

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**New Zealand Television:
What are the benefits of state ownership
of television in a commercial world?**

**The Public Service Broadcasting
debate continues ...**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts (Social Sciences) in Media Studies
at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

John Wyatt

1999

Abstract

Faced with the possible sale of our free-to-air state broadcaster Television New Zealand to overseas media interests, this thesis argues a firm case against sale, and sets out to create further public interest and comment. Television is valuable more for its programme content than its ability to raise revenue. Starting with the premise that television has a unique role as a mass communications medium in creating social reality, discussion centres on how ideas of cultural identity, democracy, sovereignty, and national identity are articulated and supported through locally-made, creative and diverse programming; and how this is strengthened in having the state broadcaster take a leading part in setting a high standard in the service provided. The tensions created by economic globalisation of media products are examined, especially in relation to how small nation-states such as New Zealand encounter a deterritorialisation of social identity arising through rapid technological advances and media processes which ignore national state and cultural boundaries.

The origin of state television in New Zealand is documented, particular emphasis being given to legislative control, financial performance and the effect that organisational structure has on the content, diversity and standard of programmes scheduled. Maximising the financial performance of TVNZ through saturation advertising is questioned, and the recent polarising debate by politicians, commentators, and the public on the merits or otherwise of state ownership of TVNZ is covered in detail. A comprehensive study of the ABC and SBS in Australia is included, which informs an alternative proposal for TVNZ based on significant restructuring.

This thesis concludes TVNZ should be retained in government ownership, but with TV1 guided by a charter which moves its prime function away from commercial imperatives. TV1 should concentrate on developing a broadcasting service dedicated to programmes which contribute a sense of national identity, and which reflect the cultural diversity and aspirations of all New Zealanders. To assist in these goals TV1 would be publicly funded to provide daily prime-time ad-free 'windows' used to schedule programmes in line with its charter. TV2, and a range of industry mechanisms, would be used to ameliorate the ratio of tax-payer funding.

Acknowledgments

This thesis is dedicated to Gytha.

I wish to acknowledge everyone who has sustained, encouraged and inspired me during the period I have been preparing and writing this thesis. To those whom I owe a special thanks:

Assoc. Prof. Roy Shuker, Dr. Graeme Bassett and other members and staff of the wider Media Studies study programme at Massey University; my fellow media students; the Massey University English and Media Studies Postgraduate Research Fund; and to Vic and Eileen Longley who provided much needed employment at a critical moment, allowing this thesis the additional time and resources it needed to reach its full potential.

To Gytha and Jane, without whose generous help, understanding and practical, positive support I would have lost my way, I owe everything.

Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgments	ii
Contents	iii
Introduction	1
Context of Research	1
Scope of Research	2
Research Questions	3
Research Methodology	4
Chapter One	8
1.1 Television as a Communications Medium	8
1.2 The Mass Media, The Public Sphere and Politics	13
1.3 Television as a Cultural and Social Practice	19
1.4 Broadcasting Models: Public and Private	23
Chapter Two	28
2.1 Cultural Discourse and National Identity	28
2.2 National Sovereignty	33
2.3 National Identity	35
2.4 Global Plus Local: 'Glocalised' Identities	40
2.5 Spaces of Identity	43
Chapter Three	46
3.1 The Historical Context	46
3.2 The Legislative Effect on Programme Content	48
3.3 TVNZ: The Last Ten Years	51

Chapter Four	57
4.1 TVNZ: Financial Analysis	57
4.2 TVNZ: To Sell or Not to Sell?	60
4.3 The TVNZ Sale Debate: Polarity or Polemics?	63
4.4 The TVNZ Sale Debate: 1998 and beyond ...	74
4.5 TVNZ Scoping Report - May 1998	82
Chapter Five	86
5.1 Australia and Public Broadcasting: The ABC	86
5.2 The Current Structure and Performance of the ABC	90
5.3 The Mansfield Review	95
5.4 Australian Culture and the SBS	98
5.5 Australian Public Service Television: Realistic Choices?	102
Chapter Six	104
6.1 A Plan for the Future: Changing Attitudes	104
6.2 A Public Service Channel for New Zealand?	106
6.3 Re-regulation: Intervention and Support Mechanisms	112
6.4 Where's the Money Coming From?	117
6.5 Digital Futures and Technological Determinism	119
Conclusions	123
New Zealand's Cultural Identity: Costed or Valued?	123
Safeguarding Identity: Global Media Pressures	126
The Final Affirmation: TVNZ <i>is</i> Too Valuable to Sell	128
References	130