

Hyperreal Australia

the construction of Australia in *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*

Melissa McEwen

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I wish to confirm that the thesis is my own work and that all sources used have been acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'McEwen', written over a horizontal dotted line.

Melissa McEwen
30 March 2001

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“No homeland can survive being processed by the films which celebrate it, and which thereby turn the unique character on which it thrives into an unchangeable sameness.”

Theodor Adorno
Culture Industry Reconsidered

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Like almost any other person who has grown up in the past thirty years, television has played an important role in developing my understanding of the world around me and in the construction of my identity. A constant presence in the home, television is more than just an entertainment medium.

While I was at primary school, my parents directed my television viewing towards documentaries and literary adaptations made especially for children. My enjoyment of *The Eagle of the Ninth* led me to read all Rosemary Sutcliffe's novels and left me with a fondness for tales of Roman legionnaires, while watching Gerald Durrell's wildlife documentaries sparked a life long interest in endangered species and conservation. However, twice a week at school I felt deprived and alienated from my peer group. These were the mornings when the previous night's episodes of *The Restless Years* and *Prisoner* were discussed. The eleven and twelve year olds of my class discussed these programs with fervour and passion, while my parents refused to allow me to watch such 'trash'. Thus my interest in soap operas began through my observation of the fascination they held for others.

As I grew older and my television viewing choices became more autonomous, soap opera began to play a more substantial role in my life. My sister and I would watch *Texas*, an American daytime soap opera, whenever we were home sick until it was cancelled. *Dynasty* became my first real soap addiction with its fascinating and glamorous characters. By the end of high school, discussions of *Days of Our Lives* were de rigeur, with absentees being interrogated the next day for plot updates. While I did not start watching *Neighbours* til much later, when *Home & Away* started, so did my viewing of it. As an undergraduate at university, a semester course in media studies allowed me to watch *E-Street* for purely academic purposes and by the time *Beverly Hills 90210* started I had complete control over my television as I no longer lived with my parents.

Watching both American and Australian soap operas, it became clear to me that, while the different programs had many features in common, they were also distinctly different

in a number of ways. Soap opera is television drama which is characterised by its on-going nature and its focus on the private, rather than public, lives of characters. Soap operas appear to be endless, while their beginnings quickly also become lost. They deal with the emotions of characters and often have a strong focus on family. Generally they privilege talk over action, unlike action-oriented police drama. They mirror the time space of the viewer and rarely is every storyline resolved at the end of an episode.

I am not alone in my fascination with Australian soap operas. The country's preoccupation with its televisual heroes is symbolised by the presence of Kylie Minogue/Charlene Ramsey's wedding dress from *Neighbours* in the Vicotiran Museum. "Kylie and Jason" have represented an iconic couple to most Australians and it is rare for (particularly younger) Australians, to not have at least one favourite soapie star of past or present.

What I explore in this thesis comes from what I observed while watching soaps—the national character of soap opera. The soap operas of the US, for example, have a very distinct flavour and identity from those produced in Australia. Further UK soaps dwell in a different world, highlighting the lives of working class Britains. From this basis of difference, I will then examine the construction of a particular kind of Australian identity within these programs.

Neighbours and *Home & Away* have both been on television for over ten years and, as such, are Australia's longest running soap operas. While *Neighbours* has a suburban setting, *Home & Away* is set in a small beachside town. Despite their different settings, the programs have much in common, including their core approach to the presentation of Australian identity. Both programs have had enormous success internationally and, as such, have also presented their construction of Australian identity to the world. Given their long running nature, popularity and my own familiarity with them (I finally started watching *Neighbours* while at university), I focus on these programs to draw out their depiction of Australian society and, by looking at early episodes as well as those from 2000, how that depiction has changed over the last decade. Chapter two will focus in depth on *Neighbours* while chapter three will examine *Home & Away* in detail.

While I have given a brief definition of soap opera above, I will draw out its meaning in more detail at the beginning of chapter four in order to gain a stronger grasp on what soap opera actually is. Soap opera is an amorphous term, used generally in a derogatory sense. While soap opera has developed and changed, there are some core components which remain consistent. I will draw out the most important components of soap opera to try and find a workable definition.

The remainder of chapter four will be used to examine the differences and similarities of Australian, United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK) soaps. By comparing Australian soaps and those from the US and UK, I examine the structural features of soap operas, while also being able to compare and contrast the national mythologies which suffuse them. Much of the difference between the soap operas of the three countries is a result of the class basis of the programs. Soap operas from the United States tend to emphasise class mobility and the professional classes, while UK soaps are generally mired in the world of the working classes. Australia stands between, with *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* in particular centred in the world of the middle classes. This class difference permeates much of the rest of the programs with other differences developing from this basis.

A question that can be posed is why should it matter how soap opera constructs Australian identity? To pre-empt this question, the first half of chapter five examines the debate about the influence of television and the role of the viewer in interpreting programs such as soap opera. Television can provoke emotive arguments from both sides of the political spectrum with the right concerned about levels of sex and violence and the impact of the decaying moral values espoused, while elements of the left see television as an overwhelmingly hegemonic force which encourages viewers to accept the status quo. I will demonstrate that rather than accepting these kind of reductionist arguments, it is important to closely examine the role of the viewer. By granting a viewer agency, it is possible to see that they are not passive receptors of information, but rather utilise their knowledge of the world and their own hopes and ideas to actively interpret what they see on the television.

Finally, in the second half of chapter five, I deconstruct Australian identity as it is presented by *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*. I examine the way this construction of

identity reflects and reinforces ideas about Australia which are current in political, cultural and social discourse. These ideas also relate to the national mythology as discussed in chapter four. I also examine how changes within the soap operas mirror changes in the external discourse about Australia.

Soap opera and television help to shape our understanding of reality. This does not mean that there is a single, monolithic interpretation of what we see. Nonetheless, no matter how active an audience is in interpreting what is viewed, when programs present a message which is already strong within political, cultural or social discourse, there is an element of reinforcement. As such, *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* have a strong role to play in the construction of a notion of Australianness amongst their viewers which then feeds back into Australia's social and political discourse.

CHAPTER 2

NEIGHBOURS

Considered by most the quintessential Australian soap, *Neighbours* first screened in Australia in March 1985.¹ It was conceived by Reg Watson, Head of Drama for the Grundy Organization. Watson was already one of the leading exponents of Australian soap opera, having previously devised *The Young Doctors*, *Sons and Daughters*, *Prisoner* and *The Restless Years* for Grundys.² After a relatively unsuccessful run in 1985 on Channel 7, *Neighbours* was axed. The Grundy Organization then offered it to Channel 10, who agreed to pick it up and have screened it ever since³. The move to Channel Ten allowed some fine tuning of the program, and was backed by an intensive promotion campaign by Channel Ten in Sydney where *Neighbours* had previously failed to rate.⁴

On the *Neighbours* website, Reg Watson explains that his idea for *Neighbours* was one about “communication”, particularly that between parents and children.⁵ For that reason, the original series of *Neighbours* was written around three very different families, the Ramseys, the Robinsons and the Clarkes living in a cul de sac—Ramsey Street, located in the fictional suburb of Erinsborough. Original characters and their descendents remained in Ramsey Street for a long time. The final remnant of the Robinson dynasty, Hannah Martin, left the series at the end of 1999 when her father and stepmother moved to Darwin. Madge Bishop nee Ramsey, one of the show’s original characters, is back in Ramsey Street after a period away from the show.

While families have changed and characters have come and gone, the essential element of differing families living within the one street has remained the same. In more recent times, some of the households have moved completely away from family structures, featuring group households of young adults. At any given time, however, there has remained a core of families.

¹ Stephen Crofts “Global Neighbours?” *Tomorrow Never Knows: Soap on Australian Television* eds Kate Bowles and Sue Turnbull, Australian Film Institute: Australia 1994 p53

² “Beginnings of Neighbours” *Neighbours Official Website* <http://www.neighbours.com/reg.htm> 30/03/2000 p1

³ “The Neighbours Story” *Neighbours Official Website* <http://www.neighbours.com/storyright.htm> 30/03/2000 p1

⁴ “The Neighbours Story” p1

⁵ “Beginnings of Neighbours” p1

In 2000, Channel Ten screened two different periods of *Neighbours*—the new series and repeats of programs from 1987. I intend to focus primarily on these two periods, although I will make reference to incidents and characters from other periods of the 15 years of *Neighbours*. While this focus is largely a matter of convenience, the use of the two periods helps to demonstrate some of the changes Erinsborough society has undertaken in the past decade, as well as the constants of soap opera society.

In 1987, the Ramseys, Clarkes and Robinsons all live in Ramsey Street. The Ramsey household consists of Madge Ramsey, the recently married Charlene and Scott Robinson, and Madge's adult son Henry. The Robinson household is occupied by Jim Robinson and his new wife Beverly Marshall, Jim's teenage daughter Lucy and (temporarily) by Beverly's young nephew and niece Todd and Katie Landers. Jim's former wife's mother, Helen Daniels, lived with Jim and Lucy until his marriage to Beverly, when she moved into a nearby flat on her own. Living at the Clarke household are Des Clarke, his baby Jamie, mother Eileen and friend Mike. The second Robinson household in the street is the home of Paul Robinson, Jim's eldest son, and his wife Gayle. The other two households around which the show focuses are Mrs Mangel's home where she lives with granddaughter Jane and boarder, Harold Bishop (engaged to Madge), and the flat where Tony Romeo and Sal Clarke, Des Clarke's half-sister live.

In 2000 the households are slightly different. Harold and Madge are married and have two teenage boys living with them—Tad Reeves and Paul McClain. The traditional family on the street is the Scullys with Joe and Lynn and their daughters Stephanie, Felicity and Michelle. Karl and Susan Kennedy have only one of their three children still living with them, Libby, engaged to Drew Kirk. Drew lives with Lou Carpenter and his young daughter Louise. The two younger households in the street consist of Toadie Rebecchi, Joel Samuels and Lance Wilkinson—all young men who are both working and studying—and Tess Bell and (temporarily) Daniel, both teachers at Erinborough High School.

Consistent with the soap opera form, a complex web of family relationships, past and current romantic involvement, animosity (past and present) and friendships surround all the characters. They are also employed by or work with each other, or attend school or

university together. While Mrs Mangel is depicted as an interfering gossip, none of the central characters are consistently villainous. Rather, the characters have their foibles and strengths and it is around these that much of the action of *Neighbours* centres. Most of the conflicts in both periods are internally generated, the result of misunderstanding, weakness or mistakes on the part of the characters. There are few interventions by outside characters and those that do occur are often plot devices, allowing the program's regular characters to make their mistakes.

All of the characters are located in a firmly middle class position. While there are differences between the actual wealth of characters, none are truly threatened with, or experience, real poverty. For example, Joe Scully manages to maintain his mortgage payments despite serious problems with his business. At the other end of the scale, Cheryl Stark begins wealthy, with money she has won in a lottery, but her tastes are depicted as vulgar and she eventually loses much of her money. When Harold's stockmarket speculations lead him to substantial gains, he gets too greedy and ends up losing all his savings. Nonetheless he has steady employment and faces no real threat of insolvency. Life in Ramsey Street is a great equaliser, eventually everyone ends up at about the same level of wealth.

Employment

A large number of the jobs held by characters in 1987 match with those of characters in 2000. There is a doctor in each series, someone runs the pub in both (and has a number of other employees); similarly there is the coffee shop owner and employees. In both series there is also someone running their own gardening business and a garage with mechanics. The Erinsborough News employs junior journalists from both eras. There have, however, been some significant changes in employment between the two periods.

In the early years of *Neighbours*, much of the action centres around Lassiters Hotel. In 2000 the pub and coffee shop are still in the Lassiters complex, but the hotel itself is no longer a feature of the program. In 1987, Lassiters is part of a chain of hotels owned by the international company, the Daniels Corporation. The Daniels Corporation is essentially a family company, with Helen's daughter Rosemary at its helm in New York. Back in Australia, both Paul and Gayle work for the Daniels Corporation, running

Lassiters. Generally at least one character remained employed at Lassiters until around 1995 when Paul Martin (married to Jim's daughter Julie) quit his high paying corporate job to run a newsagency. Around this time Lassiters was sold to another hotel chain and the Daniels Corporation's role in Erinsborough ceased. This marked the final involvement of 'big business' in *Neighbours* in anything but an external, threatening manner.

In 2000, almost all the characters work in small businesses, other than the school principal and teachers. Employment by anyone other than oneself (or one's neighbour) is a generally unhappy experience in Erinsborough, even if Des, an exception, works for the bank in 1987. Jim Robinson owns his own engineering firm which gets into financial difficulties when he leaves it in the hands of his partner. Meanwhile, in 2000, a developer who has contracted Joe Scully, a builder, goes broke. Lyn Scully manages a hairdressing salon which is owned by a difficult man who takes money from the till and puts undue pressure on Lyn. Subsequently, Lyn finds it hard to properly manage the salon and becomes very stressed.

Similarly, Harold and Madge, in addition to owning and running the local cafe, buy a franchised restaurant 'Grease Monkeys' and face problems from the owners of the franchise who are shown to be unscrupulous and demanding. Harold is forced to counter-blackmail the son of the owner of the franchise who is demanding kickbacks. Later Harold, an avid vegetarian, becomes frustrated when the franchise owners do not allow him to introduce vegetarian burgers to the menu.

In employment, control of the situation is very important to the characters of *Neighbours*. Without control, situations often become difficult. This occurs to a far greater extent in 2000 than in 1987 when working for another company was not seen as great a threat to an individual's self-determination.

Teaching and running the school are frequently held jobs in Erinsborough. Characters throughout the history of *Neighbours* have either taught at or been principal of Erinsborough High School, which is attended by all the Ramsey Street teenagers. In 1987, Erinsborough High plays a less significant role as Lucy is the only high school

aged character. Subsequently there are no teachers featured at the time, unlike 2000 when Susan Kennedy and Tess Bell both work at the school.

Modelling has occasionally provided a career for women on the program, although generally this has not lasted long and has had its own problems. Jane Harris' modelling contract was to take her to New York, and it is only with Paul Robinson's help she avoids this fate and manages to remain in Erinsborough, working in the office at Lassiters (although she still does some modelling on the side). Another model who has lived in Ramsey Street is Sarah Beaumont who came to Erinsborough after modelling in the UK, where she was being stalked by her photographer fiancée. Deciding that this career was not for her, she preferred to work as a receptionist for Karl Kennedy's doctor's surgery and later studied to be a nurse. Lucy Robinson, who left Ramsey Street to become a 'famous' model, returns to demonstrate how this choice of career led to marital breakdown, alcoholism, drug abuse and involvement in pornography. In this case, a career which could result in fame and fortune, tends to have undesirable results.

A number of different types of small businesses have been owned and run by Ramsey Street inhabitants. In addition to the constants—the pub and coffee shop—garage and construction and gardening businesses have also been regular features. Other businesses which have featured include a newsagency, a dress shop (run by a fledgling designer), a personal trainer, a carpentry firm, a one-person accountancy firm and a second-hand car yard.

Medical professionals have had a significant role to play with doctors, nurses and even a physiotherapist choosing to make their homes in Erinsborough. Other professionals have featured less often. There have been virtually no lawyers, although Toadie is currently studying law at university. It was interesting to note that when he spent some time in a law firm over summer, it was as far away as Geelong, leading Toadie to leave the Street for a couple of months. Tess' violent ex-husband, who featured briefly before dying in a car accident, was a lawyer in a large city firm.

Employment is a defining part of each character, and unemployment, particularly welfare dependency, is viewed as humiliating. Faced with the bankrupt developer, rather than discussing the issue with his parents-in-law or asking for help, Joe goes and drives

a taxi to earn some income. His shame is such that he attempts to hide this job from his daughters. Similarly, when Doug Willis' building firm went out of business in the mid 1990s, Doug resisted accepting the dole for a long time. His eventual encounter with the CES was shown as alienating and dehumanising.

Even most of the students work, or gain an independent income from some source. There is little discussion of Austudy, and when Joel, Toadie and Lance find themselves short of the rent, they turn one of the bedrooms of their house into a backpacker hostel. Libby and Toadie, while studying, work part time at the pub. Joel does some work as a personal trainer and gets a job doing part time telemarketing work from home. Lance runs his own gardening business.

Education

Closely aligned with the issue of the employment of characters is their education. Many *Neighbours* characters have made the transition from high school student to young adult. There is a marked difference in this transition in 2000 to that which occurred in 1987.

Scott, Charlene, Mike, Henry, Jane and Sally are all young adults in 1987. They have either recently finished school or are in their early twenties. Of the six, only one, Mike, is undertaking any form of post-secondary education. Mike is at college studying to become a teacher, which, as discussed above, is one of the few professional jobs any of the inhabitants of Ramsey Street are likely to hold. His studies are not a significant feature of the program; he is rarely shown studying; we do not see any images of him at college, and he tends to go away when he is undertaking 'prac teaching' training.

In 1987, *Neighbours* seems to favour the apprentice approach to learning a profession. Charlene, having left school early, is the apprentice at the garage, learning from Tony Romeo, the current mechanic. Scott, who received a good HSC mark and wants to be a journalist, does not consider study as an option, but rather works hard to gain a cadetship to a paper. While one of the reasons for Scott's choice of a cadetship over an academic approach may be the fact that he is already married, and there is a significant emphasis on the need for him and Charlene to 'pay their own way' (despite the fact that

they live with Charlene's mother), there is no discussion of the possibility of university, despite his good marks.

In contrast to this, Libby, who in 2000 is keen to become a journalist, while doing some work from the Erinsborough News, is studying journalism at the local Erinsborough University. Erinsborough University appeared in the mid 1990s around the time many of the current characters first left school. It now is represented in the series with its own set and has become part of the broader Erinsborough community. Toadie has his own radio show on Uni FM, a community radio station run on the university campus, to which the whole community listens.

In 1987 Henry runs a gardening business and in 2000 Lance does the same. While this is Henry's primary occupation, Lance's approach is more casual. He is studying horticulture at university and is aiming to be a landscape gardener. As with journalism, there has been a shift to a more academic approach to this kind of work.

As mentioned above, Toadie is studying law at university. As a high achiever at school, law was seen as the logical choice. Joel is studying marine biology. High school students also have more clearly articulated ambitions to undertake higher education and there are more discussions between parents (and parental figures) and children on the topic. Tad, for example, who wants to study film making, has already made his own BMX video not only to sell but to use to get into his preferred university course.

One character in 2000 who remained with the apprenticeship model was Bill Kennedy who recently left the series. Bill, who is dyslexic, did a TAFE course in carpentry before going on to set up his own small business. Later, after many of his tools had been destroyed in a robbery, he was invited to become the apprentice of a renowned furniture maker, requiring him to move to Queensland.

Not all the young adults in 2000 are at university—Steph works in a delivery job while Drew is a qualified mechanic—but study at university is clearly a more viable option in 2000 than it was 1987.

In both 2000 and 1987, school is the same—with virtually the same school uniform. All the children of Ramsey Street have attended Erinsborough High. Occasionally girlfriends or boyfriends may attend another school, but if they are to become on-going characters, it is inevitable that they transfer to Erinsborough High. None of the permanent characters attend private schools. Occasionally characters may be privately educated before coming to Erinsborough, such as Danni and Brett Stark. Usually, they have either been expelled, such as Danni, or hated it. Cheryl Stark, a barmaid who won the lottery, was initially depicted as being a person who vulgarly displayed her money, and sending Danni and Brett to boarding school was a component of this. On other occasions when students from private schools are shown interacting with those from Erinsborough High School, they are often seen as snobby and rude, or involved in bad behaviour such as drinking and smoking.

In 1987, a good friend of Lucy's, attending Harlenwood College, a private school, writes to Lucy telling her how wonderful it is. Lucy, who has just started high school, is subsequently keen to go to Harlenwood herself, sits the entrance examination, and later disappears off to boarding school. On her first return to Erinsborough she is shown to have been transformed into a punk. Later her private education prefaces her move into the world of modelling.

Ethnicity

Ramsey Street remains a very white Anglo-Celtic place. In fact in 2000 there are no major characters who are ethnically diverse, and only one minor character, Simone King, who appears not to be of Anglo-Australian heritage.

In contrast, in 1987 there is an on-going character of Italian background, Tony Romeo. Tony, the mechanic at the garage, is recently arrived from Perth. He is mates with Henry and gets on well with others in the street. His ethnicity is highlighted when he discusses how romantic he is—"it's the Italian in me". Tony dresses in tight shirts and jeans which, while not an exclusively Italian look for the period, is certainly different from the manner in which the other male characters in Ramsey Street of his age dress.

A major storyline was based around Tony's Italian heritage. His mother keeps calling him from Perth, trying to convince him to come home and get married. It is an arranged marriage to a girl he knows but does not love. When Henry tries to put Tony's mother off by convincing Tony to write her a letter including a photo of Jane saying he was engaged to someone else, his mother immediately comes to town. She is a short, dumpy Italian matron who is an excellent cook, but with a twist—she specialises in Chinese food. She also does not speak English very well.

His mother is ecstatic about Tony's engagement. When she eventually discovers that Tony is not in fact engaged she returns to nagging him to come home and marry the Italian girl chosen for him. Eventually she is dissuaded when Mrs Mangel and Mrs Clarke colluded to persuade her that her tea leaves indicate that there would be much bad luck for Tony (and possibly death) if he was to marry this girl. After this Mrs Romeo returns to Perth, leaving Tony to his own devices.

One other character of non-Anglo background appears in the program in 1987. Pete is black, of possible Pacific Islander appearance, and has a very minor role. He works as a clerk at Des' bank and occasionally hangs out with Scott, Mike and the others.

There have been a number, though not large, of other ethnic characters who have lived either in Ramsey Street or visited for some time. Caroline and Christina Alessi, who were also of Italian origin, spent a significant amount of time in Erinsborough, with Christina marrying Paul Robinson. Their cousin Rick Alessi came and stayed with them and remained in Ramsey Street for a period. Rick, Christina and Caroline all had major on-going roles in the series and while their ethnicity was the driver of a small number storylines, for the most part they were relatively undifferentiated from other characters.

An indigenous character featured briefly on *Neighbours* with the depiction of Sally Pritchard, a teacher at Erinsborough High School. During her brief stint on the program, Sally has to come to terms with her Aboriginality before being married and then immediately leaving the show.⁶

⁶ Alan McKee "Marking the liminal for true blue Aussies: The generic placement of Aboriginality in Australian soap opera" *Australian Journal of Communication* Vol 24(1) 1997 pp46-47 & 56

There have been no on-going Asian characters in the series. Asian characters have visited the series, with the most significant of these being Lou's daughter May. She is Lou's illegitimate daughter from Hong Kong. Lou had met her mother while he had been living in Hong Kong. While her arrival causes some discomfort at first, she is accepted by Lou who asks her to stay in Australia with him. She chooses, however, to return to Hong Kong.

Interestingly, very few extras in the series are ethnically diverse. Few of the students at Erinsborough High School or the visitors to the coffee shop or pub are non Anglo-Celtic in origin.

Women

Attitudes to women have altered between 1987 and 2000. In both eras women undertake a number of different roles. There are no women who are exclusively domestically focussed, all either work or study. The closest person to the purely domestic figure is Helen Daniels. Helen had spent most of her time looking after Jim and Lucy (and previously other Robinsons such as Scott), however with Jim's marriage to Beverly she moves out of the Robinson home and into her own flat. Within all discussions she states that this has "freed her", giving her more time to devote to her art, her curating and her other business interests.

The departure of Helen and the adoption of her position by Beverly demonstrates one of the areas of ambiguity in the depiction of women in 1987. Beverly is a career doctor who is devoted to her work as the local GP. When she and Jim marry she retains her own name—a decision which Jim resents a little, but only brings up when they have a major argument. Beverly has never been a housewife and displays great trepidation about taking over the role from Helen. She feels she cannot cook and has few domestic skills. She constantly apologises to Jim for this. In these discussions, everyone, particularly Jim and Helen, say things like "you'll soon get the hang of it" and "it won't take long to learn". There is never any suggestion that Beverly's role in the house will be shared by Jim.

Shortly after they are married, Jim invites Paul, Gayle and Helen over for Sunday lunch. Beverly is overawed by the task of cooking this lunch and stays at home from church preparing. Naturally enough, the meal is a disaster and Helen has to take over. Beverly storms out of the room when she drops the fruit salad stating “it is to me” when Jim tells her it is no big deal. To Beverly, her achievements as a doctor count for nothing when she is faced with her domestic incompetence and her perceived failure as Jim’s wife. Even when Jim slyly admits he can cook and Beverly tells him that he will have to “pull his weight”, she organises for cooking lessons with Eileen Clarke and her incompetence at organising the house and domestic chores continues to be highlighted.

Eileen Clarke too provides a study in female expectation and failings. Eileen Clarke, long divorced from Malcolm, spends time with him again and finds the romance rekindled. Despite warnings from Helen and Mrs Mangel she is determined to remarry him—he has explained that the breakdown of their marriage previously was due to her controlling nature, and she believes she can make it work this time. At the last moment, Malcolm gets cold feet, leaving a devastated Eileen in his wake. This event is in many ways characterised as her own fault—given the warnings she had received from her friends, she should have proceeded more cautiously. On the other hand, the depiction of Malcolm’s decision verges on the sympathetic.

Many of the older women in the program are shown in a somewhat unfortunate light. The separated Mrs Mangel can be a malicious gossip and is generally very judgemental and moralising. She does have her soft side though, particularly in her relationship with Jane and with Bouncer, the troublesome neighbourhood dog. Jim’s sister Hilary, who attends his wedding and comes to Ramsey Street at other times, is unmarried and constructed as difficult, demanding and fussy.

Despite these kinds of depictions of women, there are careful attempts to ensure that women are seen in progressive positions. Gayle is a ‘career woman’, although her inability to have children is very significant, particularly when Paul shows a strong desire to start a family. She is at first reluctant to reveal this perceived failing to Paul, trying to find other reasons to put off children. Eventually she tells Paul the truth and they participate in an IVF program.

In addition to Gayle, there is the oft mentioned but rarely seen Rosemary Daniels, who is the head of the Daniels Corporation based in New York. She appears at different times through the series while the Robinsons remain in Ramsey Street and is depicted as hard-headed and single. On the other hand there is Daphne, who started life as a stripper, but who managed to make a good business of the coffee shop through hard work and common sense.

The position of Charlene as an apprentice garage mechanic begins the tendency of *Neighbours* to have a female character in a 'tomboy' type role. While maintaining her femininity in most other ways, Charlene is positioned as a woman who is achieving things in a traditional male area. Later this position is taken up by Beth, who is an apprentice builder. Again she is young, pretty and feminine, but determined to make her way in a male environment. In 2000, Steph steps into this position. A tough, straightforward girl who plays poker and rides a motorbike, she is also capable of looking beautiful in a dress when going to a ball with Lance. Steph plays cricket in the otherwise all-male Erinsborough team and drives a delivery van. She nonetheless has strong female friendships and goes dancing with her female friends. But she also enjoys playing darts at the pub with the boys.

The female characters with whom Steph interacts demonstrate a slightly advanced attitude toward women. Libby is determined to have a career as a journalist and sees marriage and children as of secondary importance. She is therefore reluctant at first to marry Drew. In this partnership, Drew is depicted as the one who will support the career of his spouse and, most probably, stay at home and look after children. The program has been careful not to imply selfishness on the part of Libby in taking this attitude.

Tess, on the other hand, a young teacher, has recently left a marriage in which her husband Brendan physically abused her. Brendan begs her to give him another chance and, while at first Tess is reluctant, eventually she agrees to go out with him. He tells her that he has taken an anger management course and is changing. While Steph and Libby are doubtful, Tess continues to see Brendan and their relationship begins to intensify. There is, clearly, a part of Tess which would like to see the relationship re-established. This is, however, finally prevented when Brendan is involved in an accident and dies, after revealing his continuing aggressive nature to Toadie.

In many households there is a more equitable sharing of chores between partners. Harold and Madge and Susan and Karl have relatively equitable relationships when it comes to household duties, although Susan is depicted as a better cook. It is slightly different in the Scully household where Lyn shoulders most of the domestic burden, but this appears to relate to the perceived nature of the Scullys. When Henry and Connie, Lyn's parents, come to town, much is made of the fact that Henry is a much better cook than Connie.

The 2000 episodes do regress in their depiction of women with the character of Gerri. While Gerri is not a permanent on-going character (and she certainly doesn't live in the Street), she has reappeared several times over the last couple of years. Introduced onto the show initially as one of Joel's girlfriends, she causes disruption in his household, alienating Toadie and Sarah who were living with Joel at the time. After they break up, she chases Drew for a period when there are problems between Drew and Libby. Libby, who already disliked her because of her treatment of Joel, becomes particularly hostile to Gerri at this time. This rivalry increases as Gerri starts work at the Erinsborough News like Libby. Here Gerri's role as gossip is formalised as she writes a gossip column for the paper.

In the role of official gossip, she moves from being merely troublesome into a strong 'bad' character position. Against his wishes, Toadie has to share his radio program with Gerri. It is strongly implied that Gerri has used sexual favours, or at least the promise thereof, with the station manager and the editor of the paper to ensure she gets what she wants, including an interview with the Environment Minister Libby was hoping to do. Toadie discovers that Gerri is being paid, unlike other presenters on the community radio station, and that she is receiving kickbacks, including the use of a sports car, for promoting products on the air. Toadie and Libby discuss the issue and, in Libby's immortal words, decide "for the sake of decent people everywhere, someone has to bring that harpie down."

Masculinity

The construction of male identity is more straightforward in 1987 than in 2000. While most of the young male characters have relatively long hair, this is more a function of fashion than of any pushing of gender boundaries. Henry and Scott refuse to do housework and work in jobs which require physical strength such as gardening. Tony does not know how to cook and buys frozen pizza as his main form of sustenance.

Paul Robinson represents a strong male characterisation with sexist remarks—he jokes to Jane when she receives flowers that she should keep them hidden or “Gayle will be wanting the same treatment”—and his preference for beers at the pub to other forms of socialising. In 2000, while the boys still enjoy their beers at the pub, the activity has become more inclusive with the girls often taking part. In general, male-female friendships are far stronger in 2000 than they are in 1987, where interactions between male and female characters tend to generally have sexual overtones.

Manliness in Erinsborough in 2000 takes a number of different forms. Characters such as Toadie stretch the boundaries of ‘blokiness’ while a character like Joe Scully represents the quintessential male character.

Toadie, Joel and Lance are relatively hopeless domestically although they manage to keep their house in order and occasionally cook. Toadie wears colourful clothes which are often flamboyant, is a little overweight and has strong relationships with female friends. He, however, maintains a strong male position with his goatee (at times), his enjoyment of a few beers and his ‘paying out’ of his mates.

Joel has long hair and an earring, but he represents one of the strongest constructions of male identity in other respects. As an athlete he is in good physical shape. He is also the most sexually successful of the male characters, with Lance and Toadie often teasing him about his successes and his predatory behaviour. Lance, on the other hand, is constructed as a more sensitive male character. Fairly straightlaced, he lacks confidence with sports and has to be coaxed onto the cricket team by Steph. The twin brother of Ann, Lance often took on the ‘male’ role in his family following his mother’s divorce, including warning his father off when he tried to cause problem in his mother’s new

relationship. He also spent a long time desperately in love with Amy, who while returning his affection at times, ultimately ended up with the more outgoing Damien. Lance helped facilitate the happy ending, putting aside his own feelings for Amy to ensure that she was happy by telling Damien about her pregnancy.

A strong masculine construction is the 'larrikin' figure. At most times on *Neighbours* there is a male character who is constantly scheming to promote romance between other characters, help solve problems or, and most often the case, make money or other benefits for himself. This character is not a bad figure, but often skirts the edges of the law and the tolerance of others in Ramsey Street. In 1987 this position is firmly occupied by Henry Ramsey. When younger, Toadie had represented such a character, however, with the arrival of Tad, his cousin, the mantle moved to the younger generation.

There is a single father in 2000. Lou has remained single since Cheryl died several years ago, bringing up his very young daughter Louisa. He takes his role as a father seriously and is even willing to don an apron and sell the kindergarten's wares outside his pub for fundraising purposes (although he donates a shop-bought cake). When the kindergarten teacher and incipient romantic interest, Merridy, praises his ability to cope, he says that he has received strong support from the community. In 1987, Des becomes a single father as Daphne dies after a car accident. He however has his mother to assist him in raising Jamie. In both situations it is death, rather than divorce, which has led the fathers to maintain control of their children, just as it had been with Jim Robinson until his remarriage to Beverly and is later with Paul Martin after Julie's death.

The men of Ramsey Street are concerned about their masculinity and engage in male bonding and male chest beating. Competitiveness is often a factor; Scott and Henry turn everything into a competition, while in 2000, Karl and Joe wrestle over control of the cricket team. There is however very little physical violence between the characters or toward other characters. The character of Brendan, Tess' s ex-husband is shown in a clearly negative light due to his willingness to use physical violence against her.

Concern about masculinity is demonstrated in different ways. Karl is very worried about his hair loss and starts taking tablets to try and ensure regrowth. Joe wants to be able to

take care of his family, and feels his masculinity is undermined due to his business problems. In both 1987 and 2000, Harold is the character least concerned about his masculinity. In 1987 he is even willing to take on the persona of 'Georgette' to write an advice column in the Erinsborough News. In 2000 he cooks and cleans and looks after his family as much as Madge. Nonetheless, in 1987 he is reluctant to marry Madge after losing his money on the stockmarket; as a man he feels it is his duty to be able to provide comfortably for his wife and puts off the wedding until he is more solvent.

Relationships and sexuality

Closely aligned to the examination of the depiction of women and masculinity is that of relationships and sex between characters. Marriage is always extremely important in Erinsborough, although the parameters have changed somewhat between 1987 and 2000.

Charlene and Scott were married shortly after Scott finished high school because Madge would not allow them to live together. By 2000 the idea of marriage at 18 has diminished. Bill and Ann, for example, started having sex while still at high school. Although they did not live together, their relationship clearly had a sexual element of which their parents were aware. There was no real suggestion at any time that they should get married. When Ann chose to follow Bill to Queensland at the beginning of 2000, it was to live together, not to marry.

Similarly Amy's relationship with Damien contained a sexual element, resulting in Amy's unexpected pregnancy. When Damien proposed to Amy initially he was not aware that she was pregnant. She turned down his proposal, concerned that he would not want to marry her if he knew about the pregnancy, and decided to hide it from him. Lance's intervention saved the situation allowing Damien and Amy to marry.

The young adults of 2000 are not particularly focussed on marriage. Libby's initial reluctance regarding her marriage to Drew is not untypical. This does not prevent the characters having active and obvious sexual lives, particularly in the case of Joel. Characters of a similar age in 1987 seem to be less sexually active, and there is little evidence of them spending the night with each other.

The high school students of 2000 are not always sexually aware. On finding a new girlfriend, Simone, Tad reluctantly admits to Felicity that he has never kissed a girl before. Claiming great expertise as she has kissed four boys, Felicity undertakes to teach him. Some of the characters have had sex while still at school, for example Bill and Ann, but this is almost exclusively in the context of long term and serious relationships. This happened less before the mid 90s. Felicity, who has an older boyfriend, comes closer to a sexual relationship, but when caught by her father in a state of near-nakedness, is most upset that Joe will not accept her innocence.

There have been a number of affairs in Ramsey Street, some of which have ended marriages but many of which have eventually been forgiven, or at least forgotten. At present all those in both series are happily married or in relationships which are still exclusive. Joel, however, is trying to repair his relationship with Dione who caught him kissing her best friend in his pool. This indiscretion went no further than kissing. Others have though. Paul Robinson, while married to Christina Alessi, had an affair with her twin sister Caroline. After some difficulty this was eventually forgiven and Christina and Paul remained married.

Similarly both Karl and Susan have some indiscretions in the past. Karl had an affair with his receptionist and Susan flirted with infidelity with a close friend of Karl's at a similar time. Nonetheless, the two were able to eventually work through their problems and have remained relatively happy together.

Divorce rarely occurs in *Neighbours*, with characters usually resolving their difficulties, even if there is a period of separation. Characters occasionally come to the series already divorced (and therefore, often, with children), although there is also a high number of spousal deaths, both before and during the series.

There have been no on-going homosexual characters on the program. Issues of sexuality have been touched on occasionally, although not often. In one storyline from the mid 1990s Debbie Martin, still at school, met a council worker, Makka, and developed a crush on him. He was portrayed as muscular and hardworking, sensible and intelligent. When she eventually approached him, he turned her down, explaining that he was gay.

While Debbie found this a little difficult to deal with, it did not change his acceptance amongst the adults of the community. A second storyline which dealt with the issue of homophobia involved a gay school teacher, Andrew Watson. Mr Watson is the subject of homophobic attacks and complaints by parents. When Bill Kennedy's girlfriend Melissa is banned from school by her parents she overcomes her own homophobia and the two join together try and prevent Mr Watson resigning. While he nonetheless leaves the series quickly after this storyline, Bill and Melissa solve the initial problem through individual action combined with community support.

Lifestyle

The characters of *Neighbours* live lives which are moderate and rarely extravagant. Like their work, their fun tends to embody solidly middle class values and centres on their community.

In 1987, Scott and Charlene are portrayed as much more industrious and frugal than most of their counterparts. While Henry and Tony might vie to take Sally to concerts and dancing, Scott and Charlene spend most of their relaxation hours at home. To them, saving up money to buy their own apartment is very important, and more important than going out with their friends.

The younger characters in 2000 spend a lot more time at Lou's pub than Henry and his friends spend at the Waterhole. Steph and Tess often go nightclubbing and there are a number of university related events which the characters attend. In 1987, Mike does play saxophone at a jazz club, where the others sometimes go, but generally we do not see any of this activity.

The school-aged students of both 1987 and 2000 are generally "[u]nrebellious youth"⁷ as Stephen Crofts puts it. They do not drink or smoke, unless as part of a storyline warning against the evils of these activities. In fact no one in Ramsey Street smokes, although most of the adult characters drink in sensible moderation. When Felicity, Paul and Tad sneak into town to a nightclub, it is with the purpose of seeing a popular DJ rather than with the intention of drinking.

⁷ Stephen Crofts "Global Neighbours?" p55

There is also little or no drug taking amongst the characters. While Eileen Clarke may abuse sedatives for a short period, there is almost no smoking of dope amongst the university students, let alone the consumption of harder drugs. Tess and Steph's nights out clubbing are most definitely not ecstasy enhanced. When Danni Stark first came to Ramsey Street much was made of the fact that she was seen injecting herself. It was later discovered this was due to her diabetes.

The older characters in both series have less exciting social lives, generally based around the community. In 2000 they have dinners at the pub, while in 1987 they seem to have dinner parties more often. When Paul Martin still lived in the street he was invited to join the local country club and took to playing golf regularly with an important client. He then strained his friendship with Lou by refusing to take him to the country club and introduce him as a potential member.

In 2000 the Erinsborough cricket team became a central focus of activity for most of the men of the street—and Steph. The team was also a centre of rivalry between Joe and Karl, who were arguing about other things. Eventually, however, the importance of community helped them overcome their differences (with a lot of pushing from their wives) and the Erinsborough team won the grand final. By contrast, in 1987, the main form of organised sport is bowls in which both Mrs Clarke and Mrs Mangel participate. Scott is a keen surfer, although we do not often see him at the beach.

Both Paul and Tad, in 2000, are into BMX bikes and love watching other Extreme Sports. Swimming was also a feature of Erinsborough High for a period with Bill involved in the school swimming team. At the time, Caitlin, an excellent swimmer, was staying in the street. Eventually she left to go to the Institute of Sport in Canberra. Similarly, Joel is an elite triathlete, although he has suffered significant injury problems and can no longer perform at such a high level.

Most of the adult characters in both 1987 and 2000 own the houses in which they live. In 1987 only Tony and Sally rent until Helen moves into the flat which she also rents. Mrs Mangel lives in the house owned by her estranged husband, who finally decides to divorce her, leaving her with great uncertainty about the status of her home. In 2000

Karl and Susan, Joe and Lyn, Harold and Madge and Lou all own their houses. Lou also owns the house where Joel, Toadie and Lance live. Ann owns the house which Tess now rents, having bought it with money she inherited. Home ownership remains an important goal for the newly married Scott and Charlene, although it seems to be less important to the soon-to-be married Libby and Drew.

In both series there is a strong sense of community which all in Ramsey Street work hard to maintain. Conflict between neighbours occurs, but rarely escalates and is generally resolved or dissipates. The sense of community is reinforced by the school, the activity centred around the Lassiters complex and with regular events involving the whole street. As Ramsey Street is a cul de sac, it has often been used as the site for parties and other community events.

One strong community presence in 1987 is the church. On a Sunday morning most of the characters go to church where they know most of the congregation and the minister. In 2000, there is little reference to church, although it is likely that Harold and Madge still attend. There is greater focus on things such as karate lessons at the community centre which are attended by Harold and Tess, and occasionally, Toadie and Lance. Harold and Madge's 'adoption' of Paul follows work Harold undertook with young people through his Salvation Army membership, and at another time, a number of characters were involved with an Op Shop and a youth centre.

Characters often get involved in events such as the 40 Hour Famine, Red Nose Day or fundraising for Breast Cancer Awareness Week amongst other things. In 1995, the involvement with World Vision became a particular highlight when Brett Stark won an essay competition and went to Kenya, accompanied by his teacher Susan Kennedy, to see World Vision's work there⁸. While Harold and his strong involvement with the church, Salvation Army and other community organisations in 2000 is perhaps the most charitably minded of the Ramsey Street residents (both past and present), all of the characters participate at some time in charity work.

⁸ Sue Williams "Charity begins with some good Neighbours" *The Australian*, 18 November 1995 p18

Disease and mental illness

Ramsey Street has seen more than its fair share of car accidents with several characters dying or being hospitalised from automobile related incidents. There have been some other illnesses and conditions which have played a major role in the lives of characters.

While everyone is generally well in both 1987 and 2000 (other than Daphne who dies after a long period in a coma after a car accident), Lucy Robinson has just recovered from a brain tumour. This was removed and Lucy goes on to live a long life. Another sufferer of cancer was Luke during the mid 1990s. At first he was unwilling to tell anyone else about his disease, and tried to hide it from everyone in the street while withdrawing from relationships.

Debbie Martin was afflicted by bulimia. This eventually required her hospitalisation and, despite help from her family and friends, treatment at a residential facility. The program took a didactic role in relation to her disease, attempting to show that the bulimia related to more than just concern about her appearance and had its basis in self-esteem issues and problems in family relationships.

Julie Martin, Debbie's stepmother, had serious mental health issues toward the end of her life. Her neuroses developed as a result of her discovery that she was conceived after her mother had been raped. Throughout her time on the show, Julie had been depicted as difficult and unpleasant and these aspects of her personality were further exaggerated by her mental health problems. She eventually died falling from a roof, which while judged an accident, carried suicidal implications.

Overall, however, the characters of Ramsey Street are healthy and fit. When Harold becomes over tired and ill, it is discovered that a pesticide used by Lou is threatening him, rather than a mysterious illness. Few diseases impact on the inhabitants of Ramsey Street and AIDS, in particular, has almost never been addressed.

Conclusion

In *Neighbours*, family and community are of prime importance, whether it is 1987 or 2000. Erinsborough is a relatively homogenous Anglo-Celtic, middle class world with attempts to reach beyond its boundaries often doomed to failure or requiring one to leave permanently. Comfortable middle class prosperity and propriety characterises the lives of most of the characters, with control over one's own life and destiny a key ingredient for happiness. In the next chapter I will closely examine *Home & Away*, extending the basis of an analysis of the representation of Australian life in soap opera.

CHAPTER 3

HOME & AWAY

Home & Away first screened in Australia in January 1988 on Channel Seven in an attempt to challenge the ratings dominance of the Sydney Channel Nine News read by Brian Henderson.⁹ It was conceived and developed in-house at Seven from 1986. According to the *Home & Away* website, Alan Bateman, Seven's Head of Drama, met a foster family while holidaying in Kangaroo Valley in New South Wales. He felt that the idea of foster families would work well in a half-hour nightly drama that Seven was wanting to develop and *Home & Away* was the result.¹⁰

The setting for *Home & Away* is the small beachside town of Summer Bay. The initial series centred around a number of different families living in the town, including a central family consisting of a number of foster children. Four original characters remain on the program in 2000, Alf and Ailsa Stewart¹¹, Sally Fletcher and Donald Fisher. Returning to the series in 2000 is the character of Colleen Smart who has not been seen in Summer Bay for around eight years. Other original characters have made intermittent returns to the Bay.

I will be examining in depth the current series of *Home & Away* as well as looking at the original episodes of the series. I will also incorporate discussion of a number of characters and incidents from other periods of the series.

A pilot episode preceded the first series of *Home & Away*. During this pilot, the Fletcher family, Pippa and Tom Fletcher, and their foster children Frank, Sally, Stephen, Carly and Lynn move to Summer Bay to take over the caravan park. Once there, they meet the wild Bobby Simpson, a troubled girl whose (adopted) father was in prison and whose mother died when she was young. After some conflict between the children and Bobby, Bobby is accepted into the Fletcher family as another foster child.

⁹ Tom Gilling "Secrets of our soapie success" *The Bulletin*, Vol 116, No 6029, July 16, 1996 p38

¹⁰ "How it All Began" *Home & Away website* http://homeandaway.seven.com.au/fact/how_began.asp 30/03/2000 p1

¹¹ Ailsa Stewart died in the last episode of 2000 of a congenital heart problem which also afflicts her daughter Shauna.

Permanent residents in the caravan park when the Fletchers arrive are Neville and Floss, retired carnival workers. They help the Fletchers get the caravan park into shape and Floss, formerly Madame Zara, is still inclined to read her tarot cards from time to time.

Also living in Summer Bay are Alf Stewart, his daughter Roo and sister Celia. Alf is courting Ailsa Hogan, who he later marries, causing tensions in his relationship with Roo. Celia is unmarried as her fiancée died in Vietnam, a fervent church-goer and nearly as fervent town gossip.

Donald Fisher, one of the local high school's teachers lives alone, as does Ailsa Hogan. The other two significant characters in the town are Martin Dibble and Lance Smart. Both in their late teens, they do not work full time, but rather spend most of their time trying to work out how to make money and impress girls with the minimum effort.

In *Home & Away* there is regular movement between residences which emphasises the symbolism of the house at the caravan park. This has always been a family home. When Pippa leaves Summer Bay in 1998, she leaves behind half her foster children and the house. By moving into the house, Travis and Rebecca Nash take on the responsibility for those children and the position of central family. With their departure, Joel and Natalie Nash represent the ideal family and moved into the house. When this relationship breaks down, Joel immediately sells the house. Interestingly, the, at the time, soon-to-be-married Sally and Kieran are not successful in their attempts to purchase the house, but a family from outside the Bay are. This family is ideal for the house—a nuclear family with three daughters. The social worker mother quickly comes into contact with a potential foster child through her work at the Drop-In Centre, and the cycle of fostering begins again.

Summer Bay has not changed much since 1988, although many of the families have. The new central family in the caravan park in Summer Bay is the Sutherlands. This family quickly takes up the mantle of the original Fletcher family, not only by taking in a foster child, but in reopening the kiosk at the Surf Club to supplement their income from the caravan park. The family consists of Rhys, Shelly and their daughters Danni and twins Jade and Kirsty. Their fosterling is the teenager Brodie, a victim of violent abuse by her mother.

Alf and Ailsa live with their teenage son Duncan, and Mitch McColl, an extremely polite street kid who befriended Duncan. Mitch is in year 11 at Summer Bay High School and is dedicated to the establishment and running of the Drop-In Centre, started after the death of a street kid.

Since 1983, Don Fisher has remarried, had a child and lost both wife and child since 1988. He also rose to the position of school principal, but gave up that position in order to spend more time teaching. Judith, the current principal, lives with her son Edward, and, for a short time, Peta, Edward's girlfriend. Both youngsters however leave for Rome shortly after Edward is diagnosed with Huntington's Disease. Joel and Judith attempt a tentative living together arrangement until Joel moves to Queensland to reconcile with Natalie.

In a rented house live Sally Fletcher, Shauna Bradley, who recently discovered that Ailsa was her biological mother, and Leah Poulos. Gypsy Nash and Vinnie share the old Nash home. The final significant household, the beach house, is inhabited by Irene and her fostered charges, Hayley and Will Smith. Irene's engagement to their father, Ken, led to the introduction of the other brother, Nick, to the household. When Ken dies tragically, Irene determines that the rest of the family will stay together.

True to the idea of foster families, more than half of the teenagers and children who have lived in the small community of Summer Bay have been fostered or have simply taken to living with new families. Even some of the characters who begin with their own families end up living with another. This serves a significant narrative function, allowing a large number of younger characters to come and go from the series, as well as allowing characters to be normalised, brought into the community where they are safe. Most threats to Summer Bay and its on-going safety come from outside the community. There have been several criminals who threatened Summer Bay's safety, while other threats come from outsiders who wish to destroy its coherence and belief system.

Employment

A number of the businesses which existed in Summer Bay in 1988 are no longer present in 2000. The caravan park is the main surviving institution. The Surf Club has developed as central to the beachside community. Shauna and Vinnie are employed by the surf club as lifeguards. For a period of time a fast food chain, Bonza Burger, operated out of the surf club. Sally worked as the manager of Bonza for part of her time at university. She decided to stop working there when she returned from Ireland, engaged to Kieran. Shortly after this decision, the Bonza Burger closed. Rhys Sutherland ran a burger store in the city before coming to Summer Bay. Discovering that several of the caravans in the caravan park were almost unusable, he needs to find an additional source of income, and reopens the kiosk at the Surf Club. In earlier series of *Home & Away* the kiosk was run by the Fletchers and often staffed by the foster children. The Sutherland girls have now inherited this mantle.

The school has always played a central role in the series. A number of the adult characters in *Home & Away* work at the school, including Irene who works in the office, a job once held by Pippa. Until leaving Summer Bay, Natalie Nash was a physical education teacher at the school. Sally undertakes her student teaching at Summer Bay High before gaining a permanent job on completing her studies. Many characters seem to fall in to teaching when they come to Summer Bay, even though it is not their regular profession. When Stephen returns to Summer Bay in the late 90s, a university academic, he ended up teaching maths. Harry, a research scientist who comes to Summer Bay as part of a witness protection program, turns to teaching. Similarly, when Joel takes time out from his career as a police officer, he ends up teaching carpentry at the school.

Ailsa owns and runs the Summer Bay Diner which she originally establishes in 1989 with Bobby. She has employed a large number of Summer Bay characters including Irene, Chloe and Selina. At present, Leah and Colleen work there.

Running the caravan park is only a part time occupation for Joel. Like several characters before him, Joel is one of the town's police officers. Another police officer who featured for a time recently was Terry, Joel's partner. She became involved with Joel's teenage son Tom, causing rifts in both the family and between Terry and Joel.

Operating a charter boat is the latest small business venture undertaken by Alf. In 1988 he runs the liquor store, which later expands into a mixed business. Following a heart attack and the sale of the shop, he establishes a bait shop in partnership with Jesse. When this burns down, he helps Ailsa at the Diner until a tough financial situation leads him to use Travis' former boat for charters. Unlike Travis and his whale watching tours, Alf is determined to make money from fishing charters.

In both 1987 and 2000, there is no resident doctor or nurse in Summer Bay although there is a local hospital. Doctors and nurses have, however, often featured. The most recent doctor, James Fraser, left at the beginning of 2000 to work in the Solomon Islands with nurse, Juliette Bellati. James followed his brother, Lachlan as town doctor.

Few characters have been employed away from the Diner, Surf Club, police station, school or hospital. Will currently works for Alf on the boat, while both Shelly Sutherland and Gypsy Nash work at the Drop-In Centre. In 1988, local businesses, such as Ailsa's cafe and Alf's shop, employ the majority of the town's characters. There have been a number of other small businesses run by various characters including Marilyn's beauty salon and Jesse's, and then Ken's, garage. On the other hand, Tom spends much of his first year in Summer Bay working on the Council's road gang while the caravan park is yet to make a profit. For a time, Lance and Martin are also employed by the council on the road gang. Work on the road gang leads Tom into conflict with a difficult and intransigent boss.

The variety of jobs in Summer Bay is limited, with characters generally leaving if they are to follow any other more interesting career. The limitations of a small town are often keenly felt. Characters like Vinnie occasionally attempt to overcome these; formerly a male stripper, he does some work for the local newspaper as a photographer.

For those attending university in 2000, part-time work has generally represented their main income source, rather than Austudy or other benefits. Part-time work at the Diner has been a source of income for many. Even though a single mother, the character Chloe worked there part-time while studying at university. The question of her accepting a single-mother pension and Austudy was never an issue—whether to accept income

support from the rich mother of the baby's father, however, was. Sally only stopped working part-time when she received a significant inheritance.

The school students of Summer Bay are often workers, in both unpaid and paid positions. As discussed above, doing shifts at the kiosk in the Surf Club when it started is mandatory for the Fletcher and later Sutherland children. Similarly, those who have lived in the house at the Caravan Park have always been required to 'do their bit' in changing linen or cleaning caravans. Duncan is also expected to help Ailsa with odd jobs at the Diner. At various times student characters have had paper rounds or been paid for work undertaken for adults. On other occasions they have had the initiative to earn money for themselves; Mitch's only source of income when he first comes to Summer Bay is busking.

Education

During the initial series of *Home & Away* two of the university-age characters, Martin and Lance, clearly have no interest in continuing their education. Similarly, but less extremely so, is Frank, who at 18 has finished school and is interested only in finding himself a job. The importance of gaining the HSC is not underestimated by the younger characters, however there is not generally great ambition to attend to university. Steven, the brightest character, is teased by Frank about his 'brains'.

During the early 1990s, in order to attend university, characters generally had to leave Summer Bay. Angel, a former street kid who was taken in by Donald Fisher, for example, gives up the chance of going to university in order to stay and marry Shane, her long term boyfriend, and be a 'proper mother' to her two year old son.

In 2000 it is possible for characters to be at university and yet remain in Summer Bay. Sally commutes to university where she has moved from studying archaeology into teaching. Chloe (who lived with Irene after running away from her racist father) and Shannon (one of Pippa's later foster children), also spent some time travelling each day into the city to university.

Home & Away sees a significant discussion of academic ideas and poetry following the arrival of the precocious Edward. The illegitimate son of his school principal mother and her former English lecturer, Edward is a confronting presence in Summer Bay with his 'Gothic' appearance and his constant reading. He quickly establishes a strong rapport with Don Fisher and various discussions of poetry, Shakespeare and philosophy ensue. The close friendship between Fisher and Judith also increases the discussion of literature and academic ideas on the program.

The arrival of Noah, Hayley's new boyfriend, in town has maintained similar themes in a less confronting manner than Edward's character. Noah dropped out of school after hacking into the Education Department's computer system. Although disillusioned by formal education, he is intelligent and spends his time reading literature. He assists Hayley with her HSC exams and, following encouragement from Donald Fisher and Irene, decides to return to school to do his HSC in 2001.

Other characters have been known to discuss books and literature, however they tend to be careful not to be overly intellectual. During their engagement, Sally and Kieran discuss Ireland and its literary figures with Judith at the Diner. Overhearing, Leah begins referring to the more populist works of Maeve Binchy. Cutting her off, Sally says "well, she's not exactly James Joyce". Later, apologising to Leah for her rudeness, Sally points out that Maeve Binchy is, in fact, one of her favourite authors. Harry's mother is a published author, and the publican in an outback hotel. When she visits Summer Bay she rather unsettles Don's conception of what a published author should be like by being crass, wild and not at all intellectual. Many of the characters have books featured in their homes and have been known to read, as well as watch television.

Despite the ease of university attendance and the growing intellectual ferment of the town, many of the characters who are in years 11 and 12 in 2000 do not have academic ambitions. In fact, 2000 saw a high drop-out rate for characters. Sam, Fisher's foster-grandson, left school in order to compete on the pro-surfing circuit. Sam's choice leads him to drugs and failure. Peta and Edward both leave school to travel overseas and 'discover life' once Edward is diagnosed with Huntington's Disease. Currently, in addition to travelling, they are attending a language school in Italy. Gypsy, always a reasonable student, leaves school in 2000. After being injured in a car accident, she

misses a significant period of school. Due to her simultaneous relationships with two boys, she has also become something of a social outcast. Faced with missed schoolwork and social ostracism, she decides not to return to school, later gaining the part-time position at the Drop-In Centre.¹² She is however intending to complete her HSC at TAFE in order to study social work at university. Finally, Will leaves school after the death of his father, deciding that he has a responsibility to look after his family. This more responsible decision is rewarded with employment by Alf.

All the teenagers in Summer Bay attend Summer Bay High School. Private schooling is generally not an option. Charlie, with whom Gypsy had an extended flirtation and affair in 2000 before he died in a car accident, is a rich boy from a nearby private school. He is also an alcoholic and depicted as irresponsible and frivolous. His former girlfriend who later stalks Gypsy for a period is from the same school. Similarly, when Roo is sent away to private boarding school in 1988, she returns a snob, pregnant and more manipulative than ever. Clearly, private education is not good for moral development.

Several years ago, following Bobby's death, Sam's grandmother, the generally evil Morag Bellingham, returns to Summer Bay and attempts to take custody of Sam. Her wish to help and support Sam is seen as a bad thing, particularly as she wants Sam to live with her in the city. One of the fates she has in store for Sam is attending an exclusive private school. The school is shown to be very old, with the all-male students dressed in blazers and hats. With the threat of this looming over him, Sam is saved by those in Summer Bay from this apparently disastrous fate.

Ethnicity

Summer Bay is a predominantly white Anglo-Celtic country town. At no time has an entirely ethnic family lived in the Bay, although the foster family structure has allowed a number of teenagers of different races to pass through.

¹² In 2001 a significant number of characters returned to school. Studying at TAFE with Gypsy is Jude, a new character who is Noah's older brother. Hayley, whose studies suffered after her father's death and an attack on her, is repeating Year 12 at Summer Bay High, while Noah who dropped out some time ago, is also at Summer Bay High undertaking Year 12.

In 1988, Frank, while clearly played by a non-Anglo actor, has an Anglo name and his ethnic background is never discussed. A minor character, Mr Baldivis, who works for the Council is obviously of an ethnic background. Similarly the mentally retarded character, Angelo 'Dummy' Poletti, whom Lynn befriends is of Italian background. Angelo does not feature for long before being startled into a near-vegetative state and institutionalised.

In 2000, Leah Poulos comes to Summer Bay after running away from her wedding. She represents a strongly archetypal Greek character, with an over-protective father, a soccer-obsessed brother and an extended family in the city. On arrival in Summer Bay, she fears that she has shamed her family by running away and that they will never accept her again. Although angry with her initially, and not impressed by Vinnie as her new choice of boyfriend, Leah's father recovers and forgives her. He does however offer Vinnie money to stop seeing Leah, but when Vinnie refuses, Mr Poulos reveals that this was a test, and he accepts that Vinnie might be a suitable partner for Leah.

Leah is a very 'proper' girl, who decides she has to move out of the house she shares with Tom Nash and Vinnie when she and Vinnie start dating. Since then, she and Vinnie have conducted a chaste romance. Leah is also a fabulous cook, having learnt from her father who runs a restaurant. She quickly gains a job cooking for Ailsa at the Diner. When she takes this job, the only example of overt discrimination or racism occurs. Colleen, threatened by Leah's presence in the kitchen, tells Ailsa that no one would want to eat that "foreign junk" and would doubtless prefer hamburgers. All Ailsa's customers are, however, won over by the interesting dishes on the Diner menu and are fully converted to Greek food. Even Colleen herself is eventually charmed by Leah and now cooks her own moussaka—only with less garlic.

At other times there have been stronger racist elements in the town. When Jack and Chloe start going out in the mid 1990s, Chloe's father objects strongly to the fact that Jack, living with Pippa and Michael, is a 'wog'. Although his ethnicity had never been raised before (and he has a very Anglo surname—Wilson) it is revealed that Jack's mother had been Lebanese. Chloe's father represents an extreme aspect of racism, beating Chloe who eventually runs away from home. His position is condemned by the other people of Summer Bay.

Racism featured in 1999 when an indigenous teacher teaches at Summer Bay High School for a period. Hayley reacts against the teacher, referring to him as a 'boong' and using other terms of racist abuse. She argues that 'they' are all lazy and cites her mother's complaints against some former Aboriginal neighbours as evidence. All the other students, including her boyfriend, and other people such as Irene, condemn her racism. Eventually, after getting to know the teacher better, she changes her mind and became one of the school's strongest advocates for reconciliation, starting a 'Sorry Book' for Summer Bay.

The only other time an indigenous character appeared in Summer Bay was when Kevin was temporarily fostered by Pippa and Michael. Kevin was lively and mischievous, eventually becoming part of a scam organised by Shane, another teenage character. An excellent artist, Kevin could draw well in traditional indigenous style. Shane and he tried to mass produce indigenous style art and sell it tourists. While Kevin was reluctant, he took part until they were caught, later feeling ashamed of having exploited his culture. McKee argues that Kevin's status on the program could be seen as liminal due to the fact that he was not featured in the opening credits, but credited at the end of the program, "...alongside incidental, single-line characters."¹³ While this is true of all temporary characters regardless of ethnicity, it does emphasise the fact that Kevin's role was not on-going. A more interesting observation made by McKee is that, despite the clutter of romance in Summer Bay, Kevin is "...not in love with anyone. And no one is in love with him. He evinces no interest. And no character comments on his singleness. It is not even presented as an issue."¹⁴ This could relate to concerns regarding interracial romance, as an important role usually played by temporary characters is that of 'love-interest' for a permanent character.

There have also been situations in which ethnic origins have either not been clearly discussed or have been considered irrelevant. In 2000, at least two characters have names which indicate ethnicity, although this ethnicity has never been. Peta Genossi and Juliette Bellati who both appear without family, are not differentiated by their ethnic names or origins. Similarly a character like Tiegan, another of Pippa's foster children,

¹³ Alan McKee "Marking the liminal" p47

¹⁴ Alan McKee "Marking the liminal" p49

who clearly, from her appearance, was not of Anglo-Celtic origins, never had her ethnicity or origins discussed.

This lack of differentiation at times has led to some odd casting choices. Will Smith, for example is very dark skinned and appears to be from a non-Anglo background, however his sister Hayley is very blonde and fair, as is his younger brother Nick. His father Ken was also very Anglo in appearance. When their mother made a brief appearance on the program, she too was clearly fair and Anglo-Celtic. Will's difference in appearance is left unexplained.

Asian characters featured once on *Home & Away* in 2000 when illegal refugees beach their boat near Summer Bay. Duncan finds one girl who has escaped detection by the authorities and feeds her and tries to help her. The refugees are, however, sick with typhoid and the Diner has to be temporarily closed due to Duncan's actions. There have been few other Asian characters featured either in major roles or as extras at locations such as the Diner, school or beach. One exception followed an approach by the Human Rights Commission as part of their Different Colours One People program, when producers introduced an Asian girl. During her eight weeks on the program, her Asian background was only referred to once and in general she was "...just like the Anglo-Australians."¹⁵ Generally extras featured are predominantly Anglo, with many blonde girls to be seen at the surf club and Diner.

Women

Until her departure, Pippa represents the archetypal mother and woman of Summer Bay. Pippa is a benchmark against which other women in general and mothers in particular are measured. Female characters often seek advice from Pippa regarding motherhood and relationships. When the first actor who played Pippa decided to leave the series, rather than losing the character, she was replaced by another actress. The second Pippa is an even softer character than the original. Plumper and with longer hair, she has an even more motherly tone than previously. Not only a mother, her paid employment

¹⁵ Ien Ang and Jon Stratton "The End of Civilisation As We Knew It: *Chances* and the postrealist soap opera" To Be Continued: Soap Operas Around the World ed Robert C Allen, Routledge: Great Britain, 1995 p138

involves baking cakes for the Diner and working part-time at the school in an administrative role.

Pippa, in both her incarnations, is always willing to take on a new foster child and would listen sympathetically to their problems, while offering firm but fair discipline. As soon as she meets the troubled Bobby, for example, she is keen to try and do something for her. She is also stoic, accepting and coping with first Tom and later Michael's deaths. She even coped through the loss her own child to cot death.

She also represents tolerance and forgiveness. Returning briefly to Summer Bay for Sally's wedding, she is the among the first to offer Gypsy understanding when Gypsy blurts out the truth about Kieran, halting the wedding.

Other than the times she is shown at the school, shots involving Pippa tend to reinforce her mother/wife role. She is invariably depicted at home carrying in or folding the laundry, cooking or vacuuming or otherwise engaged in the kitchen. Almost every time she visits the Diner she is carrying containers of chocolate brownies or other cakes.

Eventually, such motherly goodness has to be rewarded. Not long after Michael's death, Pippa is awarded an Order of Australia medal, essentially for being a foster mother.

This depiction of Pippa as a caring, loving and accepting mother, particularly of children who are not of her own genetic makeup, contrasts sharply with the depiction of Morag, Alf's other sister, a Supreme Court Judge. Morag is a cold, calculating heartless career woman who abandoned her child, Bobby. When Bobby discovers the truth of her parentage, Morag displays absolutely no remorse. In fact, when Bobby tells her she hates her, Morag's cool response is "you can hate me as much as you want to because no one could blame me for giving up a child who so clearly hates me."

Morag is not the only career woman to have been depicted in such a light. In the mid 1990s, Shannon sought out her birth mother. After much tribulation, it was revealed that Shannon's mother is a Senator. Shannon's mother is at first reluctant to re-establish contact with Shannon for fear of adverse publicity, but later goes on to attempt to manipulate Shannon in order to improve her chances of re election. Similarly, Diana

Fraser, mother of two of the doctors who have passed through Summer Bay and a doctor herself, is constantly depicted in a bad light. The grandmother of Chloe's baby, she engages in manipulation, bribery and outright kidnap in order to try and maintain access to Chloe and Lachlan's child. She encourages James' relationship with Chloe once Lachlan is shipped off to the US for treatment for brain damage. When James and Chloe's marriage breaks down and Lachlan has died in the US, Diana blames Summer Bay and attempts to revenge herself on the place by buying the caravan park and turning it into an up-market resort development. She is only foiled by the Summer Bay community banding together to outbid her at the auction.

In 1987 Roo proves that young women can be just as manipulative as older women. Resenting her father's engagement to Ailsa, Roo searches Ailsa's house, finding a card which indicated a previous relationship between Ailsa and Fisher. When this is not enough to discourage Alf, Roo and Celia use Morag's connections to find out more about Ailsa's past, discovering that she had been to prison for murdering her father. When Roo reveals this information to the town, she ends up doing more harm to herself than to Ailsa. Ailsa, who had murdered her father to prevent him beating her mother again, is given sympathy and understanding by Alf and others, while Roo is shunned by the community and sent away to boarding school.

On her return to Summer Bay, the pregnant Roo does not reveal her condition to anyone. When Brett, the father, tells Roo that he thinks she should have an abortion, she tells him that she intends to find someone who is willing to marry her and be the baby's father. She thus sets about tricking Frank into believing that the baby is his, and ensuring that Alf will think the same. Roo eventually begins to regret this deception as genuine feelings for Frank develop. Similarly, in 2000 when Gillie the English backpacker convinces Tom to marry her as part of a plan her real boyfriend and she have embarked upon to gain permanent residency, she begins to regret the deception and manipulation when she develops genuine feelings for Tom.

Few of the permanent woman characters in *Home & Away* are shown in roles that are non traditional. The female character in the most significant position of power who has not been depicted as somehow evil, is the current high school principal Judith. A significantly transgressive character, when at university, Judith had an affair with her

English lecturer who left his wife to be with her before eventually dying of Huntington's Disease. A result of their relationship is Edward, her intellectually gifted son. Judith resists minor attempts by Don Fisher to undermine her position, and strongly defines her role in the school. An attractive woman, Judith is the object of romantic attentions from both Don Fisher and, the newly separated, Joel Nash.

While her professional role is significant and important, Judith is still primarily defined by her role as a mother. Her closeness with Edward is partly a result of her position as a single mother and partly due to the threat to him of contracting Huntington's Disease. As if in punishment for his origins, Edward is found to have contracted Huntington's himself, prompting a desire to travel. When Edward and Peta subsequently leave Summer Bay to travel in Europe, much emphasis is placed on the difficulties of the separation from Edward. Later, when her relationship with Joel is only a few weeks old, Judith makes her desire to have another child known. Despite her career success, another child appears to be more important to her life than allowing her relationship with Joel to develop gradually.

Motherhood has been important even to the younger female characters. Angel, one of the most beloved of *Home & Away's* characters, at 18 was as defined by her role as a wife (then widow) and mother as the much older Pippa. Similarly, more recently, Chloe's role as a mother was integral to the construction of her character.

With most of the women in the Bay in traditionally female roles such as social worker and cook, few of the teenage girls aspire to non-traditional positions. Much is made of the fact that Shauna has adopted a career which could be seen as masculine. The youngest in a family of four boys, she felt the need to compete with them to attract her father's attention. With short hair and a focus on sports, Shauna is depicted as a tomboy who has no immediate plans to marry or settle down, refusing Harry's proposal and later breaking up with him because they wanted different things from the relationship. When Shauna meets and falls in love with the married Gavin, she is overtly positioned as a potential 'home-wrecker', despite the very negative depiction of Gavin's wife. Shauna's career as a lifesaver, however, is severely curtailed when it is revealed that she has a congenital heart condition and is therefore no longer able to undertake surf rescues.

An older woman character who appears in both the early *Home & Away* and in 2000 is Colleen Smart. In early *Home & Away* Colleen works in menial jobs and is a relatively minor character. Colleen returns to the Bay in 2000, reclaims her portable home in the caravan park, and is soon annoying the Nashes with complaints, nosiness, interference and malingering. Her job at the Diner gives her the ability to successfully fill her time passing on gossip, spreading rumours and generally exasperating the residents of Summer Bay.

An older woman with a limited income and few real friends, Colleen is depicted as often taking advantage of those who help her. After she hurts her foot and is not able to walk, Natalie Nash takes pity on her until discovering that Colleen is hiding the fact that she has recovered completely. The relationship between Colleen and Natalie later breaks down completely when Natalie discovered that Colleen has been instrumental in spreading a rumour that her pregnancy was by another man. At the time this rumour was spread, it appeared to be false, and thus there was strong sympathy for Natalie. Later, however, when the truth is known, there is no attempt to rehabilitate Colleen.

Colleen's husband Les, who had deserted her many years previously, returns to the Bay in 2000 as a homeless tramp. Despite initial reluctance, Colleen eventually invites him back into her home, only to have him steal her savings and run off with another woman. Colleen gains little sympathy from Summer Bay residents (barring the kind-hearted Leah), as most people thought it was clear that Les was still a rogue.

Similarly, in 1988 Celia Stewart is seen as an interfering, do-gooder, gossip. When characters want disinformation spread, they tell Celia. Celia is also often attempts to spoil the fun of the young people of Summer Bay, for example banning them from using the Church Hall for a dance. When Celia takes over the running of the local tea-house and shop, she is seen as grasping and willing to do anything to make money. Like Colleen, when her gossiping leads to trouble, she takes a vow to renounce gossip, however she returns to her love after only a short time.

Masculinity

Masculinity in Summer Bay is constructed around a number of lines with the focus particularly on sporting prowess, either current or former, the willingness to engage in physical labour, the position of breadwinner, the treatment of women and the use of violence.

In 1988, one of the most obvious areas of tension in masculinity is around the characters of Steven and Frank. Frank, older and street-wise, mocks Steven's intelligence which is seen as less important to his role as a man than physical prowess. Steven, however, possesses a secret which is gradually revealed over the course of the first series. Before his death, Steven's father was an expert in karate and Steven has followed in his footsteps. When Steven spots Bobby tangling with Martin and Lance on the beach, the more traditionally blokey men ignore him, laughing at his demands that they unhand Bobby. It does not take them long to discover their mistake when Steven uses his karate expertise on them. In a recent reappearance for Sally's wedding, Steven again uses his karate skills to punish a transgressive male when he fights with Kieran after the debacle of Sally's wedding.

On several further occasions during the first season, Steven uses his karate to prove his manliness. In fact, several characters, including Frank and Tom, engage in violence. This man-to-man, ritualised violence is contrasted with violence against women and children which is seen as unacceptable. The character of Mr Barlow, who savagely beats his wife and daughter, engages in unacceptable violence, although it is reasonable for Tom and Steven to beat Barlow for his actions.

In 2000 the attitude to violence and its role in masculinity has altered. While Ken may punch the local sleazy real estate agent who has been harassing his daughter, and Alf may look fondly on as Duncan and Nick brawl on the beach, other characters and actions argue against violence. When Sam returns to Summer Bay bragging about his shabby treatment of Hayley, Will proposes that they "take it outside". Walking outside, Sam king-hits Will from behind, knocking him unconscious. While Sam's actions are clearly those of a coward, Will's injuries are seen as an inevitable consequence of resorting to violence. Noah stops Nick from attacking Sam, counselling that violence is

not the solution. He goes on to prove it by comprehensively humiliating Sam at a later time through his words and not his actions. Similarly, when a young man who attacked Hayley is cornered on the beach, Rhys prevents Will and Nick from taking to him violently, telling them that in so doing, they would be no better than the perpetrator. Preceding this was the shooting by Chloe's father of the man accused of raping her. The ineffective nature of this kind of vigilante action is highlighted by the fact that this man was not the actual rapist, who continued to stalk and terrorise Chloe.

The other dimension of violence is the role of war and armed services. In 1988, both Tom and Alf are Vietnam veterans. Neither however are willing to glorify war, although both are seen as more manly for it. When Fisher condemns Tom for his lack of enthusiasm about military service on ANZAC Day, Bobby determines to humiliate Fisher by proving Tom's manliness by publicly showing him Tom's Medal of Bravery from the war. Similarly, Travis had been part of the peacekeeping mission in Somalia where he had witnessed the massacre of a Somali village and the killing of his Somalian fiancée.

Sport or sporting ability plays a significant role in masculinity particularly in 2000. Rhys, who is constructed as a strong Australian male archetype, is a former AFL footballer who enthusiastically engages in touch football on the beach and gives the boys tips in the gym. Similarly, Alf is a former rugby player who loves his fishing and is an avid viewer of sports on television.

Given the proximity to the beach, surfing and related sports have a strong role in this part of masculine identity. Matt, the boy who Carly falls for when she first arrives in Summer Bay in 1988, is a surfer. Following in his footsteps are characters like Adam, Curtis and Sam. Before Sam left Summer Bay to go on the surfing circuit, he is seen as a generally good male character. This position diminishes on his two subsequent returns to the Bay, as Sam breaks a number of the defining criteria of masculinity.

Firstly, his treatment of Hayley is marked in its contrast to the way a 'proper' man treats his woman. In sleeping with Hayley, dumping her and then bragging about it, Sam steps outside accepted male behaviour. The idea of behaving like a gentleman has always been important in the construction of male characters. For example, in 1988 Frank

initially refuses to have sex with Roo when she asks him, knowing that she is merely doing it because of her anger towards her father. Later (after they have had sex) when she tells him that she is pregnant, he is thrilled and happy to marry her.

Secondly, as discussed above, Sam's use of violence is underhanded and unfair. By hitting Will from behind he takes unfair advantage, probably due to the fact that he would have been unlikely to win the fight under any other circumstance.

Thirdly, Sam loses his ability to surf well. All reports have him failing in major tournaments, while the observation of spectators like Vinnie and Duncan highlights the diminution of Sam's formerly prodigious talents. The reason for Sam's personality change seems to be his new enthusiasm for marijuana. By leaving the Bay and engaging with the world he has been corrupted by drugs and has failed in his ambitions. Sam's later redemption comes through his friendship with Sandi, a teenage single mother. By rescuing her and insisting that he helps her, even if it means sacrificing his surfing, his position as a good character is restored.

Summer Bay has also consistently been the home of at least one larrikin figure. In 1987 this position is filled by Lance and, particularly, Martin whose schemes for making money include selling cigarettes to school student laced with dried parsley, claiming they are marijuana. When John Farnham comes to town to visit the sick Sally, Martin writes a song which he and Lance perform in the hope of impressing John Farnham and convincing him to make them stars.

In 2000, Vinnie fills this role. While a more sympathetic and likeable character than Martin, Vinnie has nearly as many schemes and is constantly exasperating his devoted girlfriend Leah with his behaviour. Like Lance and Martin who spent some time working on the road gang, Vinnie has recently found more permanent employment at the surf club. Nonetheless, he still spends much of his time trying to find ways to 'get rich quick'. When Martin returns to Summer Bay for Sally's wedding boasting of his wealth and success, Vinnie quickly tries to convince Martin to take him on. What he does not know was that Martin was recently bankrupt and could not help anybody.

Relationships and sexuality

The way relationships are viewed in 2000 has shifted significantly since 1988, particularly with respect to sex and living arrangements. Marriage is of much greater importance in 1988 than in 2000 and sex is more likely to result in disaster.

Nonetheless, sex is not without consequences in Summer Bay in 2000.

The major young couple in 1988 is Roo and Frank, and, as discussed above, their liaison was in part manipulated by Roo in order to convince Frank to marry her. In 2000 the number of young characters in relationships is much greater. Harry and Gypsy, who is only 17, live together for a period, while Leah and Vinnie conduct a chaste relationship, due to Leah's strong feelings about propriety, which Vinnie seems to accept with equanimity.

Most of the older Summer Bay teenagers in 2000 have engaged in sexual relationships at some time or another. Here it is interesting to note that before Peta and Edward have sex for the first time, they conduct their own 'wedding ceremony' and use this as an argument to Judith to allow them to live together in her house. The easy acceptance of teen sexuality in 2000 is contrasted with the reaction Carly encounters in 1988 following the revelation of her rape—she is cast as a slut by town gossips and the rape is seen by some as her own fault.

While sexual relations within relationships, even between teenagers, seem generally to be without consequences in 2000, inappropriate sex is not. While Shauna's 'affair' with the married Gavin does not seem to venture into actual sexual behaviour, its consequences include the death of Gavin's wife and subsequent accusations of murder against both Shauna and Gavin. Shortly after, Gavin himself dies in an accident during the mud slide in the town.

Summer Bay seems to be a very fecund place. Selina and Chloe are amongst those who, during the mid 1990s, were impregnated by single acts of teenage sexual indiscretion. Recently the wayward neglected rich girl, Sandi, returned to the Bay to give birth to her daughter, the result, apparently, of a one-night stand. The breakdown of Joel and Natalie's marriage occurs also, in part, because of such a pregnancy. During a troubled

period in Joel and Natalie's relationship in late 1999, Natalie has a brief affair with Glen, one of Joel's good friends. As a result, Natalie ends up pregnant. Joel is pleased about the pregnancy, thinking it is his baby despite the fact that he has had fertility issues. When Glen begins calling Natalie and trying to see her, it becomes inevitable that her secret will be revealed.

At the same time that Natalie is trying to fend off Glen, Gypsy is enjoying having two boyfriends—Will who she seriously cares about but whom she is afraid will never be able to afford to support her in the lifestyle she wants, and the rich and irresponsible Charlie, with whom she has fun and who spends money on her constantly. Gypsy discovers the liaison between her mother and Glen and tells her to break it off, or she will reveal all to her father.

One afternoon, after finally have sex for the first time, Gypsy and Charlie encounter Natalie and Glen in a shopping mall. A car accident follows, in which Gypsy is seriously injured and Charlie dies. This accident eventually brings the deceptions of both Gypsy and Natalie into the open. At first Joel refuses to have any more to do with Natalie, but later decides he is willing to try and continue the relationship. Natalie, however, feels this would be wrong and leaves, moving to Queensland. After the birth of the child, and following an accident which leaves Joel seriously injured, she returns to Summer Bay and convinces Joel, despite his relationship with Judith, to come back to Queensland with her and become a family again.

It is interesting that Tom, Gypsy's brother, is horrified by the behaviour of both his mother and sister. Gypsy rails against this hypocrisy, as only a year previously, Tom himself had deceived his girlfriend Justine by seeing the police officer Terry behind her back. Gypsy makes it clear that the double standards of which soap opera women are often the victim are grossly unfair. This is a rare example of an Australian soap commenting upon itself.

Other than the Nashes, the married folk of Summer Bay tend not to have affairs and generally stay married, even when there are hardships in their relationships. Pippa and Tom's marriage is strong until Tom's death, and while Pippa and Michael's marriage goes through some hard times, it survives until Michael's death. Similarly, Alf and

Ailsa have had some disagreements and problems since their engagement in 1988, however they remain married now, seemingly as happy as ever. In contrast, Don Fisher's marriage to the younger, flighty and relatively unsuitable Marilyn first experiences a long separation when Marilyn runs away after the birth of their child, Byron, suffering post-natal depression and then again, when she disappears, apparently permanently, following Byron's death in a hospital in the US.

Marriage is not unimportant to the younger people of Summer Bay. Sally is devastated following revelations from Gypsy, at the church on her wedding day, that Kieran, her intended, is a slimebag who has been trying to get more friendly with Gypsy than is appropriate. Not six months later, Sally is engaged to Kieran's more honourable best man, Luke. It is unlikely, however, that any of the younger characters still at school would consider immediate marriage. In the mid 1990s, marriage amongst teen characters was more likely than sex. Shane and Angel, who represented an ideal couple, were never depicted behaving overtly sexually (beyond kissing) until they were married at 18—then they never seemed to stop having sex.

While there have been no permanent gay characters on *Home & Away*, the issue of sexuality was focussed upon through the character of Mandy Thomas, an author who comes to stay in Summer Bay. Shannon, with ambitions of her own to be a writer, is drawn to Mandy who acts as a mentor. It is revealed, when her partner comes to stay, that Mandy is a lesbian. This starts many in the town wondering about Mandy's relationship with Shannon. About a year later, after corresponding with Shannon, Mandy returns to Summer Bay. At the time, Shannon is at university and deeply involved in a relationship with Lachlan Fraser. Almost simultaneously, Shannon is offered the choice of staying in Summer Bay and marrying Lachie, or travelling to Paris to live with Mandy. She chooses the latter. While there is no depiction of a sexual relationship between Mandy and Shannon, the implications of her choice, life in Paris with a lesbian author over marriage to the conventionally ideal man—a good looking doctor—are clear.

In 2000, the issue of sexuality was used for humour when Leah goes and work temporarily for Stefan, the owner of an upmarket restaurant in Yabbie Creek. Stefan has recently broken up with his partner and Vinnie fears that he might pose a threat to his

relationship with Leah. Eventually, when Stefan reconciles with his partner, it is revealed that he is in fact gay, creating humorous dimensions to Vinnie's previous reactions and interactions with him. While none of the permanent characters express anything but acceptance of Stefan and his sexuality, he almost immediately disappears from the series.¹⁶

Lifestyle

The beachside lifestyle of Summer Bay is relaxed and enjoyable, community-oriented and not extravagant. While the men of Summer Bay do not mind the occasional beer, most of the teenagers, in both 1987 and 2000 are non drinkers and smokers. For example, when Will and Hayley throw a party because Irene and Ken are out of town, the strongest beverage their guests bring is Coke—of the cola variety. Sometimes drinking occurs, but this generally is associated with unacceptable behaviour and leads to alcoholism. There have been a number of teenage alcoholics in Summer Bay, starting with Carly who turns to alcohol following her rape. Following her are Curtis, Alf and Ailsa's foster son, who starts drinking after witnessing Laura's death, and Justine, whose struggle with conformity leads her eventually to alcohol. After Gypsy's kidnapping by Robert, she too spends a period determinedly drowning her sorrows.

Drugs have also come to Summer Bay, but again in a way which has emphasised their deviancy. When Justine first arrives in Summer Bay she is a heroin addict, and it is only through Pippa's care that she eventually becomes a regular teenager. Chloe spends a period addicted to amphetamines, while the impact of Sam's marijuana use is discussed above. When Joey, who lived with Irene, becomes involved with marijuana it is as a result of his mental illness.

There seems to be a greater sense of community in 2000 than in 1987. In 1987 the town was more divided between people like Celia and Don Fisher and the more tolerant side of town including the Fletchers and Ailsa. There is often a sense of conflict between the

¹⁶ The issue of sexuality has been touched on in 2001 with Gypsy declaring that she is 'in love' with Shelly. Faced with Shelly's dismissal of her feelings, Gypsy kisses a girl she knows from TAFE who is a lesbian to prove she can have feelings for a girl. The most outraged reaction to this event is from the traditionally conservative Colleen, while male characters like Vinnie and Mitch react with fascination. Shelly and Gypsy then discuss their situation and decide that it is not an issue of gender, but feelings. Thus discussed, the issue disappears and Gypsy quickly returns to displaying strong feelings for Will.

conservative elements and the others, such as when the children wanted to hold a dance in the Church Hall, and Celia will not allow it.

In 2000, while there may be division over specific issues, there is a much greater overall sense of community. This is particularly highlighted by incidents such as the flood and mud slides which bring out the State Emergency Service and the use of the Drop-In Centre as a base for activities. Likewise, when the Diner's kitchen is on fire, Vinnie has no problems in rapidly organising a chain of people to bring sand into the Diner to try and put it out. Generally there is a sense of working together to solve problems and overcome barriers.

The presence of the Church is non-existent in 2000, and is largely associated with Celia and the more conservative elements in the town in 1987. Lynn, who strongly believes in God when she first comes to Summer Bay with the Fletchers, struggles with her faith during the course of the 1987, gradually re-finding her beliefs.

Disease and mental illness

Mental illness, or at least, mental problems generally are a strong focus of *Home & Away*'s first year. On running away, Lynn befriends Angelo Poletti, or 'Dummy' to most of the Summer Bay people, when she takes refuge in his barn. Angelo is laughed at by people in the town, which Lynn thinks is terrible. As their friendship grows, she discovers that he is taking medication, and, believing that he might be an addict, convinces him to stop. Once he stops taking his medication, Angelo becomes aggressive.

Donald Fisher in the meantime starts a petition to have Angelo committed. While he gains some support, most of the regular Summer Bay characters refuse to sign it. Martin and Lance trick Angelo into upsetting Fisher and later, when Angelo's cow is poisoned, he believes that Fisher must be responsible, violently confronting him then lapsing into catatonia. He remains catatonic and institutionalised for most of the rest of the year.

A more straightforward storyline regarding mental illness occurred more recently. During his HSC year, Joey, always a brilliant student, seriously messes up his final

exams. His old friend Aaron, visiting Summer Bay, takes Joey camping and discovers him smoking dope, trying to escape “the voices”. Joey is also visited by his dead father, who tells him he needs to kill Irene. Eventually Joey has a seriously threatening episode and is institutionalised, diagnosed with schizophrenia. Once on medication, Joey is quickly normalised, and after a period of reintegration into the community leaves Summer Bay to help other teenagers understand about mental illness.

Following the non-event of her wedding, Sally suffers from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder for a period which cripples her study and her ability to live her life. When Luke, a doctor, recognises her problem, he convinces her to see a psychiatrist. Her treatment results in a swift recovery.

As discussed previously, Edward is diagnosed with Huntington’s Disease during 2000. When he first comes to the Bay, Edward is not old enough to take the test which would reveal whether he will develop the disease, but his belief that he might be a sufferer leads him to take risks and behave in a way generally different from the other teenagers. During the year his symptoms develop and it becomes clear that he has the illness.

A needlestick injury on the beach left Leah wondering whether she might have contracted any disease. While she is reassured by doctors that the chances are very small, when she is ill with the flu she avoids others and is reluctant to go to the doctor for fear of what she might have. Shortly after she first receives the injury, Colleen comments that it might be best if she was no longer around food. When Leah then feels that she should resign from the Diner because her presence is putting customers off, Ailsa organises a party to reassure her that no one is worried.

An HIV positive character featured on *Home & Away* for a short period, when Miranda Porter, the daughter of a nanny hired by Fisher came to Summer Bay. A student at a private school in the city who had contracted the disease through a blood transfusion, befriends post-schizophrenia Joey while visiting her mother. At first she keeps her illness a secret and freaks out when she cuts herself at Irene’s house. At her school she had faced social ostracism due to her illness. Joey eventually helps her overcome her fears by drawing on his own experiences and be honest about her disease while

educating their peer group. While considering staying in Summer Bay to attend school, her mother is no longer needed by Fisher and they both leave.

Conclusion

Like Erinsborough, Summer Bay is a close, tight knit community the population of which is dominated by small business owners. While the approach to a number of issues, such as education, changed between 1987 and 2000, in general the basic characteristics of the series remain the same. In the next chapter I will examine how Australian soaps compare with those from the US and UK. This will allow me to more clearly identify the ideas which are exclusively Australian in the construction of the reality of *Home & Away* and *Neighbours*.

CHAPTER 4

NATIONAL STORIES

In order to explore the notion of Australian identity which is constructed by *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* it is useful to consider what soap opera is, how the genre impacts on this construction of Australianness and how Australian soap opera is different from, and similar to, soap operas produced in other countries. While touching on soaps from a number of different cultures, I intend to most closely compare Australian soap opera to those which due to their language and similar cultural heritage, one would imagine would be most like our own—those of the US and the UK.

What is soap opera?

The most basic question to be asked is what constitutes soap opera and how is it different to other forms of television?

Writing in 1985, Robert C Allen was one of the first to codify the soap opera genre. Based on an examination of early radio soap operas, he described four basic qualities which marked soap opera as a distinctive textual system. These qualities are:

- absolute resistance to closure;
- use of contemporary settings and emphasis on “domestic concerns”;
- didacticism; and
- being produced for and consumed by women, most of whom spend their weekdays at home looking after children¹⁷

Of Allen’s criteria, the one which can be most questioned, particularly in relation to Australian soap operas, is the fourth. Soap operas are no longer only produced for and consumed by women. Allen’s definition was formulated about a different historical moment, particularly with respect to radio soaps. Firstly, the increase in dual-income households means that there are, nowadays, fewer and fewer women who spend their weekdays at home with children. Secondly, the growth in disposable income amongst teens and unmarried working people has led to an increase in the importance of the

¹⁷ Robert C Allen *Speaking of Soap Operas* University of North Carolina Press: US 1985 pp137-138

youth demographic to advertisers. This, in turn, has changed the nature of the audiences sought by television programmers. Consequently, the 1990s saw the rise of soaps aimed firmly at young professional adults (for example *Melrose Place*) and, more latterly, teens (*Dawson's Creek*). A number of writers about daytime soaps, including Allen himself, have also acknowledged the popularity of daytime soap operas amongst a variety of groups, in particular highlighting their popularity with college students¹⁸. While I do not think that this broader audience focus detracts from the idea of soap opera as primarily a women's form, it should be noted that these programs are no longer "produced for" house-bound women.

Jostein Gripsrud takes issue with Allen's didacticism criterion, particularly in relation to *Dynasty*, stating that "...the openly didactic character of early soaps is gone."¹⁹ However, as he rightly points out, a "...didactic function is...not dependent on an overt didacticism"²⁰. Soap operas like *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* are still, however, occasionally openly didactic. In particular, they maintain a didactic function in relation to a number of social and moral issues. After *Home & Away* episodes featuring Joey's mental illness aired, for example, Channel 7 gave details of mental health support groups.

There is also a more general awareness of the didactic potential of soap operas. Recently, the deputy chair of the NSW Premier's Council for Women, bemoaning the lack of participation by women in the information technology sector, suggested "...introducing girls in IT as role models in TV soaps such as *Home and Away*"²¹ as a way of convincing young women that IT represented a viable career option. As perception of soap's didactic function is important in understanding their influence, it is discussed in more depth in the next chapter.

¹⁸ For example Dannielle Blumenthal *Women and Soap Opera: A Cultural Feminist Perspective* Praeger: US 1997 pp 93, 96 & 105, Laura Stempel Mumford *Love and Ideology in the Afternoon: Soap Opera, Women and Television Genre* Indiana University Press: US 1995 pp 1-2, Lauren Rabinovitz "Soap opera bridal fantasies" *Screen* 33:3 Autumn 1992 pp276-277, Nicholas Abercrombie *Television and Society* Polity Press: Great Britain 1976 pp54-55, Gilah Ritenhouse "The Nuclear Family is Alive and Well: *As the World Turns*" *Staying Tuned: Contemporary Soap Opera Criticism* ed Suzanne Frenzt, Bowling Green State University Popular Press: US 1992 p48 and Robert Allen *Speaking of Soap Opera* pp178-179

¹⁹ Jostein Gripsrud *The Dynasty Years: Hollywood Television and Critical Media Studies* Routledge: Great Britain 1995 p164

²⁰ Gripsrud *Dynasty Years* p164

²¹ Julia Baird "Geek image is putting women off jobs in IT" *Sydney Morning Herald Online* <http://www.smh.com.au/news/0012/0/national/nation110.html> 4/12/2000 p2

Allen's first two characteristics of soap, resistance to closure and contemporary settings, are probably the least contested. Endless seriality characterises soaps from Australia, the US and the UK, although it is true that occasionally soap operas, such as *Dynasty*, *Melrose Place*, *A Country Practice* and *Chances*, end, usually as a result of waning popularity. It should be noted, however, that the 'telenovela' or South and Central American form of soap operas have a finite existence. Similarly the 'durama' of Japan, while featuring many other of the characteristics of soap opera, have a limited run. The Latin American telenovela, with its melodrama and its focus on the personal life of its characters, certainly reflects the content of Anglo soaps. Nonetheless, due to its structural differences (and possibly a certain snobbery), in one article a spokesperson for Telmundo, a Mexican television network, asks that telenovelas not be referred to as "soaps" but rather prefers to consider that they are more like serialised novels, comparing them explicitly to Dickens.²² Therefore while US, European and Australian soaps are, indeed, characterised by their "endless seriality", extending the cultural boundaries of the genre problematises Allen's first criterion.

Despite Allen's argument, in the first part of the second criterion, that soaps are contemporary, it could also be argued that there is no reason why this has to be so. It is true that generally soap operas are set in the present and that this makes it easier for soaps to maintain a similar pattern of time to that of the audience's world. Various writers, such as Christine Geraghty, argue that the relationship between soap opera time and real time is another defining characteristics of soap opera. For example, Christmas in *Beverly Hills 90210* happens at the same time as it does for viewers, the HSC students of Erinsborough and Summer Bay get their results at the same time as those watching the show and in "...*EastEnders* plastic daffodils are planted in the Square...to ensure that the flowers will be correctly in bloom in April"²³. Nonetheless, I cannot see a valid reason why a program such as *The Sullivans*, set during World War II, could not be classed as a soap, although perhaps it creates its own sub-genre of historical soap.

The reason that I think programs such as *The Sullivans*, Mexican telenovelas and Japanese duramas should be considered soaps is due to the second part of the second

²² Andrés Martínez "'La Vida' loca" *Salon.com*

<http://www.salon.com/ent/feature/2000/02/28/telenovelas/print.html> 28/02/2000 p5

²³ Christine Geraghty *Women and Soap Opera: A Study of Prime Time Soaps* Polity Press: Great Britain 1991 p 12

criterion—the “emphasis on... “domestic concerns””. One thing all these programs have in common is a focus on families and family life. Even in a program like *Prisoner*, “family-type” relations are formed.²⁴ Similarly, a soap like *Melrose Place* often features the quest for family (and thus happiness), with strong female characters such as Amanda spending entire seasons attempting to get pregnant²⁵ in order to cement a relationship. Most US daytime soap operas centre around one or two families from which relationship snake around all other characters. Similarly the 1980s US soaps such as *Dynasty* and *Dallas* highlighted the dramas of a single family. Family also maintains a centrality in British soaps, and, as discussed in the previous chapters, the family has a strong role to play in both *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*.

Much academic writing on US day-time soap operas emphasises their melodramatic nature²⁶. As Jane Feuer, who problematises the notion of genre generally, points out, the equation of melodrama and soap opera is not necessarily valid when British soaps with their social realism are brought into the equation.²⁷ Christine Geraghty argues that actors in primetime soaps work across three different modes of acting, “light entertainment” (by which they are shown as a star), melodrama and realism.²⁸ Similarly Australian soap operas with a balance of realism and melodrama, move between these modes, and a fourth which I would add, the comedic. There are also aspects of pantomime, mystery and suspense within these programs. Most soaps contain elements of all these approaches, although different types and nationalities of soaps favour different levels of each.

The privileging of private life and concerns over the world of work and business, coupled with a combination of seriality, the use of time and the movement between dramatic modes, characterise the soap opera. As Geraghty points out, it “...is not

²⁴ John Docker and Ann Curthoys “Melodrama in Action: *Prisoner* or *Cell Block H*” Postmodernism and Popular Culture: a Cultural History John Docker, Cambridge University Press: Australia 1994 p265

²⁵ In 1998-1999 in Australia, Amanda was devoted to getting pregnant to Kyle in order to create the perfect family to live in the dream house they were building. Naturally, when Amanda does get pregnant, everything goes awry.

²⁶ For example Verina Glaessner “Gendered Fictions” Understanding Television eds Andrew Goodwin and Garry Whannel, Routledge: UK 1990 pp116, 120 & 125-126, Tania Modleski Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-produced fantasies for women Routledge: US 1990 pp91-93, Martha Nochimson No End to Her: Soap Opera and the Female Subject University of California Press: US 1992 pp145-159 and Stempel Mumford Love and Ideology pp22-24,57,61 & 65

²⁷ Jane Feuer “Genre Study and Television” Channels of Discourse: Television and Contemporary Criticism ed Robert C Allen, Routledge: Great Britain 1987 p115

²⁸ Geraghty Women and Soap p 37

necessary for each soap to display to the same degree all the characteristics which they share.”²⁹ It should be noted however that the ongoing survival of the soap opera form and its continued popularity has led to many other television forms gaining soapie-like characteristics. Several writers from the late 1980s and early 1990 cite *Hill Street Blues* as one of the first ostensibly crime genre programs to include elements of soap opera. The incorporation of personal dramas and issues has continued in programs like *The Practice*, ostensibly a courtroom drama, where interpersonal dramas are often at the fore and episode-based storylines are often the minor focus. Characters in *The Practice* maintain a history, and minor characters and clients return with new problems which generally force the major characters to examine an aspect of their own personality, rather than just win the case. In the UK, a well-established and popular program, *The Bill* has changed its format and become increasingly soapie-like, with the relationships and problems of the police officers taking prominence over the crimes they are solving. In Australia, *Blue Heelers*, ostensibly a police drama, has similarly focused increasingly on the interpersonal dramas of its officers.

National myths and representation

Television is an important aspect of mythmaking and all soap operas appear to contain aspects of national myths and constructs. Lisa Rofel, for example, examines the role television has played in recreating a sense of Chinese identity. She discusses the manner in which the Chinese soap *Yearnings* used the “speaking bitterness” device which was traditionally employed in Communist China as a manner of telling of suffering, whether by the workers immediately after the revolution or by intellectuals in the post-Cultural Revolution period.³⁰ Similarly, Ana Lopez points out the clear difference between telenovelas of different Latin American countries, not only in terms of their production values but also in more general characteristics such as their setting and cultural ideas³¹.

The major differences between British, US and Australian soaps stems from the social mythology in which they are grounded. As discussed above, soap operas contain

²⁹ Geraghty *Women and Soap* p12

³⁰ Lisa Rofel “The melodrama of national identity in post-Tiananmen China” *To Be Continued: Soap Operas Around the World* ed Robert C Allen, Routledge: Great Britain 1995 pp 302-305

³¹ Ana M Lopez “Our welcomed guests: Telenovelas in Latin America” *To Be Continued: Soap Operas Around the World* ed Robert C Allen, Routledge: Great Britain, 1995 pp261-268

similarities which ensure that they are considered a genre and, as I will highlight later in this chapter, there are further similarities in some of their storylines and themes. The greatest difference, other than perhaps their particular mix of melodrama and realism, is their class basis and the mythology that this reflects.

In *The Grapes of Wrath* John Steinbeck deliberately set out to expose a national myth, one which continues to suffuse American films and television, the idea of the 'American Dream'. The notion that the United States is a land of opportunity where anyone can become President is still a strong theme of American popular culture. It is interesting to note that at the time of President Clinton's inauguration, much media attention was focussed on his humble background which included divorce, abuse and poverty, and yet a 'Dream' of becoming President reflected by the photo of the young Bill shaking hands with President Kennedy. Conversely, Clinton's academic career, which in reality was what made achieving this Dream possible, was considered almost suspect—it was at Oxford after all that the notorious non-inhalation took place. While Steinbeck set out to debunk the myth of the American dream through his depiction of the epic journey of the Joad family which ended in defeat and death, current US television is much more on the side of the myth makers.

While US soap operas are not always about the ultra-rich featured in *Dynasty*, they do not shy away from positive depictions of rich people, and class mobility is a constant feature. While some theorists call US daytime soaps "middle class"³², the middle class featured is generally a professional, college-educated middle class. Prime time soaps have been more explicitly about the rich—Beverly Hills and Melrose are locations which signify wealth, fashion and prestige to the audience. While *Days of Our Lives* on the other hand, may feature working class characters, these characters are not confined by their class milieu. Often the poor do not remain so for long, as story lines continually feature their rise to wealth and power. This is often achieved by women through marriage and for men by hard work, although occasionally these positions are reversed. In one *Days of Our Lives* storyline, for example, Adrienne, a victim of incest and rape who murdered her father in self-defence and is from a distinctly working class background, wins the love of Justin, the nephew of the richest character on the show and

³² For example Modleski *Loving with a Vengeance* pp85-86 (although she argues that class boundaries become quickly blurred) and Allen *Speaking of Soap* pp73-74 (Allen himself refers to "middle-class professional people")

heretofore a flippant playboy who is redeemed by her love and elevates her to a place of wealth and power. Similarly on *The Young and the Restless*, Sharon, another a victim of rape who has a crippled single mother, marries Nicholas Newman, the son of the wealthiest man on the program, ensuring her own wealth and power.

Relationships between the rich and the poor are not generally characterised as bad or inappropriate, and those who do view them in this way are depicted unsympathetically. Angela Ndaliansis discusses at length the conflict in *The Bold and the Beautiful*, between the rich matriarch Stephanie and the 'poor' girl Brooke, who eventually rises to take control of the Forrester Empire.³³ Stephanie tries but fails to prevent Brooke from "...ruptur[ing] her desired narrative resolutions"³⁴ through marriage first to Stephanie's ex-husband Erik and then to her son Ridge, and finally by gaining control of a large income stream from the Forrester company through her invention of a new chemical formula. In the period after Ndaliansis wrote, Brooke has continued to disrupt Stephanie by her new relationship with Ridge's brother, Thorne. Generally, Brooke has been portrayed with sympathy, although as Ndaliansis points out, there is a good deal of complexity in the portrayal of both Brooke and Stephanie. Nonetheless, it is clear that Brooke's move from 'valley girl' to scion of a major design house is reasonable, and has been facilitated both through the use of her brains and of her body. She has thus achieved the American Dream of wealth and power, as many other denizens of US soap operas have and will.

While class (and wealth) mobility is central to the stories of US soap operas, in Britain, the remnants of the class system have left a cultural divide which clearly influences film and television, and soap opera in particular. While there has been a creeping growth in the representation of the middle classes, particularly rural, in more recent television drama, generally the working class milieu is a favourite for British television. Sitcoms have often reflected this class divide; currently the *Royle Family* presents the darkly comic side of *EastEnders*, while *Keeping Up Appearances* demonstrated the difficulties of leaving one's class. Hyacinth constantly denies her working class roots to claim a place in the modern aristocracy, but the main on-going joke of the program is that

³³ Angela Ndaliansis "Style, Spectacle, Excess and *The Bold and the Beautiful*" *Tomorrow Never Knows: Soap on Australian Television* ed Kate Bowles and Sue Turnbull, Australian Film Institute: Australia 1994 pp35-40

³⁴ Ndaliansis "Style, Spectacle" p35

Hyacinth can never be what she wants to be—one is born into a class or one is not. Conversely, *To The Manor Born* represented the struggle between old and new money, where, despite being poor, Audrey remained an aristocrat. The national mythology of Britain tends to reinforce the idea that one is what one is born to be, and that even monetary wealth will not alter this.

British soap tends to incorporate these ideas about class by focussing firmly on the working classes. The British soap which aimed to depict the middle classes, *Eldorado*, was a dismal failure, unlike programs like *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders* and *Crossroads* which have endured for long periods. *EastEnders* for example selfconsciously establishes itself in the working class milieu and clearly resists class mobility. Few, if any, characters aspire to leave Albert Square and those that have pretensions to middle class values or ideas are often despised or pose a threat to other characters. David Buckingham demonstrates how Debbie Wilkins was “...routinely mocked by the other characters for being ‘stuck up’ and ‘posh’.”³⁵ During the same period, a clearly disruptive force was the middle class Jan, Den’s lover. As Buckingham argues, her middle class status was clearly demonstrated “...to the point of caricature.”³⁶ Jan caused disruption in the life of Albert Square by threatening Den’s (already disintegrating) marriage to Angie. In later years, the character of Richard, a property owner and market manager, is given little to do in the program but be unsympathetic and create trouble. He appears to spend most of his time at the pub, making sarcastic comments and sniffing out issues he can stir up. He is unsympathetic and is generally depicted in an unwholesome light. Buckingham notes that overall, class boundaries are “clearly marked” and attempts to cross these boundaries are “seen as absurd” or “fail...miserably.”³⁷ Similarly, in *Coronation Street*, the “borders of the community are staunchly patrolled” and those who attempt to move up in the world either fail or face danger.³⁸ Thus British soap characters tend to be restricted by the class boundaries and rarely even aspire to, let alone achieve, class mobility.

³⁵ David Buckingham *Public Secrets: EastEnders and its Audience* BFI Publishing: Great Britain 1987 p96

³⁶ Buckingham *Public Secrets* p97

³⁷ Buckingham *Public Secrets* p98

³⁸ Glaessner “Gendered Fictions” p122

The Australian myth is one which incorporates notions of equality and not getting above oneself. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, Australian soaps, particularly *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*, tend to reflect this idea by being situated in a comfortable middle class milieu in which doctor and builder live side-by-side in the same kinds of houses. Australian programs take the middle ground between the opulence of most US soaps and the grinding poverty of UK ones. There is a lack of upward class mobility past the middle classes in Australian soaps which is similar to that of British soaps. Too much ambition, such as that demonstrated by Lucy Robinson on *Neighbours* in her desire to become a model, tends to presage emotional or financial disaster. On the other hand, those who come from deprived backgrounds, particularly the children on *Home & Away* who are fostered by Pippa and her successors, have every right to aspire to be middle class, generally achieving this goal. The characters of Australian soaps live very comfortable lives, implying that the desire for upward mobility is related to greed or hubris. It should also be noted that characters who are ostensibly of a class above the characters of *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*, such as Morag or Diana Fletcher, often threaten the life and safety of the community.

Television, the great storyteller of the late twentieth century and, no doubt, early twenty-first, has a clear role in reinforcing the myths of the different cultures which produce it, thought not necessarily in straightforward ways. From this overview of class, I wish to more closely examine some particular aspects of national soaps to attempt to tease out what it is that Australian soap operas are saying which is specific to Australia.

Jobs and education

Given the discussion of class, it follows that there are significant differences between the jobs and levels of education in each form of soap opera. There are however some similarities which relate to the structural function of characters and locations in soaps.

The most common profession in soaps is the doctor. There are ongoing or regular doctor characters in all soaps, with the exception of the much smaller cast *Dynasty* and *Dallas*. Other US primetime soaps, like *Melrose Place* feature doctors strongly—at one time four of the 12 or so regular characters were doctors. Similarly, US daytime soaps such as *Days of Our Lives* and *The Young and the Restless* generally feature one, if not

several, medical professionals. Most of these work, at least some of the time, in a hospital which often becomes a centre for action.

While the medical professionals within UK soaps are often more peripheral to the general community, they remain a part of the action. Dr Legg on *EastEnders* for example has been a long term, if not constant, participant in the life of the Square. Nurses and 'health visitors' have also featured on *EastEnders*. As shown in the previous chapters, doctors and nurses feature regularly in Australian soap operas.

The medical professional has an important structural role, allowing regular and familiar access to a hospital and making medically—based storylines stronger and prominent. The hospital also plays a meeting place role, with, for example, a seemingly endless number of side rooms at Salem General Hospital in *Days of Our Lives* where characters go for pivotal conversations. Doctors are also a person to whom characters often talk about problems beyond the merely medical, with Dr Legg, for example, acting "...as a 'father confessor' to characters with emotional, rather than simply medical, problems."³⁹

Lawyers, on the other hand, while a feature of the US soap, tend to be absent from UK soaps and, as discussed earlier, appear in Australian soaps as temporary 'bad' characters, such as Tess' ex-husband, or only briefly when necessary for court cases. While doctors perform an on-going structural function, the lack of lawyers in UK and Australian soaps tends to be more indicative of the class basis of the programs. Lawyers are usually much wealthier than the class milieu of these soaps and the wealthy characters in US soaps tend to require lawyers more frequently than the suburban Australians. Most of the working class characters in UK soaps would have trouble affording a lawyer.

In all soaps, many of the characters own their own businesses, however the scale of these differs. In *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*, these businesses generally employ three or four other characters or are run through the participation of most of the family. They are comfortably profitable, though occasionally require the owner to find additional employment elsewhere. Many businesses persist for long periods and can pass from friend to friend or to spouses or children.

³⁹ Buckingham Public Secrets p79

While some of the small businesses of *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street* are similar to those of *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*, such as the corner store, cafe or pub, the scale and profitability of these enterprises tends to be different from their Australian equivalents. Geraghty points out that “[p]ublic space...needs to be widely accessible, free-for-all areas where no one can be prevented from joining in a conversation even when their views are not wanted.”⁴⁰ The kinds of small businesses featured thus provide this kind of public space and enable “...one or two individuals to make a precarious living”.⁴¹ The other small entrepreneurs of *EastEnders* run market stalls giving them a vantage point for those passing through the Square while still allowing them to make ends meet.

In US soaps the scale of business ownership is completely different. Even away from the oil tycoons of *Dynasty* and *Dallas*, characters own, for example, their own advertising agencies (Amanda in *Melrose Place*), cosmetics companies (the Abbotts and Victor Newman in *The Young and the Restless*) and clothing companies (the Forresters in *The Bold and the Beautiful* and Lauren Fenmore in *The Young and the Restless*). As these large businesses often employ a significant number of characters in the program, they still fulfil the function of creating a public space. Further, spouses, mothers, friends and lovers generally seem to have little reluctance to bring themselves and their problems to the office. As in *Dallas* and *Dynasty* where, as Geraghty points out, children work with parents or siblings work together⁴², so too do other US soaps feature these incestuous work places. Where more traditional public meeting places are owned or run by on-going characters, these are more often fine restaurants, such as Gina’s restaurant in *The Young and the Restless* or exclusive clubs, like Kyle and Amanda’s jazz club in *Melrose Place*, than corner cafes or pubs.

The importance of control of these businesses is a theme which is common to both the US and Australian soaps. Struggles for control are more titanic in US soaps where, for example, John and Jack Abbott, in *The Young and the Restless*, continually struggle to wrest back control of their family business from Victor Newman. Similarly Amanda, in *Melrose Place*, utilises manipulation, deceit and clever strategies to allow her to

⁴⁰ Geraghty *Women and Soap* p53

⁴¹ Geraghty *Women and Soap* p52

⁴² Geraghty *Women and Soap* p54

maintain her hold on her advertising agency. This same need for self determination is displayed by characters such as Harold with his concerns over the Grease Monkeys franchise in *Neighbours*.

Factory style wage labour is most prominent in UK soaps, where union activity can also feature. For a period, the character of Bobby Grant in *Brookside* was featured in a trade union storyline, leading a strike at the factory.⁴³ In *Coronation Street* the clothing factory has a number of women characters as workers and has featured a number of industrial disputes.⁴⁴ In US soaps it is more likely that major characters will be on the other end of industrial action, while the scale of employment in Australian soaps tends to mean that grievances about the workplace are limited and are dealt with in the private sphere. One exception to this is when Tom, on *Home & Away*, has a dispute with the leader of the road gang which, while more personal than work-related, is seen by Martin and Lance as an excuse to skive off work by going on strike.

The resistance to social security featured in Australian soaps is not apparent in British programs.⁴⁵ Characters, such as Michelle Fowler in *EastEnders*, happily mention that they need to 'sign on' with an easy acceptance which does not occur in *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*. Reflecting the very different nature of the social safety-net in the US, social security is rarely raised as an issue—characters who fall on hard times are more likely to turn to stripping, prostitution, blackmail or other forms of crime than mention social security.

Many of the characters in US soaps have a college education—even the chauffeur's daughter in *Dynasty* was sent to the Sorbonne! Given the heavier emphasis on professions over wage labour in these programs, college education often goes without comment. It is interesting, however, that almost no teachers, an integral part of the Australian soap, feature in US soaps. Even when almost the entire action of a program centred around a high school, as in the early days of *Beverly Hills 90210*, there were no major teacher characters.

⁴³ Geraghty *Women and Soap* p58

⁴⁴ Geraghty *Women and Soap* p 52

⁴⁵ It should be noted that in 2001 when Alf decides to reduce his Charter business following Ailsa's death, Will receives JobSearch allowance and has to attend training courses or have his payments docked.

At the opposite end of the scale are the UK soaps where almost no characters have any post-secondary education. Michelle Fowler has worked her way through university but she is alone in gaining an education. Her achievement is strongly supported by her family who insist on making her graduation a big deal. With less focus on education, the same lack of teachers is obvious as in the US soaps.

Ethnicity and racism

While each features a different racial mix, the US, the UK and Australia are all multiracial, if not multicultural, societies. All soap opera forms appear to struggle with the representation of ethnic difference, facing the problems of stereotyping, the representation of 'problems' rather than characters, and the assimilation of characters to dominant norms.

Ien Ang and Jon Stratton articulate their concerns with one approach taken by *Home & Away*, described last chapter, in which an Asian girl featured for eight weeks with only one overt mention of her Asian background, arguing it:

...remains firmly within the ideological preoccupation with community and homogeneity which characterizes the traditional soaps, and with Australia's assimilation policy of the post-Second World War period...⁴⁶

Similarly, despite the greater commitment of *EastEnders* to the depiction of a multiracial community, or perhaps because of it, Buckingham argues that it constructs "...white characters with black faces."⁴⁷ With respect to US daytime soaps, Modleski argues that blacks and other minorities are almost entirely excluded.⁴⁸

Looking at some specific examples Martha Nochimson highlights two storylines featuring ethnic difference from *Days of Our Lives*. In one of these stories Michael Horton has a relationship with Robin Jacobs, an Orthodox Jew. The relationship cannot overcome the barriers of difference and eventually Robin departs the series.⁴⁹ This storyline points out some of the clear issues that occur when ethnic difference is highlighted. Robin represents an extreme case of her ethnicity, just as Tony Romeo's

⁴⁶ Ang and Stratton "The End of Civilisation" p138

⁴⁷ Buckingham *Public Secrets* p103

⁴⁸ Modleski *Loving with a Vengeance* p86

⁴⁹ Nochimson *No End to Her* pp164-168

mother in *Neighbours* represents an extreme case of her own. It is also Robin who creates the barriers due to cultural difference, despite the acceptance shown to her by other characters.

Similarly, the second racial storyline which Nochimson discusses takes difference to its most extreme point. Marcus Hunter, a black character in *Days of Our Lives*, is plagued by memories from his childhood. He eventually discovers that he witnessed the bombing of a black church by radical white supremacists in which his parents were killed, and he remains in danger from those who perpetrated the crime.⁵⁰ Here, racism is seen as the act of extremists and Marcus only has agency while investigating his past. When he returns to Salem he returns to the position of 'friend' to major characters with little in the way of his own storylines. Nochimson notes, interestingly, that during this storyline the producers of *Days of Our Lives* received a large amount of racist hate mail which curtailed plans for a longer storyline and also saw the rejection of a possible interracial romance.

While *EastEnders* features interracial couples, US soaps tend to avoid them. After the first season of *Melrose Place* for example, there were no on-going black characters and very few short term ones. *Beverly Hills 90210* has never featured an on-going major black character. The one black character who featured with any regularity on *Beverly Hills 90210* was a scholarship athlete who Brandon tutored for a time while at college. Without on-going black characters, black-white romances cannot occur. The romance between Janet, the Chinese-American character whose role gradually increased over the Australian 1999 and 2000 seasons, and Steve in *Beverly Hills 90210* was seen as a problem by Janet, whose parents disapproved and would have preferred to see her married to a successful Chinese-American man. It was the 'all-American' Steve who urged Janet to confront her parents on the issue.

In US daytime soaps there are black characters, however they are generally ghettoised, allowed to be successful professionals (although more often they play some kind of 'sidekick' role), but restricted in many of their storylines to interactions with other black characters. Characters such as Drusilla and her sister in *The Young and the Restless* are examples of this, they are both married to other black characters and tend to interact

⁵⁰ Nochimson *No End to Her* pp169-173

socially only with each other. Similarly, there are few Asian actors, or characters of other races. Interracial romance has occurred, but is often problematic. For example, when on *The Young and the Restless*, after many years of devotion as a domestic servant, Maime is rewarded with the love of the rich and powerful John Abbott and they plan to marry and go on a cruise together, John is first struck by illness and then threatened with the loss of custody of his very young son. John cannot be with Maime, despite his love for her, and although she is transformed by wealth, she ends up alone.

As in Australian soap operas, racism in UK and US soaps is generally seen as the preserve of 'bad' or mistaken individuals and the community as a whole is free from those kinds of attitudes. Buckingham argues that *EastEnders'* stance can be "explicitly didactic" in this regard, with characters who display racist beliefs being corrected or attacked for their beliefs by more sympathetic characters.⁵¹ This is similar to the storyline involving Hayley and her Aboriginal teacher on *Home & Away*, with friends and family telling Hayley that her attitude is wrong.

Geraghty discusses the three strategies which she believes primetime soap operas use to incorporate ethnic characters: the "singleton", the appearance of one character who is marginalised and only comes to prominence in storylines which emphasis difference; the "exotic" strategy in which characters appear for a short time, often generating disruption, although this disruption is not usually due to their race; and the "incorporation" strategy in which ethnic characters face problems but have them solved through their absorption into the community.⁵² Australian soap operas tend to use the first and last of these strategies most often. The community basis of many Australian soaps sees the incorporation approach the most popular as it diminishes difference and removes disruption.

Race is a problematic area for television in general and in particular for soaps which focus so greatly on the private life of their characters. Producers must often feel that they are trapped in a position where criticism can be levelled at them no matter what strategies they utilise. Trying to ignore the existence of non-Anglo characters still appears to be the major strategy for many soaps, and Australian soaps are probably less

⁵¹ Buckingham *Public Secrets* p102

⁵² Geraghty *Women and Soap* pp140-147

racially diverse than many of those from the US and UK.

Women

There has been more written about women in soaps and women watching soaps than any other writings on the topic. For this reason I will not even attempt to be comprehensive on this topic, but rather draw out some key issues as they relate to the construction of national mythologies.

Whether soaps are empowering to women or not is the key focus of a number of writers on soaps.⁵³ The empowerment derives, most often, from the fact of female agency or the position of woman as subject. While these issues are important ones, they fall somewhat outside the scope of my work. Nonetheless, it is important to note that, like many of the other soaps discussed, women in *Home & Away* and *Neighbours* play strong cohesive central roles.

Geraghty highlights the difference between US and UK primetime soaps, defining them as patriarchal and matriarchal respectively. In the patriarchal soap, the family's survival lies with the central male figure who attempts to control the family, regulating the entrance of outsiders and preventing the departure of insiders. In these soaps, threats to the stability of the family are often internally generated. The matriarchal soap, on the other hand, sees families which are more openly structured and which are generally dominated by women and more subject to external forces such as unemployment.⁵⁴

Home & Away clearly falls in the latter category as it features families which are open and dominated by a matriarchal figure. The central role of Pippa, and to a lesser extent Ailsa, at the beginning of the series, has been shared out between the adult female characters as the series continued. Characters like Irene and Shelly now maintain the balance in their families, and through them, the community. *Neighbours* falls into a rather greyer category. While Helen played a significant role in early years, Jim was still central to the maintenance of the family. In most of the episodes I have described, the

⁵³ For example Blumenthal *Women and Soap Opera* focuses on this question throughout her book, while Nochimson *No End to Her* (p2) and Glaessner "Gendered Fictions" (p116) specifically address the question.

⁵⁴ Geraghty *Women and Soap* pp62-83

weight of centrality seems to be equally shared, with the women sometimes playing a subordinate role to their husbands in the approach to family. The foster family basis in *Home & Away* creates the greater openness of the matriarchal soap, while the closed, tight-knit families of, particularly, the early *Neighbours* focus more intently on internally generated issues.

As demonstrated in previous chapters, much emphasis is placed on motherhood in Australian soaps. This is true of US daytime soaps where, Laura Stempel Mumford argues, "...pregnancy [is]...something that *happens to* women, and whose end is beyond their control."⁵⁵ Like those in Summer Bay who get pregnant so easily, pregnancy tends to occur to the women of US soaps and abortion is "...virtually always wrong".⁵⁶ In *Home & Away*, Roo follows a long line of female villainesses by trying to 'trap' a man into marriage through manipulation surrounding pregnancy and by confusing the issue of paternity. Stempel Mumford discusses the recurring storyline of doubtful or confused paternity in daytime soaps in some depth,⁵⁷ a device which occurs less often in UK and Australian soaps, but still arises occasionally. For example, in *EastEnders* Pat Wicks taunted Peter Beale over the paternity of Simon Wicks, while Michelle Fowler hid the identity of her baby's father. In Australian soaps there have been a number of occasions where the issue of parenthood has become important, including the return of Ruth's son on *Neighbours* and the discovery by Tad that he was adopted and his search for his 'real' mother.

Career women seem to find more opportunities in US soaps than in Australian or UK ones. This is probably because all characters have more opportunities due to the differing social milieux and increased class mobility. Cricket, later Christina, Blair went from massively successful teen model to a committed, socially aware lawyer in *The Young and the Restless*, making use of both her brains and her beauty. Similarly, while in *Melrose Place* Amanda was initially depicted as a 'bitch', her character later softened despite her move from employee to owner of an advertising agency. For the women of US soaps, 'having it all' in terms of family and career is both easier and more acceptable. This ease is probably at least in part due to the fact that there appears to be

⁵⁵ Stempel Mumford *Love and Ideology* p105

⁵⁶ Stempel Mumford *Love and Ideology* p105

⁵⁷ Stempel Mumford *Love and Ideology* pp94-116

no need to ever do housework in the US soaps, while in *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* many women appear to be obsessed by it.

There is an element of the career-woman-as-evil in US soaps with characters like the aforementioned Amanda, Alexis in *Dynasty* and Jill Abbott in *The Young and the Restless*. This however remains only a component of the construction. Characters sometimes change and become sympathetic. Alexis is a “partially positive figure” who represents “an ironic, humorously acceptable” image of the “bad” woman⁵⁸. Different are the evil career women of daytime soap operas such as Jill Abbott, or those of Australian soaps such as Morag Bellingham. These women are more representative of Modleski’s villainess, the “...negative image of the spectator’s ideal self.”⁵⁹ In Australian soaps, the majority of career women fall into this category, while in daytime and primetime US soaps they are generally counterbalanced by positive representations of women in career positions. For every Jill Abbott there is a Christine Blair.

In the working class environment of British soaps, professional careers for women are a rare thing. There are many depictions of strong and independent women—*Crossroads* initially, for example, was built around the character of Meg Richardson who owned the motel⁶⁰—however these women do not necessarily fall into the category of ‘career’ women. Geraghty discusses how a character in *Coronation Street*, Susan Baldwin, who remained interested in looking for work and a career once married, was considered “stuck up” by other women in the Street.⁶¹ Further, when the character of Deidre Barlow in *Coronation Street* becomes a local councillor, it creates conflict within her family. As Geraghty puts it, the dilemma which arises for the career woman is that she may have to “...abandon her sustaining role in the family and the community for a more personally fulfilling role elsewhere”.⁶² This dilemma is less evident in US soaps where, for example recently in *The Young and the Restless*, in a conflict between Drusilla and her husband over her devotion to her career, he was depicted as clearly in the wrong, churlish and uncaring.

⁵⁸ Gripsrud *The Dynasty Years* p231

⁵⁹ Modleski *Loving with a vengeance* p94

⁶⁰ Geraghty *Women and Soap* p136

⁶¹ Geraghty *Women and Soap* p137

⁶² Geraghty *Women and Soap* p137-138

One career choice which does appear in both US and UK soaps but rarely in Australian (and not in *Neighbours* or *Home & Away* in the periods under discussion) is prostitution. The construction of this choice differs markedly. In US soaps, a former life as a prostitute is often something from which women are 'saved' or which remains their hidden secret. It does not, however, permanently prevent these women from achieving romantic and career fulfilment. Scott Nelson may argue despairingly that former teen prostitute Donna Tyler in *All My Children* remains a victim, however at the time he writes she is happily remarried to the man she loved when she first came to the show and is the owner of "Glamorama" an important beauty salon—Scott merely speculates that her "...same old feelings of inadequacy" will return to disrupt her life.⁶³

Nochimson explores the character of Kimberley Brady in *Days of Our Lives* who returned to Salem after working as a 'high class' prostitute in Europe. Kimberley establishes a career as a photographer and, more importantly, a strong relationship with the aristocratic Shane Donovan, a secret agent. While Nochimson recognises that this particular relationship is "overt diegetic fantasy" she argues that this kind of fantasy is "resistant", particularly to dominant readings.⁶⁴ In exploring the relationship between Kimberley and Shane on *Days of Our Lives*, Nochimson focuses on the shift to mutuality in their relationship. Until this mutuality occurs, Kimberley and Shane cannot be properly together.⁶⁵ In the achievement of this mutuality, the prostitute overcomes her past to make a happy life for herself.

Prostitution is not seen as a good thing in US soaps⁶⁶, but rather something to escape and something which, while not always a permanent obstruction, can create problems within romantic liaisons and familial relationships. Deborah Rogers argues that it is something which can be overtly punished, with two major storylines in US soaps featuring women with AIDS as a result of participation in the life of a prostitute.⁶⁷

⁶³ Scott R Nelson "Pine Valley Prostitute: The Representation of *All My Children*'s Donna Tyler" Staying Tuned: Contemporary Soap Opera Criticism ed Suzanne Frenzt, Bowling Green State University Popular Press: Ohio 1992 pp103-108

⁶⁴ Nochimson No End to Her pp118-119

⁶⁵ Nochimson No End to Her pp85-96

⁶⁶ Prostitution features in a lot of US mainstream drama including programs such as *The West Wing* and the plethora of crime and courtroom series. While outside the scope of this thesis to discuss at length, an issue that could be considered elsewhere is how prostitution symbolises fantasy and/or otherness.

⁶⁷ Deborah D Rogers "AIDS spreads to the Soaps, Sort Of" Staying Tuned: Contemporary Soap Opera Criticism ed Suzanne Frenzt, Bowling Green State University Popular Press: Ohio 1992 pp57-59

In the more overtly realistic world of UK soaps, prostitution tends to function on a much more basic level, that is as a way for women to make money when they have few other options. Mary Smith, a young single mother in *EastEnders* becomes a part-time prostitute. Illiterate and uneducated, few other choices remained open to her.⁶⁸ Pat Wicks, similarly, “flirted” with prostitution until she took over the role of landlady at the Queen Vic from Angie.⁶⁹ In Pat’s case there was an element of resistance to male power in the act of becoming a prostitute, getting “...revenge on men by using [her] power as [a] wom[a]n.”⁷⁰ Generally there is less punishment for prostitution in the UK soaps; while not viewed as the ideal career choice, neither does it necessarily have devastating consequences.

In the middle class milieu of Australian soaps, former prostitutes do not feature, nor is prostitution seen as a viable choice to solve financial difficulties—hard as it may be, female characters would accept even social security before exercising that option. The muting of the sexual power of women compared with its outrageous flaunting in US soaps also impacts on the position of an issue like prostitution. It should also be considered that the time slots in which *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* screen would make an extended storyline regarding prostitution difficult, although the programs do feature sex and occasionally rape.

The depiction of older women is quite different in US soaps from that of Australian and UK soaps. The interfering, gossipy older woman figure, prominent in Australian and UK soaps, is generally absent from programs such as *Melrose Place*, *Dynasty* and *Days of Our Lives*. Older women in US soaps tend to be sympathetic grandmotherly types who often represent the “...moral centre of their families”⁷¹ such as Miss Ellie in *Dallas* or Mrs Horton in *Days of Our Lives*. While older women such as Helen Daniels play these roles in *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* they are often countered by nosy gossips such as Mrs Mangel. Similarly in the UK, for every strong matriarch such like Lou Beale there is an opinionated, racist and old-fashioned Dot Cotton.

⁶⁸ Buckingham *Public Secrets* pp80-81

⁶⁹ Geraghty *Women and Soap* pp104-105

⁷⁰ Buckingham *Public Secrets* p109

⁷¹ Geraghty *Women and Soap* p73

Masculinity

The construction of masculinity is significantly varied between soaps in the three countries. John Fiske discusses at length the depiction of men and masculinity in Television Culture. He writes:

...the “good” male in daytime soaps is caring, nurturing, and verbal....He will talk about feelings and people and rarely expresses his masculinity in direct action. Of course he is still decisive, he still has masculine power, but that power is given a “feminine” inflection....The “macho” characteristics of goal centredness, assertiveness, and the morality of the strongest that identify the hero in masculine television, tend here to be characteristics of the villain.⁷²

It is interesting that Fiske gives no examples to support this assertion. I would argue that this is such a generalisation that it is, in fact, inaccurate. In US daytime soap operas, many of the ‘heroes’ are in fact police officers or private detectives, like Bo and Roman Brady (*Days of Our Lives*), Cruz Castillo (*Santa Barbara*) and Paul Williams (*The Young and the Restless*), for whom direct action and assertiveness are part of their daily lives. Sometimes these characters do express their feelings, but it is a lesser part of their characterisation than their ability to ‘do something’ about whatever is happening. These characters are always off trying to stop villains or save loved ones, generally by themselves. While this may occasionally be foolhardy, it is rarely villainous.

Similarly, the men in *EastEnders*, for example, are rarely “...shown actually talking about [their problems], particularly with each other.”⁷³ An understanding of the problems of men in UK soaps tends to come from the observation of their activities, rather than through their discourse. Nigel Bates, in *EastEnders*, refrains from telling his fiancée of their financial troubles, hoping instead that he will find another way to deal with them.

Goal centredness plays a strong role in the characterisation of many of the more business-oriented men of daytime soaps. Characters like Victor Newman and Jack Abbott (*The Young and the Restless*) or Ridge and Eric Forrester (*Bold and the Beautiful*) may not always be ideal men, however their goal-centredness does not

⁷² John Fiske Television Culture Routledge: Great Britain 1994 p186

⁷³ Buckingham Public Secrets p112

necessarily cast them in the role of a villain. In fact their determination is often constructed as a strength.

I am more inclined to agree with Fiske's argument that the men of daytime soap opera "...typically have the strong good looks associated with conventional heterosexual masculinity"⁷⁴ although, along with Ndalians, I would dispute his assertion that soaps do not objectify the male body.⁷⁵ Both US daytime and primetime soaps contain a strong emphasis on the male body with men being shown in states of undress as often, if not more often, than women. Although they are rarely shown at the gym, almost every soap opera male under 40 (and some over) has a washboard stomach, perfect tan and generally powerful physique.

By contrast, Australian and UK soaps have male characters of a variety of shapes and sizes, many of whom no one would want to see without their shirts on. The pool in Ramsey Street and the beach at Summer Bay provide the perfect opportunity for states of undress, and while we are regularly exposed to the sight of Joel and Vinnie's US style physiques, the somewhat overweight Toadie is more often serving drinks in a Hawaiian shirt by the side of the pool. The climate in the UK saves us from the view of the UK men's semi-naked bodies, which, given their daily beer consumption, is probably fortunate indeed.

An analysis of the depiction of the role of violence in the construction of masculinity is perhaps closest to Fiske's assertions about direct action. Men in Australian soaps occasionally act in a relatively acceptable violent manner, however the overt suggestion is that violence is not the most effective way to solve problems. When Chloe's father, in *Home & Away*, shoots and kills the man he believes to be Chloe's rapist, nothing good is achieved—the father goes to prison and Chloe continues to be menaced by the man who really is the rapist. There is a low level of violence in British soaps, however it is generally greeted with some uneasiness. When Gavin lays out Simon Wicks in the pub in *EastEnders*, everyone turns a blind eye when asked what happened by the police, yet characters are uncomfortable with and unimpressed by Gavin's action. Buckingham argues that Pete Beale's use of violence occurred when his masculinity was questioned

⁷⁴ Fiske *Television Culture* pp186-187

⁷⁵ Ndalians "Style, Spectacle" p37

and that “..the connection between masculinity and violence, far from being celebrated, has been seen as a problem.”⁷⁶ In US soaps, violence by good characters tends to be limited, with arrests far more common than assaults. Other forms of violence almost always lead to dire consequences, often beyond what could be seen as a reasonable punishment for transgression. In *The Young and the Restless*, for example, when Nicholas Newman goes to ‘have it out’ with a college acquaintance who raped his girlfriend, he later ends up on trial for murder, despite his complete innocence.

An area of similarity between the characterisation of UK and Australian soaps is the impact on a man of the loss of income and inability to support his family. In *EastEnders*, Arthur Fowler found unemployment impossible to bear, eventually having a breakdown which was “...at least partly a result of his inability to perform his allotted role within the family”.⁷⁷ Similarly, in *Brookside*, Billy Corkhill felt threatened and undermined by both his wife and his son when he was no longer the main breadwinner.⁷⁸ The importance of providing for the family is similarly apparent in Australian soaps through characters such as Doug Willis, Tom Fletcher and Joe Scully. It is less of an issue in US soaps, where fighting off threats to the family business is often the central role of the family patriarch.

The larrikin figure of Australian soaps is largely absent from US and UK soaps. The most similar character type would be Steve Sanders on *Beverly Hills 90210*, however his is a rare character. Generally male characters are either bad or good and while there are shades of grey, they do not tend to take the form of larrikins. A number of male characters in daytime soaps have gone from being bad characters to favourite and much loved characters, with two of the most striking examples both from *Days of Our Lives* being Jack Davenport who raped a character before reforming, and Steve ‘Patch’ Johnson who moved from evil henchman to central romantic figure. Similarly, characters have been known to change from good to bad, with the character of Michael in *Melrose Place*, a mild mannered doctor and loving husband in the first season becoming what has been termed “a real rat-bastard”⁷⁹ for the duration of the series.

⁷⁶ Buckingham *Public Secrets* p112

⁷⁷ Buckingham *Public Secrets* p107

⁷⁸ Geraghty *Women and Soap* p78

⁷⁹ Anthony Rubino Jr *Life Lessons from Melrose Place* Adams Media Corporation: Canada 1996 (no page numbers). The full quote reads “Being a loving husband, hard-working doctor/superintendent, and generally nice guy can turn you into a real rat-bastard in a very short period of time.”

Relationships and sexuality

Sex and romance is far more central to US soaps than to either Australian or UK soaps. As I touched on earlier, the women in Australian soaps are less likely to utilise their sexual power than many of their colleagues in US soaps. Families tend to be less complex in their arrangements, and relationships, particularly between adults, are generally more enduring. In US programs with smaller casts like *Dynasty* or *Melrose Place* it is often the case that almost everyone has been involved with everyone else at some point. While the teenagers of Australian soaps may go out with each other relatively interchangeably, often these relationships do not involve sex and are more fleeting in nature. UK soaps are more like Australian soaps, with relationships enduring for longer periods of time. Of course, as would be clear from earlier chapters, this comparative stability does not mean there is no adultery or intrigue.

Adultery and affairs are a way of life in US soaps, providing a large proportion of the grist for the narrative mill. There is less emphasis on this kind of romantic intrigue in Australian and UK soaps, possibly reflecting the more melodramatic nature US soaps. Peter Brooks points out that term melodrama includes the following connotations:

...the indulgence of strong emotionalism; moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situation, actions; overt villainy, persecution of the good, and final rewards of virtue; inflated and extravagant expression; dark plottings, suspense, breathtaking peripety.⁸⁰

While these elements can be found in a variety of different storylines (and for example are a strong feature in many business related storylines in US soaps) the area in which they can most strongly be displayed is, I would argue, relationships. The construction of many romances in US soaps bears this out. Good women and men are constantly wronged (usually temporarily), moral quandaries arise and no issue seems to raise stronger emotions.

As Buckingham and Geraghty discuss,⁸¹ while British soaps such as *EastEnders* contain elements of melodrama and comedy, generally they are more naturalistic and contain

⁸⁰ Peter Brooks *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* Yale University Press: US 1976 pp11-12

⁸¹ Buckingham *Public Secrets* pp3-6 and Geraghty *Women and Soap* pp31-35

strong realist elements. Thus, while there are romantic intrigues, adultery and betrayal, these elements are less dominating than in the US soaps. *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* aim, I would argue, for the same naturalism of UK soaps, even if their reality is less 'gritty'. For this reason the emphasis on relationships is similarly diluted.

This desire for realism has led British soaps to contain the most examples of gay characters of all the soaps under discussion. Nonetheless, this very quest for realism leads to a problematic presentation of gay characters. As Geraghty points out, like many of the black characters depicted, "[t]heir treatment tended to be exemplary rather than passionate and they represented problems to the audience rather than demanding the viewer's identification."⁸² Colin, a gay character featured on *EastEnders* for a period, while accepted by the community, was clearly not *of* the community as he was a middle class professional person. Geraghty also discusses the character of Gordon Collins in *Brookside* who came out, causing anguish to his father and thus providing the opportunity for Gordon and his lover Chris "...to lecture him (and the audience) about their right to lead their own life as a gay couple without interference or condemnation."⁸³ Interestingly, Colin's partner Barry, decides to "go straight"⁸⁴ when he ends his relationship with Colin.

This idea that gay men are just as likely to take on a female lover suffused the depiction of Steven Carrington in *Dynasty*. During the course of the series, the gay Steven had more female lovers than male. Nonetheless, Blake Carrington was depicted negatively after killing Steven's male partner, although he was quickly rehabilitated after this crime. Conversely, while Matt Fielding in *Melrose Place* did marry a woman, he was never sexually involved with one. In fact, Matt was rarely sexually involved with anyone, despite the rampant promiscuity around him, and when he did get sexually involved, something bad usually happened.

In 1982, Modleski argued that in daytime soaps "[a]n issue like homosexuality, which could explode the family structure rather than temporarily disrupt it, is simply

⁸² Christine Geraghty "Social issues and realist soaps: A study of British soaps in the 1980s/1990s" *To Be Continued: Soap Operas Around the World* ed Robert C Allen, Routledge: Great Britain, 1995 p71

⁸³ Geraghty "Social issues" p73

⁸⁴ Geraghty *Women and Soap* p100

ignored.”⁸⁵ It is likely that a result of the change in the level of general community tolerance toward homosexuality has been the depiction of the occasional homosexual character. Given the number of extant US daytime soaps and the range of their stories, it is nonetheless significant that there have been only one or two gay characters and almost no on-going gay characters. The one example presented by Nochimson is that of Hank Elliot in *As the World Turns*. As Nochimson discusses, the character is used both as a didactic tool to highlight the evils of homophobia, and as the “faithful...sidekick” who saves another character from wrongful conviction. His narrative purpose served, he soon left the series; however, as Nochimson points out, at least he left alive.⁸⁶

Lesbian characters are depicted even less than gay males, although a storyline on *EastEnders* used the device to highlight men’s assumptions about women. When Della arrives in Albert Square there is much discussion of her attractiveness the interest a male character, Steve, shows in her. Like the story of Stefan in *Home & Away* this is a case of mistake sexual identity, however here played for melodramatic effect rather than humour. Della and her partner live for just over a year in an openly lesbian relationship in Albert Square, eventually leaving to live in Spain.

Lifestyles

The geographical and class locations of the differing programs play a strong role in determining the after-hours activities of their characters. In all programs there are regular locations for socialising and entertainment, but it is the nature of these locations which varies significantly.

In *EastEnders* the pub, the Queen Vic, is a central location for celebrations, confrontations and a pint at pretty much any time of the day. The characters of Albert Square drink regularly and constantly, seemingly from the moment the pub opens in the morning. If alcohol is not to their taste, the cafe run by Kath for tea and a ‘fry up’ is the other option. Characters occasionally make their way to other locations, such as the pool hall or a nightclub, however these are generally rare occasions with a specific narrative purpose. *Coronation Street* similarly sees the pub as the central social location.

⁸⁵ Modleski *Loving with a vengeance* p93

⁸⁶ Nochimson *No End to Her* p174-177

In both daytime and primetime US soaps, expensive restaurants and clubs form the basis of their social activities. In daytime soaps where some class differences remain, such as *Days of Our Lives*, there are less glamorous locations, like the Brady's fish place. Nonetheless even the Bradys get to go to the most expensive restaurant in town when celebrating major events.

Both US and UK soaps tend to feature proportionally fewer teenage characters than *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* and subsequently there is less emphasis on sports and other types of recreation. While the residents of Melrose Place endlessly swim in the pool, they rarely seem to engage in other sporting pastimes. Horseriding was favoured by many of the women in *Dynasty*, an activity which served to emphasise the wealth of the Carringtons.

Church is not a strong element of either British or US soaps, except for special occasions like marriages and births. Hospital chapels feature strongly in US soaps as various characters go to pray for the recovery of their loved one, sibling, child, friend or accident victim. The importance of religion was however strongly expressed in one of *Days of Our Lives*' more outlandish plots, that of the satanic possession of Marlena.

A great deal more drinking occurs in US and UK soaps than in Australian ones—in the UK it is beer and in the US, champagne. Even in the choice of drink, the class basis of the soap opera is highlighted. Like in *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* however, teen drinking is not a strong feature. Buckingham points out that the attempt to provide positive teenage characters in *EastEnders* “...runs the risk of appearing implausible, or at least merely bland.”⁸⁷ Thus the majority of teens in all soaps do not drink to excess or take drugs, unless it is for a specific plot purpose.

Thus in *Beverly Hills 90210* virtually every major continuing character has had a substance abuse issue at some time. All these storylines are presented as problems to be solved, and use of any drug (with the occasional exception of alcohol) leads to addiction and disaster. Alcoholism is also a frequently used device in US soaps, with characters,

⁸⁷ Buckingham Public Secrets p114

both teen and adult, constantly facing 'interventions' and encouragement to break their dependency.

Disease and mental illness

The more melodramatic nature of US soaps sees a greater prevalence of disease, pregnancy-related complications and mental illness than tends to occur in British soaps. As most US soaps feature at least one doctor, it is not inconvenient for characters to be frequently hospitalised. The working class folk of British soaps tend to be a far hardier bunch, who are also less likely to go insane.

Compared to the more didactic approach of the Joey storyline on *Home & Away*, mental illness is treated very much in a melodramatic mode in US soaps. It is often a punishment for transgressive characters, particularly women, or an explanation for their behaviour⁸⁸. In *The Young and the Restless*, following an abortion, Ashley Abbot went insane, haunted by the "imagined crying of babies"⁸⁹ and had to be institutionalised.

Kimberley, in *Melrose Place*, is an example of classic melodramatic insanity. Planning to marry Michael with whom she had been conducting an adulterous affair, she is apparently killed in a car accident by the drunken Michael. She later returns to the community, recovered, but with homicidal intentions and hiding a massive head injury scar under her wig. Kimberly's insanity takes many forms, from homicidal plotting to nymphomaniacal seduction, and later her head wound is supplemented by a brain tumour. It is never made clear what is actually wrong with Kimberly, merely that she is 'insane' and subsequently tangling with her is intensely dangerous.

Illness also tends to be milked for its melodramatic effects in US soaps and can be used as a punishment. Deborah Rogers discusses the problematic depiction of AIDS in daytime soaps. Three of the first major AIDS storylines all featured women with no history of drug abuse. In two of these cases, AIDS was contracted through engagement in prostitution and in all cases the characters died.⁹⁰ In contrast, *EastEnders* had a male

⁸⁸ I discuss this notion at more length in my article "Punishing Desire: Soap Opera and Sexually Aggressive Women" *Social Alternatives*, Volume 16 No 1 January 1997 pp14-15.

⁸⁹ Stempel Mumford *Love and Ideology* p105

⁹⁰ Rogers "AIDS spreads" pp57-59

heterosexual character, Mark Fowler, who was diagnosed with HIV and for whom the issue was dealt with on a long term basis.⁹¹ While there have been melodramatic aspects to other AIDS storylines in British soaps, particularly around the anticipation of test results, the Mark Fowler approach attempted to deal with the issue of disease in a more naturalistic manner. As with mental illness, the approach to the issue of HIV in *Home & Away* is primarily didactic. Through the cipher of Miranda, Fisher's nanny's daughter, issues of transmission, the progress of the disease and the associated social prejudice and pressure, are explored. Similarly, when Leah has a needlestick injury, the storyline is used didactically to explore the transmission and prejudice, although there was also melodramatic tension over whether Leah had contracted the disease.

Conclusion

While elements of soap operas remain consistent whatever the nationality, there are clear distinctions between US, UK and Australian soaps. These seem to have two primary bases; the class distinctions and relative class mobility of the characters; and the dominance of melodrama or realism in the narrative form. These two factors impact on most levels of the program, from the level of education held by most of the characters to the depiction of women and sexuality. US soaps tend to emphasise class mobility and wealth, and are generally the most melodramatic of the three. On the other hand, British soaps tend to strive for a more naturalistic approach while concentrating on the travails of working classes and lower middle class characters.

Australian soaps fall somewhere between the two in terms of both class status and mobility, and melodrama versus realism. They are firmly middle class and while characters who begin poor can attain middle class security, few move beyond this point successfully. While eschewing the melodramatic excess of US soaps, Australian soaps venture away from the social realism of UK soaps on a regular basis.

In the next chapter I will explore how the construction of Australian identity contained within *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* relates to the general social, cultural and political discourse of Australianness.

⁹¹ Geraghty "Social issues" p77

CHAPTER 5

CONSTRUCTING AUSTRALIA

In this chapter I bring together the previous chapters, outlining the construction of Australian society which is presented to the viewer by *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*. As a critical reader however it is useful to examine the use and reception of soaps and the impact that any such construction of Australia might have on perceptions of Australian society and identity.

These are areas which are significantly contested theoretically and in broader social commentary. Television had become a powerful area of debate by the end of the 20th century and is likely to remain so while it is still the most important source of entertainment and information across the world.

Construction and reception of soaps

Soap opera is undoubtedly a “commodity art form”⁹². As Robert C Allen discusses, the origins of radio soap, from which television soaps eventually evolved, were as “merchandising vehicles” for food companies and soap makers.⁹³ Even in 1985, when Allen published *Speaking of Soap Operas*, Proctor and Gamble still owned six television soap operas—the only regularly scheduled US programs still produced by their sponsors.⁹⁴ Most succinctly, Allen states “[t]he soap opera is and always has been a narrative text in service of an economic imperative...”⁹⁵

In Australia, soaps like *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* serve several important roles for the television stations which purchase them. Primarily they are a method of gaining viewers, allowing television stations to sell advertising space. These soaps attract a younger demographic in the mid-evening period and provide a reliable method of drawing in an audience for evening programs. Secondly, they are a relatively cheap source of drama which help the networks fill their Australian drama content requirements under the Australian Broadcasting Authority’s Australian Content

⁹² Dennis Porter uses this term in the title of his article “Soap Time: Thoughts on a Commodity Art Form” *College English* 38 1977 pp278-788

⁹³ Robert C Allen *Speaking of Soap Operas* pp101-117

⁹⁴ Robert C Allen *Speaking of Soap Operas* p127

⁹⁵ Robert C Allen *Speaking of Soap Operas* p100

Standard.⁹⁶ Serial drama which is produced on video tape with relatively low production values on a fast turn-around, may not rate as highly as more expensive programs such as *Water Rats*, however, in terms of dollar-value per rating point it is often more attractive. The efficiency of Australian production of this sort is demonstrated by the fact that not only has the Grundy Organization sold its programs consistently overseas, it has also been successful in selling its production techniques and management system in European markets.⁹⁷

This ability to sell programs overseas is another factor which ensures the attractiveness of soaps to Australian television networks. The Australian model of financing television programs has changed significantly over the past 30 years, when licence fees paid by the stations would generally cover the entire costs of production of Australian programs. Currently Australian free-to-air license fees tend not to cover more than 60-70% of the costs of drama production. Rather than purely licensing programs from independent producers, television networks now also characterise a component of their financial input as investment which they then generally recoup on a preferential basis, that is, before the producer begins to recoup costs. Subsequently, in order to make a profit from their programs, independent producers need to be able to sell them internationally. Similarly, given their ability to earn additional cash from international program sales, television networks tend to prefer to continue to licence programs which are successful internationally, often regardless of their ratings in Australia. A program, such as *State Coroner*, for example, which received solid, if not spectacular, ratings in Australia, was cancelled by Ten when it failed to make significant sales overseas.⁹⁸

Neighbours and *Home & Away* are very successful in this respect. A significant proportion of the costs of production for *Neighbours* comes from licence sales to the BBC alone. In 1996, *Neighbours* was sold to 49 countries and was watched by at least

⁹⁶ "Australian Content Standard" *Australian Broadcasting Authority website*

http://www.aba.gov.au/what/program/oztv_standard99.htm 5/3/01. *Neighbours* has played an important role for 10 in reaching its drama quota. For example, in 1997, *Neighbours* provided 112.5 points out of the required 225, significantly more than any other program. (From Australian Broadcasting Authority *Australian content and Children's programs on commercial TV in 1997* ABA: Australia 1998 p3).

⁹⁷ David O'Reilly "Grundy's Big Picture" *The Bulletin*, Vol 116, No 6029, July 16 1996 pp36-37

⁹⁸ Much of the information in this paragraph comes from discussions I held with independent producers in my position as Policy Manager for the Screen Producers' Association of Australia. Many of these issues were raised during the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Broadcasting. See for example submissions and evidence given by the Screen Producers' Association, the Media Arts and Entertainment Alliance and the Australian Film Commission.

80 million viewers worldwide.⁹⁹ The combination of international success and Ten's need to fill its Australian Content quota has seen *Neighbours* survive significant drops in ratings. Similarly, following a recent deal with Channel 5 in Britain, *Home & Away*'s ongoing survival appears to be assured. In this deal, Channel 5 made an open ended commitment to buy the series for the rest of its life. Channel 5, a relative newcomer to the British television market, struggling to gain ratings, used this commitment to poach *Home & Away* from ITV where it attracted more than six million viewers a day.¹⁰⁰

The commodity nature of soap opera clearly impacts upon creative decisions and production methods. Nochimson, Allen and Gripsrud¹⁰¹ all examine in some detail production methods in American soaps, particularly the approach to script writing, while Tulloch and Moran closely detail the production approach of *A Country Practice*, although they take the perspective that *A Country Practice* is more than a standard soap.¹⁰² Beyond noting that there remains a strong emphasis on issues such as time and cost in the production of Australian soaps, it is outside the scope of this thesis to examine in depth the impact that this has on production processes generally. More important is the impact of commodification on content.

As a commodity, soap opera delivers viewers to the networks which are then sold to advertisers as advertising 'eyeballs'. Subsequently, in order to maintain its value as a commodity, the soap opera must continue to attract viewers. To do this, program producers must ensure that their program is attractive to viewers.

⁹⁹ Tom Gilling "Secrets of our soapie success" p38

¹⁰⁰ "Home away from home" *Sydney Morning Herald Online*

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/0003/24/features/features14.html> 24 March 2000 pp1-2

¹⁰¹ Nochimson *No End to Her* pp11-20, Gripsrud *The Dynasty Years* pp21-59 and Allen *Speaking of Soaps* pp46-60

¹⁰² John Tulloch and Albert Moran *A Country Practice: Quality Soap* Currency Press: Australia 1986 pp23-193 Tulloch and Moran record the production process for *A Country Practice* in significant detail. In so doing they attempt to argue that *A Country Practice* is 'better' than many of its contemporaneous soaps, particularly *Sons & Daughters* particularly due to the greater emphasis placed on craft by the producers. To my mind, their descriptions clearly demonstrate the commodity nature of *A Country Practice* particularly with discussions about the costs of extras, the impact of the costs of outdoor filming and the cutting of several of the directors more "arty" approaches to shot composition and cutting. In fact, the discussion by Tulloch and Moran of the need of directors to comply with *A Country Practice* "style" in order to be employed again (p105) reflects the notion of the need for "authorial anonymity" as discussed by Robert C Allen.

While Glaessner argues that soap inevitably "...commands strong audience loyalty,"¹⁰³ in order to develop and maintain that loyalty it is still important to ensure that the majority of viewers are not offended by what they see on a soap. Allen discusses the "normative perspective" of soap operas, which is centred on "...those values, attitudes, and behaviours believed by soap opera producers to be most dearly held by the 'average' viewer."¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Modleski argues that "...only those issues which can be tolerated and ultimately pardoned" tend to be dealt with by soaps, explaining their avoidance of issues such as homosexuality.¹⁰⁵ As was mentioned briefly in the last chapter, strong criticism by viewers of a particular storyline, such as that of the black character, Marcus Hunter on *Days of Our Lives*, can alter the storyline, returning it to the viewer's normative comfort zone.¹⁰⁶

An important aspect of viewer pleasure in soaps is their familiarity. John Holmes, the original producer of *Home & Away*, argues that regular viewers become emotionally involved with characters and therefore need to see characters doing things which are believable for that character. In the same article, Stanley Walsh, long time Executive Producer of *Neighbours*, says that while people want something different, they do not want anything too different: "[t]hose who watched it last week want to watch the same thing this week."¹⁰⁷ Gripsrud discusses repetition and familiarity in some depth, though his perspective is slightly different. Gripsrud points out that *Dynasty* contains a "...high degree of narrative repetition of a few basic plots" and comforts the viewer by demonstrating that "...endings do not really matter because everything remains basically the same anyway." Gripsrud goes on to argue that criticism of soaps in this area has failed because it "...provides a classic ideological cover-up for cultural production which...openly serves the at least slightly dubious main function of producing happy, obedient consumers."¹⁰⁸ While I will discuss the issue of ideology shortly, I would argue that he has missed the point of soaps if he believes that they exist for any reason other than to deliver "happy" consumers to television networks. In achieving this, the repetitious nature of soap opera storylines and ideas, and the

¹⁰³ Glaessner "Gendered Fictions" 1990 p117

¹⁰⁴ Robert C Allen *Speaking of Soap Operas* p 173

¹⁰⁵ Tania Modleski *Loving with a Vengeance* p93

¹⁰⁶ Martha Nochimson *No End to Her* p173

¹⁰⁷ quoted in Tom Gilling "Secrets of our soapie success" p38

¹⁰⁸ Gripsrud *The Dynasty Years* pp178-179

comfortable normative space into which soap opera subsequently takes the viewer are the hallmarks of a successful commodity.

If soap opera aims to present viewers with programs which deliver familiar and repetitive plots, located in a friendly normative space, the question of what the viewer receives presents itself. There has been a lot written about audience reception of television in general, and on soap operas in particular. Some of this writing has been from a purely theoretical viewpoint, while others studying soaps have used audience/reception studies in combination with theoretical approaches.¹⁰⁹ Most of the empirical work done can only be considered from a qualitative point of view due to either its limitations in sample size or its methodology. Nonetheless, this kind of work does highlight some of the contradictions of soap opera reception.

An interesting place to commence an examination of the way television, as exemplified by soap opera, is received by an audience is to look at the work of Adorno and Horkheimer and, in particular, their *essay The Culture Industry: enlightenment as mass deception*. In this essay, written before television began in earnest, Adorno and Horkheimer argues that modern culture "...now impresses the same stamp on everything."¹¹⁰ In effect, they have taken the idea that familiarity and repetition are often used in popular culture, to its extreme, arguing that there is no originality in popular culture, that it is in no way individual and that it is all in the service of the dominant ideology of capitalism. While Adorno and Horkheimer do make some interesting and useful points amongst the relatively unmitigated bile of their essay, these would carry more credibility if their own prejudices were not so obviously on display. To them, Tolstoy is "...garbled in a film script", jazz musicians are "supercilious" and popular culture is "rubbish" and "vulgar". Adorno and Horkheimer long for the days of Beethoven, Mozart and Picasso and deplore anything which appears on film or popular radio.

¹⁰⁹ For example Blumenthal in Women and Soap utilises surveys of soap viewers Ian Ang in Watching Dallas: Soap opera and the melodramatic imagination trans Della Couling, Methuen: US 1985 utilised written responses from *Dallas* viewers.

¹¹⁰ TW Adorno and M Horkheimer "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as mass deception" Mass Communication and Society eds James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woollacott. Edward Arnold: Great Britain 1977 p349

A more pointed theoretical criticism of Adorno and Horkheimer is the role which they assign the consumer of popular culture. To them the viewer is entirely passive and without agency, whose love for the popular culture enslaves her more effectively than censorship.¹¹¹ Adorno and Horkheimer see no value in the pleasure derived from popular culture by people, completely dismissing it with the argument that amusement is a "...prolongation of work."¹¹² While they may be right in arguing that mass culture, in general, has renounced its role as art and embraced its nature as a commodity¹¹³, they do not leave any space for artistic endeavour in mass or popular culture or any role for the individual consumer, except as a passive receiver of an ideological message.

Most writers on popular culture in general, and television specifically, would take issue to some extent with the extreme position taken by Adorno and Horkheimer. Televisual texts are rarely that straightforward and viewers are rarely that pliant. As briefly mentioned in the previous chapters, much has been written about women and soap opera and a lot of that has focussed on the way women interpret soap opera. Ien Ang, for example, refers to Adorno and Horkheimer's disavowal of pleasure, in her discussion of Dutch women's enjoyment of *Dallas*¹¹⁴. She points out that:

[t]he way in which a cultural product is consumed can...not be directly deduced from the way in which it is produced; it is also dependent on all sorts of socio-cultural and psychological conditions.¹¹⁵

To Ang, therefore, the pleasure derived from *Dallas* is critical in understanding the way viewers read the text.

The question of how much latitude a viewer has in the interpretation of a text is a significant one. The counter argument to that put forward by Adorno and Horkheimer, who champion the purely passive viewer, is that the consumer plays a significant role in the interpretation of the meaning of a televisual text. Jeanine Basinger talks about the way that, paradoxically, even in attempting to promote a dominant ideology, the women's film of the 1940s and 50s "...released [women] into a dream of potency and freedom." This occurred because, as Hollywood films:

¹¹¹ Adorno and Horkheimer "The Culture Industry" p359

¹¹² Adorno and Horkheimer "The Culture Industry" p361

¹¹³ Adorno and Horkheimer "The Culture Industry" p376

¹¹⁴ Ien Ang *Watching Dallas* pp17-18

¹¹⁵ Ang *Watching Dallas* p18

...repressed women and sought to teach them what they ought to do...in order to achieve this, the movies first had to bring to life the opposite of their own morality. To convince women that marriage and motherhood were the right path, movies had to show women making the mistake of doing something else. By making the Other live on the screen, movies made it real. By making it real they made it desirable. By making it desirable, they made it possible.¹¹⁶

Basinger goes on to discuss how these films could be read subversively when women looked at the whole of the film, rather than merely its conclusion. In an unending narrative, such as that presented by soap opera, this ability to subvert the message is even stronger. I previously explored this subject in *Embracing the Bitch*¹¹⁷ in which I contended that the constantly deferred closure of soap allowed women the opportunity to construct their own interpretations of the feminine role presented.

Stuart Hall critiques the idea that mass communication provides a linear mode of interpretation by audiences. He argues that before an (ideological) message can be “put to use” it must be meaningfully decoded by the viewer. He notes that “...codes of encoding and decoding may not be perfectly symmetrical” leading to differing interpretations of a televisual sign.¹¹⁸ Umberto Eco discusses the way that the signifying chain produces texts which

...carry with them the recollection of the intertextuality which nourishes them. Texts generate, or are capable of generating, multiple (and ultimately infinite) readings and interpretations.”¹¹⁹

Thus the way in which a text, such as a soap opera, is interpreted is dependent upon the context in which it is read. Hall argues, however, that while television programs cannot prescribe or guarantee the acceptance of their preferred meaning, “...encoding will have the effect of constructing some of the limits and parameters within which decodings will

¹¹⁶ Jeanine Basinger *A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930-1960* Chatto & Windus: UK 1994 p6

¹¹⁷ Melissa McEwen “Embracing the Bitch: Alternative Readings of Soap Opera” paper given at Feminism in Transit 3 conference, Australian National University, Canberra, July 1996 (unpublished).

¹¹⁸ Stuart Hall “Encoding/decoding” *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79* eds Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis. Hutchison: Great Britain 1980 pp130-131

¹¹⁹ Umberto Eco *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* Macmillan Press: Hong Kong 1984 p24

operate.”¹²⁰ If this was not so, then it would be impossible for effective communication to occur at all.

The interpretation of a televisual text is just that, an interpretation. The way one viewer receives a television program is different from the way another might, although a “...sufficiently shared understanding of texts”¹²¹ generally remains. The viewer is not passive, nor is she or he necessarily free to completely decide the meaning of the text; its interpretation depends on the cultural and political context which the viewer uses to make sense of it. This can still lead to what could be considered highly aberrant readings of television programs. Queer theory, in particular, examines the way in which readings using a homosexual orientation can change perspectives on programs, while fan fiction about programs like *Star Trek* often demonstrates how subversively viewers can interpret the televisual sign.¹²²

Impact of television

An important aspect of the debate over viewer reception of television is concern about television’s influence. Both the political left and right continue to express alarm over the power of television; the left concerned, while less dramatically than Adorno and Horkheimer, over television’s power to reinforce the status quo, while the right has seen television as a cause for moral alarm. Another issue for Australians is the level of Americanisation to which our culture may be subjected, not only through television, but popular culture in general.

For a long time Australian governments has recognised that television must have the capability to influence, or at least that a large section of the population believe in television’s power to do so, given the level of regulation which surrounds commercial

¹²⁰ Stuart Hall “Encoding/decoding” p135

¹²¹ Stuart Cunningham and Toby Miller Contemporary Australian Television UNSW Press: Australia 1994 p6

¹²² There is a vast amount of fan fiction on the internet. The most interesting and deviant interpretations occur in slash fiction, which often involves characters in strange sexual (usually homosexual) encounters. An example of a story which brings together Dr Spock and Data in such a way is at <http://www.fanfiction.net/sections/tvshows/index.fic?action=story—read&storyid=190805>. A discussion of slash fan fiction is included in the article “Love Knows No Gender: Introduction to Yadi – What, Who and Why” by kksatnip kat at <http://www.fanfiction.net/index.fic?action=column—read&columnEntryID=360> (February 26, 2001). Daytime soap operas like *Days of Our Lives* and *The Guiding Light* also attract fan fiction writers.

television in Australia. While I do not wish to outline the history of content regulation here, I think it is important to point out that regulation covers at least some of the issues raised above: sex and violence and Americanisation. Commercial television channels are subject to a Code of Practice relating to the acceptability of content. This Code of Practice covers issues such as violence, nudity and language, and hours in which certain kinds of content are acceptable.

The Australian Content Standard, to which I referred earlier, serves a two-fold purpose for the Government. Firstly it acts as an industry support mechanism, ensuring that commercial networks use the Australian industry to produce a significant level of its programming, rather than purchasing it internationally. Its second, and generally more important role, is to ensure that Australians are able to see themselves on television. In addition to mandating an overall level of Australian content (55% of programming between 6am and midnight), the Australian Content Standard contains specific subquotas for documentaries and drama. A recent Senate inquiry reiterated the importance of the Australian Content standard, noting the influential nature of television, writing:

...television is a most important medium for reflecting the tastes, concerns and aspirations of a society and as such, it is the main means of transmitting that society's culture through the 'stories' portrayed through the medium.¹²³

Also significant to the question of influence is that soaps have been consistently viewed by Government and interest groups as means of transmitting their own messages. In their discussion of *A Country Practice*, Tulloch and Moran detail a number of instances in which the Australian Medical Association and other bodies contacted *A Country Practice* producers directly to request that they incorporate specific issues in a program.¹²⁴ They also argue that "...[i]n an important sense the social knowledge that fans...acquire through a show like *ACP* is a displacement of knowledge about how their actual society works."¹²⁵ More recently, there was some political controversy when it was revealed that the Government intended to "negotiate with television producers" to use *Neighbours* or *Home & Away* to "counter bad publicity" about the Government's

¹²³ Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Legislation Committee Australian Content Standard for Television and Paragraph 160(d) of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* Australian Senate: Australia 17 February 1999 p1

¹²⁴ Tulloch and Moran *A Country Practice* p66

¹²⁵ Tulloch and Moran *A Country Practice* p11

Common Youth Allowance.¹²⁶ In the end this never eventuated, possibly due to the negative publicity, nonetheless the fact that it had been seriously considered demonstrates the importance placed on the influence of television.

The concerns that television is a medium which profoundly supports the status quo, in effect, a hegemonic force, is, naturally, less likely to be addressed through Government regulation. Hegemony, a concept formulated by Antonio Gramsci which built upon Marx's theories of ideology, is perhaps best summed up by Boggs:

...the permeation throughout civil society—including a whole range of structures and activities like trade unions, schools the churches, and the family—of an entire system of values attitudes, beliefs, morality, etc that is in one way or another supportive of the established order and the class interests that dominate it.¹²⁷

If we return to my earlier discussion of soap opera as a commodity, and Modleski and Allen's points regarding the content of soaps, we can see that they can be seen as a hegemonic force. In using normative values which are generally acceptable to the viewing public, soaps reinforce a system of beliefs which is supportive of the established order.

Nonetheless, the issue of television's influence is not as simple as that. From one perspective, Neil Postman argues that "[t]he best things on television *are* its junk, and no one and nothing is seriously threatened by it."¹²⁸ To Postman, "junk television", which could potentially include soap opera, is not likely to be taken seriously and therefore unlikely to provide a significant influence upon anyone. Postman's concerns about television relate more to its role when its "aspirations are high" and it is used as a purveyor of "important cultural conversations."¹²⁹ I think that Postman misses the point of the hegemony in this respect. All television contains the ability to act as hegemonic force, not just those concerned with intellectual debate. To Gramsci, "junk" television would be as significant a proponent of hegemonic ideas as more ambitious

¹²⁶ Tom Allard "Plan to use TV soaps to sell youth allowance" *Sydney Morning Herald* 8 April 1998 p2

¹²⁷ Carl Boggs Gramsci's Marxism Pluto Press: Great Britain 1986 p39 Gramsci himself was never so good as to provide a straightforward definition of hegemony, or pretty much anything else. As Hoare and Nowell Smith point out in their Preface to Selections from the Prison Notebooks (Lawrence and Wishart: Great Britain 1971 pp x-xi) Gramsci's prison writings were "fragmentary" and often carefully disguised to avoid confiscation by prison censors.

¹²⁸ Neil Postman Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business Elizabeth Sifton Books - Viking: US 1985 p16

¹²⁹ Neil Postman Amusing Ourselves to Death p16

television—probably a more effective force as it is likely that more people would watch “junk”.

Kellner, who also takes issue with the approach of Adorno and Horkheimer, argues that:

...television—far from being the monolithic voice of a liberal or conservative ideology—is a highly conflicted mass medium in which competing economic, political, social, and cultural forces intersect.¹³⁰

While Kellner acknowledges that “...the conflicts take place within well defined limits” and that extreme radicalism is generally “rigorously excluded”¹³¹, he argues that television reflects the divisions of society. Kellner does accept there is a hegemonic aspect to television, but underlines its complexity:

Television...mobilizes images, forms, style, and ideas to present ideological positions. It draws on and processes social experience, uses familiar generic codes and forms, and employs rhetorical and persuasive devices to attempt to induce consent to certain positions and practices. Yet this process of ideological production and transmission is not a one-dimensional process of indoctrination, but, rather, is an active process of negotiation that can be resisted or transformed by audiences according to their own ends and interests.¹³²

This approach synthesises the idea of hegemony with the notions of reception discussed earlier. Most television programs attempt to generate a hegemonic position because this is likely to provide the program with its greatest value as a commodity. The viewer then interprets the program using their “encyclopedia”¹³³ of knowledge which is bounded partly by the program itself and partly by their previous encounters with the world. Thus, while the hegemonic nature of television cannot be denied, it should be recognised that it is not uncontested, and that preferred textual readings are not meekly accepted by the viewer.

John Fiske takes that argument one step further, asserting that television can be part of the movement of social change. He cites, in particular *Charlie's Angels* as a program which was part of “the changing of status of women in society”, going on to state that it “...could not have been popular in a period when women were firmly confined to

¹³⁰ Douglas Kellner *Television and the Crisis of Democracy* Westview Press: US 1990 p14

¹³¹ Douglas Kellner *Television* p14

¹³² Douglas Kellner *Television* pp18-19

¹³³ Umberto Eco *Semiotics* pp46-84 Eco uses this term to refer to the knowledge and systems of organisation which are used to understand signs and thus texts

domestic and traditional female roles".¹³⁴ Using the model of television viewing discussed above (and putting aside arguments about the anti-feminist aspects of a program which involved women, controlled by an unseen male, carrying out detective work while dressed in the skimpiest of outfits), Fiske's second statement to an extent undermines his first. A program like *Charlie's Angels* was reflecting a change in normative values that pictured women in a more active role. Had this change not already begun to occur, the program would not have fulfilled its role as a commodity. Thus while *Charlie's Angels* was not necessarily anti-progressive or reflecting the ideas of a more conservative era, it was not made until its values would not offend the majority of its intended viewers. While television programs are not always conservative, and may reflect social changes as they take place, their role as a commodity ensures that they are rarely, if ever, at the vanguard of social change.

Hyperreal Australia

What image of Australian society do *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* create? And to what extent does this image of Australia reflect current political and social discourse about Australia?

So far I have used Allen's quote about the inclusion in soaps of "...values held dear" without any critical examination of this notion. For a start, the question must be raised as to how producers understand what these normative values are. In my previous chapter I discussed the national myths which help shape soap operas. In order to reflect a national myth, that myth must come from somewhere. I do not necessarily wish to question the 'reality' of the picture of Australian identity which is created by Australian soaps, rather its reflection of current political and social discourses and the way that these have changed in the past decade.

As the world is currently too big for one individual to experience, our ideas about the world must come from somewhere other than merely personal experience. The media in its broadest sense, coupled with our educational system, is largely responsible for our understanding of the world. Current social, political and cultural discourses are mediated through the television, radio and print media, while our own experiences help

¹³⁴ John Fiske Television Culture p45

to determine our particular interpretations of the information provided. In this way, what is achieved, according to Baudrillard, is the “...substituting signs of the real for the real itself.”¹³⁵ This simulation leads to “...the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.”¹³⁶ It would be extreme of me to argue that the current discourse about Australian society is without an origin in the real, nonetheless it should be recognised that much which is seen in the media is a reflection of other media, without recourse to anything beyond the media text. A crude example of this is the increasing tendency of journalists to interview other journalists or media analysts on topics ranging across the political, cultural and social spheres.

Thus as it is difficult to know the ‘real’ of Australian society, I will be relying on media artifacts and political discourse in my examination of the construction of Australian identity contained within *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*.

As discussed in previous chapters, *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* are overwhelmingly middle class and suburban, with characters living a comfortable and relatively safe existence in nice houses with gardens. This aspect of Australian soaps is clearly different from US or British soaps and can be seen as a particularly Australian construction. This configuration of Australian society has not changed between the early episodes I discussed and the later ones—in *Neighbours* the same houses and street are the locale of the story and in *Home & Away*, although a more moveable community, some of the original homes remain.

It would not be wrong to argue that the idea of Australia which has dominated Australian discourses over the past decade has been about a suburban middle class society. When John Howard made his famous remarks about Australia being “relaxed and comfortable” he was reflecting this idea which has been a strong part of Australian popular culture over the last few years. Most Australian television drama has reflected this—the doctors, nurses and policemen of genre drama have lived comfortable lives outside their workplaces, dealing generally with middle class people. Even in *Wildside*, which dealt more consistently with characters from the under-classes, the principal

¹³⁵ Jean Baudrillard “Simulacra and Simulations” *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings* ed Mark Poster. Polity Press: Great Britain 1990 p167

¹³⁶ Baudrillard “Simulacra” p166

characters lived middle class lives in nice apartments, except when disrupted by divorce or disaster.

A survey of “Middle Australians” revealed that, when asked what gave them most satisfaction in life, “[f]riendships, tension-free leisure, family, harmony, interesting work, good health and social peace” were rated above income.¹³⁷ This is an idea which is strongly evident in both *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*, where wealth is often negatively viewed and the wealthy are considered threatening to the community. Friendships and family harmony, in particular, are stressed in these programs, although maintaining a functioning and coherent community is almost more important. For example, when, in *Neighbours*, conflict erupted between Joe Scully and Karl Kennedy over the cricket team, the entire community pressured them to sort the problem out, not because of the importance of their personal relationship, but in order to return harmony to the community.

Writing for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Craig McGregor argues that class remains a significant issue and that, despite Australia’s apparent social mobility, only a “minority of people...manage to become class-jumpers”¹³⁸ This is reflected in *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* where it is better, and indeed safer, to remain within one’s class. When Martin Dibble in *Home & Away*, for example, attempted to become a class-jumper he ended up bankrupt, and when Lucy Robinson tried she ended up drug-addicted and ripped off by her agent. McGregor also refers to the “scorn” which ordinary Australians feel for “Toorak and North Shore toffs” and those who are “up themselves”¹³⁹. This kind of scorn is reflected in both the depiction of rich characters, such as Diana Fletcher in *Home & Away*, and the attitudes to them and their accoutrements, such as private schooling, held by the other characters of Summer Bay and Erinsborough.

It should be noted that the two Australian soaps, *Chances* and *Pacific Drive*, which tried to focus on the rich, were not highly successful. *Chances*, which screened in 1991 and

¹³⁷ Craig McGregor “Stuck in the Middle” *Sydney Morning Herald* 22 July 1997 p10. This was a report on a presentation given by Professor Michael Pusey of the University of New South Wales on research he was undertaking into “Middle Australia” defined as people living in areas with average household incomes of between \$30,640 and \$48,325 pa.

¹³⁸ Craig McGregor “Class Ceiling” *Sydney Morning Herald* 28 April 1997 p8

¹³⁹ McGregor “Class Ceiling” p8

1992 "...signal[ed] a qualitative departure from the familiar world of soap opera"¹⁴⁰. Ien Ang and Jon Stratton explore the differences between *Chances* and more traditional Australian soaps. These differences include the wealth of the characters, the significantly more melodramatic nature of the program marked by its radical excess and its refusal to perpetuate the 'order' of the community. The moral values expressed by *Chances* were very different from those within *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*. By the end of its run, *Chances* was being screened at 11.30pm, further marking its difference from the early evening time slots of most Australian soaps¹⁴¹. Similarly, *Pacific Drive* spent much of its on-air existence in the 11.00pm or 11.30pm timeslot. Set on the Gold Coast, *Pacific Drive* focussed on the rich and the devious. It featured male prostitutes, HIV positive characters, undercover policemen and lesbians. Like *Chances*, *Pacific Drive* had a more melodramatic framework, and again, did not achieve significant ratings success and was eventually dropped from Nine's schedule.

Another issue that was revealed in the survey of middle Australians was that there was profound unease about the social and economic change that had been taking place over the past 15 years.¹⁴² This is largely not depicted in *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*. As Adorno and Horkheimer argue, in popular culture socially perpetuated distress tends to be dealt with, and generally solved, on a one-to-one basis¹⁴³. From my observation of *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* this is usually the case. While characters such as Joe Scully and Doug Willis on *Neighbours* or Tom Fletcher on *Home & Away* may suffer financial difficulties or unemployment (one of the issues of unease revealed by the survey), these events tend to occur on an individual basis and as problems to be solved by the individual. There is almost no political debate on issues—the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax, for example, completely passed by the largely small business owning inhabitants of Summer Bay. There is some social activism by individuals, such as the construction of the Drop-In Centre by the high school students in *Home & Away* but again this occurs primarily in response to an isolated incident (the drowning of a street kid in a culvert) and is considered to have solved the problem. The wider social issue of homelessness barely gets a mention.

¹⁴⁰ Ang and Stratton "The End of Civilization" p122

¹⁴¹ Ang and Stratton "The End of Civilization" pp122-144

¹⁴² McGregor "Stuck in the Middle" p10

¹⁴³ Adorno and Horkheimer "The Culture Industry" p371

Another consistency between the two programs, and between the earlier and later episodes, is the preponderance towards small business ownership. At the end of the 1980s, the era of *Dynasty* and *Dallas*, Bond and Skase, a major corporation did feature in *Neighbours*, the Daniels Corporation. Involvement with this entity however ceased by the mid 1990s.

The discourse surrounding small businesses has been strong since the Howard Government came to power in 1996, promising to cut their red tape. A House of Representatives report into “fair trading” and small business, states

[a]s Australia’s largest employment sector and the main source of employment growth in recent years, the economic health of the small business sector is critical to the well being of the Australian economy.¹⁴⁴

Much of opposition to the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax, and subsequent debate about its impact, has centred around the complexity and hardship that it creates for small businesses. Small business has also proved attractive to many Australians. A 1996 report on small business ownership indicated that 1.25 million Australians ran small businesses.¹⁴⁵ While this number is large, it would nonetheless be fair to consider that small business ownership remains as over-represented in Australian soaps as it often is in political discourse.

Professional people, on the other hand, tend not to be the subject of political debate, except at times to be disparaged as elites. Here differences in representation and the class of US soaps and Australian soaps is marked. Unlike US soaps, for example, *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* rarely feature lawyers, except when required by the plot or as ‘bad’ characters. Australia does not have a strong tradition of courtroom based drama, a popular US form. Australian dramas that have featured courtrooms have, interestingly, been focussed on the judge rather than the lawyers, for example *Rafferty’s Rules*, *Seachange* and *State Coroner*. On the other hand, television programs generally are awash with doctors and nurses, characters who often have a significant narrative role. Over the past decade Australian television has featured its own medical dramas, for example *All Saints* and *Medivac* (both of which are set in Catholic-run hospitals and

¹⁴⁴ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology Finding a balance: towards fair trading in Australia House of Representatives: Australia May 1997 p2

¹⁴⁵ Owen Brown “Be the boss—go for broke” *Daily Telegraph*, 1 May 1996 p20

feature nuns). The hospital drama is also a staple of US programming while the UK also produces a quantity of medically based series. It is therefore not surprising that doctors and nurses feature as strongly in *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* as they do in US and UK soaps.

Other types of professionals are rarely featured. It is unusual for both popular discourse and soap operas to feature bureaucrats (except pejoratively), accountants or people who work for large corporations. The only other professionals who feature strongly in *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* are teachers, a profession largely absent from US or UK soaps. Like nurses, teachers in Australia are not highly paid, as is highlighted by the teacher's strikes and pay disputes which are often in the news, and thus more likely to live in the middle class milieu of Ramsey Street or Summer Bay.

The approach to education in *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* is very similar. In early episodes very few characters attend university, and those that do generally leave the series to do so. The one exception in early *Neighbours* was Mike who was studying to be a teacher, at a College of Advanced Education. By 2000, a significant proportion of school leavers attend university and there has been a strong acceptance of post-secondary studies. This change mirrors the 'Dawkins expansions' whereby Institutes of Technology and Colleges of Advanced Education were combined into universities in 1990. Since that time, the massive expansion of university places, initially funded by the introduction of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme and fuelled by the creation of these new universities has changed community discourse around higher education. It is now viewed as more likely and desirable for young people to attend university, and a university degree is seen as important in gaining employment.

At school, in both eras, characters resolutely attend the local public high school, with little discussion about or aspirations toward private school education. In the earlier episodes, both Lucy (*Neighbours*) and Roo (*Home & Away*) are sent to private schools. This quickly turns into a disaster for Roo who returns to Summer Bay pregnant and more manipulative than ever. Lucy, who first returns a punk, is gradually alienated from the rest of Ramsey Street, later taking up modelling, aiming to attain the wealth of her classmates. This focus on public education has a straightforward narrative purpose—featuring only one school is much simpler than trying to depict several, and much of the

teen-based narrative occurs in and around school, however it also reflects the overall class designation of the characters within the programs. Private schooling in popular discourse has continued to appear to be out of the reach of many middle class families, the preserve of the much disparaged “toffs”. News reports tend to focus on the costs of private schooling without any real focus on potential benefits. This is despite actual rises in the level of private schooling.¹⁴⁶

The ethnic diversity of Australian television drama has improved over the last decade. A study undertaken on Australian television drama in 1999 showed that between 1992 (the last survey) and 1999 there had been increases in the numbers of actors in on-going roles from a non-English speaking background born outside Australia (2%-3%) and indigenous actors (0%-3%). A further 17% of actors were from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), born in Australia. In this area, the proportion of actors was greater than the general population (10%), although NESB actors born outside Australia were under-represented compared to the general population(14%).¹⁴⁷ The report also highlights some of the problems in the representation of characters from diverse ethnic backgrounds. As it argues:

On the one hand is the total lack of reference to the sustaining actors ethnicity or cultural background....The ethnicity of these actors was never referred to in the analysis period. However, when it comes to guest roles and guest cast, one finds that stories are more likely to be ethnically based.¹⁴⁸

While the report goes on to point out that it does not necessarily mean this observation as a criticism, it does raise some interesting questions. Given the focus on community of programs like *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* the creation of a distinct focus on characters with differing ethnicity could create tension or problems within that community. *EastEnders* has faced the same problem, as David Buckingham points out “...[w]hile the ethnicity of the white characters remains unproblematic, that of the black characters is rarely emphasised.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Gerard Noonan “Private schools attract 31% of enrolments” *Sydney Morning Herald Online* <http://www.smh.com.au/news/0102/13/national/national11.html> 13/02/01 p1

¹⁴⁷ Harvey May, Terry Flew and Christina Spurgeon Report on Casting in Australian Commercial Television Drama Centre for Media Policy and Practice, Queensland University of Technology: Australia 2000 pv

¹⁴⁸ May, Flew, Spurgeon Report on Casting p12

¹⁴⁹ Buckingham Public Secrets p103

In the periods of under discussion, *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* use different strategies to integrate the specifically ethnic on-going characters they feature. Tony Romeo in *Neighbours* in 1987 is in many ways a crudely drawn stereotype, resisting his mother's attempts to marry him off, while constructed as vain and willing to refer to the skill of Italian lovers. His mother, when she comes to town, is an even more overdrawn stereotype. Once free of his mother, Tony's ethnicity disappears, except at the most superficial level, to be replaced by a focus on his masculinity—his inability to cook and his chauvinist attitudes. Leah Poulos, featured in *Home & Away* in 2000, is less stereotyped, although she retains aspects of her heritage with respect to her cooking and her unwillingness to have sex before she is married. Her family is more stereotyped with her father who comes to town to convince her to break up with Vinnie and get married to her former fiancée. The father does, however come to accept Vinnie when he realises how he feels about Leah. In the portrayal of Leah her ethnicity remains a feature—she cooks Greek food for the Diner and speaks Greek to her ex fiancée, however she remains an integrated member of the community. In the characterisation of Leah, *Home & Away* achieves a degree of balance in its depiction of ethnicity. McKee highlights this as a goal for the depiction of Aboriginality, achievable in a serial drama due to its on-going narrative: “..to [both] address [ethnicity] as a narrative issue, and to accept it as a narrative given.”¹⁵⁰

Home & Away has featured more ethnic characters and actors than *Neighbours*, although both have been dominated by Anglo-Celtic faces. This is probably not so unexpected. The majority of Australians remain from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds as are most television producers and network executives. Over the past decade there has been significant debate about multiculturalism and immigration, an issue which has plagued Australia since Federation. Perhaps the most significant phenomena arising from this debate has been the political and media discourse surrounding Pauline Hanson and the One Nation Party. One Nation is in many ways an artifact of media discourse, with most journalists appearing to be simultaneously revulsed and fascinated by the positions put forward by Hanson, and as such, unable to resist affording her disproportionate media coverage.

¹⁵⁰ McKee “Marking the liminal” p55

Besides the extremes of Hanson, immigration has remained a point of significant contention. The Howard government, in particular, has fuelled this debate with its curtailing of immigration and its severe approach to increased illegal immigration. In 1996, before the current wave of illegal immigration, there was unease about immigration, with a Herald-AGB McNair poll revealing that 65% of people surveyed indicated that they believed that immigration levels were too high. Their reason for this was primarily related to the belief that high levels of immigration would impact negatively on already high levels of unemployment. Nonetheless, 77% favoured the current non-discriminatory approach of Australia's immigration policy.¹⁵¹ This kind of ambivalence is a feature of Australia's discourse on these issues, at times embracing the benefits and diversity of multiculturalism while at others highlighting racist assumptions about criminality and the assimilation. The intense debate about illegal immigration is reflected in the *Home & Away* storyline featuring illegal immigrants. While Duncan's actions in helping to hide the fugitive boat person are depicted sympathetically, the fact that she is a typhoid carrier underlines the threat posed by this kind of immigration.

Racism, like issues of unemployment, is treated as an individual rather than social issue by *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*. The community is not disrupted by this racism, rather it teaches tolerance to the aberrant individual and thus removes the problem. This is exemplified by the situation of Hayley and the indigenous teacher in *Home & Away*. Broader social issues, if dealt with at all, are reduced to the level of the individual. It can be argued that this is a result of limitations to the form, that it is impossible to deal with these issues on a structural level, nonetheless, it should be noted that it is rarely even acknowledged that these problems exist on a wider basis.

Over the decade between the early episodes discussed and 2000 there have been some advances in the depiction of women. There is no longer the stress on women's ability to undertake housework (although many are still regularly depicted doing it) and it is more reasonable for women to privilege career over family. The depiction of Beverly's (*Neighbours*) inability to undertake housework despite her professional competence can be contrasted with that of Shelly's (*Home & Away*) desire to return to work against the wishes of her daughters, who are characterised as selfish. The 2000 depiction of women

¹⁵¹ Michael Millett "White Australia alive and kicking" *Sydney Morning Herald Online* <http://www.smh.com.au/daily/pageone/960619-pageone4.html> 19 June 1996 p1

focusing more on career, and either dealing competently with both career and family or delaying families, reflects a change in television commercials. In commercials women are often depicted symbolically in suits or obvious work attire, still organising the family perfectly (though generally with the assistance of the featured product). The career woman dynamic reflects research by Professor Bob Gregory, discussed in the *Australian Financial Review*, which shows that men are increasingly marrying women with similar income levels.¹⁵²

Nonetheless, the idea that women should not be too involved in their careers, and should leave certain careers to men, remains. In 2000, in both series, women remain in more traditional roles such as teachers, social workers, nurses and secretarial type positions. Stepping outside this mould can cause problems; Shauna, the lifeguard in *Home & Away*, has found that she can no longer undertake rescues due to a heart problem, while Libby, the journalist in *Neighbours*, has been prevented by complications following a motorbike accident, from having children. *Home & Away* has taken this anxiety about career women further through the characters of Morag Bellingham the judge, Senator Katherine Walker and Diana Fletcher the medical specialist, as these women tend to be characterised as hard-hearted villainous types. These depictions reflect concerns which remain in popular discourse around issues such as childcare and 'latch-key' children.

Neighbours has clearly moved away from its characterisation of elderly women as busy-body gossips, although *Home & Away*, without it for many years, has returned to incorporate this construction. As discussed in the previous chapter, the figure of the gossiping older woman is one which is shared with UK soaps. Programs such as *A Country Practice* in Australia have also featured such a figure. While it should be noted that these characters have a strong narrative role, this idea of the interfering old woman seems to have a strong resonance with audiences; according to one press report, Vivean Gray who played Mrs Mangel on *Neighbours* "...received a spate of public abuse for the character she played...and was forced to move several times as a result."¹⁵³ Nonetheless, it is not clear what creates this resonance as there is very little discourse about the aged, particularly in popular culture. Rather it seems to reflect long held notions about women, in particular the 'mother-in-law' stereotype. In general though there are very

¹⁵² Julie Macken "The fortunate one with the winning hand in life's lottery" *Australian Financial Review* December 6-7 1997 The Fin p3

¹⁵³ Michelle Cazzulino "Streets ahead" *Daily Telegraph* 16 March 2000 7 Days p5

few old people featured, particularly in the 2000 episodes. Older characters, such as Lyn's parents in *Neighbours* may come to visit, however they rarely stay permanently. This shift reflects both the increasing attractiveness of the youth demographic to advertisers, and the generally increased focus on youth in popular culture.

Discourses about Australian masculinity fill much of Australia's cultural heritage. One important element is mateship, particularly in the context of war. Visiting the Australian War Memorial it is significant to note how much Australian war art is dedicated to the idea of one soldier helping or supporting another. This idea of the role of mateship, particularly in war is featured in the *Home & Away* storyline featuring Tom and Pippa's brother. It also featured in *Chances* where the character of Bill Anderson had saved the life of Dan Taylor.¹⁵⁴ Similarly the short lived *Echo Beach* featured a pair of older men one of whom had saved the life of another in Vietnam. This focus on mateship and the importance of putting oneself out to help another, is a strong feature of the depiction of male characters in both *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*.

The larrikin figure is present strongly in both serials. The depiction of a character who walks the line between serious transgressions and fun, comes at least partly from what Docker and Curthoys refer to as the "complex and ambivalent" attitudes held by Australians to crime and authority.¹⁵⁵ Serious crime is not tolerated in Erinsborough or Summer Bay in the way that it is in *EastEnders*. When the character of Jesse (*Home & Away*), for example, is caught up in a car stealing racket, his position as part of the community becomes untenable and he is forced to flee, both Summer Bay and the series, despite the fact his involvement is a result of blackmail. Nonetheless, characters such as Martin and Vinnie (*Home & Away*) and Henry and Toadie (*Neighbours*) who often brush against authority and the law without ever really breaking it, are tolerated as part of the community, if occasionally despaired of by the elder characters.

Some aspects of masculinity have altered between the 1980s and 2000. Male characters, particularly older married men, are now much more likely to play an active role in the house. This, like the depiction of career women, picks up on the changes in the depiction of men in advertising, in which a greater household role has been granted

¹⁵⁴ Ang and Stratton "The end of civilisation" p122

¹⁵⁵ Docker and Curthoys "Melodrama in Action" p263

men—even if they are not always expert. For example the recent campaign for butter shows a man using butter to create ‘great tasting’ dishes, even when the rest of his culinary efforts fall flat. This is similar to the idea of Lou from *Neighbours* in an apron staffing the kindergarten’s cake stall—notwithstanding the fact that his contribution was bought at the shop. It is interesting to note that this gradual change is not without a statistical correlation, with an Australian Bureau of Statistics survey indicating that there was a small increase in the amount of time men devoted to childcare between 1992 and 1997.¹⁵⁶ In general discourse there has also been increased discussion about the idea that it is appropriate for men to work shorter hours and spend more time with their families.

Education and academic prowess have been associated positively with masculinity. Early *Home & Away* saw the character of Steven proving that he could both be ‘manly’ in the traditional sense (through sporting prowess and use of violence) and an academic high achiever. In more recent *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* this approach has been expressed through the characters of Joel and Toadie, Noah and Edward. Joel, the sports hero, also won a Medal at university for his studies, while Toadie was revealed as a ‘genius’ who undertook additional studies at school and is now performing well in law at university. Edward and Noah have shown an appreciation of literature and history, and strong academic talents. The depiction of Edward demonstrates the limits of alternative depiction. Edward, the make-up wearing Gothic type only lasted a year on the program. Around his depiction there was much discourse about normality with Edward generally representing what was considered not normal. Before he ultimately left the program his image was softened as he stopped wearing make up and started wearing less black clothing. Eventually, he left, travelling to Europe. Edward’s character could be seen as a failure in the attempt by *Home & Away* to break with established normative notions of masculinity. Anecdotally, I have spoken with adults who, while appreciating the character themselves, recounted that their male adolescent children found Edward a ‘weirdo’ and could not in any way identify with him. His short life on the program could indicate that the producers received similar feedback, although it is always possible that the actor was not interested in continuing in the role. The character of Noah, who essentially replaced Edward, presents academic ability in a

¹⁵⁶ Nancy Folbre “Take a bow, Dad...the world looks to the new Australian fatherland” *Sydney Morning Herald Online* <http://www.smh.com.au/news/0003/13/features/features8.html> 13 March 2000 p2

more acceptable guise. A young rebellious type, who rides his brother's motorcycle, Noah creates a depiction of masculinity which resonates with younger viewers, thus allowing his academic abilities to be accepted.

The depiction of boys and young men as academically successful runs counter to much of the social discourse in the last five years about the declining academic success of boys at school. With the release of Year 12 results each year comes a series of articles focussing on the concerns about the decline in academic achievement in boys, particularly relative to girls. This is also reflected in some of the men's movement literature and the writings of commentators. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations is currently holding an inquiry into the "Education of Boys" seeking to understand the "social, cultural and education factors affecting the education of boys."¹⁵⁷ Possibly attempting to play a more didactic role, the soaps could be seen to be attempting to overcome this popularly perceived tendency of boys to see academic achievement as 'uncool' through their use of cool and smart strongly masculine characters. Alternately, the soap opera world has not yet caught up to current norms.

A distinct change in *Neighbours* between 1987 and 2000 is the amount of sex on the program. In 1987 there was a clear tendency for sex not to occur outside marriage, while by 2000, even some of the older teen characters have had sex. Nonetheless *Neighbours* (which featured the Tad-learning-to-kiss storyline) remains relatively chaste compared to *Home & Away*, in which teen sex occurs in abundance. While the general depiction of young people as clean-cut, well-behaved, industrious, non drinking, smoking or drug taking types tends to work against the usual media discourse about young people as dole-bludging, drug-taking criminals, the sexual activities of characters in 2000 seem to have caught up with the modern world. While in the past even one act of sexual congress could leave a young girl pregnant, increasingly teens are shown being sensible—using condoms—and engaging in problem-free sex. The movement to a greater recognition of teenage (and young adult) sexuality reflects the increased occurrence of sexual activity generally on television, particularly primetime US soaps. During the 1990s, *Beverly Hills 90210* made sex between consulting teens the norm,

¹⁵⁷ "Terms of Reference" *Inquiry into the Education of Boys website*
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/eewr/Eofb/index.htm> 7 March 2001 p1

contrasting strongly with the character of Donna who steadfastly hung on to her virginity for about four seasons due to her Catholicism.¹⁵⁸ Youth radio station Triple J, only nationally networked in the early 1990s, also regularly discusses sexual issues, which, while primarily aimed at young adults, also includes teenagers within its discourse. Even the ‘new virginity’ movement popularised by celebrities such as Britney Spears (rather ironically one might argue given her continual exploitation of her sexuality) has built on the idea that teens have a lot of sex.

The temptation of adults by potential or actual adulterous relationships is a more melodramatic narrative device, and therefore less used in *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* than in US soaps. Political and social discourse, often around the well being of children, has focused on the high levels of divorce and increasing numbers of de facto relationships in recent years. The occurrence of de facto relationships has increased in *Home & Away*, in particular, though usually on a short term basis only. Marrying couples in 2000 are usually older than Scott and Charlene in *Neighbours* or Roo and Frank in *Home & Away*. This reflects an increase in the age of men and women who marry. Few soap opera characters, however, make it to 30 unmarried, unlike the 37% in recent Australian Bureau of Statistics surveys.¹⁵⁹ Rather than being a deliberative choice, this is more a result of the requirements of narrative—weddings are a significant storyline development which are needed from time to time to maintain story momentum. As Michelle Cazulino points out, there were seventeen weddings in the first fifteen years of *Neighbours*.¹⁶⁰ Also unlike the ABS statistics, few of the characters cohabit before marriage, as opposed to the 67% figure of the survey.¹⁶¹ This is also probably the result of a combination of narrative exigencies and fear of negative audience reaction. While few couples actually divorce, and as with Joel and Natalie on *Home & Away*, often reconcile after a period of estrangement, many older characters arrive on the program already divorced. There is also a disproportionately high number of widows and widowers. Divorce is more likely to be avoided on these programs, even when one actor of a married couple wishes to leave the series, as it threatens disruption

¹⁵⁸ Ofcourse, it could be argued that the reason Donna retained her virginity was because the father of the actor who played her, Aaron Spelling, the producer of the program, didn't like the idea of his daughter as a sexual object.

¹⁵⁹ Claire Payne “Post-feminist brides still want to be princess for a day” *Sydney Morning Herald Online* <http://www.smh.com.au/news/0005/03/features/arts/features/arts06.html> 3 May 2000 p2

¹⁶⁰ Cazzulino “Streets ahead” p5

¹⁶¹ Claire Payne “Post-feminist brides” p3

CHAPTER 6

A MOMENT'S REFLECTION

In concluding this thesis I wish to return to the quote which precedes it:

No homeland can survive being processed by the films which celebrate it, and which thereby turn the unique character on which it thrives into an unchangeable sameness.¹⁶³

With these words, Adorno is expressing the notion that with the advent of popular culture such as film and television, ideas about particular nations become limited to the forms which are seen in on film and television and, as such, their difference is quashed.

I both agree and disagree with Adorno's sentiments. Television and other forms of mass culture have become pivotal in constructing notions of national identity. It is now impossible to understand a society and how that society is, without recourse to its cultural artifacts like film and television. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Government regulation will even try to ensure that these cultural forms continue to exist because of their importance to the creation of a sense of national identity.

In analysing *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*, the degrees of homogeneity between these programs becomes clear. Both situate their fictional world in a middle class community, where small business ownership is an important goal and excess threatens to disrupt the well-being of the communities. Also of note is the fact that soaps which try to step outside this sameness, such as *Chances* and *Pacific Drive* have limited success and last for only a short period of time. Nonetheless, unlike Adorno's idea of "unchangeable sameness," these worlds have changed a little over the past decade and there are differences between them. For example, the role and treatment of women has developed and changed to an extent over the decade, and attitudes to university study have altered. The community of Summer Bay in *Home & Away* tends to be threatened by outsiders, while that of Erinsborough in *Neighbours* usually faces internally generated threats.

While the "unique character" of each country may be homogenised across its television programs, as I clearly argued in chapter 4 there are distinct differences in the soap

¹⁶³ Theodor W Adorno "Culture Industry Reconsidered" *Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates* eds Jeffrey C Alexander & Steven Seidman. Cambridge University Press: US 1990 p279 .

operas of each individual nation. In particular, despite the historical links between the US, UK and Australia, the domestic worlds depicted by the soap operas of each of these countries are distinctly different. These differences seem to stem, almost entirely, from the differing class basis on which they are built. This class basis, in turn, reflects elements of the national mythology of each country.

Australia considers itself a classless society, by which is really meant that Australians are all comfortably middle class. While I think that it should be obvious that this cannot be true, it is also clear that much of our political, cultural and social discourse is based on this notion. Thus while Adorno would argue that it is film and television itself which are creating these cultural notions, equally one could see that they are developing and reinterpreting themes which have been present in discourse about Australia since Federation.

This myth of the middle class is clearly reflected in *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*, and Australian television more generally. Characters who are from the 'underclasses', such as street kids, are quickly assimilated and brought up to par, either through the intervention of others or through their own hard work. Characters who are wealthy either represent threats to the community, or threats to themselves. The lifestyle depicted in these soaps is one with which middle class viewers can identify, and, sometimes lags behind what actually seems to be happening in Australian society. For example, while 31% of Australian students now attend private schools¹⁶⁴, almost all television characters are still at public high schools. As discourse surrounding private education continues to develop, it could be that Summer Bay High School is replaced by 'Our Lady of the Sea College', just as university education has replaced apprenticeships over the past decade.

My thesis raises areas of possible future research. Given the differences, and more importantly, the similarities of the two programs even over a decade, a more comprehensive survey of Australian soap opera since the beginnings of the genre in Australia could be revealing. Has Australian soap opera consistently dealt with this middle class milieu, or has this changed over time? What other myths of Australianness

¹⁶⁴ Gerard Noonan "Private schools" p1

have featured in our soap operas? How different is *Number 96* or *The Young Doctors* from *Something in the Air* or *All Saints*?

Similarly, a more extensive examination of why soap opera seems to be so tied to national myths, not only in Australia, but in countries like the US, UK and South America could prove enlightening. Why, for example, is it that soap operas outside their usual class milieu, like *Chances* or *Eldorado* or *The Heights*¹⁶⁵, fail? It would also be interesting to examine how these elements of national mythology and, thus, cultural difference, reveal themselves in other genres of television programming, and across cultural discourse generally. Another area of potential study is why depictions of older women and issues such as prostitution, for example, differ so markedly in soaps between the three countries.

Soap opera is an important factor in the creation and communication of a sense of national identity. For many people, television is the most accessible and most regularly consulted source of knowledge about the world and themselves. The consistency of the message about Australia that is purveyed by both *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*, and its close relationship to general political, social and cultural discourse, means that it cannot help but have some resonance with those who watch these programs. No matter how small their influence, soaps do add to a body of cultural understanding of Australian national identity which is then further reflected and reinforced by other media and in other discourse and debate. In this way, *Neighbours* and *Home & Away* help to shape our national identity.

¹⁶⁵ Aaron Spelling produced soap made in 1992 which only lasted one season. It was the story of a number of working class characters (and one rich one) who were attempting to put a band together.

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