability to relay to each other was coupled with an emerging and growing demand for more news from a community that was becoming better educated. These factors provided the seed bed from which news grew as an integral and vital part of television program schedules. TCN and GTV were able to give an emphasis to news with 30 minutes at 6.30 every night and 6 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays from the time they acquired a permanent relay. As well, both stations were able to give an emphasis to late night news and important news reports as required through regular transmissions. (cited in Stone, 2000:287-289)

This was the event that started the Australian television trend of regarding news and current affairs as a network's programming flagship. As Stone (founding executive producer of the Australian *60 Minutes*) suggests, tuning in to the news "has become something of a ritual in the lives of many Australians" (2000:290). While they may switch from channel to channel when they simply seek entertainment, the general impression of the news producers seems to be that the audience is more likely to return to the news bulletin they think is the most "reliable", "trustworthy" or "relevant"; that is, the one that gives them the greatest feeling of sharing in communal information. They gather around a perceived sense of unity which usually probably only stretches as far as their demographic, though can still represent a nation to them.

The Network Ten viewer may think of themselves as younger and enjoy the informal

atmosphere. Nine and Seven viewers may be slightly older or more conservative and regard themselves as the silent majority - the real Australia - while the ABC and SBS audiences may consider themselves educated or elite, and have an “elitist” disregard for the commercial channels’ content and viewers.

Whichever demographic, the main reason for watching the news is to reinforce your membership of an imagined community. As John Hartley puts it:

the news media function, at the most general level, to create a sense of belonging for the population of a given city, state or country. Their readers and audiences... are encouraged by each newspaper or TV channel to see the news as part of their own identity, while the news strives to identify with them. So news includes stories on a daily basis which enable everyone to recognize a larger unity of community than their own immediate contacts, and to identify with the news outlet as “our” storyteller.

(1992a:207)

This description shows to what degree the news media illustrates the theories of Anderson, Renan and Gramsci in particular, amongst those already discussed in this thesis. Renan would probably argue that it is the tool the masses use to conduct what he called their “daily plebiscite”; it is the nation discussing itself with its members and deciding what things it will stand for and what it won’t. To Gramsci, this may have been the perfect example of hegemony; only a powerful elite class have a say in what is shown on television and it uses it to keep the lower classes in line. Who would revolt when they can watch *The New Price is Right* instead? Anderson may disagree. His “imagined community” seems to imply a creative negotiation. Content is determined by audience demand and it is their way of representing their various imaginings of themselves as individuals and as groups. But how can this account for the oligopolistic nature of the commercial television market, where content is determined by the need to maintain the status quo?

One of the main ways that the news reinforces social norms and wins consent for the status quo of an imagined community is through “strategies of inclusion and exclusion from ‘our’

community” (Hartley, 1992a:207). News stories use narratives that implicitly tell us what is considered normal and what is considered deviant. For example, crime is generally shown to be the result of a “bad” person doing “bad” things. Rarely are the complex social forces behind crime given any attention. This is partly because of time constraints in television news but also because a more detailed analysis would show that crime was not deviant at all, but rather the only possible result from certain social forces. That is, that sort of news story would show that the audience is complicit in crime.

Therefore, crime is constructed as something outside of social norms. But these narratives are not only restricted to the actual content of the stories. When the Australian commercial television networks are creating their newsreaders’ star status, they need to take care to show the “Australian-ness” of these individuals. They need to create an image of someone trustworthy and authoritative, someone that the audience will not find condescending as they tell them how their community expects them to behave. The audience has to see the newsreader as not only “one of us”, but also someone to be looked up to. These days it is usually someone who has been a journalist, a reporter who has had their head on the screen occasionally and received good Q ratings.<sup>10</sup> In the past this hasn’t mattered. Perhaps Australia’s most successful news anchor, Brian Henderson, began his career as the host of the music show *Bandstand*. Nine’s Bruce Gyngell put a great deal of faith in the sound of Henderson’s voice and made him a newsreader despite a complete lack of journalistic experience. As Gerald Stone put it, he has an “on-camera presence that exudes authority and calming reassurance. Even when he relates the grimmest of events, there is not the slightest tremor in his voice or tilt of an eyebrow to signal alarm” (2000:34). Like the Seven Network’s long time newsreader, Roger Climpson, Henderson started working in television as a booth announcer.

## **News, Sport and Packer**

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<sup>10</sup> Q Scores are published by the “independent media research company”, Audience Development. They purport to measure viewer attitudes to the appeal of both programs and performers, as well as concepts, pilots and characters. For further information, please refer to: <http://www.audiencedevelopment.com.au/website/default.asp>, accessed June 6 2005.

When Brian Henderson retired, Nine needed to create a new star newsreader, a new suited head which could tell Australians how their nation was meant to be. Winning the ratings for news and current affairs was traditionally very important to Nine and was considered of paramount importance to Kerry Packer, Nine's long-term proprietor.<sup>1</sup> According to Paul Barry (1993:281), Kerry Packer took television much more seriously than his father Frank. His father had built an empire with newspapers and considered print media much more important than television. Kerry, however, grew up watching the TV and enjoyed it. Also, he had an aversion to reading and anything intellectual. As Barry puts it:

he knew what the masses wanted because he shared their tastes... At the office, there would always be a screen playing in the background. He would boast of his viewing habits to rival executives, claiming that he always watched at least four hours of television a day. (1993:281)

When he took charge of the Nine Network in 1974, Nine looked as though it was going to lose the overall ratings dominance that it had maintained for almost fifteen years. Yet, Kerry Packer insisted that his station be number one. His executives advised him that the company could make just as much money being number two, a strategy which the Seven Network proved repeatedly for many years. There isn't the need to spend as much money when you are not defending the top spot, which means that income does not need to be as high to maintain a steady profit. Packer was not interested. He wanted there to be no confusion about who was dominating the ratings. He wanted Nine to be clearly on top. By 1977, Packer and his top executive, Sam Chisholm, had accomplished this.

Their tactics for achieving ratings dominance in the 1970s are the same which Nine still uses today. They placed the majority of their corporate emphasis on the programs which were cheapest to produce: news and sport. It makes sense to suggest that Packer inherited a fondness for news and journalism from his newspaper obsessed father, and his own leanings towards sport are well known; he was quite good at sport in school, played polo and golf as an adult, and his feelings about cricket have been made abundantly clear by his revolutionary

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<sup>1</sup> Until his death on December 26, 2005.



World Series. However, it seems more likely that the determining factors behind the Nine Network's efforts in news and sport are economic. Popular and inexpensive, these programs have made Nine's profits possible. It poured more money into these programs than its commercial rivals but they still cost far less than locally produced comedy, drama or documentary. Since 1977, Nine has prized its news and sport above all else. Up until the last half of 2005, Nine regarded it as the formula for continued success.

This is why it was very important that Nine came up with a newsreader that could take the place of Brian Henderson, a man who seemed to have wormed his way into the viewer's hearts. The only way to do this was to make the audience believe that Nine's new anchor was someone they could trust and keep coming back to for that identification with their imagined community. Nine needed to find someone who would measure up to the audience's perception of "Hendo". If what the audience exactly felt about "Hendo" was slightly unclear (because ratings and Q scores aren't an exact science), then Nine needed to tell the audience what they wanted. As I have already mentioned, news reinforces the imagined community and plays on images of it to attract the viewer. For this reason, Nine needed to present its new newsreader in not only a national context but also as Australia's representative in international affairs. Nine needed to introduce the new anchor by convincing the viewer of its place in the imagined community and, by extension, their community's place in the world.



- The Daily Telegraph, Tuesday, September 7, 2004 – pg. 11

An interesting illustration of their efforts to accomplish this appeared in the Sydney newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph* on Tuesday September 7, 2004. It was a full-page advertisement for Nine's 6pm news bulletin, *The National Nine News*.<sup>1</sup> The background of the advertisement shows a picture of a truck burning and is textured to give it the low resolution video cassette look that is often associated with television. In the foreground and on the reader's right hand side of the page is half of Jim Waley's middle-aged face. The newsreader betrays no expression but seems to be possessed of a steely resolve to deliver the "news". His staring eye looks out at us and dominates the page. The top of the page contains the large font,

<sup>1</sup> This is a charming alliteration which calls to mind the appeal of nursery rhymes and stories by Doctor Suess.

capitalised caption, “When the world’s falling apart he keeps it together”. At the very bottom of the page are the simple words, “Jim Waley. National Nine News Sydney. 6pm” and the Nine Network logo.

This advertisement tries to convey several ideas. It tells the reader that Nine’s news bulletin knows and understands what is going on in the world and that the network’s embodiment, Jim Waley, is able to calmly and surely respond to international crises, always giving the Nine viewer an authoritative insight. Again, this is an imitation of the American style, where newsreaders have often had some editorial control over the content of the bulletin. The audience is made aware of this in America as they are in Australia, the difference being that newsreaders have never really had any editorial control in Australia (O’Regan, 1993).

The advertisement also tries to portray the world as particularly troubled. It is attempting to accentuate Jim Waley’s authority by scaring the reader with a very vague reference to the troubles of terrorism and security which have been the focus of most of the mainstream media since 2001. They are painting a picture of a world where no one is really safe from attack by the unknown “Other” and the only way the community can sleep peacefully at night is if *The National Nine News* tells us what is going on. Nine seems to take particular pride in reinforcing this message. In maintaining its reputation for taking news more seriously than the other commercial network, it takes every opportunity to emphasise the importance of news in the audience’s daily lives.

The intention behind the Waley advertisement was to get people to watch *National Nine News* by portraying it as something indispensable to the community. The reference to the “World” shows Nine’s interpretation of recent history. It is trying to capture some idea of “our” (Nine’s and the viewer’s) history which will create a bond between audience and broadcaster. It is adopting a style of historical storytelling to position not only itself and the viewer, but also Australia and the world. In this narrative, Australia and its people are part of the Coalition of the Willing which fights terrorism and is under threat from deranged people who are on the side of the Enemy. It is a vision of the Australian people as a homogenous

audience with unified ideas about world affairs, religion, gender identity and ethnicity (some of the main attributes of the nation and nationalism, as discussed in previous chapters). In this imagined community, Jim Waley, a middle-class white man, is the authority – the one who “keeps it together”.

Waley himself appears as a middle-aged man in a suit. In the advertisement the streaks of grey through his hair are prominent and the lines on his face look serious. He is presented as a father figure, but one who you can affectionately call Jim rather than James. This is something that Brian Henderson, and his wonderfully smooth and reassuring voice, did extremely well. The perception was that the audience regarded him as a leader who was particularly in touch with the ordinary people. Nine’s producers tried to emulate this with Waley but luck apparently ran against them. His downfall began with Nine’s coverage of the troubles in Iraq. His flak-jacketed appearances seemed contrived, particularly since there was clearly no fighting in his vicinity and none of the other networks’ correspondents needed bullet-proof armour. His ear looked a little strange after surgery on it to remove a skin cancer and there did appear to be the suggestion of a face lift around his eyes. These things, and the fact that his peer, Ian Ross, had started reading the news on Seven, didn’t bode well for Waley. If the newsreader was supposed to be a reflection of the imagined community’s values, then the imagined community was moving on. Or, at least, this is the way Nine’s executives saw it. They needed to make a change so they could feel like they were keeping up with the audience. They needed to maintain the idea that today’s imagined community and television are inextricably intertwined.

## **Packer and Sport**

As Frank Packer himself said in 1955, during an Australian Broadcasting Corporation Board (ABCB) hearing for applications for Sydney's first commercial television licenses, television was "going to be a very important factor in building up the character of the nation" (cited in Griffen-Foley, 1999:213). As discussed in chapter previously in this thesis, "national character" is a myth usually put to the service of those in positions of power and authority in society. It is also usually taken as something that already exists and needs to be defended. Perhaps Packer meant that in Australia's particular case, we were only just stepping out of the shadow of England, the Mother Country, and television would be of service in our *discovering* what our national character is.

However, if we acknowledge the idea that decisions about televisual content have become mired in the market's need for nothing to change, then perhaps Packer was right in that television has created a "national character" (although these days that means it is a "developed world character"). By taking on the responsibility of being the tool of imagining a community and then not introducing any new ideas, it has forced a recycled community on its audience and made it conform to stagnant group characteristics that were previously very dynamic.

Whatever Packer may have believed he was saying, he must also have realised the power that a television licence would give him in other business interests. As Bridget Griffen-Foley demonstrates throughout her book, *The House of Packer* (1999), the Packers were not strangers to close relationships with politicians and wielded real community power through their media empire for many years before television was introduced. Perhaps Packer's actual views on the power of television were revealed more accurately at those initial hearings when he and his lawyers convinced the ABCB of one of the key practical necessities of being granted a television licence: lots of money. As Griffen-Foley puts it:

he had asked his solicitors to draw up a deed setting out the functions of an advisory panel to be

adorned with church leaders and the headmasters of private schools. Although his activities and intentions appeared less benign under cross-examination, he and his counterparts convinced the ABCB that only financially sound companies that could guarantee the amount of capital required for a television station and sustain losses for at least two years should be granted a license. (1999:213)

Here Frank Packer displays perhaps the profoundest understanding of how an imagined community, or nation, actually works. Its symbolic mainstays are church leaders and headmasters (or relevant contemporary substitutes – the key point is the sacredness of the nation), while it is really those with the money who call the shots. Mass media shapes and maintains an imagined community and, when it comes to commercial mass media (which commands a far larger audience than public broadcasting) only those with immense wealth can have practical direct influence over its running.

There are those who question the degree to which media proprietors actually influence content. As Tiffen (2002:36) points out:

much journalism and much popular thinking about politics focuses excessively on key individuals with insufficient attention to the structures which constrain and direct their actions. Individual actions are visible while the situations in which action occurs remains invisible or unattended to.

Mass media production can only be achieved by corporations, and television broadcasting is complicated. The technology requires a large organisation to operate it and it would be impossible for one person or family to micro-manage the daily running of such an organisation. Also, most of the decisions must be made within the strictures of market competition. However, Tiffen goes on to point out the deficiencies of a completely structural view of media institutions, pointing out the need to allow for individual agency (2002:36-37). While doing this, he asks the question, “how much of what Channel Nine does relates to the nature of commercial TV competition and how much to Kerry Packer’s personal predispositions?” (36).

Of all the proprietors of Australian television, Kerry Packer was the most “hands-on” in his management style. His direct influence was said to have been less after his major heart attack in the early 1990s, but Nine didn’t seem to change much in the intervening years. Kerry Packer’s loosening of the reigns roughly coincided with Nine’s parent company, PBL, branching out into the casino business, which now accounts for most its profits. Perhaps Packer felt that his social and political power was entrenched enough that he no longer needed to wield the media like his father Frank did. Certainly, his authority remained stamped all over the Nine Network until his death. In early 2005, after Seven won the first ratings period and Nine seemed to have lost the right to use its slogan “still the one”, Nine CEO David Gyngell resigned, reportedly because of too much outside interference from PBL. After their ratings loss, it was rumoured that Kerry Packer and the executives at PBL were doing well enough with the casinos that they may want to change Nine’s business plan.<sup>1</sup> That is, they had lost interest in spending the money required to stay number one in the ratings. In PBL’s August annual report, Nine’s profits were unexpectedly low. James Packer reassured stock holders, and Nine’s audience, that PBL still took Nine’s ratings success seriously. Profits were low because they had spent a lot of money on maintaining their supremacy. He also hinted that the Packers had a sentimental attachment to their television business and would never abandon it, while speaking much more enthusiastically about their new media interests such as, cable television and NineMSN.<sup>2</sup>

It can be argued that the Packers reached their current status because of their hands-on approach to the management of their media businesses.<sup>3</sup> Frank Packer recognised early on the value of media power to politicians. He was staunchly conservative and did his best to influence the way governments were both formed and run at all levels. Politicians recognised the power of the mass media and did what they could to mollify media proprietors, Frank

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<sup>1</sup> For reportage of these rumours, please refer to “Changing the guard at Nine” at [www.crikey.com.au/articles/2005/03/22-1628-6396.print.html](http://www.crikey.com.au/articles/2005/03/22-1628-6396.print.html), accessed July 22 2005.

<sup>2</sup> These events are described in Knight, E. “Little Kerry hits Big Kerry in hip pocket” in *The Sydney Morning Herald, Business section*, August 26 2005 and Publishing and Broadcasting Limited’s corporate website, [www.pbl.com.au](http://www.pbl.com.au).

<sup>3</sup> As an example of the Packer’s success and status, Kerry Packer was number one on *Business Review Weekly’s* 2005 list of the top 200 wealthiest Australian individuals and families: <http://www.brw.com.au/lists.aspx>, accessed October 12 2005.

Packer in particular because he seemed so open about allowing his ideological attitudes to bias editorial content (Griffen-Foley, 1999). Indeed, Robert Menzies, Prime Minister of Australia for seventeen years, had a close personal relationship with the senior Packer and they shared the same attitudes to a variety of issues. Consequently, the *Daily Telegraph* was fanatically supportive of Menzies at every election (Barry, 1993:57-63).

One event that amply demonstrates Frank Packer's willingness to push his ideology through his media businesses was the referendum that resulted from Menzies' hatred of communism, a hatred shared by Packer. In the early 1950s, the Prime Minister held a referendum to change the constitution. According to constitutional law expert, Justice Michael Kirby, the intention behind this referendum was to outlaw communism.<sup>4</sup> They wanted to rid the public service and the trade unions of communists. The proposal was that anyone suspected of being a communist could be removed from their post with the opportunity of proving their innocence in a court appeal. While many newspapers argued for a "yes" vote, despite the obvious infringements of civil liberties, the *Daily Telegraph* was particularly one-sided. Packer used his paper to proselytise the extreme views he shared with Menzies (Barry, 1993:57-59). In return, it is safe to assume that the Prime Minister and his government did what they could to look after Packer's business interests. This relationship was particularly useful a few years after the referendum when Packer acquired the first television license in Australia, the process smoothed considerably by his friends in high places (Griffen-Foley, 1999:213).

The Packer family attitude to business recognises the usefulness of power, especially the power associated with owning mass media. The influence he could wield over the people who made decisions in society must have made his media businesses seem even more dear to Frank Packer, and even more in need of his personal attention. Proof of this is evident in his reaction to the sale of his beloved *Daily Telegraph*. Even though it made him a fortune and was a very sound business deal, he reacted as though he had lost a member of his family.

According to Donald Horne, who was editor of the *Bulletin* at the time,

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<sup>4</sup> Justice Michael Kirby delivered this interpretation in a speech entitled "A centenary reflection on the Australian Constitution: the Republic Referendum, 1999". It can be found at [http://www.hcourt.gov.au/speeches/kirbyj/kirbyj\\_menzies.htm#\\_ftn6](http://www.hcourt.gov.au/speeches/kirbyj/kirbyj_menzies.htm#_ftn6) (accessed October 12 2005).



his reaction to this sacrifice was so great that people wondered if it might kill him. Several times he cried when he spoke of it; his face was pinched and his gaze distracted; he walked slowly like a wounded man, his hand on a helpful shoulder; his words wandered; he spoke of the dead as if they were still alive, and gave orders to men and machinery that it was no longer in his power to give. (cited in Barry, 1993:162)

Kerry Packer seemed to have inherited, amongst many other things, this direct approach to business management. He also shared his father's taste for power: associating with the powerful, influencing the powerful, being powerful; although, Kerry was not as discerning as his father. As long as he backed a winner, political ideology did not matter. Paul Barry cites an example of this in *The Rise and Rise of Kerry Packer* (1993:244),

The Wran Government's vital support for World Series Cricket was the first time that Packer's cosy relationship with the New South Wales Labor government had been laid bare. But ever since his father had died, all politicians had been keen for his support. Given the way in which Sir Frank Packer had used his *Telegraph* and Channel Nine to make or break governments, it was inevitable that this should be so. If state or federal politicians of either party could do favours for Kerry Packer without compromising their principles, or without compromising them too much, they would invariably be eager to do so.

While he accepted a state Labor government's assistance with World Series Cricket, he was consulted by the federal Liberal government of Malcolm Fraser (266) on electoral matters, particularly during the aftermath of the Whitlam government's dismissal. While he may have had a personal bias toward the policies of the Liberal party, he realised that his audience (and profits) would be bigger if his media companies appeared to be neutral. Although he may not have chosen to try and sway the Australian people's political views one way or the other in a direct sense, as his father did, he still had an enormous influence over the nation.

Nine's emphasis on news and sport was an initiative of Packer's and the nature of television

news meant that focussing on it gave the Nine Network some sway in reinforcing national norms and beliefs. Its other focus, on sport, plays into, and reinforces, the apparent Australian national tendency to enjoy sport. World Series Cricket in particular, showed Kerry Packer's influence over Australian culture. In one way or another, cricket is part of Australian culture and to some extent occupies a large portion of many Australians' leisure time. He completely changed the nature of cricket around the world, thereby changing the way that many Australians spend their days. His efforts in this were focussed on making cricket, one of the most traditional sports in Australia, a palatable and popular television experience. He succeeded admirably, with Nine's cricket coverage now a popular item in the year's viewing.

Whether through the international influence during the early years of Australian television, or through attempts at embodying the nation in a newsreader, or through an emphasis on sport and masculinity, the theoretical motifs of nationalism appear to have a strong presence at the Nine Network: the nation as sacred to those included in it; the national "characteristics" as historically continuous; the error inherent in these historical assumptions; and the embodiment of a primary ethnicity.

## **Chapter 9**

### **The Seven Network and Imagined Communities**

The Seven Network, like the other Australian commercial television corporations, creates a market for itself by taking different attributes from the various levels of imagined communities and using them to construct a set of characteristics which, it then maintains, describes their audience. Seven takes various themes, narratives, myths and motifs from the cultural backdrop of people's lives and litters them throughout its marketing campaigns, creating station advertisements which feature representations of the city, the nation, the region and the globe. Seven tries to convince the group of people it puts in its demographic that it is like them, can speak to them and for them, represents them in the public sphere and will provide all their entertainment needs. As with other television corporations, whenever the Seven Network uses these tactics to win audiences, they are recycling the inherent contradictions of the nation and nationalism: the nation is sacred, homogenous and historically continuous, while at the same time it is also secular, heterogeneous and defined by its historical inaccuracy.

Like the other television networks, Seven has its own style of doing this. The networks have two considerations when they are trying to build this style (or corporate identity). First, they need to identify and appropriate traits from the different levels of imagined communities with which they think their audiences will identify. Second, the traits they use must be those that the other networks haven't already used, or if they have, they must be twisted so that they become individualised.

Each of the networks needs to do the exact same thing as the other networks: construct an audience. All they have at their disposal is very similar content and programming, and their abilities to spin marketing fictions to convince advertisers that they can deliver them the audience's attention. Therefore, the style of their marketing – the discursive tropes with which they represent the imagined communities of their audiences – is all-important.

The previous chapter argued that the Nine Network has been central to the Australian commercial television oligopoly. The fact that its ratings successes allowed it to base its corporate culture and marketing campaigns on the idea that it was number one gave the appearance that it represented the typical Australian. To the extent that a media outlet could represent the Australian imagined community, it tried to capture what are supposed to be the key attributes of the “Australian way of life” and based its corporate identity upon them. Nine built its reputation by creating the impression that, because it was the most popular, it was the most Australian.

The Nine Network has seemed to operate this way since 1956. Over the years it has developed the reputation of defending its number one position, and thereby its identity, at all costs. Compared to the other two commercial networks it has, since the 1980s, spent very large sums of money to ensure the stability of the market structure. For most of that time this “spend a lot to make a lot” strategy has also provided it with the highest earnings, although not always the highest profit margin. This chapter will take 2005-6 as the period during which this market structure began to change.

All of this took place in the shadow of regulatory and technological change. The television oligopoly was still in place but it was becoming less important in the media corporations’ overall existence. PBL executives chose to ignore Seven’s successes by arguing that their television business was becoming increasingly unimportant to them. Historically, Seven was becoming accustomed to its second-place market position; now that the market structure was beginning to change, both networks were finding that the rules had altered. Their programming strategies were being drastically affected by forces outside the oligopoly; that is, new media. The inherent contradictions that characterise imagined communities were beginning to cause difficulty for the Australian commercial television corporations and their marketing efforts.

I will explore these changes by relating the theories of the previous chapters of this thesis to various examples of Seven’s programming strategies since David Leckie took over as Chief

Executive Officer in 2004. These programming strategies will give some clue as to how Seven imagines the imagined communities: how they represent Australians and how they need to adapt to changing community structures. These strategies will include the changes Peter Meakin has made as Seven's head of news and current affairs, which spearheaded Seven's ratings successes. I will also examine the long battles over the rights to broadcast various sporting events and the disproportionate amounts of money that is now spent in winning these bidding wars. This competition also extends into new forms of media as the large media corporations struggle to get some sort of foothold or head start in new fields, in some cases extending their battles into the courts. By analysing Seven's attitude to sport, we can see how they respond to one of the mainstays of purported Australian national characteristics, as well as gain insight into how Seven sees the future of television.

## **Transformation**

This chapter is based on the idea that the Australian commercial television oligopoly embarked upon a period of transformation in 2005-2006. These transformations took place because the industry itself is facing massive change. Television corporations seem to have realised that they must expand their horizons and explore new avenues if they are to continue to make a profit and survive as corporate entities. This chapter will examine the Seven Network's strategies for achieving this change while it struggled with updating and re-imagining both its corporate identity and its audience.

## **ATN-7**

In the first few years of Australian television, after TCN-9 leapt ahead with the first broadcast in 1956, Amalgamated Television Services' station, ATN-7, was the most expensive of all the Australian television corporations. Initially, this was because the executives at ATN were not prepared for the new medium. Sandra Hall (1976:24) claims that this was a result of the widely held perception that it would be simple and cost effective to recycle radio content for television. ATN, and others, invested its time and money into the conversion of existing

programming formats in the belief that television would simply be radio with pictures. It failed to capitalise on the new medium's specific capabilities and necessities, while those at TCN and GTV seemed to be much more open to new ideas and new programming concepts.

Executives at ATN spent large sums of money developing and producing local content, which they approached with the same attitude as they would radio programming. The fact that producing television content costs a lot more than radio was something that they had to come to terms with as they went and as they spent. After a corporate restructure Fairfax became ATN's majority shareholder and commenced a long struggle to make its television adventure financially viable.

TCN-9, however, spent far less on domestic product, instead focussing its spending on importing content from America. It successfully lobbied the government to further lift import restrictions and despite heavy losses in its first two years of broadcasting, was making a profit by 1958 (Hall, 1976:25). Then, in 1960, Frank Packer took full control of the TCN board, engineered the takeover of GTV Melbourne and defined a market structure which seems to have remained in place for the next forty-five years.

Nine dominated Australian television while Seven, and eventually Ten, struggled to catch up. Occasionally Seven showed signs of being competitive in the ratings, usually accompanied by a spurt of marketing based on the idea that Seven could now be number one. However, Nine's usual strategy of spending its way out of trouble always seemed to vanquish Seven's aspirations, sending it back to number two. If Seven had a long-term corporate identity, it was defined in relation to Nine – Seven was a close second to Nine; Seven appeared to consider it an achievement when they caught Nine in the ratings and a failure when it almost slipped back to Ten. Whatever happened, the overall market structure remained the same: Nine on top, then Seven, then Ten. Each one was very similar in content, each one was desperately trying to make itself sound like it had its own niche.

## **Oligopoly as Family**

The Seven Network has also traditionally tried to define itself in the public's eyes as "the home of drama". Sandra Hall (1976) is not convinced by this sort of marketing. She argued that the commercial television networks in Australia were too similar. For her, Ten was introduced too early and made too big an increase of demand on a limited supply of programming, making the three networks very similar in style and identity. Tom O'Regan (1993:8) has a different view. He identifies Nine as being the most commercial and associates it with entertainment, while he puts Seven closer to the ABC because it successfully screens BBC dramas and has had close involvement with the production of mini-series over the years.

This has become the common apprehension of Seven's role in the Australian television system. In the hyperreal world of media marketing, Seven is associated with drama, Nine with news and sport and Ten with light entertainment. Seven intermittently runs advertising campaigns to remind the audience of the industry structure: it is "the home of serious drama". It is almost as though Seven is thought of as the feminine to Nine's masculine. If the audience were to believe the image that television marketers, and the journalists who are their prey, put forth, then the oligopolistic structure of the Australian commercial television industry could almost be described as a nuclear family. Nine's image is the equivalent of the patriarchal Australian society's ideal father figure – a serious, blokey figure who loves his sport. The audience family gathers around the set to listen to Nine's wise pronouncements on what is happening in the world. Seven, the mother, loves her melodramas and is not so great at dealing with the cold hard facts of the news, preferring the gossipy nature of fictional content. The audience supposedly turns to her for a more spiritual sense of fulfilment, when they have spare time. Ten is the happy child, content to play in the backyard, the set babbling inanely in the corner.

In a sense, this gender role identification ties in to notions of Australian national identity and may offer an alternative to an explanation of this long-term market structure based solely on commercial antecedents. For example, by far the majority of traits that are often touted as

being typically Australian are linked with males. In Australian mythology the progenitors of these traits are men. Mateship, larrikinism, love of sport, egalitarianism (ironically) are all usually associated with the Digger, the Bush Man or the Blue Collar Worker, all men. Perhaps this was the reason for Nine's long-term dominance of the ratings. Not only was it operating in a patriarchal capitalist social system, which prefers the masculine to the feminine, but the Australian social norms which television reinforces are particularly male. Therefore, it is possible that the audience may have traditionally welcomed Nine as the typically Australian network because of its association with the attributes of patriarchy – news and sport. However, the contradictions inherent in the nation and nationalism (as discussed in previous chapters) make this difficult to maintain as a marketing strategy.

This would mean that Seven was always second primarily because there is a perception that they have been better at programming drama, associated with the feminine. This may not have been a conscious element in the viewer's decision-making process. It may have only been a subtle under-current, just strong enough to suggest that an Australian citizen was only being a normal reasonable person if they thought the cricket and the Nine news were more worthy of the ratings than some fictional mini-series, serialised drama or soap opera.

Of course, this perception of Seven's identity is a vague generalisation, but that is the type of groundless stereotype which media companies pay marketing companies a lot of money to either create or destroy. It is the assumption "that sounds right" which sticks in the audience's head. So, while the dramas and mini-series which Seven have been involved in may have strongly reflected a perceived Australian identity (*Bodyline*, *The Dismissal*, *Blue Heelers* amongst others), and while Nine showed much more of a focus on drama in the late 1990s (*Water Rats*, *Stingers* and *Halifax F.P.*), Seven still seemed to feel the need to change its identity to finally release Nine's strangle hold on the ratings. It did this through poaching some of Nine's best programming executives and focusing its efforts on its news bulletins, while maintaining its strength in lifestyle programming and spending an enormous amount of money to win back the AFL broadcast rights.



While the Seven Network accomplished the task of besting Nine in the news and current affairs ratings, it also maintained its reputation for drama – mostly through sheer good luck. Distribution of US made programs to the Australian market is fixed by long-term contracts. In 2004-2005 the majority of the top rating US drama series were produced by companies whose programs were signed over to the Seven Network for Australian distribution. Shows such as *Lost*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Prison Break* and *Commander in Chief* have proven to be a ratings windfall for Seven, consolidating the lead over the Nine Network which their news programming opened up.

### **Seven Nightly News**

In late 2004, and in the first half of 2005, Seven's news and current affairs ratings began to compete more consistently with Nine. As Nine was shifting newsreaders and trying to recover from the loss of Brian Henderson, Seven was making the most of the anchor it had poached from Nine, Ian Ross. Along with Ross, Seven also hired away Peter Meakin, one of Nine's news and current affairs stalwarts, to become its news and current affairs director and David Leckie, an ex-chief executive of Nine who had come unstuck by earning Kerry Packer's disapproval over some programming decisions. Indeed, it was probably these two executive recruits who encouraged The Seven Network to hire Ian Ross and refocus its efforts on beating Nine at its own game: news and current affairs.

From the mid-1990s until 2004, Seven's nightly current affairs program, *Today Tonight*, occasionally gave Nine's *A Current Affair* close competition in the ratings. While the competition between these two programs was usually closer than in any other timeslot, Seven was still undoubtedly second best – the only times they were able to change this at all was with sport. Seven has had the Australian tennis broadcasting rights for a number of years and usually broadcasts the Olympics, which is always a ratings winner. For many years Seven also had the AFL broadcasting rights, delivering them ratings success, although Nine dominated the rest of sports broadcasting with the cricket, which is on much more during the summer and always delivers consistent ratings. Seven was put at further disadvantage when

Nine outbid them for the AFL rights and split it up with Ten and Fox Sports, eventually leading to the court case which I will describe later in this chapter. In the years leading up to 2005, it seemed that whenever Seven managed to be competitive with Nine, Nine always had the edge. In Nine's eyes, what gave them the edge was the nightly six p.m. news bulletin, which was both Nine's flagship and stronghold.

Seven's chance came when Brian Henderson retired. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Australian audience seemed to regard Henderson as some sort of trustworthy authority on events, or at least this is what was claimed by Nine's publicity. Either way, Nine dominated the news ratings for many years and when Henderson retired, Jim Waley filling his chair, Nine's ratings began to drop. Seven tried to capitalise upon this by making Ian Ross the newsreader on its network flagship news bulletin, the Sydney 6pm *Seven Nightly News*. It had tried other formulae and combinations of newsreaders before but it had been some time since it had used Nine's method: one middle-aged male anchor being authoritative and patriarchal. The Seven Network chose this time to compete with Nine on its own turf. In doing this it tried to appropriate Nine's corporate identity; Seven tried to re-imagine its marketing identity as the news and sport network, the leader, the "typical Australian" network. It tried to re-imagine its imagined audience community rather than continuing to simply complement Nine and be content with its "second best" identity.

They started this re-imagining by concentrating on their acquisition of Ian Ross.<sup>5</sup> As the *7News* website states, Ross worked at the Nine Network for 38 years.<sup>6</sup> When Henderson retired he was passed over for the news anchor position in favour of Jim Waley, another long time Nine employee, and Seven decided that he should be the focus of their next ratings challenge. In effect, they were trying to use Nine's news delivery methods against them.

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<sup>5</sup> Ian Ross is the newsreader on Seven's Sydney news bulletin. I have chosen to use an example from Sydney again because Sydney news bulletins are generally considered corporations' flagships and generate the most revenue. Also, the imagined communities theory is poorly served by choosing examples which are too broad. While the rest of the Australian nation does not see Ross, an examination of community must have some level of specificity (as argued in preceding chapters of this thesis).

<sup>6</sup> The *7News* website is part of the 2006 *Yahoo!*<sup>7</sup> partnership. [http://seven.com.au/news/profile\\_040131\\_ianross](http://seven.com.au/news/profile_040131_ianross), accessed April 12 2006.

Ian Ross is a man in late middle-age. In appearance he matches the characteristics that most people would assume the Australian public thinks of as Australian. He has blue eyes, looks authoritative in a suit and has white skin, though usually it is tanned – the *7News* website actually draws attention to the fact that he is:

a big fan of the outdoors, spending his leisure time playing tennis, kayaking and keeping fit. When he catches his breath from those activities, his three children, five grandchildren and a demanding dog consume much of his free time.

It also points out that in his youth he was “a keen surfer”. By drawing attention to these elements of Ross’s life, the news producers and executives are creating a persona for their network. They are imbuing their 6pm news anchor with the Seven Network identity that they wish the viewers to see: an outdoors-loving, rugged sportsman with a loving family, a dog and years of experience.

In terms of ratings, this concentration on the construction of Ross as an authoritative, but typical, Australian has appeared to work. In January 2005, Seven were speaking about their primetime news bulletin closing in on Nine news.<sup>7</sup> According to the ratings, *Seven Nightly News* averaged 1.23 million viewers for the first five weeks of 2005 while *National Nine News* averaged 1.41 million. These figures slowly improved in Seven’s favour throughout 2005 and continued to improve in 2006. Their ratings press release on April 10, 2006, uses much more triumphant language:<sup>8</sup> “Seven is number 1 in news and public affairs”; “Seven is number 1 in primetime”; “Seven is number 1 for the television year-to-date”; “Seven is number 1 in breakfast television”, and so on.

Another contributing factor to Seven’s ratings improvements and successes may have been their news production unit’s move to Martin Place, in the centre of the Sydney CBD.

According to Seven’s corporate website, the Seven Network used this site to “create a new

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<sup>7</sup> They use this language in a January 2005 media release, <http://www.sevencorporate.com.au/page.asp?partid=667>, accessed March 13 2006.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.sevencorporate.com.au/page.asp?partid=919>, accessed April 10 2006.

state-of-the-art digital studio and news centre".<sup>9</sup> It certainly stands out to pedestrians as they walk through Martin Place. The studio is glass-faced, so the people outside can look in while news programs are being made. A digital news feed runs around the top of the tall windows, giving Sydney a taste of what some of the bigger cities in the world take for granted. This gives Seven a concrete, non-abstract, connection with Sydney, the city upon which the commercial television networks concentrate most of their ratings attention. Being produced so visibly in the middle of the city personalises the Seven news programs and gives the viewers even more chance to identify with them.<sup>10</sup>

The *Sunrise* program in particular seems to have taken advantage of this locale. In another example of Australian television copying United States' formats, the *Sunrise* program screens weekdays from 6am to 9am and is produced from the city studio. Seven have paid a lot of attention to winning this particular timeslot, probably because they want people to identify their station as being the one that starts their day. They have succeeded. *Sunrise* regularly out-rates Nine's equivalent *Today* program. The program often presents popular performers outside in Martin Place and the presenters regularly go out and talk to people. Seven tries to bill this an interactive, family style news program. The *Sunrise* website claims that:

Like talkback radio, our viewers set the news agenda of the day by getting their point straight to air by email, SMS or conventional mail.

Some of the issues raised are written on a whiteboard on set - the ROSwall (Responses of Sunrisers Wall) - then Kachie and Mel chase the story and seek appropriate action on behalf of the audience.

With new forms of media threatening broadcast models for the delivery of news, Seven is trying to maintain their news revenue by making it seem more interactive. News anchors have been positioned as working on behalf of the audience for many years. However, while Ian Ross remains aloof and patriarchal, David Koch and Melissa Doyle are constructed as being

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.sevencorporate.com.au/page.asp?partid=300>, accessed April 10 2006.

<sup>10</sup> The links between the theory of imagined communities, the nation and television corporations were discussed in chapter 5.

much more approachable presenters who will listen to what the audience has to say and leap into immediate action.

*Sunrise* is also constructed to look family-oriented. The *Sunrise* website has a section where the viewer can register to become a member of the *Sunrise Family*.<sup>11</sup> The benefits of this include discounts from retailers across Australia and being first to learn about *Sunrise* concerts, interviews and special events. Again, Seven is presenting the viewer with a particular representation of the Australian imagined community: it is family oriented and consumerist, particularly focussing on its “leisure time”. It is important to note that this is a much more assertive representation than Seven has used in the past. It is no longer just the home of Australian drama. It now seeks to represent the entire audience because the ratings have given it that mandate. Meanwhile, Nine has paid *Sunrise* the oligopolistic compliment of imitating it. When *Sunrise* moved into the Martin Place studio – designed to look like a comfortable lounge area – Nine moved *Today* into an apartment and replaced Steve Liebman with a new, younger, host and a more frivolous weatherman.

## Success

When these various changes and strategies began to work, and Seven started to achieve some success in the ratings, it launched an advertising campaign that once more affirmed the central status of the newsreader as the viewer’s point of identification with the network. Its advertisements showed each of its reporters in various spots around Sydney with helicopters flying off in the background as though to say, “Seven has the best resources and we can get our reporters anywhere in Sydney in the blink of an eye”. These scenes were intercut with pictures of Ian Ross smiling benevolently, seeming pleased with the work his team was doing. Before too long, it became clear that Nine was paying attention to Seven’s success and soon brought out a new advertising campaign of their own. Unsurprisingly, it was an exact copy of Seven’s: the Nine reporters in various places round Sydney, Mark Ferguson (who had by then replaced Jim Waley) smiling at his well-oiled machine. Perhaps this is another indication that

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<sup>11</sup> <http://sunrisefamily.com.au/current/content/benefits/>, accessed April 15 2006.

Seven has permanently assumed Nine's mantle as the average Australian's television provider.

Nine had previously been focussing its image-making on a global scale, and these advertising campaigns seemed to suggest that this had lost a part of its audience's identification with it. Its Jim Waley campaign had concentrated on the problems of the world at large, emphasising the popular idea that the "global terror threat" and the events of September 11, 2001, had changed the entire world. They were claiming that only Jim Waley could help the viewers understand this strange new world. Both Seven and Nine's subsequent campaigns attempted to draw the viewer's attention to their news bulletin's place in the local sphere: Mark Ferguson's head superimposed on a bright, sunny Sydney Harbour, Opera House, Harbour Bridge and sparkling water for Nine, and reporters on the spot in various suburbs for Seven.

This change suggests that both corporations' marketing research came up with an audience that had tired of the global focus; an audience who wanted to pay more attention to what was going on in their immediate vicinity rather than having to deal with international events that seemed too large or out of their local control. This could be indicative of the traditional insularity of the Australian public, as discussed in previous chapters. Or it could indicate a high level of media awareness – too high to accept a narrative in which an Australian newsreader can tell them all they need to know about what is actually happening in the world.

Whatever the case may be, the most important function of this change of focus from global to local is the perception that something has been done. The television networks were trying to create a catch-all sense of change and communicate it to the viewers. Whatever problem each imagined audience member may have, creating this sense of change allows the television executive to believe they have convinced the "mass" audience that all problems have been addressed and fixed.

Again, this strange attitude to a large group of people is a result of the confusion and controversy that Raymond Williams (1974:16) argues has surrounded broadcasting since it

was initiated:

Sound radio and television... were developed for transmission to individual homes, though there was nothing in the technology to make this inevitable. But then this new form of social communication – broadcasting – was obscured by its definition as “mass communication”; an abstraction to its most general characteristic, that it went to many people, “the masses”, which obscured the fact that the means chosen was the offer of individual sets, a method much better described by the earlier word “broadcasting”. (17)

For Williams, the misuse of the word “mass” to describe television’s audience, institutionalised the idea that the main uses of television could “be seen as socially, commercially and at times politically manipulative” (16). That is, an assumption was perpetuated in the early days of radio and television that broadcasting had a social power that was predetermined by its technology; it could deliver the attention of large groups of consumers to the advertiser. Williams’ point is that this assumption is wrong. Social decisions led to this belief and social decisions have perpetuated it.

### **The Advertising Dollar**

The most important consideration for any commercial television broadcaster is advertising. While the Seven Network went through its long period of not winning the ratings, it needed to make its potential advertisers aware that it was competitive. It created the marketing idea that because it was a close second to the Nine Network it must naturally have some programs that out-rated equivalent Nine timeslots. Also, because Seven was number two, it could develop a business plan based on the idea that it could spend less than Nine to hold its market position and also, presumably, charge less for advertising space.

Making money in commercial television is not as straight-forward as in other businesses. The relationship between the producer and the consumer is different. As Given (2000:36) puts it,

the audiences for Australia’s commercial TV stations do not pay the broadcasters for the programs they

watch. Rather, advertisers pay the broadcasters for the right to insert advertisements for their goods and services between those programs... Audiences who tune in primarily to watch the programs see the advertisements as well and change their spending behaviour as a result.

In this sense, the relationship between the producer and the consumer could be interpreted as the broadcaster selling the advertiser access to the consumer. This leaves us with two interesting points. The first is that the product that commercial television broadcasters actually produce and sell is not program content, as most people think. All the money and labour that goes in to making a television program is spent to produce access to an audience. Most people would automatically think of the access as a by-product of the content production process when in actual fact it is the other way around: content is a by-product of the production of audience access.

The second ties into the nature of the oligopoly. The whole industry follows this business plan, not just one or two companies who have gone down one path while others have followed their own. This means that *all* of this large industry is based on something imagined, which may or may not exist in fact. The audience is a deliberately constructed imagined community, made up of statistics and an amalgam of traits drawn from other imagined communities. Any attempt to measure its size can only be inaccurate because it will always depend on who is doing the imagining.

Australians witnessed an example of this when the industry switched from the AC Nielsen ratings system to Oztam in 2001. The new processes for collecting figures indicated that AC Nielsen's ratings had been erroneously inflated. The new ratings showed that the overall Australian television audience was much smaller than it was previously thought to be.<sup>12</sup> The industry panicked for a short time but then little more was heard about it. This is just another one of the reasons why Raymond Williams described broadcasting as confused and controversial. Anyone engaged in this industry must be able to persuade themselves that there is a concrete basis to what they do; that the audience is in fact a large, measurable group.

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<sup>12</sup> A description of the changeover from AC Nielsen to Oztam can be found at: <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/stories/s246055.htm>, accessed November 12, 2006.



Also, based on their business plan, they have to convince themselves that the viewer will actually pay attention to the broadcast advertisements. This is another thing that it is impossible to be certain about.

As a result of this confusion and uncertainty, television corporations develop strategies and corporate identities to entice the advertisers into spending their money on television advertisements. For Seven, this meant calling itself the “home of drama” and trying to create a sentimental attachment with its “gottaloveit” slogan. The ratings were not on Seven’s side so it had to create an alternative to the statistics in the minds of the advertisers.

Then the Seven Network started to win the news and current affairs ratings consistently in 2005. It released a series of advertisements to capitalise on this development but it took it a long while to move beyond defining itself against the Nine Network. Two of its advertisements in particular demonstrate this.



- [www.sevencorporate.com.au](http://www.sevencorporate.com.au), accessed November 12, 2006

The first shows a drawing of a television with the Seven Network logo showing on the screen, arms and legs coming out of it. This Seven television-creature stands upon the words “National Nine News” with the Nine News’ logo, a pixilated globe, next to it. Seven is squashing Nine. Obviously, Seven is celebrating consistent wins in the news and current affairs ratings. Yet the power of the oligopoly is so strong that they can only celebrate with reference to Nine. It is less like commercial competition and more like some sort of local sporting rivalry between two children.



- [www.sevencorporate.com.au](http://www.sevencorporate.com.au), accessed November 12, 2006

The other example displays the same characteristics. In this one the Seven television-creature is juggling the balls that appear in the Nine Network’s logo. Once again, the Seven Network is trying to communicate a success to the audience and its clients and can only do so by employing the internal logic of the Australia television market structure. Even when it becomes number one, it still acts as though Nine is actually the natural number one. This seems to be, once again, a part of the confusion that Raymond Williams (1974:16) says characterises broadcasting. It could also be an indication that Williams’ idea should be

extended to include a limitation of the terms of reference available to broadcasters. Perhaps they simply don't have the vocabulary to deal with what lies beyond the oligopolistic market structure in which the audience can only be defined as "mass" or "demographic".

Another of these strange confusions that characterise the Australian television market is the willingness to slice their imagined television audience up into a range of diverse groups, or demographics, whilst being completely unwilling to deal with the individual. For example, an article appeared as the cover story of *The Guide* – The *Sydney Morning Herald's* weekly television liftout – on August 19, 2002, which detailed some of the decisions faced by television programmers and featured quotes from each of the Australian television programming executives (Buchanan, 2000). The main question the article asks is why there are so many popular programs on Monday nights. Matt Buchanan, the author of the article, admits the three commercial channels are very similar to each other and writes, "demographics overlap, especially on Monday, and when the rewards are richest, you go with everything you've got". He then goes on to quote Chris O'Mara, Seven's programmer at the time, as saying,

We produce shows to go into tough timeslots... You don't always know what your opposition have got in the timeslot you've earmarked. And sometimes you can predict what they're going to do. But the situation is that we're trying to maximise an audience and they're more readily available early in the week... At Seven, our primary audience is 25 to 54, which is consistently available across most nights of the week. However, our secondary demographic would be 16 to 39, the same as Channel 10's primary demographic – although if you look at its profile, it's really more 16 to 24 – which is more likely to be available on Mondays... Also, you look at the history of what works in that timeslot. For instance, when we first launched *All Saints*, I moved *Blue Heelers* out of Tuesday night and put *All Saints* in its place. I knew there was an audience with a strong appetite for Australian drama at 8:30 on Tuesday nights.

O'Mara then describes how he builds program blocks. The demographic profile of the drama-

hungry audience is similar to that of the lifestyles hungry audience. Hence, he will program a lifestyles program followed by a drama so that the first audience will feed into the second. Clearly, for O'Mara, imagining that the (already abstract) audience can be divided up into different classes and categories, and that these classes can "overlap", helps him to feel he is doing his job. He can say what characteristics each of these demographics has, as though they are people. Television programmers may certainly be able to present a convincing set of statistics but it's important to remember that they are a representation of the real – an abstraction that has been removed from its context. As Ien Ang points out in *Living Room Wars* (1996), people watch television in their living rooms, surrounded by social situations and complex interactions that interfere with reception.

It also seems that this tendency towards demographics has made broadcasting corporations incapable of dealing with the individual viewer. They have been so successful in separating, in their minds (and the minds of the advertisers), ratings, audiences, demographics and spending habits from actual people that they refuse to listen to what individuals think. A good example was a complaint that came before the Australian Broadcasting Authority in 1999.<sup>13</sup> A Victorian viewer was offended by language used in an episode of *Ally McBeal*:

On the 24 May 1999, the Australian Broadcasting Authority (the ABA) received an unresolved written complaint from Ms Lisa Thwaites (the complainant) of Chrinside Park, Victoria. The complaint concerned a program promotion for "Ally McBeal" broadcast on Sunday, 28 March 1999 at 7.50pm by Channel 7 Melbourne. The licensee of Channel 7 Melbourne is HSV Channel 7 Pty Ltd.

Ms Thwaites was concerned that the promotion contained the word "bitch". She believed the promotion would have been more appropriately broadcast during a latter time slot.

The ABA's investigative report goes on to state that Ms Thwaites initially complained in writing to Channel Seven Melbourne, saying that her four year old child had seen the

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<sup>13</sup> The ABA's investigation report is available at: [http://www.aba.gov.au/newspubs/radio\\_TV/investigations/broadcast\\_operations/documents/television/1999/689.pdf](http://www.aba.gov.au/newspubs/radio_TV/investigations/broadcast_operations/documents/television/1999/689.pdf), accessed Dec 17, 2005.

advertisement in question and automatically used the word “bitch” immediately afterward. Neil Coulston, the Program Director of Channel Seven Melbourne, replied to her in writing saying that the industry is self-regulated and that while the program being advertised was rated PG, the advertisement in question was rated G and was quite allowable in that time slot. For him, Ms Thwaites could rest assured because he was positive Channel Seven had not violated the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS) “Code of Practice”.

Obviously, this was no consolation to Ms Thwaites. The investigative report goes on to relate Seven’s response to the ABA’s inquiries about this matter. In their letter, HSV quotes the relevant section of the “Code of Practice”:

Section 3.8.10 of the Code states that specifically with reference to language, promotions “must include no material which involves any of the following: ... socially offensive or discriminatory language.”

HSV does not believe the word “bitch” is socially offensive or discriminatory language. “Bitch” is a common colloquial word used widely in the community to mean many things including a woman or a complaint (Macquarie Dictionary). Accordingly HSV is satisfied that broadcast of the promotion in issue did not breach the code.

After more pressing by the ABA, HSV refused to back down from its statement that the word “bitch” was not offensive. Eventually the ABA decided that HSV was wrong and that “bitch” could be classed as a mild expletive and that HSV was therefore in breach of the Code for airing it in the G time slot. This is related in the ABA’s investigative report under the sub-heading “Conclusion”. Following “Conclusion” is “Action Taken” which reads as follows:

Seven has not proposed any particular remedial action in response to the ABA’s findings in this investigation, however, the ABA has sought information from Seven on the classification of promotions. The ABA intends to pursue this issue further with Seven in due course.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> I have been unable to find a record of such a pursuit.

Here we find both a broadcaster and its regulatory body unwilling or incapable of dealing with an individual rather than an imagined community. HSV-Seven preferred to attempt a redefinition of a word rather than simply apologise to one woman, or even take her complaint seriously. This may be the point where Raymond Williams' assertion about the inherent confusion of broadcasting becomes incorrect. Baudrillard's notion of the hyperreal seems like a much more apt description of this process. "Audiences" and "demographics", abstracted masses, have in this case become more real than the actual fact of the individual sitting in their home, in their family context, watching the television. Williams' concept of confusion relies on the idea that broadcasters have basically gotten things the wrong way round: a mistaken "mass" has taken the place of individual homes. Yet if a government regulatory body takes no action in enforcing the rights of the individual viewer, and the broadcaster is permitted to solely treat its audience as "mass", then they have actually made the "mass" more real than the individual.<sup>15</sup>

However, tradition is starting to lose its hold on the television industry. There are signs that commercial television broadcasters are finding it harder to maintain their profit levels and these trends suggest that the overall television audience is diminishing. If they are losing the younger audiences to new media – mainly the internet, although cable TV is also having an impact – then they are losing them because people prefer to be treated as individuals. These new forms of media can offer the audience the best of both worlds: they can get the communal feeling of mass media, on a much more global scale, as well as individual service. Their experience of media becomes much richer because of this. When they hear or read news about the various levels of imagined communities, they chose whether they want to hear the impersonal voice of the mass media or find their own paths to experience the information more intimately. Usually, they combine the two. This is something that television can't compete with. This is not to say television will die, but more that it will do what radio did: take a back seat to a newer medium.

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<sup>15</sup> Jean Baudrillard discussed these ideas in his book, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (1983), pp. 65 – 94.

Media corporations' marketing rhetoric concerning these issues usually implies that they are preparing for these things when they eventually happen. In reality, they are busily trying to catch up to what is already occurring. The Seven Network is no exception.

### **Kerry Stokes**

The individual certainly still exists in the figure of the media mogul. Kerry Stokes is the Seven Network's version. He originally bought Seven just after the time of great entrepreneurial upheaval in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The network was floated in 1993 and Stokes "has been chairman of the company since 1995 and was appointed executive chairman when CEO Julian Mounter left in mid-1999" (Given, 2000:44).

Tom O'Regan sites the upheaval that preceded Stokes as having started during the 1988-89 financial year, the first time the Australian commercial television industry lost money:

By September 1990, two of Australia's three commercial networks, Seven and Ten, were in the hands of the receivers. Seven had been that way all year; Ten was put into receivership that month – a little more than a year after former network owner, Frank Lowy, sold the network at a discounted price to Steve Cosser. Leading network Nine change hands in 1990 for a fraction of its original price. (1993:40)

One of the main contributing factors that led to the commercial upheavals of this time was a change of government regulation. In combination with financial deregulation, which created overly long credit lines, the change in media ownership rules made television stations look like goldmines to investors. The media rules meant that regional and metropolitan stations could be networked and "made it possible for a company to control four of the five largest television markets in the country and still come under the 60 percent ownership limit" (O'Regan, 1993:32). The possibilities of controlling the advertising for 60 percent of the national audience led to a furious race to gain control of the biggest license holders. Christopher Skase paid an enormous amount for Seven; Alan Bond and Frank Lowy did the

same for Nine and Ten, respectively. The guiding principle for each of these property developers as they entered the information industry was “the notion that information asset values could be just as unrelated to cash flow and profit levels but, nonetheless, just as capable of enormous capital gains as real estate values” (O’Regan, 1993:45).

It was clear to most of the players involved that the information industry would only become more of an oligopoly. They knew that during the 1990s, information companies would merge into corporations and they wanted to be a part of that, diversifying their information interests tremendously. However, they were wrong about the anticipated massive level of advertising revenue. Spending on advertising was already very high anyway and advertising agencies had taken care of national integration years previously. Also, the creative accountancy of Skase and Bond in particular, led to their downfalls. Australian commercial television went through a period of hardship as more stable proprietors took over, or, in Kerry Packer’s case, retook the reigns. As O’Regan puts it:

New/old proprietors like Kerry Packer sought a return to a stable oligopolistic environment which would see them doing just enough to maintain an edge over competitors. Packer’s record, like his father Frank’s, was never one of destroying the competition; he simply wanted to maintain an edge. (1993:51)

This was the situation which Kerry Stokes entered into when he took control at the Seven Network. The recovery was gradual, relying on the oligopoly to stabilise the industry and Seven’s place in it: Seven continued to play the number two role as Australian television recovered from the entrepreneurs. It has only been since 2004 that Seven started to look like it felt ready to introduce the concept of competition to the television industry.

This started with the hiring of David Leckie in April 2003. Leckie had previously been chief executive officer at the Nine Network, fired in 2002 “because of the bungled introduction of a new TV ratings system” (Shoebridge, 2006:14), mentioned above. Peter Meakin soon followed Leckie from Nine to Seven and began the news and current affairs ratings revival



that continued into 2006. A lucky run with their distribution deals continued their ratings successes. Shows like *Lost*, *Desperate Housewives* and *Prison Break* eventually gave them overall ratings supremacy. Their victory over Nine seemed as though it had taken on some form of completion when on March 8, 2006, they released their December half results for 2005:

Seven's TV earnings jumped 49 per cent to \$153 million. Two weeks earlier, James Packer, PBL's executive chairman, had announced that Nine's earnings fell 13.1 per cent to \$148.9 million in the December half, hit by 4.6 per cent decline in revenue. (Shoebridge, 2006:14)

This was the first time ever that the Seven Network made more money than the Nine Network. Yet this success is tempered by the knowledge that Seven still face an impressive set of problems in their struggle to adapt to new media. As the journalist Neil Shoebridge puts it:

Though they are winning the battles against Nine and Ten Network, the big question now for Leckie and Stokes is whether they will win the war that all the nation's free-to-air TV networks are engaged in – and that is ensuring their longer-term survival against the threat from new forms of media such as the internet and pay TV... (2006:14)

Seven has been able to parlay its television ratings success into Pacific Magazines, its print arm, and has established itself as being competitive with PBL and the other Australian magazine companies. While it has also made a positive move towards survival with its Yahoo! partnership, it has been, at the same time, fighting to be a part of pay TV.

Seven (although it mostly seems to be Stokes' initiative) has been fighting a massive court battle against most of its media competitors, over their apparent collusion to shut Seven out of the pay TV market. According to Seven:

At a meeting held on or about 13 December 2000, Telstra, News, PBL and Foxtel entered into a

contract, arrangement or understanding to secure both the AFL broadcast rights and the NRL pay, internet and naming rights. (Birmingham, 2006:26)

That is, these companies teamed up to ensure that neither Seven, nor its pay television arm, C7, would have access to either of these high rating programs. It worked; C7 went out of business and the free-to-air AFL rights went to Nine and Ten. Now, if most media analysts are to be believed, Stokes wants revenge. The court case

has been described, only half in jest, as the case of Kerry Stokes versus the world. It is a case that has already run for more than three years in its various phases, costing over a hundred and fifty million dollars. (Birmingham, 2006:26)

The outcome will have a large impact on the industry. If Seven loses it will have to pay an enormous amount in court costs. If its opponents lose, Seven's demands will restrict their businesses immeasurably. Yet Stokes and Seven seem determined to play out the case to the end.

While the need for a foothold in the pay television market may be one of the driving factors motivating Seven, new media laws could also play a part. Changes to cross-media ownership legislation will "free up" the market and are expected to unleash a torrent of takeover bids.<sup>16</sup> When Seven was happy to occupy its number two position, it seemed to be the most likely target of a commercial television takeover. Now that Seven is on top, it is starting to seem a lot more secure. In fact, Stokes will most likely turn into a predator.

## **Turning off the Television**

Whatever the details of the latest round of commercial television upheavals, it seems as

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<sup>16</sup> This idea has been bandied about extensively in the media, most notably, Hewitt, J. and T. Boyd (2005) "Can Coonan tame these wild men?" in *The Weekend Australian Financial Review*, November 26-27, 2005 and Chenoweth, N. (2005) "Ugly side of big media on trial" in *The Weekend Australian Financial Review*, September 17-18, 2005.

though the industry is resigned to the decline of free-to-air television.<sup>1</sup> New and emerging technology is making it seem as though there is a question mark over television. As Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill (2004:535) put it:

The “whole question of TV’s future”... is bound up with rapid change occurring across a variety of areas: technology (the shift from analog to digital modes of imaging, sound recording, data transmission and storage; internet applications; computer software and hardware development; etc.), international and national commercial and communication policy (the regulation and deregulation of telephony, satellite, cable, terrestrial broadcasting, media ownership and concentration, copyright, etc.), and corporate strategies (mergers of/alliances among equipment manufacturers, software developers, internet providers, computer and peripheral manufacturers, terrestrial broadcasters, film studios, cable and/or satellite services, etc.). It is clear that television has been and is being transformed as a result...

Australia will switch off the analogue broadcasts at some stage in the next decade and this alone will provoke a period of upheaval and transformation in the industry (Given, 2003:x).<sup>2</sup> With the dizzying array of other changes also taking place it is extremely hard for anyone to predict what shape the future of television will take. This is why the industry players are doing all they possibly can now to ensure that their businesses survive and remain profitable.

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<sup>1</sup> Graeme Turner presents this idea most persuasively with regards news and current affairs in his book *Ending the Affair* (2005).

<sup>2</sup> The actual date when analogue broadcasts will be switched off in Australia has changed a number of times since it was first approved. The legislated analogue to digital switchover timeframe, as at May 11 2006, was 2008 but the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts at the time, Helen Coonan, wanted to push the date back to between 2010 and 2012. The new timeframe, as proposed by the 2008 Minister, Stephen Conroy, is 2013 ([http://www.minister.dcita.gov.au/media/speeches/a\\_digital\\_action\\_plan\\_for\\_australia](http://www.minister.dcita.gov.au/media/speeches/a_digital_action_plan_for_australia), accessed May 11 2006 and [http://www.minister.dbcde.gov.au/media/media\\_releases/2008/042](http://www.minister.dbcde.gov.au/media/media_releases/2008/042), accessed July 14 2008).

## Chapter 10

### Network Ten and Imagined Communities

On visiting [www.ten.com.au](http://www.ten.com.au)<sup>3</sup>, the Ten Network's public website, the user is first asked to nominate his or her city of residence. When a city is selected the site opens up with a variety of local information including weather, the latest local news and what is currently showing on channel Ten in that city. Next to the Ten logo, at the top of the page, are the words:

Welcome to Network Ten.

This site has been designed to offer you the latest information for your capital station.

Click below to change your city.

You are currently tuned into Ten Sydney.

This highlights the importance Network Ten places on the local or, rather, giving the impression that it is focussed on the local. It is trying to show the Australian viewing public that, while the other networks are gazing outward at the world, Network Ten is solely concerned with what is going on locally, in the "place" where the audience lives.

This has been Ten's projected identity since the mid-1990s. It was only toward the end of 2005 that the Seven Network started to use some of the same emphases, and Nine followed suit in mid-2006. Now it has become clear that the television broadcasters think that the splintered media audience wants something new from television. There is less of a perceived demand for it to represent the global or even the national.

This strong local focus is also evident at the Ten corporate website, [www.tencorporate.com.au](http://www.tencorporate.com.au)<sup>4</sup>. In the "About Ten" dropdown menu there is an option that shows a map of Australia with sections indicating Network Ten's broadcast coverage. This map is not hidden in any way and is reasonably easy to find. It shows that Ten broadcasts to a narrow

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<sup>3</sup> Accessed May 12 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Accessed May 12 2006.

strip along the east coast, a small area around Perth on the west coast and a small area around Adelaide on the southern coast. The vast majority of Australia is not reached. While the same could be said of Nine and Seven, the other two Australian commercial television networks, they seem much more careful not to admit to it. Similar maps do not appear on any of their websites. This is because they market themselves as being representative of, and representing, the nation. Nine and Seven try to persuade the viewers to watch their networks because doing so will provide them with membership to the imagined community. Ten has stopped trying to give the appearance of identifying with the whole of the nation and now focuses on local areas instead.

This is not to say that Ten doesn't use the narrative symbols of Australian national identity. The language of nationalism is very recognisable and flexible and has effectively replaced any sense of local, urban signifying systems. Ten's identity as a broadcaster is still very much couched in the discourse of nation; however, it uses its own particular discursive trope. Where Nine and Seven will make a show of their news bulletins keeping tabs on what is happening all over the country and the world, Ten will not presume such omniscience and will try to concentrate on news stories that can almost have a direct relationship to their audience. While Nine and Seven are still using the traditional television news rhetorical formulae of promoting themselves as educational providers of vital knowledge, Ten tries to appeal to much more limited interests. Rather than sending reporters to far-flung war zones, it prefers to have a helicopter hovering above Sydney reporting on the traffic. This is an attempt to give the Ten identity a sense of immediacy, so that the viewer will think Ten is the only station which is bothering to consider local conditions.

There is also not as much use of "world" imagery in the Ten news bulletins' sets and advertisements. Seven and Nine always seem to use an image of the world in some context and failing that, a map of Australia.<sup>5</sup> Apart from the coverage map on their website, Ten avoids maps as much as it can. It prefers to give the impression that its gaze is turned inwards, allowing it to use the same discourse and symbols in its representations as Seven and Nine,

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<sup>5</sup> Although, as of May, 2006, imagery of the local city dominates Seven and Nine's news bulletins as well as Ten's.

while attempting to project a different identity. This shows the audience that, while Ten does things slightly differently, it is still recognisable as television and as part of the oligopoly. It still has the sense of familiarity and comfort that is vital if it is to be allowed into the living rooms of vast numbers of people.

In effect, Ten represents itself as inverting the power of the national map. It is the opposite of the imperialist strategy that Fiske (2003:282) attributes to the Mercator projection – the commonly used method for flattening the earth so that it can be represented on a map. By making the meridians parallel, Mercator enlarged the distance between them as they travel north. To allow for this he proportionately widened the distance between the meridians. This means that the landmasses in the northern hemisphere appear larger than they actually are. It also means that Europeans could easily find their way to back to Europe with booty from far flung parts of the globe. North was accepted as being up and the equator was dropped down the map lower than it should be. The result was that

the Eurocentric representation of the world was part of Eurocentric action in the world, for knowing and doing are continuous. European derived societies have retained it as one of their commonest maps, if not the normal one, because we are still engaged in much the same global enterprise as the seventeenth century helmsman. (Fiske, 2003:282)

Maps are not only a way of representing territory but also creating it. Once a large area is mapped it becomes knowable and sovereignty over areas of it can be attributed; it also implies that one can travel to that place and find one's way home. As Miller (1998:147) describes this process in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

the post-World War II proliferation of multinational corporations... united First World businesses and governments in a search for cheap labor, new markets, and pliant regimes on the margin of a globe designed to spin as a Northern Hemisphere top.

In opposition to Fiske's ideas about the cultural imperialist's use of cartography, Ten makes a

show of retreating from the map of the globe and even the map of Australia. This means that it makes local issues and stories more important than what goes in the rest of the world. There is no need for Ten to display a map of the local because viewers don't need to find their way home if they haven't left it.

Ten (and now the other commercial networks) have gone beyond the postmodern idea of the map preceding the territory. It is almost a denial of maps because maps imply changing territory and by emphasising the local Ten are trying to create the impression of a stable centre.

### **Local Nationalism**

On the surface, this means that Ten appears to put more importance on "place" than "space". That is, by its prime time news bulletin reporting on local traffic it is showing the audience that it exists in the same location as they do. Rather than producing content based on notions and narratives of the "space of flows" – boasting of being the masters of telling stories of the nation and the globe – Ten's news and its helicopter show an awareness of landmarks and shared area. The same technique is used in Ten's weather segment. In Sydney, Tim Bailey broadcasts the weather from a different spot in the city every day, often getting local people to do something interesting in the background before and after he gives the audience the facts. He also provides a running commentary on the place where he is, sometimes historical or sometimes utterly frivolous; it doesn't matter if it is silly or serious because it is usually something that members of the audience will recognise, providing them (Ten hopes) with a sense of their own milieu and a sentimental attachment to it that involves Ten. Once again, they are adopting a vision of an imagined community that involves immediacy, the intention being to create the idea of Ten being the most available television network.

Obviously, this is only a superficial impression that Ten tries to purvey for marketing purposes. In reality it has no more association to a "place" than Nine or Seven. The images and techniques it uses to create this sense of local-ness are aimed at the lowest common

denominator in the same way as those of the other commercial networks. In fact, Ten is the least legitimately “local” network, with its corporate structure designed to hide significant levels of foreign ownership. Ten also relies on the most foreign content. Most of the programs it broadcasts come from the United States and those it produces locally are cheap reality TV shows or sketch comedy. The real strategy behind Ten’s operations revolves around efficiency.

### **Niche Marketing**

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Ten suffered the most from what O’Regan (1993:40) calls the period of “entrepreneurial television”. As discussed in Chapter Nine, Australian commercial television went through a time of enormous upheaval.

Coming into existence in the early 1960s with the granting of a third commercial television licence in Sydney, Tens in other capital cities soon followed. They started to be drawn together when News Corporation gained controlling interests of Ten in Sydney and Melbourne. In 1987, control of these stations passed to Westfield Capital Corp who already had control of Ten in Canberra, Perth and Adelaide. The Lowys gained control of Ten Brisbane in 1989, bringing all the capital city Tens together in a national network. However, poor business decisions and inexperience forced the break-up of the network, which did not become national again until 1995 (Stockbridge, 2000:191). Ten fared particularly badly in the period of entrepreneurial television and Frank Lowy sold the network to a consortium of overseas buyers in 1989 for a \$280 million loss (O’Regan, 1993:48). As Stockbridge (2000:191) put it:

In 1990, Ten was placed in receivership and regarded as the basket case of the TV industry. It was locked in a losing ratings battle with Nine and Seven, with all three networks going flat-out for the same viewers, spending huge amounts to do so.



Ten recovered from these difficulties by targeting a much smaller market during the 1990s and focussing on an efficient business plan that did not involve competing with the other broadcasters. Perhaps it was the decentralised nature of the new ownership that allowed this course of action to occur:

Network Ten's current ownership structure was initiated in 1992 when a consortium, including Canadian broadcaster CanWest Global Communications, purchased the network out of receivership... While Nine and Seven were battling it out to be number one across the board, Ten set out (under CEO Peter Viner) to target a younger audience... (Stockbridge, 2000:191-192)

With no one particular personality enforcing their will as "owner", sound business sense took its course. Network Ten targeted the younger audience, aiming the majority of its programming at the 16-39 year old demographic. It imported programming that was expensive to produce, such as dramas and sitcoms, to support the cheaper reality programs which have become the basis of its marketing identity.

Ten has been programming *Law and Order* and *The Simpsons* for many years, repeating them endlessly in much the same way as occurs on pay TV. Television critics berate them for this tactic but the viewers do not seem to object, as both programs have a consistent audience. In opposition to these solid mainstays, Ten rotates reality programs. When one of them succeeds, Ten reaps the rewards of high ratings, and when one fails, it doesn't matter because the program's producers simply devise another format.

This focus on a specific demographic, in conjunction with their emphasis on the local, has been a successful formula for Ten. They have adopted an "underdog" (Stockbridge, 2000:190) market position and spent money accordingly. That is, they spend less than the other two commercial networks because they are not trying to compete for the top position. Being content with third place has given them the healthiest profit margins in the industry. As the Ten Corporate website puts it:

Ten's television operations have consistently delivered outstanding earnings through a "seriously different business model", focusing on clear differentiation from competitors, targeted demographics, careful expenditure, efficiency, profitability and returns to shareholders.

Network Ten has the highest operating margins of Australia's three national commercial television broadcasters and since 2005 has been the country's most profitable TV network.<sup>1</sup>

Market research has shown that the spending habits of those in Ten's target demographic make them particularly desirable to advertisers:

The 16-39 year old age group has become the holy grail of commercial television. The other commercial networks, Seven and Nine, also recognise the appeal of this group. Its members are perceived as being big earners, big spenders, quick to adopt new products and having little brand loyalty. (Stockbridge, 2000:192)

Demographics seem to be the television and advertising industries' response to the fragmentation of the mass. It is based on the idea that as the audience becomes harder to define as a mass, new forms of market research can define particular groups in society and deliver information about their consumption habits to advertisers. These advertisers can then target their products to these particular groups and develop marketing strategies based on this information. Superficially, demographics are a way of coping with the obvious "de-massification" of the audience. Television and advertising executives recognise that not only are they losing their audiences to other forms of media, but also, their audiences are becoming much more aware of the broadcasting industry's tactics and modes of operation. There is an increasing amount of information in the world about what goes on behind the scenes at media corporations and, in the network society, more information equals uncertainty.

Strathern uses this idea as the basis for her analysis of "imagined communications"

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<sup>1</sup> "About Ten", <http://www.tencorporate.com.au/>, accessed May 13 2006.

(2005:466). In her discussion of the sciences she quotes the study of Nowotny et al. regarding this characteristic of contemporary society:

In traditional [modern] society science was “external”... and scientists saw their task as the benign reconstitution of society according to “modern” principles [Mode 1]... In contemporary [modern] society, in contrast, science is “internal”; as a result science and research are no longer terminal or authoritative projects... but instead, by creating new knowledge, they add fresh elements of uncertainty and instability [Mode 2].

I would argue that the television industry’s turn from masses to demographics is a result of television becoming “internal”. That is, as argued in Chapter Seven, contemporary “identity” is based on a self-reflexive awareness. Social actors watch themselves as though from outside and choose modes of behaviour that they think make them coherent to others. Part of this self-reflexive awareness in Australian society is the observation of television and advertising as part of our lives. This leads to uncertainty as the individual begins to question the influence of the media in society. Seeing self-reflexivity in this light implies a certain sense of autonomy and power. However, the trend towards demographics in television, advertising, marketing and economics in general, stems from an abstraction that takes power away from the consumer:

From the foundations of modern Western economic thought... there has been a tendency to construe people in their economic guise as autonomous individuals motivated by internal springs rather than interpersonal relations, to dis-embed them from the social relations and structures within which they exist. (Carrier, 1998:6)

Taken out of their contexts, individuals become units of value, calculations that can be predicted and categorised. A map of society is created where people fall into demographics and marketers are able to claim that buying habits can be analysed and used to predict what an individual will do. Despite the observable lack of predictability in the actual world, people are put into categories based on abstract figures and a false logic is superimposed on them. The

problem is that this form of economics has become institutionalised and the real world is being made to fit into it:

the results have included efforts to reduce government control over international trade in a range of objects and services, to de-regulate different industries in various countries, to turn different sorts of collective property into commodities... to encourage or oblige governments in various places to reduce or eliminate programmes of support for public goods and services, to encourage international standards that make it easier for international investors to place and profit from their money. (Carrier, 1998:8)

This form of economics is not only evident in the policies of the Australian government but also in the workings of the commercial television networks, who have piled abstraction upon abstraction. Not only do they produce content with abstractions of “place”, while being solidly part of the “space of flows”, they target their viewers as abstractions. While the television business purports to be driven by ratings and viewer approval, they are talking about an abstract, virtualised category of viewers.

As Strathern (467), once again, puts it in relation to the sciences:

expectations continue to move: from science demonstrating its effectiveness by reaching toward potential consumers through the promise of (say) medical advancement to requiring from “society” something akin to endorsement. Consumption now becomes part of the production process. In research policy rhetoric, the switch away from “public understanding” of science to “public engagement” switches from society as the passive consumer to society as an active consumer-participant in knowledge production.

While science and media have completely different funding structures, in a way, they are both driven by a virtual public consent. The two modes of information consumption outlined by Strathern are driven by the same forces, whether in the sciences or the media. The audience is no longer regarded as a passive mass, waiting to be told what to consume. Demographics recognise narrower traits and identify spending habits. Particularly in the case of Network

Ten, the media has re-configured itself so that the particularities of the active consumer drive its content. Yet, the active consumer that determines what Ten will do is not real – it is an abstraction. Therefore, Ten's (and the other commercial television broadcasters') business plan are predicated entirely on self-legitimising logic where real people do not play a part. However, at the same time, this produces information and creates uncertainty. Real people are aware that they are being abstracted and their identities fragment as a result.

This raises the possibility that, while television broadcasters seem to set great store in the information created by demographics, they may be contributing in some ways to declining audience numbers. The creation of uncertainty in combination with self-reflexive awareness could be making it obvious to viewers that, in reality, demographics are simply another way of obscuring the fact that broadcast media is transmitted to individual receivers. As Raymond Williams (1974:17) observed of the word "mass" in relation to broadcast media, its definition as "'mass communication' [is] an abstraction to its most general characteristic, that it went to many people, 'the masses', which obscured the fact that the means chosen was the offer of individual sets".

Demographics seem to be more like a method for splitting masses up into little masses, rather than a way of dealing with social fragmentation. It implies that the function of advertising is to find a way to tell people what products exist and try to interest them in purchasing some. We can see this rhetoric in the way Ten's programming for the 16-39 year olds is often referred to as "attracting" that demographic.

Ten is experimenting with programming that it feels will communicate with a group of people that exists outside of them, in society; that is, Ten thinks that the abstraction is real. This way of thinking about the audience permeates the television industry. It neglects the fact that the audience is a construct. Television broadcasters draw on broad categorisations provided by the various methods of abstract data collection, boil them down into a demographics and then draw on mythic attributes from the narrative of nation and community to make the abstract appear real. That is, they are dealing solely with the imagined community of the space of

flows, rather than the local formations of groups of people. The demographics they talk about are just as constructed as the audience. In fact, this seems to be more a characteristic of advertising in general, rather than just television's defining trait. As Williams (66), again, puts it:

It is often said that advertising is old as urban society, and it undoubtedly increased in the expanding trade of early capitalist societies. Yet there was a qualitative change at a much later date: in Britain in the late nineteenth century, related primarily to corporate developments in production and distribution, and to the attempt, following major trade crises, to organise rather than simply supply or inform a market.

That is, advertising does not just supply information to consumers, it constructs markets. Therefore, no matter how much Ten says it is focussing on target demographics and operating successfully with a "seriously different business model", it is simply doing what television has always done, following along with the oligopolistic industry structure, using the same discourse but with its own individual trope.

Despite Ten's use of words such as "demographic" and "niche", all that really happens if a consumer watches an advertisement is an increased awareness of the re-enforcement of the message that, in order to be a member of this society, you must buy. This, in turn creates the awareness of membership of an imagined community. In effect, it is the self-reflexive awareness of being targeted as part of a demographic, rather than Anderson's (2000) original notion of shared media literacy, that ties contemporary imagined communities together.

This means that the symbols and images of Australian nationhood are no longer the binding elements of the Australia nation. In the past, whether one believed in their valency or not, these symbols and images were what made Australia's imagined community cohesive as a nation. Now it would seem that cohesiveness is achieved by a self-reflexive awareness of one's abstract status as a consumer within a national economy. That is, the viewer knows that

they are being targeted by images of nationhood in the assumption that this will remind them of their sentimental attachment of the nation, and it is this awareness of being targeted that creates the sentimental attachment rather than the images themselves. In a way, television producers and audiences are playing a game and it is this game that characterises the imagined community. The television broadcaster uses the expected imagery and the viewer agrees to contribute themselves as statistics so that the television can go on providing them with entertainment.

All the commercial networks use the same imagery to play this game, each with its own discursive trope. An interesting example of this is the way Ten appears to contravene social norms at times in the reality program *Big Brother*. It seems that Ten deliberately tries to provoke the more conservative elements in Australian society because it recognises that these actions are something with which its target audience will identify. In January 2006, Prime Minister John Howard made a speech expressing his concern about the bad manners of Australian people. According to a story that appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (2006:8), Howard blamed television, “‘I think it’s time that the television networks put a curb on the increasing use of vulgarism on television,’ Mr Howard told reporters”. Further on in the newspaper story the focus turns to reality television:

He [Howard] said he was particularly concerned about vulgar language on reality TV.

While he did not mention *Big Brother*, the late night version of Network Ten’s reality program last year attracted criticism from politicians over its sexual antics, nudity and foul language.

The broadcasting watchdog also found *Big Brother Uncut* had breached the industry code, prompting Ten to change its format.

While the criticism of *Big Brother* implies that elements of the program transgressed societal

norms, Ten has continued using the same sort of content for this program. Ten does this because its youthful target audience likes to feel it has a resistance identity in relation to what it sees as the mainstream. While Howard's speech may have earned him some approval from his constituency, Ten has had a similar vote of confidence from its audience. The sixth series of *Big Brother* began in April 2006, once again doing very well in the ratings. According to journalist Amanda Meade (2006):

An average audience of 1.8 million viewers tuned in to the sixth series of the reality show, which this year features a mother and daughter team with matching breast enlargements. Desperate to maintain interest in the fading Big Brother franchise, producers have cast 15 young, attractive people, many of whom have a background in modelling or stripping.

## Sports Tonight

Another interesting example of Ten's trope for representing the discourse of the nation was the Anzac Day, 2006, broadcast of its sports news program, *Sports Tonight*. *Sports Tonight* is a nightly half-hour show and is Network Ten's efficient solution to broadcasting sport without spending much money. Rather than outlay enormous amounts for the rights to broadcast entire matches or games, Ten simply compiles the other networks' highlights and puts them together with a news format.<sup>2</sup> According to [www.ten.com.au](http://www.ten.com.au):<sup>3</sup>

Starting in 1993, Sports Tonight filled a void by providing comprehensive sporting results, interviews and stories EVERY day. Australia has always had a fascination with sport and the introduction of such a detailed program quickly created a strong following, which has gone from strength to strength and is now recognised as the number one sport news program in the country.

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<sup>2</sup> Network Ten recently contributed, with Seven, to the purchase of the rights to broadcast the AFL. This is one of the very few significant expenditures Ten has made on sport since the early 1990s. There is a possibility that Ten only agreed to this deal so it could be excluded from Seven's court case against virtually every other large Australian media player. Seven, of course, wanted the AFL rights to compete with Nine. The only other sports Ten has rights to are a relatively unpopular range of motor racing events.

<sup>3</sup> Accessed May 13 2006.



Here we see a direct appeal to the myth of the Australian as a lover of sport. According to this myth, it doesn't matter what the sport is, the Australian will be engaged by it and find it rewarding entertainment.<sup>4</sup> The myth is a large part of the reason why the other commercial television networks spend so much money on their sports coverage. It also gets an airing every time an Australian athlete or sportsperson does anything significant. We are told that Australia and Australians are obsessed by sport.

On Anzac Day 2006, *Sport Tonight*'s presenter, Ryan Phelan, delivered this myth in a particularly direct way. At the start of each program he gives a brief précis of each story for that edition, so that the viewer doesn't have to wonder what is coming up and will be enticed to stay tuned Network Ten. On this occasion there was a story about sport and the Australian war memorial and, as Phelan said, "war and sport are vital to the experience of being Australian".

The idea that there is a relationship between war and sport, and that both have particular relevance to being Australian, might seem attractive to a *Sports Tonight* viewer. The image of the soldier, the Anzac, is a powerful symbol in Australia. Equally, the image of the champion sportsperson holds sway over the majority. The fact that these two can be put together so easily, and be assumed to be easily understood by the people watching, provides an interesting view on the way Network Ten imagines Australian culture. In his book, *On Television and Journalism* (1996), Pierre Bourdieu categorises sports news with human interest news. According to him,

human interest stories create a political vacuum. They depoliticize and reduce what goes on in the world to the level of anecdote or scandal. This can occur on a national or international scale, especially with film stars or members of the royal family, and is accomplished by fixing and keeping attention fixed on events without political consequences, but which are nonetheless dramatized so as to "draw a lesson" or

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<sup>4</sup> The myth also ignores the fact Australian television only ever covers a very limited range of sports. Perhaps because of the oligopoly, it is only very rarely that a network covers something different.

be transformed into illustrations of “social problems”. (51)

In Ten’s abstracted Australia of demographics and spending habits, war, a serious political situation, can be conflated with sport, a trifle. While this “political vacuum” is also created by the other two commercial television networks, Ten seem to have associated it with their target, “youth”, demographic and decided to specialise in it.

The majority of Ten’s most popular programs are forms of reality television. For example, at the end of April, 2006, Ten came first overall in the weekly ratings: the Nine Network was pushed into third behind Seven for the first time since viewer meters began in 1991;

the start of the sixth series of *Big Brother*, two shows in the final week of *The Biggest Loser* and the surprise hit *Thank God You’re Here* gave Ten an average audience across the week of 1.042 million, compared with Seven’s 1.033 million and Nine’s 1.024 million. (Meade, 2006:2)

Two of the three programs mentioned, *Big Brother* and *The Biggest Loser*, seem to revolve around “lifestyles” and the idea that they can be chosen. They are given dramatic impact by the implication that it also possible to chose the wrong lifestyle. Again, the result is a potential political vacuum because Ten is trying to persuade the viewer to believe that the issues raised in these shows are important.

### **The Sacred Loser**

As discussed in Chapter Three, there is a sacred element to the Australian Anzac myth that coincides with Benedict Anderson’s (2000) analysis of the tomb of the unknown soldier and its importance to the imagined community. The sacred status of these two mythic symbols create the feeling in the populace that their community started at some point in the past and took on an essential quality that will allow it to continue into the future. The question that arises out of *Sports Tonight*’s conflation of the Anzac with sport is, does this make televised

sport the Anzac's equal in sacredness?

There are many ways in which contemporary Australian culture associates the Anzac with sport. Apart from the obvious examples where professional sporting competitions hold matches on Anzac Day to confer some of that mythic Australian-ness on themselves in the hope of drawing a public holiday crowd and viewing audience, sportspeople and teams are often described using the same discourse of Australian values: mateship, courage, larrikinism and others. These traits are usually said to have been created, or at least perpetuated, at Gallipoli.<sup>5</sup>

Televised sport is predominantly spectacle. Its content is designed to thrill the audience. It is colourful, extreme and suspenseful. If Debord is right and we now live in a society of spectacle, perhaps Anzac Day is appropriating from sport to remain culturally relevant rather than the other way round. Thousands of backpackers now flock to Gallipoli every year to witness the spectacle of being in that place on April 25. More movies are being made focussing on the Anzac legend. Perhaps Anzac Day has needed to become more of a spectacle in order to survive.

If this is the case, then it is the spectacle which is sacred in contemporary society. As Agamben puts it:

The state of the integrated spectacle (or, spectacular-democratic state) is the final stage in the evolution of the state-form – the ruinous stage toward which monarchies and republics, tyrannies and democracies, racist regimes and progressive regimes are all rushing. Although it seems to bring national identities back to life, this global movement actually embodies a tendency toward the constitution of a kind of supranational police state... (2000:86)

While it may be difficult to imagine programs like Big Brother as a manifestation of a

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<sup>5</sup> It is important here to draw the distinction between televised sport and actual participatory sport. While they share the same name they are actually distinct things. The type of sport that gets associated with Anzac Day and myths of Australian-ness is rarely amateur and un-televised.

supranational police state, it can be argued that the identity that Ten tries to sell to its audience – both of itself and of them – promotes insularity in the guise of local community and makes sacred the search for an “identity” based on the spectacle of lifestyles television, while contributing to the abstraction of the viewers. However, people still have the power to choose. They are switching off their televisions. It’s debatable whether one can find a way to resist and withdraw from the power of the spectacle, but at least people are exerting some power.

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to explore theories and ideas which focus on the relationship between the business practices of broadcast television and the imagined community it sees as its audience. The relationship is almost symbiotic. For all levels of imagined community, whether local, national, regional or global, broadcast television provides the vehicle – the medium – which allows a person's mind to make the leap between their immediate surroundings and the abstract world beyond. At the same time, television exists in a community context. It is not just influenced by cultural forces like history, tradition, politics or moral belief; it consists of them. Television and the imagined community feed off each other.

Throughout the history of television the nature of this relationship has remained constant. For as long as television has existed it has fed off the imagined community and vice versa. This is not to say that the two depend on each other to survive. The nature of the relationship is *almost* symbiotic. The imagined community existed before broadcast television and it will exist after it. The opposite, however, is not the case. Television could not have thrived without the imagined community. It would not have had any context. While large scale communities have fed off television and have been irreversibly influenced by it, they will not change drastically when free-to-air television is replaced. The relationship was simply a marriage of convenience.

The body of this thesis examines the nature of this marriage by investigating contemporary examples of Australian broadcast television – predominantly news bulletins and station promotions – to see how each network's branding images have changed in accordance to changes in society at large. As is the way of convenience, this investigation has revealed both enormous change and stasis. Since the beginning of television in Australia, society's norms, customs and traditions have mutated dramatically. However, the overall social system has remained the same. This systemised facet of society is reflected by the television industry. Content has changed as industry business practices and marketing have tried to keep pace

with perceived change in society. However, while this tremendous level of change and adaptation has taken place, the end goal has remained the same: profit.

The third chapter of this thesis demonstrates this point by revealing the essential flexibility of the imagined community in its original context: the nation. The rhetoric of those who promote the nation and nationalism speaks of these concepts as though they exist outside of time and society; as though nothing that actually occurs in a nation could alter its essential qualities. Yet even the most superficial analysis reveals that the nation has no timeless essence. It is utterly contingent and changes constantly. Australian commercial television corporations ignore the factual falsity of the nation and promote its abstract qualities as the mainstay of their corporate identities. They do this because they want their audiences to be as numerous as the population of the nation. The only idea that stands a chance of uniting all the people within that geographical boundary into one audience is the idea of an Australian national heritage.

This means that the networks' commercial identities exist in a process of constant change because the thing they are trying to represent and emulate, the nation, is constantly changing. Ideas of "Australian national traits" or an "Australian way of life" are ceaselessly manipulated and adapted, mostly to sell products but also to get politicians elected. When surveying the history of the television networks' commercial identities, this state of change may not be immediately apparent. It does seem as though the most significant changes only took place from 2004 onwards. The Nine Network, for example, promoted itself as "still the one" for many years without change until Seven usurped its right to that claim in 2005. Before that the market structure seemed secure and unchanging. During the years Nine used its "still the one" slogan, and appeared to have an unchanging identity, the details that made up that identity constantly changed to keep pace with the perceived audience's expectations.

As shown in the body of this thesis, from the late 1970s until 2004/2005, Nine was consistently at the top of the ratings. For Nine, this meant it could identify itself as the station most in tune with the majority of people in the nation and, therefore, it had the right to claim

accurate representation of Australia. It chose to represent the nation as masculine. For the years it was on top Nine's tactics did not change. However, the details of being masculine in Australian society changed considerably. The same thing has happened with Ten's corporate identity since the early 1990s. It markets itself as the youth network but the details of being an Australian youth have changed.

These examples also make clear the fact that while each of the networks tries to represent the nation, they each have different ideas about the content of the images. They imagine their audience, and construct the subsequent representations of community, in different ways. These differences do not occur because the various executives involved have privately diverse internal images of the nation (although it is undoubtedly true that they do) but because each network's business model and position in the marketplace dictates what form its representations will take. If their ratings figures and market research indicated that the majority of Australians were Muslim, then the call to prayer would be televised five times a day. Once again, it is a symbiotic relationship and change is constant.

The differences between the networks also remain reasonably constant. The relationship between Seven, Nine and Ten has been defined as an oligopoly, as described in the body of this thesis. This thesis uses news bulletins to demonstrate this clearly. Each network has a distinct style of news delivery, yet these styles do not vary enormously. In Sydney, for example, Nine attempts to maintain the male patriarch as anchor, Seven hints at teamwork between the sexes (with a strong emphasis on the man) and Ten seems intent on portraying a newsreading family. These are specific points of variation. However, the overall format remains the same: a primetime news bulletin containing news, sport and weather, delivered by news readers and reporters. No matter what happens in the television market place, none of the networks dares to make any significant changes to this formula. Even at times of genuine upheaval, nothing really changes.

For example, during 2005 it became clear that Seven had not only challenged Nine's market leading position but actually overtaken it. One of the main contributing factors to this victory

was the imitation of Nine's news style. As demonstrated in this thesis, Seven was content to be number two behind Nine for many years. This position could have allowed Seven to innovate. However, while it was number two, its news style was different enough from Nine's to mark it as not a direct copy, but could in no sense be described as innovative. It was only when Seven chose to directly recycle Nine's style that it actually started to win. The details changed but the system remained the same. As with the nation, flexibility, constant change and adaptation maintain the status quo.

Many of the theorists cited in the main body of this thesis argue that one of the primary functions of mass media is the preservation of the status quo. Television, newspapers and radio recycle society's traditions, myths and narratives to create content that reaches the largest portions of the market. Yet change occurs. Generations change, environments change and technological innovation proceeds. While mass media can normally be described as conservative – in the sense that it reinforces society's traditions – it is an empty, rhetorical conservatism. It does not try to fight change. Instead it tries to assimilate it. The radical fringe is absorbed into the centre and becomes part of mass media culture; another example of flexibility – once again, simply in order to maintain profit. This means that while the mass media continues to mechanically crank out the over-used refrains of mass culture, the detailed content of these refrains changes. It is not the content which matters, it is the process.

This process also plays a stabilising role when representations of a homogenous imagined community are confronted by increasingly detailed representations of fragmentation and layers of associations. This thesis has analysed these fragmented imagined communities as local (Sydney), regional (Asian) and global. Television has no choice but to try to keep pace with the changes that are taking place at these various levels, whilst at the same time attempting to maintain the primacy of national representations in these global contexts.

For example, it is obvious that television is viewed in a local context while, for economic reasons, it is made on an increasingly national scale. This means that the networks' marketing has to be localised. The networks attempt to identify themselves with the images of the



public, community “place”, while their production processes and corporate ownership occupy an increasingly globalised, abstract “space”. It seems reasonable that this in itself can have a transformative effect on local “place”. One of the ways this thesis demonstrates this point is by examining Seven’s Sydney news bulletin’s relocation to Martin Place. They, and the crowds that gather outside their fishbowl studio, now dominate the eastern end of the arcade and regularly take over the entire public thoroughfare for their publicity stunts. They seem effectively to “own” this public place whenever they choose to use it and mutate its local-ness into the global space of flows.

The tension between “place” and “space” is even more starkly demonstrated by Australian television’s representations of its international region. Asia has been in Australia’s news regularly since the turn of the century, usually because of drug crime or terrorism. Australian representations of Asia have always been confused and often racist, only now they are becoming increasingly out of touch with the actual experience of most of the viewers. There are increasing numbers of people from Asian countries living in Australia and many more visiting Australia as students. As the Asian nations’ economies grow and develop, increasingly large portions of their populations are being educated in English so that they can interact with English speaking economies. Continued negative representations of Asia will only cause problems for the Australian television networks.

One of the reasons for this is because they now operate in a global commercial environment. Each of the corporations that own the Australian commercial television networks is diversifying in the global network economy. PBL has significantly downgraded its emphasis on the Nine Network and is now concentrating more of its corporate efforts on casino ventures in Macau. Ten have been a globalised corporation for years (which is reflected by their emphasis on efficiency over style) and Seven has allied itself with an international internet company to fend off the threat of new media. The Australian television industry seems to have transformed itself entirely. Yet this thesis argues that once again, at the middle of all this change is stability. Social fragmentation has forced television to change, yet the social structures of society remain the same.

As the television audience is gradually eroded by new forms of media, existing broadcasting corporations will have to adapt their marketing and branding images still further to maintain successful business plans. As this thesis has pointed out, this will simply mean business as usual for the networks. Television has changed as the imagined community has changed and one is continually adapted to suit the other. The actual details of the broadcast medium itself may soon become part of this process of change, but the actual system will remain the same. As long as there is an imagined community it will need some unifying mass code through which to maintain its community identity.

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