

Whither Cultural Diversity on the Dutch TV Screen?

In this paper, a country which has traditionally played a visible role in the development of multiculturalism in Western Europe will be examined as a discursive and policy exemplar. In accordance with the Media Act (1988), and notwithstanding important shifts in Dutch integration policy in the last three decades paralleled by an overall toughening of the social climate, cultural diversity continues to be given considerable encouragement on public radio and television, both in program provision and in staff composition. The Concession Act (2000), i.e. the first time that the public broadcaster's social and cultural role is laid down by law, encourages public broadcasting services to make more programs for ethnic minorities as target groups. In its task of serving as a model, the Netherlands Program Foundation (NPS) has to devote no less than 20 per cent of its television and 25 per cent of its radio broadcasting time to multicultural subjects. The Netherlands has focused on the public broadcasting system, which in itself is a "pillarized" model shared among about twenty organizations that have obtained a license because they each represent a certain ideological, political, religious, or demographic section of society.

After historically differentiating framing multicultural programming initiatives in the Netherlands, this paper will carefully examine the lessons and best practices that may emerge from the Dutch experience. What does research inform us about how media can best be utilized to sustain and encourage the co-existence and social cohesion of multiple constituency groups living in the Netherlands? Referring to content analysis on the degree of "colour" on Dutch television, in-depth interviews were conducted with program-makers. This research evidence will allow us to analyze the enabling mechanisms and strengths, as well as the obstacles and failures that have been experienced in an effort to build an integrated, cohesive, and transformative media system in which all members of society are recognized to having a right to both fair portrayal practices and employment opportunities.

1. Recent Shifts in The Dutch Integration Policy

Before going any further, we will point out a number of important shifts in emphasis in the Dutch integration policy. Undoubtedly, the events of September 11, 2001, the bombings in London and Madrid, and the more

recent events in the Netherlands such as the assassination of Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam in 2004 have affected citizens' level of tolerance. The Dutch integration policy of the 1980s characterized by "freedom from obligation" and the multicultural ideal has made way for key words like "self-sufficiency" and "personal responsibility" in the 1990s. While in the 1980s immigrant groups were expected to promote cultural diversity by preserving their own identity within the current political values of the country (Castles & Miller, 1993), this changed drastically as of the mid-1990s when the emphasis shifted to integration and assimilation.

Immigrants were confronted with the *Newcomers Integration Act* (WIN) as of 1998, stating that each newcomer was obliged to participate in an integration program with Dutch language lessons, courses on social and employment-related familiarization and support, and a test on the degree of integration after one year. Until the end of 2003, the *Employment of Minorities Promotion Act* (SAMEN Act, 1998), which made it compulsory for firms that employed at least 35 people to maintain separate registration of multicultural staff, was one of the most important legal integration instruments. Both acts aimed at improving the position of the newcomers with education and employment measures, but the SAMEN Act (1998) also indirectly promoted the presence of more "colour" in the media and consequently had more impact on the immigrants' cultural rights.

As of March 15, 2006, the *Civic Integration Abroad Act* became law as a consequence of the Dutch Cabinet's Outline Agreement dated May 16, 2003, aiming at the following: "Any person who wishes to settle permanently in the Netherlands must actively take part in society, learn Dutch, be aware of Dutch values and abide by the rules". The Civic Integration Abroad Act is to be seen as a set of additional conditions to the Newcomers Integration Act that one should meet in order to obtain an authorization for temporary stay in the Netherlands, the major change being that newcomers must now have a basic knowledge of Dutch language and society even before coming to the Netherlands.

This gradual stiffening of the law demonstrates that the freedom from obligation of the integration policy during the early 1980s has made way for self-sufficiency and personal responsibility in the new millennium. As a central point in the integration policy the preservation of one's identity has now been replaced with assimilation. This means that adaptation and personal responsibility are considered more important to active citizenship than the preservation of one's own identity and culture. There is a growing emphasis on the independence and self-sufficiency of the individual. Government measures are aimed at equipping immigrants with the knowledge and skills that will promote their independence and self-sufficiency.

The Council for Social Development (2005, 2006) recently released two studies that aim at enhancing social cohesion. Its study *Unity, Diversity, and Ties* is a plea for a new integration model allowing a “culture of difference”. The Council recognized the negative consequences of concentration (e.g., the so-called “white flight” of native Dutch fleeing away from the cities, and the “black schools” with high concentration levels of ethnic minority kids) on integration. Since a deconcentration policy would run up against legal, constitutional and practical objections (e.g., one cannot tell people where to live and where not to), the Council pleaded in favor of a new model, based upon unity which creates space for diversity, provided that new ties, along other lines than ethnic ones, be made. The primary issue was to create social cement and to promote the socio-cultural integration of minority groups. As a response to the Council’s report the then-Minister for integration and immigration, Rita Verdonk, asked for more concrete definitions of “unity” and “binding” and wondered how to foster “spontaneous meetings and contacts among groups”. She also asked the Council to operationalize further the notion of “common frame” and the definition of what belongs to it and what does not. Various examples of this binding policy along other lines than ethnic ones are given in the Council’s study *No Longer with the Backs Towards Each Other. A Study about Binding*. The Cabinet’s reaction to the Council’s recommendations followed an and/or-approach of both geographical spreading, albeit on a voluntary basis, and building new forms of integration along other than ethnic lines. For this policy to be successful, the Cabinet built its new integration campaign around three recommendations of the Council: 1) Strengthening communication of basic democratic values and conduct in education and community work, e.g., by adding integration issues to the curriculum and giving youths the tools to defend themselves against radicalization; 2) Investing in the command of the Dutch language; 3) Fostering access to communal stories through the media, in theatre, and in literature. In this respect the notion of “binding leadership” was highly visible in the much criticized &-campaign [www.en.nl] of the hard-line Minister which amounted to €10 million. However, the political environment will presumably change with the new government.

In June 2006 the Dutch cabinet went through a major crisis, after its smallest coalition partner (D66) said it could no longer reconcile its visions with the country’s hard-line immigration and integration minister Verdonk. This resulted in the resignation of the government. Early elections took place in November 2006. A new coalition government made up of the Christian Democrat Appeal (CDA), the Social Democratic Labour Party (PvdA) and the Christian Union came into power in February 2007. The future may well bring a more positive environment for migrants. This new government, which seems

to want to return to the consensus politics of the Dutch polder model, has made the decision to halt the deportation of long-term asylum seekers in December 2006 and has initiated a more humane policy that will provide a general pardon for those asylum seekers who arrived in the Netherlands before April 1, 2001 and who have made a request to stay.

After this general introduction and overall evaluation of the Dutch integration policy, as well as the societal model that lies underneath it, we will sketch the peculiar structure of the public broadcasting system which is considered apt to represent all social and ideological fractions in society. Parallel to this, the degree to which the Dutch media system succeeds in reflecting the diversity of its population in its media content and workforce will be assessed. This is an issue that has been and still is at the forefront of controversy and concern in the media industry.

By way of illustration, two research initiatives questioning the diversity of the media will be looked into. In an effort to improve the symbolic representation of the “majority” as well as of the “minority” in each other’s eyes and to achieve greater social and cultural participation of ethnic minorities in the media, we will assess the way in which the Dutch portray, or omit to portray, symbolic diversity on television. Special emphasis will be put on the public broadcaster’s contribution to fostering a more inclusive media portrayal. The first case deals with the responsibility assumed by a pluralist society consisting of both the commercial and public broadcasters to create fair portrayals of age, gender, and ethnicity. The second refers to in-depth interviews with producers of homemade fiction and their views on critical success factors enabling (or not) diverse television content.

2. The Dutch Broadcasting System: The Right Answer to Appeal to All Taste Cultures?

The Netherlands has not chosen a unitary national public broadcasting system (as in most other European countries). Nor does it have a commercial broadcasting model (as in the US or Luxembourg). Rather, it has come up with a prototype of its own, commonly characterized as a “pillarized” model. Neither market nor state-oriented, the Dutch model of broadcasting was developed by its civil society, i.e. social movements that were already well established in most domains of social life (Bardoel, 2001, 2003; Van der Haak & Van Snippenburg, 2001). The ideological foundation for this strategy is rooted in the Calvinist and Catholic social ideologies of “cultural sovereignty” and “subsidiarity”: These movements aimed at uniting and emancipating their own social groups while at the same time isolating themselves from external

“modernist” influences (i.e., the existing liberal-bourgeois elite and the emerging socialist Labour movement). Although unique, the Dutch system fits well into Hallin & Mancini’s (2004) North/Central European or Democratic Corporatist Model in which consensus-seeking by coalition governments usually led to tolerant and moderate pluralism (Bardoel, 2006). Hence, originally this system, built around the notion of external pluralism, was not designed to confront citizens with diverging viewpoints at all, but on the contrary aimed at uniformity, at providing religious and ideological fractions in society with their own truth and their own window to the world in a structure of social segregation or social “apartheid” (Bardoel, 2006).

Over the years the Dutch public service expanded to eight full-license broadcasting companies: five classical networks (representing the Calvinists, the Catholics, the liberal-conservatives, and the liberal-protestants) dating back from the 1920s, while a broadcasting company aimed at a general audience, one evangelical, and one addressing youths became part of the system in 1966, 1971 and 1998 respectively. Netherlands Public Broadcasting (*Publieke Omroep*, NPB) is the new name for the former NOS that serves as the overarching umbrella organization for the national public broadcasting service: its main tasks are to coordinate and direct programming. Nowadays broadcasting time on Dutch public radio and television is shared by 23 private organizations, big broadcasting associations and small licensed broadcasters, that have obtained a broadcasting license because they (re)present a certain religious, social or spiritual fraction in society or have a specific programming task (i.e. NOS, NPS and the educational broadcasters).

Membership numbers as a criterion for the division of broadcast time and money were first introduced in the 1967 Broadcasting Act: a minimum of 150,000 paying members were required for obtaining a full license, with a program guide as the binding agent between the organizations and the members. These guides became instruments in a commercial struggle between the different broadcasting organizations. The former social and ideological ties were thus de facto transformed into a mainly consumer-oriented relationship (Van der Haak & Van Snippenburg, 2001). The Media Act (1988) and the Concession Act (2000) explicitly state that public broadcasting organizations themselves determine the form and content of their programs. Nevertheless, standards are set by imposing the production of a full range of programs comprising information, education, art, culture, and entertainment. For television, minimum percentages for these program categories are also stipulated: information and education (min. 35%); arts (min. 12.5%); culture, including arts (min. 25%); entertainment (max. 25%); European productions (min. 51%); Dutch or Frisian (50%); independent producers (25%); subtitling or hearing impaired (50%). That the public service continues to be an open

and dynamic system allowing new organizations to join, is illustrated by MAX, focusing at senior citizens, and Llink, representing new social movements, which entered the public system in September 2005. Those organizations wishing to join the public system must show at least 50,000 signatures of members and demonstrate that they add something new to the existing range of programs, thus increasing the diversity of the public broadcasting service.

In light of this traditional concern for (re)presenting all social and ideological fractions in society, we ask ourselves to what extent provisions are made in order to (re)present the more recent multicultural aspect of society in the Dutch public broadcasters' supply.

3. What About Provisions for Cultural Diversity?

In accordance with the Concession Act¹ (2000), in recent years cultural diversity has been given considerable encouragement on radio and television. This cultural diversity is expressed in the program provision as well as in the composition of the staff behind the scenes. The Concession Act (2000) encourages public broadcasting organizations to make more programs for ethnic minorities as target groups. This is the first time that the social and cultural role of the public broadcasting service has been laid down by law. In its task of serving as a model, the Netherlands Program Foundation (NPS) has to devote no less than 20 per cent of its television broadcasting time and 25 per cent of its radio broadcasting time to multicultural subjects. The idea behind this is that ethnic minorities should no longer have to resort to satellite channels from their country of origin for a media menu that appeals to them, but that they are able to find something to suit their taste in the Dutch public broadcasters' supply. As far as media content is concerned, this has resulted, for example, in public broadcasting services developing a broader program supply aimed at ethnic minorities. The Memorandum "Media and Minorities Policy" of the then-State Secretary of Media and Culture, Van der Ploeg, presented in 1999 (Bink, 2006), paved the way for the minorities passage in the Concession Act. However, these stipulations had yet to convince the policy- and media producers at the public broadcasting corporation. To support this, the public broadcaster launched a bureau for representation and diversity "Meer van Anders" (*More of Something Else*) in 2002. That same year three other organizations involved with media in a culturally diverse society came into

1 The Concession Act is part of the Media Act and states that the public broadcasting foundation holds the concession to produce public radio and television programs from 2000 to 2010.

being: MTNL (multicultural television in the four largest cities), FunX (metropolitan, multicultural radio station for youths) and Mixed Media (intermediary for traineeships for immigrant journalists). It appeared that on a national level, projects were being initiated in radio, television, and the press leading to more ethnic groups recognizing themselves in the media.

Visions of broadcasting towards ethnic minorities have undergone major changes in the Netherlands. In the 1950s and 1960s programs were aimed at target groups with educational and informative content about the home country and in the 'own' language. *Paspoort* (Passport) was such a service program supplying news and information in an effort to foster successful integration. Until the 1980s these target audience programs predominated on radio and television. But after realizing that the integration issue was not all that successful, new journalistic programs were produced to onesidedly remedy this failure, by informing ethnic groups in Dutch about the Netherlands, while emphasizing at times their intrinsicities and their "exoticisms" in comparison with Dutch society and the Dutch: *Meer op zondag* (More on Sunday) was an example. The 1990s, the decade of the emergence of commercial channels, introduced a smarter portrayal of ethnic minority groups on television, albeit as part of foreign (read US) programs. The NPS was set up in 1995 in order to provide more depth and quality, and get rid of the target audience television once and for all. As of the mid-1990s a crosscultural approach was adopted instead, and black actors and presenters became gradually more visible on the TV screen in programs such as *Comedy factory*, *Dunya and Desie*, *Bradaz*, *Urbania*, and children's programs with a multicultural angle². Also in the informative field, different topics such as dating, sexuality, religion, cultural differences, relationships with partners of different origins were brought to the fore. After 9/11 and in the aftermath of the murders of Pim Fortuyn (2002) and Theo van Gogh (2004), the multicultural society's reality has become more grim, which resulted in NPS programs emphasizing the political side of the multicultural society, for instance in programs such as *De meiden van Halal* (The Halal Girls). In short, nowadays there seems to be more variety in the portraits of ethnic minorities shown on Dutch television. On the one hand there is the soft, unproblematic approach of *Urbania*, also adopted in the Europe-wide program *Cityfolk*, staging three city dwellers one of whom is of ethnic minority

2 *Comedy factory* is a TV show with Surinamese presenter Raymann staging national and international stand-up comedians; *Dunya & Desie* evolves around a Moroccan and a Dutch 15 year-old living in Amsterdam and discussing teenage problems; *Bradaz* is a comedy about two Surinamese brothers running a music shop; *Urbania* shows portraits of people living in the multicultural city of Amsterdam.

background. On the other hand in the problem-seeking *Premtime*, a Surinamese presenter looks for discrimination and stigmatization in Dutch society and by doing so, succeeds in portraying this society in a much less stereotypical fashion than it is the case in the regular current affairs programs such as NOVA/*Den Haag Vandaag* (NOVA/The Hague Today).

As far as the employment of ethnic minorities is concerned, in 1995 national and regional public broadcasters and the World Service signed a declaration of intent striving for equal participation by ethnic minorities in all functions and at all levels. This resulted in the “More Colour in the Media” project implemented by Mira Media, a non-profit organization lobbying for more inclusivity. Towards the end of this project, the Stimulating Labor Participation of Minorities Act (SAMEN Act) came into force as a successor to the Act promoting equal employment for immigrant groups, which, however, terminated in December 2003. Since 2002 the public broadcaster’s Office for Diversity (formerly the Department of Portrayal), has worked on implementing the Concession Act for improving the visibility of ethnic employees within public broadcasting, both on and off screen. Several Mira Media projects are linked to this aim by acquiring information through immigrant opinion-leaders and their networks and approaching them (i.e., the online database “Perslink”) and by training immigrants to become media professionals (i.e., “Multiple Choice”).

Notwithstanding these initiatives and good intentions, two consecutive Monitors of Diversity (Sterk/Van Dijck, 2003; Koeman/Peeters/d’Haenens, 2007) showed that overall Dutch television (both public and commercial) is still far from providing a fair and pluralistic account of society. Furthermore, by way of a complementary qualitative professional insider’s perspective on the matter, seven program makers were interviewed in-depth about their views on visualizing diversity. This research (Aarden, 2006), of which we are providing a secondary analysis, assesses both the obstacles and opportunities (e.g., media logic, casting, scenario) experienced by the program makers when working at the (re)presentation of constituent groups in society on the Dutch public broadcaster’s fiction output.

4. Recent Research Evidence: Two Examples

As of the beginning of 2000, a need for statistics showing the state of affairs concerning questions of representation on Dutch television was felt. This empirical evidence was meant to persuade media professionals to improve their representation of the multicultural society in all its pluriformity and from multiple perspectives. A coding instrument was developed (see also Sterk,

2006) identifying all persons and characters visible on television and labelling them for various categories (gender, ethnicity, age group, and visible disability) as well as their function in the program (anchor, talk show host, leading character, etc.). Ethnicity was operationalized in terms of visibility (skin colour, hair, shape of the eyes, style of clothing, family name, and/or self-identification). Summarizing, the results revealed that the dominant group on Dutch television was white (70%), while 14 percent belonged to the group of ethnic others. At first sight, this result does not seem to be too bad, given the approximate 10 percent in demographics. Nevertheless, the 14 percent included “foreign” ethnic groups, the largest group being “African Americans”, mainly appeared in bought US productions aired on Dutch commercial channels, in (pop) concerts or athletic events, and were not particularly representative of the Dutch multicultural fabric. In comparison: Just 2.4 percent of the people shown on public television and 1.1 percent on commercial television were of Surinamese or Antillean origin. People from North African descent were represented with a mere 0.2 percent.

4.1 The Diversity Monitor 2005

The second Monitor of Diversity (by Koeman, Peeters & d'Haenens, 2007) is a follow-up of the first and equally evolves around the extent to which and the way in which social reality is being constructed through the Dutch public broadcaster compared to its commercial counterparts. The Diversity Monitor 2005 analysed a total of nine Dutch television channels, among which were three public channels (*Nederland 1, 2 and 3*) and six commercial channels (*RTL4, RTL5, Yorin, SBS6, Net5 and Veronica*). These were all the Dutch general interest channels at the time which together reached a market share of 89%. A constructed week has been examined: the seven days were spread over the period from Monday, February 28, up to and including Tuesday, April 5, 2005. This was done in order to reduce the risk of current events influencing the data. Only prime-time programs were included in the sample, which consisted of 104 hours of public-service programs and 124 hours of commercial program output³. The number of programs analysed amounted to 481 (i.e., 250 of the public channels and 231 of the commercial channels). These programs were predominantly non-fiction (71%). The commercial channels offer, relatively speaking, more fiction, especially because of the input of *RTL5* and *Net 5*.

3 These are net figures, i.e. exclusive of commercials, program announcements and parts of programs already begun.

Parallel to the former version of the Diversity Monitor, this content analysis also looked into the ways in which public service as well as commercial TV stations in the Netherlands assume their social responsibility towards a pluralist society. Research questions were: How “virtuously” are the broadcasters portraying social reality when it comes to the visualization of age, ethnicity and gender?; What TV channels are doing a lesser or better job, and in what program genres?

By means of a quantitative analysis the Diversity Monitor charted the (re)presentation of different groups, with particular focus on gender, age and ethnicity. As stated above, under the terms of the Concession Act of 2000, the Dutch public broadcasting system takes its responsibility very seriously: its mission is to address all groups of society and to (re)present them in the most balanced fashion possible. The policy with which this mission is to be carried out highlights the broadcaster’s public responsibility and goes beyond mere conformity with program regulations and financial criteria (see Bardoel, d’Haenens & Peeters, 2005). Still, the question remains to what extent the audience-oriented programming policy of the public-service system is effectively more successful than the consumer-oriented approach of the commercial stations in reflecting the diversity of Dutch society. A further question then is: Does the public system not quite succeed in achieving its goals or do the commercial stations manage to do so even without those specific guidelines?

The results revealed a wide diversity of TV programs in the Netherlands, but diversity as such is no guarantee of a balanced (re)presentation of society at large. The fact is that public and commercial stations make a selection of the material they show their audiences, and this results in a kind of sub-optimal diversity. Moreover, audience groups too tend to make their own selections, so that the diversity on offer is effectively reduced even further. Hence, in light of the combined selection mechanisms of the broadcaster and the public, what the viewer eventually gets is at the most a mirror of his or her own group.

On first viewing the results of our research, neither public nor commercial television in the Netherlands appeared to be particularly representative of Dutch society. Women, children, senior citizens and ethnic minorities are, generally speaking, underrepresented. However, finding out if Dutch television or its public channels and commercial channels create a balanced image of different groups is less simple than it might appear to be. Things are fairly simple as far as the men/women ratio is concerned: Men have a clear majority, whoever the broadcaster and whatever the channel or genre, although *Net5* is definitely non-chauvinist and *Nederland 2* mainly puts men on screen (e.g. in sports programs). The distribution on the basis of ethnic origin shows the most marked distortion of reality. Eight out of ten persons on Dutch

television is classified as “white”, two out of ten as “non-white”. In the latter category we find slightly more people of Mediterranean and Asiatic descent on public channels, whereas commercial channels have a slightly larger percentage of people with a darker skin (“blacks”). The reason for this difference is that commercial channels have a larger number of American films and series, in which African Americans are more numerous.

The Diversity Monitor therefore mainly traced the differences between the public and commercial channels at the level of the program genre. Women are underrepresented in sports items mainly, and in other programs they are presented as common citizens, cast in “softer” roles or invited to discuss social themes. The most balanced male/female ratio is found in children’s programs and in entertainment and fiction. The age structure of the Dutch population is best reflected in children’s programs, which are also more “colourful” than other genres. With respect to the representation of black people, fiction has an above-average score, but that is due to fiction programs from the US. Information and children’s programs present an above-average number of people of Mediterranean origin. With respect to ethnicity in the various genres there are few differences between commercial and public channels: the information and educational programs of the public channels are the only ones that are slightly more colourful. An examination of the relation between ethnicity and the appearance of individuals produces a striking finding: More than half of the white people (55.7%) appearing on screen take the floor several times or regularly, while most non-white individuals (56.9%) are given only one chance to speak. Yet, migrants are not more explicitly presented as spokespersons for their ‘own’ group than individuals belonging to the native population. Just like other groups, the non-white group is strongest in subjects related to art, culture and entertainment (18.3%). Apart from these three subjects they are mainly associated with the multicultural society (11.7%) as well as terrorism and war (10.7%). The public-service channel in particular mainly highlights migrants in the context of the multicultural society and integration. The commercial channels, by contrast, present people of colour mainly in programs dealing with art, culture, and entertainment. In fiction programs the main activities of white as well as of non-white characters involve work or are distributed over work and home.

Thanks to the combination of our content analysis with continuous audience measurement figures of the programs under study, we were able to assess the demographic composition of the audience in terms of age and gender. A striking example: for non-fiction programs, the composition of the audience (i.e., percentage of women) correlates with the gender of the presenters (i.e., percentage of women in the presenters’ team) as well as with the gender of the other actors figuring in the program (i.e., percentage of

women in the items dealt with). When it comes to fiction programs, however, the amount of female viewers does not correlate significantly with the percentage of female actors. Additionally, young audiences show a tendency to watch young presenters and youngsters in non-fiction programs, which is clearly not the case for seniors. Moreover, while young people do not seem to watch seniors (neither in fiction nor in non-fiction), seniors do watch their own age group both in fiction and non-fiction. In general, seniors are relatively underrepresented in public television fiction programs and evidently in competition with numerous younger actors, except for a few striking examples in homemade fiction programs attracting a lot of viewers.

Above are a few indications illustrating that diversity in programming does not automatically lead towards diversity of audience groups. Television is therefore not a mirror of society (partly due to the viewer's choice). It may be true that Dutch viewers make a varied selection of programs and zap, for example, from news to entertainment and drama, but that does not mean that in doing so they come face to face with diverse social groups. If diversity on television is linked to a few ratings which are available, what we find is that the preference of the public is for programs with and about their own group: young people select (foreign) programs in which adolescents and young adults are the key figures, and they do not go for programs featuring over-50s. One more example: men tend to zap away from programs in which women are well represented. Nevertheless, public channels tend to be more "coloured" than their commercial counterparts, but we find this feature particularly in programs staging many other (white) persons or in programs attracting a relatively low number of viewers as well as in children's programs.

4.2 Interviewing the Program Makers: What Remedies Are There?

As both Monitors of Diversity were mere quantitative content analyses that revealed a difference between public and commercial channels, homemade and foreign productions, as well as among program genres, it was deemed interesting to look beyond the program as a mere result and pay particular attention to the production process of Dutch homemade fiction. Therefore, the aim was to look behind the scenes, asking program makers working for public and commercial broadcasters about the choices they tend to make when visualizing diversity on the television screen, as well as the rationales behind

their casting decisions and story-line selections⁴. The following research questions were raised: Which factors are influencing the ways in which ethnic diversity is being visualized in the production of homemade fiction series? And in what way do these factors play a role in the production process⁵? Four kinds of fiction series were analysed. Seven program makers (either the scenario writer or the creative producer) of a soap series⁶, a police series⁷, a comedy series⁸, and a children's series⁹ were interviewed in-depth. Only two of them were working on a series aired on the commercial broadcaster. This illustrates the more prominent role the public broadcaster is playing in the production of homemade fiction in the Netherlands.

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- 4 Such research was carried out by René Aarden for his Master's thesis in Communication Studies at Radboud University Nijmegen under the supervision of the author of this article.
 - 5 This basic knowledge examined in the country of residence consists of two parts: knowledge of the Dutch language and of Dutch society. The former is tested with 50 questions examining sentence repetition, answering short questions, finding opposites, retelling stories. The latter is examined by means of 30 questions covering the 7 topics from the DVD 'Coming to the Netherlands' dealing with geography and living, history, polity, democracy and legislation, Dutch language, education and upbringing, health care, work and income. This DVD is part of the integration package that the individual eager to come to the Netherlands should purchase in order to prepare her- or himself for the integration examination, which takes place in the Dutch embassy or at the consulate-general in one's country or neighboring country. Costs amount to €350 to be paid to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, prior to examination. The exam can be taken over and over again.
 - 6 As soap operas, *Goede tijden slechte tijden/Good Times Bad Times* (RTL4) en *Onderweg naar morgen/On the Way to Tomorrow* (BNN, PSB) were selected. *Good Times Bad Times* is about relations and problems among and within families. The series lasts already for ten years. *Underway to tomorrow* started off as a hospital series, but changed its focus to the life of urban youth in their twenties.
 - 7 Van Speijk (Talpa) and Spangen (TROS, PSB) were the police series under study. Van Speijk is about the (petty) crime-related ongoing in the Van Speijk street in Amsterdam. Spangen is a detective series in which murder cases are to be solved.
 - 8 *De band/The Band* (VARA, PSB) and *Kinderen geen bezwaar/Children no Objection* (VARA, PSB) were the examples chosen for comedy series. *The Band* follows the lives of five members of a music band. *Children no Objection* is a sitcom casting a couple with two kids from a former marriage. He is a house husband and she is a psychiatrist. The boy is in love with the girl and does about everything to attract her attention.
 - 9 *Ik ben Willem/I am Willem* (VPRO, PSB) was the only homemade children's program produced by the public broadcaster. *I am Willem* is based on a book, following an eight-year-old boy with divorced parents. Willem lives in Amsterdam with his mom and dad alternately.

Seven factors (Table 1) were found to impact on the reflection of ethnic diversity in television fiction: the program maker, the broadcaster, the genre, the media logic, the actors, the audience, and the subject dealt with.

The following paragraphs will look into each of these factors in more detail and expand on the accompanying rationales brought up by the makers interviewed. *Individual preferences and opinions* unmistakably tend to play a role in the portrayal of ethnic diversity (or the lack thereof). Sometimes the aesthetics of the showing of different cultures mark the decision. At times colour does not play a decisive factor in the decision-making process at all. Other factors do, such as the quality of an actor, which is considered more important at all times. Also the personal living context of the producer does have an impact on the series produced.

Success factors	Rationales
Personal experiences and preferences	1. Determining and emphasizing certain issues. 2. Own living conditions play a role in the writing of the scenario. 3. Own opinions of what is “good” when it comes to the showing of diversity.
Broadcasting organization	1. Contact with contact person/intermediary at the broadcasting organization. 2. Few conditions set out by the broadcasting organization when it comes to diversity.
Genre	1. Each genre has its own possibilities. 2. Each genre is in principle apt to show diversity.
Media logic	1. Too few crew members from ethnic minority background available. 2. Amount of time and money available is determining the possibilities to visualize ethnic diversity.
Audience	1. Connection seen between the colour of the series and the colour of the audience.
Actors	1. Disagreement about the influence of actors on the ethnic diversity of the series. 2. Disagreement about whether a character should be performed by a person of the same ethnicity.
Subject	1. Subject determines whether ethnic diversity is already self-evidently present in the story. If not, it is the task of the makers to make it so.

Table 1: Factors playing a role in the portrayal of ethnic minorities with accompanying rationales

The interviewees all recognize that their own world and the production world in which they evolve is predominantly white, and they all see this reality as a serious impediment for ethnically diverse scenarios (as in “The Band”, written from the personal experience of the writer and with obvious implications for the script):

[...] I was born in 1960, and this whole issue of multiculturalism or multi-ethnic diversity did not play a role in my youth. And because “The Band” is inspired by my own youth and my own band time, the series is white. This would be different should it be about rappers, I would have probably thought about Moroccans and Moroccan bands, but I’m simply too old for this.

A second factor of importance is the *broadcasting organization* airing the production. Usually one single contact person is playing the intermediary role between the production team and the broadcaster who commissioned the production. The contact varies between once and several times a week to discuss story lines and role attributions. The producers acknowledge that to maintain their creative freedom, and ethnic diversity rarely seems to be an issue in the discussions: when brought up, it is never a goal in itself. In two instances the broadcasting organizations have put their stamp on the subject of the series. For example, “On the Way to Tomorrow” moved from the commercial broadcaster Yorin to BNN, a public broadcasting organization aimed at youngsters. This move resulted in doing away with some older characters and introducing some younger ones. Moreover, instead of a hospital set-up in its former version, the emphasis is put on life in the big city, which automatically brings along more ethnic diversity. The second case is “Children No Objection”: the broadcaster explicitly asked the producer to make a product that caters to an audience similar to that of the previous program. However, this request did not have an impact on the degree of ethnic diversity in the series. The difference between commercial and public broadcasters is also pointed at: The former will only look at the interest of the advertisers and therefore consider the opportunities offered by programs and series to attract an audience as large as possible. Since ethnic minority groups are not yet seen as an interesting group by commercial broadcasters, their interest in catering programs for this group is still relatively low. As the public broadcaster is publicly financed and every tax payer should find his or her taste in its supply, it seems to be gradually more aware of its public role in diversifying its programs.

According to the informants each of the four fiction *genres* under study offer possibilities of their own in terms of portraying ethnic diversity. Multiculturalism can offer a prolific soil for misunderstandings and hilarious situations. Nevertheless, opinions are diverging here: while one informant sees difficulties in connecting multiculturalism with humour, another believes humour offers an excellent platform to keep away from the heavily loaded stereotypical images and portrayals as experienced in the news and current affairs formats. Soaps are seen as an excellent genre to show diversity because

it is storytelling about the real issues of life. Soaps rely furthermore on a large cast, almost organically allowing the introduction of actors from a different ethnic origin. The producer of “Good Times Bad Times” first and foremost considers the series as fictitious, in contrast with real life and a meticulous representation of it. The maker of “On the Way to Tomorrow” on the contrary stages characters in the series that viewers identify themselves with.

A fourth factor that may somewhat colour a television program is its *production team, the crew*. This statement was at first qualified as nonsense by all our informants. When thinking about it further, the informants could imagine the potential impact of a culturally mixed crew on the content, whether or not this is relevant for the series’ subject. All informants agree on the fact that too few people from another ethnic background are part of the profession. This seems to be changing currently but in this very moment it is still felt as problematic. Moreover, as the funds are shrinking, this is a rather bad period for hiring. Hence, the media logic or, in other words, the amount of time and money spent on a production, does play a major role on the ways in which diversity is visualized or not.

The informants aim at catering to a large *audience*, which has its implications for the degree of prominence of ethnicity in the program. They all see a connection between the representation of a certain minority group and their viewing of the program. The maker of “Van Speijk” refers to reactions of Turkish viewers to the portrayal of Turks in the program. Also the Internet site of “On the Way to Tomorrow” makes it possible to maintain active contact with the BNN members and thus with the viewers of the series. This allows the producers to consult their audience and make (colour) adjustments in the series if needed, on the basis of appreciation given in relation to certain characters and issues dealt with.

In contrast with the problematic hiring of crew members of colour, the scouting of *actors* with an ethnic minority background is experienced as a lot easier. There are enough good actors with an ethnic minority background, so it seems. The answer to the question whether actors have a true impact on the way in which ethnic diversity is visualized in the series varies. The maker of “Children No Objection” believes that actors do not impact on the portrayal of ethnic diversity. “They play a role that is written in the script, and in principle nothing is changed to it.” The other informants do believe the actors have an impact on their role as they serve as some sort of sounding board against which the makers can check their story lines. Actors also happen to co-decide about issues that are acceptable or not according to their culture. Of course each actor brings in a personal style, a personality, which determines the way the character looks.

Finally the *subject* of a series can exert some influence in that diversity is not always self-evident. In “I am Willem” a white little boy is being followed; in “Children No Objection” a white mother and father with white kids are presented, and the series “The band” is about five white band members. Only in the first series the makers have tried to bring in some secondary characters of colour. In the other two nothing of the like has happened. In the other series, the subject lent itself better to ethnic diversity: “On the Way to Tomorrow” is about youngsters in a big city and “Van Speijk” evolves in and around a multicultural area in Amsterdam. In “Good Times Bad Times” multiculturalism is brought up in the context of (extended) family lines.

Because life in Amsterdam is like that. That is why we have introduced Hicham, a Moroccan boy who is very popular and cute but also behaving very badly... (“On the Way to Tomorrow”)

Amsterdam West, where the series evolves, is a Turkish bulwark, that is why we casted a Turk, but also in real life the police force has tried to hire a lot of allochtones in order to work well in these areas. (“Van Speijk”)

Overall, the in-depth interviews made it clear that the program makers are at all times conscious about the impact multiculturalism and ethnic diversity may have when chosen as topics in TV content. In their daily work they tend to reflect a great deal about the social responsibility issue. They also pointed out that the societal climate plays a central role in their decision-making about visualizations of multiculturalism and ethnic diversity. But ideas are diverging: the producer of “Good Times Bad Times” thinks he is above all making a fiction program and therefore he believes it is up to the viewer to decide whether to go along with the story or not. The maker of “On the Way to Tomorrow” does find herself fulfilling a social responsibility. The danger of political correctness was brought up several times in the interviews, but it remained unclear what political correctness precisely is and consequently, what a realistic account of society is or should be. In fact, it is seen as the potential death of diversity. Visualizing ethnicity is considered clearly as a conflict variable in the production of fiction, given that it is socially loaded.

5. Conclusion

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reflect a great deal about the social responsibility issue. They also pointed out that the societal climate plays a central role in their decision-making about visualizations of multiculturalism and ethnic diversity. But ideas are diverging: the producer of “Good Times Bad Times” thinks he is above all making a fiction program and therefore he believes it is up to the viewer to decide whether to go along with the story or not. The maker of “On the Way to Tomorrow” does find herself fulfilling a social responsibility. The danger of political correctness was brought up several times in the interviews, but it remained unclear what political correctness precisely is and consequently, what a realistic account of society is or should be. In fact, it is seen as the potential death of diversity. Visualizing ethnicity is considered clearly as a conflict variable in the production of fiction given that it is socially loaded.

As a result of our diversity monitor 2005, the Dutch public broadcaster has recently decided (at the end of 2006) to prescribe guidelines for the amount of multicultural subjects that should be portrayed and quotas for the number of guests with an ethnic minority background who should be staged in which programs. Moreover, the public broadcaster also intends to spend 2 more million euros in order to continuously measure the viewing behaviour of ethnic minority groups. These measures clearly illustrate the firm intention to formulate clear-cut guidelines and to keep away from the former attitude characterized by a great extent of freedom from obligation. In addition to these important and perhaps temporary quantitative measures, an approach in which diversity is seen as an integral part of program quality management seems to be a fruitful way of looking at the matter. This entails taking into account staffing strategies, improving intercultural competences of the current staff, fostering ongoing communication with diverse audience groups, as well as polishing the overall image of the broadcasting organization. However, a smooth implementation of all this requires a bearing among the staff: in other words, the staff should share the same vision.

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