

## Story: Television

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# Dunleavy, 2014

In its first two decades (1960–80), New Zealand television's potential to an overwhelming majority of television personnel were middle-class Pākehā, who dominated the cultural perspectives of the programmes that were produced. When Māori did appear, it was usually as entertainers. Performers, including singer Prince Tui Teke and comedian Billy T. James, were included in variety shows, and a high proportion of the few programmes about Māori focused on song and dance. *Songs of their forefathers* (1964), *Pupiri ra* (a six-part series, 1970) and *Taku toa* (the first full-length colour film production, 1970) all fell into this category. In 1974 the *Tangata whenua* series (directed by Barry Barclay of Ngāti Apa) and the one-off drama *Uenuku* (narrated entirely in the Māori language) showed some of the potential for Māori programming.

#### Shining stars

The Howard Morrison Quartet made the first of their many TV appearances on the first official night of television broadcast (1 June 1960).

An *Auckland Star* reviewer described the quartet (which had previous television experience in Melbourne) looking 'as much at ease as on stage or in night club. They shone.'<sup>1</sup>

#### Where are the Māori?

A 1978 petition calling for more Māori content on television had more than 25,000 signatures, and came with the comment that there were more African Americans than Māori on New Zealand screens.

The 1970s surge in Māori activism included a push by the Maori Council and the Wellington-based Te Reo Maori Society for better representation of Māori on screen. There were marches and a petition signed by more than 30,000 people, calling for support for te reo Māori (the Māori language).

#### Maori Production Unit

In 1980 TVNZ created a Maori Production Unit dedicated to producing a set of Māori-language programmes. The unit also provided a training ground for Māori staff. The 'mainstreaming' of Māori language, news and culture that this unit's regular programmes aimed for was all the more effective because there were only two TV channels.

A weekly current affairs magazine, *Koha* (1980–89, continuing as *Marae* from 1990), and a daily bulletin, *Te karere* (1983–), were the first regular Māori-produced programmes. They aimed to nurture Māori language, culture and custom and to nourish biculturalism by offering Māori perspectives to mainstream audiences. Aired in prime time until 1990, such programmes continued in the 2000s in off-peak slots and remained important. They pioneered a distinctive style for Māori-produced TV news, and provided an initial training ground for the development of the larger range of news, current affairs and factual programmes later produced for Māori television.

In late 2014 TVNZ announced that it would be outsourcing the production of most of its Māori and Pacific programming, other than *Te karere*.

### Fighting for Māori television

The decision to create a separate Māori television network was preceded by a series of legal battles. The first took place in 1985, when a claim brought by Ngā Kaiwhakapūmau i te Reo (the Wellington Māori Language Board) was heard by the Waitangi Tribunal. The last was heard in 1993 by the Privy Council (then New Zealand's highest court), when it decided that promises made by government to Māori had to be fulfilled.

Te Māngai Pāho, a Māori broadcast funding agency, was one result; another was the inclusion of programming promoting Māori language and culture as a priority for NZ On Air funding. Setting up a Māori television channel took nearly a decade. A pilot service, Aotearoa Television Network (ATN), was created in 1996, largely limited to viewers in Auckland. Insufficient public funding and related uncertainties led to ATN's closure in 1997.

#### Māori Television

The most successful of the Labour government's achievements in broadcast television was the introduction of a non-commercial Māori Television Service (MTS). In stark contrast with the advertiser-funded position of TVNZ, the founding legislation of MTS (the Māori Television Service Act 2003) gave it a clear 'public service' remit and full public funding. Launched in 2004, Māori Television, the flagship channel of MTS, brought a profile to Māori language, culture, custom, society and history that was unprecedented in television. A second channel, Te Reo, entirely in the Māori language, was launched in 2008.

Māori Television is required to broadcast mainly in the Māori language during prime-time hours, to offer a programme mix that informs, educates and entertains, and to nurture indigenous culture, custom and language. An important marker of its

public status is the very high proportion (up to 70%) of local content it offers viewers. Broadcasting a full range of programming, including current affairs, documentaries, children's programmes, light entertainment and drama, Māori Television attracted a small but diverse audience.

**Footnotes:**

1. Quoted in Robert Boyd-Bell, *New Zealand television: the first 25 years*. Auckland: Reed Methuen, 1985, p. 75.

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