

***Bringing us all together: Multiculturalism as neoliberalism through New***

***Zealand on Air***

Abstract:

New Zealand on Air (NZOA) is the principal funding body for local media content. Notwithstanding its mandate to represent and reflect New Zealand culture and identity, the decisions made by NZOA must also take into account the commercial objectives of its broadcast partners. This chapter examines the implications of this dual mandate as it relates to multicultural-interest programming. Drawing on the discourses of post-multiculturalism, post-race and neo-assimilation, and the inter-connection between these concepts and neoliberalism, the author argues that the way multiculturalism is represented in NZOA texts serves to enhance the prevailing cultural authority through the closing down of channels for critical discussion and rendering difference to solely benign forms of cultural diversity. The author concludes by accepting the now popular position that digital media may offer a novel pathway to more critical and analytical programming for marginalized and/or minority groups. However, this technological-cultural nexus does not foster an inclusive society and may serve to further marginalize non-mainstream voices.

**Keywords: multiculturalism; neoliberalism; New Zealand broadcasting; neo-assimilation; post-race; post-multiculturalism**

## **Celebrating the maximized audience**

In July 2016 cultural commentator for the New Zealand web-based news journal *The Spinoff* Duncan Grieve wrote a column titled '*Terry Teo* signals the end of the NZ on Air model as we know it (and that's a good thing)'. Grieve examined the process surrounding the commissioning of the expensive and high-profile locally produced youth-orientated series *Terry Teo*. The program was funded by the state public broadcasting body New Zealand on Air (NZOA) and originally planned to screen on the free-to-air state-owned network Television New Zealand (TVNZ) in order to maximize the potential audience for what should have been a mass appeal product. However, the production met controversy when the broadcaster refused to screen the finished series, as executives deemed the content inappropriate for its target demographic; TVNZ compromised by making the series available via their on-demand service. Grieve's argued that the current NZOA model has become unworkable and irrelevant. He adds that conflict between the funding body and the broadcaster, based on the moral judgement of a few gatekeepers, has resulted in a top quality series being denied its maximum possible audience. Grieve maintains the situation surrounding the *Terry Teo* series is evidence of the necessity for reform and notes that local media pundits have been speculating that by the end of 2016 the funding structure will become platform agnostic, with projects designed for any delivery platform being eligible for funding as long as the producers can promise an intended audience.

This is the crux of the problem, we're now \$1.3m poorer, and an outstanding production now has no hope of reaching the kind of audience it was intended for, without any recourse or comeuppance for the giant, autocratic organisation which created this whole imbroglio. (Greive)

Duncan Greive's is just the latest commentator to call for reform of New Zealand's broadcasting funding systems since the establishment of New Zealand on Air (NZOA) in 1991. When *Terry Teo* was screened via TVNZ onDemand web-based broadcast facility the series garnered wide praise from the public and critics alike, with the network's decision to not support a television screening seemingly representative of the network's lack of knowledge of its audience. The strength of this particular debate notwithstanding, what the commentary around this series highlights is how NZOA's role has come to be defined primarily as a provider of mainstream local content, thus superseding any obligation NZOA has towards public service broadcasting, a role also mandated in NZOA's guiding principles and enabling legislation.

New Zealand on Air-funded programming is commissioned and screened by companies operating in the commercial media environment. So whilst public money is used for production, the wider institutional model is not an intervention or disruption into the prevailing institutional culture; instead the majority of this content must conform to the same standards of commercially-orientated programming, that being the necessity to reach a broad, advertising-friendly audience. NZOA however also carries a public service mandate, with stipulation that they support programming aimed at non-mainstream audiences:

including children's programming and programming for ethnic and cultural groups. The terms 'multicultural' and 'multiculturalism' do not appear in NZOA's literature, but for the purposes of this chapter I am interpreting the wording of the Broadcasting Act (NZOA's enabling legislation) as including programming for a multicultural audience, notably in relation to stipulation 1(c)(v) and 1(ca).

The Act states

(1) The functions of [NZOA] are:

(a) to reflect and develop New Zealand identity and culture by—

(i) promoting programmes about New Zealand and New Zealand interests; and

(ii) promoting Maori language and Maori culture; and

(b) to maintain and, where the Commission considers that it is appropriate, extend the coverage of television and sound radio broadcasting to New Zealand communities that would otherwise not receive a commercially viable signal; and

(c) to ensure that a range of broadcasts is available to provide for the interests of—

(i) women; and

(ii) youth; and

(iii) children; and

(iv) persons with disabilities; and

(v) minorities in the community including ethnic minorities; and

(ca) to encourage a range of broadcasts that reflects the diverse religious and ethical beliefs of New Zealanders; and

(d) to encourage the establishment and operation of archives of programmes that are likely to be of historical interest in New Zealand—

by making funds available, on such terms and conditions as the Commission thinks fit, for—

(e) broadcasting; and

(f) the production of programmes to be broadcast; and

(g) the archiving of programmes.

(2) [NZOA] may also make funds available (on the terms and conditions that it thinks fit and, as far as practicable, in a manner consistent with its primary functions) for—

(a) transmitting on demand; and

(b) producing content for transmitting on demand; and

(c) archiving content.

The guidelines of NZOA broadly coincide with the objectives of a number of state and public broadcasters around the world (Tracey 1998; Papathanassopoulos 2002) and is aligned to the notion that the broadcaster's role is to represent, or attempt to represent, social and ethnic diversity as effectively as possible.

However, for NZOA the commercial factors –articulated as the necessity to maximize the audience – are situated alongside cultural significance in the decision making process. In the 2014-2018 Statement of Intent, NZOA is represented as a funder of local content –as opposed to a public service broadcaster – with the mandate being to provide New Zealand material that

would not be produced given the economies of scale operating in the international television market

Most countries have market intervention mechanisms to retain a space for domestic content in the sea of global options. In television, intervention is necessary because, for broadcasters, the cost and risk of local production far exceeds the cost of purchasing ready-made foreign content (NZOA 2014: 3)

Applying a commercial rationale to state broadcasting entity is, of itself, neither unusual nor particularly contentious given the prevalence of a market-led logic in governmental and media discourse. What does warrant critical appraisal is the impact of commercialism in the representation of diversity. Whilst the notion that the domestic audience is a diverse one is reiterated throughout the guiding documents of the various funding bodies, the demographics that comprise this diverse audience remain only broadly drawn. This is based on the marginalised groups listed in the Broadcasting Act (ethnic and/or religious minorities, youth, children and women) but issues of how programming should be targeted to these groups, and their relationship with what is considered mainstream, is left unstated and becomes part of the subjective decision-making process. With this ambiguity in mind, this chapter examines the ideological outcomes of NZOA's dual mandate as it relates to multicultural representation. I argue that the conflation of local content with public service media, and the focus on mainstream productions targeting a mass audience, serves a particular

ideological function insofar as it shuts down the possibility for broadcasting to be a site for critical reflection of the political, economic or cultural status quo.

In the New Zealand context, NZOA is both a feature of, and designed to be an intervention to, the prevailing neo-liberal political agenda via its establishment through the Broadcasting Act. I maintain that in both the institutional framework and in the programming that is produced, NZOA functions to perpetuate (and not problematize) the basic elements of the state's neoliberal agenda. I begin by providing an historic overview of New Zealand broadcasting: the role of the state, the establishment of NZOA through the Broadcasting Act (1989) and the various recent political arguments relating to public broadcasting; here my focus is on the way the implementation of a free market agenda has become (somewhat disingenuously) inter-connected with the rationale of pragmatism, and subsequently how this perspective shaped the form and function of NZOA. I go on to examine NZOA's approach to multiculturalism: how the focus on visibility and portrayal of diversity serves to promulgate a neoliberal worldview through i) ignoring modes of production in the discussion surrounding inclusion; and ii) through the promotion of a non-contentious version of multiculturalism, the consequences of which conform to the globalized demarcation of cultures. Finally, I argue that NZOA's portrayal of multiculturalism does not represent diversity, but instead functions as a form of neo-assimilation where society's non-mainstream actors are incorporated into the dominant ideology.

### ***Broadcasting and the state***

Since broadcasting began in New Zealand the industry has been typified by the pragmatic interaction between the state's governance role, the engagement of commercial interests and the harnessing of broadcasting's ideological influence. Between 1936 and 1960 broadcasting governance was the provision of the New Zealand Broadcasting Service. Here, under ministerial guidance, the Service's first director James Shelley used the new technology as a platform for the "cultural and educational improvement" of society (Day 1994: 220). However, Shelley's Reithian zeal was only one of the elements determining the shape and form of the Service. Arguably the commercial ZB network comprising regionally-based commercial stations cemented the connections between broadcasting as a state institution and everyday culture more effectively than the paternalistically orientated non-commercial national network. During the radio era, broadcasting's controllers and financiers were primarily focused on the development of infrastructure and the promotion of the New Zealand Broadcasting Service as symbolic of a united and technologically progressive nation. New Zealand's relatively late adoption of television meant that the public's uptake of the new medium from the early 1960s onward broadly coincided with a protracted period of social change that would come to be reflected in broadcasting policy and programming through the 1970s and into the 1980s.

Throughout the various transitions in New Zealand's broadcasting governance models, the state has remained a central actor. Television New Zealand (TVNZ) has been the commercial name for the state-owned broadcaster since 1980. As part of the fourth Labour government's (1984-1990) market liberalization

agenda TVNZ was re-organized as a state-owned enterprise. In this configuration the network was mandated to operate as a commercial entity with the stipulation to pay the government (as its sole shareholder) an annual dividend. In 1989 the introduction of the Broadcasting Act initiated further reforms in the state's economic relationship with the national broadcaster. The principal focus of the Act is the de-regulation of the New Zealand broadcasting environment, notably the allowance of private players into what was a monopoly-driven sector. But the Act also included provision for the establishment of the New Zealand Broadcasting Commission (the institutional mechanism that would become NZOA) as a means by which independent producers could produce content for the local market<sup>1</sup>. In the 1990s the Labour government changed TVNZ's administrative and legal framework once more as they tried to introduce public service elements into the network's programming policies. TVNZ thus become a Crown-owned company that still operated with a commercial focus but needed to adhere to a broader cultural mandate (Horrocks 2004).

### ***The contentious politics of public broadcasting***

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<sup>1</sup> NZOA provides independent voices a significant opportunity to produce local content, but it is only one of several broadcasting policy initiatives designed to encourage such inclusion. In 1972 the Adam Report into New Zealand broadcasting (published in 1973 as *The Broadcasting Future of New Zealand*) advocated for liberalization of gatekeeping mechanisms in order to broaden the diversity of the mediated national narrative. The Report signaled the beginning of a time of experimentation in both the institutional structure and programming decisions for local broadcasting. A second state-owned channel was launched thus providing more scope for both content and revenue making. The new institutional framework also facilitated a programming culture that produced a number of significant local series. These include the groundbreaking documentary series *Tangata Whenua* (1974) and the post-colonial period drama *The Governor* ((1977).

Political attitudes towards the role of broadcasting in New Zealand are demarcated along party lines, however the market-orientated system dominates the local media environment despite, at time, a divergent political discourse. The Broadcasting Act (1989) represents the odd ideological schism that typifies the policies and political culture of New Zealand's fourth and fifth Labour governments (1984-1990). The primary legacy of these governments is as facilitator of a free-market agenda. As noted above, the principle objective of the Broadcasting Act was the dismantling on the state broadcasting monopoly and thus affirms Labour's neoliberal impetus. However, the establishment of the Broadcasting Commission (re-named in 1991 as New Zealand on Air), was the first major state gate-keeping initiative designed to promote local content and public service media. In 1999 Labour returned to government under Prime Minister Helen Clark after nine years in opposition. Labour's arrival in government was influenced by the adaptable new-left rhetoric practiced by Tony Blair's Labour in Britain and the Clinton administration in the United States with policies that skirted the 'third-way' philosophy by attempting to meet the economic objectives underlying a free-market agenda whilst also incorporating pastoral elements of government (Giddens 2000). In the case of New Zealand this included state funding for arts, the re-investment in state corporations and a qualified commitment to state public service media. This commitment was realized in a spate of initiatives designed to reform the Television New Zealand's programming agenda that were introduced during Clark's first two terms. These included a multi-channel digital network that carried public service material and the TVNZ Charter, a one-page document and a funding package (channeled

through the Ministry for Culture and Heritage budget) that was to be used to produce public service material that would be screen by the state broadcaster. Following Thompson (2003, 2004, 2005) and Comrie & Fountaine (2005, 2005a), the Clark era Labour governments may elicit criticism for providing an ideologically-driven agenda without supporting their policies with adequate funding. Labour's appeal to a 'third way' philosophy contrasts with National's broadcasting policies from the 1990s onward (Thompson 2000).

Broadcasting is arguably the sector where the ideological difference between New Zealand's two political parties is most apparent. Contrasting with Labour's proactive approach to creating institutional foundations for public service broadcasting, the first term of John Key-led government (2008-2011) scrapped all Labour's public service provisions including the TVNZ Charter and TVNZ's digital public service channels, thus returning TVNZ's mandate back to a solely commercial function. The National government have also overseen changes to NZOA where they now have a multi-platform jurisdiction, with equal value being placed on digital content as legacy media. NZOA has been funding digital content since 2003, but the decision-making process for digital projects had been made using specific criteria. As of 2015, projects are judged on editorial merit and the potential audience with broadcast platform now irrelevant to the decision. The implications of this policy change are yet to be fully examined. Supporters suggest this new framework represents more accurately contemporary production and consumption practices and will democratize the gatekeeping process. While this is likely to happen to some degree, the distribution of funds to more, smaller, projects designed for digital platforms only may serve to erode

the possibility for an inclusive national narrative. Implementation of the multi-platform policy initiatives notwithstanding, NZOA's greatest beneficiaries remain the high profile, big-budget, mass appeal drama series that, as I discuss in later sections, serve to propagate and celebrate the national status quo rather than provide any critical function. This is not to argue against the validity and cultural value of such texts, but instead to suggest that the policy functions to marginalize the voices on the fringe of New Zealand's national narrative and amplify the positive rhetoric.

In light of its longevity, NZOA is now an important feature within New Zealand's broadcasting environment and its role as facilitator of local content is generally unquestioned by media scholars and cultural commentators. However whilst NZOA goes some way to intervening in New Zealand's dominant free market mediascape, the organization's structure and the programming it presents actually conform to a neoliberal paradigm and as such, the presence of minority voices within the national narrative must comply to particular non-contentious rationale. NZOA was born of ideologically divergent parents. However, if any tension exists, or did exist, they are seldom aired in the wider discussion concerning New Zealand broadcasting, with the perception that NZOA's role is to fund local, audience-friendly material having become widely accepted. NZOA is a product of a free-market agenda transformed into what Wendy Larner describes as a "neoliberal ideology" (8). Here NZOA's fundamental requirement – to produce a range of local programming including those to those audiences deemed marginalized by commercial broadcasting – becomes infused with neoliberalism as the dominant socio-political and economic ethos of the state.

The intention is not to suggest that minority audience do not have cause to make and be represented in a celebratory discourse of the nation state, but rather that the way NZOA is structured and its place in the prevailing broadcasting culture serves to negate the possibility to explore critical narratives in all but the most perfunctory ways.

### ***Defining multiculturalism and a word on texts***

NZOA's institutional structure demands the necessity for the programming to be commercially competitive; as such these texts tend towards non-critical populism. When this combination of elements is applied to the depiction non-dominant cultures (texts depicting multiculturalism in New Zealand or targeting a multicultural audience), NZOA operates as an ideological mechanism, incorporating the depiction of difference into New Zealand's dominant narrative. Evidence for this position is born out in the texts produced in the years since the establishment of NZOA in 1991.

Television programming produced by NZOA fits into two broad categories: high budget local content targeting a mass audience; and low cost public service or specialist interest content. Of these, the bulk of funds go towards the mainstream-orientated product, such as the long-running drama *Outrageous Fortune*, that show's recent spinoff *West Side*, franchised format series including *New Zealand Idol* and *New Zealand's Got Talent* and non-scripted drama such as *The GC*. Programming conforming to public service ideals identifiable in the New Zealand mediasphere by virtue of their scarcity in the schedule. Over the past 25

years these texts have typically screened in the low rating zone of Sunday mornings and primarily constructed around a magazine-based format. Alongside the long-running *Attitude* series that examines issues around disability, the NZOA-funded programming in this timeslot represents multicultural-interest, public service television including past series *Asia Downunder* and current long-running series *Tangata Pasifika* and *Waka Huia*. Over the decades these long-running series have been augmented by smaller series and one-off documentaries. These include *An Immigrant Nation* (1994) examining the rituals, customs and experience of inclusion of a number of migrant communities, including members of the Indian, Italian, Vietnamese and Chinese communities. Similarly *A Taste of Home* (2007) focused on the social and cultural significance of food within particular communities and examines the role food cultural has played in the incorporation of communities into the mainstream articulation of national identity. Since the turn of the century the articulation of New Zealand's cultural identity has broadened from colonial mono-culturalism to multiculturalism, and this has been reflected in the types of texts funded by NZOA. But program hours for series aimed at specific cultural or ethnic groups remained low and have been kept in the low rating zones. However mainstream content such as the travel food shows *Hunger for the Wild* and *A Taste of Home* serve to essentialize the multicultural narrative into the popular discussion on what it means to be a New Zealander.

Mishra (2005) makes two fundamental observations with regard to New Zealand's mediated multicultural self. Firstly, that NZOA situates New Zealand multiculturalism primarily as an Asia/Pacific identity; secondly that both the

magazine or light entertainment genre that dominates the televisual representation of multiculturalism and the subject matter that is the focus of these texts constitutes a form of benign representation where the primary modes of self-identity are celebratory and non-critical. Here the emphasis of activities such as festivals, food and the colourful inclusiveness of ethnic communities represents the positive face of multiculturalism (Gunew 1999: 147) and becomes the sole articulation of the multicultural experience in New Zealand.

Questions regarding the role of multicultural representation in relation to the dominant culture and the potential of multiculturalism for a vehicle for critical discourse are important factors in examining its purpose. Multiculturalism as a socio-cultural rationale, a legislative criteria or (as we discuss in this chapter) as a media genre is represented as much by a set of recognized conventions and codes as by any definitive guidelines. As an initial marker, New Zealand multiculturalism may be perceived as representation of ethnic communities exclusive of either that belonging to or concerning the hegemonic dominant Pakeha culture or the specific bicultural representations of Maori that is supported by a raft of general and specific legislation and funding with its own political genealogy and thus should be examined separately.

New Zealand's well-defined articulation of biculturalism contrasts with that nation's far less well-defined version of multiculturalism. Even constructing the most basic framework is fraught with contradictions. For example the idealized position of 'liberal multiculturalism' expressed by Will Kymlicka in the 1990s

advocates for state protection for all minority groups within society. An idea expanded on through the concept of cultural citizenship, also defined Kymlicka (1996) and later by Bryan Turner (2003), where the basic suite of rights and tolerances that comprise the legal framework of multiculturalism are extended to included cultural practice and autonomous self-representation within the narrative of national identity. But even if the accepted position of multiculturalism is as a socio-cultural framework aimed at advancing equality and tolerance, it remains a set of legislative and discursive markers developed and imposed by dominant European actors and applied to non-dominant communities. Therefore, whether one takes a critical or non-critical position on multiculturalism, it remains valid to pose the question: how does multiculturalism impact on issues of equality, class, poverty and other social ills or benefits? One rationale to be considered, especially in the context of media representation, is the value of visibility and the use of representation within the national narrative as a means to signal legitimacy and inclusion. A second position interprets multiculturalism as a socio-cultural technology operating as a means of organizing social diversity for the benefit of society's dominant group.

In the last four decades the politics of cultural and ethnic self-determination, biculturalism and multiculturalism have become formulated into a fixed set of ideals through which cultural and ethnic diversity is governed. Following Donald Pease's (1997) assertion that true multiculturalism cannot exist because the clashing cultural codes form "incommensurable rationalities" (398) questions maybe asked as to motivations and political, economic and cultural reasoning "preserving and fortifying power relations" (Davis 1996: 41) by the dominant

parties? Or does the multicultural governance regime foster a truly more tolerant society? These issues, I suggest, do not necessarily constitute a polemic binary. State obligations to multicultural inclusion can and do exist alongside agitation for social cohesion conducted by grassroots non-government organizations. However if we also contend that multiculturalism does, in part, represent a form of governance, then it is feasible to follow researchers including Fish (1997), Gozdecka et al (2014), Walsh (2014) and Lentin (2012) and argue that multiculturalism is also part of a wider neoliberal ethos: a means of organizing and governing populations in ways external to conventional democratic methods (Harvey 2005: 76). When considering the media representation, the essentialization of the multicultural experience constitutes an aspect of this neoliberal form of governance. The ability of organizations such as NZOA to establish the field through which a mediated multiculturalism may exist is, of itself, a governance model typical of neoliberal systems. But the gatekeeping obligations of this system concede to commercial imperatives, the sympathetic interaction between the organization and the state (as representative of the dominant culture) become overt.

### ***New Zealand on Air as a product of neoliberalism***

New Zealand on Air both typifies neoliberal forms of governance in its structure and perpetuates a general neoliberal ideology through the programming it produces. The NZOA model as a state institution but external to ministerial

regulations (such as a governing charter) and employing non-state participants represents a neoliberal system where governance is executed from a distance. The briefly sketched list of stipulations and intended audiences, the funding contestability model (as opposed to the provision of a stand-alone channel), and the lack of demarcation between local content and public service all suggest an adherence to a neoliberal agenda that has formed the backbone of successive government strategies since the 1980s (Aukett 2002). Having NZOA as a state entity means that the perception of a state broadcaster may be perpetuated by governments from both sides of the political spectrum. But by making commercial viability so central to the acceptability criteria, NZOA can be construed more as a state-sponsored actor in a commercial operation rather than a public or state broadcasting provider.

The conflation of local content and (the discourse) of public service media is not wholly negative. If the outcomes of New Zealand's gatekeeping and funding bodies were to be examined via a political economy framework factors such as employment opportunities for local craftspeople and technicians and the development of infrastructure would be viewed positively. Similarly the representation of New Zealand's mainstream culture is itself something of a victory against the odds given availability, popularity and cost-effectiveness of imported media products and the lack of legislative protection for the local industry. However as an inclusive mechanism within New Zealand's internal culture (as opposed to the outward, internationally-focused 'Brand New Zealand'), NZOA serves to homogenize the national narrative albeit with a veneer

of cultural and ethnic diversity and the dynamics of cultural expression become rendered exclusively visible rather than critical.

The centrality of visibility to the gatekeeping rationale has a significant impact on the depiction and articulation of multiculturalism in the mediascape. New Zealand's mediated national narrative overtly celebrates cultural diversity as a desirable byproduct of cultural and economic globalization. This concept draws on the now familiar transition of citizen-to-consumer that underpins the broader ideology of neoliberalism that has been both celebrated and critiqued since the 1970s. As Bauman (2011) and others suggest, this mix of multiculturalism, globalization and neoliberalism exists primarily in the visible realm: of consumerism, the space of food and leisure; the space of festivals, celebrations and the benign representation of cultural identity within the inclusive and tolerant confines of the western nation state. There are two significant consequences to the way representation has been rendered in this form. Firstly, this reduction of difference to the visible, when situated in relation to NZOA's commercial imperatives, serves to erode historic trauma. Here concepts of history, colonialism, conflict and those elements that may produce disparate or divergent opportunities and social roles for citizens are discursively (and with that, politically, culturally and ultimately, materially) reduced and eroded. What remains is the unifying logic of capital and the immediate but seemingly resolvable disparities of economics; resolvable insofar as the twin myths of neoliberalism – 'hard work' and 'level playing fields' – are often foregrounded in the popular imaginary and form the basis for many narratives involving multicultural characters and representations. Secondly, the situation of

multiculturalism as primarily an element of the mainstream narrative means that non-dominant communities are further excluded from the modes of production. Whilst new media forms may provide the opportunity for greater control over production and narrative design<sup>2</sup>, legacy content remains framed in predictable generic conventions provide no intervention to the status quo. This contrasts with the opportunities afforded Maori producers by virtue of the Maori Television Service. Texts such as *Marae Makeover* and *Find me a Maori Bride* play with conventions and contribute to what historian, journalist and filmmaker Michael King described as breaking the “mono-cultural mould of New Zealand television” (King 1999: 126).

In the last decade discussion relating to cultural inclusion in the media has increasingly focused on the possibilities provided by digital platforms. This includes production and consumption platforms and alternative methods of funding and gatekeeping (Reid 2015). The growing role of such sites for the dissemination of multicultural material may offer a pragmatic solution to the problems of cultural exclusivity in conventional legacy media. But while the fragmentation of the mediascape is becoming less problematic as non-linear forms of consumption are becoming the cultural norm, this does not address the issue that the bulk of state funding for broadcasting is diverted into material designed to incorporate minority communities into the dominant national/neoliberal ideology. Analyzing multiculturalism in Australia, James

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<sup>2</sup> This is represented by the celebrated web series *Flat 3*. This series revolved around the lives of three 20-something Asian New Zealanders in Auckland *Flat 3* received funding from New Zealand on Air and was widely praised by critics for its humorous and contemporary approach.

Walsh argues that the neoliberal conditions in which diversity is managed has created an “neo-assimilationist” environment that “amplifies demands for national unity, conformity and identity” (282). I argue that NZOA’s gatekeeping agenda may also serve as an assimilatory mechanism by suppressing the opportunity for critical voices and the subsequent affirmation of those that are celebratory and non-critical. As I note above, this represents something of a hybrid notion of assimilation; one that discourages the visible markers of conformity but necessitates the political and ideological ones. Even in the era of digital production and consumption, certain tropes, symbols and markers rise to prominence in the discourse of the multicultural nation. And, again, this is the aspirational and non-critical national narrative that seeks to portray diversity without claim to inclusion.

The duality with which mainstream culture engages with diversity, driven by the ideals, processes and mechanisms of neoliberalism, is facilitating the transition towards the “post-race, post-politics” era (Lentin 2014:1268) where the issue of race has become too problematic for both the left and the right to address in any meaningful fashion. This contemporary moment is driven equally by the intensification of the politics of tolerance – what may be labeled the culture of ‘political correctness’ – including the negative reaction to this culture; and the politics of radical separatism, from extreme nationalism to radicalized minorities. For many political actors and cultural and media commentators in Europe and the US the reaction is to declare multiculturalism an “experiment that failed” (Lentin: 1269; Gozdecka et al 2014: 50) as a means to have it removed from the political agenda. New Zealand’s political leaders, governing a

country that exists in geographic isolation and sustaining relative economic and political stability, does not need to make such a declaration as the issue of race here is not the lightning rod it is in Europe. But the absence of a threat of civil disobedience notwithstanding, the cultural-political nexus in New Zealand has also served to shut down the processes of inclusion, and arguably through more stealthy tactics that direct proclamations. New Zealand's broadcasting model exemplifies an effective post-multicultural politics by closing down all available avenues for critical discourse. For this to occur in a commercial environment is not surprising: critical discussion of one's own culture is less likely to develop from the risk-adverse space of ratings-driven media. But NZOA's originating rationale is as an intervention in the commercial mediascape and, because of this, the assumption that such a body provide avenues for critique, protest, and talking back to power is legitimate. Instead the operations of NZOA are caught up in semantics. The objective to 'represent' stated in the Broadcasting Act is interpreted literally by NZOA. Minority communities are portrayed in relation to the dominant culture and most often enacting a benign form of representation that serves to bring praise and colour to the host state. In the past decade internet-based platforms are increasingly perceived as providing a space for critical commentary not available through mainstream channels. Although the digital media is a cause for significant celebration as a new pathway for creative outlets, I maintain that a robust critical culture should be part of a nation's mainstream narrative. In many states this role is undertaken by a public broadcasting body, the likes of which have never been part of the New Zealand system. I suggest for this form of critical culture to exist in New Zealand NZOA has to re-focus its objectives away from commercialism and commission

programming accordingly. Such a change would demand buy-in by NZOA, but more so by New Zealand's political leaders who are able to alter the economic obligations of both NZOA and TVNZ through legislative changes without considerable corporate failure. I suggest such a change would be of significant benefit to both minority and mainstream culture in New Zealand.

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