21

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

We have seen the process through which the internal membership of the nation is defined, in which the acceptable diversity is codified and the hierarchies enunciated. We turn now to the process of differentiation, the media work done on constructing differences and, in that process, rendering them as relationships. In media products differences are ranked either explicitly according to a dimension of power or authority, or resources (other characters, commentators, economies, ways of life) or implicitly via frameworks of social meanings. In this latter sense framing includes the conventions governing the production of media events which themselves include assumptions about audience response, though audience interpretations may vary widely.

We suggest that ranked and structured differences can be elaborated according to the following: sexuality, rationality–irrationality, violence, disease, disorder, and calamity, and according to institutional criteria such as language, family life, political stability, economic organisation, religious affiliation, and notions of justice. Various rankings were also indicated by accent, speed of delivery, camera (lighting, angle), headlining, dubbing, and commentary. In all cases these strategies and conventions took the Anglo centre as the point of reference, and others were implicity ranked in terms of distance from the Anglo-Australian norm. Three qualifications are necessary for interpreting this material:

1 Despite the use of fixed and ranked contrasts as an aesthetic or professional device to summarise social relations (e.g. male/female; black/white; working class/middle class), signifiers such as colour, culture, class and sex often operated interchangeably—they were not fixed to a specific group of people (women, men, black, white, worker). Difference from the central image always signified something less, so that groups of people filling one side of a contrast slipped according to the contrast theme. For example, *female* often seemed to operate as a mark of inferiority. We see this when black men and working-class men are feminised in contrast to middle-class men, as an alternative to equating black/working class with violence. In these cases women, blacks (especially black men) and

working-class men were ranked on the female side of a male/female distinction. But in other cases specific women did not fit the 'female' convention, and black men were moved under the sign 'male' to be 'on side' with white men. Similarly 'black' often stands in for 'class', for example in 'black riots', where 'whites' are also visibly part of the riot, but where 'white' signifies non-working-class or *non-class*.

2 While the elaboration of difference was densely coded to differentiate Australia from the rest of the world, it also operated to indicate and rank relations/differences within Australia. This is obvious in the case of non-Anglo Australians and Aboriginal Australians, but it was also applied to females and to class differences. In these latter cases 'the typical Aussie' included women and workers (Aussie battlers, the Aussie working man), but rarely specific Aboriginals; and both groups were placed outside the norm when they were distinguished from classless Anglo-Australian males. Some examples occur in sitcoms with working-class characters such as *Hey Dad*; in ads pitched to an upmarket audience; in news coverage of wage claims, strikes and western suburbs; in the relation of women to 'important local events'; in the relegation of women to the home; and so forth.

3 The third qualification concerns how age (youth, maturity) and marital status are brought in to play, as variations on these themes. In many cases age accompanied the lower-status term (female, black, working class etc.) to denote immaturity. This was most marked in the persistent coupling of women and children in product ads where women speak baby-talk and where women and children depend on an authoritative male. However, non-Anglo Australians (male and female) are also often depicted as children: for example in the manipulation of language (interviews in English; Anglo clarification of English utterances by non-English speakers etc.); in images and expressions of high emotion and excitement; in 'these simple people' themes in documentaries and current affairs items; and in the contrast between non-Anglos and Anglos in situations involving help and advice. In all these cases, the adult, authoritative voice and position was accorded to an Anglo-Australian male, or else an Anglo, or an Anglo Australian.

But there is a twist here, that turns on media attempts to diversify 'typical Australia' according to perceived population demand (especially internal and external markets—diversification has a monetary export value, as we shall see). Television in the period from 1990 to 1993, portrayed a significantly increased number of images diversifying Australia. In these cases, however, diversification—images of non-Anglo Australians as Australians—is depicted by women and children, but rarely by 'typically Aussie males'. Several children's ads and programs have ethnically diverse casts, whereas the few

images of ethnically diverse 'Aussie men' are marked as ethnic—for example, an Italian Australian in an Italian food ad; crims and nightclub owners in soapies (*E Street*) and sitcoms (*Acropolis Now*)—and are placed in a subordinate position to Anglo Australians, male and female.

Marital status adds another twist to this. Endogamy seems to be the rule, especially in differentiating 'typical Australia'. While cross-ethnic flirtations and hints of affairs have featured in some genres (ads; soaps; magazine stories and features), most of these occur among unmarried people. Non-Anglos, especially Afro-Caribbeans and Afro-Americans (but seldom Asians) are portrayed as erotic but not marriageable. Marriage is ethnically homogeneous, especially marriage that entails children (passage of 'blood'). The one exception, *E Street*, was that of a childless couple. Horror stories of cross-ethnic marriages abound, especially those about 'Filipina brides'. Perhaps the most bizarre example of resistance to cross-ethnic marriage occurred during the April 1990 viewing period. Grace Bros, a department store, ran ads for Mothers Day. There were children from many ethnic backgrounds in the TV ads, but in print ads they all had unmistakably Anglo fathers (hence they appear to have been 'adopted'—this avoids any problem with 'blood' pollution). The relationship between the passage of 'blood' and the reproduction of a differentiated nation finds its most pervasive setting in television programming and advertisements during children's viewing times.

22

MAKING CHILDREN: SUGAR AND SPICE AND TV ADVERTISING

Children's television was monitored from September 1991 to July 1992. We did not monitor the small proportion of material that is categorised as 'high quality' by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal but concentrated on what most kids watch most of the time—what the ABT has called 'the wallpaper' programming. Much of this consists of imported animations, and it is clear that older patterns of representing non-Anglo racial and cultural groups have changed. The use of 'foreignness' or blackness to mark out the 'baddies' has diminished although it has not entirely gone; the alternative strategy, of presenting only a racially homogenous Anglo-American world of people or anthropomorphic creatures, also seems to be less common. The new trend is to include racial and cultural diversity among the 'goodies' and even, occasionally, the 'baddies'. Advertisements also reflect this trend to include both actors and animated characters who are not of northern European descent. These inclusions, however, while attractive and interesting, are made within a very narrow range of patterns. This section explores the power relations suggested by the new trend in advertisements shown in children's viewing time in Sydney during 1991 and 1992.

The impact of American models for advertisement production, even before regulations relaxed in 1992 to allow more overseas produced material, is noticeable in the relative frequency with which non-white children appear in advertisements in children's viewing time, and particularly in ads for girls' toys. This raises important questions concerning gender analysis as it is entangled with particular ideals of beauty for little girls.

The ads shown throughout children's viewing time include station identification and trailers, music ads including segments of video clips, and ads for charity organisations, food, toys and some fashion and cosmetic products. Each type of ad has its own style, which means that a wide range of messages may be transmitted in a typical break of between six to eleven advertisements, from the asexual sweetness of ads for little girls' toys to the erotic excitement of Salt'n'Peppa singing 'Let's Talk About Sex, Baby!'.

Food ads predominate. Most are made in Australia and blondness is the main attribute of the largely white Australian casts, especially of mothers providing food and little girls receiving it, although the hair colour of fathers

and little boys varies more. Few Australian-made ads show non-Caucasian actors, and they are invariably children. A Red Rooster Chicken ad shows a group of dark-haired adults grouped round a laughing Asian child as the voice-over sings: 'Australia. . .your chicken is ready'. The Smarties ad ('How do you make your Smarties last?') features a very attractive Asian girl, who is shown in close-up just as often and who moves just as actively as the other, white and fair, children do. An Uncle Toby's muesli bar ad, with Lisa Curry-Kenny, has included for the first time a dark-complexioned and probably non-white child in the group receiving the confectionery. The McDonald's ads often include an Asian child in a group of children eating at McDonald's.

The non-white children in all except the Red Rooster ad, however, are always a minority and are neither the centre of the ad narrative (e.g. the birthday child is always white and blond) nor of the camera's focus. The only other notable example is the Kraft Singles ad series in which a group of very young toddlers play, while an a capella group with African–American accents sings a version of a child's rhyme about bones ('The knee bone's connected to the thigh bone. . ..'), with a chorus 'Feed Dem Bones'. Along with this disembodied presence of African–American culture, one version features two Asian children in a group of about six children, while another features two dark-complexioned children, one of whom is clearly of African descent. Kraft is an American-based transnational, but the ad was made in Australia by J. Walter Thompson, an advertising company which has the rights to market Kraft worldwide. It was considering the world market when this ad was made, with New Zealand as its first overseas target. It is interesting, although hardly surprising, that it included African–Americans and east Asians (probably Japanese) as these are the groups most often included in American advertising. Why does this Australian-made advertisement strive for an attractive image of racial diversity yet so noticeably exclude Aboriginal, Maori or other more specifically Pacific people?

There have also been reductions in diversity. The dark-complexioned (Aboriginal?) child has disappeared from the Quik ad for milk flavouring, and the end of the Bicentennial period's obsession with food ads featuring groups of people referred to as 'Australia' in the accompanying jingles, has also meant the disappearance of some other token Aboriginal presences. The most frequent representation in food, toy and game ads still made in Australia is of what one marketing professional referred to as 'the typical suburban family, the English type' (Jan Ellis, *Milton Bradley*, interview 27 May 1992).

The high proportion of children's toys marketed from America means that many of the ads for those products are also made in the USA. Prior to the deregulation of foreign content in advertising, overseas influences were still very strong; Australian producers often simply recast Australian actors and repeated the American or English original. The 1991 Barbie Video Star

ad, discussed below, is a good example. Although it uses Australian actors, it follows exactly the same formulae as the 1992 Barbie ads that retain the American actors. The relatively frequent presence of non-caucasian actors in children's toy ads is probably due to the dominance of American and English models or ads, which reflect the changes in those overseas marketing strategies.

The increasing presence of non-caucasians, and particularly African–Americans, is most noticeable in ads for girls' toys, apparently because boys' toys are often battery-operated, mechanical or non-human in form, and can be shown without human actors at all, except for the occasional white hand to show the toy's scale. Where the toys are humanoid, such as the GI Joe dolls, African–American characters are represented, and the dolls show the same patterns of organisation and focus as discussed below in relation to girls' dolls, but the boys shown in the ads are still only white. Girls' toys are more often 'nurturing' toys, dolls or soft animals, which require the girl viewer to imagine herself holding them, so they demand human representations. The gender focus in the representation of racial difference therefore adds other dimensions to this discussion.

Many of the ads for girls' toys now show non-caucasian, and particularly African–American actors and dolls, in beautiful images of attractive, healthy children of mixed races playing together, all within the usual fantasy context of middle-class affluence. These are undoubtedly positive images generally speaking, and emphasise the tardiness of Australian advertisement producers to include non-caucasians in their products in this way. They do, however, relate better to (some) American populations than to Australian populations. Why have Australian producers not included Aboriginal, Asian and Pacific children in the same prominent and positive style?

There are more serious questions about the way interactions between children of different races are portrayed in these advertisements. Persistent patterns in the way each group is represented imply certain power relations and inequality of access to resources. The patterns amount to a preference for blondness over darker complexions, which operates within the representations of white children as well as between racial groups and indicates what ideals of beauty are involved in our culture's gender constructions. An interesting example of this occurs in doll advertisements that focus on sexuality, beauty and race. Three elements can be identified here:

1 There is an overwhelming dominance of blondness in these ads for little girls' toys, to a far greater extent than in ads for either boys' toys or food. This extends to a preference for blonde white girls over darker-haired girls which is extremely pronounced in the ads for Mattel products, in particular the Magic Nursery Baby and the Barbie Hawaiian Fun and Video Star dolls advertised in November 1991. In the first, the child who is the centre of the ad's script about acquiring the doll, and who is

always shown alone or in the centre of the three girl actors, is the child with the longest, curliest and blondest hair. The other fair-haired girl is given attention with giggles and smiles by the child in the centre; the third child, who is white but has black hair, receives none of the blonde girl's confidences or glances.

The Hawaiian Fun Barbie exhibits the same dominance of the blonde actor in an ad showing only two girls looking at a blonde doll. The darker-haired white girl is kept behind the fair girl, who gets to hold the doll, leaving the dark-haired child to exclaim excitedly in the background. The Video Star Barbie also has two girls acting in it, one with long wavy fair hair and the other with black hair and an olive complexion. The blonde girl is kept in the centre of the frame, and slightly in front of the other girl in each shot. When the camera moves, the dark-haired girl moves out of the right edge of the frame, while a burst of light from an earring shines on the fair girl's face. When a child's hand is shown removing the doll's light-up clip to put in her hair, it belongs to the blonde child who is then shown wearing this badge of proprietorial status.

2 Where non-caucasian dolls are shown, the visual arrangement of the dolls usually favours the blonder dolls; this is particularly noticeable with the 'original' blonde Barbie. The Video Star Barbie ad has three dolls in it, and in each presentation, the blonde doll takes the centre of the frame or the other two dark dolls' attention. The only child to handle a doll is the blonde actor touching the blonde Barbie doll, so each is seen as more active and in a proprietorial relationship.

3 Where non-caucasian actors and dolls are shown, there are obvious patterns and few exceptions. These patterns appear in ads for dolls not only in the Mattel advertisements (Barbie Sun Sensation June 1992), but in those for products made by Hasbro, and distributed in Australia by Kenner Parker (Tropical Treat Cup Cake, May 1992) and Milton Bradley (Puppy Surprise, March 1992).

The advertisement bracket in children's viewing time presents a complex and often contradictory body of images of non-caucasians: erotic and sexually related to each other in music, particularly if African–American or African–English; sexually (but wholesomely) related to whites in some food/cosmetic ads, particularly if African–Carribean; female and middle class if an African–American child interested in toys, but only if the child is the friend of the white girls who really own the toys because they are the only ones allowed to handle them; desperately ill and dependent on charity if African in Africa; but able to share some good kids' junk food if the child is middle-class Japanese or, just occasionally, Aboriginal.

Nor is a simple, unified 'message' transmitted by either the ad or the program it slots into. There are some conflicting trends as well as different

issues raised in each. In children's animations, for example, where increasing racial and cultural exclusiveness is also apparent, there is no sexuality, no romantic interest between 'races' or 'ethnicities' at all; whereas in fashion/cosmetic ads and video clips there is deliberate and often light-hearted erotic suggestion in black/white contacts.

Although non-caucasian groups now appear regularly in ads shown in children's viewing time, there is a severe limit on which groups to show! In Australian-produced ads, there are almost no Aborigines visible at all, except in sport promos. This parallels the American-produced ads' exclusion of American Indians or Hispanic actors. Although Australian material shows children and adults with black or brown hair there is almost no-one who looks like a southern European or Arabic Australian unless they are being parodied in some food ads. The Asians in local and American-produced ads are usually east Asian, with few south or south-east Asians at all except in some airline and travel ads, where they are depicted as beautiful and exotic but always as flight attendants or tourist attractions.

The increasing occurrence of beautiful and engaging images of racial diversity in children's advertising is an improvement on the homogeneity of past representations. This development has occurred largely because of the increased amount of American advertising material being screened in Australia; the material reflects changing marketing strategies in the USA which in turn have arisen from African–Americans' intense political lobbying as well as the rise of a black middle class with greater purchasing power. This positive result is offset, however, by the severely restricted roles given to non-caucasian figures in all these advertisements. We are importing a representation of unequal power relations as well as a beautiful (if selective) image of racial diversity.

The range of images is severely limited to a small handful of simple stereotypes that have long been embedded in European ideology: African rhythm and sexuality, Carribean/African sensuality and carefree leisure; blacks as passive, ill and dependent; blacks acceptable in relations with whites only when subordinate and marginalised.

23

ALL TOGETHER NOW: THE NEW RACIAL AND CULTURAL INCLUSIVITY IN CHILDREN'S ANIMATIONS

Children's TV is the most worried over, most controlled, and most frequently exhorted to be 'responsible' in its self-regulation. The desire to regulate arises from the powerful although contradictory conceptions many of us hold of children, as either innocents in need of protection, or as untamed creatures in need of discipline to protect their own and others' futures. Much of the debate has been about how violence is depicted in children's TV and its effect on child viewers, but many commentators are also concerned with common biases concerning gender and racism.

Yet very few studies investigate racial or cultural difference and power relations in children's TV. When we began to observe programming for primary children shown in Sydney in 1991 and 1992, it became clear that race and ethnicity are widely referred to in animations where the central characters are human, animal or fantasy characters. We also found a significant number of recent attempts to include non-white and non-English groups in children's animated programs. We explore here the terms on which these inclusions have been made, and suggest that while they challenge established representations, many of these more recent animations depict a very narrow range of power relations, and power remains with the white, Anglo characters or their anthropomorphic animal equivalents.

With the disbanding of the Children's Programming Committee of the former ABT, most programming for children's viewing time is still completely unregulated on commercial stations and the ABC. The programming occupying most of that time is what the former ABT called 'wallpaper' material: a diverse collection of material with only a few claims to be 'high quality', much of it animated, some very old, and most of it imported. Each program is often inserted in a longer programming segment, which is introduced and compered by local hosts and given some local content. On commercial stations such material usually runs for 1 or 2 hours in both the morning and afternoon, punctuated by brackets of advertisements. These programs are therefore seldom broadcast 'whole', but are contexualised, 'nationalised' and intersected.

This has been discussed by Michaels and others as the 'transmitted text', a text which may differ significantly from the original 'whole' text of the

individual program. How this is understood by the viewer is a different matter again, and greatly depends on the viewer's knowledge and expectations (i.e. culture). This can be called the 'perceived text' and may differ from one viewer to another. When people discuss their ideas about the programs they have viewed, they may reach another, consensual interpretation, which Michaels (1990) has called the 'social text'.

Our discussion of how racial and cultural differences are portrayed in children's material will concentrate on this 'wallpaper' material, to gauge the range of its representations and to examine the 'transmitted text'.

Most examples come from Channels 2, 7 and 10, from weekday morning and afternoon shows and weekend morning programs from October 1991 to May 1992. SBS has been excluded as its often fascinating programs are not accessible to many of the primary school age-group whose reading skills are too limited to cope with subtitling. Channel 9, reportedly a major player in the challenge to the ABT Children's Programming Committee, offers very little television for the primary school audience.

Animations are created from the experiences as well as the imaginations of their adult authors, and draw directly on cultural models for character and plot material. As well, animations are based on comic stereotypes, that is, on two-dimensional, easily recognisable caricatures on which simple, rapid comic or action scenarios are built. These two sources—author experience and established caricature—make it likely that many old and well-known stereotypes will appear in cartoons. Indeed, there has been a history of cruel comic representations of African–Americans in cartoons for early film shows.

On the other hand, in animation, anything is possible: heroes can be green or black or purple, depicted in realistic styles or as bizarre imaginary creatures, so while animations may simply reproduce the same range of characters and relationships as in acted programs, they can break away altogether from accepted models and present new, challenging heroes, villains, and relationships.

MEANING, TEXTS AND FANTASY

While this is a review of the content of transmitted texts, rather than an audience survey, any exploration of the meanings of animation and fantasy created for children must keep in mind how children might interpret what they read or see. Any transmitted text can have multiple and contradictory readings for different viewers, and some interpretations may run contrary to the intentions of the producers. The ambivalent relationship which fantasy and particularly animation have with 'reality' further complicates any attempt to discuss 'content' in children's programming.

Children's programs shown in Sydney in the 1990s offer glimpses of the history of children's television. The earliest 1960s episodes of Hanna Barbera's

Flintstones are followed the next week by episodes from a later series, in which some of the more blatant male-focus of the early series is reduced by an emphasis on Fred's adolescent daughter, Pebbles. There are rare occasions when the earliest Mickey Mouse mixes it with his own later manifestations, and Walt's old themes can be seen in the new, expanded range of Disney cartoons such as *Ducktales* and *Tailspin*. The 1960s satires on superheroes and the Cold War, *Rocky and Bullwinkl*e and *Roger Ramjet*, still line up today in the 4–6 p.m. children's timeslot but now they jostle for space with the 1990s eco-cartoons, from the earnest superhero *Captain Planet* (who appears along with Gaia), to his tongue-in-cheek rivals, the *Toxic Crusaders*.

While many old animations are shown, fewer of the old acted children's adventure series are still around, particularly those staples of early TV, the 'cowboys and Indians' genre. *Hopalong Cassidy*, *Wells Fargo* and *The Lone Ranger* were just a few of the diverse shows in which 'badness' was frequently marked out by ethnicity, where 'villains' were always 'Indian' or 'Mexican'. The large quantity of these early programs, however, ensured some variations on the theme of the ethnic baddie: there were 'good' as well as 'bad' Indians, or the villains were white men running guns or liquor to the Indians or exploiting them in some way (which sometimes defined the Indians as weak, vulnerable or stupid). Nevertheless, viewers were often invited to sympathise with the Indians, so even the most stereotyped stories did not always identify 'goodness' with caucasian characters. Sometimes, too, the presence and power of the 'attacking' Indians offered viewers an attractive alternative to the 'good' white authority figures.

Many of these variations dwindled with the onset of the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s. These and other political and sociological concerns about racism and ethnic discrimination appeared to affect the contents of children's material. For example, references to races other than caucasians were avoided—this was obvious in the early Hanna Barbera cartoons which were still being rerun as a major component of children's television in Sydney in 1991 and 1992. These included the *Flintstones* (totally devoid of the satire and biting class humour of its acted model, the *Honeymooners*), and the *Jetsons*, recently updated as a feature-length animated film. These series each avoided the major race questions of the 1960s in America by representing the working class (of the *Flintstones*' stone age quarry) and the whole of the future (in the *Jetsons*) as totally white. No variations of skin colour, voice accent or culture are allowed in these monolithically Anglo-American societies. While this strategy is present in some recent animations, and of course still evident in the reruns, it is no longer common in animations.

Some cartoon-makers have not felt any need to review the practice of defining characters by ethnicity. The Disney cartoons are an example. The earliest Disney characters were animals, such as Donald Duck or Mickey Mouse, who are shown doing very middle-class American things, such as

moose hunting or big game fishing. Mickey Mouse neither refers to his own black colour nor celebrates it, unlike Daffy Duck, the *Looney Toons* character, whose cry of 'Not this little black duck!' was ironically taken up by at least some young Aboriginal viewers in the 1950s. Disney frequently cast human characters as 'baddies' or as socially or politically subordinate to the main characters and commonly used race or ethnicity to identify them. Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse were pursued by bad Indians, Russians or Mexicans, and in some very early examples, by cannibalistic Africans.

These practices have continued to the present. There are two forms: the human peripheral character and the main animal character who has been given racial or ethnic attributes. A viewer of *Saturday Disney* or any of the other Disney cartoons featured in much of the Channel 7 programming for children in Sydney during 1991 and 1992 will find that these attributes are still stereotyping traits and relations with the main 'white American' animal figures. A typical example of the peripheral human character occurs in the recent *Duck Tales* series, which continues the old acquisitive characters of Uncle Scrooge and the three Duck nephews. In an episode shown on Channel 7 on 7 March 1992, the ducks journeyed to South America looking for archaeological treasure; the subplot involved outwitting an Hispanic tour bus driver who was depicted visually and verbally as stupid and exploitative.

The newer Disney series, such as *Tailspin* and *Chip'n'Dale: The Rescue Rangers*, have no human characters at all, only anthropomorphic animals. In these, ethnic markers unmistakably delineate both 'good' and 'bad' characters. In *Tailspin* (e.g. Channel 7's episode shown on 11 April 1992) the main heroes have Anglo-American voices and middle-class clothes. Their friends include a monkey with an Afro-Caribbean accent, who wears a tropical shirt and lives on an apparently Caribbean island. Some of the villains have Anglo-American voices but many are 'foreign', such as a warthog who has an unmistakably Russian accent, wears a uniform and has an authoritarian style in which he lies to little animals. His homeland is snowbound and ringed with barbed wire; the main building looks rather like the Kremlin. It is not at all hard to work out what ethnicities are ascribed to the characters in this example, although it is not clear whether the intention was anti-Russian or anti-communist in the warthog instance, nor is it clear how a child would interpret the characterisations. What is clear is that the creators of the cartoon continue to draw on a very limited range of caricatures for character and plot material. In the *Chip'n'Dale* episode on the same date Chinese characters were caricatured either as naive, or evil and cunning, or both!

A notable Australian example of this persistent use of negative ethnic stereotypes in cartoons to indicate 'baddies' or socially subordinate characters is the *Dot* series, animated films shown on television regularly, and available on video. The original, award-winning film, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, portrayed Aboriginal men in a traditional stereotype, as physically fine and healthy but

extremely menacing and dangerous. They are shown engaged in a ceremony depicting a kangaroo hunt, after which they and their dingos pursue Dot and her female kangaroo protector, only to be scared away by a trick that plays on the Aboriginals' fears of the bunyip. The portrayal of the 'baddies' in *Dot and the Whale* is just as disturbing: as Dot tries to save a beached whale, the villains try to have the whale cut up to be sold. These villains are 'mediterranean' and 'oriental' caricatures whose voices are accented to ensure recognition. These men, like many post-war migrants, are fish-shop owners. They are depicted as mercenary, stupid and cruel, in an extremely vicious, negative stereotype of southern European and Asian migrants.

A popular strategy to avoid delineating the ethnicity or race of 'baddies' and heroes has been to turn them into space monsters, robots or fantasy figures to whom a racial or ethnic label was irrelevant. Initially, the goodies remained white, as in *The Transformers* and the *Vultron* animations, as if their audiences (assumed white) needed this identity marker. So for a long period 'cleaning up' potentially derogatory stereotype 'baddies' left a homogeneous cast of identifiably human 'goodies', all white and usually male.

The presentation of racial and ethnic caricatures as 'baddies' was revived by the hugely successful *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. This American cartoon was an early example of the industry's acknowledgement of the dangers of chemical and radioactive contamination, and might be compared with 'eco-cartoons' such as the French *Smoggies*, and the American *Toxic Crusaders* and *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*.

Some might argue that the *Turtles* are an example of 'non- racist' practice because the heroes are non-human and green. Yet the ethnicity (and indeed race) of all the characters is only thinly disguised: the scripts, the Turtles' voices and accents, and the material culture surrounding them inside their sewer, identifies them unequivocally as adolescent, west coast, white Americans. (Their addiction to pizzas simply suggests the limits of the multiculturalism-equals-different-food position.) The Turtles' mentor in the cartoon version of the original comic is Splinter, the Japanese Ninja who has been mutated into a talking rat. This 'good' Japanese is essentially the 'wise oriental' stereotype; the other 'good' characters are all drawn as caucasian.

On the other hand, all the 'badness' in this series emanates from the Japanese villain Shredder and the evil Foot Clan, whose members look like faceless machines but are known to be human Japanese Ninjas. A monster from outer space (a disembodied brain looking for a human form) provides the Shredder with super hi-tech equipment but all the malice stems from the human Japanese villains. Even the historical glimpse of the Foot Clan when Splinter was a devoted member (the Clan presumably is the source of his education and 'wisdom'), is parodied and its honoured leader shown as ignorant, foul-mouthed and easily misled by the wicked Shredder. Two working-class Americans (one caucasian, one Afro-American) become dupes

of the Japanese Shredder; for their stupidity they are mutated to fighting versions of wild animals, and other villains take either monster or mechanical forms. The persistent theme of the series, however, is that Japanese culture has generated this relentless evil threatening to overtake America, and from which only the Turtles can save the nation. Is this a descendant of the cowboys and Indians plot? If so, how often might alternative interpetations be made? Do any children side with the Foot Clan?

The depiction of ethnicity and race is a complex matter of constructing characters by visual, sound and plot components, with references (at times satirical) to stereotypes and caricatures. Obscuring one or two elements, such as skin colour and physiognomy, may still leave the overall racial or ethnic reference of the character intact, so long as their voice, surroundings and the plot continue to stereotype them.

Most recently, and of more interest as it will undoubtedly continue as a trend in children's animation, goodies have been given racial or ethnic diversity and in some cases baddies have as well. These attempts to include diversity are important because the creators of racially or ethnically defined characters must also create relationships for these characters, thereby revealing their own assumptions about power. How children then intepret these narratives is another question. It is interesting, however, to review the content of some recent animations in these terms, particularly as some have very self-consciously incorporated racial and ethnic issues. One example is the Hanna Barbera cartoons—here we look at *The Smurfs*.

The Smurfs form a significant proportion of the programming for children on Channel 7's *Agro's Breakfast Show*. Ethnicity in the earliest series of this 1970s cartoon was relatively uniform: the main characters were little blue elves or gnomes, who lived in pre-industrial Europe and whose main enemies were non-humanoid animals and an apparently caucasian and human-sized wizard. In the later series, however, the Smurfs travel through time and space, which ensures many opportunities to portray 'human' difference and power relations.

There is a strong presence of Africans among the humans visited in this way by the elves, and the representations of traditional African agrarian lifestyles are consistently positive. There are occasional African 'baddies', such as tricksters who are reformed by the Smurfs, but these are far outnumbered by delightful African children of both sexes and all ages, and by wise and interesting African adults, storytellers and artists. These Africans all have names like Aeyisha, names used frequently by African–Americans today in celebration of their African heritage. Yet in all this time-travel there are no visits to any contemporary African or African American communities, so the affirmative and respectful images of Africans remain remote in time and space for American audiences.

Other people are not so lucky! In March 1992 in an episode of *The*

Smurfs the elves travelled to a Pacific island, where the depiction of traditional life was riddled with some of the oldest and most vicious caricatures of Polynesian societies. The dominant person in the village is shown as an enormously fat woman, who enslaves her own people and the Smurfs in the service of a carved stone idol of a cruel god who demands human/Smurf sacrifices. *The Smurfs*' respectful treatment of oral tradition in African life has reverted here to the old western caricatures and contempt for 'heathens' and 'superstitions' in its treatment of Polynesian subjects. It seems that *The Smurfs* reflects the positive impact of America's new marketing focus on Afro-Americans, at least in regard to treatments of traditional Africa, but persists with negative caricatures of other non-caucasian races and non-western cultures.

Arising from an idea by Ted Turner, *Captain Planet and the Planeteers* is a high-powered attempt to apply all the things that make successful cartoons (e.g. crusading hero and lots of hi-tech action) to an ideologically sound approach to increasing environmental awareness. The cast includes the voices of many famous and politically active performers like Sting and Whoopie Goldberg. In general, it is successful: engaging, exciting, it gives child audiences at least as much optimism often as fear and depression about enormous issues like overpopulation. There are some doubts about its finer political points; for example, the fact that its solutions arise from magical powers rather than the Planeteers' own resources might discourage children from taking political action; and it equates nuclear warfare's destructiveness with that of 'vandals' who 'deface property'. Nevertheless, the animation tries very hard to represent non-Anglo races and cultures, as well as women in general, in roles which are at least as active and intelligent as those for western males.

The main plot has the earth approaching environmental crisis, and Gaia (Whoopie Goldberg) selecting 'five special young people' to save the planet: three teenage boys from the USA, Africa and the Amazon, and two young women, from the USSR and Asia. Gaia equips them each with power over one element of nature, such as fire or wind. When these 'Planeteers' combine their powers they can call up Captain Planet, 'earth's greatest hero', who looks like a green but very spunky Superman! The 'good' characters are carefully balanced by race and gender, and possess far more diverse ethnic/cultural characteristics than are usually present in animations. For example, their voices are accented appropriately at least to the continent of their origin instead of with the ubiquitous north American Anglo cartoon accents.

The 'baddies' are more uniformly Anglo-American (including Sting), including a white American woman and some mutant characters with Anglo-American accents. In an interesting and probably unintentional association, a humanoid–rodent 'baddie' is depicted in a hooded shawl which strongly resembles an Arabic man's headwear. This small piece of carelessness highlights the general absence of any Arabic (or Muslim) presence among the

Planeteers, suggesting perhaps the limits of the producers' ideological correctness.

All the characters get a scrupulously fair cut of the action: in every episode each character uses his or her individual power before they join forces to call up Captain Planet. The character development is not so evenly shared by gender. Each male character not only gets a go at the heroics but also has a crisis of confidence, but the female characters are less fully rounded, although Linka, the USSR character, has lots of power and vigorous conflict with Wheeler.

The stories generally deal with urban and western problems, although these are not limited to the USA. They include nuclear power (the scientists are white); overpopulation (rats in a western urban setting); and littering (Kwame confronts white western urban citizens). There is some exploration of third world situations too, as in the episode about a cure for a new plague; the only cure is found in a South American rainforest plant, threatened of course by the burning of the Amazonian forest. In this episode the local Spanish-descent 'mestizo' cattle farmers destroy the forest for quick profit, in conflict with the indigenous forest people (like Mati). This is an interesting depiction of conflict between non-caucasian groups, but even this episode falls back on the old pattern—the local non-white elite were misled by the real villains, the profiteers who are all either white or non-human or mutants.

Despite its modern complexities *Captain Planet* contains subtle racial and ethnic caricaturing and establishes a hierarchy of power and dramatic interest for its characters, as follows:

1 The dominant 'good' mythic/hero figures, Captain Planet and Gaia, are overwhelmingly American, even if Gaia is played by an African-American. It might be considered important to target American children as their country is a major energy user and polluter, but the Americanness of the heroes also presumably reinforces any viewer's concept of international American dominance. Furthermore, since the physiognomy of both is caucasian, even if one is green and the other brown, so the major hero is most closely identified with white Americans, and Gaia, though she has an African–American accent, is an exotic character who has no distinct cultural trait other than her voice. Despite attempts to avoid the established representations of power relations, the series continues to associate the greatest power with white Americans; it allows an African–American woman a disembodied presence at the top, but does not include an African–American man, nor any readily identifiable person from a *contemporary* African–American community.
2 Ethnic and/or racial stereotyping persists in the Planeteers' 'powers' and character development, which provides several sub-plots. The American Planeteer, Wheeler, has the power of fire; its qualities of unrestrained

dynamism have long been appropriated by 'Aryan' and northern European societies. The other caucasian character, Linka, from the old Soviet Union, is given the power of wind and the attributes of cool logic and rationality, the obverse side of old northern European self-representations. Although Linka is given a strong role (especially as she is often in direct conflict with the American Wheeler), the other female Planeteer, the 'Asian' Gi, with the power of water, is the least developed personality, which suggests that the producers find it hard to come to grips with the complexity of Asia and America's ambiguous relationship with it.

The main personal tension in the series arises between the impulsive, insensitive Wheeler and the others. Linka frequently expresses irritation but most of the moral weight is given to the responses of Mati (the indigenous Amazonian who has the power of heart), Kwame (the African with the power of earth) and Gi (from an unidentified part of Asia, with the power of water). Wheeler's crassness is often met with shouts of 'sit down Yankee!'. Yet all this maintains the dramatic focus on Wheeler/USA, who has to be constantly re-educated and perhaps this keeps viewers' attention on the white, western Americans.

ROMANCING THE TRADITIONAL

Two Planeteers are depicted as pre-industrial: Mati, the indigenous Amazonian with the power of heart (emotional sensitivity) and Kwame, the traditional African farmer with the power of earth (which means being able to conjure up huge mounds of earth and rock as obstacles to baddies). These two non-western male characters are the most romanticised/mysticised. Kwame tends to make 'wise', philosophical sayings while Mati has all the emotional sensitivity, moral goodness and unifying power. The presence of Africans and African–Americans is powerful, in Kwame and in Gaia's voice, but no African–Americans are represented visually or culturally. It seems easier to celebrate a 'traditional' culture now distant in time and place than to acknowledge a powerful contemporary sub-culture which is seen by some white Americans as threateningly close.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this analysis:

- A few animations persist with negative caricatures of non-western human characters, and/or use derogatory racial or ethnic caricatures to delineate anthropomorphic animal characters.
- Cartoons still give non-human or unnaturally coloured hero figures racially and ethnically specific characterisations, as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *Toxic Crusaders* do. The depiction of ethnicity and race is a complex matter of constructing characters with visual, audio and plot

components, and integrating established (if at times satirical) stereotypes/caricatures. Obscuring one or two elements, such as skin colour and physiognomy, does not disguise a racial or ethnic identity or type if voice, surroundings and plot place a character in a particular stereotype.

- In many cartoons, whether or not race or ethnicity is specified, there is a hierarchy of colour, with lightness/whiteness associated with the most 'goodness' and power, amongst both 'goodies' and 'baddies'.
- There are now several animations that present non-Anglo, non-western human characters in permanent and prominent roles; some of these are only subordinate to the main hero and villain, locked into permanent dependence on the more powerful caucasian characters. Others alter the appearance of the main characters, but give them white American accents, scripts and material culture. Only a very few allow real alternatives to the narrow limits of older characterisations, and even the better ones, like *Captain Planet*, maintain the white American character, voice style and cultural attributes in high profile. Some of the most prominent non-caucasians in this series are of African descent, but even here the current cultural and social characteristics of African–Americans are omitted. There is romanticised traditional Africa, but where is south central LA?
- In the growing ethnic and racial diversity evident in contemporary cartoons, there is a markedly more positive representation of African–American characters than there has been in the past. This is the most prominent non-caucasian group shown and most representations are sympathetic or try to be, although they are still drawn from a fairly narrow range, and power invariably resides with the caucasian characters.
- Non-African descent groups are far less positively represented in contemporary animations. Polynesians, Jews and particularly Asians (the Japanese in *Ninja Turtles*) are still given negative representations. However, since the Japanese in *Ninja Turtles* hold great power, the power relations of this cartoon are left open to the interpretations of its young viewers.

We have now examined how differentiation works for specific audiences, in this case children. Yet the work of constructing the Other and presenting him/her is heavily influenced by stereotypes for audiences other than children, and in circumstances that claim to represent reality. We now examine a format and an audience remote from breakfast television cartoons and children: the only national news daily, *The Australian*.

24

MAKING *THE AUSTRALIAN*

The editorial stance of *The Australian* newspaper has prompted us to explore our contention that the mainstream press can maintain a negative influence on the issue of racism so that non-Anglo groups and their interests are subordinated. Smitherman-Donaldson and Van Dijk explain that 'the discursive reproduction of racism is the enactment or legitimation of white majority power at the micro levels of everyday verbal interaction and communication'. (1988:17)

The Australian is the flagship of News Ltd, the Rupert Murdoch group of media companies in Australia. Its generally conservative political position, its strong identification with free market economic policies and its primary market among the technocratic and business elites (e.g. through its regular sections on computers and higher education) suggest that it reflects the values and attitudes of that social stratum. In terms of social values *The Australian* reflects the interests and orientation of the New Right more precisely than its major (regional) competitors, the Melbourne *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, do.

The Australian has concerned itself with government policies on multiculturalism and racism for many years, and its position has remained almost unchanged over recent years. It has made its opinion pages available to critics of multiculturalism such as former Melbourne University psychology academic Dr Frank Knopfelmacher, its own foreign affairs commentator Greg Sheridan, and its regular economic and social affairs commentator P. P. McGuiness. It offers the views of Phillip Adams as a proponent of multiculturalism in the name of balance.

The Australian's editorial position on the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Inquiry into Racist Violence, commenced in 1989 and completed in 1991, indicates a firm commitment to a position that denied structural racism existed in Australia. In an editorial on the first hearings of the Inquiry (28 August 1989) it advises the Inquiry Commissioner Irene Moss not to find that racist violence was 'the tip of an iceberg of racism [for if it did so, it] may be dismissed as just another manifestation of the grievance industry'. It continued: 'Australia has been virtually free of institutionalised racism. . .Australians are not perfect; neither are we to any significant degree,

racist'. According to this editorial, the conclusion to be drawn from these last two decades is that 'questions of race need to be handled with sensitivity to the feelings of the dominant race [sic], no less than those of racial minorities'.

The Australian expresses a most important perspective here: 'racial minorities' need not imply a power relationship nor any particular legitimacy or illegitimacy—the term could simply refer to relative numbers. 'Dominant race' with all its overtones is not, however, simply a numerical term—it refers to power and legitimacy; domination implies higher status, greater rights, wider claims. What indeed is this dominant race to which *The Australian* refers? Is this race aware of its common racial feelings?

The statements that minimise the issue of racism, though offered in an unselfconscious and matter-of-fact manner, expose an agenda in which the hierarchy is unquestioned and unquestionable, and in which minorities should keep quiet and toe the line. Since the concept of race hardly qualifies as a scientific descriptor of social behaviour, whose values are laying claim to speak for the whole 'race'?

We are reminded here of the writing of Herbert Spencer, a mid-19th century social Darwinist, one of the forebears of scientific racism, who coined the phrase 'survival of the fittest' and whose theories of social evolution were based on a perception of social development from the homogeneous to heterogeneous. Homogeneous societies were savage and barbaric, and those that survived did so by evolving into more complex and 'market' oriented systems of interdependencies (Bock 1978:65; Peel 1985: 814–15).

The release of the report of the National Inquiry into Racist Violence prompted *The Australian* editorialists to continue their discourse on race. Under the heading 'Hysteria Will Not Rid Us of Racism' (22 April 1991) the editorial attacked the report as hysterical reportage and exaggeration. Responding to the editorial, this time under a heading 'Facing up to racist cancer', two letter-writers condemned the editorial and asserted the reality and extent of racist violence. One writer claimed sustained harassment by 'xenophobic males' and the other wrote: 'no doubt. . .the majority of submissions were both accurate and honest attempts to assist the Government to assess and redress the problem of racist violence in this country' (1 May 1991).

We would conclude from this that a strong belief exists in the heartland of the media, as expressed in *The Australian*, that the social and economic system is fair and reasonable, that sustained action is neither prudent nor necessary to address any inequalities others claim to exist, and that minorities have no role to play in setting the social agenda.

The media do consistently develop ideas, images and themes about

particular ethnic minorities and racial groups. Their departures from the assumptions of Anglo-Australian norms are demonstrated in a range of genres. We now review the process of creating the Italians for Australian media audiences in dramatic television representation.

25

MAKING ITALIANS IN AUSTRALIAN TELEVISION DRAMA

As the largest non-Anglo-Saxon immigrant group in Australia, Italians have had an indelible influence on local language, social customs and food, but their dramatic representation in Australian theatre, cinema and television has never reflected this influence. One of the few drama series on commercial television that deals with Italian immigrants in a historical perspective, *Fields of Fire* (1988–90), shows how Italians are mainly portrayed as volatile and often corrupt background figures in a story about a young British immigrant. *Fields of Fire*'s dramatic parameters were established by its Anglo-Australian producers' concern with providing entertainment for a predominantly Anglo-Australian audience.

Apart from SBS, Italo-Australian writers, directors and film-makers have had little opportunity to produce their own stories, despite the considerable talents of film-makers like Franco di Chiera, Monica Pellizzari and Luigi D'Aquisto (whose 1988 film about Italian migrants in Melbourne, *Hungry Heart*, did not receive even a cinema release). Rosa Colosimo, a Melbourne-based film and television producer who has promoted Italo-Australian films and television series for two decades, describes how Italians are portrayed on Australian television:

> Unfortunately the Italian characters who appear on the small screen are the usual stereotypes, the usual clichés, the natural progeny of racism. The husband is a fruiterer called Luigi or Giuseppe, and is stupid, possessive and suspicious. The wife is fat, dressed in black, with no makeup, and is called Maria or Concetta. The sons have little intelligence but their parents want them to become doctors or lawyers, while the daughters are absolute geniuses who their parents do not understand in their insistence that the woman's place is in the home, preferably in the kitchen. There is no need to go on, you can imagine the rest all too well. (Colosimo 1987:153)

Colosimo' s scenario can be recognised in comedy programs such as the ABC's *Home Sweet Home* (1981), which focuses on the internal conflicts of an Italo-Australian family, and Anglo-Australian dramas where Italians, often portrayed by Anglo-Australian actors, appear in 'bit parts'.

It also applies to the historical survey of images of Italians in American film and television contained in Allen L. Woll and Randall M. Miller's book *Ethnic and Racial Issues in American Film and Television*, where the two principal traditional stereotypes of Italian-Americans are identified as Mafiosi-type criminals and working-class comic buffoons. Woll and Miller also claim that Italian women have usually been portrayed either as passive and kitchen-bound, or passionate, overtly eroticised figures. They conclude:

> The Italian has generally appeared as a creature of passion, an emotional being given to excess in love or hatred, whose religion, culture, and condition seemingly explained his exaggerated behaviour. (Woll and Miller 1987: 275)

While Italo-Australian characterisations in television comedy and drama have tended to be 'softer' than American prototypes like the Corleone family in *The Godfather* (I and II), *Rocky* and *Rambo*, they have frequently exhibited similar traits to those Woll and Miller describe. The first important portrayal of an Italian in Australia occurred in *They're a Weird Mob*, which British director Michael Powell directed in 1963 with Italian actor Walter Chiari playing the role of Nino Culotta, the nom-de-plume of author John O'Grady's unashamedly assimilationist novel. Nino was a relatively mild comic figure, an Italian journalist who observed the foibles of Australians, but this mildness concealed a propagandist who concluded that the Australian way of life was the best in the world, and that non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants to this country should forget about their ethnic heritage and become Australians.

The first dramatic portrayal of Italian immigrants to Australia 'from the inside' was Michael Pattinson's film *Moving Out* (1983), which dealt with the generation gap in an Italo-Australian family, a standard scenario for dramatisations of non-Anglo immigrants in Australia. Gino Condello (Vince Colosimo), a 15-year-old Italo-Australian who considers himself a streetwise native of North Fitzroy in Melbourne, is faced with a newly arrived Italian family, and his own family's decision to move to the outer western suburbs of Melbourne. Gino's developing relationship with the recently arrived Maria forces him to come to terms with his own ethnicity and the fact that he is a 'wog' despite his efforts to Anglicise himself, and the film ends with his acceptance of his dual culture. Helen Garner and Jennifer Giles' book developed from Jan Sardi's screenplay of *Moving Out* became a set text in some Australian schools, but it was not screened on television until many years after its cinema release. Rosa Colosimo has expressed reservations about *Moving Out* as an accurate reflection of contemporary Italo-Australians:

> The film was critically acclaimed, but we made it 15 years too late and it has some grave defects. The ending in which Gino returns to his origins is too facile,

> and the Australian characters are all unsympathetic or racist, which is not entirely accurate. We are quick to condemn the prejudices of others, but we don't even notice our own. (Colosimo 1987:154)

Waterfront, a 6-hour television drama series about the Melbourne waterside workers' strike in the late 1920s, was screened on Channel 10 in 1984 and was the next important attempt to dramatise Italians in Australia. The protagonists of *Waterfront* are mostly Anglo-Australian: the main character, the unionist Maxey, was played by Jack Thompson, and Warren Mitchell, Noni Hazlhurst, Ray Barrett and Chris Hayward all had major roles, along with Greta Scacchi as Maxey's Italian 'love interest', Anna. But it included a major subplot about Italian migrants who were used as strikebreakers, and began with the migration to Australia of Professor Chieri, an anti-fascist militant from Turin, and his family—upper middle-class Italians who have difficulties adapting to the 'classlessness' of Australian society. *Waterfront* was written by Mac Gudgeon, directed by Chris Thompson and produced by Bob Weis, who hired Rosa Colosimo as an adviser for the sections dealing with the Italian characters in order 'not to repeat the errors of others'. As a result, as Colosimo recounts:

> At last, in 1984, Italians were portrayed not just dressed in black, but as intellectuals, political activists, fair-haired and thin, Italians who played the piano and had fun. The Australian hero fell in love with the Italian heroine. It was a very complex and convincing work . . . Italian dialogue was heard for what I believe was the first time in the history of Australian commercial television. (1987:154)

Channel 10 wanted to eliminate all the Italian dialogue from *Waterfront*, but Bob Weis refused to allow this and leaked Channel 10's decision to the press, with the result that only a few cuts were made, and English subtitles were used for the Italian scenes for what was probably the first (and last) time on Australian commercial television. Like *Moving Out*, the screenplay for *Waterfront* was subsequently published as a novel, compiled by Sue McKinnon. Like its predecessor it presented a sympathetic, but Anglocentric view of the Italian characters 'from the outside'. One particularly contentious scene in *Waterfront* portrays a confrontation between striking Australian waterside workers and Italian and Greek 'scab' labourers, which McKinnon, describing the sequence of events in the television film, is at pains to present sympathetically. This dramatisation, despite its good intentions, nonetheless depicts the Italian workers as ignorant, disorientated, and even of fascist persuasion, while its attempt to show Anglo-Australian good intentions giving way to mild racist abuse is clumsy. Although it sincerely attempts to portray

the experiences of some educated Italian migrants in Australia, *Waterfront* ultimately confirms Rosa Colosimo's claim:

> I believe that we Italo-Australians should relate our own experiences and lives, and not leave the job of representing us to others, whether they're Italian or Australian. This doesn't mean that these others are not excellent directors, screenwriters or actors, but they can never really understand us, or know what it means to be Italo-Australian. It is our responsibility to tell our own story, and the cinema is probably the best medium for this, as long as we can avoid the pitfalls of stereotypes. (Colosimo 1987:154)

It was not until 1989 that any advance on *Waterfront*'s portrayal of Italians in Australia was made with *The Magistrate*. A 6-hour mini-series about an Italian magistrate searching for his son in Australia, co-produced by the ABC, Rete-Italia and TVS Television, it was written and produced by Chris Warner, and directed by Kathy Mueller. Warner's previous work for television included the SBS series *In Between* (1988) about young people from Turkish, Vietnamese, Anglo-Australian and other backgrounds; these were mostly lugubrious, pessimistic portrayals of young non-English-speaking people in Australia. Warner originally attempted to set up *The Magistrate* with SBS, but when the budget of this multinational production began to escalate, SBS was forced to pull out and the ABC took over. A major factor in the success of *The Magistrate* project was the engagement of Italian actor Franco Nero, who has appeared in more than 100 Italian and international films since 1963, to play the series' protagonist, Paolo Pizzi. As Nero explained in an interview:

> I accepted the offer because I liked the script. It was not an easy decision to reach due to the fortunate fact that I am much in demand . . . But I am a strange actor, maybe the only Italian actor who is constantly working abroad. I can speak different languages and have worked with people of many different nationalities. Most stories of the Mafia have focused on the crime connection between Italy and the USA. This is something new because of the Australian link. (*Cinema Papers*, May 1989:12)

Nero is rarely off-screen throughout *The Magistrate*, and he imbues the eponymous protagonist with a moving dignity; he is mostly quiet, rational and subdued, contravening the impulsive, passionate and effusive Italian stereotype. Although Pizzi does not avoid showing emotion—he cries in a particularly poignant scene with his father, an immigrant to Australia (played skilfully by Melbourne actor Osvaldo Maione), his control of emotion in his battle against the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta, who have killed his wife with a bomb, is particularly powerful. The *Sydney Morning Herald* television drama

critic, Robin Oliver, considered *The Magistrate* 'close to the best British work in the serial thriller area' (*SMH* Guide, 13 Nov. 1989), an indication of the series' somewhat Anglocentric restraint.

In dealing with themes related to Anglo-Saxon notions of the Mafia, *The Magistrate* works from a premise fraught with the danger of reinforcing film and television stereotypes of Italians as criminals, but it largely succeeds in subverting these stereotypes (and the criminal element in the story involves the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta, not the Sicilian-based Mafia).

The characters of *The Magistrate* express a wide range of attitudes and behaviour affecting Anglo-Australians and Italians. The ocker detective Davies is well-meaning and sympathetic towards Pizzi, respectful of his Italian idiosyncrasies, and willing to learn from his experience, both in Italy and Australia. The local police in the fictional Victorian town of Woongabbie, which has a reputation for marijuana-growing by its Calabrese community, brutally harass Pizzi's brother Leonardo (Joe Petruzzi), which provokes a public demonstration by the Calabrese fruitgrowers. Anglo-Australian prejudices towards Italians are counterbalanced by Italian tendencies to regard Australia as a British colony lacking the history and cultural traditions of Italy. 'So much for British justice', comments Pizzi after police order him to leave Australia. 'This is Australia' is the reply, with a hint of republican sentiments.

In *The ABC of Drama* Elizabeth Jacka expresses a different viewpoint:

> This is one of the most aesthetically satisfying of the mini-series shown (by the ABC) in 1988–89. Not every part of it is a masterpiece (the first hour is terribly slow and deliberate but then it finds its rhythm beautifully) but it is among the most structurally ambitious and robust in content terms. It is the story of a Calabrian magistrate involved in investigating Mafia control (sic) of the drug trade. . .Once it hits its stride, *The Magistrate* is a very exciting thriller—but it is also a complex family saga and an exposé of the drug trade, with a glance at journalistic ethics along the way. . . It is also a welcome change from the predominantly Anglo fare of ABC drama and was something of a landmark in being the first co-production with an Italian partner. (Jacka 1991:88)

Jacka also points out that *The Magistrate* was only the eleventh drama program on multicultural themes that the ABC had produced since 1975 (1991:68). The series had a rather lukewarm reception when it was screened on the Berlusconi-owned private TV channel Rete-Italia in Italy in 1990, partly because it appeared subdued and low-key in comparison with the popular Italian Mafia mini-series, *La Piovra* (The Octopus), which has had at least three sequels to date. In *La Piovra*, Michele Placido plays a policeman whose family is killed by the Mafia, and who sets out on a bloody vendetta. The high-powered violence, action and emotion in *La Piovra* (which SBS has

so far screened twice in Australia) is more sensational than the relatively contemplative concerns of *The Magistrate*, which is more relevant to Australia on account of its incisive observations about Italo-Australian relations.

In 1990 the ABC's record for positive portrayals of Italians took a downward slide with *Police Crop*, a fictionalised one-off drama about events surrounding the murder of Canberra Assistant Police Commissioner Colin Winchester. Originally entitled *The Black Hand*, echoing at least two early American sensational Mafia films whose titles derive from the racist expression 'the black hand of the dago', *Police Crop* was billed as a follow-up to *Police State*, a successful and often comic drama about Joh Bjelke-Petersen and the Fitzgerald Inquiry. Both programs rated very highly (18 and 22 in Sydney) and Jacka regards them both as interesting examples of the docudrama genre:

> . . .they are the first time the ABC has made docudramas which, as well as being very appropriate vehicles for such [controversial] material, are a good strategy for making programs quickly and cheaply so that they are able to be seen by audiences while the issues are still current and are thus able to have an effect. (1991:68)

Police Crop, written by Ian David and directed by Ken Cameron, buys straight into Italian-Australian Mafia mythology, deriving its revised title from a police-sanctioned dummy marijuana crop instigated by Joe Verducci, a man with Calabrian syndicate connections (or connections with the 'Ndrangheta, not the Mafia, as the film implies). The program starred the Italian actor Luciano Catenacci, who played Pizzi's treacherous former tutor, Silvestri, in *The Magistrate*, and Catenacci, along with Italo-Australian actors Rob Ruggiero, Vince D'Amico and Joseph Spano, struggled to imbue his role with some dignity. 'No prizes for who they're playing!' commented an anonymous item listing the Italian actors in *Police Crop* in the Sydney *Sun-Herald* (18 Feb. 1990). The fact that the program was made 'quickly and cheaply' is evident in its producers' last-minute realisation that the Italian characters would have to converse with one another in Italian, and that sections of David's script would have to be translated. Frank Cavanagh, the Italian dialogue consultant for *The Magistrate* who Anglicised his real name on the credits of *Police Crop* to distance himself from the project, was engaged to translate and to coach Catenacci in English. He did such a good job that the supposedly 'evil' Italian characters spoke so fluently they put the Anglo-Australian cops' relentlessly scatological banter to shame. Marion McDonald, reviewing the program in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, commented:

> It was a curious—and unintended, surely?—effect of this sensational docu-drama that the alleged Mafiosi came out of it virtually looking like Honest Joes, or Giuseppes. I put it down to the subtitles. 'We can't let these crooks take our

> work and money.' That is the sort of thing they are supposed to have said. 'We'll have to put in another crop to pay for the lawyers.' The police by contrast employed an earthy argot, often alluding to each other's ears and arseholes. This may well be a true picture, however. Even in your reviewer's relatively sheltered life, the good guys have not necessarily been the smooth talkers.' (*SMH* 24 March 1990)

The tortuous, twisting plot of *Police Crop* made it difficult to follow, although its general picture of widespread police corruption and cover-ups was clear enough.

In perpetuating myths of marijuana-growing Mafiosi, *Police Crop* repeated common stereotypes, while its portrayal of Italians as shadowy background figures in an Anglo-Australian cop drama reversed the gains made by *The Magistrate* with its Italian protagonist.

Signs of widespread concern among Italo-Australian communities about the Anglo-Australian tendency to associate Italian immigrants with marijuana growing and the Mafia are indicated by *Victoria Market* (1982), a play by Nino Randazzo, the editor of the Melbourne-based Italian newspaper, *Il Globo*. Subtitled 'The Genesis of a Myth', *Victoria Market* deals with the serial murders of Italian stallholders in Victoria Market in the mid-1960s, and was performed in Italian at the 1982 Melbourne Italian Festival. Randazzo has described the play as. . .

> . . .a message, a protest against those elements, both Italian and Australian, of constitutional power who have created the myth of 'the Mafia in Australia'. Lawyers, journalists, police officials, politicians, academics and professional racists have hidden and are still hiding their complicity and vested interests, prejudices, and sometimes their crimes, corruption and lust for power and privilege under the convenient cloak of the 'Mafia in Australia', a myth which originated at the beginning of the 60s and which continues to crucify the Italians of Australia. (Randazzo 1982)

Victoria Market is a plea for justice and an end to prejudice. It also suggests that the Australian tendency to use the term 'Mafia' indiscriminately (as in 'New South Wales Labor Party Mafia', 'gay Mafia', 'feminist Mafia', 'multicultural Mafia', etc.) support the argument for precision when it is applied to its country of origin. The play has never been performed in English, although it provided the basis for a highly distorted screenplay by two Anglo-Australian writers, entitled *In Duty Bound,* which has fortunately never reached production.

The Italian narrative in Australian drama suggests that the issue of how Australia is represented in the media reverts time and again to control over the scripting and production process. The media can appropriate all too easily

a minority (some of which may be criminal but most of which is not) to promote some other commercial goal. We turn now to the construction of the Other through comedy. Laughing at or with the Other becomes crucial for understanding the tensions revealed by our interrogation of the media.