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In search of common ground
Strategies of multicultural television producers in Europe

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ABSTRACT   The article explores conceptualizations of multicultural programming by commissioning editors and programme-makers working for public broadcasters in five west European countries. It discusses current ideas concerning multicultural programming as well as resulting programme formats. The article shows how makers of multicultural programmes have developed several strategies to address both minority and mainstream audiences. These vary from creating common points of reference and concentrating on so-called universal experiences such as death, birth, love and friendship to making use of lighthearted formulas. It also shows how, especially in the Netherlands and the UK, multicultural programming has developed into a broad range of formats, labelled 'cross-cultural'. Factual entertainment or infotainment formats, addressing urban and young audiences, are favoured at the cost of social realist styles and programmes addressing older audiences or first-generation immigrants.

KEYWORDS   *cross-cultural, cultural diversity, ethnic minorities, European television, genre, minority programmes, multicultural television, public broadcasting, television*

Introduction

The popular British television series *Goodness Gracious Me*[1] (BBC, 1998–2001) mocked the prejudices of both white British and British Asians and subverted Asian and British stereotypes. It achieved popular and critical acclaim, won awards and has been exported to a number of countries in and outside Europe. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (2000) described the series as 'a wonderful example of how something transforms itself to become a story of the nation, from a ghetto slot to something which defines us'. The series in fact had become so widely recognized and valued that it had become part of mainstream British television.

The popularity of *Goodness Gracious Me* indicates that multicultural
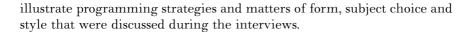
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programming in Britain has developed from 'ghetto' programming to a new type of programming which is valued by majority and minority audiences alike. This is a remarkable achievement because multicultural programming in many European countries is considered as ghetto programming with little audience appeal. Even though multicultural programming is no longer confined to service programmes for ethnic minorities, as was the case in the 1960s and 1970s, programme-makers still struggle to develop formats that have a wider audience appeal.[2]

This article explores recent conceptualizations of multicultural programming by commissioning editors and programme-makers working for public broadcasting companies in a number of West European countries. It will look at the current ideas concerning multicultural programming as well as the resulting programme formats. Producers' perspectives on multicultural programming within public broadcasting organizations form the starting point. How do they define multicultural programming? What are their main aims? And most importantly, how do they attempt to reach ethnically and culturally diverse television audiences? A related purpose of the article is to discover the strengths and weaknesses of different strategies in European multicultural programmes.

Method

The article is based on desk research and on interviews conducted between 2001 and 2003 with 23 people working for multicultural programmes in national public broadcasting organizations. The interviewees were heads of multicultural departments, coordinators or commissioning editors for multicultural programming and programme-makers working in this field from five different West European countries: Austria, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The article does not give a complete and detailed overview of all the ideas and multicultural programme formats produced in these countries, but shows the main developments in late 20th and early 21st-century multicultural programmes. The major part of the analysis and the examples used in this article are based on the situation in these five countries. During three subsequent television festivals in Berlin (Prix Europe Iris, 2001, 2002 and 2003) producers of similar programmes from Finland, Ireland and Sweden were interviewed. Finally, a former producer from Italy was interviewed during a visit to Italy. All these interviews provided additional information and examples.[3]

Background information on programmes and policies was acquired from the broadcasting companies' websites and annual reports, researchers and non-governmental organizations active in the field of multicultural programming in the respective countries. In addition, a sample of multicultural programmes from each of the five countries, and screenings of exemplary programmes during the Prix Europe Iris festivals, are used to

illustrate programming strategies and matters of form, subject choice and style that were discussed during the interviews.

Discussion

Defining multicultural television

Multicultural television always has been a much-contested field. Even apart from its association with television, the concept of multiculturalism already raises many questions concerning its philosophical meaning and political implications (for a discussion of the concept, see Taylor, 1994; Watson, 2002). As an adjective, the use of 'multicultural television' is often rather unspecific and means something like 'programmes dealing with minorities or with multicultural themes'. In a purely descriptive way the term refers to programmes that reflect, in their selection of participants, actors or guests, the demographic ethnic and cultural diversity of present-day western European societies. It can mean also that the programmes specifically address multicultural themes. A more ideological interpretation is that the programmes contain an educational message on how people with different backgrounds should live together in multicultural societies. Yet another interpretation is that the programmes are made from a perspective which, in an attempt to correct dominant media representations, privileges the perspective of minority cultures or addresses inequalities in multicultural societies. In general the programmes are based on the assumption that cultural diversity and multicultural society are not (yet) sufficiently or adequately represented in the programme schedules and require separate attention, special staff and dedicated time slots. The programmes are meant to provide a platform for views that are lacking or less prominent in regular news and current affairs magazines, as these report mainly on multicultural issues in the case of violent incidents and cultural controversies, and tend to neglect positive developments as well as events that take place within minority communities. Programme-makers working for multicultural magazines can follow developments concerning multicultural issues continuously and structurally invest in building networks in ethnic minority communities.

The existence of special multicultural programmes always has been the subject of much debate. Those in favour of multicultural programmes claim that cultural diversity on television requires special professional and organizational provisions, such as dedicated time slots and budgets, special departments, coordinators and training programmes. However, critics argue that multiculturalism gradually will become a self-evident characteristic of present-day television as the natural result of changing demographics in West European countries. They consider multicultural television to be outmoded, as the term often raises negative connotations of niche programming or 'political correctness and box ticking' (Millwood Hargrave, 2002: 49). Programme-makers who are weary of the concept

claim that they produce high-quality and/or popular programming, regardless of considerations of 'race' or culture. Producing multicultural television conflicts with their professional standards, which are governed by concepts such as quality and objectivity. In their interpretation of multicultural television these standards would be endangered if political objectives such as 'promoting multiculturalism' or 'introducing minority perspectives' were to take precedence over professional standards.

Other critics support special efforts to make television more culturally diverse but question the necessity of multicultural television in the form of special programme slots for explicitly multicultural programmes. Instead of being confined to special time slots, multicultural issues and ethnic minority actors, guests and presenters should be integrated in regular programmes. A successful black soap opera actor could do more for integration and mutual understanding than all the well-meaning educational programmes in the multicultural timeslots – so runs the argument. Special programmes even could be counterproductive as other departments and programme-makers might use them as an excuse for neglecting issues concerning ethnic minorities and multicultural society in mainstream programming.

Multicultural programming across Western Europe

Although the debate on the necessity of multicultural programming continues, many European public broadcasting companies still enact policies to produce separate multicultural television programmes in one form or another. This is part of their public service obligation to offer a full programme service that is representative of, and accessible to, all groups in their countries' populations. In Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK, media law or the public broadcasters' concession contain an explicit obligation to provide special minority or multicultural programming. Only in the Netherlands and the UK is this general goal tied to quantitative targets. But even public broadcasting companies whose remits lacked an explicit article on minorities or cultural diversity had – and some still have – some kind of multicultural programming.

In countries such as Austria (*Heimat Fremde Heimat*, ORF), Germany (*Cosmo*, WDR), Norway (*Migrapolis*, NRK), Finland (*Basaari*, Yle) and Italy (*Un mondo à colori*, RAI) multicultural programmes are predominantly 30–60-minute magazines on multicultural issues.[4] Their formats vary from compilations of five to six items to magazines on one special theme and single portraits of remarkable people. Most programmes are moderated and occasionally include interviews with one or more studio guests.

In the Netherlands and the UK the mission to make multicultural programmes is no longer confined to one particular magazine but includes a number of programmes in both information and entertainment genres

and in different time slots. At the BBC (UK), NPS (Netherlands) and until recently also at Channel 4 (UK), commissioning editors are appointed to bundle expertise and generate new ideas (for overviews of British multi-cultural programming see Cottle, 1997, 2000; Malik, 2002; Pines, 1992; Ross, 1996; for an overview of Dutch multicultural programming, see Bink, 2002; Frachon and Vargäftik, 1995; Leurdijk, 2004; Leurdijk et al., 1998; ter Wal, 2002).

There are also public broadcasting companies that do not or no longer produce special multicultural programmes (VRT, Belgium; SVT, Sweden; ZDF and ARD, Germany).[5] In Sweden the multicultural magazine (*Mosaik*, SVT) and the special minorities department were ended in 2003. Instead, two multicultural officers were appointed, whose task it was to incorporate multiculturalism into 50 programmes on SVT (see SVT, 2005). At the VRT an addendum to the public broadcasting charter has led to a number of initiatives to integrate multicultural issues in mainstream programming (VRT Beheersovereenkomst, 2002). In Germany national public broadcasting companies no longer have any explicit policies to achieve cultural diversity; only on the regional level do some public channels (WDR) still broadcast a multicultural magazine.

Since the 1990s, developments in multicultural programming have had to be considered within the context of increasing competition between public and commercial channels in most West European countries. Satellite and cable have become widely available in Europe, and in some countries digital television has been introduced. European audiences can now watch a great number of commercial and foreign television channels. These developments largely have reduced audience figures for public broadcasting companies. As a result, public broadcasting companies are being pressured to adapt their programmes and programme schedules in order to meet this competition.[6]

Both public broadcasting companies' policies concerning multicultural programmes and an increasingly competitive media environment have shaped the current forms of multicultural television. Clearly, multicultural television has become a multifaceted concept, meaning different things in different countries and changing its meaning over time. This article explores the differences between European public broadcasting companies' multicultural programmes and the common dilemmas that their makers face, as well as their strategies to address a culturally and ethnically diverse audience.

In search of common ground, or explaining minorities to the majority

In contrast to the earlier targeted minority programmes, all present-day multicultural programmes on national public television channels are programmes aimed at both minority and majority viewers. This mission

to reach both types of viewers is a complicated one because of their diverse and disparate knowledge and experiences. It means that programme-makers have to search for subjects of common interest or find clever ways of presenting a subject in such a way that it appeals to viewers with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Frequently-used ingredients in multicultural programmes, especially in their early years, were food, music and sport, as these were considered easy points of access to foreign cultures. The former chief editor of the Flemish multicultural programme *Couleur Locale* (1993–5) relates how they did a culinary tour around Belgium and made portraits of the people working in or owning foreign cuisine restaurants. This was seen as an accessible way of interesting a predominantly white audience in other cultures:

> Because even the most strictly monocultural-minded, or even racist person, would occasionally go into an Italian, Chinese or even Moroccan restaurant. (Former editor-in-chief of multicultural magazine, VRT)

However, soon the celebration of successful individuals and of cultural differences in food and music was felt to be too restrictive. At present, commissioning editors and most programme-makers involved in multi-cultural programming no longer claim that showing the positive aspects of cultural diversity is their main or only goal. They have broadened their scope both in subject matter and approach and, in some countries, also in programme formats.

Programme-makers who wish to address a diverse audience face a number of dilemmas. One of the dilemmas that often came up in the interviews was having to explain things that were evident to minority viewers but unfamiliar to a mainstream audience. A telling example is the way in which numerous programmes have dealt with the issue of headscarves and veils by attempting to explain their religious meaning for Muslims to a non-Muslim audience; knowledge that would be superfluous for most Muslim viewers. A programme-maker relates how dealing with this issue has become more complex since the programme that she worked for changed its formula from a targeted programme to a multicultural magazine that also wants to address white viewers:

> Germans, even after 30 years of immigration, still want to know why Muslim women wear a headscarf! One could make an item about that every week, and they'd still want to know! When we were broadcasting in two languages there was an easy solution. The Turkish text would be different from the German text (originally *Babylon* was made with two separate soundtracks; viewers could tune in to either the German or the foreign language soundtrack, AL). In the Turkish voiceover we would just state: 'This woman is wearing a head-scarf.' In the German voiceover we would say: 'She is a devotedly religious Muslim, therefore she is wearing a headscarf.' (Programme-maker, WDR)

In spending too much time explaining particular experiences and cultural practices for the benefit of white viewers, there is a risk of alienating minority audiences. The programmes run the risk of becoming concerned with what some of the interviewees called 'explaining blacks and Muslims to a white audience'. Programme-makers have come up with different solutions to this dilemma. Some try to show the similarities between people with different backgrounds. Others aim to record a diversity of perspectives, thereby deconstructing the one-dimensional stereotype of the Muslim woman (or other ethnic and cultural stereotypes) and the idea of a single Muslim point of view. Others still further seek a solution in addressing the subject in a lighthearted way. Examples are a report on Islamic fashion designers, a woman who is buying a new headscarf and comments on colours, materials and style while also referring to its religious meanings (programme adviser, VRT), and a quiz in which a question concerning headscarves is included (programme-maker, WDR).

An Austrian programme-maker explains that she would deal with an issue such as 'headscarves' by introducing women with different views on the custom. She would picture women from Turkey, where it is forbidden to wear a headscarf in universities and other public buildings, next to second or third-generation Muslim women in Austria who wear the headscarf consciously and proudly as an expression of cultural and religious identity. In addition, she would compare the Islamic custom to a similar custom in Austria where elderly married women also used to wear headscarves, a custom one can still see in the streets of small Burgenland villages near the border (programme-maker, ORF).

A British programme-maker and commissioning editor suggests a way of telling a story in which he constructs a point of identification for white viewers without being patronising for Muslim viewers:

> If I'd be doing Turkish women in Holland, I'd be looking for a Dutch woman who married a Muslim and follow her route into that world. Then a white audience would have a route into an alien world that they actually understand. And Turkish viewers . . . see their culture . . . They'd be interested to see how she adapts, how she reacts, what she makes of something which is new for her. But the Dutch audience would get a route into something on terms they're more familiar with. (Commissioning editor, multicultural programmes, Channel 4)

In this way the religious meaning of dress codes can be explained to non-Muslim viewers without turning the issue into a problem to be explained or a practice to be questioned.

Similar dilemmas come up when dealing with issues such as racism and discrimination or with feelings of alienation felt by immigrants in their new home country. The early ethnic minority programmes could operate from within a shared, taken-for-granted understanding of oppression and

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exclusion, whereas mainstream broadcasting companies usually start from a common assumption of operating within a 'tolerant' social democracy scarred by 'some' racists (WDR et al., 1999: 140). Programme-makers need to present those experiences, which are often all too familiar for minority viewers, in such a way that a larger audience that does not necessarily share these experiences can relate to them.

In his work on the BBC's multicultural department Cottle (1997, 2000) has discussed this tension. On the one hand, the producers at the multicultural BBC department stress their distinct capability to address the needs of black and Asian audiences through their knowledge, experience and contacts within these communities. This legitimizes the existence of a separate department or provision. On the other hand, the producers distance themselves from the label of ghetto programming and identify themselves as professionals making high-profile, mainstream programmes that can be interesting to large heterogeneous audiences. By establishing their professional status as independent programme-makers within the BBC they have distanced themselves from issues around representation and accountability, according to Cottle.

However, most programme-makers interviewed for this project do not experience this tension in exactly the same way. The people working for multicultural programmes no longer see their main task as serving ethnic minority audiences. They all point to the fact that the majority of their audience is white, but at the same time they want to make programmes that also appeal to minorities. Consequently, their main challenge lies in attempting to develop formats which have crossover appeal, both in subject matter and form. This is true for the innovative programme formats developed by Channel 4 and the BBC, but also for the programmes which are still scheduled in marginal time slots.

Genre conventions informing multicultural programming

The programme-makers interviewed for this project continuously stressed the importance of matters of form. For them, the key to addressing an ethnically and culturally diverse audience is in living up to the supposedly universal conventions of producing popular television. The programme-makers presented a number of formulas that can make difficult issues attractive for mainstream audiences. Only adopting these strategies will enable programme-makers to supersede potential differences in viewers' ethnic or cultural backgrounds.

Portraying remarkable individuals is the most common strategy and has always been an important strand in multicultural programmes. This is not because programme-makers still see the celebration of successful role models as their main mission, but mainly because this format fits closely with another dominant convention in (western) television production. According to these conventions, television works best when focusing on

individuals, human interest and emotions. A strong character or interest-ing personality that leads the viewers through the story enables them to relate to the programme.

This is true for all informational or educational programmes and all the more important for multicultural programmes, for which the main aims are to interest viewers in other people's cultural backgrounds and foster mutual understanding. This means that the choice of personalities to be portrayed is determined no longer by their potential attractiveness for a single community; they need to be interesting characters whose stories can express the essentials of life in modern, multicultural societies.

A Dutch programme-maker explains how the programme *Urbania* (1996–2003) focused not so much on ethnic and cultural differences in a traditional sense but on differences in lifestyle that, according to the programme-maker, are more a matter of individual choice than of the group into which one is born:

> The person comes first, not so much the question to which group someone belongs. In *Urbania* we have a broad definition of 'multicultural'. Cultural differences between a squatter and a well-off lawyer are probably bigger than between a Turkish snack bar owner and a Dutch baker. In the future, differ-ences between black and white will disappear into the background and particu-larly in the big towns, life will be about differences in lifestyle. (Interview with programme-maker, NPS, on website, www.nps.nl).[7]

Programme-makers also stressed the fact that television is used mainly as a medium for relaxation and entertainment. This requires that issues are presented in a lighthearted and possibly humorous way, even when they concern political or serious social issues:

> Well, 'the' Turks are quite different from 'the' Surinamese, and who are 'the Turks' or 'the Surinamese'? Among these groups are highly-educated, low-educated, left-wing, right-wing people ... and the average person from Surinam has a completely different view on television than the average Turk. I find it extremely difficult to mix that all together and make a programme that is attractive to Turks, Surinamese, Moroccans ... I can only try to make a programme that is accessible to as many viewers as possible ... I'll have a presenter and I'll try to make items both informative and attractive. Not too much heavy and lengthy discussions ... And people also like to have solutions and want to be taken along in a programme. Successful programmes do that. It becomes even more successful when one brings humour into it. (Commis-sioning editor, multicultural programmes, NPS)

Another way of fostering a relationship with the viewer is to focus on daily life situations such as children's upbringing, events at schools, in neighbourhoods, shops and workplaces that the viewer can easily

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recognize. As with the portraits of exceptional people, the idea is that the particular stands for general social or human problems and displays something about present-day multicultural societies. These conventions have become major criteria for professional quality in television journalism and are at the same time a means for making social issues accessible for people with different cultural backgrounds. Also, they are contrasted often with earlier models for multicultural television programmes, which are described by some of the interviewees as 'paternalistic' and 'too educational'.

The coordinator of the Finnish programme *Basaari* (Yle, 1995–), a weekly 25-minute programme which usually portrays one remarkable person or subject, explains why she chooses to produce portraits instead of a magazine or current affairs programme:

> In the short pieces you get in a magazine, you deliver information and that is not what we want. We want to give the audience emotions and show them the personalities. In a magazine that is not possible. (Programme-maker, YLE)

A former producer of the Swedish magazine *Mosaik* (SVT, 1987–2003) also thinks that making programmes about remarkable people is a good concept:

> The story should strike the viewer in an emotional way, show conflict and drama. The drama should reflect a bigger problem. The best way for television is to start with the individual and then move on to the bigger issues. (Former editor-in-chief of multicultural magazine, SVT)

Finally, programme-makers often claim to look for the 'universal' in trying to find formulas that can work for a wide audience. Many of the programme-makers who were interviewed agree that, in trying to reach a diverse audience, it is best to focus on general human emotions and experiences such as birth, love, death, having children, coming of age, loneliness, (not) feeling at home. Although different cultures might have different rituals and habits, showing the impact that these events have on people's lives makes them recognizable to people with different cultural backgrounds:

> The producer wants to have love, birth, death and those kind of things in the programme. We are not making social documentaries or current affairs programmes. We are very clearly telling about people, not about problems. The idea was to show the Finnish people that these strange looking foreigners are just normal people and are just like you and me. And at the same time, to show the newcomers in a positive way that they can be proud of themselves. (Programme-maker, YLE)

Several authors have analysed the codes and conventions through which factual television genres frame social reality and the changes in these

conventions that have taken place within an increasingly competitive and commercializing audiovisual market (Corner, 1995, 1999; Dahlgren, 1995; Dahlgren and Sparks, 1992). Referring to the numerous reality formats on television since the mid-1990s they signal changing and blurring distinctions between public and private, fact and fiction and more access to television for the vox pop and common people. This analysis shows that the multicultural programme producers have adopted some of these conventions as well, although the magazine producers still adopt the more traditional documentary modes.

In all the interviews the programme-makers showed an acute awareness of the importance of thinking about matters of form when trying to get across information to an ethnically and culturally diverse audience. Looking for universal emotions and experiences, or focusing on remarkable individuals, are seen as the best ways to keep viewers attracted. These arguments show the extent to which multicultural programmes have become subject to a dominant media logic. Professional codes clearly prevail over a social mission or considerations concerning the content that one wants to display. Although these codes might be instrumental in delivering the message, to a certain extent they also limit the meanings that can be conveyed about multicultural society through individual stories. The suitability of sources and subjects for television appearance overrules social relevance as selection criteria, a tendency that had been signalled in Philip Elliot's (1972) seminal study of the making of a British series for commercial television on the phenomenon of prejudice. In the UK, commercial television was introduced much earlier than in most other European countries, so British programme-makers at that time were used to operating in a competitive environment. In his analysis, Elliot contrasts 'communication' with 'attention' as the main rationale for the producers to select and include material in the documentary series. He suggests that the goal to attract viewers' attention often overrules the wish to display a coherent analysis of the phenomenon of prejudice. Nevertheless, the producers still attempted to accomplish the complicated job of explaining a relatively abstract concept such as 'prejudice' in a seven-episode weekly series, an undertaking that – because of its length, costs and level of abstraction – seems almost unthinkable in the present-day broadcasting landscape. Elliot also shows the producers' conviction that the use of film footage and filmed scientific experiments would contribute to gaining viewers' attention. Moreover, in the selection of sources and in the final editing, expert interviews were privileged over interviews with victims and offenders of prejudice. Apparently, at that time the value of an authoritative view (experts and scientific experiments) was still considered the best way to get across a message *and* retain viewers' attention. Comparing present-day multicultural programmes with the study of the production of a documentary series in the early 1970s shows that the requirements of the medium as perceived by television producers have always strongly affected

the content and form of television programmes. However, the requirements of the medium, which producers often present as a reified universal truth, are clearly subject to change and depend very much on social developments and developments in broadcasting market structures.

Cross-cultural

The need to reach both minority and majority audiences in some countries meant a decision to develop more mainstream and popular programming. This led to a redefinition of what the adjective 'multicultural' in multicultural programmes should mean. For example, Channel 4's main approach became 'cross-cultural', which the commissioning editor interviewed described as

> ideas which come from a strong black or Asian perspective, but which are accessible to bigger audiences. (Commissioning editor, multicultural programming, Channel 4)

In Channel 4's philosophy, multiculturalism is something that – at least in theory – should be a self-evident characteristic of all its programmes. As the British population is multicultural and multi-ethnic, somehow this should be reflected in its programme output, if only in representing people with different skin colours. As Channel 4's multicultural commissioning editor explains:

> This is where you have black and Asian people in the programme, but they are not necessarily talking about 'race'. They are just there because that is a reflection of modern society. (Commissioning editor, Channel 4)

At the same time, Channel 4's special remit has required it to support multicultural programming explicitly as a separate programme category. In 2003, Channel 4's multicultural department was disbanded but the channel maintains its commitment to commissioning mainstream multicultural (or cross-cultural) programmes (Channel 4, 2002–3).

At the BBC a similar development took place. Both broadcasting companies attempted to get rid of the negative image of multicultural programming and aimed for the modern, young, cosmopolitan expressions of multicultural society that have a crossover appeal to wider audiences. Because the BBC still has a public service obligation to cater for minority audiences, it has adopted a twin-track approach. It maintains a slate of both monocultural programmes with a specific ethnic minority audience in mind (e.g. the series *Black Britain*) while also producing multicultural programmes designed to have a broader appeal (Wells, 2002). Examples from the latter are the prime-time drama series *Babyfather* (BBC Two, 2001–2) on the complexities of 21st-century life from the perspective of

four young black male friends, comedies such as *Goodness Gracious Me* and *The Kumars At No. 42*[8] and a range of documentaries on controversial subjects such as *Trading Races* and *Motherland*, both dealing with issues of racial and ethnic identity in a challenging way. In a BBC brochure on diversity this change in policies is formulated as follows:

> [We] shifted the perspective from a tendency to see black and Asian audiences as the 3D's − Dispossessed, Disenfranchised, Depressed − and start seeing key sections of these communities as the 3 A's − Articulate, Ambitious, Affluent. (BBC, 2002)

Following the British example the NPS in the Netherlands also began to label its multicultural programmes 'cross-cultural' in 2001. A number of programme formats have been developed that work from the assumption that some (sub)cultures have now become a visible and common part of Dutch urban culture to the extent that they will be recognized and appreciated by a considerable slice of the viewers, whatever their cultural or ethnic background:

> Within the last two years this has become the culture within our broadcasting organization [NPS]. Multicultural is no longer a separate category, or a separate department, or a special kind of people. It should be included in everything. One should be able to laugh about it, to cry about it, to curse and to applaud it. That kind of attitude is reflected in our programmes, all aspects are included. (Commissioning editor, multicultural programming, NPS)

In the new NPS programmes cultural differences are explained or problematized no longer but are treated as challenging and exciting subject matter that lends itself to comedy, dramatic storylines and investigative journalism. Looking at the programme output of the BBC, Channel 4 and NPS in the late 1990s and early 2000s, one can distinguish a number of themes and genres which seem to lend themselves particularly well to a cross-cultural approach.

First, urban youth and subcultures are an important source of inspiration. Nowhere else does the mix of cultures become more visible than in urban street culture. Urban subcultures are a prominent arena of contact between youngsters of different cultural backgrounds, if not in schools, clubs and on the streets then at least in the symbolic areas of music and fashion. For programme-makers these areas became an important source of issues of common interest to both minority and majority audiences.

Urban youth culture
Hip Hop Years (Channel 4, 1999) charted the history of rap music from its origins in urban America to its pinnacle as a multi-billion dollar staple in

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the global music industry. Originally a black, urban music form, hip hop has become mainstream and attracts many white fans and listeners. The sitcom *Bradaz* (NPS, 2001–3) was located in a record shop run by two Surinamese brothers. Urban street culture, street lingo and black music styles, especially R&B and hip hop, were the main ingredients of the programme's style. The series *Love In Leeds* (Channel 4, 1999) was based on a group of multi-racial women looking for love.

A second genre qualified by many interviewees as a genre that builds bridges between diverse audiences is comedy. A successful British example is the series *Goodness Gracious Me* (1998, 2000) as mentioned in the introduction (see BBC, 2003). The series plays on the cultural stereotypes of Indians and Asians. The jokes require inside knowledge of cultural and religious differences within the Asian-British population, but the show is also very much a family-based show, recognizable to anyone who has experienced the intricacies of family life. Thus it plays on 'sameness and difference in a way that is not alienating or exclusive' (Gillespie, 1999: 88). In her analysis of the series, Gillespie refers to *The Times*' critics who have lauded the series for being 'the oil of race relations', 'for when blacks, whites and Asians can laugh together the sting is taken from prejudice or crude generalisations' (quoted in Gillespie, 1999: 83).

Its makers explain that the BBC wanted them to produce the programme in such a way that it would not alienate white viewers:

> If we had any agenda at all it was to be accommodating to white sensitivities . . . They did not want the show to be confrontational or guilt-inducing, otherwise they knew they would lose their white audience . . . And the team were painfully aware that if the show was perceived to be targeted at ethnic minorities alone, then the white audience would not watch it. (Gillespie, 1999: 88)

This meant that they had to devise sketches that had universal appeal. The humour was intended to work both ways. It was recognized that Indians too have stereotypical and strange views about the English; for example, that they send their children to boarding school at three years old and treat dogs better than their children. Here again, one can see the deliberate attempt to tie in both mainstream and minority audiences at the same time.

A Dutch crossover formula is the late-night talk show *Raymann is laat* (*Raymann Is Late*, 2001–), presented by the Surinamese stand-up comedian Jörgen Raymann. This is a programme with a strong sense of Surinam–Antillian humour and style but in a way that appeals to a wider audience. The commissioning editor explains why a successful cross-cultural programme does not need to incorporate all cultures:

> One should not tell Raymann that he should create a talk show which pleases all cultures and in which every group in our population can recognize itself.

That would make the guy mad, because in that case he can no longer play out his mean Surinam humour or his transvestite act. But I am not sure whether Moroccan viewers can appreciate a man dressed up as a woman. (Commissioning editor, multicultural programmes, NPS)

Interventionist documentaries

A third and final example of programmes produced to win a large audience encompasses a number of so-called 'interventionist' documentaries produced by both the BBC and Channel 4. A common characteristic of these programmes is that they aim to address questions of cultural and ethnic identity in innovative ways. One example is the two-part series *Trading Races* (BBC Two, 2002), which explored what happens when people temporarily change their skin colour.

In the first episode of *Trading Races* a white man and a black man change their appearances through clever make-up and dress. In the second episode a Pakistani woman working in a takeaway shop changes roles with a white nurse. All the participants enter into situations where they would not normally go in order to experience what it is like to be of another ethnicity. For example, the white man visits Brixton's nightlife and goes clubbing in black clubs. He experiences people's looks when he walks around as a black man with his Caucasian wife. The black man joins a National Front march and visits a boxing match, which is usually attended by an all-white audience watching mainly black boxers in the boxing ring. The characters show and discuss their inner conflicts in these situations. The black man experienced a lot of racial violence and the growth of the National Front when he grew up in East London. He used to be a black separatist and considers England to be a 'white man's country'. In the programme he is seen communicating at the boxing match with people that he used to despise. The white man is pictured as the typical white liberal, with a lot of hang-ups about black masculinity and concerned not to do or say something that could be considered as racist.

Trading Races has been highly controversial. It has been accused of trivializing the issue of racism and of only providing a skin-deep impression of colour barriers in the UK. In whatever way one may evaluate the ideological and political aspects of the series, the concept clearly shows the BBC's attempt to make issues around 'race' relevant for mainstream audiences and the subject matter of popular documentaries. Or, as the makers put it:

White people normally do not need to think about race. This series wants to interest people that normally would not be interested in race issues. It should have 'water-cooler appeal'. (Programme-maker, BBC)

Motherland (BBC Two, 2003) was another BBC project on ethnic identity. The programme films three black Britons in the search for their   39
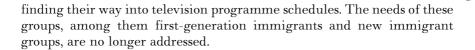
roots and their attempts to reclaim their black heritage. The BBC organized this project by inviting people to have their DNA tested. From this group the programme-makers selected three people and followed them on a journey to the places in Africa where their ancestors originated before they were transported to other continents during the slave trade.

In both *Trading Races* and *Motherland* the issue of 'race' becomes the subject of an exploration of ethnic (and gendered) identities. Both series are examples of looking at an aspect of social reality without using the social realist or educational style dominant in earlier multicultural programming.

Similarly, Channel 4 attempts to make the documentary genre appealing for a wide audience. In their guidelines for documentary producers, Channel 4 (2003) invites producers to come up with 'ideas tapping into the white, liberal anxiety associated with race issues, including problems of political correctness and urban fear' and 'ideas exploring race identity in a popular style' or ideas that 'will help dismantle cultural clichés, putting human, humorous and controversial faces on a lot of heavy topics such as crime, gangs and Muslims in Britain'.

White Tribe (Channel 4, 2000) explored how England has changed by following a well-known black presenter on a journey to quintessential English places such as the pub, where they now have wine-tasting soirées, the nightclub where white girls adore black performers' bodies and the Conservative Party conference, which debates Britain's identity crisis. *The Real Fresh Prince – A Month In The Country* (BBC Two, 2002) – part of the series *Black Britain* – explores how social environment affects black pupils' school achievements by moving a young black kid from a urban working-class neighbourhood to a black middle-class family and predominantly white school in a country village. *Wife Swap* (Channel 4, 2003) is a series in which women switch husbands and families. The series became a national talking point after the first episode, in which a woman who was against mixed-race relationships was put together with a sexist black man, resulting in heated arguments.

Although this is by no means an exhaustive list, these examples do reveal important characteristics of the recent 'cross-cultural trend' in multicultural programming. They show how popular appeal and innovation have become more important motivations than social realism or compensating misrepresentation or under-representation in mainstream programmes. If anything, the programmes attempt to – and in some cases indeed have – become mainstream themselves. They also show that mainly those (aspects of) ethnic minority cultures and communities that have become part of urban youth culture or mainstream popular culture have succeeded in becoming ingredients for this type of multicultural programming. Closed communities, aspects of ethnic minority cultures that are less accessible to mainstream audiences and the particular interests of certain subcultures or communities, will have a harder task in

finding their way into television programme schedules. The needs of these groups, among them first-generation immigrants and new immigrant groups, are no longer addressed.

Conclusions

In this article different policies concerning multicultural programming by West European public broadcasting companies in the early 21st century have been described, each with their particular strengths and weaknesses. The most obvious difference that was found is between broadcasting companies that produce a single multicultural weekly magazine and broadcasting companies that produce a number of multicultural programmes each week in different genres. On British and Dutch television especially multicultural programming has become more diverse, containing documentaries, talk shows, comedy and drama and new experimental documentary formats, a development that was accompanied generally by higher budgets, higher status within the broadcasting organizations and better appreciation by audiences.

Despite these differences, all programme-makers involved in multicultural programming have to deal with the same dilemma: how to produce programmes that appeal to both minority and majority audiences. The makers of multicultural magazines try to solve this dilemma by focusing on human emotions, daily life issues and finding perspectives that can be of common interest. The British and Dutch public broadcasting companies have adopted a strategy of developing innovative programme formats with cross-cultural appeal. Instead of the early and more traditional documentary modes or magazines, they now focus on popular 'infotainment' formats.

Multicultural programmes do not necessary imply a specific political stance, philosophy or ideology on multicultural societies or on the issues concerning immigration and integration. However, at a more abstract level, the underlying concepts do express a certain way of thinking about multiculturalism. In these conceptualizations the following development can be discerned. The early programmes expressed the enrichment of western societies by immigrant cultures in the form of food, music, artists, rituals and other cultural practices and artefacts. The programmes also dealt increasingly with social and political issues concerning inequality, injustice, racism and intercultural conflict. Here the term 'multicultural' refers to both subject matter and a certain perspective. The programmes functioned as a sort of compensation for the under-representation or misrepresentation of minority perspectives in mainstream programming. In trying to gain larger audiences, stressing the universality of human emotions and experiences became the next important strand in multicultural programming. 'Multicultural' came to stand for showing the locations and incidences of contact and communication between minority

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and majority groups, despite differences in cultural backgrounds. Finally, in its latest inflections, the term 'multicultural' refers to a mixture of cosmopolitan styles most visible in urban youth culture, or to subject matter that deals with cultural identity as an important field of both pleasure and anxiety in modern western societies.

Of course the development and present reality of multicultural programming are not as clear-cut as this categorization suggests. Different approaches coexist over time and rarely are programmes informed by well-considered and philosophically-grounded concepts of multiculturalism. However, the development does suggest that once multicultural programmes are released from their restricted but safe niches in the schedules, they become subject to the same logic as other prime-time programming. This means that popular formats and appealing subject matter have a better chance of being approved than more difficult issues, which from the perspective of public service ideals or social relevance might be well worth covering. Consequently, in this interaction of media logic and conceptualizations of multiculturalism the favoured model of multiculturalism is a cosmopolitan one, a version in which cultural and ethnic identities are not seen as fixed characteristics of people but as flexible constructions that can be explored in a self-reflexive and playful way. A remarkable achievement of the cross-cultural approach is that it has led to a number of programmes that have become part of national television culture and a point of identification for both black and white audiences.

The necessity to develop new programmes continuously with high audience appeal also has its drawbacks. It offers less space for niche tastes, preferences, subjects or angles that are more difficult to digest. It favours popular genres and young urban audiences at the cost of information and commercially less interesting audiences, such as first-generation immigrants.

A strong element of the former minority programmes and of the subsequent weekly multicultural magazines was (and in some countries still is) their structural commitment to follow developments within minority communities as well as issues concerning immigration and integration. Unless public broadcasting companies take care that these networks and knowledge are provided elsewhere, the abolition of multicultural magazines puts these at risk of disappearing as well.

Kadriye Acar (freelancer, WDR), Giti Hatef (freelancer, WDR): Rehm (ZDF), Ingrid Skrobicki (WDR), Gualtiero Zambonini (WDR); Netherlands: Frans Jennekens (NPS), Erik Hogenboom (NPS), Myriam Sahraoui (NPS), Huub Spall (former NPS), Henk Baard (RVU); Italy: Massimo Ghirelli (RAI); Sweden: Inger Etzler (SVT), Keja Stenstrom (SVT), Mårten Anderson (former SVT); UK: Patrick Younge (Channel 4), David Russel (BBC). Also thanks to Monica Cardinale for conducting the interview with Massimo Ghirelli in Italy and to Naima Charkaoui (Forum, Belgium), Ching Lin Pang and Geert de Kock (Centrum voor gelijke kansen en tegen racisme), Hakan Gürses, Cornelia Kogoj (Initiative Minderheiten, Austria) and Friedrich Hausjell (Institut für Publizistik und Kommunikationswissenschaft der Universität Wien) for delivering valuable background information on the representation of multiculturalism on Flemish and Austrian public television respectively.

Notes

1. *Goodness Gracious Me* began as a radio programme and transferred to BBC Two in 1998. Anil Gupta is the creator and producer of the show. The core ensemble of actors are Sanjeev Bhaskar, Meera Syal, Nina Wadia and Kulvinder Ghir.
2. In each European country different terms are used to describe the ethnic minority populations in that country, each with its slightly different meanings and different historical and ideological connotations. British authors usually speak of blacks and Asians when talking about the largest diaspora populations in Britain with roots in West Caribbean or in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh respectively (Brah, 1992). In other West European countries with a large labour immigrant population, terms such as ethnic minorities, migrants, immigrants, foreigners or 'allochtonen' are more common. In the quotes used in this article I have retained as much as possible the original words of the interviewees. Apart from that, the term 'ethnic minorities' will be used mostly in this article.
3. Most of the people interviewed worked for a multicultural programme (2001–3). In the meantime, some have moved on to other programmes, departments or channels. I also interviewed some people who worked for multicultural programmes in the past in broadcasting organizations that no longer have a regular multicultural programme, for example, the editor-in-chief of the Belgium VRT programme *Couleur Locale* and a programme-maker from the German ZDF-programme *Schwarzrotbunt*.
4. Usually the staff of these programmes is mixed, i.e. both from white majority and ethnic minority backgrounds. It is remarkable that the editors-in-chief, heads of departments, commissioning editors or coordinators are often white and male. On several occasions during the interviews this was motivated by the claim that in positions such as these, one needs people who are familiar with organizational culture and politics and have achieved a certain professional standing in order to gain a foothold within the organization, qualifications which ethnic minority staff supposedly do not yet possess to a sufficient degree. This motivation again shows the pressure to conform to organizational culture and politics which, even though realistic, can explain the distance felt by minority

communities to these departments as reported by, for example, Cottle (1997). Only in the UK have the heads of Asian, black or multicultural departments and commissioning editors been black and Asian British.

5. For an overview of multicultural programming in Germany see Kosnick (2000), Raiser (2002) and Tolun (2002). For information on Austrian multicultural programming, see Böse and Kogoj (2002).

6. Among the available channels are many channels from the immigrants' original home countries, which has been one of the factors contributing to a gradual disappearance of the original minority programmes in the mother tongue on public channels.

7. This series has become a format subsequently used in a European programme exchange under the umbrella of the European Broadcasting Union, in which several European public broadcasting companies contribute portraits of remarkable urban dwellers which are compiled in the programme *City Folk* and then broadcast in each of the participating countries. The formula is based on the idea that European cities and the people living there have become increasingly multi-ethnic and multicultural and as a result of this similar development these cities have a lot in common. Consequently, a programme made in Berlin can be interesting for people living in Stockholm, Vienna or Amsterdam and vice versa. On Dutch television the series *Urbania* concluded in 2003.

8. The formula of *The Kumars* has been adapted into a various versions: German with a Turkish family, Dutch with a Surinamese family, Israeli with a Moroccan Jewish family, US with a Hispanic family and Australian with a Greek family.

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