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‘Kate Darian-Smith et al., Migrants, Television and Australian Stories: A New History’

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Kate Darian-Smith, Sue Turnbull, Sukhmani Khorana and Kyle Harvey, *Migrants, Television and Australian Stories: A New History* (Routledge, 2025), 278pp. Paperback. £41.99. ISBN: 978-1-0328-5694-0.

This is quite an interesting history of migrants and Australian television. I was quite keen to review it having focused on migration to Australia in my research in the past as well having lived in Australia (where I did my Ph.D. a few decades ago now) and being amazed by the quality of programming on the Australian channel SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) in particular. In fact, I have commented to many people over the years since that SBS was the best television channel that I have ever come across (and I have lived in several other countries during my lifetime, including the United Kingdom, Canada, and Hong Kong) and every country needed an SBS.

Darian-Smith et al. provide a very useful historical context to immigration to Australia, primarily from the post-Second World War period onwards. It was at this time that Australia embarked on a mass migration programme, preferring British and Irish migrants (as it had done for much of its history to that point) but realising that it could not get the numbers it desired, it widened the net to include northern and western Europeans, eastern and central Europeans, and then southern Europeans. The 1970s saw the arrival of Turks and Lebanese and then primarily refugees from South-East Asia. Recent decades have seen a huge increase in migrants from China and India, the latter being the source country of most of Australia's migrants today.

Having outlined this broader context of migration patterns the book goes on to explore the way in which Australian television has reflected the changing make-up of its population. As the authors quite rightly point out until the 1970s the majority of Australian television and the presenters and actors on those shows reflected the British identity of Australia at this time, even though a growing proportion of its population was not of British descent. It was partly in response to increasing criticism of this from the latter that SBS was established in 1978 and the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation – Australia's other public broadcaster) was encouraged to do more to better reflect its audience.

Interestingly Australia did not go down the same route as Canada for example in legislating for a quota of Australian content in its television broadcasting. The results of this were on display though as a vast proportion of content on Australian television became dominated initially by British content and then American. This is something I observed myself when I lived in Australia. The book also highlights the challenges when it comes to representation of Australia's ethnic diversity on its television channels. Australians of Anglo-Celtic descent had dominated the presentation of Australian shows, especially news broadcasts for so long that including Australians of Italian or Greek descent was seen as real progress from the perspective of Australian production companies. This was despite the fact that Australia's population had become much more diverse, with peoples from all over the world, not just Europe, making Australia their home.

Even though it is not a primary focus of the book, the authors also put the lack of representation of Australia's ethnic diversity on television in a wider context by illustrating the nearly complete lack of representation of First Nations in Australia on television as well until recent decades. So, the problem has historically been a broader one. Furthermore, even when both of the above groups have finally been represented on television, initially this was based on stereotypes. The book provides an example of a newly arrived family from Hong Kong, the Lims to Ramsay Street in the famous Australian soap *Neighbours* who were accused of kidnapping and eating

a neighbourhood dog in 1993. It is partly in response to the propagation of these quite shocking stereotypes that new technology, particularly web series and international streaming services has allowed Australians from non-European backgrounds especially to produce their own shows with their own narratives. A good example of this is *Halal Gurls*, an Australian drama-comedy series.

Migrants, Television, and Australian Stories: A New History is quite a thought-provoking book which certainly piqued my interest. The greatest strength of the book I think is the future directions of research that it outlines. I, for one, am quite excited to see what more is written about the subject in the future and what entertaining shows Australia continues to produce on the international stage.

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