

Humour as ‘Cultural Reconciliation’

in South African Situation Comedy:

An Ethnographic Study of Multicultural Female Viewers

Dorothy M. Roome

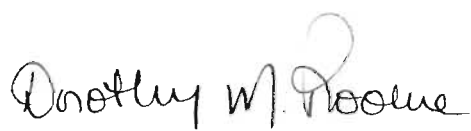
Despite existing conditions or laws to mandate change, nothing substantial can be changed without an organic movement from within the society arising to become a new reality, shifting the previous disposition of social forces (Gramsci, 1973:178).

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
in the Centre for Cultural and Media Studies,
University of Natal, Durban.

Durban, June 1998

Supervisor:
Ruth Teer-Tomaselli, PhD.

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities. University of Natal, Durban. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Dorothy M. Roome". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'D'.

Dorothy M. Roome

June 1998.

Acknowledgements

The work presented here came about originally through the belief that women could make a difference towards change in South Africa. The nature of this project has changed in the three years since it began. What started off as research into literacy for Zulu women became more focused through discussion, plus trial-and-error pilot groups. I originally came to undertake the research at the University of Natal because I had become acquainted with Professor Keyan Tomaselli through his incredible publications on the media in South Africa. It was his supervision that finally guided me into looking at the multicultural aspect of the research and reception studies. The encouragement of and suggestions from Dr. Ruth Teer-Tomaselli at early stages of investigation, and later as my supervisor have been the mainstay for the completion of the project. To both I say thank you for the opportunities you have made available in so many ways.

To Carl Fischer and Gray Hofmeyr, of Dapple Productions, who made time and space for me to start my investigation on *Suburban Bliss*, many thanks. Roberta Durrant, of Penguin Films twice found time to be interviewed for *Going Up* which was necessary when I started the second project, and I thank her. To Susan Govender, friend and colleague, whose concern and assistance at all times really kept me going, a special thank you.

In particular I would like to thank the following for their encouragement and gentle criticism: Professor Tom O'Regan from Murdoch University; Professor James Zaffiro, and Professor Louise Zaffiro, Iowa University.

In addition, thank you to Brunton Nicholls for his computer depictions of television's 'hermeneutic circle'; those incredibly helpful librarians, Zola Mdledle and Lindiwe Gumede who never failed to help me find those missing citations; Adele Uys, Research Executive South African Broadcasting Corporation Research Unit who helped me with the AMPS.

For the women on the ground who made the research possible by convening and facilitating the groups thank you: Nise Malenge, (pilot group), Jubilee Shimaliya; Elizabeth Mncadi; Janet Watson, Freda van Rensburg, Joanne September, Susan Govender, Leigh-Ann Petherbridge, Leigh Phipson and Eunice Gambushe.

Thank you also to my three daughters, Colleen, Siobhan and Alison, who took care of our home and affairs while we were in South Africa. Finally, without the unstinting emotional and practical support of my husband John Roome, who helped me transcribe the tapes and complete the graphics to finish this dissertation would not be finished yet, so an extra special thank you to him.

The Human Sciences Research Council provided financial assistance for the dissertation. The Centre for Cultural and Media Studies, University of Natal, Durban, provided a Graduate Assistantship.

The outcome is my responsibility alone.

Abstract

South African women of different ethnicity and background, having lived under apartheid, are now challenged by the freedoms expressed in the Bill of Rights and the new Constitution. This study, identifying the connections between gender, race, class and social relations, incorporates an ethnographic methodology and a cultural studies perspective in the reception analysis of thirteen multicultural focus groups. In the analysis of their response to two locally produced situation comedies, *Suburban Bliss* and *Going Up III*, the effort to determine existing cultural barriers is made, examining laughter as a benchmark for the comprehension by women from different backgrounds. The theoretical framework for the research evaluates the extent to which the writers, producers and directors created a text which connects with the multicultural women viewers' reality. Changes affecting the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) in terms of broadcasting policy, are traced, and a brief history of the organization since the inception of broadcasting in South Africa is incorporated. Language policy had reflected the overt political ideology of Afrikaner nationalism, consequently the political changes resulting from the 1994 democratic election led to major transformations in language and style of programming to incorporate local content for multicultural audiences. This caused economic hardship for the SABC, as advertising revenue was drastically curtailed.

Textual analysis of both *Suburban Bliss* and *Going Up III* employed a mix of structural, semiotics, and ideological analysis. Through interviews with the production team it became apparent that *SB* was based on American sitcom genre, while *GU III* is a hybrid combination, conceived to meet the perceived needs of the local multilingual multicultural audience. The extent to which the programmes mediate the producer/audience relationship, contributing to the hegemonic process is investigated, as the interpretation of the text can be different in the decoding from that originally intended by the producer or encoder when creating the programme. The situation comedies by depicting in a humorous vein the realities of affirmative action, adult access to pornography, the aspirations of the new black elite, feminine participation in the democratic process, and the rejection of authoritarian censorship, from the state or the home indicates the ideological position of the production teams.

The responses of the focus groups were examined in terms of their own identity as well as where an historic individuality expands into the collective communities of nations, gender, classes, generations, race and ethnic groups. Identity was perceived as connected but distinct and separate, as any event can affect both individuals and society. The thesis explores the proposition that humour as 'cultural reconciliation' can be effective if people are prepared to alter negative patterns of thinking and social practices.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	v
Preface.....	vi
Chapter I	
Research Design: The ethnographic interview	1
Chapter II	
South African Television Ecology: The ‘new’ multicultural audiences.....	27
Chapter III	
Moment of production : <i>Suburban Bliss</i>	60
Chapter IV	
Moment of production : <i>Going Up III</i>	116
Chapter V	
Towards Mediation and Accommodation: Discursive representation of ‘audience activity’	163
Chapter VI	
Transformation and Reconciliation: A Flexible Model.....	218
Chapter VII	
Identity and the Comprehension of Humour: Negotiating the Notion of Pleasure Among Multicultural Viewers.....	255
Chapter VIII	
Conclusion.....	283
References.....	304

PREFACE

There has been a forty-year history in South Africa of women attempting to improve their living and working conditions. Starting in 1955, the Freedom Charter (which was compiled by the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) in preparation for the Congress of the People), demanded, in addition to many other rights, the following:

*We demand for all women in South Africa ...**Full opportunities for employment in all spheres of work** ... (Walker,1991:285).*

There is no division mentioned with regard to ethnicity or race in this Freedom Charter, only gender. Eventually after the democratic election of 1994, the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of South Africa passed in 1996, guarantees that:

The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth (South African Bill of Rights, 1996: Section 9).

This dissertation examines how South African women of different ethnicity and background dealt with apartheid and how they are adjusting to a democratic society. My methodology for data-collection was through participant observation, where I became a participating non-threatening member of each of the thirteen focus groups in order to understand the constraints, motivations, emotions, and meanings espoused by each group (Lindlof,1995). Participant observation is a way of self-reflexive learning, depending on the person's reflection on their own response to other human beings. The craft of ethnography includes explaining how research problems develop and how researchers become part of the process of investigation. Explicating the significance of this lived experience becomes the report in the past tense, describing events that are not available for observation, fostering trust and analysing certain kinds of discourse. Reasons for studying a particular group of people include trying to discover how they infuse their own actions and that of others with meanings from which they can imagine future actions. Cultural rules and resources create communication strategies in social interaction, but to provide

a coherent explanation for embarking on this ethnographic research with exclusive female participants from South Africa, requires a brief personal history.

Early years - a personal history

My roots run deep in South Africa. I trace paternal ancestors to the early Dutch settlers and maternal ones to 1820 settler stock from England. In addition, a major influence on my intellectual development was an urbane English grandfather, who came from a liberal tradition and who arrived in the early twentieth century to make his fortune in the gold rush. The animosity between the British and the Afrikaners was exacerbated by the Anglo-Boer war of 1899-1902, as was evidenced in both families' negative reaction to my parents' 'mixed' marriage. Neither family attended the wedding: my father's family were appalled he had married an '*Engelse vrou*' (an English woman) and my mother's parents believed she had married a man below her station. In South Africa many Afrikaners never forgave their conquerors, and for some the Anglo-Boer war continued in the development of 'racial capitalism' (Chapter Two). I married during the last year of my degree and spent the next few years, moving around South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe at the behest of employers from the construction industry, together with husband and a growing family of daughters.

Efforts at political involvement aimed at change in South Africa were tainted with fear, since any deviation from the *status quo* became punishable in various ways, including ninety days detention by the police. My mother's next door neighbour was the late Helen Joseph, head of the Garment Workers' Union, banned and under house arrest for five years; a police car parked permanently outside her gate, as a living reminder of the power of the state to punish the recalcitrant. The decision to emigrate from South Africa (the land of the lotus eaters¹ for some) to the United States came when the black school riots erupted, leading to the killing of black school children in Soweto in June 1976. Since fighting the system from within had been ineffectual, it seemed a protest might be made by departing.

¹ The lotus plant in ancient Greek legend is represented as inducing luxurious dreaminess and distaste for an active life hence the metaphor comparing many white South Africans to being in a state of euphoria, ignoring the realities of people of colour who were being persecuted under racial capitalism, perpetuated by apartheid (The Reader's Digest Great Encyclopaedia Dictionary, by Oxford University Press, 1962:521).

An interregnum

After the release of Nelson Mandela, the spirit of change indicated a different era, so, during the summer of 1993, I visited South Africa and shot a series of videos, interviewing various distinguished black and white men and women. Some of my questions sought a response about the place of women in a post-apartheid era. All interviewees indicated a need for women's participation at all levels of society existed, but expressed hesitation about the urgency of this participation. Women's higher education and participation in politics and economics seemed not to be a priority. Mr Mathews Phosa, at that time Senior Legal Council to Mr Nelson Mandela, and now Premier of Mpumalanga (formerly the Eastern Transvaal), was one of the interviewees and proved informative on the future of media as an educational tool in a post-apartheid society. His responses on the exclusive use of English as a medium of communication after the inception of the 'new' South Africa were especially interesting. The legal rights of women generally have been given lip-service by politicians and lawmakers and, although the focus for change in education is based on equity of representation, discourse on higher education for women has been vague.

After apartheid

After the democratic elections of 1994, I felt emboldened to return to South Africa to embark on research among multicultural women. I wondered how South African women, having lived under apartheid with its censorship, draconian laws and an overbearing patriarchal society, would respond to the challenge of the freedoms expressed in the Bill of Rights and the new constitution. As a white middle class woman, who had lived away from a life of privilege and separation of the races for nearly twenty years, on my return I was intrigued how white women would adjust to the 'new' South Africa and how women of colour would react to the new dispensation? More importantly what response would black women at a grassroots level give to the **new challenges** in a democratic society? Messages designed for development communication in the media have continued to be hierarchically dominated and centrally controlled to meet the needs of government and advertisers (Mody, 1991) so my research aimed at a participative style of interaction. Eventually, after trial and error and interviewing ten pilot focus groups of exclusively Zulu women, I realized I needed to initiate a discourse between the producers of the media and a **multicultural** female audience. In South Africa, since audience

reception analysis has been practically non-existent, my research explored readings of a situation comedy television series, the analysis of which might be used to benefit both marginalised and affluent communities.

Overall parameters of the research project

The effects of the economic forces in South Africa following the 1994 election have not been random but have continued to exclude those voices which lack economic power or resources (Adam, 1997:6-13, *Mail & Guardian*). With the advent of majority rule in South Africa the representation of women in government rose from 2,7 per cent to 26,5 per cent and discrimination on the basis of gender, race or creed is now unconstitutional. However, males still control the top echelons of power in South Africa. According to Unesco's Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow "A new order with regard to the status of women is inseparable from the problem of the new international order that peoples and states are attempting to establish in the fields of economics, culture and *communication*" [my italics] (Borcelle, 1985:11).

The concept of 'race' is socially imagined and ideologically constructs and negotiates social relations (Miles, 1989:71). In this study, race is part of the process of constructing reality but in the analysis of gender, the research examines social relations, identifying the connections between gender, imperial and race-ethnic relations (Mbilinyi in Meena, 1992:34). 'Gender' is a term interlinked with feminist studies so that race, class and social relations are all located in gender relations. Socially constructed 'gender' refers to the social relations between men and women, connoting relations of power domination but are also subject to abolition and transformation (Mbilinyi in Meena, 1992:49).

The struggle against racial domination in South Africa has created a highly politicised environment where interpretations of the past have the power to provoke passionate controversy. Although the relationship between racism and sexism is complex, there is a tendency to classify people according to strictly drawn categories based on race, ethnicity and gender so that the country remains a bastion of attitudes and practices demeaning to women (Berger, 1992:291). Until the Bill of Rights, all women shared a uniform and unambiguous subordination to men, under the Roman-Dutch law. Even though their subordination has been

general it is not possible to talk of women as if they make up a single category (Walker, 1991:1). Walker suggests that since women are distributed throughout the class spectrum, their different class positions determine their basic and varied political allegiance. A rough correspondence has been apparent between class and ethnicity but there has never been homogeneity, working class and peasantry being black, and bourgeois being white. Racism has been manipulated in the interests of capitalism to underpin cheap black labour, so that colour consciousness and ethnic divisions have formed part of the ideology since the Union in 1910, and reached a peak after the Nationalist government came to power in 1948 (Adam, 1971). Feminist research needs to inform itself about the divisions that exist according to class, ethnicity and race as all women have been oppressed in some way so 'women' is not a homogenous category.

I was interested in the ways multicultural groups of women felt about their freedom being guaranteed in the Constitution; for the purpose of this research I decided to use comedy as a conduit by which women could examine their reaction to existing cultural barriers and the process might contain or expand their readings of a television series. I decided to incorporate South African culture as a shared phenomenon through local television, realising English would have to be the language of communication since most of the participants would understand some English. Since the time of Aristotle, comedy has been regarded as the most appropriate genre for representing the lives of the 'middle' and 'lower' orders of society, whose power is limited and whose manners, behaviour and values are considered vulgar (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:12). Therefore the goal of the research project became "to see how particular cultural phenomena exist in several dimensions at once and how an account of those dimensions enhances our knowledge" (Palmer, 1994:3). The notion of incongruity in the establishment of certain relationships and situations can create laughter. But the creation of laughter is directly involved with the class position or gender of the audience, which negotiates its own meaning from that event. Thus the primary question to be investigated was whether a judgement, declared as laughter, was possible across the boundaries of cultures, so that women from different backgrounds would be able to laugh, communicating their 'voice' to express a reaction to situations, performance and jokes (Palmer, 1994:2). The theoretical framework for the research on *Suburban Bliss* and *Going Up III* involved an evaluation of the extent to which the writers,

producers and directors portrayed a situation comedy which connected with the multicultural women viewers' reality.

Examples of reception studies research in South Africa

In an unpublished MA thesis, Lisa Bold (1994) examined the comedy genre in a local cinema production *There's a Zulu on my Stoep*, by analysing production and reception of the film through focus groups. Bold's investigation into whether a film with a racial theme has any effect on an audience's racial attitude was not resolved, because she felt it required a pre-test/ post-test research design and a quantifiable measurement of racial attitudes involving more focus groups. However, my primary research aim was to ascertain how women saw their roles in the new society. The assumption was that comedy would be a 'loosening up' process, and laughter would encourage social interaction and serve as an indicator of comprehension.

There has been little research on reception study for **Zulu speakers** at whom films and television have been aimed, with the exception of a report on the industrial relations film, *Indaba Ye Grievance* (Godsell, Hall and Tomaselli, 1985:19-20). In this film, which was shown in both Zulu and English, the aim was to inform mineworkers that a process for grievances was available to attempt to resolve conflict. In a different documentary film, *A World of Difference*, produced during the same period, the producer and filmmaker lacked awareness of differences in interpretations by the audience. The production team totally misrepresented the world of the mineworkers due to the definitive culture and class. As an industrial film for mineworkers, *A World of Difference* failed because the black workers resisted the codes in the film as propagandistic, even though white management saw these as natural common sense ways of perceiving their white world. However, in *Indaba Ye Grievance* "to make the film convincing to black workers, the film **had** [has] to portray events from their point of view" (Tomaselli, 1985:15). Supervisors' reactions to *Indaba Ye Grievance* indicated that they considered the film biased in favour of the workers. Signs, codes and representations have a history which is perceived differently by each class. However, the cinematic codes used in *Indaba Ye Grievance* were deliberately connected to the workers' everyday conditions of existence (Godsell, Hall & Tomaselli, 1985). The industrial relations film, *Indaba Ye Grievance*

successfully communicated its message because it portrayed events from the black workers' point of view.

The anti-apartheid film *Mapantsula* (1988) was written by a black writer/actor, and directed by a white director. Yet according to audience research, it was unconditionally accepted by black viewers as an authentic representation of life in the townships (Tomaselli, 1993:72). The portrayal of the anti-hero, Panic, a petty thief, offered an authenticity of black experience indicating there was a common ground between the inactive text and the black audience (Tomaselli, 1993). Audience research conducted with students at the University of Natal in July, 1993 on *Mapantsula* indicated that conservative white Afrikaans-speaking students failed to make sense of the film except in relation to Spike Lee's films and *Cry Freedom* (1987).² Black students at the University of Natal, Durban, after seeing the film felt empowered; black trade unionists connected with *Mapantsula's* themes but middle class Coloured and Asian students kept their distance, depending on their personal class position and ideology. Black peri-urban African National Congress (ANC) supporters at St Wendolin Church near Durban felt the film could not have been directed by a white man, as it was such an authentic portrayal of township life. In all of these divisions the struggle over images and meanings was being equated to each group's subjectivity (Tomaselli, 1993).

Reception Studies research elsewhere in the world

The research cited above were South African and not female specific, but elsewhere in the world there have been studies which focused specifically on women. Janice Radway (1984), selected a community of women readers based on their use of the library in Smithton, by using questionnaire responses and interviews. She wanted to situate women's reading in its domestic, familial context, so as to investigate women's consumption of romantic fiction as a social event in the context of family and domesticity in Smithton, USA. Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz's reception analysis of *Dallas* (1993) was undertaken through a 'snowball' sample of sixty five focus groups including married couples, friends or neighbours of the same ethnic background - Israeli, Arabs, Moroccan Jews and second generation kibbutz members, discussing an episode

² Research conducted by CCMS, University of Natal, May 1993 - self selected sample from English II class studying media. The black unemployed ANC supporters, 14 to 25 years old were interviewed at St Wendolin Church, July 1993, in research conducted by Vukani Cele.

of *Dallas* (Liebes & Katz, 1993). The Israeli groups, ten from each of the four communities, were assembled and asked to invite two other couples to view an episode. The serial was subtitled in Hebrew and Arabic, and notes were made on the interaction during the viewing and the one hour post-viewing discussion. Interviews were conducted covering four weekly episodes and ethnic homogeneity was achieved for each group through the neighbourhoods and friendships. Ien Ang's famous cross-cultural study on *Dallas* (Ang, 1985) was based on replies to advertisements from the fans of the programme.

Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabrielle and Eva-Maria Warth conducted twenty six ethnographic interviews with viewers in western Oregon on soap opera, and based their research design on Radway's (1984) and Morley's (1980) "*Nationwide*" research. Two of Seiter's research team interviewed fifteen white women viewers and fifteen men (Seiter et al, 1989). There were sixty four participants solicited through the help-wanted advertisements; no men or women of colour applied but many applicants were working class and unemployed. The interviews took place at one informant's home in the company of friends and family members whom the research team had chosen for the purpose in seemingly similar methodology to the 'snowball' sample described earlier for the Liebes and Katz reception analysis. In the research undertaken by Mary Field Beienky *et al* (1986) she and three colleagues explored, with their female interviewees, problems women had experienced as learners and knowers. The researchers evaluated the women's changing ideas of self image, and relationships with others. The sample included ninety students, plus forty-five women from family agencies, through which clients asked for help with parenting. Diversity of age, circumstance and outlook permitted the researchers an opportunity to see the common ground women share, regardless of different ethnic, economic, social or educational background. This fact was encouraging since I was concerned that, initially, multicultural women of different class and background might have difficulty in articulating their thoughts. Paulo Freire's contention that literacy can develop women's consciousness of their rights and their ability to criticize events in the real world was incorporated as an important dimension of my research (Freire, 1985).

Conclusion

The aim of the ethnographic study for this dissertation was to promote the unfolding of emic cultural knowledge in its most heuristic natural form, and to allow emotionally charged reaction and expression to surface³. In the subsequent evaluation of these discussions, I have tried to explain the groups' cultural responses, making explicit what was only implicit, through my inferences of observation. The reactions of the participants is explained from their point of view and extensive interaction was encouraged (Spindler, G. & Spindler, L.,1987:22). As a participative observer I contributed information about my own experiences and asked questions to promote interaction. My aim was to ensure that every group of women would feel comfortable about speaking freely, and unless I were prepared to set the tone, sharing my perceptions and experiences, I felt I would not succeed in stimulating discussion. Although inference is necessary in the ethnographic discourse, the goal was to provide reliable source material for analysis. Many additional researchable problems occurred in the field (which due to the size of the project will not be explored here) and, although some of the interviewees might have attempted to obfuscate and provide ambiguous answers, my focus was on the relation between cultural knowledge as it occurred between the participants, as well as observed behaviour of all the participants. All transcripts from the videos of the focus groups as well as interviews with the production team are presented in the Appendix and are offered as evidence of the researcher's conclusions.

³ In the transcripts in the Appendix it can be seen that '[babble]' is used to explain when the group became very excited by the discussion and discussed heatedly the issue among themselves. It was not possible to decipher this additional conversation occurring simultaneously.

CHAPTER I

Research Design: The ethnographic interview

'Humanizing the research subject in Africa within a cultural context'

S.T. Kwame Boafo (1992)

Nancy A. George

Introduction

Aim of the research

A theory is "a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations between variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena" (Kerlinger, 1973:9). Theories aim at explaining and predicting phenomena and events. The theory to be investigated in this research of multicultural women watching South African situation comedy proposes that the phenomenon of humour acts as a catalyst, breaking down cultural barriers among people of different cultures and languages and in the process dilutes anger and thereby effects cultural reconciliation.

The ethnographic approach

Ethnographic research procedures include holding discussions among focus groups, personal interviews and writing up a text of discourse analysis. Discourse is a way of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic or practice (Hall, 1996b:6). In terms of Hall's definition the discourse analysis of the ethnographic research of *SB* analyses the way respondents talk about their interaction with the television programme. This aspect demonstrates to the ethnographer how these viewers applied the television messages in their daily lives and their cultural practices. The ethnographic approach allows the researcher to study viewers as socially and historically situated people being part of the interpretive communities to which they belong (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1993:126). Ethnography also acknowledges the **differences** between people who, despite their similar social construction, may interpret messages differently. The researcher accounts for differences within social formations, thereby moving the emphasis away

from socially constructed 'subjects' to socially situated 'people' who attempt to explain what role television plays in their lives (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1993:125).

The reception studies for *Suburban Bliss (SB)* and *Going Up III (GU III)* began after the 1994 democratic election in South Africa; the researcher used a flexible methodology - any method which had the potential for securing relevant data. Focus groups, interviews with production teams, transcripts, audiotapes, demographic data and a six-month course in conversational Zulu to improve communication with Zulu groups were all potential resources. In this research an ethnographic discourse analysis traces the forms of discussion through which accounts of their reality were constituted by Zulu, Afrikaans and English-speaking **women** (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1993:126). The women's accounts interpreted their culture and identity by discussing their thoughts and feelings after viewing the situation comedies. Discussion was infused with their analysis of identity at different levels of society within the boundaries of the particular culture from which the group emanated. The extent to which laughter was stimulated by the sitcom in specific incidences was recorded on a laughter table (Appendix I). Power relationships in the family of the participants were examined and women's position in South African society was interpreted according to the values inherent in the terms of the new Constitution in the Bill of Rights (1996, Section 16, 1b and 1c) of South Africa. The multicultural group interviews were not intended to be representative of the entire South African society but as indicators of how the women perceived their situation since the democratic election of 1994. In the meeting between the focus groups and the text, another discourse emerged, created by the groups' differing cultural education and institutional practices. The responses of the groups illustrated how the micro-processes of viewing a television programme engage with the macro-structures of South African media and South African society.

Influence of African research on the project

In Zambia, in the early 1960s after independence, in the town of Luanshya on the Copperbelt in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia as it is known today) an American anthropologist, Hortense Powdermaker investigated the effects of media on the local population. Since her study was exploratory she used a flexible methodology - any method which had potential for securing relevant data (Powdermaker, 1962:xv). She stressed it was always necessary to have the consent

and cooperation of those in authority to pursue one's investigations. She did not learn to speak Bemba, as she did not have sufficient time, but she employed educated African assistants whom she trained. Her sample of 551 adults was randomly selected, differentiating variables in age, sex, tribe (ethnicity), occupation, education, rural/urban by birth, pagan/Christian by birth. Powdermaker believed that asking the respondent how s/he *felt* about what s/he had seen or heard, or read in one of the mass media, would yield her/his preference and would bear the best results. Her goal was to study social change through investigating different age groups among boys and girls in their teens to ascertain their values, self-imagery and their imagery of 'Europeans'. She planned to describe and interpret a fundamental process of social and individual change in Africa, the basic elements of which continued to be much the same (Powdermaker, 1962:xxi). She attempted to discover the inner coherence and logic of complicated social and individual changes in a contemporary African society - specifically, a modern heterogeneous community on the Copperbelt - the majority of individuals being Africans from small homogeneous villages. In addition there was a minority of whites from South Africa, England and (Southern Rhodesia) Zimbabwe (Powdermaker, 1962:xiii).

Polly McLean (1992:89) has criticised the attitude-measurement methods used in Africa as "mechanistic and devoid of context" since in Africa social structure and cultural patterns of behaviours, as well as age and gender variables are dictated by group norms (McLean, 1992:89). She pointed out that research in Africa has been undertaken on radio study groups, educational media, agricultural education, mass media structures, functions and policies, news flows, technology and content analysis of development news, most of which suggest information trickles down from the source to ultimate users, then ignoring the content. Other areas of concentration have been cross-cultural studies, which primarily discuss communication and planning, and media use in relation to health. Consequently, most empirical research has been in the area of development communication, with a focus on media effects on audiences' knowledge, attitudes, practices and behavioural changes. McLean expressed doubt whether these methods would obtain valid samples of African attitudes (McLean, 1992:91). She suggested most researchers pay "little attention to the cultural context and questions are seldom derived from cognitive categories meaningful to the respondents". McLean was convinced that the problem with survey research undertaken in Africa lay in the design of the questions and

good point
very

their suitability for eliciting particular data. She found in her work with the Swazi, they were non-confrontational and desired to please, and would answer in the affirmative to survey questions, so, applying dichotomous questions would not yield information regarding attitudes, values and behaviour patterns. Furthermore she felt that the assumption of homogeneity among these groups was erroneous, as research cannot standardize interculturality, and English language questionnaires, when translated into the local language, are problematic. McLean believed that researchers use the survey method because of its convenience and that they should rather, in the light of cultural behaviours, explore ethnographic research methods, especially that of the focus group. This method concentrates more on group decision-making and discussions since "it is better for the African context than isolating an individual from the group for questioning" (citing Obeng-Quaidoo, McLean, 1992:99). Group sessions were moderated by a facilitator providing free-flowing comments in a familiar non-threatening environment. McLean also stated that in her research in Swaziland no money was to be paid to respondents as once the money variable was introduced, donor funds might not always be available to further the process (McLean, 1992:105). Like Powdermaker's research, the goal for this research was to study "social and individual change" among women in South Africa. McLean felt no money was to be paid for helping with the groups but this route had become impractical in this research, as in order to convene focus groups it had become essential to pay the facilitators for their efforts.

Overview of intention

Although an ethnographic analysis maps the diversity of audiences in their reception of *Suburban Bliss (SB)* and *Going Up III (GU III)*, the purpose was to evaluate if a transformation and cultural reconciliation occurred in the cultural and ethnic processes which affected viewers' patterns of identification and differentiation. Members of the group stimulated each other's responses or supported each other, so the group dynamics and interaction among all present provided the data required by the researcher (Lindlof, 1995:174). The first research project devised for the evaluation of *SB* began March 27 1996 and ended May 5, 1996. The *SB* project consisted of three Zulu-speaking groups, three English-speaking, one Afrikaans-speaking, a Hindu group and a 'Coloured' group totalling 54 women viewing three episodes of *Suburban Bliss (SB)*. The second project began October 26th 1996 and ended January 16th, 1997. This

research consisted of two Zulu-speaking groups, one Afrikaans-speaking and one English-speaking group totalling twenty six women answering questions about *Going Up III (GU III)*.

The research subject

Among the women interviewed, even though education and income were frequently homogeneous, the psychographic factors inherent in the audience varied. Religious beliefs, values, attitudes and personal circumstances based on levels of responsibility as mother, teacher, nurse, accountant, sister, daughter, daughter-in-law, wife, citizen - all these roles contributed to constitution of a different personality and to different perceptions of power. However there was a political dimension involved in the interpretation of audience responses to the text, since by advancing an interpretation of the data, the researcher introduced an alternative to existing power relations.

Respondent validation and triangulation

The patterns of social relations that people have developed determines the kind of information they have available, and the particular perspectives that people in different social locations generate filter their understanding and knowledge of the world (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1993:227). The convergence of their social location and their sociohistoric context shaped the responses of the women who participated. However, the presence of the researcher also was seen by the focus groups as an audience for whom they delineated the information in terms of that researcher's interests. In respondent validation of the research there were two aspects. After discussion of the sitcom, if there was time, the groups saw the video of themselves discussing the sitcom and then commented on their appearance and performance (Appendix D and E). In October and November 1997 when the transcripts were shown to the facilitators to clarify transcript language, no denial of the validity of these was made.

The structure of production, circulation, distribution/consumption and reproduction in television programming becomes a 'complex structure in dominance' (Hall, 1980a: 130) where each of the practices retains a distinctiveness with its own forms and conditions of existence. The 'object' of these practices is to provide meanings and messages organized through the use of codes in the syntagmatic chain of the televisual discourse (Hall, 1980a: 128). John Corner questions the

why students & teachers from different race groups

facilitator

practice of using audience research, the symbolic and ambiguous establishment of media output “and those processes of meaning production by which understanding, significance and pleasure are generated” (Corner, 1996:280). In this chapter the research procedures employed are described, together with a description of the analysis of the participants’ engagement with interpretation and context of the sitcoms screened (Corner, 1996:280). In a cultural studies approach the researcher allows for the process by which the customs and values in a society are investigated, and attempts an explanation for the constant changes in societies caused by individuals breaking the rules in that society. Using a cultural studies approach the researcher also investigates the negative side of the dominant culture, adopting a critical stance to the culture (Muller & Tomaselli, 1990:301). Informed by reception theory and evincing a cultural studies perspective, an ethnographic discourse emerged concerning the interpretation of three episodes from *Suburban Bliss (SB)* and two episodes of *Going Up (GU III)*.

General parameters of this project

In the reception studies undertaken for this project, women viewers’ responses are analysed as an organising principle “abstract[ing] the **notion** of womanhood/woman-ness ... as it operates in particular societies” (Walker, 1990:7). The researcher’s reasons for the exclusive selection of women as viewers are based on the **Bill of Rights** in the new South African Constitution. Since women, regardless of race, ethnicity or class previously had never experienced this freedom under the law, it was decided to limit the research to **female** focus groups. The researcher has avoided use of the ‘I’ in the discourse by abstaining from including “autobiographical data” (Brunsdon, 1989:124). In addition, the white identity of the researcher does not automatically invalidate conclusions made in the course of the ethnographic study. D. Nkululeko (a black South African woman) has queried whether a segment of an oppressed nation can rely on knowledge produced, researched and theorised by one of the former members of the oppressive class (Nkululeko, 1987:88). It has been suggested that white female researchers would be hampered always by their own history, values, culture and ideology so their work would be flawed. Beyond subjectivity and bias, Nkululeko has suggested that the work of academic outsiders was part of the larger forces of oppression and exploitation. The influence of a researcher’s history and values was inevitable, but a subjective experience of a

condition does not guarantee a critical analysis or preclude bias. A distinctive feature of the current research has been that it has generated its problematics from the perspective of women's experiences. Women come in different classes, races, cultures. Masculine and feminine are always categories within every class, race and culture because women and men's experiences, desires and interests differ according to race, class and culture (Ladner, 1987:78). Gender experiences may vary across cultural categories and individual experiences, however, since feminist theory articulates women's perception of their own experiences within communication research, this study rejects a single definition of women's communication (Carter & Spitzack, 1989:2).

Television's Hermeneutic Circle

In a discussion of television it is necessary to examine both how texts are produced and reproduced, and the creation, distribution and interpretation of media texts. For different audiences television is not an invariable constant and neither is the human response a dependent variable. Television produces socially constructed texts using the specific meaning of the producers even if later the audiences provide unpredictable interpretations (Michaels, 1990:11). Eric Michaels (1990:11) has conceived of a model to indicate the:

intrinsic structures of the television medium as a negotiation of texts between producers, technology and audiences which intends to identify some significant features of the social organization of meanings involved in this signifying activity.

The model is based on western television production use (Appendix J). Michaels (1990) compares the intention of the producers with the responses of the receivers but suggests since the television text is a continuous process it is irrelevant as to where on the circle of **conceived** text one begins. The methodology for the reception of the text has been indicated already, the methodology employed for the research for the production of *SB* and *GU III* follows. The production of the sitcom is explained and assumes that media involve a one-way transmission of meaning in a continuous cyclical process (Chapters Three [*SB*] and Four [*GU*]).

The *conceived* text, *SB*, began as the creative idea of the production team, Dapple Productions, (an independent production arm of Toron Films) after The South African Broadcasting Corporation had commissioned 104 episodes of the situation comedy, *Suburban Bliss*. The justification for the choice of the sitcom was the use of local drama (Chapter Three) for 'nation-building and cultural reconciliation' (Edmunds, 1995 Nov.10-16:12, *Mail & Guardian*). The researcher saw the newspaper article and, having already completed the interviews with the focus groups as described above (the audience on the hermeneutic circle), arranged with Carl Fischer, the producer to interview both himself and the chief writer Gray Hofmeyr. These interviews were completed on March 14, 1996. The researcher was invited onto the set where further interviews were conducted over the next few days with actors playing the roles of Kobie, Ma Moloi, Thando and Andrew.

This should be included in the conclusion

Peter Se Puma, the director, was also interviewed and the researcher was invited to sit in the operations box with the director and watch the process involved in producing an episode. The **production** 'text' used four cameras and the entire episode was shot in a week, using the crew from the English television department of the SABC. According to the director, the editing was done in the same week, since the team was working on a tight budget, and the shorter the time in the studios, (including editing time) the lower their costs would be. As the episode was shot various changes were made in the dialogue and narrative as they went through it. Later the economic infrastructure would insert advertisements at several points in the programme when periods of time were sold to a sponsor. The **received** text differs from the **transmitted** text since it has been recorded on video tape, and the viewer does not necessarily have to listen to the audio or can turn off the video and listen to the audio. The **perceived** text was the video screened by the researcher for the focus groups. Wolfgang Iser's explanation of reception theory, according to Holub (1984:83), explains the **perceived** text as a set of instructions and a structured schemata; the readers fill the gaps concretising the schematised aspects of the text, by using their background experience and knowledge to mediate and tell themselves the story they have seen. The **social** text relates to the readers' prior experiences, including aspects of the genre and narrative to assist them in imputing the meaning of the text, as different cross-cultural interpretations can occur. The negotiation of the interpretation of the **social** text might

produce a number of different meanings and for this proliferation, discussion sometimes occurs when the audience may revise their initial interpretation.

Michaels (1990) argues that social structures like class, gender, associational divisions and ideology imply who can speak with whom, and as a result, in the modern world associational groupings, possibly through relations of production, would assist in opening up meaning to many more groups. *SB* according to Gray Hofmeyr, was based on *All in the Family*, a controversial sitcom (Chapter Two - details) that played in the 1970s in the United States and was a good example of the audience reading the text differently. The initial reviews of *All in the Family* (Adler, 1979) were polarised as some reviewers found the programme insulting to unbigoted viewers and others wondered if the bigotry could be laughed away.

In the research on *SB* and *GU III*, the audience's reading activity was 'gap filling'. Sociohistoric influences affected the audiences's reading. The interview questions for Fischer and Hofmeyr attempted to examine how they felt about *SB*'s perceived bigotry, but their attitude indicated they believed they were there to entertain. In the interviews among the cast only Sylvaine Strike, who played Frankie, was disenchanted with the production and felt its production values were not up to par. Se Puma was ambivalent about Thando's character, as she sent the signal of greed and wanting to be 'white'. The rest of the cast were enthusiastic about the series and since *SB* had such a long production period, the economic factor of having work may have influenced their responses.

There were two sets of interviews with the production team for the *GU* series. For the 1993 production of *GU II* in April 1995, interviews with Roberta Durrant, Joe Mafela and Abigail Kubeka were undertaken in Johannesburg. The focus group work on *GU II* was attempted after the meeting with the production team but was unsuccessful as it was impossible to arrange focus groups. The following year, whilst the researcher was visiting the set of *SB* in March 1996, Durrant invited her to visit the set of the new *GU III*, also being shot at the SABC. As the new series was more in tune with the post-apartheid South Africa, it was decided to examine it through focus groups. Interviews were set up with Durrant and the writer of the show, Richard Benyon. The most revealing aspect of Benyon's interview was that although he had written a

number of episodes for *SB*, he disliked the characters who were so rude to each other and took no responsibility for their actions. He admitted that Joe Mafela, as co-author, provided ideas but these needed a lot of work from himself and the production team.

The advantage of interviewing the production teams meant that the interviews provided the Y axis while the focus group interviews gave the X axis. Thus the prevailing definition of reality was challenged and revised. *SB* was trying to teach South Africa to laugh at itself and invited black viewers to watch how the Molos were participating in the process, placing them as equals in the capitalist hierarchy with their neighbours, the Dwyers. The “colour line is less visible but the barbs that fly between the two houses are the pegs from which the humour is hung” (Anstey, 1995 November 5, *Sunday Times*). Mafela and Durrant explained how the success of their Nguni production *S'gudi S'naysi* led Mafela to suggest that the audience could be increased if programmes were multicultural and in English to attract that wealthy white English-speaking segment of the market. *GU I* and *GU II* were almost ahead of themselves historically but after the 1994 elections, *GU III* was on target with multiculturalism. The intention was not to engage the black viewers but to attract white viewers. Consequently the story lines and situations appealed to white fears of affirmative action, but there are no satirical comments between the races. The women in *SB* are strong characters but in *GU III* Mrs Jakobs is really an apologetic type of woman trying to be ‘posh’ in Durrant’s words (Appendix B).

Description of various methodologies employed in the project

Focus groups

Focus groups are useful for obtaining a particular kind of information that would be difficult to obtain using other methodological procedures (Krueger, 1994: 16). Krueger states there are six characteristics relating to the ingredients of focus groups. Focus groups:

- ◆ require people
- ◆ are assembled in a series of groups
- ◆ possess certain characteristics (in this study women over 21 with particular language and particular ethnic background)
- ◆ provide data (how they **felt** as women about the changes in South Africa)

- ◆ are of a qualitative nature
- ◆ are in a focused discussion

Focus group interviews are based on the fact that the interviewees possess information which the researcher desires to elicit. The researcher must create a setting in which diverse perceptions, judgements and experiences concerning topics can be discussed. In such a situation members of the group stimulate each other's responses or support each other, so the group interaction provides the data required by the researcher (Lindlof, 1995: 174). A selection of five to eight homogenous people or those with common experiences meet at a neutral site, or one nominated by one of their members. A small group of four to five affords more opportunity to share ideas but results in a smaller pool of ideas (Krueger, 1994: 17). Focus groups involve a data collection procedure whereby the members provide perceptions, feelings, and manner of thinking regarding products and services. They are not expected to arrive at consensus or make decisions (Krueger, 1994: 19), but they produce qualitative data that provide insights into attitudes, perceptions, and opinions which are solicited through open-ended questions. In this process a more natural environment is presented because people are influencing each other as in real life. The researcher serves several functions in the group by moderating, listening, observing and eventually analysing, using an inductive process. In the inductive argument one's premises provide much inductive support for the conclusion (Mouton & Marais, 1988: 112). However the conclusion does not follow automatically. Mouton and Marais (1988: 113), contend that:

If all the premises are true, then the conclusion is probably true, but not necessarily true. The conclusion contains information not present even implicitly in the premises.

Although the researcher utilises the services of a facilitator, it is vital that she participates in the process of the focus group interview to encourage interaction and horizontal participation (Spindler G. & Spindler, L., 1987: 22)

Cultural studies perspective

In this research it is assumed that although the communities being researched are exposed to television, the signs and symbols in these texts may signify other associations, (particularly for black communities) relating a different discourse from the concrete explanation of the First World (Tomaselli, 1996). Using a cultural studies perspective, the researcher cannot restrict the research to studying only audiences and their activities, or to relating those activities to other variables a measure of gratification sought or obtained, dependencies or effects. Rather she engages with the structural and cultural processes which constitute the audience, where the dynamics of watching television are always related to the operation of some kind of social power. The attempt is made to try to find out where and how these forms of power are exercised and with what kind of effect in the community in which the discussion takes place. Audiences may decode texts in different ways and arrive at oppositional meanings but there is always an ongoing struggle over meaning and pleasure which relates to the quality of that audience's everyday life. Therefore the researcher must be aware that each group may respond to the same text differently depending on their socio-historic and cultural background.

Semiotics as a method of interpretation

Semiotics is the study of the way people make sense of information. Current meanings evolve as interaction occurs between people, their beliefs and the way they live (Tomaselli, 1996). David Morley suggests that "the interview and participant observation is an appropriate way to understand what audiences do when they watch television" (Morley, 1989: 24). A television programme is an inactive text, which becomes an activated text when the reader interacts with it and in this process of interaction a struggle for meaning occurs. Individuals look at the frames in television and produce special meanings from them, creating their own 'text' and when they interrelate these meanings with their personal experiences they create an intertext. Consequently there is more than one way to read a television series or other media. The 'con-text' is the historical environment of social, economic and political elements in which the text is produced but the 'context' (without the hyphen) is the historical material process into which people are born (Tomaselli, 1996). Meanings can change but integrated communities usually agree about their responses, so meanings remain steady even though multiple interpretations can survive among interpretive communities (Fish, 1980). Jane Feuer (cited in Morley, 1989) argues that the

constitution of a text is extremely complex as it is difficult to decide which is the 'text' and separate the text from the advertisements, the books and the publicity articles. However, discrepant decoding does occur among integrated communities when the dominant meaning is decoded depending on the con-text. Readers then appropriate those meanings which best suit their personal cultural and class experience. In the current reception analysis, women's responses are evaluated in response to the images, words and sounds in the media texts to which they are exposed. The way the focus groups interpreted these codes indicated how they viewed their reality which was the only 'real' immutable one.

Television 'home' viewing

The concept of 'inter-discourse' occurs in the rendezvous between 'text' (the video of *SB* and *GU*) and subject (focus groups), when additional discourses of the cultural, educational and institutional practices of the subject are created (citing Morley, Shaun Moores, 1993:152). Tania Modleski (1982:31) suggests that her analysis of Harlequin books, Gothics and soap opera contributed to the psychology of the interaction between female readers and texts, because these texts were targeted predominantly at a female audience and the texts do not employ "devices for distancing and transforming anxieties and wishes of the readers". In Morley's (1980) original research on the encoding/decoding model, the context of location was not considered important. However, Janice Radway (1984), in order to investigate women's consumption of romantic fiction as a social event in the context of family and domesticity, used questionnaire response interviews to select a community of women readers through the use of the library at Smithton, USA. This 'domestic familial context', as a location for watching television, was not applicable to the *SB* and *GU III* research. Although many white families enjoyed their own television, many black families shared that of their neighbours so location for viewing was not really an issue.

American television and 'home viewing'

The installation of American television into domestic space following World War II, meant that people moved from public space to the private space of the home, as television became a part of people's daily lives (Spigel, 1992:10). During the 1950s, family-living constructed a set of generational and gender roles as a consensus ideology, promising security and stability after the

upheavals of the war. The introduction of television seemed a catalyst for renewing these values, both to consolidate family unity and as an appliance the television set invoked consumerism but the discourse introducing television, both idealized its effects and warned of its negative impact on family relationships. This discourse reflected the people's ongoing hopes and fears about technology still prevalent today. Television's installation in the home is framed by the Victorian ideology of family recreation so its spatial positioning is dependent on the fact that areas in the home had been allocated for public and private space (Spigel, 1992:15). Lynn Spigel also stated that popular discourse is not unified and that contradictions exist in what these family ideals should be. The changing ideals of family life in the twentieth century are reflected in the pastoral ideal of suburbia and the new world of consumer mechanization (Spigel, 1992:37). The incompatibility and contradiction of consumerism versus family ideals indicate television's acceptance into the home is built on consumerism (Spigel, 1992:77). The cultural ideology of family reunification assists in acceptance of television into the home, but the contradiction is that although television becomes a centre piece, replacing the fireplace, communication between family members does not improve. The technology of television fulfilled futuristic fancies and satisfied the ideology of consumerism as a status symbol, as a symbol of technology in its own right (Spigel, 1992:89). In the ideology of privacy, the suburbs became homogenized, solitary places, where a television of 'Home Theater' projects the world into the home (Spigel, 1992:89). This 'social sanitation' included cleaning up television which also had to be censored, so societal norms pressured television, demanding the removal of sexual behaviours from its programming. The 'Home Theatre' aspect of television justified replacing 'going outside' the home for entertainment by showing viewers their television neighbours (Spigel, 1992:163).

Even if today the new 'Home Theater' promises to replicate social settings and strengthening of family ties, there are no democratic social benefits as the cost restricts it to the privileged (Spigel, 1992:186). The contradiction remains because the impact of gender, class, racial and social differences affects the way families watch television and circumscribes women's use of the technology. In South Africa, the discourse on television communication is tied in to a need for people to pay their licences and to come to terms with public service broadcasting, which is becoming more and more commercial. The viewing of television is not seen particularly as a family affair, especially as in upper income homes there are a number of television sets from

which to choose, so family members watch television on their own. Black viewers tend to share viewing with neighbours since not every home owns a television set, and this means that for many viewers it is not possible to watch television always in their own home.

Phenomenonology and 'reading television'

Phenomenology's interest in 'reading' is tied to the process during which words on a page or images on the screen are brought to life in the imagination of the reader (Allen, 1987:76). A piece of creative work is a 'schemata', a skeleton or structure of possible meanings which should be concretised or completed by the reader/viewer (citing Ingarden, Holub, 1984:22). Readers fill the gaps or schematised aspects in the text and this activity is 'concretisation'. In this way reading/viewing is seen as a creative process of concretisation filling in the schematised aspects of the text and actualising the potential of the 'schemata' (Allen, 1987:104). The process of filling the gaps needs skill, hence some women are judged as having a 'keener sense of humour' in reacting to the 'gaps' and finding the humour (Chapter Seven - details of humour) than others. Schematised texts have fixed plots and narrative structures but also variables which include the viewer's human needs, previous experiences, prejudices, attitudes, expectations, cognitive abilities and interest or lack thereof. The ability to create a 'schemata' can be affected by whether or not the viewer is alone or in a group in the wider sociocultural and ideological world (Freund, 1987). The number of concretisations of the same text is unlimited and will vary from reader to reader. Reading becomes an active and creative process enabling the readers to interpret messages according to their perception of reality, by making connections as 'gap filling' (Allen, 1987).

According to Holub (1984:83) Wolfgang Iser was the main exponent of reception theory and Ingarden's work was Iser's framework. Citing Iser, Holub (1984:83) states there are three interrelated aspects of the reading process as follows:

- ◆ The text is perceived as a set of instructions and a structured schemata - skeleton. It is the reader's responsibility to fill the gaps so they must actualise or concretise the schematised aspects of the text.

- ◆ Readers' processing of the text and conditions that lead to and govern the interaction between text and reader.
- ◆ The way the reader processes the text while reading it affects the reader's understanding which is a result of interaction between the reader and the text so that the mental images are an important aspect for a cohesive aesthetic object.

Reading activity is 'gap filling' (Allen, 1987:106) like the semiotic distinction between paradigmatic and syntagmatic organisation. A narrative is structured along two axes syntagmatic (combinatory) and paradigmatic (associative) axes. Allen stated that Iser said 'gaps' in the text involve a syntagmatic arrangement of textual segments so the reader has a chance to try different relationships. Historical and social conditions influence the interaction between reader and the text. Prior to the text/reader interaction, the **author** also had an interaction with his/her social/cultural/historical environment. Reading the text aesthetically thus means the discovery of the reader's inner world which is personal and social, leading to an expansion of self. Allen (1987:81) said beneath Iser's model lay the idea of 'consistency-building' - the connections readers make between textual segments. All this is influenced by the reader's existing opinions, norms and reality, so that their *Gestalt* recreates their world continually, in order to make sense to them based on past experience.

The extent to which conflicts in the text represented the reality of the focus group women was debated. Representation of the two narrative's characters in terms of their identity and language was assessed, and the use of music and imagery in songs and dances were discussed as symbols of identity. In the sitcom narratives, moral lessons implying ethical choices are evidence of rapid social change, and conflict frequently arises between modernity and traditionalism causing a rift to develop in the perception of change by members of the society experiencing the change (Bourgault, 1996a). The viewers' comfort level with the performance discourse was looked at in terms of their familiarity with various elements in the diegesis. In a narrative film or television programme the diegesis includes events that are presumed to have occurred and actions and spaces not shown on screen (Bordwell & Thompson, 1993:493). In the meeting between the focus groups and the text, another discourse emerges, created by the groups' differing cultural education and institutional practices.

How the Research was Accomplished

Although the analysis maps the diversity of audiences in their reception of *Going Up III* (*GU III*) and *Suburban Bliss* (*SB*), the purpose is also to evaluate if a transformation and cultural reconciliation occurs in the cultural and ethnic processes which affect viewers' patterns of identification and differentiation (Chapters Five and Six). Members of the group stimulate each other's responses or support each other, so the group dynamics and interaction among all present provide the data required by the researcher (Lindlof, 1995:174). The first research project devised for the evaluation of *SB* began March 27 1996 and ended May 5, 1996, and for *GU III* began on October 26, 1996 while the last group was interviewed on January 16, 1997. The *SB* project consisted of four Zulu-speaking groups, two English-speaking, one Afrikaans-speaking, a Hindu group and a 'Coloured'¹ group totalling 54 women. The *GU III* project consisted of English, Afrikaans and two Zulu-speaking groups totalling 26 women, varying between six and eight in a group, most of whom had not seen any episodes of *SB* or *GU III*. The second section of the research for *GU III* was undertaken subsequent to that of *SB* but, at that stage, only four out of the nine facilitators were prepared to undertake the facilitation a second time due to other commitments.

The research subject

Among the eighty women interviewed for *Suburban Bliss* and *Going Up III* and the forty seven for the *Going Up II* (*GU II*) pilot, even though education and income were frequently homogeneous, the psychographic factors inherent in the audience varied. Religious beliefs, values, attitudes and personal circumstances based on levels of responsibility as mother, teacher, nurse, accountant, sister, daughter, daughter-in-law, wife, citizen - all these roles contributed to constitutions of a different personality and to different perceptions of power. In positivist social science the hypothetico-deductive testing of theory through empirical research, quantitative in form, is believed to produce scientific knowledge. Even to capture the complexity of the audience's activity using ethnographic methods has been touted. However

¹ 'Coloured' is used as a cultural description since this group see themselves as a separate group. They are descendants from miscegenation between the first European settlers and indigenous Hottentots and imported slaves. Rejected by whites and divorced from Africans by culture, status and certain economic privileges, the Coloureds are a typical marginal group (Adam, 1971:41).

there is a political dimension involved in the process of interpretation of audience responses to texts, through which, by advancing an interpretation one can introduce an alternative to existing power relations. This means the researcher's job changes where she produces historically and culturally specific knowledges as a result of the ethnographic encounter. The interpretations can not claim to be definitive, and are also incomplete. Material obtained by ethnographic fieldwork or depth interviews are not just 'data' where the statements made by the audience require understanding of how and why varieties in experience occur. The data requires a sensitive discernment that these responses are informed by power, contradiction and struggle, so that interpretations can create new areas of constraints but also the opportunity for restructuring social relationships, identities and desires. Television not only transmits certain messages but is a cultural form where certain constraints are negotiated by the audience. In the process of using an ethnographic method it is essential, therefore, to maintain an awareness of concrete specificities and an ongoing critical engagement with the ways audiences constitute themselves through media consumption (Ang, 1989).

Snowball sampling

The conceptual focus of the project was to identify a group of women with certain characteristics to provide a focus group with attributes in common. To achieve this goal, a variety of procedures was employed to establish these focus groups including replicating the 'snowball' method used by Mary Ellen Brown when she was researching women's responses to soap opera (Brown, 1994). 'Snowball sampling' uses an informant as a source for locating other persons from whom data can be generated and these informants refer the researcher to other persons and so on with an accumulative result over a period. It is an efficient method of finding subjects with attributes central to the research problem and the researcher is able to build a focus group representing an active social network in a community. There is a bias reflected in the focus group, but this can be avoided by obtaining additional lists of persons in the community to be interviewed so the researcher can then select the most frequently nominated persons (Lindlof, 1995: 127).

Geographic area of research

All interviews were conducted in the facilitators' homes in and near Durban, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. The Durban area has been characterised by political violence for a number of years between African National Congress (ANC) members and Inkatha members. In the 1980s the latter were denounced "as a tribal, populist, petty-bourgeois force with little standing in urban politics except among traditional Zulu migrants" (Adam & Moodley, 1986:82) representing Inkatha members, the conservative Zulu traditionalists together with the tribal chiefs who did not want to lose their authority in the new dispensation. During the sanctions campaign and the civil war with the ANC, the South African government saw Inkatha as a valuable ally and Buthelezi as a support (Adam & Moodley, 1993:125).

The languages spoken at home in KwaZulu Natal consist of 79,3 % Zulu, 16,0% English and 1,9% Afrikaans speakers (Appendix F: Distribution of home language, Figure 1.2). Zulu speakers tend to live in the areas of Kwa Mashu, Chatsworth and Umlazi near Durban, and commute to work. Middle class white English and Afrikaans speakers live in neighbourhoods like Westville, Glenwood, Pinetown and Glenanil. The research interviews took place in Chatsworth (Jubilee), a mix of Indian and black residents; Glenanil, predominantly white (Freda, Afrikaans); Westville, predominantly white (Janet, English) and Kwadengezi, black (Elizabeth, Zulu). Although the facilitators might have co-incidentally known some of the participants socially, most women had been invited by a different member of the group. The English and Afrikaans groups were middle class, an evaluation which is based on occupation or home location, not the stated income in the questionnaire. It was much more difficult to assess an economic status for the Zulu groups, as professionally they could be considered middle class but the remnants of apartheid are reflected in the very basic design and construction of many of their homes. Different criteria were applied like owning their own home, and their professional status.

Profile of focus group sessions

The individual sessions took place in the homes of facilitators and lasted about three hours including the screening time. Three discussion groups were organised for Saturday afternoons and one for a Sunday afternoon since all facilitators worked outside the home during the week.

Case folder

In the later reception studies for *SB* and *GU III* the facilitators supplied refreshments. At every session participants formed a circle in the living room with the television as the main focus. The video camera was focused on the group. The researcher explained that the goal of the research was to investigate how the group made sense of the screening and to what extent it impacted on their ideas about the changes taking place in South Africa. The participants were encouraged to express their opinions freely, even if these were in conflict with those of other women in the room. They were also advised that the discussion proceedings would be videotaped but their anonymity would be protected. Each participant then introduced herself by name, describing her family and work situation. The researcher screened the three episodes from *SB*, "**Maid from Hell**", "**Campaign Trail**" and "**Comic Relief**" and in the case of *GU III* the two episodes, "**The Case of the Historically Advantaged Pale Males**" and "**Flexible Asian Models**" after which a discussion about the media text was led by questions from the facilitator ensued. In this participatory environment, as the interviewees became familiar with the researcher, their willingness and ability to articulate their experiences or opinions in a social environment improved. At the end of the session, if there was time, respondents were shown the video of their discussion and then asked to comment on how they felt seeing themselves on camera.

Facilitator - the link in the chain

In this study the facilitator was the important link in the chain of research. Having decided that certain ethnic and language and lifestyle groups were necessary as a microcosm of South African society, the researcher actively solicited women who appeared to be outgoing, good communicators and from the ethnic or language group required. This worked well in the middle class category since the researcher came into contact with these categories of women both socially and through the university. However it proved more difficult to find working class women who were good communicators and would agree to undertake the project - even if paid to do so. For the Zulu women, Jubilee, who taught sewing to disadvantaged women for the Department of Labour on a contract basis, proved most helpful. She had been an activist in the African National Congress for thirty years and was accustomed to convening groups as well as soliciting information. She was reliable with a delightful warm and friendly manner. The groups she convened were at a grassroots level, something which would have been an impossible feat

for the researcher to achieve. In addition, being a Zulu speaker, she had the group's confidence and trust, so intimate information was discussed. Elizabeth, the facilitator for the middle class group, is also active in her community. The researcher met her at a workshop for writing research proposals, where her forthright articulate manner, earmarked her as a possible facilitator. She proved to be very organised, because she does much in her community. Elizabeth is a trained midwife in the community and had access to a wide range of participants. The Zulu group, facilitated by Eunice, had been solicited by Jubilee and since Eunice also is an energetic activist, running a daycare centre and other outreach programmes, she handled her group well. Theodora's Zulu group consisted of much younger women for whom Jubilee was to have been the facilitator but when the group arrived without her, Theodora seemed the most outgoing with the best command of English, so she was asked to facilitate. She did not have the ability to manage the group so the researcher had to become much more involved in the questioning. The working class English group facilitator, Leigh-Anne, came through contact with a local hairdressing salon as did the Coloured facilitator, Joanne, who was the researcher's stylist. These two women were accustomed to dealing with the public and coped well in their facilitation. Since the new constitution has also recognized alternate lifestyles, it was decided to include a lesbian group to ensure full representation of women. The lesbian group proved very difficult to convene since many lesbians conceal their lifestyle but a male colleague, who is gay, was most helpful in this regard and finally Leigh agreed to be a facilitator. The rest of the groups were convened through colleagues at work or social contacts with outgoing and good interpersonal skills.

After the facilitators agreed to participate they were requested to invite a minimum of six women between 21 and 64 years of age with at least an educational level of Grade Four to participate, using the snowball sampling method. Brown (1994) explains how over the period of the study from 1985-1988 she interviewed a total of twenty nine participants adding one more in 1991 and all were involved on a changing basis (Brown, 1994). These were divided into seven groups and they discussed different soaps screened in the United States (US), Australia and the United Kingdom (UK). The researcher's active participation in discussions with the focus groups was an important ingredient for generating a flow of shared meanings of the codes in the text, since these codes were of cultural and social value and often led to negotiating meanings in different

ways. The research aimed at discovering how these groups of multicultural women read the cinematic codes in *Going Up III* and *Suburban Bliss* and whether they derived pleasure from their reading. Multilingualism has become an important policy element in South African broadcasting so the educational value of learning alternate languages arose in the research. Education becomes both an ideal and a referent for change in the service of a new kind of society where it represents a struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations (Freire:1985). Based on Freire's argument a number of questions arise. How might these women be empowered by the codes and signs assigned in popularist media? What are the implications for women in the government's educational and cultural policy? Is there a precedent for using **narrative forms of programming** as consciousness-raising devices for a multicultural and multilingual society in South Africa?

At the end of the discussions a questionnaire was handed out to each individual to obtain demographic variables (Mofokeng,1994). In addition the participants were asked to explain what media was consumed (Sudman, 1976). In questionnaire design, Sudman and Bradman suggest asking what genres, what programmes, what articles are read (Sudman & Bradman,1993). The questions attempted to ascertain whether the focus groups understood the narrative of *Going Up* or *Suburban Bliss*; whether or not they derived pleasure from their viewing and reading and whether they learned anything from their interaction (Sudman & Bradman,1993).

Thirteen focus groups of Zulu, Coloured, Hindu, Afrikaans and English-speaking women participated in the reception studies research, with a minimum age of 21, and minimum Grade Four education (Appendix F, demographic tables). The demographic variables asked for on the questionnaire included occupation, income, number of people per household unit; distance from the nearest tap, distance from the nearest shop, source of power (electricity, batteries, solar); media choices for magazines, newspapers, radio stations, favourite programmes; daily time spent watching television; favourite television programmes and a detailed description of the most important event in the last few years; what kind of things were important to the person; what pictures these events bring to mind: what life was like right now. At the focus group session it was important to become familiar with the groups so the participants would be comfortable and

feel welcome. Each woman, including the researcher, after being seated explained to the circle who she was - mother, wife or single, number of children and what, if any, work she did outside of the home. The *SB* and *GU III* focus group facilitators were paid R60 per session from the researcher's personal funds. Among the less privileged women, this payment was an incentive to perform well.

Focus group interviews for this project

In October 1995, the situation comedy series, *Suburban Bliss* began airing on the SABC and the potential for varied interpretation of its caustic and satirical humour by multicultural and multilingual focus groups appeared promising. While interviewing producers and actors on the set of *Suburban Bliss*, at the SABC, in May 1996, the researcher was invited to view *Going Up III* (*GU III*), and decided to extend the focus groups to include sessions for *GU III*.

Researcher - gaining a perspective on field work

A practical way to interpret events that align with the culture codes of the participants in the focus group is by referencing their codes of behaviour with each other. Interaction with the specific facilitators helped achieve this, as prior to finding facilitators who would agree to participating, it was difficult to convene the groups. A perspective on the research developed as the researcher formulated her role in a field setting, beginning when she interacted with the facilitators or 'gatekeepers' and then adapted to their social codes in her dress, language, style of address and manner of presentation. Circumscribing the research relationship involved warm but casual greetings and even farewells revealed details about the participants' world. All respondents in the Zulu groups were anxious to prolong the interaction after the session.

Lack of telephones prior to acquiring facilitators meant no pressure could be applied to the group to convene the meeting. It was much easier when the facilitators pursued participants to increase the numbers in their groups. Contact with the group was restricted to a one time only meeting. Later when *Going Up III* focus groups were being recruited only four of the nine facilitators were prepared to do a second group and the reason given was that as yet nobody watched the show, which had only just begun airing. For recruitment of focus groups for *Suburban Bliss* (*SB*) one upper middle class English-speaker refused to be involved as she felt

the characters were 'common' and she did not want to invite people like that onto the screen in her living room as the black characters were always 'taking points off the whites'. *SB* poked fun at white/black relations and that could have been the real reason for the woman's refusal to participate. Giving lifts, paying busfare and exchanging time, effort and services, signified a simple expression of thanks to the group members for participating. The payment of R60 to each facilitator was received differently as the English upper middle class woman was embarrassed to accept it. Subsequently the money was placed discreetly in an envelope with a thank you note and presented to the facilitator on departure.

Structure for the rest of the dissertation

Using a socio-historic methodology, Chapter Two investigates the ecology of television, examining changes at the SABC in terms of broadcasting policy. The chapter traces the inception of broadcasting in South Africa beginning with radio and the early influence of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on policy. Change at the SABC was effected through technological, political, economic and social occurrences. The SABC language policy reflected the overt political ideology of Afrikaner nationalism and the covert aspects of political economy. The development of multichannel broadcasting, the national FM network, as well as subsequent satellite broadcasting were all due to advances in broadcast technology. Political changes in South Africa culminated in the democratic 1994 election with major policy revisions for language and style of programming for multicultural audiences. The subsequent introduction of programmes with local content and the economic implications of the overhauling of the organization led to economic hardship. Technological developments also have encouraged globalization of the media which could threaten the issue of cultural identity in South Africa (Teer-Tomaselli, 1995).

Chapter Three looks at the moment of production of *Suburban Bliss*'s origins and history by briefly examining the American sitcom *All in the Family* which first appeared in 1971. Archie, the main character was an outspoken, stubborn, intolerant provincial reacting against whatever was different from himself. The writers of *SB* based Billy and Hempies on Archie Bunker for this chapter. A textual analysis employs structural analysis, utilizing meaning from an

ideological perspective. The approach includes semiotic and ideological analyses and a cultural studies perspective.

Chapter Four examines the moment of production for *Going Up III*, investigating its different policy moments and history by looking at its antecedents, *Going Up I* and *II*. Through interviews with the production team it becomes apparent that *GU III* is a hybrid of comic realism, allegoric mode, situation comedy, folk musical and African oral tradition, conceived to meet the perceived needs of the local multilingual multicultural audience. With its representational narrative, visual naturalism and its attention to the quotidian detail of a law office in the Central Business District of Johannesburg, *GU III* plays for laughs, reproducing comedy's subversive potential for creating divergent readings.

Chapter Five describes the reasons for the nine focus groups' responses to the ideological impact on the construction of the television message for *Suburban Bliss* and explains how the programmes mediate the producer/audience relationship making an important contribution to the hegemonic process. This is the domination of one clan over another by political and ideological means and is unlikely ever to be complete (Gramsci, 1973). The balance between coercion and consent varies in different societies and in the cross cultural reception studies undertaken here, the interpretation of the text can be very different in the decoding from that originally intended by the producer or encoder when creating the programme. According to Carl Fischer, producer of *SB*, he had to attract blacks as an audience for *SB*, and this chapter investigates how the 'audience' responds to the 'political imperative' when the intentionality of the production team, using humour as a catalyst, addresses sensitive social and cultural issues.

Chapter Six examines the way four focus groups interpret the two episodes from *GU III* to arrive at the influences on their engagement in interpreting the programme. In *GU III*, the plot centres around situations with which many South African viewers are familiar. The plots used include attempting to find work and the reality of affirmative action in **"A Case of the Historically Advantages Pale Males" (HAPMs)**. The subtext for mixing up video tapes in **"Flexible Asian Models" (FAM)** jibes at government inefficiency and points out that adults have access now to pornography. To participate in the discussion the viewers had to identify

with the text and internalise the events that occur against the background of their knowledge, experience and culture.

Chapter Seven looks at humour and the way this has impacted on the audiences of the sitcoms, *Suburban Bliss* and *Going Up III*, since political power has changed in South Africa so the “consciousness is [now] reached of the solidarity of interests among all the members of a social class, but still in the purely economic field” (Gramsci, 1973: 181). The corporate interests in their present and future development have not yet been transcended and become the interests of all other subordinate groups, so that the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a whole lot of subgroups is not yet accomplished (Gramsci, 1973: 182). The new hegemonic bloc, the ANC, is still in the process of achieving hegemony in civil society by ideological means. This chapter evaluates how thirteen focus groups with different cultures, languages and educational background responded to the humour in *SB* and *GU III*, grasped the intended political sub-text of black and white groups accommodating each other and then applied that concept to their own lives. The new political order in South Africa has already been established by the electorate so the characters in the texts are shown to be in the process of cultural integration with the ultimate goal being to develop a position within the community without leaving it.

Chapter Eight summarises the responses of all the focus groups, who discussed the concept of ‘identity as sameness’ as distinguished from ‘identity as subjectivity’ where the location of subjects and their historic individuality expand into the collective communities of nation, gender, class, generation, race and ethnicity. The subjects in a community see themselves in others and sees others in themselves so that the very idea of ‘sameness’ brings in the idea of ‘otherness’ and ‘difference’. Identity is also conceived as ‘solidarity’, when whatever happens in society is connected but distinct and separate, so that events occurring in society can affect both individuals and society. The dissertation explores the proposition that among different social groups, humour as cultural reconciliation can be effective if people are prepared to adjust their patterns of thinking and social practices.

CHAPTER II

South African Television Ecology: The 'new' multicultural audiences

"to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level" (Gramsci, 1973:259).

Introduction

Texts of popular culture, including film, television and music, intersect with industry and social history. Social history attempts to show how human beings interact with social institutions without merely being acted upon by them. Because everyday life is part of the social process not only the effect of social systems, the total cultural system expresses the conflict and resistance experienced by the people in the system. The social history of television analyses the way television participates in the production and distribution of social knowledge and integrates theory, criticism and approaches to television history (Haralovich, 1986). The goals of social history incorporate understanding of how people participate in producing their own social consciousness and how they fit into the dominant ideology. These goals also show how the past helps present institutions and how opposition can be expressed against these institutions. A social history approach helps research understand differences and the way people can participate in the dominant discourse. Multiple meanings and pleasure, plus a mediation between the television industry and other social institutions, position programmes and the industry in the social process.

This process is furthered by the discourse of commercial culture in the electronic mass media whereby consumerism has become the essence of human existence. Avid consumers require money to fulfil this need which suggests that a plenitude of money is equated with the social hierarchy. The mass media trivializes culture by making art into a commodity but also gives a meaningful connection to our past (Lipsitz, 1990). This process of collective memory frames the production of the commodity and introduces a paradoxical relationship between history and

commercialized leisure. The capacity of new technology to transcend time and space creates instability because it disconnects people from past traditions; but it also liberates people by making the past less determinate of present experience. People have become disconnected from their past but they can be re-integrated to give the past a new meaning. Popular culture reflects the dominant ideology of a particular period but also speaks to the residual memory and hopes for the future, creating a continuous process of re-education. The demise of tradition in the United States (US) was accelerated by the reach and scope of the electronic mass media. The advent of television introduced both the advertising medium and the discursive medium of television by applying myth and history to tap the collective popular memory and imagination of the people.

Social History of South African Broadcasting

Since the general election of 1994 and the appointment of a new South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) Board as well as the appointment of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), the SABC's re-launch of the new programming and scheduling has met with considerable criticism from the press and certain members of the public. The effects of the economic forces in South Africa following the 1994 election have not been random but have continued to exclude those voices which lack economic power or resources (Adam, 1997, March 6-13:B3). Those groups who economically survived the disbandment of apartheid are less likely to criticise the prevailing distribution of wealth and power. There are less privileged groups who cannot contribute the resources needed for effective communication to a broad audience, or express their frustration with the continuing status quo, as these less privileged lack the capital base required for successful entry (Murdock & Golding, 1987:37).

The core values of modern Western society "freedom, justice/equality and order/solidarity" can be applied as criteria to evaluate the media's performance on a global scale (McQuail, 1991:67). In this chapter, to contextualise the debates about Public Service Broadcasting (PSB), the social history of South African broadcasting is traced, including the manner in which broadcasting has subsequently attempted to reconstitute itself since the 1994 elections, taking into account the requirements for PSB and the perceptions of what this entails for the media in a new democracy

in their contribution to the construction of a 'national identity'. An investigation of the language requirements of a multicultural society in South Africa follows with its attendant impact on programming. The two local South African productions, *Suburban Bliss (SB)* and *Going Up (GU)* are the practical illustrations used to clarify the changes in programming. The chapter articulates how the sitcom has been affected in its creation by production teams in the United Kingdom (UK) and the USA involving local, national and international elements. Further, the use of humour is related to the audience's perception of local reality as the micro-processes of their viewing engage the macro-processes of the media (Ang, 1996). Finally, the role of the audience in the production of culture is located within the concept of globalization in broadcasting in the 1990s and its relationship to the public sphere.

The regulation of broadcasting in many countries started in the 1920s when radio was adopted as a means of communication for the general public and most countries in the world introduced local regulations or laws to control broadcasting. Television also has been subject to regulations because of the wide-spread assumptions about its power to affect morals and public decency and because the limited airwaves needed to be allocated equitably (McQuail, 1991:49). In the post-war decades, media policy debates have centred around a number of issues, including the autonomy of national language and culture, the rights of cultural expression for various cultural groups, the need to protect regional and local media, the control of commercial communication like advertising or sponsored events and the internationalisation of media and economic and industrial elements concerned with the regulation of media industries. New media forms have led to the internationalisation of the media debate so that the 'public sphere', where principles of media performance are debated, has been enlarged (McQuail, 1991:64).

Early influence of British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on policy

In 1935 when the introduction of radio into South Africa appeared to be in a chaotic state, Sir John Reith, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the BBC was invited by the South African Prime Minister to write a charter which, after debate in Parliament, became the Broadcasting Act in 1936 (Teer-Tomaselli, 1996a). Lord Reith's vision for an ideal public service broadcasting included:

- ◆ universal geographic access

- ◆ universal programming, including education, entertainment and information
- ◆ financial independence of government and the commercial sector through raising licence fees
- ◆ editorial independence
- ◆ being a unifying force for a single national identity

These elements indicate a belief in the role of the broadcaster as a conveyer of 'culture' where the broadcast spectrum belongs to the nation (Teer-Tomaselli, 1996a:2). Originally broadcasting was expected to accomplish the task of providing access to programmes of cultural excellence and inculcating principles of democracy. Reith's understanding of ordinary people was confined to those who spoke English so initially broadcasting was only in English but later Afrikaans was introduced. The language for broadcasting was limited to English and Afrikaans languages - English speakers in urban areas and Afrikaans speakers largely in rural areas, ignoring the languages of the black population. The major difference in regulation from the BBC was that the SABC was not subject to regular statutory commissions of inquiry. There was a serious attempt on the part of the SABC to represent the 'national interest' in their programming policy but no attempt to integrate the various cultures found in South Africa. The programming policy served an ideological purpose helping to maintain cultural and racial divisions. Discussion programmes, news and commentary represented only the government view of events, in line with the subsequent government's policy of apartheid as discussed later.

Language Policy and Broadcasting

Although the SABC was modelled on the BBC, the further development of broadcasting in SA was determined by the geographic size and nature of the country. Language policy is often a reflection of a complicated set of relationships between overt political ideology and the more covert aspects of the political economy (Teer-Tomaselli, 1997:125). The changing policy of SA can either become assimilationist - under the hegemony of a coercive and/or politically dominant language or guarantee rights of all citizens and the promotion of their languages (Teer-Tomaselli, 1997:125). Language is a contentious area of broadcasting in SA because of the coincidence of race. In the reconstitution of the SABC, meeting the language needs of different

sectors of the population without perpetuating channel divisions along racial lines, became a major problem.

Radio and the beginnings of broadcasting

In the early years of radio broadcasting, language was limited to English, 'as the only legitimate language of commerce, politics and social interaction'. Anglicisation had been deliberately practised and enforced during British colonial rule ending in 1910, when South Africa became the Union of South Africa. Afrikaans was not recognized as an appropriate language for the public sphere. This was challenged by the Afrikaans *Broederbond*, an organization advancing Afrikaans speakers' empowerment. Radio broadcasting had begun for the public with the establishment of three radio stations in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town, between 1924 and 1925, but these were amalgamated in 1927 to form the African Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in 1927. In 1936, the Broadcasting Act was passed and the South African Broadcasting Corporation took over the structure of the ABC, reflecting the hegemony of the English-speaking industrial and commercial classes (Teer-Tomaselli, 1997: 125). However by 1936, use of the Afrikaans language had been extended to one and some half hours daily on the same channel as English, broadcasting on medium wave. With the establishment of the SABC as a national public broadcaster, Afrikaans was allocated to short wave frequency transmitters but with a concomitant loss of fidelity. English was on the A programme and Afrikaans on the B Programme.

Significant changes in broadcasting policy

Until 1943 no African language programming existed but after that until 1945, the 'A' and 'B' services broadcast an hour-long indigenous language programme three times a week, split between Zulu, Xhosa and Sotho, depending on the territory served (Teer-Tomaselli, 1997). A rediffusion system or cable was wired into institutions, compounds and hostels in some major cities. When the National Party came to power, radio broadcasts were seen as a means of social distraction to ensure passivity. Afrikaner capital increased during the 1950 boom for the South African economy and increased black urbanization as well as dominance of the *Broederbond* economically, politically and culturally, particularly at the SABC. With the ascendancy of Dr Piet Meyer as Chairman of both the SABC and the *Broederbond*, the SABC became politically

and culturally an arm of Afrikaner hegemony. The Afrikaans service was on a par with that of English on medium wave, and in 1950 the Broadcasting Act was amended to establish a combined English-Afrikaans national commercial channel, Springbok Radio. The latter promoted local programme production houses in contrast to the previous situation which had relied on imported programming.

The establishment of radio stations and language

In the late 1950s, early 1960s, the introduction of frequency-modulated (FM) transmission upgraded the English and Afrikaans services and allowed target broadcasting in different languages over different areas, enabling broadcasts to indigenous-language speakers in areas deemed to be 'traditional homelands'. In 1960 the Broadcasting Amendment Act established Radio Bantu, which offered six channels run by white supervisors controlling black announcers and programmers. 'Pure' language separated black and white listeners and reinforced class and political divisions in the black community (Teer-Tomaselli, 1997). Radio Bantu classified black South Africans according to their indigenous language and geographic location which enabled rule by the whites, by preventing the 75% black population from cohering into a unified group (citing Louw, Teer-Tomaselli, 1997: 127). This 'separate development' or 'apartheid' language policy had already permeated education through the Bantu Education Act of 1953. Radio led to the establishment of language-based radio stations. Eventually in 1976 a television language policy emerged and meant programming was split between English and Afrikaans. Advertisers' responded positively since the split of English and Afrikaans defined identity clearly.

The national FM network led to the establishment of bilingual radio stations aimed at the lower socio-economic classes of the white, Indian and Coloured listener and was modelled on American radio station formats with a mix of music-news-advertisement. This instituted bilingualism with an uneven *rapprochement* between English and Afrikaans interests, and a frequently contradictory pragmatic merging of boundaries between 'white' 'Coloured' and 'Indian' South Africans (Teer-Tomaselli, 1997). In 1976, when the SABC took over the Radio Club of Mozambique - Lourenco Marques (LM) Radio, with its somewhat 'subversive' rock and pop music - it cleaned up the music selection, and broadcast on AM and FM channels entirely in English, illustrating the latter's commercial dominance.

The introduction of television into South Africa

South Africa was the last westernised country to introduce television as a regular service, partly due to the fear within certain right-wing sectors of the National Party that television would undermine the Afrikaner language and culture (Tomaselli, Tomaselli & Muller, 1989:84). The first broadcast channel, TV1, broadcast for five hours every evening, divided equally between English and Afrikaans, with the afternoon programmes, including children's programmes, also divided equally between these. A short news bulletin at 18:00 and a later news bulletin at 20:00 alternated languages, including advertisements (Teer-Tomaselli, 1997). Television was extended to black listeners in 1982 with the introduction of TV2/3, where TV2 covered the eastern portion of South Africa and broadcast in two Nguni languages: Zulu and Xhosa, while TV3 covered the central and northern regions in three Sotho languages; Tswana, North Sotho and South Sotho, broadcasting between 19:00 and 21:30. TV4 was a purely entertainment channel, broadcasting mainly in English with much imported programming.

The content of programmes on the combined TV2/3 was not 'Radio Bantu with pictures' but represented the emerging class structure, stimulated by structural modifications within the political economy of South Africa during the early 1970s. Radio Bantu aimed its messages at traditionalism among the lower-income, less urbanized and rural dwellers in an attempt to draw them into the economy. TV2/3 focused on the emergent black middle classes in the predominantly 'white' urban areas, being more sophisticated and less crudely propagandistic than Radio Bantu. Content of the magazine/documentary programmes on TV2/3 aimed at the self-development of the black middle class but narrative serials were similar to those of Radio Bantu, and were produced by white companies with white directors and black actors (Teer-Tomaselli, 1997).

In January 1992, the SABC launched the Contemporary Community Values Television (CCV-TV) replacing the existing TV2/3, which still broadcast much African language programming but concentrated on imported English-language programmes from the United States. The new station aimed at a broader alignment of class interests to widen its audience-base with less paternalistic management. It appointed a black director, Mdala Mphahlele, and strove towards

'cross-cultural dialogue' based on race rather than language (citing *Financial Mail*, Teer-Tomaselli, 1997). The slogan for CCV was 'station for the nation' and within two years it proved to be the most popular television channel with a wide cross-cultural appeal, so much so that in 1993, 6,02 million viewers, or a fifth of the population, was watching every day.

'Nation-building' and commercial viability

Language policy and scheduling were regarded as a means to achieve nation-building: instead of different languages, Mphahlele aimed at using English as a bridging on the channels. He contended that a mix of different languages were barriers but that English would show the commonalities between different language groups. English programming was introduced at first after the 21:00 slot and then increasingly in the 17:00-21:00 slot, being 49% of broadcast time but during peak time the proportion fell to 18% (SABC Annual Report, 1991:2:26). Most of the budget - 80% - went on local programming in either African languages or Afrikaans. Foreign programmes were dubbed into South African languages and usually films produced in France or Germany were dubbed into Afrikaans. Those from America were dubbed into African languages, but the latter practice casts doubt about nation-building as an aim (Teer-Tomaselli, 1997:129). According to Eric Louw (citing Alexander and Nhlapo, 1992:54), Neville Alexander from the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) proposed English should be adopted as a common language as it offered access as an international language for world-wide communication (Louw, 1992:54). Basing his work on that of Jacob Nhlapo, he also proposed standardised forms of Sotho and Nguni as language families, being mutually interchangeable and mutually comprehensible, a fact which has been subsequently challenged (Teer-Tomaselli, 1997). The unification of language was seen as a 'de-apartheidising' of language in terms of re-codifying into more standardised versions. In addition it also was suggested that Afrikaans, having become the indigenous language of the western Cape should be included (Louw, 1993) in a way that did not require massive linguistic imposition. CCV, although keen on the nation-building project, disagreed as it did not rationalise African languages on a regional basis. CCV was intended to cross-fertilize all languages available to it, using African languages for documentary and narrative programming, but still broadcasting news bulletins split on the regional patterns set up by TV2/3.

CCV was also an important source of revenue for the SABC, which, at that stage, depended on advertising for up to 60% of its income; 20% coming from licence fees. Subsequently advertising has increased to approximately 80% of its revenue. Since the power of advertising to people in their home tongue is significant, advertisers pressurised the channel to allow African advertising only when scheduled with African language programming, indicating the language policy of desegregation was incomplete. This policy meant that effectively only two hours per day was given to vernacular languages, which was viewed by the highest number of audiences as CCV was segmenting its audience since it only catered for Nguni/Sotho audiences between 19h00 and 21h00 daily. Prior to 19h00 the target audience was the English/Afrikaans youth market resulting in a minimum success for advertisers (Association of Marketers, Communication to the SABC Research Department, August 1993).

There had been efforts from the late 1980s and early 1990s to make broadcasting more democratic and the direct result had been the establishment of the Independent Broadcasting Authority. After a lengthy process of public hearings, the appointment of the first democratically nominated Board of Governors took place. The SABC language policy was developed prior to the national language policy because debates around the issue of language use on radio and television stressed inclusiveness, accessibility and recognition of diversity. The Black Consciousness view had espoused an assimilationist policy under the hegemony of political and economic dominance of English, but post-apartheid policy under the ANC stressed the guarantee of rights, including languages. Thus the mandate for language policy was to promote a diverse sound in television broadcasting on a national, regional and local level, providing entertainment, education and information to ensure the development and protection of a national and regional identity, culture and character (Language Policy, 1994, SABC).

Ideology of Apartheid and the Media

As described above, television broadcasting began in January 1976 with a single television channel carrying thirty-seven hours of programming in English and Afrikaans. Television advertising was introduced in 1978, and television broadcasting was subsequently expanded to two national channels, TV2 and TV3 (Tomaselli, Tomaselli & Muller, 1989). TV1 broadcast

in English and Afrikaans with a daily multilingual audience of approximately 6 million adults, TV2 in the Nguni languages and TV3 in Sotho languages. In 1985, TV4 was inaugurated mainly as an English language entertainment service, and by the late 1980s the SABC was using eleven languages on radio and five on television to reach a combined audience of 50 million people (Mpofu, 1996:21). The 1990s saw the restructuring of the SABC on 'business' lines when CCV was introduced to replace TV2, TV3 and TV4 and was called the 'rainbow' channel as it was a multicultural sports and entertainment channel (Mpofu, 1996:30). In addition the Electronic Media Network (M-Net), a private encrypted subscription television service, is owned by the country's print media conglomerates, Argus Newspapers (now Independent Newspapers), Times Media Limited, Afrikaner owned *Nasionale Pers* and *Perskor*. M-Net has one main TV channel which provides entertainment without news. Although changes at the SABC had been set in motion in the late 1980s and early 1990s, until the democratic elections of 1994 in South Africa, in the process of expanding its hegemonic influence, the Nationalist Party government had been spreading the ideology of apartheid through news and narrative (Tomaselli, Tomaselli & Muller, 1989). There had been ideological allegiances of different political sectors in the print media with English-language South African publishers, supported by the well established mining industry and advocating libertarian values. An Afrikaans-language press had emerged from the National Party (NP) which introduced apartheid in 1948, and this press "opposed English-dominated capital and supported Afrikaans capital accumulation" (Tomaselli, Tomaselli & Muller, 1987). Between 1960 and 1990 apartheid ideology through the process of hegemony had won the consent of white South African opinion, and, by devising new Afrikaans and African language words with apartheid imagery, controlled opinions among conservative people of colour (Tomaselli, Tomaselli & Muller, 1989). During a thirty-year period, three popular ideologies emerged among the black population. The oppositional discourses from these groups were located in opposition to the apartheid language of Afrikaner Nationalism and English-derived liberalism.

Apartheid rhetoric actually hid its true goal of Afrikaner nationalism assisting the emergent Afrikaner capital from 1950 to the 1970s. It was 'racial capitalism' which made legal economic, political and social arrangements to serve these goals and the apartheid discourse became internalised by individuals, classes and groups (Adam, 1971:148). The language/race specific

television stations have 'footprints' which coincide with those spatial boundaries for broadcasting to the prescribed 'population' groups. The Bantu Education system and broadcasting both mediated black subjectivity to accept the 'advantages' of apartheid promoting concepts of 'self-determination', 'independence' and 'cultural integrity' (Tomaselli, Louw & Tomaselli, 1990). Apartheid discourse changed in the 1980s when the industrial economy matured and blacks became urbanized to fill jobs in the cities. 'Racial superiority' became 'cultural difference' to re-position blacks as urban workers who could also fill certain supervisory jobs. For whites to accept this change, overt racism disappeared in the urban areas linguistically, supplanted by 'multiculturalism' or 'pluralism' and this modified concept was apparent in television advertisements and series, where blacks and whites were now seen in the same frame (Holt, 1997). Apartheid ideology in the 1980s served the material interests of the white middle class and a class of Afrikaner bureaucrats (Tomaselli, 1997:4).

Television and Voter Education

The fragmentation of groups of people by language, ethnicity, geography and politics during apartheid had begun to change in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when an effort was needed to develop a sense of unified identity and 'nation'. Today in the emergent new South Africa the dominant group represents its interests as those of all members of the society and universalises the concept as 'national'. South Africa presents an unusual example of a nation-state in the South in an era of political independence and national consciousness (Adam, 1995, July). Huge disparities in education, living standards and a lack of social resources caused by the racial capitalism of apartheid, do not appear to provide a sense of a 'national culture' in terms of media consumption with the politicisation due to ethnic consciousness and cultural and linguistic separations. Reincorporation of the separated homelands into a 'unified state' became a task for the SABC as the post-apartheid broadcaster (Tomaselli, 1997:5). The question of local identity as an ethnic sign community within a national framework has been a prime issue in the transition process. Hence the focus on inclusion of local content in programming for the media, particularly for the SABC.

In the ideological debate prior to the 1994 election, DEBI - the Democracy Education Broadcast Initiative - was born out of necessity. Ruth Teer-Tomaselli, one of the original twenty-five persons appointed to the SABC Board in 1993, explains DEBI was a voter and literacy campaign jointly run by the SABC and disparate members of South African civil society, representing varying interests and ideological standpoints (Teer-Tomaselli, 1996b:379). Teer-Tomaselli, as chairperson and coordinator of DEBI, became involved in the initiative of voter education. The SABC had realised that voter education was going to be crucial to the election but, given the SABC's history and legitimacy problem it could not proceed alone, as it lacked the credibility among the majority of people who had never voted before (Teer-Tomaselli, 1996b:380). Barry Gilder, of Matla Trust, a Nongovernmental Organisation (NGO), approached individual radio and television stations for assistance to make airtime available to Matla Trust at no cost (Teer-Tomaselli, 1996b). Matla Trust commissioned *Kululeka*, a thirteen part dramatization that resulted from negotiations with television channels and subsequently paid for with foreign money (EU). Guidelines for commissioning of programmes exhorted use of simple language accessible to all population sectors. Content had to have clear topics and the objectives were to be strictly nonpartisan with a positive tone aimed at reconciliation. The themes of the voter education initiative emphasized political tolerance, the secrecy of the vote and the importance for both sides to accept the results of the election. The campaign fell into three parts - motivation to vote, education to understand the process, and reassurance for those who were concerned about the process. The programmes were also expected to warn the audience not to have unreasonable expectations of a new order and to indicate the responsibilities required of a new government.

Kululeka was 'a voter soapie' with a comedy soap opera format and was the nucleus for the Independent Forum for Electoral Education (IFEE) voter education campaign. Roberta Durrant and Joe Mafela were responsible for the *Kululeka* project and after the elections Durrant explained the background to Teer-Tomaselli (1996b:392) in an interview:

*People relate to things that amuse them. People want to be entertained. There is no question about that. People want to relax. They get mellow and they open out and that opens up the channels of communication. Just about every person I have spoken to, everyone said what they liked about **Kukuleka** was that it was funny. It wasn't too serious and directed, and they didn't have to think too hard. And that came*

across very clearly ... in the end we had to use nine different languages. It was mainly Zulu - our research showed us that 55% of our target audience [were] Zulu and 35% spoke South Sotho. We also used Tswana, Xhosa and English but our research showed the people in the Cape [who speak Afrikaans] were unhappy at not being able to understand ... I honestly think entertainment is so important ... you've got to keep them entertained.

Kukuleka, as a vital part of the voter education project for DEBI, was obviously successful in its goal, as tens of thousands of voters turned out for the election, which achieved democracy for South Africa. An ideological analysis can examine the text and the viewer/text relations to see how the meanings of television express specific social, material and class interests but, as explained by Durrant, the use of comedy keeps people entertained. While television programmes allow a variety of negotiated or oppositional meanings, their structure prefers a set of meanings working to maintain the dominant ideology - in this instance the introduction of democracy through voting. Television texts can only be popular if they allow a range of negotiated readings so various groups can find the particular meaning that coincides with their own relationship to the dominant ideology. In the example given about the Cape, by Durrant, the Coloureds there generally have voted for the Nationalist Party since the election, so their complaint about *Kukuleka* was probably, in essence, ideological.

Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) in South Africa since 1994

Complying with the changed political and ideological imperatives in the media after the election to redress the disparities caused by the 'racial capitalism' of the apartheid years has been a major endeavour. Capitalism has brought enormous problems to the concept of PSB as a supplier of information, education and entertainment in the public interest. The SABC as a public service broadcaster has had to adapt to the costs involved in keeping pace with technology and accommodating government pressures to include the notion of nationalism in broadcasting (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1994:47). The balancing of these factors has exposed the SABC to frequent censure by the press (Golding-Duffy, 1996, Dec 13-19, *Mail & Guardian*). Although technological advances helped PSB fulfil its mandate as a national broadcaster by extending the broadcast footprint, its consequent ability to access the global network has had to be assessed (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1994:48). The SABC has attempted, in keeping with its

responsibility to address the needs of diverse audiences, to contribute to moulding a national sentiment for a “collective identity” (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1994, citing Schlesinger, 1991). In this process of addressing the needs of diverse audiences it has been essential for the SABC to avoid the pitfalls of those apartheid ‘nationalisms’ with the attendant concept of ‘homelands’ or the ‘independent states’ of the Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei. In addition, localised differences in language and culture have had to be met by the SABC programming and even today local content programming still attracted greater attention from the ‘majority’ of black viewers (Smith, 1997-1998, Dec 24 to Jan 8, *Mail & Guardian*:20).

Two months following the relaunch of the SABC in February 1996, *The Star*, in its television scheduling section, criticised the scheduling, but allowed that the top four programmes in the ratings were local productions. *Suburban Bliss*, the nation’s first multiracial situation comedy, topped the list by drawing 1,4 million viewers, followed by three African language programmes (Schedules fail SABC’s new TV service, *The Star*, 1996, April 3:16). Either reviewers had slated *Suburban Bliss*, or suggested that since it catered more to blacks than to whites, it was a wise decision to include it in programming as the nation has a 75 percent black majority. *Going Up III*, the latest of a situation comedy series, received only praise from its inception by reviewers, one of whom suggested it could be viewed as a Reconstruction and Development Programme.

What the word ‘public’ means in the context of broadcasting has not been clarified, so the debates on public broadcasting regarding television’s social role remain remarkably under examined (Scannell, 1992:318). The process of extending PSB services to 99 percent of the population in Britain, regardless of the fact that this may not be commercially viable for the BBC, constitutes “the public good” (Scannell, 1992:318). However, as not all viewers are equal in their purchasing power, privatisation of broadcasting means that not all viewers would have access to commercial or pay channels. This leads to the creation of a two-tiered society, thereby undercutting the democratic principles upon which public broadcasting is based. The broadcaster asserts the right of access should contain wide range of political, religious, social, sporting and cultural activities.

The proposed new 'free-for-all' television channel

The criteria for 'good' or 'quality' programming is controversial and "open to contradictory meanings readily mobilised by public and political opportunism" (Teer-Tomaselli, 1994:130). In 1997, in open session, private sector interests applied to the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) for consideration for the award of a 'free-for-all' private television licence, although the actual broadcasting starts in 1999. It became apparent that commercial freedom and consumer sovereignty are trying to win the award with fewer conditions to prevent their being controlled by the IBA. All applicants criticised the IBA's proposed regulations for the new licence during the public hearings on the authority's private television discussion paper. 'A lighter touch' and more flexibility was requested by one of the bidders if the new station was to be commercially viable. The requirements determine that the new television service must be available to the majority of South Africans; must provide news, information and local drama according to quotas; cater for provincial diversity; supply programming for children; reflect a South African identity, culture and character and contribute to the development of the South African languages. The proposed local drama quota of 234 hours per year was seen as unsustainable, and more flexibility in programme classification and screening times were proposed with a restriction on advertising time to ten minutes per hour during prime time. The private television channel would have to rely solely on advertising and sponsorship for its revenue, so it was suggested the length of advertising allowed should be decided by the management of the station. A limit of 20% on foreign ownership was proposed to preserve the rights of South Africans to their own airwaves. The SABC, however, has indicated that it feels that no further channels should be allotted until the transformation currently underway has been completed.

Whether corporate interests in obtaining this channel would be 'socially responsive and accountable' is difficult to assess, given the history of corporate performance in the 'public interest' during apartheid. Applicants have requested flexibility in the IBA enforcement of any of the proposed conditions of licence to ensure a viable commercial enterprise. Debates on the future of the media concern the relation of cultural forms to the state versus corporate interests, where state and market forces have operated as separate forces to absorb popular needs and demands which could destabilise and threaten social order (Robins & Webster, 1986:137).

During apartheid white capitalist accumulation was aided in every possible way by the government, and laws were consistently promulgated to be used against black people enforcing the ideology of apartheid and 'racial capitalism' (Adam & Moodley, 1993:32).

Advertising and public service broadcasting

Broadcasting has been a very important factor in the mass communication by the way it can deliver advertising into the homes of consumers. Saatchi & Saatchi, one of the top five advertising agencies in the world, advocates full-scale commercialisation of the media (Robins & Webster, 1986). The global implications of satellite broadcasting seem to depend more on multinational corporate interests than on national legislation and policy decisions. At the heart of the 'communications revolution' it appears there is this reinvigoration of consumer capitalism which appeals to the individual as a consumer and inhibits their identity as a citizen. Public service broadcasting is not always perceived to be giving 'value for money' if one is white and the programme's message is also aimed at blacks.

Ideology of language in public service broadcasting

Dick Hebdige (1982:47) maps out the connection between cultural conservatism and the spectre of Americanisation as perceived by certain British elites. Social conflicts and shifts in power from 1935 to 1962 (Hebdige, 1982:47) in the United Kingdom saw the United States and its productive process as the image of industrial barbarism. In Mathew Arnold's work in **Culture and Anarchy**, Arnold states cultural values would maintain consensus and stability (Hebdige, 1982:53, citing Mathew Arnold).

White English-speaking South Africans seem to have this same Arnoldian conception of the importance of cultural values for maintaining consensus and stability (Hebdige, 1982:53) and the same moral sense for programming that permeates the concept of public broadcasting in South Africa. Condemnation of the 'tawdry US media' exists universally but British imports are seen as 'cultured'. It is significant that in the creation of a national or ethnocultural identity there should be a struggle for power between the elites (as cited in Brass, Van den Bulck & Van Poecke, 1996:161). The Afrikaners who previously controlled so many economic and political assets, including the SABC, now find Afrikaans programmes have been considerably reduced

on the SABC. Consequently Afrikaans viewers have been sending only partial payments for their licences to the SABC's licencing offices, who are returning the cheques (Younghusband, 1996, Dec 8, *Sunday Times*). Afrikaans was the language of the oppressor under apartheid so under the new dispensation there seems to have been a concerted effort to reduce its excessive air-time allotment in broadcasting. However, the reality is that many whites in the rural districts, 'Coloureds' in the Western Cape and blacks in the North West, do speak Afrikaans. Consequently despite the political power of the new elite the economic buying power of these groups with their attractiveness to advertisers could be a playing card in resolving the financial difficulties the SABC have been experiencing. The recent financial difficulties of the SABC has resulted in the government conceding that the IBA's mandate for the SABC, central to transformation, is too expensive. Enoch Sithole, SABC spokesperson, stated that the SABC had been made aware the IBA recommendations could be overturned by government (Time to salvage the SABC, 1997, April 18-24 *Mail & Guardian*). The SABC however was suffering heavy losses, as many people were refusing to pay their licences and the ambitious mandate for transformation proved to be too expensive. It seems that, if the SABC were to be self-sufficient, a different style of public broadcasting would have to be initiated, where commercial broadcasting would support a public service mandate in a commercial environment and public broadcasting would be a secondary factor (Golding-Duffy, 1997, Feb. 13-20, *Mail & Guardian*).

Initial realities of public service broadcasting

In 1996, Professor Paulus Zulu was appointed head of the SABC Board, and at that time he stated that broadcasting in eleven official languages was more a product of current and previous political deals than a reality, and felt there should be a simplified practical language policy (*Sunday Times*, 1996 December 1). According to reviewers a different approach also has been suggested for advertising agencies who are 'out of touch' with the new reality in South Africa by ignoring the large bulk of potential black consumers and lagging behind the market place ('Kick Butt' Broadcasting, 1996 Nov 29 - Dec 6). Too much advertising reflects 'Eurocentric marketing concepts' that are ineffectual in the 'black' market. Language subtleties and nuances which influence Eurocentric markets are not always effective in Afrocentric ones, so advertisers should aim to present advertisements in the South African idiom. The newspaper article ('Kick Butt' Broadcasting) suggested that advertisers should try to understand the diverse cultures but

the tendency has been to separate advertisements for black and white markets so that prejudices show up. However, Saatchi & Saatchi's head in South Africa espouses a universal/global approach to advertising concepts, maintaining great ideas transcend race, culture and age boundaries. He suggests "Eurocentric and Afrocentric" as separate concepts are patronising to blacks, while suggesting that the black youth market from Soweto and the white youth market in Sandton (an exclusive white area) have more in common than is realised. If this is correct, then it could mean that a different approach to advertising might help forge a positive commercial station with programming in line with the democratic ideals of public service broadcasting.

Public Service Broadcasting in a Climate of Multiculturalism

Modernity proposes the ideal of rational thought with a sense of shared universal human rationality (Teer-Tomaselli, 1996a:3). Modernity is characterized by rational thought based on the notion of a shared universal rationality so that politics could be seen as an achievement of human emancipation from nature's control. However, post-modernists contend cultural relativism prevents universal rationality and progressive politics but presents pleasure and difference instead (Teer-Tomaselli, 1996a). As a result rational debate in the public sphere is challenged and, since mass media are central to the theory of post-modernity, they are responsible for the infrastructures of economic and cultural globalization (Teer-Tomaselli, 1996a). Post modernity does not allow a universal rationality and believes progressive politics cannot occur because of cultural relativism. Consequently post modernism substitutes 'pleasure and difference for reason and universality' as analytical categories (Teer-Tomaselli, 1996b:3). The role of the mass media in this debate involves the challenge to rational debate in the public sphere - modernist politics - versus the infrastructures of the media in cultural globalization.

Crisis in post-modern South Africa

Problems in public service broadcasting (PSB) in South Africa are not unique but relate to the move from modernity to post-modernity (Teer-Tomaselli, 1996a:3). Three systems of economic organization exist in South Africa:

- ◆ pre-modern economics of rural subsistence
- ◆ modern economic production - distribution and consumption
- ◆ post-modern intervention of a global economic world order threatening to undermine the nation state.

There are three problems to be recognized with the occurrence of change in South Africa:

- ◆ the nation-state as the primary political and economic structure
- ◆ cultural identity with the emergence of awareness of ethnicity, different religions, gender and 'alternative life style' all of which are now more significant than class in determining identity
- ◆ political and ethical shifts in the way people think about who they are in the world
(Teer-Tomaselli, 1996b:4)

Media industries are experiencing major changes in technology and political economy in terms of concentration, diversification, globalization, deregulation, convergence, loss of legitimacy and financial instability. The basic difficulty for the SABC has been a lack of terms of its mandated access to public funds since:

- ◆ 18% of its budget comes from licences
- ◆ 78% from advertising
- ◆ 4% from sponsorship and commercial sales

The regulator, the IBA, had **imposed** a mandate for programming and languages, but only **recommended** a funding mechanism. As discussed earlier, the SABC was divided into 'Business Units' in 1991, each with its own financial responsibility to generate profit (Collins, 1993). In 1993, the new SABC Board of Directors instituted changes in line with economic changes taking place in the country. These changes included full-spectrum services to all South Africans in all parts of the country with programme content aimed at protecting and nurturing South African culture and creativity. The reconfiguration of the television channels, which previously had served only middle class white, Coloured and Indian interests, was aimed at providing more of the country's eleven languages with greater equity. This goal was also applied to radio. Thus the aim was to:

- ◆ extend language services to full equity on television
- ◆ increase local content programming
- ◆ extend the TV footprint to reach all potential viewers
- ◆ introduce regional TV slots in all provinces
- ◆ provide curriculum-based education on radio and TV
- ◆ upgrade African language services

The expense in fulfilling the aims cited has almost overwhelmed the SABC. Local content programming to protect national identity and culture and provide for the diverse language needs of the audience is very expensive. A local drama would cost up to R15000 per minute (norm being R8000), but a drama produced abroad would cost R600 per minute. In addition the SABC has provided coverage of South African national and local elections, voter education, as well as coverage of the truth and reconciliation commission and Parliamentary debates. The culture of non-payment of TV licences has reduced the income of the SABC as payment of licences by the viewing public has shrunk to 18% (Argus, 1996 August 16). Advertising has dropped substantially as new formats and reconfiguration of the television channels plus a multicultural audience has caused advertisers to cease buying broadcast time. In addition, the SABC sold off six radio stations at the request of the IBA. Since these were all commercial stations this source of income (which previously cross-subsidized the less profitable public service stations) meant a loss amounting to R90-million per annum. Finally, most advertising is spent on white, Coloured and Indian target markets so the larger audiences in African languages do not necessarily mean revenue, since disposable income is not available and these Living Standard Measures (LSMs) of 1-3 and 3-5 are not profitable for advertisers (Appendix G).

National identity

Social solidarity is reinforced when consumers share the same cultural and informational environment (Teer-Tomaselli, 1996a). The SABC's programming content guidelines emphasises that "diversity is reflected positively ... and should not in any way disparage the life style or belief systems of any specific cultural group" (SABC Annual Report, 1996: 10). According to Kinman Gecau, developing countries need to consolidate a national identity and media help provide this (Gecau, 1996: 189). The media is also watch-dog and critic but this is not accepted

happily by African governments, who feel the critical role usually played by the media should be relaxed in the interests of national unity (Munyuki, 1996: 172). However, this attitude can lead to the media becoming a mouth-piece for the government and a potential instrument of oppression. Reassessment of the nation-state at the international level in the face of international globalization is ongoing, and the incongruities at a local level become apparent in the foregrounding of uneconomical languages broadcast, as an acknowledgement of equity as in the case of Afrikaans and the 'north-western languages' of Venda, Pedi and Ndebele. Audiences' perceptions of identity are undertaken in Chapter Six. The focus groups' discussions indicated an awareness that meaning and values were changing. 'Simunye' or 'We are one', the promotional logo for SABC 1 is contentious.

Culturally, educationally and socially valuable broadcasting distinguishes between 'needs' and 'wants', where 'wants' are seen as legitimate desires and 'needs' are thought of as a paternalistic response from those in charge who think they know what the public should be viewing (Teer-Tomaselli, 1996a). 'Wants' are perceived through audience ratings and 'the market' or consumer support manifested through buying into encrypted channels like M-Net. Broadcasting policy needs to recognize the 'wants' of those who may not be in a position to buy into an encrypted channel so taking account of these members of society means amplifying "existing inequalities in wealth and power" (Collins, 1993: 29). Thus, if only driven by commercial logic it is not possible to ensure diverse programming is available to audiences not considered profitable. These include audiences too poor, too geographically dispersed, too linguistically or culturally diverse. The range of programming becomes limited by commercial considerations in terms of commodity exchange (Garnham, 1990: 121). The public broadcaster's ability to provide programming in the public interest should include programmes for the very young, the elderly and disabled, curriculum-based education and close caption and/or sign language.

Survival of public service broadcasting

When 1997 began, it seemed it would be a bleak year for the SABC but on the advice of management consultants, it cut 1400 jobs and, despite a shortfall of R56-million in 1996, by September 1997, the SABC turned around its fortunes through increased advertising revenue, improved collection of licence fees and the implementation of tough measures to limit

management bureaucracy (Kobokane, 1997, September 9, *Sunday Times*, p.4). Reviewers contended that in public service broadcasting, the 'p' is for profitable not for public, as there has been less money for foreign correspondents to supply news, fewer regional offices and less regional news (Haffajee, 1997/1998, Dec 24 - Jan. 8, *Mail & Guardian*). Broadcasting policy had proven too expensive when designed by consultants. The Minister of Posts, Telecommunications and Broadcasting, Mr Jay Naidoo, instead, wanted tight budgets without extravagant projects or bloated staff complements (Golding-Duffy, 1997, Feb 13-20). The tussle between government and the SABC involved letting go of broadcast coverage of the election, regional broadcasts, coverage of the truth commission and parliamentary broadcasts. As a result, now profit will drive the organization and, according to the new head of television, Molefe Mokgatle "no programmes which are not profitable will air" (Haffajee, 1997/1998, Dec. 24 - Jan. 8 *Mail & Guardian*). In addition, there has been a suggestion in the Naidoo policy paper that one of the three channels should be cut and sold. The contest between the SABC and the government will continue until profit-driven broadcasting rules. As Enoch Sithole announced "SABC has restructured its operational processes and is now implementing a strategy for revenue generation" while Zwelakhe Sisulu predicted the SABC would make a profit in the next financial year (Kobokane, 1997, September 9, *Sunday Times*).

Creation of a local 'product' for public service broadcasting

To fulfil the goals for democracy of 'nation-building and cultural reconciliation' in the use of local drama, in 1994 the SABC commissioned 104 episodes of the situation comedy, *Suburban Bliss*, at a cost of R11-million (Roome, 1996). The *Suburban Bliss* series propagates a goal of consumerism for black viewers by depicting a black couple with expensive clothing, leather living room furniture and modern kitchen as proof of their newly acquired status by Western cultural standards. In a transitional stage, as is occurring in South Africa, Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' is useful, where the habitus, operating according to a 'logic of practice', is a family group or class phenomenon derived from a common set of material conditions of existence to regulate the practice of a group of individuals responding to those conditions (Bourdieu, 1977:82). Upward-mobility gives an optimistic view of possible outcomes, and downward-mobility a pessimistic view, each determining a different set of practical orientations towards the social struggle. Thus in cultural consumption, taste patterns are revealed across a

wide range from food to clothing, interior decor and art, indicating the 'habitus' of classes and class fractions. Bourdieu explains how the relationship between cultural goods and social practices indicates symbolic power and political intervention in symbolic class struggle.

An explanation of the type of market segmentation conducted in South Africa is useful for referencing the issues raised in the debate about advertising on television and radio. The Living Standards Measures (LSMs) were introduced in the late 1980s to segment the market on a nonracial basis, and this measurement strategy has now proven successful as a growing number of blacks become part of the more affluent sectors of South African society (Appendix F). However, race is still a strong element in market segmentation considering that LSMs 8s, the most affluent, are 81% white, while LSM 1s, the least affluent, are 100 percent black (SAARF, 1995. South African Research Foundation). The LSMs have a broad application in evaluating market segments and they are used extensively by marketing departments (Kelly, 1996 Jan 28). Although the SABC says their audience has increased, in most cases advertisers have disagreed. Since this audience includes a large percentage of black viewers who may well be LSM 1s or "Traditional Have-Nots" which would not be an audience segment saleable to advertisers. In an interview on SAfm, Enoch Sithole, spokesperson for the SABC, was asked whether SABC would cover the 1999 elections as it had done in 1994 (Teer-Tomaselli, 1996b), regardless of whether or not it received the R30-million-plus funding requested from the government. Sithole acknowledged the SABC as the public service broadcaster to supply information about democracy to all the people but admonished that should the SABC not receive the budget requested, they would have to scale down the coverage (Kobokane, 1997, Sept. 9, *Sunday Times*).

As discussed earlier, multichannel broadcasting was policy at the SABC during the era of apartheid for ideological reasons. CCV (now SABC 2) was a consolidation of TV2, 3 and 4 and had been broadcasting to African speakers with about 49% of its programmes broadcast in English. The station had the largest viewership of any South African television station but it had less geographical penetration than TV1, and revenue from its advertising constituted 69.4% of its income. TV1 and CCV were not racially based, but were located on an economic basis according to the LSMs (Bird, 1996:62). However, in South Africa there is a high correlation

between race and wealth and the LSM of TV1 is mostly white and CCV black, so this inevitably affected what was selected for the two channels. In the re-launching of SABC in February 1996, TV1 became SABC3, all English programming, and CCV became SABC2, (*Suburban Bliss* airs here) broadcasting with a mix of African languages, Afrikaans and English, while *Going Up* plays on SABC1. The programme content on SABC TV has also changed considerably. The intended logic was to include different programming across all three channels so viewers would watch **programmes** and not **channels**, switching programmes to satisfy their particular interest.

The SABC has been criticised for their alleged decision to replace local magazine programmes with ‘cheap US imports’. Despite being saddled with a public service mandate for which the government refuses to pay (Mda, 1997, April 13, *Sunday Times*). According to Mda, advertisers will not pay for an audience that watches ethnic programmes as advertisers look at South Africa with “race-coloured eyes” where bulk viewership is black and a ‘poor market’. US sitcoms have a ‘WCI’ or White, Coloured or Indian viewership, which is regarded as a quality viewership for which advertisers would pay. US imports are also much cheaper to air but “local programmes belong to [the people]” (Mda, 1997, April 13, *Sunday Times*). Cultural programmes originating in Africa have been ignored, despite good cultural programmes originating from Senegal or the Caribbean (Mda, 1997, March 23, *Sunday Times*). Strong local programmes should become ‘part of the South African culture’ and incentives should be provided for satellite broadcasters to invest in South Africa with a commitment to providing a quota of local programming (Campher, 1997, March 7-13 *Mail & Guardian*, B5). To increase the use of local programming, the Independent Producers Organisation (IPO) was launched in November 1996. The IPO defines its members as those who are not employed by or have a shareholding in a broadcaster. Their goal has been to persuade government and broadcasters to use their services for making local programmes (*Mail & Guardian*, 1996, Nov 29-Dec 5).

Audience Ratings as a measure of popularity

The Audience Ratings (ARs) from November 25 until December 1, 1996 (Golding-Duffy, 1996, Dec. 13-19, *Mail & Guardian*) indicated, since its inception, *Suburban Bliss* had consistently maintained high scores of over 12.9 ARs on SABC2. But it is interesting to note that it had 18,5 ARs among Nguni/Sotho speaking viewers as opposed to English/Afrikaans

viewers where it scored 8,3 ARS. Golding-Duffy (1996, Dec 13-19) quotes a McCann Erikson media planner's comments that *Suburban Bliss* is an interesting example of a programme doing well among a **cross section** of people as its new South African political slant attracts vernacular audiences as well as Afrikaans viewers (Golding-Duffy, 1996, Dec. 13-19, *Mail & Guardian*). (Appendix G, AMPS). The predecessor of *Going Up (GU)* was *S'gudi S'naysi*, using Zulu dialogue throughout, but *GU I* was aimed at English speakers so its dialogue was mainly English (Roome, 1997). *GU I* was not broadcast until extensive testing with focus groups from different ethnicities had been undertaken and after the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990. *GU I* was the first of the multiracial, multilingual series on the combined channels of TV2/3 and 4, ie CCV. Advertising sponsorship and glowing press reviews led eventually to the creation of further programmes in the series. Later twenty-six episodes of *Going Up III* started airing in October 1996 and the highest ratings for the week of November 11 to 17 went to *Going Up* on SABC 1 with 14,6 ARS while on SABC 2 *Suburban Bliss* topped 13,2 ARS, being second across all channels (Appendix G). The success of these two local productions indicates that local content programming still attracts greater attention from the majority of viewers than imported productions. SABC can thus continue to play an important role in reconciliation by the development of 'products' which fulfil local, regional and specific language needs (Teer-Tomaselli, 1994).

Globalization of Audiences

The idea of a unified global village implies an anonymous global audience but actually "global media do affect, but cannot control local meanings" as there is a complicated relationship between them (Ang, 1996: 151). The concept of a linear process of cultural homogenisation as a result of domination of defenceless people by a powerful culture implies the 'hypodermic needle of media effects theory' (Ang, 1996: 151). Alternatively the implication is that 'culture' is a self-contained unit with fixed boundaries overwhelmed by an equally self-contained dominant culture. This supports cultural puritanism, where the 'global' is seen as part of an erosion and destruction of culture while the 'local' has uncontaminated cultural authenticity. However global movements depict their valuableness in particular localities, while local realities today are inside the global sphere of influence.

'Globalization' implies a series of developments in which the world changes to a single place but the process is incomplete because globalization becomes ruptured. There is no homogenized global culture where cultural differences are eradicated. Local cultures become interdependent and interconnected (Ang, 1996: 153). However the global dissemination of economic, political and ideological conventions influencing media production, circulation and consumption does impact on the infrastructure of local cultures. Marketing, advertising and audience research are specialised practices which assist in the commodification of media culture as an increasingly global phenomenon. In television productions there is a rehashing of formats and genres by an appropriation and adaptation of these to local contexts and local conditions. A hybrid cultural format emerges in which the global and the local are interwoven and what is local and 'authentic' is thus subject to change and modification in the process of domesticating global cultural goods. The local interpretation takes priority where the complicated relationship between global media and local meanings intersect as local productions tend to be more popular. Capitalist culture is still the framework for the production process but local productions could provide a material economic base for local communities.

Media economics suggest an audience must be produced and maximised. Certain cultural audiences are assumed to be valuable because access to them is sold at a profit. This purchase accepts the **objectivity** of the 'research' that measures audience volume and preferences (Meehan, 1990: 117-37). Such research entails examining the numbers of people who read watch or listen to the medium so that the advertisers then pay a price for access to these markets. Communication industries become fused with the sphere of production and greater flexibility in production means an acceleration in production innovation. Within the cultural industries of television, the proliferation of situation comedy in commercial broadcasting in the US indicates the genre satisfies the television channels' demand for capital accumulation where, providing the audience response is positive, the advertiser will pay for that period of time to reach that specific audience (Meehan, 1986). The situation comedy is not only extremely popular, but in the USA it has driven all other genres off the network and television schedules at prime time (Grote, 1983: 9). Globalization discourse articulates how different combinations of a cultural form can be inflected from different places, so that what begins as a particular model in one place changes its narrative, but retains the format as it moves location. Situation comedy in

America was adapted originally from the pre-existing entertainment forms of vaudeville and music-hall sketches, in the 1870s and 1890s (Palmer, 1987:227). (Chapter Seven - more details).

Genealogy of a globalized product: Suburban Bliss

The process of globalization is deeply influenced by relations of power, and transformations wrought by globalization can be strongly marked (Sparks, 1997). In the process of importing a model, (like situation comedy), the text becomes a hybridised model which assumes the character of its new home and in this way texts are transformed. Carl Fischer's maintains that the forerunner to *Suburban Bliss*, *People Like Us*, was refused permission for broadcast during apartheid. The story involved a Coloured doctor living in a white neighbourhood, and Fischer said hearsay suggests the decision not to air was made at the highest level of government. In 1987, at the time of the production, the Group Areas Act made it illegal for Coloureds to live in white neighbourhoods so one assumes this fact would have affected the decision not to air the programme (Roome, 1996).

When asked how the negotiation for the production of *Suburban Bliss* had been initiated, both Carl Fischer and Gray Hofmeyr explained that the SABC wanted additional programming for TV1 (subsequently SABC 3) to attract a black audience, so that black viewers also would be able to see characters they recognized and situations they knew. As the idea, however, was to retain both the white English and Afrikaans speaking audiences, Dapple Productions designed something for all viewers. In the middle of the first run of the series, the assigned station for airing *SB* was changed in the re-launching of the SABC and its time slot moved from 19h30 to 20h00. SABC 2, the newly assigned channel where *SB* subsequently aired, lost many white English-speaking viewers because of the counter programming of the English news during the 20h00 time slot.

Inception of the globalized product

When asked why the decision was made to use the sitcom genre, Hofmeyr detailed how he and Craig Gardner, his American co-writer, studied episodes of *All in the Family*, (the 1970s American situation comedy illustrating the bigotry of a working class family), as a model for the

sitcom *Suburban Bliss*. Archie Bunker, the white working class bigot is a formulaic character of television and builds on Ralph Kramden the working class male character in *The Honeymooners* (1950s American situation comedy about a working class married couple). *All in the Family* was based on the enormously successful British television comedy *Till Death Us Do Part*, (Taylor, 1989:46) a political propaganda masquerading as humour (Palmer, 1987:9).

When the producer/director, Norman Lear, saw *Till Death Us Do Part*, a British comedy series about a bigot constantly at odds with his family (especially his liberal son-in-law) Lear obtained programme rights and developed a series of his own based on it, *All in the Family* (*AIF*). Lear said he had bought the rights because a father and son-in-law were constantly arguing and it reminded him of himself and his own father (Adler, 1979:xx). Robert Wood, president of Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) found *AIF* appealing, and agreed to air it, because it could provoke controversy (Adler, 1979:202). Lear recognised what was new and openly controversial. In the new style of situation comedy Lear introduced, writers and performers had to 'render' social types through satire, rather than by telling a story (Adler 1979). *All in the Family* is a case study in demythologizing the American working class - the 'common man' believed to be able to save the nation as he is closer to nature (citing Berger, Adler, 1979:204). Jokes feed on differences and since ethnic humour is built on stereotypes, it fulfills the absurd notions people have about other people or their class or socio-economic status. Ethnic jokes release aggression because the humour is overt becoming a forbidden pleasure about aggression against ethnic groups (citing Berger, Adler, 1979:207).

Till Death Us Do Part

The character of Archie Bunker in *AIF* is modelled on Alf Garnett in *Till Death Us Do Part* (*TDUP*). Alf Garnett, a grotesque man, fights endlessly with his wife, another grotesque, (but more humanized character) his daughter and his son-in-law, as well as political forces in England especially the Labour Party (Adler, 1979:210). The title is ambivalent - the story concerns the marriage contract and marriage conflict in a little world of people living in a small, run-down apartment. There is a fight to the death, a blood feud between members of the same family who can not bypass a cutting remark or a practical joke - loving and hating each other. Alf Garnett is a bigot, a racist with contempt for Jews, blacks and Labour. He is a working class Tory who

can not understand what the Conservative party is saying, but he is intrigued by those fancy types who actually would loathe him. Alf therefore remains grotesque, mirroring the distortions in the society with pure feeling, in a country with uptight people, who have monstrous superegos but cannot let themselves go (Adler, 1979). Although Alf is regarded as a fool, he speaks for those secret souls, who would like to be free to admit their hatred. He gives good value because, in addition to speaking to the secret souls of aggression against ethnic groups and political parties, the people have the added pleasure of feeling legitimate aggression against Alf, the aggressor. He **does** nothing, he just **is**!

All in the Family

However, in *AIF* the characters are diluted because in egalitarian America, people have to conform to be nice and ordinary, so the model American personality lacks definition, parameters being narrow, a strong personality would be deviant (Adler, 1979). Archie (Arch means extreme and Bunker is full of nonsense) is the pipsqueak with petty hatreds and ignorant prejudices, being the American common man (Adler, 1979:213). Ambivalence towards the series never meant it might be cancelled the first season. It ranked twelfth in the ratings in the first season but the problem was that it was perceived as legitimizing and thus encouraging bigotry. The big criticism was the 'lovable bigot' Archie - a bigot cannot be lovable. Lear said it was Archie's inconsistency and complexity that made him human, because comedy exposes our flaws, encouraging us to acknowledge them and overcome them. The primary focus of the programme was dealing with a broad range of issues - law and order, patriotism and protest, religion and morality, politics and economics, but not as an abstraction. Personal problems of the characters were depicted showing those problems which had never before been acknowledged on television.

Thus the acceptance or rejection of the show had nothing to do with artistic standards but what was happening in the minds of the audiences. From a telephone survey done by CBS most people liked the show and found it funny. In 1974 two academics, Neil Vidmar and Milton Rokeach, undertook a detailed study in audience reception, indicating how unprejudiced viewers appreciated *AIF* as a satire on bigotry, while prejudiced viewers did not. Vidmar and Rokeach hypothesized that the more prejudiced viewers would admire Archie as making sense and would

not mind his using racial epithets (Adler, 1979:xxx). Their study was based on a group of Midwest high school students and a group of Canadian adults. Their conclusion was that the effects of the show lay in reinforcing existing beliefs (Adler, 1979:xxx). High prejudice viewers did feel Mike (the liberal son-in-law) made more sense and Canadians said the show made them aware of their prejudices.

South African Situation comedy: *Suburban Bliss and Going Up*

Suburban Bliss (SB) based Hempies, the old *boer*, and Billy Dwyer, his oblivious son-in-law, on the character of Archie, with all the situations contrived, but resting on the triumph of situation over individuality. The goal for the sitcom was different from what had previously been aired on TV, as it depicts blacks and whites living next door to one another and in business together, coping with those problems relevant to South Africa in a transition stage. The hostile tone of the sitcom softens out in the later episodes with Hempies even shaking hands with Andrew, but the humour remains insulting at the ethnic level, illustrating the pet hates of racial groups in a satirical manner. Critical events are based on the topical political scene as it affects the daily lives of individuals. In a similar way *SB* constructs a narrative for the establishment of a new social order set in motion by the 1994 election with characters in the process of cultural integration, who have the ultimate goal of transforming their position within the community. In the creation of *SB* writer, Gray Hofmeyr, and producer, Carl Fischer, say they attempt to present situations and representations of people coping with the changes in South Africa through humour (personal interviews, March 1996 Appendix A). This sitcom in an emergent new South Africa, represents the dominant group (blacks) whose interests are represented as the 'common interest' of all members of society and 'common interest' is presented as the only valid and rational message.

Going Up

The main character in *Going Up III (GU III)* is Jabulani Cebekui, played by Joe Mafela, well known from the African series *S'gudi S'nayisi*, so *GU III* displays its antecedents with African oral tradition, since the storylines are suggested by Joe Mafela and then workshopped by a team of writers (Personal interview, Benyon, Appendix C, p56). *GU III* focuses on issues that are occurring in South African society, indicating the conflicts between traditionalism and

modernism, by introducing topics depicting homosexuality and affirmative action. It also succeeds in symbolizing and dramatizing conflicts which have arisen in the country by commenting on what is happening in society. The characters react to situations not initiating anything but Jabu (Mafela) is the trickster of African narrative and he controls the storyline. Ong (1982) says persons in oral culture enjoy verbal and intellectual combat as the oral world sees life in polarised terms. Villains need vilification - heroes need exhortation - while human beings require struggle. Symbols are taken to be as powerful as their discursive referents so combat is always in the realm of possibility - it 'could' happen. Storylines must have action with physical contest, the sound of insults, whacks, punches. This takes the form of vilification of one's opponents which is the opposite of praise of one's patrons, or ancestors.

Examples of audience reception by Audience Ratings

Incorporating the local in programming means the local is visible as a resistance ... "[where] the local has reasserted itself as the source of meaning for individuals and communities" (Braman, 1996:27). *AIF* ran on television for five years and was always in the top five shows. Different people viewed *AIF* in different ways as both bigots and nonbigots saw the show in support of their view. Vidmar and Rokeach however decided the programme harmful as most people could not recognize satire. In *SB* there were two families in apposition to each other - one black and one white. The audience ratings in the month of November 1996 show how there were more Afrikaans speakers watching *SB* than English (Appendix G). *SB* was watched by more blacks, from different black language groups (Appendix G) ARS for blacks was 18,8 and 21 (Appendix G). The AR for Coloured adults was 13,2 but only 5,9 for Indian compared with 7,3 for whites and 10,7 for blacks in the same period November 11, 1996 (Appendix G). The comparison between *SB* and *GU III* indicates that on November 11, 1996 the AR for all adults for *SB* was 13,2 and for *GU III* in the same week was 14,6 (Appendix G). Both programmes were watched more (having higher ARS) by black and Coloured viewers than by whites (Appendix G - AMPs)

Globalization of Products for Audiences

Audience-as-public

Technical developments which encourage globalization allow access to international entertainment programming which can bring the threat of cultural domination. (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1994). The pragmatic philosophy behind commercial television is based on the “intertwined double principle of the making of programmes for profit and the use of television channels for advertising” (Ang, 1991:27). The television broadcast system operates according to the laws of capitalist market economy whereby the most popular programmes are usually the most expensive and the ratings reflect this. As discussed earlier, ARS indicate that race is still a strong element in market segmentation. However, after the relaunch in 1996, when the SABC denied that the audience had dropped, this did not account for an audience measured for its affluence. Ratings do not predict what makes people watch particular programmes so ratings do not generally foretell future success or failure (Ang, 1991:27). However, in PSB there is a different place for the audience, as the relationship to the audience is through a sense of cultural responsibility and social accountability by the broadcaster. There is a different positioning of the ‘audience-as-public’ as the central object served - citizens who must be reformed, educated, informed as well as entertained (McQuail, 1986:220). In this manner the commercial model of ‘audience-as-market’ falls into a separate paradigm of communication. Communication is considered effective as soon as the audience gives its attention, regardless of the quality of the programme. ‘Audience-as-public’ however, implies sending communication to audiences who are ‘receivers’ of messages which translate meaning in an orderly manner.

Carl Fischer, the producer of (*SB*), suggested that perhaps with sustained viewing of the show humour might transform the existing socialized prejudices in South Africa, and, by screening a body of issues with humour, not necessarily profound, but applicable to any group (Appendix A). Advertisers, Fischer stressed, are rigidly stuck in the old system of advertising where white viewers speak English or Afrikaans and where the advertisers have control over images and campaigns. This ‘fragmented’ audience has confused advertisers and they have a problem with the new programming being attempted at the SABC. Previously, broadcasting at the SABC was essentially commercial with 80% of the revenue coming from advertisements. Fischer suggested that effectively, new policies were being implemented to try to change the SABC to a national

public service broadcaster less reliant on consumer-delivered programmes and more reliant on programmes designed for the citizens of South Africa. Neither the IBA nor the SABC board, he said, ignored how the future of the SABC could close the gap. However, the public service broadcasting commitment should not be compromised by commercial reality. Thus although originally only twenty-six episodes of *SB* were contracted for, Dapple Productions negotiated to produce 104 episodes to be aired continuously for two years. The audience had a longer period of time in which to become accustomed to the series. With the continued airing of its 104 episodes, *SB*, despite the fact that initially advertisers seldom recommended it as they regarded it as 'cheap', survived the axe. The headcount has changed dramatically illustrating which populations watch it and how these viewers want to be associated with the values and vision of the characters in *SB*.

A desire by certain segments of the population to be associated with the ideology signified in *SB* indicates the "unrecognized, unconscious and contradictory effectivity of the hegemonic within the popular, the relations of power that are inscribed within the very texture of media reception practices" (Ang, 1996:142). Sue Parker, an advertising executive commented how the vernacular element attracted both Afrikaner and black audiences to *SB* (Appendix G). Ang contended an ethnographic perspective of audience reception needs to move beyond the boundaries of the local. It needs to develop an awareness of the differences in production/distribution and consumption, general/particular and global/local where ethnographic perspective can help to "detail and specify the ... telescopic view invoked by structural analysis of the transnational media system" (Ang, 1996:143). The intertwining of global and local developments has repercussions for the issue of cultural identity where, in the increasingly integrated world-system, every identity defines and positions itself in relation to the cultural frames affirmed in that system.

CHAPTER III

Moment of production in *Suburban Bliss*:

A postcard message from the production team

Mythmaking and the symbolic

In evaluating television it becomes apparent that it is not one self-evident thing nor is it neutral but it does “produce and reproduce socially constructed texts whose intents are meaningful, even if the realization of such intent proves unpredictable, misconstrued, or insidious in historical or social terms” (Michaels, 1990:11). When meaning from an ideological perspective is given to an event in the narrative then critical theory allows it has been produced in a specific way. Examining the meanings of a television programme can illuminate other aspects of how narratives work, how notions of masculinity and femininity are derived or how the symbol systems encountered everyday are made meaningful (Allen, 1987:4). Critical approaches to analysing television programmes include, semiotics, narrative theory, genre theory, reader/audience analysis, ideological analysis, psychoanalytic criticism, feminist criticism and cultural studies. In this section which looks at the moment of production, a critical perspective towards *SB* is undertaken by the critiquing of ideology, the examining of social interests, conflicts and contradictions expressed and reproduced in *SB*, semiotics being the study of how thought, knowledge and behaviour relate to meaning (Sless, 1986). A semiotic analysis of television explains the way the signs of television communicate and the rules that arise in examining the television text.

To give expression to an ideology in a television text, the support of the editorial department of the production company for the programme is essential because the significance of an event is produced by language as well as visual manipulation. The assigning of meaning involves a process where transforming the raw material of the script is undertaken by various personnel. When the encoding process takes place specific types of labour are undertaken. Certain codes pertain in the activities of the camera persons, the director, the actors, make-up persons, costume and set design, lighting, sound, music, the video mixer and editing. When writer, Gray Hofmeyr, and producer, Carl Fischer, were interviewed it became apparent that Hofmeyr is not the only

author of *SB*. It is difficult to locate an 'author' of a television program as many types of labour create the final 'text'. Five of the actors as well as the director, Peter SePuma (who directs episodes particularly where the black family, the Molois are involved) were all interviewed to examine the way in which they interpret their roles. By critiquing the ideology of the production team the processes underlying particular textual practices indicate the context of producing *Suburban Bliss*.

History and the construction of myth in South Africa

To contextualise the critique of the production team's ideological position in the creation of *SB* programme for South African viewers, the history and construction of myth among the Afrikaner is relevant. In the cultural experiences of the Afrikaner social formation among Afrikaners there are three main media myths in the Afrikaner psyche - the Eden myth, the urban myth and the social position of the outsider or uitlander are relevant (Tomaselli & van Zyl, 1992:397). The actual experience, which forms the basis of the myths, is the collective memory of the Afrikaans working class, living in the cities since the beginning of the twentieth century. The myths are idealised fictions based on historical experiences and romanticised themes perpetuated in Afrikaans literature, film and television by writers. Gary Hofmeyr is a writer in English with an Afrikaans background, who seems to be unconsciously aware of these myths and incorporates them at the iconic and indexical level into the narrative of *SB*. To understand the myths it is necessary to digress into the social history of the relationship between the Afrikaner, English and black people of South Africa.

In the text of *SB*, humour is a device for negotiating, evaluating and reconstructing past and present history. The television programme uses a sign system based on the cultural experiences of the South African social formation and the contexts of each episode of the situation comedies in the series represent a reaction which mediates the relationship between a black and a white family (Tomaselli & van Zyl, 1992:396). During the apartheid era in the texts of Afrikaans narratives, certain signs were encoded which need to be understood against South African social and labour history. The primary elements were the "penetration of international capital into Afrikaner society, of rural urban migrations, of war and peace, urban unrest, of poverty and

wealth, and religion” (Tomaselli & van Zyl, 1992:397) so that in the plot structures the characters and social practices could be found through signification of the “suppressed traumas, hopes, fears and preoccupation of Afrikaner culture” (Tomaselli & van Zyl, 1992:397). Certain media myths were active in the film and television narratives during apartheid, and these idealised fictions were based on historical experiences.

In Afrikaans cinema the ideas and goals of an emergent ‘petty bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie’ had been represented as the interests of all Afrikaners so the audience for Afrikaans films had sympathy for these classes in the films. The collective memory based on the actual experiences of the Afrikaans working class, who have been living in the cities since the start of the twentieth century created the basis of the three myths which were idealised fictions (Tomaselli & van Zyl, 1992:397). Thus according to Tomaselli & van Zyl (1992: 397) the “Afrikaans filmmakers of the 1960s and ’70s (and television producers of the early ’80s) imposed on the plots the traumas experienced by the working class”. Thus the social and economic progress of the Afrikaner has affected the cultural consciousness of both Afrikaner and blacks in South Africa. In the late 1830s groups of Afrikaner families had left the Cape for the hinterland of southern Africa to escape the domination of the British who had arrived to occupy the Cape after the Napoleonic wars. In the late nineteenth century the move from a rural economy to a competitive urban industrial one caused a cultural trauma for the Afrikaner, splitting the Afrikaner nation geographically and economically, and eventually leading to an Afrikaner hegemony based on a cultural identity with the recognition of Afrikaans as a language. The decisive turning point occurred with the discovery of diamonds in 1869 and gold shortly thereafter (Adam, 1971). These events meant the Afrikaners in the Boer Republics were again invaded by foreign influences who had come to exploit the land (Adam, 1971:25). Previously the Afrikaners had subsisted in agrarian economies producing little for exchange, so when foreign capital flowed into mining, with its subsequent squeeze on the land, and the stimulus of production for an urban market, many blacks and white Afrikaners migrated to the new cities. This stratum of unskilled labourers was mainly Afrikaans-speaking and became known as ‘poor whites’. One of the historical-economic origins of the Afrikaner nationalist movement can be traced to the defeat by the British in the Boer War 1899-1902, while the Great War (1914-1918) exacerbated the situation between the English and Afrikaner groups (Adam, 1971:29). The original trek into the hinterland in 1836 had united

those surviving Afrikaner agricultural capitalists, urban working classes and surfacing petty bourgeoisie against the English and blacks. However, eventually by the middle of the twentieth century the rise of Afrikanerdom was co-determined by the establishment of 'racial capitalism', which helped provide opportunities to enunciate a parley through institutions like the media. With the advent of broadcasting in the early 1930s, the implementation of bilingualism was negotiated through action groups like the Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuur Vereeniging [ATKV] (Hayman & Tomaselli, 1989:29).

'Eden myth' and the *boeredogter*

The narrative of *SB* works at an indexical level with a preoccupation with 'cultural identity'. The 'Eden myth' comes from the symbolism in western art of the Fall from the Garden of Eden (citing Steiner, Tomaselli & van Zyl, 1992:472). The concept of the 'Eden myth' has been applied to the Afrikaners' previous peaceful living with the environment, associated with a relatively stable, loosely bound agricultural economy, so the 'Fall from Eden' meant moving to a competitive capital industrial economy (Tomaselli & van Zyl, 1992: 472). According to Tomaselli and van Zyl in the 'Fall', the myth offers an explanation to Afrikaners about urban discontent, suggesting a solution whereby neither blacks nor the English could disturb the idyllic state. Applying this concept of myth to the characters in *SB*, in his very appearance, Hempies, the aged parent, in the Dwyer family iconically represents an Afrikaner, who no longer has his farm and is living in a city. In the new South Africa, Ma Moloi is indexical of the mother of the new nation, symbolically representing the aspirations and traditions of blacks. This ideological position is in direct confrontation with that of the ideology of the Afrikaner, represented by Hempies.

In terms of the development of Afrikaner cinema culture and later television mythology, Kobie Dwyer is the *boeredogter* or farmer's daughter who sold out to the British by marrying one of them. Kobie's marriage to a non-Afrikaner indexically brings her into contact with the culturally alienating influences of international capital. But myth is a second order indexical sign containing a whole range of cultural meanings. As described in her biography for *SB*, Kobie broke out of her culturally inherited way of life on the farm to adopt a new way of life in the city, with a different social organisation. This break out symbolised a "disintegration of pastoral values, social

adaptation and a move towards individualism” (Tomaselli & Van Zyl, 1992:420). The tension between the individual and the group serves as a warning of the danger that outsiders pose to the group identity, just as in the new South Africa the emergent blacks are a threat to the Afrikaner identity. The myth of the *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) also had been magnified in Afrikaner tradition, because of the appalling conditions experienced in British concentration camps during the Boer War, when nearly 26 000 women and children died from disease (Walker, 1990). The notion of *volksmoeder*, or ‘Mother of the Nation’ meant the woman was idealised as a central unity for Afrikanerdom (Brink, 1990:274). The mores produced women who were “disciplined, inhibited, conforming and [who] placed perceived familial and social needs before those of the individual” (citing Roberts, Brink, 1990:203). Victorian domestic ideology in Britain influenced Afrikaner ideas of motherhood where “the woman’s status turned on her success as a housewife in the family economy, in domestic management and forethought, baking and brewing, cleanliness and child-care” (citing E. P. Thompson, Brink, 1990:274). The Boer War and the emergence of Afrikaner nationalism added another dimension to the *volksmoeder*, where the new Afrikaner nationalist were concerned with the degeneracy of the new poor whites and ‘degeneration’ of the Afrikaner. The unpaid labour of the woman was seen as the mainspring towards maintaining the structure of nationalist ideology (Brink, 1990:287).

Kobie’s marriage to the Englishman, Billy Dwyer, indexically represents the hated *uitlander* foreigner or outsider, identified with British imperialism and later English-speaking South Africans. Kobie and Billy’s alliance portrays a coalition which becomes indexical for the unification of white capital in South Africa against the overwhelming numbers of emergent blacks. However, another crucial element is the *boeredogter*’s ability to adapt to changing circumstances, as Kobie illustrates when she takes on the responsibility of running Handmade Furniture. It is apparent that Billy is not a businessman so with her administrative abilities, Kobie symbolises the persistent work of capital which has integrated the rural and urban Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie. The way in which she adapts to her new black neighbours, accepting them without any apparent racism, signifies what is possible for the new South Africa.

In Afrikaans narrative, the *boeredogter* works on three levels of signification. First she represents the idea of a young girl - a denotative concept with the idea of purity, group ties and respect for

traditional values. There are a number of secondary meanings based on the way society perceives the signifier and the signified. In *SB* Kobie loses her mythical status as a *boeredogter* as she has sold out completely: she married an English-speaker, she smokes incessantly and she treats blacks as equals all of which are inimical traits to the standards of conservative Afrikaners. Young Frankie, the school girl and apple of Hempie's eye, is the *boeredogter* of the late 1990s, and hovering on the brink of permissiveness in her relationship with a young black male neighbour. There is a new level of cultural crisis for Afrikanerdom but since mythology is constantly adaptive, so instead of a young woman, Frankie modelling her behaviour on her forbearers, today Frankie adapts to changing circumstances. This includes befriending Andrew, a young black man who is also a *tsotsi*.¹ Although there is never a sexual relationship between them, the theme of 'sex across the colour bar', in the words of the writer, Gray Hofmeyr "it is an obvious plot with this series, you know". But it is the resolution of the relationship between black *uitlander*/outsider and the Afrikaner/English insider that is the basis of the main plot. The integration of innovative social and even sexual mores must be redefined in terms of the new South African way of life, so that eligible but limited numbers of blacks can be admitted to the capitalist coterie of privilege.

Today the new *uitlanders* or outsiders are the black neighbours, the Molois. The younger Molois' aspiration to materialist values - sophisticated kitchen fittings, expensive clothes, leather furniture - is in contrast to the lifestyle and desires of the Dwyers. The new urban black capitalist culture is represented primarily by Thando and the social practices in which she indulges, particularly her consumerism of expensive purchases as indicators of class position. She is the icon for the materialism manifested by the new black elite. The power of money had been a threat to Afrikanerdom stemming back to economic subjugation at the hands of British imperialism after the Boer War. However, Afrikaner hostility to capitalism had changed since the 1948 election of the Nationalist government, when Afrikanerdom entrenched its capitalist base with the racial capitalism of apartheid (Adam, 1971:26). Thus, in addition to the power symbolised by black money, Thando's election as president of the ratepayers' association signifies at a secondary indexical level how black capitalist aspirations have been met by the 1994 General Elections.

¹ *Tsotsi* has connotations of young male lawbreakers who approach life with nonchalance and whose moral turpitude is condemned by their own cultural group.

Television as a vehicle of myths

When discussing television, Ellen Seiter describes how Christian Metz, in applying semiotics to the cinema, identified five channels of communication - the image, the written language, the voice, the music, and sound effects. Seiter substituted graphics for written materials when applying semiotics to television (Seiter, 1987: 43). Critical television theory is concerned with the mythical nature of symbolic forms of expression because these forms reflect the thinking, values, ideology, behaviour and myths of society - or its deep structure. A myth is a socially constructed truth with an underlying ideological meaning to retain the status quo which overturns the historical into the natural, so contemporary myth consists of stereotypes (Barthes, 1977: 165). Semiology breaks the message into a connoted and a denoted system: the connoted is where the signified is ideological, and the denoted naturalises the myth with a literal image, object or sentence (Barthes, 1977: 166). Societies create and maintain myths for their survival and these are communicated through signification. In signification the sign is a combination of physical object and what it means. The associative total relates the two meanings or orders of signification (Fiske & Hartley, 1978: 38). In the first level the order is self-contained; in the second order there is a range of cultural meanings derived from the way society uses and values the signifier and signified. In the third order of signification, a comprehensive cultural picture of reality emerges. This cultural meaning is what Barthes calls a myth (citing Barthes, Fiske & Hartley, 1978: 42). Since myths are ideological they naturalize history.

During apartheid the myths regarding the superiority of whites sustained the Nationalist Party in power by promoting the interests of whites. Myths also have intercultural implications where very different ideas of family can be culturally disturbing. In the analysis of *SB* the meaning being conveyed is examined through the messages which confront viewers with myths, like socially constructed truths about justice and human relations. By articulating the relationship between the text and the ideology of South African society, it is hoped to investigate whether or not the text supports the political and economic structures existing in South African society.

Signification and cultural identifiers in *SB*

In television there are three orders of signification (Fiske & Hartley, 1978:40). The first might be the use of furniture or clothing to denote meaning within a scene - the maid in the first episode wears pink overalls which distinguishes her from the other characters. When a sign carries cultural meaning rather than representation meaning it has moved into the second order of meaning. The colour of clothing can connote anger, or a furniture arrangement can connote family or group harmony. The third order of signification indicates subjective responses and so the Moloi's leather furniture can form part of the imagery of a capitalist consumer society (Fiske, 1987:41). When the sign carries cultural meanings it has moved into the second order and the sign becomes the signifier of those cultural values which introduces its mythical quality.

Thando indicates an obsession with expensive clothes and coiffured hair. But since she is black, and the myth at the second level has been for black women in South Africa to be dressed in the traditional pink overalls associated with domestic workers, heads covered by scarf or beret, she becomes the threat of that new order of the black elite. In the connotative order, the sign signifies that dominant memory of the new hegemonic bloc. However the dominant memory also includes memories of both past and present crises and all operate connotatively and symbolically (Tomaselli & Van Zyl, 1992:401). In dramas like situation comedies artifacts act as cultural indicators - the expensive clothes worn by Thando, the young black female lead in *SB*, show the consumerism among the new black elite. The characters represent social groupings in South Africa and the plots exemplify negotiation and resolution of cultural conflicts. As the constant bickering between Ma Moloi, the African grandmother and Hempies van Rensburg, the Afrikaner grandfather attest, this visual image can assist in defining a collective consciousness as described in Chapter Five by the Afrikaans and Zulu groups.

Structural model in the representation of characters

In the structural approach, a character is seen as a textual device constructed from discourse (Fiske, 1987:153). The physical presence of the characters is used to embody discourse and ideology so that the characters are understood as a series of textual and intertextual relations. A representation of the two families, the Molois, a black family and the Dwyers, a white family

(Appendix H), indicates Ma Moloi, the female aged parent representing the black tradition and Hempies, male, aged parent, white, apartheid and Afrikanerdom, with a gender balance (Appendix H). The conflict between Ma Moloi and Hempies is expressed through invectives and abuse modelled on racial epithets. Ike Moloi and Thando are a married couple, black middle class, ambitious. Their neighbours and business partners, are Billy and Kobie Dwyer, white and lower middle class in aspirations. Andrew Moloi is the young black son, whose relationship to the family is unclear, since sometimes he is presented as Ma Moloi's son, Ike's brother, but in the biography for the cast he is described as Ike's son from a previous marriage. He is balanced by Frankie, the only young daughter of the Dwyers, who, when the series starts, is sixteen in Grade Eleven, a sheltered, protected little white girl, out to impress everybody around her. At the end of the series, she is nineteen and at Art school.

As a discursive textual structure, among the characters there is the notion of a subject with contradictions, which is exploited by the structural approach. The characters cross different trajectories: gender cancels out within families but is complementary across families. In addition there is symmetry across both locations - home and business. The powerful personalities are complementary as Kobie, unconventional, strong, white female, financial director of the business, Handmade Furniture, is balanced by Ike, black, powerful marketing man and the bulwark of the business structure providing a gender balance - female/male (Appendix H). These two characters are supportive of each other in the office, since both are aware that their joint efforts are necessary to maintain Handmade Furniture's profitability. There is a balance in arguments where Ma Moloi argues with Hempies (across gender/race lines) and Thando and Kobie argue oppositionally in race but from the same gender lines, so that opposites are paired. When the opposites suddenly appear friendly (as in the episode "**Comic Relief**"), there is a contradiction introduced which is incongruous and is therefore humorous (Neale & Krutnik, 1990). A further female to female opposition is located in the mother-in-law, Ma Moloi and daughter-in-law, Thando, who are constantly squabbling. Their relationship represents the cultural practice in traditional Zulu society where the daughter-in-law, having been paid for with bride-wealth or *lobola*, is considered property and like a slave is expected to perform all domestic duties (Elizabeth's focus group Appendix D). Since Thando represents the modern black woman this causes conflict. Thando and Billy are also paired, opposite in gender and race but both are parasitical in their relationship

to their partners, as they contribute very little in the way of productivity to the financial enterprise, and both have a bloated sense of their own importance (Appendix H). This structural approach emphasises the social implications of the programme since theories of realism and structuralism, constitute different reading strategies. A combination of the structural and realist approach would interpret the text according to the political orientation of the viewer (Fiske, 1987:151).

Narrative of *Suburban Bliss*

Suburban Bliss (SB) exploits the problems that arise between a black family, the Molois, and a white family, the Dwyers, who are in business together but end up fortuitously living next door to each other. The Molois are an upwardly mobile black family who have moved out of Soweto.² Dapper Ike Moloi has become a business partner in Handmade Furniture by threatening to leave. Since he is a top sales person this has forced the Dwyers to accept him as a partner. His wife, Thando, is an ambitious woman constantly buying the latest clothes and seeking opportunities to meet 'amatop'³ socialites. Ma Moloi, Ike's mother, lives with them, cooks and does all the housework but complains how the move to Parkhurst has meant she now seldom sees her friends from Soweto. She actively dislikes her socially ambitious daughter-in law, constantly jibing at her about her laziness and spendthrift habits. Her aggressive stance towards Hempies represents the extreme black ideological position and symbolises for whites all those negative factional qualities associated with black culture by her aggressive stance towards whites. Andrew (Ike's son from a previous marriage), has an attractive upbeat personality. He is in his late teens, and has dubious friends, involved in drug selling and theft. His hard realism about life and the way he constantly seeks opportunities to exploit society, signify the young black male in urban South Africa.

Middle-aged Billy Dwyer, with racist tendencies, is the inept ostensible head of Handmade. Billy's obsession about order and cleanliness makes him the cleaner of the house. He is also a dreamer

² Soweto originally stood for Southwest Township and was a designated area for blacks to live, from where they commuted to nearby Johannesburg to service industries with their labour. It was developed to fulfil the mandate of the Group Areas Act of 1950 when blacks, Coloureds and Indians were pushed out of designated white areas (Brits.1995:102).

³ Zulu prefix 'ama' (people) added to 'top' to indicate the best in society.

and would like to spend his life creating special furniture. His shrewish wife, Kobie, is responsible for the administrative and financial control of Handmade. Kobie and Ike Moloi, as the lynchpin with his sales ability, run the business. Kobie is aware of Billy's racism and constantly berates him for this. She smokes incessantly, does not attempt to ape Thando's chic, favouring American western style clothes, and has a penchant for gambling. Frankie, Kobie and Billy's rebellious teenage daughter, is adored by her grandfather, Hempies van Rensburg. He lives with the family and had initially provided the capital, from the sale of his mealie farm, to start Handmade. Hempies, Kobie's father, has taken care of the cooking and Frankie, since he came to live with the family. He has little or no respect for Billy whom he regards as a fool. His strong conservative Afrikaans background is manifested in his unashamed racism and violent reaction to any possible integration between the two families.

SB exploits the South African social formation dipping into the cultural experiences of both black and white and does this with stereotypical characters who communicate particular information about the Afrikaner and African psyche. Gray Hofmeyr, explained how in *SB* the work/home situation functioned for the structural aspects of the writing:

The idea of a black family and a white family living next door is not an original one. But it seemed a very obvious vehicle with the new South Africa and with this becoming a reality. Just on a creative level, the one element which we added, which I added at that point, was the workplace which serves two purposes. One is purely a creative structural device, which gives them a place to interact outside of the home situation. Yeah, so there's always creatively something happening at the Dwyers, something happening at the Molois. And the discussion of it, or the interaction thereof, goes on, generally speaking, in the workplace. And then the problem goes back home again. Also the workplace in the initial concept of the thing has the added dimension of the black guy, Ike Moloi, the salesman, wanting shares, wanting a stake in the business. And all those industrial realities. And those conflicts and so on. From there, most of those considerations become comedic and entertainment things, in the sense of the kind of characters that one creates, in that Billy is this terribly insecure guy that actually does nothing but desperately hangs onto being managing director because it's the only way he can maintain his dignity, if you like. The workplace is not a typical situation in terms of industrial realities. It's taking those industrial realities and turning them into a comedic vehicle, because of the kind of characters that one creates within that situation. You know, if one was doing drama, it would have been completely different. We would have the boss and the worker and those things would be treated much more seriously, obviously [...] (interview Gray Hofmeyr, 15 March 1996). (Appendix A)

Although Hofmeyr contends that the workplace was merely added as a 'structural device' the fact is the average white South African only interacts with black South Africans in an **employment** situation so this **equality** in the work place of *SB* is part of a signification for the new South Africa, indicating racial capitalism is over. This signification means elements of the social practices in the workplace can be portrayed, where the production team organisation, using narrative and technical equipment, construct an image of transformation in the workplace and this specific meaning of reconciliation and unity becomes the dominant element of the message (Hall,1982:77).

Realist approach in representation of characters

In the portrayal of a character, a set of social discourses about individuality come together in a symbolic manner and are embodied in the appearance and mannerisms of the actor (Fiske,1987:160). The realist approach proposes that the character represents a real person where the text provides "accurate and adequate metonymic pointers to the characteristics of the person being portrayed ... the viewers then call upon [our] life experience of understanding real people" (Fiske,1987:152). The viewers' social experience also gives them metonymic pointers of how someone is likely to transform the character into a 'real' person. The use of psychological realism is a way of understanding, responding to and evaluating the portrayal of characters, where the ideology of individualism sees the self as the way to make sense of experience. In modern societies where the viewers are not always homogeneous, the narrative in television cannot always speak for itself so the viewers may need to be guided to comprehend the special codes used. In the debate as to whether the collective response of viewers can sway individual perceptions, it has been argued that "meaning lies in the context not only in the texts of art" as the collective experience encourages an individual's approval or disapproval (Dalrymple,1987:301). A character provides a framework of values through which the viewers can make sense of the discourses of their own social experience in order to read the text and thereby read the characters as part of that text.

Actors' interpretation of the programme and characters

A few of the actors, who play the parts of the characters, were interviewed on the set when they were available. They offered astute interpretations of their characters, generally through a realist

approach. Ruth Cele, who plays the role of Ma Moloi, said that Ma Moloi is lonely and misses her friends from Soweto (interview, 15 March 1996, Appendix C). Motshabi Tyelele, who plays Thando, felt her role is to indicate new class positions for blacks and that an audience would either hate or admire her. She, in her opposition to Kobie is constantly testing her, whether it be hiring a maid or challenging Kobie to give up smoking. Sue Pam Grant, who plays Kobie, saw the Dwylers as lower middle class in their aspirations but financially middle class. She perceived Kobie's character in a very positive light:

Sue Pam Grant (Kobie): *OK. Well, I think, for me I feel positive. I feel positive because I think we're dealing with the real aspects - and that is insecurity, temper, sense of humour, beyond the human emotions that lie beyond the face. [She is someone] that is firstly very accessible, understandable, and someone who's not a particularly, like squeaky-clean human being, which most of us aren't. But I think she's got a heart, so I think it only becomes negative when you don't feel, or there's no heart. And I believe that she's got a heart and she's not a prejudiced human being. That she's open. She comes from a very conservative background. So the place where she's come to is an enormous positive place. Because she's far less conservative than her husband [...] I think at first in Afrikaans communities she's probably seen as a very cheeky girl. How can she be so horrible to her father, and so cheeky to her father? I think that's the Afrikaans view, because there's always an Afrikaans community [watching the show]. The other values having an older **verkrampte aardvark**⁵ like my father it's not going to be easy. It's a pain in the butt. The point is she'd never kick him out. She is loyal, but she'll fight, but she'll fight - so of course she's going to try and correct him and try and argue with him (interview, 15 March 1996, Appendix B)*

Grant's assessment of Kobie's character was a positive one, pointing out that her unorthodoxy might give offence in some quarters, particularly her blunt outspoken manner with her father Hempies, but she would never throw him out of the house. Kobie had met her husband, Billy, when she was very young and they have grown up together, but she finds ultimately they are different and he disappoints her but they are "tied at the hip". Kobie signifies positive mental attributes for women and an ability to be successful in the marketplace.

⁵ *Verkrampte aardvark* literally "reactionary anteater"

Desmond Dube (Andrew) gave a critical interpretation of the series and the Andrew character:

***Dube (Andrew):**[...] the character I'm playing, Andrew, is over-the-top. His whole natural being is over the top. Actually I've met a lot of people who say **Suburban Bliss** is using this kind of over- the- top acting, but they don't think Andrew's playing over the top. They think he would play like that [even] if it wasn't the style of **Suburban Bliss** anyway, you know [...] I think **Suburban Bliss** actually represents all of both sides, [black and white] though it looks much like it's more on the lower class. But when it comes to the Molois - you know, you realise that Thando even if she lives a false life, but because of the struggle they went through, you know, and ending up being with neighbours to the Dwyers, it simply means they had to work very hard to get there. And though people look at it and they think - no it's not because of their honest job, you know, though Ike comes across as a very honest man, but I'll give one example - that Andrew stole most of the furniture that is in the house. You know what I'm saying? So you [see] and it means basically Ike has got better things to do with his money, you know as a working man. Because Andrew supplied the needs [basics] (interview, 15 March 1996). (Appendix B)*

The interpretation of the various characters provided by Dube proved enlightening, especially the information about Andrew's involvement in crime. As an example of representation by the production team it might be a realistic depiction for what is happening to young black men but it is a negative one. Ike's apparent connivance, since he has "better things to do with his money", is also a commentary on ethics and morals among middle class black families - a sort of ideological 'swipe'. Dube also revealed that he had based his interpretation of the character on someone he knew since he sensed that Andrew:

is a bad guy but when we interpret the character he's not a bad guy, he's a middle man. But being involved in things like selling stolen goods, buying stolen goods, it's bad and it comes across in all episodes that he is doing that [...] But I think Andrew and Frankie are actually the new South Africa [...] [my character] depending on the economy I think [he] could be both negative and positive [role model] (interview, 15 March 1996).

Sylvaine Strike suggested her character, Frankie, has a more natural style than her parents, the Dwyers. Frankie is amazed and excited that blacks live next door but finds her father and grandfather's racism very embarrassing:

***Sylvaine Strike (Frankie):** Frankie deeply resents the fact that her parents missed out on their higher education. She's completely cool with tertiary education. She will put herself through it if the money's available. She awakens and she gets finally*

culturally engrossed and culturally fed. She goes to a fine arts school. And she just loathes - she's ashamed of the family. She spends her life being ashamed. [My] her father has a standard seven, my grandfather's a rabid racist. [My friends think the show's] too burlesque. The sets are overdone. They overstate [the class thing]. [Friends] They're critical because it's overdone. They're critical because the lighting is [bright]. They're critical because things are overstated. Things are never sort of [real]. It's unfriendly - which is the main thing. There's no natural thing of quality which is I think a reservoir. One doesn't want to sit back and say come on, it couldn't possibly be that bad. And a lot of the writing is conducive to this interpretation of [over- the- top]. Quite frankly, the characters are trying to cope with one another next door. I think Frankie, as an example, she's aware of the social structures that her parents have emerged from. She is rising above [them] (interview, 15 March 1996).

Strike's discomfort with her peers' criticism of the programme was quite illuminating since similar comments came from newspaper reports. Robert Kirby, a white male reviewer, slated *Suburban Bliss* "which by any standards is embarrassingly bad" and he said that at every level it "remains an appalling piece of work". Kirby's further criticism of the SABC was his comment on Zwelakwe Sisulu's⁶ remark during a TV documentary on the SABC, that the corporation would never again hire or use anyone to produce programmes on the basis of who they are or what they produce. Kirby suggested that regardless of what the discount was for the 104 episodes of *SB* 'you get what you pay for' (Kirby, 1996, February 8, Johannesburg, *The Star*). There is a deep-rooted racism among many white South Africans who find it difficult to accept racial equality, based on depictions of successful attractive black people whom they could respect so those viewers indicate a strong negative bias in commentaries on the show (Jhally & Lewis, 1992:81). The case against *SB* is that there are very few middle class black people who live like the Molois, the acting is bad, the sets are bad. Since a different aesthetic was being implemented many whites rejected the entire show as they disliked the message of 'reconciliation'. It appears that race is a social as well as a physical construction and that middle class viewers feel a greater obligation to be critical of television (Jhally & Lewis, 1992:27).

Peter SePuma has directed many of the episodes, particularly those involving the Molois. He has been an actor and director with a versatile career, involving film, television and the stage. SePuma's familiarity with Brecht's alienation theory became apparent as he had spent time acting

⁶ Current head of the SABC since 1995

and directing in Protest theatre in South Africa, which being political theatre used Brechtian techniques. SePuma's involvement in *SB* came about from previous work done with Hofmeyr and Fischer and he saw the series as an explanation of how whites and blacks felt about moving in next door to each other. He felt very ambivalent about Thando's role:

Peter SePuma: It's a very tricky one. Because Thando on the one hand can be quite a positive character, could turn out as a role model type of character. But it also has tendencies of being a negative type of role model as her aspirations are totally away from what some of us aspire to, as when we are looking for a house in the white suburbs. I had a house in the white suburbs - long before black people lived there and looking at the character of Thando, I would like to relate that to my ex-wife, the way she was about moving to the white suburbs. There was this thing. 'I want to be like a 'madam' as well. I want to have my own house with my own maid, a big yard and all that'. It was a question of a status thing. And with me it was an investment, it was my nature, or maybe there was another house there - you know, like you sell that and make a lot of money and you move on. We are now expanding towards these white materialistic issues (interview 15 March 1996, Appendix B).

His interpretation here is based on seeing Thando as a real person and relating this to his own life experience with a wife who was ambitious for the 'white life'. He understood the Ma Moloi character and believed she is very racist, a trait, according to him, to be found amongst both young and old black South Africans:

Peter SePuma: [...] Ma Moloi is a racist and she's like any other black person I know now, who is still a [racist]. I think it's irrelevant. I think black people are very superficial and very prejudiced in many ways - you hear them talk about, you know, you're a Shangaan - I'm not that tribe, and that's a low class tribe, you know, and because of that I think Ma Moloi doesn't only reflect the older generation, she also reflects the young one. Normally she does reflect the older ones who are very much holding onto [the past] and Hempies - the old man, the white man who balances it very well - they are both from the same school. But as it progresses, you realise that she might be racist, but she's a human being (interview 16 March 1996).

SePuma looked at these black images within the context in which he felt the images had some effect on the world. Being a human being who can project positive images on the world as a black person is a positive attribute. In the interpretation of their characters, the actors indicated a realist perspective and in the reception study of the audience this perspective varied depending on the ethnic background of the group (Chapter Five). The idea of character as a discursive textual structure matches the notion of the subject containing contradictions (Fiske, 1987: 154).

Realism's stress on the unity of the self tries to deny contradictions in the text and reading subject, inviting the viewer to read the character as a unique individual. However discursive reading strategies can discourage identification promoting a Brechtian critical alienation between viewer and character (Fiske, 1987:154), but it can be combined with a realistic reading, or alternated with it.

Politics of signification

The process by which certain events and actions become signified socially and politically is important. In South Africa the political mobilization of language and ideas occurred in the struggle against apartheid, which was an ideological and material phenomenon (Louw & Tomaselli, 1991:99). The political mobilization of language and ideas is again occurring in the struggle for the sign between the old regime and the new government of National Unity, where the national interest is transformation and reconciliation. When Carl Fischer says he has no message to impart in *SB* this is actually untrue, since in the production of the sitcom the media's mandate from the SABC was to adjust their interpretations for a different hegemonic bloc. Power to signify transformation involves whites and middle-class Coloureds and Indians many of whom would prefer the old system which invested them with power (Adam, 1971:157). The significations in *SB* which depict black people as equal to whites in political and economic power, enters into controversial and conflicting issues. The signification of transfer power to black South Africans is where the struggle takes place in mobilising consent among all South Africans so that the new ideology of power becomes both 'a material force' and a site of struggle between competing significations.

At this particular historical juncture in South Africa the struggle over meaning depends on the framing in which the new, privileged meanings for 'transformation' 'reconciliation' '*simunye*'⁷ can be sustained. Moving from the narrative of myths to the generative system out of which they are produced, it can be seen how apparently different myths at the surface level originate from the same source. All cultural products contain conventions and inventions to respond to changing

⁷ '*Simunye*' is a Zulu word meaning 'we are one' and is used as a promotional jingle on TV1, SABC's mixed language channel.

circumstances and new information about the world (Cawelti,1984:55). The concept of myth for Afrikaner cinema discussed earlier can be found also as a variation in the American Western movie with its conflicts between the pioneer, attempting to remain in the pristine agricultural Eden, and the inevitable march of progress/civilisation (Cawelti,1984:65). The move from content to structure or from manifest meaning to the level of the code is a characteristic of the critical approach. If ideologies are structures - not images but sets of rules for coding reality - then ideology is not a determined set of messages; it is the semantic rule which generates messages (Hall,1982:79).

Signification process: use of codes, myths and their historical background

If inventories of significations are seen as a set of ideological statements then the concepts have to be historicized so the 'deep structure' of a statement must be seen as a network of elements. Gramsci's 'common sense' contained this inventory of significations. The structural study of the myth suggests that in all ideological statements there would be a logic about the way stories and statements contain a 'truth'. By linking propositions, everything else that follows could be assumed to be true. In the 'reality' of the discourse, language is thought to be transparent for truth itself, so the 'real' world would guarantee the 'truth' of a statement. Television with its visual texts exploits this concept so that if it is 'seen' it must be 'true' and this becomes the 'naturalistic illusion' with its space elaborated by coding - editing, juxta-positioning, point of view shots of the camera person, long shots, medium shots and all the elements that make up the *mise-en-scène*.

Representations of culture and signifying practices

Cultural studies and the sociology of culture have emphasised the importance of meaning in the definition of culture as opposed to mass culture, or the anthropological definition referring to a way of life or shared values of a group or society (Hall,1997a:2). When any powerful cultural mode ceases to develop in a particular system, rather than becoming a formative process, it stops being relevant for contemporary life with its relationships, institutions and formations (Williams,1977:132). Culture as a process is a set of practices and these social practices can be more easily understood when they are stated and explicit, as language is a special kind of social practice where no generation exactly speaks the language of its predecessors. These cultural

practices occur in dress, manners, buildings - all of which practices are a particular kind of social experience with special insignia to change the social and economic relations between the classes. A change in deportment is evident while these changes are happening, or when they emerge, or even pre-emerge and they in turn can exert pressures and set limits on action and experience. These are 'structures of feeling' and are concerned with the meanings and values lived and felt where a social experience is still in process (Williams, 1977:132). This is a structured formation with special linkages, emphases and suppressions, so, when a formation appears to break away from its class norms, it might keep its substantial affiliation and new figures or representations are created. In South Africa, the changes taking place involve cultural changes in terms of values - economic and political changes of power relations.

Representation through language is very significant, for it is the process by which meaning is produced and constantly exchanged, giving a sense of identity through personal and social interaction (Hall, 1997a:3). Meanings regulate conduct and practices through rules, norms and conventions, and members of the same culture would share sets of concepts, images and ideas, called 'codes' to assist in interpreting the world in roughly similar ways. To communicate these meanings the visual images - body language, facial expressions, gestures, clothes and music - have to be translated to decipher their feelings in roughly similar ways (Hall, 1997a:4). All these elements construct meaning and transmit it, because they are symbols or signs. Language is therefore a signifying practice in which representation is bound up with identity and knowledge. Culture and language are thought to construct meaning, so representation shapes social subjects and historical events when the process is a discursive one as ideas form and images and practices about a topic are discussed. This concept is concerned with the **reception** of the meaning or effects and consequences of its politics, while the semiotic approach explains **how** it occurs. Representation is analysed in terms of the actual concrete forms which meaning assumes so the signs have to be interpreted.

Media messages in the context of society and culture

The knowledge of events beyond one's immediate experience is gained from the media and is derived from the reception of mass-mediated symbolic forms (Thompson, 1990:216). Therefore for some readers the encoding of these characters would gain resonance as the characters

symbolise the secret hopes and fears among certain cultural groups in South Africa to ensure that all people had equal access to knowledge. In the new South Africa, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) was brought into being by the Broadcasting Act approved in September 1993 by the Transitional Executive Council. The primary function of the Act is to regulate broadcasting in the public interest in South Africa and there is a need to provide opportunities for historically disadvantaged people to participate at every level - ownership, management, on air and in support positions. With the advent of the Government of National Unity, politically it was felt all ethnic groups should be represented in the media (Teer-Tomaselli, 1995:579). The IBA had proposed that the SABC, as a public television broadcaster, should be required to provide a full range of entertaining, informative and educative programming both across the schedule as a whole and at prime time (Public Services Broadcasting Bill, 1995). Previously the rise of Afrikanerdom had led to the establishment of racial capitalism, which was represented in media narratives based on popular memory of the hegemonic bloc at that time, the Nationalist Party. However, in *SB*, the *mise-en-scène*, characters and narrative act as cultural indicators to affirm the audience's relationships in a **wider** society. The characters can be read to represent various social groups and their relationships in those groups, while the plots symbolise negotiations and resolutions so that the television's visual image helps define a collective consciousness.

The members of the Moloi family constitute those new cultural representations created by the production team to depict a black middle class family with aspirations for economic and social self-improvement in the new South Africa. In some ways the family is a traditional extended black social unit with an attendant mother-in-law and an adult son, Andrew. Ike Moloi is a mix of the 'emergent' practices (Williams, 1977:132) occurring in South Africa among many black business men since he is always immaculately dressed plus his business acumen as marketing director is responsible for Handmade Furniture's financial success. In his makeup and behaviour there is evidence of his proletarian and traditional background. However, there is "no necessary correspondence" or law which states that the ideology Ike held when he earned much less money must or must not correspond to the position of the group, with which he now holds different economic relations of production (Hall, 1996a:13). There is never a guarantee that under all circumstances ideology and class cannot be articulated together in any way, because a class

cannot be read just from its original position in the structure of socio-economic relations of production.

In every social practice there is an interaction between meaning and representation, which presents a connotative association. How the subjects recognise themselves and how this implicates identity, ethnicity and social information around the word 'black' depends on the ideology of the viewers. Ike is represented as successful with an elegant home and a thriving business. He is accepted by his neighbour, Billy Dwyer, who also is the managing director of the business, Handmade Furniture, of which Ike is the marketing director. 'Black' as a term to describe the 'Bantu' is a relatively recent term and since the early 1990s has come into general usage. 'Coloured' and 'Asian' were introduced during apartheid to differentiate these groups, who were granted more privileges than 'blacks' and had certain political rights through the Tricameral Parliament from which blacks were excluded (Chapter Five). With the government of National Unity this has changed as all ethnic groups are equal in the eyes of the law. However 'Coloured' and Indian or Asian groups seem to desire to keep this ethnicity (Chapter Five). Kobie is white and she and Ike are coherent points in the narrative of *SB* since they display a pragmatism in their approach to running the business, and signify the reality of the races working together. Ike is also traditional in the way he relates to his mother but constantly has to prise Thando and his mother apart since neither likes the other. He is also manipulated by Thando.

Language as a sign system.

It has been argued that media 'language' is not only a way to convey ideas, or present a perspective of society but is a system of signs (Hall, 1980a: 133). Therefore television programmes are shaped in texts through symbolic encoding. Cultural power and social relations are part of the encoding process (Hall, 1980a: 134). However, in reading/viewing the text, audience members are also involved in the production of meaning when they decipher the text so their labour and that of the production team may not always coincide. Sometimes the making of meaning is attributed to polysemy (open to more than one meaning) which applies especially to the visual signs in film and television. Many associations are possible but the 'structure of dominance' involves "a pattern of preferred readings" (Morley, 1980: 13). Hall (1980a: 136) contends that television news production gives 'hegemonic meanings' while other theorists, including John Fiske, suggest that

sometimes the viewer or reader decodes a sign or message and the encoding by the author may not coincide with the meaning understood by the reader, which is called 'aberrant' decoding (citing Eco, Fiske, 1987:65). Here it was argued that whenever there are significant social differences, the text will be decoded by a different set of codes than those operating during its encoding or production. Within the domain of signs, the ideological sign is a material segment of reality, as the sign, and the effects it produces, happen within actual experience of the viewer. The understanding of that sign is an act of reference between the sign understood and other signs already known. This promotes a chain of activity in understanding, as individuals move from sign to sign merging in interaction between one individual consciousness and another until the ideological becomes the way individuals communicate (Vološinov, 1973:147).

A semiotic analysis applied to the choice of language in *SB* has wide implications indicating the way language is used as a sign system to denote how a people, place or time also has second order meanings. In "**Comic Relief**" Ma Moloi sees the cartoon of herself married to Hempies and becomes irate with Andrew. She beats him over the head with a rolled newspaper and breaks into a tirade of Zulu. This break from English to Zulu confirms her Zulu ethnicity. Use of English at a second order of meaning equals power and prestige for those who speak it, with connotations of status. The Molois are all fluent in the language, and their skill in speaking English connects them with power and privilege. Although colonial and racial domination by English language has led to an ambivalent status for English, now it is being absorbed into the culture and gaining stature so that most people want to be able to speak it (Smith, 1993:18). The changes towards consumerism in the new society are depicted by the leather couches in the Moloi household signifying a middle class lifestyle, in contrast to Ma Moloi's *shebeen* which makes reference to a traditional Zulu lifestyle. Ma Moloi's loose fitting clothes are an index of a society in transition, while the formal fashionable western clothes worn by Thando indicate a rising black middle class. The actors did not *become* the characters, which would have been individualistic and a strategy of realism (Fiske, 1987:169) but performed their social and ideological actions understood in terms of their relationship to the dominant ideology. Citing Brecht, Fiske, (1987:169) indicates that the identification of audience with performer was a reading relation of capitalism. He aims at rupturing this with a mode of writing, acting and production which intended to separate the

audience from the performance. An alienated audience, therefore, would not accept Kobie as a 'person' but would perceive her as signifying 'woman' with a tough independent spirit.

Episodes from *Suburban Bliss* examined in this Dissertation

As stated in the Preface, the goal in embarking on a reception analysis of multicultural women in South Africa was to ascertain how women were making sense of their world after the 1994 elections. The SABC commissioned 104 episodes of *SB* and justification for the choice of the sitcom was the use of local drama for 'nation-building and cultural reconciliation' (Edmunds, Nov.10-16,1995:12, Blissful contract for suburban series, *Mail & Guardian*). It seemed a logical move to screen *SB* as a conduit for examining how the micro-processes of viewing a television programme engage with the macro-structures of media and society. The purpose was also to evaluate whether a 'cultural reconciliation' is possible through incorporating those varying cultural and ethnic processes which affect viewers' patterns of identification and differentiation.

The episodes "**Maid from Hell**", "**Campaign Trail**" and "**Comic Relief**" were selected from the list of episodes complete at the time of embarking on the project since they were deemed to be representative of a number of political issues being negotiated in the 'new' South Africa. In *SB* the discourse is frequently hostile and that is what provides the humour⁸ for the emergent social relations in South Africa. The new oppositions in South African society are capitalism versus crime, which is regarded as rampant, (as in the episode "**The Maid from Hell**"). The new goals for the society include striving for racial harmony to allow business to succeed ("**Campaign Trail**"). An issue up for negotiation on both sides of the black/white spectrum is the reduction of centralised authoritarianism in terms of freedom of speech in society and family ("**Comic Relief**").

Domestic Labour in "**Maid from Hell**" (episode 6)

There is no narrative closure as the story-line continues through the next few episodes, which are not examined in this project. The episode "**Maid from Hell**" demonstrates how the black and white

⁸ The extent to which humour aids this process of cultural negotiation and reconciliation becomes more apparent in Chapter Five, which looks at multicultural focus groups in their confrontation with the text and their active participation after watching the programmes. The relationship between text and the viewers (subjects) with their own background, intellect, emotion, needs and circumstances, is investigated (Appendix D and E).

characters struggle for one-upmanship through employment of a domestic servant as a symbol of power. Neighbours, Kobie Dwyer and Thando Moloi unwittingly hire the same maid, Dalia. The latter realises she can exploit the competitiveness each feels for the other and tells lies about each of them to the other. As Dalia's stories become increasingly far-fetched, the contest between the two women heats up until both families end up being arrested by the police for fictitious crimes - the Moloi for sacrificing children for witchcraft and the Dwyers for making and selling heroin. Finally, during their interrogation at the police station the families all realise how they have been duped and rush home to discover both houses have been burglarized by the maid, Dalia, with a band of helpers.

The episode opens as Kobie is hanging out her underwear in her backyard when Thando saunters over and, from her side of the fence, taunts Kobie about not having a maid. In response Kobie lies, saying the maid is on vacation. Kobie's competitiveness for Thando causes her to hire a maid. According to **Hofmeyr**, Kobie has no feelings of racism towards Thando:

Between Kobie and Thando there is absolutely no racism. The jibing that goes on there is out and out female jealousy. There is nothing, if they use any racism it's because of their personal relationship. That they might try to exploit some racist thing. I mean, they never call each other 'that white bitch' or 'that black bitch' or anything like that. They might say 'that thing with the dyed hair', you know, or 'that bloody black cougar', something like that. But their relationship has nothing to do with race. It's simply that, at bottom, Kobie is jealous of Thando, because Thando is actually going places and has aspirations and does things. And Kobie is stuck, you know. She's been stuck for fifteen years with this Billy Dwyer, and Handmade Furniture and that's it. And Thando genuinely thinks that the Dwyers are low-class people [it's low-class]. Ok, Thando is a snob, there's no question about that. But it's by that inversion of the general status quo that one creates the conflict between the two women (interview September 1995). (Appendix A)

Thando understands how to rile Kobie but in this competition with Kobie, she has to persuade Ike to pay for a maid and she stimulates his competitiveness by telling him Kobie has one. Thando bribes Ike with her sexuality to agree to paying for a maid. Ma Moloi, who disapproves of Ike and Thando's relationship as well as the prospect of a maid, mutters "I wish you were gay", which, according to African values is ideologically heinous as children in African society are highly

valued and also play a vital role in economic relations⁹. The use of the word 'gay' to a married man causes a 'gap' producing counter-ideological connotations which are intended to be comic. In the Dwyer household Kobie, who is not dependent on Billie financially, announces she is to employ a maid. She meets with considerable antagonism as both males, Billy and Hempies, protest they do not need a maid, because Billy cleans house very thoroughly and Hempies dislikes blacks. Based on collective memory, it is assumed ideologically that the maid will be black and Hempies declares maids are allergic to soap, implying they lack the ideology of cleanliness. In the following takes, various females apply for the position projecting the South African stereotype of maids onto the screen, and symbolise the 'common sense' perspective of the difficulties in procuring an appropriate maid. Primarily black females are displayed, but one white applicant arrives at the Molois. Both Thando and the applicant appear aghast at the implication of a white woman being employed in a domestic capacity by a black family. Some applicants arrive intoxicated yet still drinking alcohol, others with squawking bands of young children, yet others who protest the maximum work they are prepared to do. This negative representation of black women is an ideological interpretation by the producer.

The scene opens finally in the Moloi living room, where Thando is interviewing a young woman who seems imminently suitable for the position as even her boyfriend is a medical intern. Ma Moloi foils the plan to hire this applicant by secretly hiding an ashtray in the woman's purse and, speaking in Zulu, accuses her of theft as she is walking out the door. The use of Zulu by Ma Moloi at junctures like this signifies her role as the icon and keeper of African traditions, since it would be unthinkable for a traditional Zulu family to employ a paid maid (Chapter Five). When Dalia arrives for the interview, she is more adept than Ma Moloi, clutching her purse throughout the interview to frustrate Ma Moloi's intentions. The highlight of the scene occurs when Dalia calls Thando "madam", to the latter's delight and so she ends up being employed. Thando reveals her white-inspired embourgeoisement in her desire to be accepted into that privileged coterie by proceeding to employ Dalia.

⁹ By oppressing women in the precolonial farming societies of southern Africa, men were able to control women's reproductive and productive capacity (Guy 1990:39). A simple technology existed so the norm was the accumulation of people rather than things. Male control over women and their fertile capacity took place through marriage with the male transfer of rights over women and their unborn children. Bride wealth or *lobola* was the method of payment - usually in the form of cattle but in modern times this is frequently supplemented with hard cash or goods.

Dalia's conduct throughout the episode confirms the perception many white and black capitalist employers hold towards black labour as she lies, cheats and steals. In addition, Dalia, being street-smart, recognises Kobie's susceptibilities and her jealousy towards Thando plays on these. When Kobie discovers Dalia is working for Thando, she desperately persuades her to lie about the length of her employment by Kobie. Dalia takes the measure of both women and subsequently manipulates the fears, jealousies and perceptions each family has about the other's race. She barter information in exchange for personal privileges - shorter hours, bacon and egg breakfasts cooked for her by Kobie. An inversion of roles occurs when Kobie placates Dalia to reveal more gossip about the Molois, after initially firing her. The comedy arises out of the incongruity at the ideological level where the employer serves the employee in each of the ridiculous situations created by Dalia. In the penultimate scene at the police-station, both women realise how they have been duped by Dalia.

Transformation and the 'new' South African humour

Among audiences today the 'representation' and circumstances occurring in South Africa have become the basis for the context of the situation comedies and the institution (production company in this instance) creates the 'comic' in terms of prevailing sociocultural rules and conventions. The two processes involve laughter which leads to 'entertainment' becoming subject to negotiation and interpretation by the audience. If the situation is comic and the utterance is serious, it can still be comic, provided that humour is accompanied by the incongruous (Palmer, 1987:64). Dalia's inventive 'tales' of the misdeeds perpetrated by the Moloi family, included the human sacrifice of children and burial of their bones in the back yard, while Kobie of the Dwyer family is accused of making heroin in the kitchen and selling it. Both accusations feed into the mythical beliefs held by whites and blacks about each other. Hempies breaks the tension with "she couldn't cook an egg in the kitchen" and Ma Moloi responds, referring to Thando, "neither could she" and the incongruity makes it comic.

Departures from the normal are shown in terms of semantics, logic and surprise and here Palmer's theory of the absurd, ie the ludicrous and absurd combines the above. (Palmer, 1987:68). Jerry Palmer argues that the two elements of these moments are the logical, a syllogism, and the

aesthetic in the narrative, a 'peripeteia' or sudden reversal. The logic of the absurd guarantees the comic by applying Palmer's theory that semantics, logic and surprise contribute to the absurd. This is due to the balance between plausibility and implausibility as a certain stress is placed on seeing that implausibility dominates and this is where the absurdity is found. (Palmer, 1987:70). In metaphor the opposite occurs when the metaphor gives a new insight so the plausible dominates. The allocation of plausibility and its opposite is not always possible outside a particular discourse in different cultures. Different concepts of causality would not ascribe implausibility. In the analysis of the relationship between jokes and discourses, it is necessary to discover what gives meaning to those jokes, when the discourse seems a form external to the joke (Palmer, 1987:70). The implication is that the demands of 'common-sense' are suspended and the logic of the absurd operates within a wider framework of rules that provides the setting within which the absurd is achievable (Palmer, 1994:97). The genre of situation comedy relies on convention to render the implausible credible, but since conventions change, this leads to new ways and standards of credibility. All forms of the comic are semiotic involving expectation and logic with different meanings and signs, but those meanings can indicate dignity and power **contradicted** by incompetence, failure and indignity. In the "**Campaign Trail**" episode as Billy is trying to coerce more votes for his candidacy, he grabs the arm of his sleeping buddy to raise as a willing voter. This action contradicts the action of 'self empowerment' voting as it is coerced by a desperate 'wannabe' president, and thereby exemplifies Billy's incompetence, failure and indignity.

Freud (1960:195) says a joke is made when speaking, which leads to laughter. There are three parts to a joke - joker, addressee and the target, who is usually innocent and tendentious. In a joke there is a semiotic status - the way the joke is addressed, and the way different levels are involved. There is a process of comparison, superior position, aggression and the erotic but in most 'gags' the erotic wishes are not stated. The humour is aimed towards the addressee (the audience) not the joker, where the audience's unconscious wish is expressed so they accept what is said and laugh at the wisecrack (citing Freud, Palmer, 1994:87). In any form of the comic, aggression is always involved because at stake is a position of superiority. In "**Comic Relief**" when Andrew proposes a topic for the cartoon he depicts the headmaster of Frankie's school finding a pair of panties on the school grounds. The process of *comparison* here is the

incongruity of finding the panties at a school; the *superior position* is that of the artist in drawing the cartoon, together with the audience in being party to the incident; the *aggression* is towards a figure of authority, the headmaster while the *erotic* (the panties) implies sexual activity although the gag does not state this explicitly. The sexist aspect occurs in that a pair of woman's panties is found - not men's underpants.

The humour in the programme arises from the gaps and fissures in the ideology of a sexist society and arises in the discrepant relationship between the two parts of the perception (Palmer, 1994:94). In analysing the role of humour in the episodes, post-structuralism is a very useful method as it "emphasises the slippage between signifier and signified - between one sign and the next, between one context and the next - whilst emphasising that meaning is always situated, specific to a given context" (Seiter, 1987:61). Much of the humour in *SB* is directed at relationships between the sexes and the incompetence, failure and lack of dignity of previous figures of *authority*, whether they be paternal (Hempies), lawyers ("**Comic Relief**") or husbands (Billy). Even after the signing of the new constitution, South Africa legally was an authoritarian and patriarchal society, with laws controlling women in many nefarious ways. The constitution has provided women with rights they never had before, potentially transforming the role of women in the society. The writers deliberately exploit this new situation in the episode and provide the slippage through 'gaps' in the dialogue. Hofmeyr confessed since he was really a drama writer and had not been a writer of comedy dialogue, he had employed an American, Craig Gardner, married to an Afrikaans woman and living in South Africa, for a number of episodes. Gardner injected the snappy dialogue, which Hofmeyr felt the British are also particularly good at, but Americans, through their deliberate cultivation of interpersonal communication, write very well.

Representation of middle class women

Hofmeyr contends that there had never been a conscious effort to involve women as role models in the narrative in a particular way:

You know, there was certainly no conscious, it wasn't a conscious aspect of the concept, it was to involve women in a particular way. In all the work that I've done, I've always enjoyed writing for women, creating strong women parts. In fact, the women in this series generally are far stronger than the men. With the possible

exception of Hempies who has a very, very strong point of view. You know, Kobie is the dominant character in that marriage and Thando manipulates Ike all the time, you know, her battle with the black mother-in-law. So, I think the women in the series have been written very strongly and very interestingly. But it wasn't a conscious decision. It's simply that I've always written strong women. I can't tell you why (interview Hofmeyr, September 1995).

Hofmeyr maintains his strength as a writer has been character and structure. He asserts that the female characters created in *SB* are strong women who would not be criticised by feminists concerned with the way roles depicting women are portrayed on television programmes. However, he has constructed Thando as a white woman in a black body. Michele Wallace writes of the way mainstream media production is passed off as a translation of black feminist creativity (Wallace, 1990:219). She compares the successes of two black media personalities. Whoopi Goldberg (with her African-Caribbean-Afro-America hairstyle) and Oprah Winfrey's straightened hair, elegant couture wardrobe, and weight loss, which suggest that in order to succeed, black women must become 'white' because "Television's most successfully saleable commodity is the 'white woman', the crucial sign in every representation from a vacation in the Bahamas to the effectiveness of cold medicine ... with its built-in assumption that every woman wants to be a 'white woman' (Wallace, 1990:221). Previously in this chapter Peter SePuma, during an interview maintained Thando's behaviour is unsatisfactory, comparing her behaviour to his ex-wife's reaction to financial success. He indicated that in the post-apartheid era, there is a colonisation of black culture by white consumer values, but there is the suggestion that a single cultural event like a change of government cannot suddenly represent the values and beliefs of the majority of black South Africans. Rather the 'canon' and 'tradition' of a culture involve highly selective and exclusionary practices which merely tend to reinforce the status quo (citing Raymond Williams, Wallace, 1990:249). Thus the cultural production, *SB*, enacts a complex process that cannot alter the 'canons' and 'traditions' of the culture but at least makes the audience aware of the existence of certain ongoing practices in the society.

South African women and domestic labour

In South Africa the process of employing domestics, for many white or Indian middle class women, is the only interaction that takes place between them and black women (Adam, 1971:157). Until quite recently, the assumption was this area of labour was exclusively the area for which

women were responsible (Cock,1980:10). The interaction of the characters in *SB* depicts how the black and white families respond to domestic labour. At no stage in the discussion about employing a maid for the Moloi family is it even implied that the males in the family should accept any responsibility for this task. But in the Dwyer household, Hempies had taken care of Frankie as she grew up and he still cooks regularly, while Billy is an obsessive house-cleaner. Ma Moloi is the sole representative of domestic production in the Moloi household. Thando would not soil her 'nails' and hands with any domestic tasks. The portrayal of both white and black younger female characters being relieved of any responsibility for this signifies changing values in South African society as more women enter the work force. However, Thando is not meaningfully employed in any way in or outside the home so she is depicted at an indexical level as parasitical.

In *SB* the employment of someone to perform domestic labour confronts two issues. First, the writer reverses the traditional roles of men and women in domestic production. Second, the confrontation between the two women, Kobie and Thando about employing a maid, negotiates through humour, the extent to which things have progressed in black/white capitalist relations and also introduces integrated black/white capitalism's vulnerability to crime. All sides of the female spectrum can identify with the programme since regardless of ethnicity or class, women traditionally have been responsible for domestic labour either directly, by appointing someone to perform the tasks or, alternatively, by being employed as domestic workers. In the programme there is a structured absence where black males are excluded from the discussion of domestic labour, as they are never addressed directly about their contribution to household chores. This is in contrast to the way the subjectivities of white males are addressed as, both Billy and Hempies object to the introduction of a maid into the household. This collision of discourses produces a burst of meaning that cannot be controlled by the text to provide a unified meaning (Fiske,1987:87). Thus in situation comedy, the genre and humour are textual devices which open the text to polysemic readings (Chapter Seven).

Genre films and television series reflect how emerging social relations in imaginary situations conceal the underlying process through symbols, and justify prevailing conditions to affirm the dominant ideas of society (Tomaselli & van Zyl,1992:397). Popular culture provides opportunities for viewers to identify with reality through characters and symbols where the

characters are cultural indicators (Chapter Five). Their forms are shaped by productive forces operating in the new climate of reconciliation between white and black. The humour in the sitcom attempts to explain the new political entities and illustrates the boundaries of the 'public sphere', which has been conceived symbolically as that area where democratic communication and information are active at a local and international level. Humour sensitises the mechanism for structuring a public sphere congruent with the processes of political decision-making, and the consequences of those decisions in the complex social structures of South African society (Dahlgren, 1995:17). In these new processes of political decision-making identity is destabilised from its previous impenetrable boundaries - whites, Coloureds, Indians all clearly differentiated- but currently these ethnic categories are becoming hybridised identities. Even male and female roles are being renegotiated because alternative roles are being incorporated. The call for a greater realism in images of women seems to indicate an awareness by the public of the importance of the representation of women and a change of attitude in how these are produced (Geraghty, 1996a).

“Politics is a dirty game” - The Campaign Trail (episode 24)

Billy Dwyer and Ike Moloi decide to run against each other for presidency of the local Residents Association, after Mr. Limpid, a 'wannabe' president canvasses them for votes. Billy runs for office because he is competitive with Ike and does not want him to win. Ike initially runs because Thando has persuaded him to run on the issue of “racial harmony and property values” but he changes his platform when Ma Moloi is victimised by Billy and Hempies for running a *shebeen* (speakeasy) in the backyard. He decides to run on the issue of the “rights of the informal sector”. At the meeting for the nominations, Thando speaks so convincingly about “racial harmony bringing increased property values to the neighbourhood” that she is elected.

Since the sitcom is a narrative text it is also subject to the narrative structure or grid through which most television programmes must pass (Kosloff, 1988:69). This episode has narrative closure as the storyline is completed in this episode. A series of events occurs in chronological order, an event being defined as “a change from one state to another” (Citing Rimman-Kenan, Kosloff, 1988:69). However in the “move from equilibrium through disequilibrium to a new

equilibrium” events cannot occur in a vacuum so the characters in an episode enact these events in a particular setting (Todorov,1977:111). The episode opens in the Moloi’s elegant kitchen where Ike is trying to read the newspaper and Thando deliberately interrupts him, petulantly inquiring why he has to read the paper every Sunday. Ma Moloi, always prompt to denigrate Thando, says it’s because they print a new one every week - illustrating how empty-headed Thando is. Ike is shown as a seriously committed young black man, who applies himself to his job and to self-improvement tasks, like reading the newspaper.

Equilibrium reigns until a visitor, Mr Limpid, heralds disequilibrium. He is a somewhat condescending white man, who is canvassing for votes as he plans to stand for election to the Residents Association. His platform is “family values” and the lack of enthusiasm by the Molois for his platform indicates his conservative stance has no resonance with them, including his attempts at greeting them in a variety of African languages. He is the icon for those whites now attempting to ingratiate themselves with petty bourgeois blacks. His remark that “it’s so nice to see people like you moving into the neighbourhood” riles the family who suggest he should see them just as people. Limpid’s ostensibly liberal solicitous remarks are perceived by Ma Moloi as a ploy to take care of his own interests by ingratiating himself with blacks. The fissure in the ideological position is the pun for ‘limpid’ or murkily transparent which is reflected in his name. Blacks are moving into white neighbourhoods and there is a very mixed reaction among whites. In June 1991, prior to the 1994 elections the Nationalist regime had scrapped the Group Areas Act (Brits,1995:102) which designated certain areas where people of different race were allowed to live, so whites and blacks, by law, could only live in certain areas. However, at the time the laws were abolished most blacks were not in a financial position to buy properties within these previously white areas. Later an attempt to remedy the situation was made through low cost housing loans to help the housing shortage of low income families through the Independent Development Trust Finance Corporation which relies on employers to administer the loans (Adam & Moodley,1993:183). With the election of the new government, the fortunes and opportunities afforded to certain black families improved, which led to the rise of a new black elite. People like the Molois are now able to move up in the world. In the context of changing norms, Limpid’s solicitous behaviour is understood by the Molois to be one of self-interest.

Mr. Limpid's visit fires Thando's imagination with the idea of Ike becoming president. She persuades him to run on the basis of 'racial harmony to raise property values'. The sign 'property values' is an indexical sign for capitalist ideology. Thando represents those black South Africans who are determined to take up a superior class position in the new society manifested through the capitalist ideology and consumerism. The Moloi's social position would seem to have something in common with the petite bourgeoisie where the latter are defined as "the owners of small enterprises, using a low level of technology and employing a small and weakly differentiated labour force" (citing Bechhofer & Elliott, Gerry & Birkbeck, 1981:123). In analysing the class position of the Moloi there are both bourgeois and proletarian elements, so an analysis must examine economic, political and ideological criteria (Gerry & Birkbeck, 1981:125). Both Ike and Thando manifest contradictory ideological positions, where Thando, anxious to associate with '*amatop*' socialites, wears expensive clothing and regards everything as 'low class' if it does not imply expensive money. Ike, on the other hand, is still close to his proletarian roots and when Billy and Hempies spread negativity about Ma Moloi's *shebeen*, he changes his platform from 'racial harmony' to 'viva the informal sector'. By supporting this economic activity, Ike is identifying with his proletarian background, moving out of the capitalist framework. He and his mother, Ma Moloi, proceed to '*toyi-toyi*'¹⁰ in the elegant living room showing solidarity in defiance of middle class values. In the 'informal sector' individuals do not need licences to operate a business or to pay Value Added Tax on their businesses. The informal sector is not required to buy a permit to operate, and individuals can set up a business anywhere, including their home or a street corner, but pay no taxes on their profits. This business activity has proliferated in South Africa since the change of government, especially in the downtown areas and has negative connotations for middle class values. Opening up the neighbourhood to this market detracts from the value of residential properties, encouraging street vendors. Hence, Ike evinces a contradictory class position, as, although he is an employer and a capitalist, his stance over the rights of the 'informal sector' to trade without restriction, indicates his political stance is in direct conflict with the policy preferences of the middle class.

¹⁰ The proletariat's freedom protest dance which grew out of black protest in the 1980s and now signifies displeasure with the government.

Thando has no such conflict and vows Ike will not have any assistance from her with his campaign, since she realises that the political criteria to vote for a candidate in a middle class neighbourhood are capitalist inspired. Subsequently in her nomination speech for president, she stresses 'property values' and 'racial harmony' to maintain those capitalist values. The second level of signification in the remark 'racial harmony' implies prosperity for all adherents who support a stable organised environment, by working hard, earning and paying their taxes. In Third World societies like parts of South Africa, metropolitan capital has had an impact on precapitalist African social structures. To have a stake in capitalism does not mean supporting the particular brand of capitalism on offer. The current use of the 'formal - informal' sector terminology sees only capitalist growth leading to economic and social development, but in the Third World there is a process of concealed proletarianism, since petty producers of the type of service selling alcohol in a *shebeen* require inputs purchased in the capitalist market (Gerry & Birkbeck, 1981:135).

Representation and identity

When Ike reverts to his proletarian roots, it emphasises the concept of identity and the tension between "roots and routes" - where he came from and where he wants to go, since the struggle between cultural identity and cultural diversity is ongoing (Hall, 1997b). The notion of cultural identity as something that is settled, placed and "where things have always been" (Hall, 1997b) is questioned in the representation of Ike's character, which addresses both black and white viewers. Ike's financial success and his wife's consumerism are portrayed as positive goals for black viewers to provoke an ideological identification. At the same time Ike's reversal from capitalism's goal reminds the black viewer of another image, where flirting with capitalism through regulation of the economy is viewed with suspicion and resentment (Adam & Moodley, 1993:181). With the representation of Ike, the white viewer is alerted to the changed status of the black middle class although the function of the character appears full of contradictions - a successful businessman, a reluctant nominee for public office, a domineering husband. Identity never has only one dimension because there are different ways in which people are addressed at different times. This is an act of identification "an 'after-the-event-recognition' ... that moment when identity surfaces and identification is made" (Hall, 1997b). However, in the identification with characters "the identification of the audience with the performer was a reading relation of capitalism" (citing

Brecht, Fiske, 1987:169). This identification as the relationship of audience to performance concealed construction of the performance, and encouraged the audience to experience the representation as if real. In this way much of the pleasure for the viewer comes from being implicated but still distanced (Fiske, 1987:175).

When discussing the development of Ike's character, Hofmeyr explained how the production team arrived at the creation of all the characters:

Hofmeyr: Let me tell you, the only parameters that I had when creating these characters, was to create a spread of types of characters. And, you know, you look at your six leading characters. Ok, Ma Moloi and Hempies, they are fairly simple people. They're easy to read. Within the other four, one's got to try to create as much difference as one possibly can between those characters. So, the creation of those characters came from a dramatic point of view as opposed to any kind of a sociological point of view. You know, you've got to have a straight guy. And rather than make the white be the straight guy, we thought let's make Ike the straight, you know. Let's get away from the stereotype that we've got that the black guy always is conniving. Let's make him straight and honest as the day is long. Ja, all that stuff. So, he's that guy. You've got to have that guy as one of the four.

Researcher: It's the old morality thing, the evil and the good?

Hofmeyr: Ja, you know within comedy, the same as drama, you try to create differences in things and differences in character which creates conflict which creates comedy. So, we settled on Ike as the straight, then. And the actor maximizes his material enormously. Ja. It's, in fact, one of the more difficult roles to play in a comedy because he's the straight. Alright, then you look at, ok, what kind of wife are you going to give this guy. And again it was an obvious dramatic device to make his wife the pushy one, that is she's the one who wants to move into the suburbs. He's happy in Soweto. And she's driven by this success and avarice and that kind of thing. So it was a dramatic decision, not a sociological or gender decision. (Interview Hofmeyr, March 1996, Appendix A)

This excerpt also illustrates the encoding process in creating the series and how Hofmeyr and his co-writer Craig Gardiner approached the development of the series. However, Dube had pointed out that all the furniture in the house was stolen "because Ike had better things to do with his money" (interview, Dube March 1996, Appendix B).

The episode continues at the Handmade Furniture office where Ike announces he is to stand for the presidency as a duty to the community. Billy rudely tells Ike he is lying and doing it for the

glory, downgrading Ike's platform of 'racial harmony' as unoriginal. Here Billy is signifying many whites' antipathy to 'racial harmony' or integration of any kind. In the next scene at the Dwyer household, the discussion of Ike's standing brings forth a sharp response:

Hempies: There's no way I'm voting for a black president.

Frankie: The country's already got one.

Hempies: And look how it's going down the drain.

In the ensuing discussion Billy decides he will also stand and Hempies suggests a platform of 'whites only' in the neighbourhood. To which Frankie replies that this is illegal. At that moment Billy's fishing partner arrives, announcing that Thando is canvassing for Ike at his house, and his wife is so intrigued with her she has served tea in a cup, not an enamel mug - signifying equality between black and white, as the enamel mug was always given to blacks, who were never allowed to drink from the china used by whites. On the strength of this news, a strategy for winning is deployed. In Hempies' words "Winning isn't about campaigning - it's about sabotage" so the decision is made to discredit Ike through busting his mother's *shebeen*. The Dwyer household will host a casino - which is illegal - and, having engaged the police's attention, Ma Moloi's *shebeen* will be 'discovered' as an illegal operation. When Kobie protests these hard arm tactics, Hempies proudly declaims "all politicians lie and cheat to get elected - that's what used to make this country great".

In the next scene which plays in the Handmade Furniture office, Billy lampoons Ike's ambition by clowning around as a praise singer, calling him "*Inkosi*"¹¹ and announcing his own candidacy. An interesting power play takes place when both males exaggerate their chances of winning "I'm anticipating a major shift in popularity" says Billy. Back in the Moloi's elegant living room, when Ike receives the posters denouncing Ma Moloi's *shebeen*, he immediately decides to change his platform to support the informal sector and proceeds to celebrate his decision, by incongruously *toyi-toying*. Thando, the icon for capitalist ideology, intervenes threatening not to support his candidacy.

¹¹ *Inkosi* literally means "my lord" and Billy is satirising the praise singer who in African oral tradition had the task of building the power of the lord with words since in an oral culture names give human beings power over things spoken hence power-driven (Ong, 1982:33).

The final scene takes place in a local hall, where Mr. Limpid's ineffectual attempts to promote his own candidature are met with boos by the audience. Ma Moloi and Hempies, each signifying traditional African and Afrikaner ideology respectively, insult one another with epithets like "you old *vetkoek*" and Ma Moloi's reply "you racist baboon" practically sends Hempies into an apoplectic fit that a black woman should dare to speak to him in this way. When Billy's fishing partner's wife suggests Thando should address the meeting, Frankie, signifying the young white South Africa, encourages her to speak. Neither Billy nor Ike are able to control their wives at the meeting, a sharp comment on the changes in a traditional sexist society. Thando accepts the nomination despite Ike forbidding her, and here, the rejection of the traditional female role to obey their spouses, jeopardises the bedrock of patriarchal ideology. Kobie seconds the nomination, despite Billy's reprimand on procedure: she can't second anyone as she has already seconded Ike. Kobie's "I've changed my mind" signifies the commonsensical view of women who constantly change their minds. Finally, after Thando is overwhelmingly elected, Mr. Limpid, representing that critical group of white voters who believe blacks never adequately perform the duties of elected office, proceeds to articulate to Ma Moloi and Ike all the duties involved in the presidency. Ma Moloi takes up the cudgels, and grasping each by the hand (Ike and Mr Limpid) prepares to devastate Thando with the bad news of "hard work" required in her new position. In this final frame, Ma Moloi, as the icon of African tradition, together with black and white male representatives of the patriarchy, expectantly await a poor political performance from Thando.

Identity and the parodying of icons - "Comic Relief" (episode 35)

In this episode Frankie enters a school newspaper competition to draw cartoons with a substantial prize of a Jeep being offered. Andrew supplies the ideas and Frankie illustrates the foibles of both families in cartoons. The families become distraught by the lampooning and when the local newspaper decides to run these cartoons as a regular feature, the families pretend to change their behaviour to eradicate the material on which the cartoons are based. They decide to become 'perfect' but when this ploy fails the families sue both Frankie and Andrew for libel. When a local television station discovers this, the station provides the best free legal counsel to defend them. In the final scene, despite their excellent chances of winning the case, Frankie recants and

promises to cease and desist from drawing further cartoons. No harm was ever intended as the cartoons were meant as a prank.

The episode opens with Frankie and Andrew sitting on the sofa of the Dwyer living room. Frankie is dressed in the garb of an art student, wearing a scarf around her head. Andrew wears the embroidered waistcoat and short bead necklace, favoured by arty young men, black or white. When Andrew asks her whether she plans to attend the forthcoming big concert, Frankie explains she is broke and cannot afford to attend as she is saving money to buy art materials for the cartoon competition being run by the school. The scene with its friendly intimacy between the black boy, Andrew and white girl, Frankie, eating popcorn, sets the theme of integration between white girl and black boy in South Africa - attending a concert together was unthinkable ten years' ago. They make a deal whereby Andrew will provide the ideas and Frankie will draw the cartoons and they agree to split the winnings from the competition on a 50% basis. At this moment, Billy, the obsessive cleaner, enters and harangues them both for messing up the living room with popcorn. As Billy leaves the room they recognise his obsessive behaviour is the perfect target for a cartoon.

The following scenes illustrate the results of their connivance. Initially Hempies and Kobie find it very funny to see Billy's overwhelming preoccupation with cleanliness as the butt of their humour, but, when each family member's idiosyncratic behaviour is used in turn for a cartoon, resentment starts to build. An alternate identity is then created for each of the characters by the creators of the cartoon. Kobie is depicted as a poor role model of a mother, smoking incessantly and gambling in the extreme. Her reaction to the cartoon satirises motherhood when she castigates Frankie for "the eighteen hours I spent in labour and the stretch marks"; yet now she has to be subjected to this ungrateful display by Frankie's irreverent cartoons. The rest of the characters also enjoy Kobie's discomfit. Illustrating her antagonistic feelings for Thando, Kobie offers to pay Frankie to draw a really disagreeable cartoon portraying Thando. Instead, Frankie's next cartoon parodies a marriage between Hempies and Ma Moloi, with a subtitle "The New South Africa". There is a violent reaction in both households at this breaking of the taboo of miscegenation. Ma Moloi is so angry, she breaks into Zulu and beats Andrew around his head with a rolled newspaper. Her abuse in Zulu recuperates her back to the familiar and traditional,

by evoking a Zulu identity. In similar vein Hempies says “it’s not a joke to me”. When Kobie says “it’s just a joke” he calls his granddaughter a “traitor” connoting the Afrikaner myth of the sell-out to the *uitlanders*.

The cultural identities of both Hempies and Kobie are forefronted in this exchange. Identity signifies the extent of one’s presence in the world, which is a particularly sensitive area since the Afrikaners’ changed circumstances of power. Even the language has been restricted in terms of media exposure as previously Afrikaans had been an official language of power, together with English, now it is much less frequently heard on public service television or radio. The humour in the cartoon representations arise from the sense of incredulity that a sexual relationship could exist between Hempies, a traditional white Afrikaner and Ma Moloi, a black woman. The caption ‘New South Africa’ ostensibly ignores the ‘separate’ racial issue but rather introduces a ‘national identity’ of mixed race.

The first cartoon created by Frankie and Andrew satirises Billy’s compulsive obsessive cleanliness and order, including alphabetising spice bottles. A personality which obsesses with the concept of order, crosses gender and ethnic boundaries. This example stimulates individual viewers to engage with this identity regardless of what race is depicted (Gilroy, 1996:45). Also an examination of a class-based cultural identity and its operation in the social world of ‘them’ and ‘us’ illustrates how regardless of race, the collective identity of women leads to the question of solidarity, and the connectedness or difference from which social action is produced. Kobie’s plaintive wail “eighteen hours of labour and stretch marks” is the maternal blackmail reminiscent of ‘domestic fascism’ (citing Mosley, Gilroy, 1996:45) frequently apparent in mother/daughter relationships and it touched a chord for the focus groups (Chapter Five). Identity is mediated by historical and economic structures, which become apparent in the signifying practices through which historical and economic structures operate, when concepts of representation and identification depict the figure of the Good/Bad mother. The traditional maternal role in a patriarchal system is satirised in Kobie’s wail, but later Kobie defends herself from further attack when she assumes the role of a traditional ‘simpering mom’. Satirisation of ‘motherhood’ as an identity of female sacrifice and devotion had an overwhelming response from the focus group

women, as women's experiences of motherhood are factors in their position as spectators (Geraghty, 1996b:309).

The representation of Thando's sexual identity in this episode is a multifaceted one. The first cartoon, indicates her swamped by shoes, since she is depicted as an unbridled spendthrift: a stereotype of women as being only interested in shopping and clothes. When the families decide to counter Frankie's cartoons, Kobie becomes the perfect mom and Thando the slave-like sex kitten (to Ike: "You are the boss - I just want to be your slave"). Thando's behaviour is intended to deny Frankie material on which to base her cartoons and oblige her to cease drawing. The successful cooperation between Frankie and Andrew is a representation of youth and race, indicating how black Andrew and white Frankie, signify racial reconciliation in a multicultural South Africa.

According to Paul Gilroy (1996:47) the "volatile concept of identity" is part of the debate on multiculturalism, which is being redefined so that identity is not an absolute but in its formation it is an ongoing chaotic process. In contrast to this notion of fluidity, identity has been understood as a 'nationality'; so 'national identity' resides where meanings and values are experienced in a world without any talk of 'structures of feeling' or those 'forms of consciousness' which separate the social from the personal (Williams, 1977:128). Identity is a state of becoming, not an absolute identity formation (Gilroy, 1996:48). The deconstruction of identity in various disciplines has been critical of the notion of an "integral, originary and unified identity" (Hall, 1996a: 1). Hall (1996a:4) also argues that identities are about using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of "becoming rather than being" so that 'identity' is the meeting point between the discourses, practices and the processes which produce the subjectivities constructing the subjects. In the "**Comic Relief**" episode the characters 'become' positive stereotypes to avoid the discomfit of being lampooned in a cartoon. Although the process of changing their personalities/identities is said to be uncomfortable and painful, they effectively do so, providing the moral of the narrative, by indicating that people can change their attitudes and identities in the 'new' South Africa.

By satirising the norms of the 'perfect housewife' there is a double consciousness of the political implications in the subjugation of women in the patriarchy. The vapid vacuousness depicted in Kobie's portrayal is not an endearing sign of femininity. Initially Frankie is mystified by her parents' behaviour and then horrified, when she enters the backyard to find those hated rivals, Ma Moloi and Hempies, sharing a drink in apparent perfect harmony. This cameo is an interesting aside demonstrating how perceptions about ethnicity and race can be accommodated when the common good of the micro-society is at stake. Andrew is equally horrified when he sees Thando waiting on Ma Moloi with offers of tea, while a eulogy issues from Ma Moloi on the merits of her daughter-in-law, Thando. In the tradition of African society, Thando was fulfilling her role in accordance with the norms of African society where the *makoti* or daughter-in-law was expected to be a slave virtually, for the pleasure of the mother-in-law (Elizabeth's group discussion, Chapter Five and Appendix D).

However, the sly pair of cartoonists understand the strategy of their elders' devious behaviour. The next edition sees these 'perfect family members' once again lampooned. In desperation the families decide to sue their children each for a half a million rand. The male lawyer, representing the Moloi's and the Dwyers, profoundly confident in his pompous old-style South African manner, guarantees the Moloi's and the Dwyers will win the case on the basis of libel. During their discussions with the lawyer, Ma Moloi and Hempies confess they cannot keep up the pretence of harmony any longer and begin castigating each other. As Ma Moloi gleefully explains "This is the new South Africa and now we can legally hate each other!" However, in a perfect take on American-style media, the local television station announces support to pay for full legal representation for the young pair, who are being sued by their parents. The parents' act is interpreted as an abrogation of their rights to freedom of expression. The introduction of a "Bliss Hotline" for phone-in completes the satire on "freedom of expression". The final scene displays the full gamut of the South African legal system, when the plaintiff's lawyer arrogantly begins interrogating Frankie when she arrives. He promptly changes his attitude as the room fills, first with the arrival of the commanding female attorney, and then with the entry of seven additional attorneys representing all races. When Kobie realises the strength of the opposition she withdraws the charges, brusquely telling their attorney to shut up when he tries to interrupt.

The aspects of the final scene make a charade of the legal system in South Africa during apartheid, when freedom of speech was practically unknown, representation by lawyers of colour was very limited and the authority of parents or the state was never questioned. Thus by satirising the media's involvement there is a narrative reflexivity in the programme, as Frankie's cartoon strip was actually called "Suburban Bliss" and the hotline to the television station was called "Bliss Line". The announcer for the 'news item' is a regular news announcer on SABC, so by introducing this intertextuality the production team emphasises television's 'bardic function' as television conveys the culture's dominant values and self-image sharing its view of itself with the audience. An audience can be helped to avoid misinterpretations of how a reality is produced if they are made aware of how it is created in a television programme (Fiske & Hartley, 1978:194).

The humour that arises from this last scene in "**Comic Relief**" depends more on the situation than the dialogue. The structural aspects of the new constitution are displayed with a 'real life scenario' of all South Africans' right to freedom of expression. Fiske and Hartley (1978:112) argue that television's meanings are arrived at through what takes place in the dialogue together with visual images, not formal logic. Inconsistencies in the scene therefore are aspects of a process to create satisfactory meaning, so myths already familiar to the viewers are used to exemplify the process. Having a total of eight attorneys represent the accused exemplifies the fact that today there are attorneys of different ethnicities and race representing the accused in the courts. The myth of the sanctity and authority of the previous South African law is destabilised by the way the parents appoint an attorney to sue their children who, in disregarding their parents authority, are being disrespectful. Their attorney's nonchalance in assuming he will win the case is the indexical sign for previous South African legal procedures, which unconditionally supported the State (father/mother) against the individual (children) when he declares "It's a cut and dried case". This scene interpellates black subjectivity, as during apartheid, the community always had taken precedence over the individual and obedience to authority discourages individuality. With the ratification of the constitution, blind obedience to authority is no longer an automatic action by citizens as their rights are guaranteed in the Bill of Rights, which "enshrines the rights of all people ... and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom" (Bill of Rights, 1996:6).

Codes that give meaning to the narrative

Certain codes in television production are a part of production of a meaning as the codes dictate how images are produced and what is produced. In the creation of *SB*, writer, Gray Hofmeyr, and producer, Carl Fischer, said they attempted to present situations and representations of people coping with the changes in South Africa through humour (personal interviews, March 1996. Appendix A). Thus in an emergent new South Africa, the dominant group would present its interests as the common interest of all members and then would universalise the concept as the only valid and rational message. In *SB* the capitalist ideology of owning a home or one's own business is also depicted as the aspiration of a black family so black viewers are included. The message of the programme is not a window on the South African world, but a construction which uses signifying mechanisms to endorse the privileged meaning of the producers. The set and costumes are part of these signifying mechanisms to indicate the black family's upwardly mobile direction and to provide "images and voices of people who have not in the past been seen or heard on South African television" (Carl Fischer, producer *SB*, personal interview, March 1996. Appendix A). This is intended to encourage a dream of upward mobility among black viewers.

The *SB* series propagates a goal of consumerism for black viewers by depicting a black couple with expensive clothing, leather living room furniture and modern kitchen as proof of their newly acquired status by western cultural standards. In her review essay on David Harvey's *The Condition of Modernity* and Frederic Jameson's *Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Eve Bertelsen (1996:89) suggests "in the construction of post-modern identity, tight stratifications of occupation and class have been eroded, with social distinction now broadly conferred by possessions and appearances". Bertelsen questions whether these pressures of consumerism are being manifested in the new dispensation in South Africa through a changing discourse of liberal capitalism and a new pluralism. This is accompanied in the media by a mania for mergers which downgrade the idea of the public service broadcasting's key value as a 'common' or 'public good' (Bertelsen, 1996:103). The significance of the 'common good' justifies the *SB* series depicting both black and white middle class families enjoying the fruits of capitalism where the black family owns 'better furniture', the lady of the house, Thando has 'better' clothes and Ike has more business sense and wears 'better' clothes than Billy the white

counterpart. Sut Jhally & Justin Lewis (1992:119), in discussing black perceptions of images on television in the United States, state:

Behind the preference for the Cosby Show lies a subtle interaction between race and class in the context of American culture - displayed on television and elsewhere - in which, to be working class, is a sign of failing in the meritocracy. In the upwardly mobile world of popular television, it is only when black people are presented as middle class that they become normal and are assimilated into the succession of images of social success.

Jhally and Lewis theorise that behind a successful sitcom targeted at a black audience there is a subtle interaction between race and class in which to be working class on television is negative (Jhally & Lewis, 1992: 120). Applying this theory to the black focus groups for *SB* demonstrates the way they would like to see themselves - a strong middle class, intelligent, successful (Appendix D). There are no poor black people in *SB*. *SB* makes the white audience uncomfortable as the black characters are better dressed and the homes are better furnished (Chapter Five and Appendix D for Afrikaans group's reaction to this). *SB* endorses a middle class lifestyle without a confrontation of class realities. The reference to Thando's phrase 'low class' only means the series must convince the black population that all is well. The producers' ideology attempts to bolster consent for a market economy constructed on enormous disparities of wealth and to continue to convince people to work harder in order to consume more. The population must believe that the system of unfettered market capitalism is fair.

As South Africa moved from formal apartheid to multi-party elections, little agreement existed on what constituted democracy and whether a ... "single nation could be forged out of linguistic, cultural, ethnic, racial, class and geographical patchwork" (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1994:44). There have been popular radical demands for total control of broadcasting in the interests of the emergent black dominated hegemony (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1994:47). Carl Fischer, when asked about the main message of the series, replied that messages were for postcards but his job was to entertain. He felt that during the years of apartheid the audience had seen only images which instilled in them artificial racial prejudices anchored in apartheid ideology, and these prejudices would take decades to undo:

Researcher: Can you define the 'message' then that's in [this TV program]? Every program has like an ideology built into it. What do you think is your ideology?

Fischer: Well, let me give you two answers. One is, as a producer, I tend to believe in the old adage, that if you want to send the message, use the post office. And if you want to entertain, then use television. That's not to say that you can't produce programming that provides entertainment and is challenging that might contain a message. But the point of departure must be entertaining and watchability. Because very often the failure of what could potentially be good television for programming is that the creators behind it were driven by some kind of ideological message. Television services [in South Africa] have been littered by twenty years of ideology. I think there's a danger that there are certain individuals who have a kind of ideological persuasion and have used television to send a 'message' to people (interview September 1995).

Fischer believes himself to be without an ideological message, indicating he is so completely submerged in his own ideology to the point that it is 'commonsensical' and he is unaware of it. Although Fischer maintains his job is to entertain not deliver a 'message', the fact is his mandate from the SABC had been to produce a drama which would depict the new realities operating in South Africa.

Situation comedy: Television's resource

The Dapple Production company presents, through the sitcom genre, a representation of both the banal and the intimate, by commenting on the effects of culture based on the opinions and styles of the various demographic groups as the sexes, the generations, the races, and classes confront each other (Marc.1984). Comedy's subversive style relies on the surprising and the improper as deviations from the socio-cultural norms expected in that society. Consequently the presentation of the stereotypical character is ambiguous, depending on whether it is a norm to be broken, or the enaction of the deviant or eccentric for that character (Neil & Krutnik, 1990:4).

As Hofmeyr had earlier admitted that he and co-writer Gardner had borrowed extensively from the format of *All in the Family* it is a moot point which came first, his absorption with the 'lower classes' as a theme, or the influence of the American sitcom. The choice of characters is part of the encoding process to signify an ideological position. The original connotation for 'working class' had a sense of 'useful' or 'productive' labour but later this came to denote 'manual labour'.

Eventually in England **class** became equivalent to rank and was used in describing the **middle class** as a perception of an active economic system (Williams, 1976:66). Thus the differentiation of 'low class' made by Thando emphasises her attempts to cloister herself from the proletariat in the way the new black elite "*amatop socialites*" have been attempting to do in South Africa since 1994. The actors in *SB* all connote a class position and their sparrings in the narrative development symbolise this.

Today, although there is a democratically elected black majority government, many of the economically privileged white minority have not yet come to terms with the dominant black majority government (Adam, 1995, July). Now humour is the nervous relief of a hissing pressure valve as the horrendous images of apartheid can be laughed at because the nightmare is over. The humour derived from *SB* depends on a "dislocation between an ideological and structural convention" (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:7). These conventions include a dependence on repetition and an avoidance of narrative closure since in the sitcom episode there is a confrontation between a stable 'inside' - consisting of the regular characters - and the intrusive 'outside' - threatening to the stability of the inside. The 'inside' to which the narrative returns is the opposite of respectable normality, which lies on the outside, remaining an unattainable impossibility. In *SB* these conventions are continuously accomplished through the interaction of the two families, the Molois and the Dwyers. Thus the situation comedy format suits television, a medium for home-based entertainment, since every week the same characters in the same setting rotate a recurring situation, refining it in the face of disruptions and transgressions (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:233). The form of the sitcom necessitates moving towards the reassertion of stability so the end of each episode returns to the initial situation, which does not change but has circularity. Neale and Krutnik (1990: 235) refer to "synchronizing motifs" or "regularly occurring bits of business" which in *SB*, take the form of abuse when Hempties constantly refers to Ma Molois as "you old vetkoek" and she calls him a 'baboon'.

Comedy is the most realistic of all dramatic forms since it is full of the minutiae of daily existence, food, clothes, money where the humour comes from events that concern everybody (Grote, 1983:49). According to David Grote (1983: 50) implicit in the statements of the sitcom is a dedication to the expression of social change and progress in people and society. Each

episode is a repetition of the “promise of change implicit in all human sexuality” (Grote, 1983: 49) and most of the humour occurs in jokes about events that are common for all the audience. However the comic ending is the least realistic, so few changes occur other than merely adjusting relationships between individuals. The sitcom in its basic plot demonstrates the urge for change in an acceptable way. Implicit in traditional Western comedy is a dedication to change especially towards a better society for the future but in those interests, cherished persons or institutions may be attacked or ridiculed, or even physically destroyed. Institutions centred around property or bourgeois respectability must be altered to be readmitted into a better society. In the final scene of the episode **“Comic Relief”**, Frankie decides to discontinue drawing caricatures of the family members and is reunited with her family, although the sitcom has made fun of authority figures like parents. The most important point of the sitcom is what does **not** happen - Frankie is not permanently separated from her family (Grote, 1983: 56) and no one in a half-hour could expect to see extensive change so in the process sitcom resists all change (Grote, 1983: 59).

The ‘sitcom’ earns its name because individual episodes are built around situations rather than plots. The characters are thrust into circumstances with humorous results, where humour comes from the actual situation and the subsequent conflict between the characters’ personalities with this situation. In the **“Maid from Hell”**, the ongoing competition between Thando and Kobie is demonstrated in the hiring of a maid with subsequent ridiculous results. *SB* opens up new territory by introducing the ‘normal’ situation of a middle class black and a white family living next door to each other and being in business together. The characters are placed in this situation, when every week the consequences of that week’s narrative lead to a different ‘problem’ but result in a solution at the end of the episode. The whole series is built around this situational format which means the economic success of the series (based on the ratings) revolves around this fact. The series allows for characters to come and go, so details of exactly who the characters are become ambiguous. The length of each episode is about twenty three minutes, without advertisements, but the actual series consists of 104 episodes running for a couple of years. In addition outside its evening slot on a Monday at 8pm on SABC 2, there have been daily reruns at 12 noon. Each episode is usually complete in itself, yet can be understood out of sequence.

There is no weekly exposition to orient the audience, only an exposition to present the week’s situation. *SB* characters seldom go anywhere, so when Richard Benyon banished the Molois by

making them immigrate to New Zealand, he had to bring them back to continue the series (Appendix C). Despite disequilibrium, nothing changes and by the end of the episode, equilibrium is restored. The *SB* series differs from the usual formula for sitcoms in that in the latest episodes of the series a *rapprochement* between Hempies and Andrew occurs after Frankie moves in to share an apartment with Andrew. White radical Hempies warns Andrew not to harm his granddaughter and then shakes Andrew's hand. This reconciliation is two-tiered, since if Hempies is not reconciled he will lose his granddaughter forever to Andrew. In addition in the spirit of transformation and reconciliation aimed at on the programme, the belligerence towards black South Africans, expressed by Hempies earlier in the series, has become muted.

Construction of characters and the actor as 'sign'

The actor as the 'sign' is part of the signifying system of the conventions of television technique and technology, so performance has a relationship to the different signs in the culture at large (King, 1991: 137). The west, particularly since the last century, has been dominated by naturalism or the kind of theatrical representation where the external portrayal is depicted through the utterances, behaviour and appearance in everyday settings making the character accessible to the audience's personal reality (King, 1991: 126). In terms of 'naturalism' acting, iconic or indexical signs predominate rather than the symbolic signs found in formalistic regimes like classical Chinese acting or Japanese Noh theatre when a symbol signifies by convention, an icon by resemblance and an index by physical connection. Naturalism acting is very popular particularly in American theatre, where the actor re-presents signs via impersonation of the general culture to which she/he bears a resemblance in the character. Thus if the actor is a member of the host culture with a given hair colour, body shape, speech accent and dialect, then that actor will pre-signify a particular meaning. The predominance of naturalism acting in much American situation comedy could account for the rejection by certain reviewers of *SB* who felt the standard of acting was very poor, despite the deliberate intention being to exaggerate the acting style.

The Brechtian style of acting undertaken in *SB* reflects Brecht's words "a technique of acting ...with a view to taking the incidents portrayed and alienating them from the spectator" (Brecht, 1964: 68). In later writings, according to Higson (1991: 164) Brecht stressed the need "to create

a tension between pleasure and instruction, between empathy and critical distance, between the strangely revealing and the natural". However in acting for television the problem is to be able to articulate the performance in relation to the camera or the camera's field of vision (Higson, 1991: 166). Brecht's strategy of distanciation attempted to establish a critical distance between the performance of the action and the viewer's **understanding** of that action, so that ideological processes at stake in the action could be emphasised. Some of the acting in *SB* verges on parody which:

has an emancipatory effect. It is always double coded. It is read alongside, through and apart from its 'target'. It depends on a complicated interplay of identity and difference, accepting the 'target' text, converging with it, yet at the same time, separating itself from it, diverting, detracting, rebelling and subverting (Higson 1991: 173, citing Wollen).

In the "**Comic Relief**" episode, the parents attempt to change their personalities which fulfils the model of parody, through their incongruous efforts at changing their behaviour by subverting the norms with a double consciousness. People are said to exhibit 'double consciousness' when two apparently inconsistent sets of beliefs are depicted at the same time - a set of beliefs formed by the dominant culture as well as one formed by life experience (Abercrombie *et al.* 1984: 127). In the process of attempting to change their personalities, the parents gave evidence that they understood how they should behave to conform to the dominant culture but after their ploy to change was discovered by Frankie and Andrew, they reverted to their previous behaviour. Billy became obsessive about cleanliness (Billy); Kobie reverted to smoking and gambling - unlike the ideal mother; Thando ceased being a respectful caring daughter-in-law; Hempies and Ma Moloi again hurled racial insults at each other. This episode stresses the ideological implications of change and then subverts the return to the normative in Frankie's apology. The apology in turn recuperates the concept of children's respect for parents but leaves open, the right to dissent with authority.

Because of the complexity of the television medium and modern industrial organisation, it would be rare that one author or writer of a programme is responsible for a unifying vision behind the programme (Allen, 1987: 9). When Richard Benyon, as chief writer of *Going Up III (GU III)* was interviewed, he acknowledged that he too had written episodes for *SB*:

*I found that the **Suburban Bliss** characters were kind of unmotivated in their mutual distrust and apparent hatred. I mean I know that underneath, everything is supposed to be fine and dandy. I couldn't really believe them as characters pretty much. They were conforming to a standard of political correctness that I felt uncomfortable with because every venture outside the boundaries of the safe was almost an endorsement of what **was safe** and what **was expected**. Three of [my episodes] are in a string and it concerns the Molois emigrating to New Zealand. I send them off. They get so fed-up with the crime situation that they eventually emigrate. The other one is Hempies and Ma Maloi remembering their old loves, remembering the old romantics. It's quite a tender episode and it was the first one that I wrote and I can see now that I was reacting against what I saw as being the pattern of Suburban Bliss. But in real life there has to be consequences for the sorts of things that people say to each other but they're not there at all, which is why I find a lack of motivation from time to time (interview, 1996 October, Appendix C).*

In the context of Richard Benyon's remarks about *SB*'s characters, Hofmeyr and Fischer's comments about the characters are illuminating. In response to the criticism of *SB* being too 'broad' in its acting, (a criticism levelled at it from many quarters including the press), Fischer's response was:

South African audiences have been fed a diet of American sitcom and have come to some kind of expectation for that genre of production. That if you want to be funny, you've got to exaggerate. It's got to be broad, very broad. The characters have been larger than life. And the most important, the characters have got to be broad. The performances have got to be pitched very, what we call 'over-the-top', larger than life, and the situations themselves are filled with coincidences and misunderstandings and all the larger-than-life situations. And that's where we pitched it, rightly or wrongly. If you look at the course that makes the interplay, they [characters] are very good, in fact, most of them very defined characters and performances pitched quite high. As I've said, normal South Africa doesn't like it. They see it as intellectual. They see the white characters as completely unrepresentative of them. They don't know anybody like that (interview September 1995, Appendix A).

The style of 'over-the-top' acting recalls the work of Bertolt Brecht's formulation of the A-effect (alienation). Brecht's approach was synonymous with a radical approach to acting. He demanded that the spectator be **alienated** from the performance, in order to recognize the work behind the illusion of reality, and to keep distant from the characters so as to be able to critique the characters' positions in society and history (Brecht, 1964:68). The alienation effect made the spectator adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism in the approach to the incident. In conventional acting, the contact between the actor and the audience is based on empathy, where

the actor devotes his/her acting to engendering this empathy but the A-effect (alienation) is the opposite because the actor does not aim to empathise with the audience.

There is a political twist to the complaint about the quality of acting in *SB* which has been directed particularly at Kobie, whose character's role signifies a break with traditional patriarchal norms. In her interview Kobie maintained she does not allow herself to become completely transformed into the character she is portraying, so the attitude is a socially critical one (Appendix B). In the characterisation, the actor brings out those elements that could be controversial in society and introduces a type of discussion with the audience. This is especially apparent when Hempies or Billy are making racist remarks or when Kobie deflates Billy's racism when he wants to stand for president. Kobie says, sarcastically:

"Okay Mister President. What do you stand for?"

Thando also has been criticised for her over-acting. An example of the A-effect takes place when, in response to her low opinion about canvassing for votes being "low class" - her classic remark for anything she does not like - Ike suggests canvassing votes would make her a prospective Hilary Clinton. Her exaggerated enthusiasm shows she is acting and alienates the 'social gest' underneath the incident or the coherence of the character, which serves to mobilise a response from the audience.

In addressing the construction of Kobie's character in response to the negativity associated with her 'commonness' by smoking and gambling Hofmeyr contended:

that the characters were created to be interesting characters and funny characters more than any kind of role model. I think your point is valid. Perhaps I should have taken it more into account. The problem is that your more role model characters are quite often not as interesting as flawed people. As far as Kobie is concerned, I think she - more than any one else in the series, people have very strong opinions about her. They either absolutely hate her or they like her very much. The people who don't like her, hate her for the reasons that this woman has given. One might find, although I don't know it, that the people who hate her are perhaps generally upper-crust. I don't know whether that's the case or not. Kobie is very, very true to herself at all times. She's very consistent. She's not a hypocrite in any way. She may lie occasionally about whether she's bet on a horse, but she's true to herself and her own perception of herself. And I think that's what makes her strong. And I think in

a way that's a better moral characteristic than to not smoke, which is, everybody knows smoking is bad. We don't advocate her smoking, she's the only character in the series who does. But she's, you know, she says, bugger you, so I smoke and I like my gin, you know, and I'm a slob. What's wrong with that?

Kobie signifies the free-spirited modern woman who refuses to be held back by the norms and mores of the patriarchy. She lacks 'class' according to Thando who condemns everything that does not have an expensive stamp as 'low class'. This is a reversal of roles in terms of race where the black woman is class conscious, which is atypical of the egalitarian African society, where all members of the community are considered equal and individualism is frowned upon. Hofmeyr maintained

Billy got Standard 8 (Grade 10). He went to trade school and he became a cabinet maker. That's where he comes from. And I have always found, personally, the working people more interesting subject matter than the intelligentsia, the more upper-class people. I've never made a program, I've never done a Dallas and those kind of things. Those people don't interest me as much as working people interest me. I can't tell you why that is, but it simply has always been so. I mean, I was raised apropos if you like. And I've consistently all my life gone out of my way to experience the other side, so it's simply a personal [quirk], it's simply what interests me. This whole series is not geared to the upper class. It's not made for them. It's made for the ordinary man. It's made about the ordinary man. It's made about the ordinary man (Appendix A).

This notion of creating cultural productions for the social imagination of 'ordinary' people can be extended and prepared in concrete terms for the future "by extending the range of personal and social experience as far as possible in order to contribute to bringing about a highly conscious, sensitive new person in a new society" (Ndebele, 1991:72). Ndebele recommends that art should contribute to the ongoing revolution in South Africa by extending the social imagination of the oppressed, revealing new worlds. Similarly broadcasting brings issues from society's public life into the private life of the viewers and discuss the private lives of viewer on television. Audiences can obtain pleasure and enjoyment as well as information and education by a variety of programming through news, documentaries, drama, sports and educational television. In South Africa, during apartheid, the range of sensitive 'boundary' topics, moral or political was taboo but now this has been extended and opened up to wide-ranging debates (Scannell, 1992:325).

Suburban Bliss and the African oral tradition

In creating a text for black viewers the African oral tradition becomes an important constituent. Walter Ong writes that the oral tradition "is close to the human life world" meaning that in the oral tradition, events are understood in terms of spiritual agents causing them. He derives his model from examination of the way oral narratives are transmitted (Ong, 1982:42). In *SB* the character of Ma Moloi is a symbol of the Mother of the Nation, keeper of traditions (interview with Professor Sienart, Head of Oral Studies, University of Natal, October 14, 1997). In her endless castigation of Thando, hers is the voice of tradition seeking a return to traditional roles for women. When Ike *toyi-toyis* with Ma Moloi, he is returning to his roots and his actions would ideologically please those viewers who are overwhelmed by the discourse of capitalism and job reductions to reduce overheads.

Social values in African systems of social organisations still stress group orientation, continuity, harmony and balance so for social harmony it becomes necessary to negotiate one's personal needs within the framework of the group. A lack of harmonising within a group is rejected in traditional African society since the strength of the community relies on group participation (Bourgault, 1996b). This inability to conform in a group is Thando's character worst flaw in that she is only interested in her own goals. However, the strong group orientation in African society looks for appeasement and placation of oppositional forces among the dead and the living to retain smooth group relations (Bourgault, 1996b). As Gray Hofmeyr explained Ma Moloi exhibits the ability to be a woman of the present as well as the past:

Ma Maloi is quite an interesting character because, I mean, she does come from that background. You know, she has clearly established that she used to do laundry for white families. At the same time she is very, very sophisticated. And she has some of the most sophisticated comedy lines in the thing. And how we motivated that is, you know, it's mentioned occasionally, is that she worked for many years for an American correspondent out here, that he appears in an episode, which is where she picked up a lot of her kind of worldly wisdom, if you like. You know when you read the sort of biography thing, what we set out to do with Ma Maloi and Hempies, you know, she's out of her environment. She grew up in a township. She started off as a domestic worker and now she's out of her environment in the white suburbs. Hempies is a farmer and he's out of his environment in the city. In a strange way, Ma Maloi and Hempies provide each other with something to do, with a purpose in life, which is to fight one another, and to take points off one another. And it's a bit like kind of being inverted soul mates, you know. If the opposite member were taken away, their life

would become dreadfully, dreadfully boring. So, in a way, they kind of provide each other with a purpose, you know (Appendix A)

Bards and story tellers and village historians used stories to explain histories and struggles and moral lessons about the gods (Bourgault, 1996b:6). African viewers really listen to the way the narrative is constructed and presented in the oral narrative, experiencing the events and persons in the stories (Bourgault, 1996b: 9). In a similar manner the altercations between Hempies as a symbol of Afrikaner culture and racism, and Ma Moloi as the Mother of the Nation are part of an old tradition of struggle, between the Afrikaner and the African in South Africa. The Western concept of individuality has always been foreign to Africans but the concept of individuality versus the needs of the group/community is changing. The symbols are taken to be as powerful as their discursive referents and since combat is always in the realm of possibility, Ma Moloi beats Andrew with the rolled newspaper for being both a traitor and a party to her humiliating 'marriage' to her perennial enemy, Hempies. In the African oral tradition, stories were designed to be inclusive to involve everyone and so minimal social criticism occurred, unless the weight of community values and traditions were behind the message. Displaying respect for the sensibility of others is a cultural norm (Appendix D for all black group discussions). In this manner group orientation encourages a set of values emphasising harmony and the balance of social forces.

The concept behind *SB* was for black people in South Africa to see their own kind represented on the screen. The integration of white and black families sharing the neighbourhood and working together in business is partly intended to counteract homeostasis¹². Ayittey argues colonial powers held indigenous African institutions and cultures in contempt (Ayittey, 1992:10). The elites who replaced them were the same. Since they considered Africa backward and primitive, they disregarded old cultural forms and social structures with alien systems. Andrew, with his street smarts is not an elite, but he projects an awareness of elite practices in the resilience he exhibits during his connivance with Frankie to create new ideas for the cartoons. Cultures though can persist and outlast the structures which originally gave rise to them. This is known as cultural lag. The oral tradition, the discourse style it fosters and the value systems it nurtures, remain to

¹²Homeostasis as a characteristic of African culture has two sides as it can be dysfunctional, insulating African cultures and making them resistant to new and useful cultural traditions, or slowing down rapid change, so that people can absorb at their own pace and make sense of their world (Ong, 1982).

modify African culture as African traditional forms are foremost, forms for communication. These forms of communications are suffused throughout the practices and content of mass media in Black Africa, where together with new alien systems, they affect the group consciousness in the emergent South Africa. The reasons for this effect relate to the view of “performance as a process by and through which people reflect on their current conditions, define or re-invent themselves and their social world, and either re-inforce, resist, or subvert the prevailing social order” (citing Drewal, Bourgault, 1996a: 62).

Target audiences in South Africa for *Suburban Bliss*

Although popular media are frequently commercially driven, there has been an increase in the use of television to promote social change in many parts of the world (Brown, W. J., 1992). Ien Ang (1991:110) explains how as early as 1930, a memorandum at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) discussed a need for finding out more about types and tastes of the audience among the various classes of society in the various parts of England. There had developed within the BBC the idea that the audience was “not an abstract entity ... but a fundamentally stratified category, both socially and culturally, with sectional interests and differentiated preferences and habits” (Ang, 1991: 11).

Conclusion

It has been argued that professional communicators themselves are not insulated from cultural influences (citing Hall, Fiske, 1990:82). Carl Fischer and Gray Hofmeyr, as well as Richard Beynon and a host of other players are responsible for the productions discussed but they ‘mediate’ the messages and do not originate them. They invent the topics, structures, events but the definitions of the situation comedies arise from the socio-cultural system of which the production teams are members. There is no single ‘authorial’ identity for the television communicator as in the construction of these sitcoms many influences from the society and its various members are evident because the meanings are generated and constrained by the generic and the narrative conventions of humour. Signs derive their meaning from their relations with and differences from other signs. Because the meaning cannot be finally fixed it is always possible to extend the signifying chain and as the participants read certain signs in each episode they will bring

to their readings other cultural signs specific to their reality. In this the arbitrary aspect becomes the relation of the signifier to the signified, that 'gap' where individual meaning can be inserted. V. N. Vološinov argues that the hegemonic bloc will try to pass off its dominance by implying certain signs like 'nationhood' can be taken for granted (Vološinov, 1973). Originating with the Government of National Unity through the SABC, the sign 'cultural reconciliation' with its implied consensus is rejected by many whites. 'Nation building' includes its own ideological material, offering the inclusive sign 'cultural reconciliation and nation building' signifying the repair of old enmities (Vološinov, 1973:46). In 'nationhood' the meaning evolves in relation to other terms and similarly 'cultural reconciliation' is a signifier for the signified 'harmony' or 'peace' but it also raises problems of understanding and interpretation (Thompson, 1990:274).

Social phenomena like voting for the President of the Neighbourhood Association and chanting and dancing the *toyi-toyi* are symbolic forms, understood and interpreted accordingly by those who support democracy. The term 'cultural reconciliation' has been appropriated to describe a state of accord for 'nation-building' which signifies acceptance of the new order since white privilege and apartheid have ceased to be the dominant ideology. Since some population groups may still adhere to the ideology of apartheid, it becomes necessary to take account of their interests to achieve that 'dual perspective', described by Antonio Gramsci where the 'levels of force and consent, authority and hegemony' maintain a state of tension to retain consensus (Gramsci, 1973:170). As the dislocation occurs between the ideological and structural conventions in *SB*, the intentionality of the producers is to make humour the catalyst in that gap between the signifier and the signified. Hegemony is never total or exclusive, so Hempies and Ma Moloi's vitriolic sparring can resurrect the old ghosts of apartheid when Ma Moloi says 'it's legal to hate each other' thereby creating laughter or horror in the audience. The object of the criticism of *SB* has been to expose ideological positions offered in the text to indicate what the programme supports, contradicts or questions about the ideologies of the society that produced it.

CHAPTER IV

Moment of Production: *Going Up III*

The serious 'consequences' of comedy

Introduction

A dialogue between television imagery and a new interpretation of the cultural life in South Africa began with the broadcasting of the pilot of *Going Up* in February 1991. When programmes with themes involving interaction of black and white South Africans were first broadcast, they evoked positive responses from the media, who regarded them as positive since the programmes by shed light on those issues of multiculturalism and multilingualism affecting the country during this time. South Africa has been a country in crisis for a long while with unstable black/white relationships and since the workplace was one of the few places where black and white people ever interacted, these relationships could be depicted as a repository for conflict, anxiety and fear about the "corrosive effect of social change" (Taylor, 1989:2). After the pilot was broadcast, reviews were enthusiastic, commenting on the new SABC sitcom, *Going Up* as providing a taste of multicultural television (*Going Up* - a taste of multicultural television. 1991, February 24). Some reviewers referred to the programme as 'farce' but most called the programme a 'multi-lingual sitcom'.

Through interviews with the production team it became apparent that *GU III* is a hybrid series, which includes elements of comic realism, the allegoric mode, situation comedy, folk musical and African oral tradition. These aspects were included to meet the perceived needs of the local multilingual multicultural audience. The production company, a business institution, acted as an intermediary between the cultural and historic changes that were occurring in South Africa, by attracting a larger multilingual audience. The aesthetic perspective, however, of the writers/producers was a crucial component in the successful development of *GU III* because it redefined the audience, attracting white and black viewers. With its representational narrative, visual naturalism and its attention to the quotidian detail of a law office in the Central Business

District of Johannesburg, *GU III* plays for laughs, reproducing comedy's subversive potential of creating divergent readings (Taylor, 1989:39).

Historic background to the series

Prior to the historic meeting of the drama sub-committee at the SABC to discuss a change of programming policy for drama¹, the first series of *Going Up* in 1991 had been aired and enjoyed enthusiastic reviews, when it was discussed as being set in 1991's changing society (Gordon, 1991, February 10, *Sunday Times*). However a year later, in 1992, CCV's General Manager Madala Mphahlele said how he had experienced opposition from pockets of the public for introducing a multilingual, multiracial identity for the channel. Mphahlele felt there were always people resistant to change so the opposition was due to this factor (Brown, 1992, February, 15).

The intentionality of the production team, in producing a television programme, is revealed through their specific decisions, discussions and the economic dynamics of their organisation, Penguin Films, an independent production company. The team has indicated political change in South Africa in the productions for which they have been responsible. Interviews were conducted with the production team for the *Going Up* series: Roberta Durrant, producer, Richard Beynon, writer and Joe Mafela, writer/actor and actress/singer Abigail Kubeka (Appendix B). In order to remain competitive there was the need for more innovative programming utilising the culture of different groups, "threaded through *all* social practices [...] the sum of their interrelationship" (Hall, 1980b:22). Culture provides meanings and images from the ordinary daily lives of people explaining historical conditions and their understanding of the constraints of social structure (Meehan, 1986:453). The legitimization of ideologies in this creative process is affected by consumption and social change, where the commodity at the cultural and economic level is a symbolic resource from which ordinary people reproduce their lives (Lee, 1993:xi). In this way

¹At a drama subcommittee meeting attended by members of the SABC board as well from the TV division's delegation on Sep. 23, 1993, among the issues to be investigated was the recommendation that production of locally made TV dramas was to be enhanced; fair and efficient script evaluation procedures to be instituted; principles of internal versus external drama productions to be recommended and a recommendation for the IBA on local content requirements to be submitted.

the commodification of products, produced for profit with a social meaning, is not socially neutral.

GUI and *GU II*'s relationship to broadcast production was affected by the SABC's decision to introduce programming with content representing the vision of transformation on broadcast programmes - a narrative of "cultural reconciliation" (IBA's mandate, Broadcasting Act 30 March 1994, approved by the Transitional Executive Council in 1993). The economic relations of cultural production of *GU III* are manifested in the Audience Ratings Survey [ARS] (Appendix G) which indicates how well it did in the ratings (Chapter Two).

Narrative of *Going Up III* - 'situation comedy'

The sitcom can be regarded as a microcosm of TV and both seek to align the viewer with "cultural systems of propriety, or norms of acceptability" as well as attempting to reaffirm a cultural identity (citing Swanson, Neale & Krutnik, 1990:242,). For the sitcom to be 'successful', it should address changing cultural standards and operate as "a site of negotiation of cultural change and difference" (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:237). *GU III* seems to successfully portray events occurring in a small established law firm, located in the central business district in downtown Johannesburg, and in a 'shebeen' or 'speak-easy' located on the top of the building and the title 'Going Up' is derived from this concept. The main characters include Jabulani Cebekulu, a black colonial style helper, wearing a khaki dust coat, signifying his servile position; Mr. Reginald Cluver, senior partner, elderly old fashioned white lawyer and Edward Tsaba, the black associate, representing the role of the new black elite in South Africa. Secondary characters include Mrs. Jakobs, secretary; Squeeza, the black owner of the shebeen, and Klein Piet Gouws, white Afrikaans speaking security guard in the foyer of the building. Each episode is motivated by the introduction of new clients.

Two episodes were used for the interviews with the focus groups. The first episode "**The Case of the Historically Advantaged Pale Males**" (23 minutes long without advertisements) concerns changing identity in the new South Africa. This episode opens in Squeeza's *shebeen* where blond, young Klein Piet Gouws is discussing a new career as a pop star/singer. Jabulani Cebekulu,

(popularly known as Jabu) and his three chums suggest he needs a new name as 'Piet Gouws' does not suit the image of a popstar. They decide on the name 'Snowman' and Piet, accompanied by a dance troupe of black males and Squeeza, proceeds to sing his rap song about a new identity. The next scene opens in the lobby of Cluver & Associates, when Mrs. Jakobs, the Coloured secretary informs Jabu that Mr. Tsaba needs him to interpret. The scene takes place in Mr. Tsaba's office with three white male Afrikaner construction partners, who have come to seek advice from Cluver and Associates. The men are puzzled as to why they no longer receive government contracts and Mr Tsaba, whose Afrikaans is negligible (after Jabu explains the problem) rather pompously announces that since this is the new South Africa they must expect this. However, Jabu, as the *tolk* or interpreter has an acute ability to cut to the real problem, suggests they change their names to African ones and include 'the handicapped, female and gays' on their board to be representative of the new South Africa. The conservative men are suitably horrified but decide to take care of the changes.

The next scene takes place in the foyer of the building where Klein Piet, as the security guard, has an exchange with a motley group of people including two gay men (one with a lisp), a handicapped man in a chair and a couple of elderly women before allowing them to continue up to Cluver & Associates. When the group arrive in the lobby Mrs. Jakobs becomes very flustered, trying to ascertain why they are there. The gay men insist they are there to see "three burly gentlemen with muscular thighs". Finally, Jabu arrives to sort out the 'muddle' and the group enter Tsaba's office where they meet the Afrikaans construction team. The latter announce they have followed Jabu's advice, changed the name of the company to "Indaba² Projects" and their own names to African ones, have a new board, namely, the 'motley crew' including the two 'alternative' men - the two gays. The three Afrikaans men now want government contracts. The action moves to the *shebeen* where Klein Piet, resplendent in sunglasses, is singing when the policeman arrives to arrest him on a charge of smuggling cocaine because his name is 'Snowman'. The scene changes to Reginald Cluver's office where he, Jabu and Klein Piet are discussing how Cluver managed to get Klein Piet released from all charges. Jabu, as the 'wannabe' attorney, suggests it is a clear case of defamation but Cluver disagrees and tells Klein Piet it was a stupid

²*Indaba* is the Zulu word meaning deliberation or conference so 'Indaba Projects' would be an organization where there was consultation or conferring board members.

choice of name as everyone knows that 'Snowman' is a name for a drug dealer. Suitably chastised, Klein Piet thanks him profusely and promises never again to indulge in such activities.

Back in the lobby, the Afrikaans men arrive to thank the company for their assistance as they have been awarded a contract by the government. Tsaba points out that they must have been awarded it prior to the changes as it would be illegal to make changes in the tender. At first they are horrified and one asks if he can have his own name back, but finally all decide to keep the changes, including the gay men, who have already suggested changing to pink hard hats. The men thank Jabu profusely but ignore Tsaba's outstretched hand. Back upstairs in the *shebeen*, Jabu announces to all "you cannot change something by changing its name whether it's a rap artist, a construction company or the 'new South Africa'". Jabu then orders drinks all round from Squeeza and the episode ends.

The second episode "**Flexible Asian Models**" (26 minutes long without advertisements) concerns the use/misuse of pornographic video tapes. The episode opens in Mrs. Jakobs' office where she is trying to transcribe video tapes and is almost falling asleep with boredom. Tsaba enters and asks her please to hurry as he needs the tapes for a client. The next moment Mrs Sue Kipling comes in to see Cluver. In his office she declares she wants a divorce because she has found pornographic tapes hidden in her husband's closet. She rants on about her terrible husband and his friends, until Cluver suggests she should try to calm down before making any hasty decisions. He proceeds to take the pornographic tapes from her. Back in the office lobby, when Mrs Jakobs gives him the completed transcripts, Tsaba declares how extraordinary it is that anyone can say so much about anything. Jabu enters with the tapes from Sue Kipling, asking Mrs. Jakobs to keep them. He says they are sex tapes for a divorce case and she first refuses and then agrees to take care of them. When all have left her office she hesitates a moment and finally slips one of the tapes into the VCR on her desk.

Meanwhile in Tsaba's office Billy Noquase, the representative from the Department of Public Works, and Brenda Armstrong a female video maker, are arguing about the quality of the work for the corporate video on work-related tasks made by Ms Armstrong. He maintains the tapes are very boring despite her promise to make entertaining educational tapes. At Tsaba's

suggestion Mr Noquase agrees to show the tapes again to the workers before pursuing a legal option. The scene returns to Mrs. Jakobs where she is watching the pornographic tapes. Jabu enters, saying there is a sound of trouble since he heard a woman's voice and something heavy moving. Mrs Jakobs hastily replies that movers were moving a piano. Jabu, realising what Mrs Jakobs is doing, solicitously suggests since she is so hot she should lie down. The next scene occurs in the foyer when Ms. Armstrong delivers her fish tank tape for Tsaba, and in reply to Klein Piet's question about action movies, replies that the tapes were made with a specific audience in mind. Immediately following this, Jabu enters with more tapes, and in reply to Klein Piet's question, Jabu says these are pornographic tapes. In the meanwhile Mrs Jakobs becomes overwhelmed by her viewing, and leaves her desk to splash her face in the bathroom. While she is gone Jabu enters and stuffs the tapes into her desk drawer. Just then Tsaba gives him another tape, which Jabu also stuffs into the same drawer, mixing up the public works tapes with the pornography tapes.

Mrs Kipling arrives at that moment, having decided that perhaps she should look at the pornographic tapes, which she euphemistically refers to as "items" and asks Mrs Jakobs' opinion. Mrs Jakobs refers mysteriously to a "friend of a friend" who watched those kinds of tapes and suggests that she makes sure to turn the sound down. Kipling decides to take two tapes "as you don't walk out on eight months of marriage without first watching the video". Mrs Jakobs then unwittingly gives her the wrong videos. That evening as Jabu is locking up the office Klein Piet accosts him but pretends he was "just passing". He tells Jabu he feels it is his duty to watch the pornographic tapes to "inform himself" and after promising to return it in the morning, Jabu lends him a tape. Piet is so anxious to watch the tape, he leaves without the usual visit to the *shebeen*. As Jabu prepares to lock up Ms Armstrong arrives to get the tapes she made for the Public Works Department because "they need to know what options are open to them" and Jabu gives her the pornographic tapes and asks "Is this part of the RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme)?"

Next morning Klein Piet in the foyer admits to Jabu the tapes were the most boring he had ever seen and in fact he fell asleep watching them. He explains they were about men and women in the office - "off with their clothes behind the pot plant- it's all so predictable". To which Jabu

replies “never in our office”. Piet then declares he prefers videos about the real world - videos like *Batman* and Jeanne Claude van Damme.

The next scene takes place in Cluver’s office with Mrs Kipling who announces that she is surprised it turned out her husband was interested in social restructuring of the country. In reply to Cluver’s question about her husband’s reaction she said he was quite shy really and asked where the remaining ones were. In reply to her question about the oddity of a man sneaking out to watch restructuring videos Cluver tells her “it’s a male thing - which happens quite often in certain circles”.

Finally, back in Tsaba’s office the meeting between Billy Noquase and Brenda Armstrong proves to be amiable, as Noquase reports the maintenance men loved the videos and some even wanted their own copy. In reply to Ms Armstrong’s question whether they had absorbed the content, Noquase assures her they were impressed with the flexibility of the Asian model but also liked the Swedish way of doing things. He announced he had ordered fifty copies to be sent to all government departments. Tsaba, when thanked by them, naively thinks it is his own power of negotiation which has resolved the conflict. Back at Mrs Jakobs’ desk, Mrs Kipling is picking up the rest of her tapes and says she feels she should look at a few more to which Mrs Jakobs, carefully replies “if you’re up to it”.

Television as discourse

A model of discourse theory is a language or system of representation that develops socially to create and circulate meanings (Morley, 1992:77). The model serves the interests of the society from whence the discourse originates and works ideologically to naturalise those meanings (Morley, 1992:83). David Morley suggests television is discourse when the meeting of the reader’s discourse with that of the text results in the reading of the text being a negotiation between the social sense in the programme and social experience readers have derived (Chapter Six Appendix E). The experience of television for the viewer is a dynamic movement between similarity and difference, as the text is full of potential meanings that can be activated in different ways. Television viewers are not always passive recipients of predetermined meanings but can

read or interpret texts actively to produce meanings corresponding to their experience. Textual devices like irony, metaphor, humour, contradiction, exaggeration, myths, fantasy and parody open the text to polysemy. All these devices work against attempted ideological closure where a perverse reading, opposing meanings against each other, leads to a collision of discourses.

Fiske contends that “discourse about television is a social force” in which a socially situated reader through the process of reading the text creates tertiary texts (Fiske & Hartley, 1978). Thus the acts of writing fan mail, or even the researcher’s transcripts of interviews with the production team and cast, become a tertiary text and discourse. The adoption of fashion trends from a production also serves as a tertiary text. John Waters’ cult movies in the early 1970s promoted the ‘punk’ look, which was adopted by a subculture. Currently *Tank Girl* (1994 Universal), a postmodern allegory about the environment, has originated fashion trends among the avantgarde. Intertextuality, discussed later in this chapter, is a valuable theoretical concept because it relates the singular text principally to other systems of representation, not just a context of reality. Placing a work in its historical circumstances means the work can be placed in its intertext and relate the text and intertext to other systems and services (Stam, Burgoyne & Flitterman-Lewis, 1992:205). In a similar manner based on the production of *GU III*, primary and secondary texts mentioned above are read and circulated and then used in the audience response. A text’s intertextual relations can therefore provide valuable clues as to how a particular culture or subculture is likely to interpret the primary text.

The text, with Mafela as the draw card, has changed since the airing of *GU I* in 1991, as over time its integrated multiracial quality has forged ahead independently of the democratic changes in South Africa. Jabulani Cebekulu motivates the action and causes mishaps but the ideology of the production team is not under political constraints about the content of the text, and can include any current content with historic significance about apartheid without fear of reprisal. However, if the ideology of the text ceases to appeal to its audience, and since television needs to sell audiences and programmes to advertisers, **economic** constraints can occur. In the episodes being examined, the programme’s context contests a number of issues under discussion in South African society, including affirmative action, freedom of speech and the role of women in the society. The ideology leaves certain gaps since free access to pornography plus the acceptance of

homosexuality in South African society are revolutionary concepts. Discussion of these subjects in a situation comedy introduces controversial issues into a television discourse. If desired by the audience further analysis is permissible without being confrontational. An audience's 'need' is a substitute for an explanation of shifts in the culture, in the industry and in the narrative form where the industry's own construction of an audience or 'interpretive community' leads to innovations (Feuer, 1987:126). Roberta Durrant and Joe Mafela both indicated in their interviews that, since they wanted to reach a wider English-speaking audience as well as the original audience for *S'gudi S'naysi*, the *Going Up* series was created to meet that need. The 'flow' of the viewing in television programmes is an important element in recombining different genres and their predecessors. By integrating those connections between the symbolic and the economic, which constitute television, a cultural commodity like *Going Up* can be theorised both as a commodity and an artifact, created and manufactured. The *Going Up* series presents "a vision for interpretation and an ideology for consumption to a viewership that is simultaneously a public celebrating meaning, and an audience produced for sale in the marketplace" (Meehan, 1986:449).

Genre as categories

When genre, as a term, is used in literary, film or television studies it implies that these texts are works that can be categorized. Genre theory examines the way these texts can be considered to belong to a particular category and then makes the division and justifies the categories (Feuer, 1987:114). Since film and television are culturally specific and to a degree historical (Todorov, 1975:14) it is necessary to define specific categories that could apply to the category under review. The literary concept behind genre helps decide the principle of coherence of its structure and the purpose of the study for comparison. As a result one can move backwards and forwards between the theory and the object of study, which in this chapter is *Going Up III (GU III)*. Every production incorporates a particular methodology, but, since film and television programmes are regarded as part of popular culture, genre in film studies is understood to be a formula of the Hollywood studio system, which is "a conventional system for structuring cultural products" (Cawelti, 1984:56). Initially the term 'genre' was used to condemn Hollywood studio films for their lack of originality and artistic merit, but when film studies incorporated semiotics and ideological criticism, genres were seen as formalised systems in themselves (Feuer, 1987:222).

Genres have been viewed as “cultural problem-solving operations” (Schatz, 1981:16) and “systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject” (Neale, 1992:20). Different elements in a genre are capable of performing different functions, where genres and their meanings have an active role, while their own social effectivity can limit the possibilities of meaning. From the television industry’s point of view “unlimited originality of programming would be a disaster because it could not assure the delivery of the weekly audience, as do the episodic and serial type programme” (Feuer, 1987:119). Genre assists the audience in being able to interpret the text. An ideological approach sees genre as a regulating medium where, at the industrial level the genre makes sure the advertisers have an audience, and at the textual level, the genre is ideological because it reproduces the dominant ideology of the capitalist system, but allows for a reader-oriented model where the viewers also make their meanings (Feuer, 1987:225). The most basic format is the situation comedy, with its half hour format based in humour, presenting a new problem every week to be resolved. David Grote (1983) proposes the goal of the sitcom is to reaffirm the family as an institution; but David Marc (1984) believes situation comedy can become social satire, and Feuer sees it as a genre that has developed towards the continuing serial. In applying the characteristics that Marc suggests to *GU III*, it is apparent that it is socially satirical, since it explores ideas to challenge dominant cultural values “not allow[ing] identification with characters to get in the way”. Feuer, however, argues that the role of the ‘interpretive community’ or audience must be accounted for in the construction, as well as the sitcom’s historic evolution, to indicate where the developments in the industry’s social and cultural history have occurred.

In the narrative of genre different forms of comedy designate disorder in relation to the discourse itself so social comedy like *GU III* defines its disorder as the disturbance of socially consigned ambiguous hierarchies (Neale, 1992:24). In the social hierarchy of Cluver, Cluver and Associates, Mr Cluver would seem to be the primary character, but Jabulani Cebekhulu, ‘Executive Social Services’ - serving teas, collecting the mail - is the main character. Social comedy maps the field of a socio-discursive order whose nodal points tend to be class and sexuality, and in *GU III*, race. The order is disrupted to allow the hierarchy to be rearranged when the new order is the condition of narrative closure. To understand the genres themselves, the spectators must know what to anticipate so genres must institutionalise and guarantee coherence with certain conventions

(Neale, 1992: 39). Two kinds of verisimilitude occur in a work - the rules pertaining to the genre, when the work must conform to the conventions of the genre and the verisimilar occurs between the discourse of the work and what the audience believes to be true. Stephen Neale (1992:40) argues that the basis of comedy depends on a “structure of illusion and belief ... and an awareness that it [comedy] is fictional”. In *GU III* ideological norms of heterosexuality are thrown into confusion when two homosexual men are admitted to the board of KKK (the Afrikaans Construction Company) in order for the company to present a politically correct image - ‘to look right’. Conversely heterosexual norms are overwhelmed when women as well as men are depicted watching pornography.

Thus verisimilitude and decorum draw on generic and cultural stereotypes, which is the way Mrs Jakobs is portrayed, but equally the concept underlying the stereotype can change with historic circumstances. Today women are in transition in South Africa and the perception of who they are and what their role is in society is very different from the publication of their rights in the constitution. However, the overturning of the patriarchy is not that simple and some viewers may not agree with this ideology, hence Mrs Jakobs’ perceived foolishness. Roberta Durrant expanded on her character as she says Mrs Jacobs attempts to better herself and is trying to be something she is not. She has practised her English, speaking with a cultivated English accent, so that she’s quite ‘posh’ and in that sense her foolishness becomes more comprehensible (interview, Appendix C). There is also an aspiration to class mobility since ‘posh’ implies ‘high class’. “Class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born, or enter voluntarily ... [so that] class-consciousness becomes the way these are embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas and institutional forms” (Thompson, 1964:9). The introduction of the word ‘class’ to express social divisions, led to the realization that class consciousness, indicating social position, is created and not only inherited (Williams, 1976:61). Williams’ explanation (1976:66) suggests changes in class structure occurred when increased individual mobility led to a new sense of society or a social system which created social divisions and eventually led to the distinction between those whose livelihood depended on ‘fees’ (professional class), profits (trading class) or property (independent). Eventually class became the equivalent of ‘rank’ and it is in this sense that ‘posh’ applies to Mrs Jakobs.

Situation comedy as narrative

Narrative is the recounting of two or more events that are logically connected, occur over time and are linked by a consistent subject into a whole. Thus narrative is a way of finding out about the meaning of events, of perceiving the transformative effects of an action and understanding the role of time in human affairs (Bordwell, 1985:48). The 'fabula' is the story of those patterns of relationships between characters as they unfold in chronological order (Bordwell, 1985:49). The *syuzhet*, often called 'plot' is where the fabula is refashioned into an aesthetically satisfying form through the use of parallel plots and ellipses. The *syuzhet* allows the narrative logic to be linear, presenting the story information in a direct and accessible way according to a causal development, or it can be complex, blocking the relation between cause and effect with intervening materials (Bordwell, 1985:52). The episodic series, of which the situation comedy is a sub-set, is a narrative specially suited to television so as to attract and maintain a regular audience for the purpose of gaining high ratings (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:233).

Subjectivity is not inherent in individuality but is the product of various social agencies which are shared with other people, and these are so various that although not all groups think alike, they have something in common. This explains why "females ... can have a male subjectivity, why members of the working class can understand themselves and their social experience in ways that serve the interests of the middle class" (Fiske, 1987:50). In the creative process of production of a television programme the ideologies of the production team become visible. The theory of the subject suggests that as there are contradictions between agencies in society so there will be the same contradictions in the subject. This then permits the making of choices, where input from diverse ideologies allows for contradictions. The cinematic sign - for Roland Barthes (1977:39) the image is characterized by polysemy - presents many meanings open to multiple significations. Thus the narrative analysis of film as a semiotic inquiry asks questions of the text and much of what is written about the semiotic inquiry in film can be applied to television programmes (Stam, Burgoyne & Flitterman-Lewis, 1992:95).

'Comedy' refers to narrative forms and the narrative comedy consists of a *protasis* or exposition, an *epitasis*, or complication and a *catastrophe* or resolution (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:27). In

Hollywood discourse happy endings and closure are derived from cause and effect, so gleaning from prior events in the narrative. Bordwell (1985:68) stresses causal motivation in narrative, but in the musical and the situation comedy the coincidental can play a role. To produce suspense or surprise in guaranteeing the spectator's involvement, comic suspense plots frequently involve a character actively engaged with a set plan of action. The comic event is humorous because of its narrative context but there is a fundamental reliance on surprise and the inclusion in the narrative of jokes, gags and wisecracks constructed to undermine logic, convention and meaning. The difference between these depends on the contrast between self-contained forms and those bound by a context.

Mrs. Jacobs, the secretary has been practising her African languages so when three Afrikaner construction men arrive she greets them rapidly in three different African languages. Shortly after Jabu walks in, Mrs Jacobs informs him that Mr. Tsaba needs him to translate for the **HAPMS**-Historically Advantaged Pale Males. Jabu says "Oh you mean whites?" Mrs Jacobs replies "Don't say 'white' it's not politically correct. All true democrats are colour blind," which is the punch line as all comic events need formal closure. In this situation Mrs Jacobs is being politically correct for two reasons: first she tries to be 'posh' and show that she understands these things, but, in the 'new' South Africa, since she is Coloured and has been part of the subordinate group, she tries harder. Jabu on the other is black and ostensibly part of the hegemonic bloc so he is allowed to say 'whites'. It is difficult to use punch lines to initiate narrative, but preferable to use them to mark or construct a pause in the narrative, which this is (Neale and Krutnik, 1990:48). Witty songs and jokes imply a control of language. Songs in musicals, revues and variety shows are frequently used for wit, where the linguistic humour comes from a comic misuse of the language due to cultural ignorance or a physical impediment. Piet Gouws's song has a play on 'toyi-toyi' and 'toy boy' 'not a mean street just a street freak' and "Mr. Snowman - no man, not a blow man". Gouws' manner is ingenuous and this has become generalized as a character trait, which then unintentionally motivates all kinds of funny lines.

Misunderstanding and ignorance show disturbance in the communication process, which becomes the basis of the verbal humour. There is comic interplay between language and action when Jabu

overhearing the sound of women's voices, comes into the lobby where Mrs. Jacobs is watching the pornography tapes:

Jabu: *It sounded like trouble - moving something very heavy.*

Mrs Jakobs: *Some movers were carrying a piano upstairs!*

Jabu: *I didn't know they used women as movers.*

Mrs Jakobs: *Jabulani, it's the new South Africa.*

Jabu: *Mrs Jakobs I heard you panting and you're sweating.*

Mrs Jakobs: *Jabulani - how can women do that sort of work?*

Jabu: *What do you mean?*

Mrs. Jakobs: *I'm getting past this.*

Jabu: *You want to lie down. Looks like a temperature. By the way you're reading that upside down.*

Neale and Krutnik (1990:51) define a gag as 'non-linguistic comic action' but comics have also used the term to refer to verbal jokes and humour. The gag in the scene above is Mrs Jakobs' act of secretly watching the video tapes, and the tapes are the main gag for the entire episode where the gag also means 'a pre-prepared piece of action' (Mrs Jakobs with the videos). The term 'gag' can apply to any visual comic effect, the idea being it will interpolate into the narrative and consequently present a degree of surprise. Expectation of the outcome of an event can derive from the cultural norms of an audience, where there is expectation of an action appropriate to the circumstances. Anticipation can come also from what has previously transpired in the narrative. The plot has indicated that there are pornographic tapes, so when Jabu carries the videos into the entrance lobby Piet Gouws nonchalantly asks:

Piet: *What sort are they?*

Jabu: *Pornography, sex. I'll put them in Mr. Cluver's office.*

Piet: *Hard core?*

Jabu: *I don't know any core! How can you tell?*

Piet: *Air hostesses and things - you can tell - leather and harnesses.*

Jabu: *Ag, Piet, Jy's deurmekaar [you're confused]. Leather and harnesses. Porno is about men and women doing their thing. Leather and harnesses is about cowboy movies.*

Piet: *If only life were that simple.*

The suspense in the narrative implies a degree of predictability so if there are pornographic videos around someone will watch them and the suspense is - when? And who? The surprise is always in the way the event is narrated. Mrs. Jakob's reaction to the pornography indicates something

is wrong; she is flustered and feeling 'hot' and this description acts as a double entendre becoming comic. Jabu says he hears a noise of women crying implying sexual ecstasy. Gags are suitable to show incompetence and frustration as failure results because there is a possibility of interrupting the action. This contradicts the genre's requirement for a happy ending but is not necessarily a problem, as closure is not necessary where the narrative can depend on endless failure with incurably incompetent characters like Mrs Jakobs and Piet Gouws, unless they lose their ingenuousness and incompetence.

Most comedies have jokes and gags so degrees of laughter vary among different audiences, depending on the interpretation which relates back to the sociocultural rules, conventions and conditions - what is **allowed** to be funny. 'Funny' then is subject to a negotiation and dispute (Afrikaans and short pants would not have been acceptable in a sitcom under apartheid). Certain features become amusing or funny when a ludicrous situation occurs, like mixing up corporate and pornographic video tapes and the ridiculous occurs through ignorance, credulity or ugliness, deformity or appalling clothes. Klein Piet and Mrs Jakobs are naive so both fall victim. Again the notion of departures from the norm, like homosexuality, stress incongruity and surprise. All instances of the comic are semiotic as they involve meanings and signs where 'dignity' 'purpose' and 'power' lead to contradictions of incompetence, failure and indignity. Two moments of the comic are the moment of disruptive surprise and the moment of semantic and logical resolution, enunciating loss and restoration of power and control respectively (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:81). The pleasure which comes from the fact that a loss of control is cued so Mrs Jakobs' discomfit about the porno videos is funny, because it is made playful through Jabu's intervention with his comments on the 'noises' he had heard and this makes the comic event safe. Her loss of dignity and its restoration are part of this comic event and its resolution, when the uncertainty is resolved by Jabu suggesting she is not well as the document she is reading is upside down. The ambiguity throughout the event depends on her fascination with watching the pornographic video. The issues of predictability and human dignity are present in this comic event which is tied into 'decorum' where this woman's behaviour is perceived as unfitting.

Situation comedy as ideological discourse

Popular fiction forms like television sitcoms transform ideological discourses in an accessible way through existing narrative devices like humour (Bennett & Woollacott, 1987:3). These narrative devices can cross cultural boundaries between different signifying practices, so popular fiction could be regarded as a particular region of ideology (like political or religious ideology) with institutional supports, which even have had an historic dimension in Afrikaner films during apartheid. To become popular, fictional forms must connect and relate to popular experience and so make concessions to the opposing/different values of subordinate groups or minority groups like the white, Hindu and Coloured groups, who from 1983 were part of the hegemonic bloc. Thus in *GU III* issues of gender, race, ethnicity, power, identity, nation and nationhood become issues for comment as these are topical. In *GU III* with the **HAPMS** episode, the ideology of affirmative action is parodied, where the previously disadvantaged receive preference as well as those who seek 'alternate' sexual identities. The narrative is created around the principle of freedom of expression and adult access to pornography but women's access to pornography is parodied. Television is a popular cultural medium and the economics that affect its production insist that it reaches a mass audience (Fiske, 1987:37). But this mass audience has many subcultures and in general people prefer jokes that are aimed at a group of which they are not a member (Palmer, 1994:68). Many comedies use a narrative form not dissimilar from a realist narrative but in comic narrative what makes sense also makes nonsense (Palmer, 1994:116):

The element of sense - the reality of both meanings - is what allows the 'nonsense' to pass: that such clear statements can be so duplicitous. In that sense, the 'thought' implied in the joke (that discourse can be ambiguous, that words can hide thoughts as well as reveal them), is an envelope for the pleasure that humour gives.

In "**Flexible Asian Models**" Billy Noquase, from the Public Works Department, reports back to Edwin Tsaba, the lawyer, and Brenda Armstrong, the videomaker, that the men from Maintenance were 'highly stimulated' after viewing the tapes. Noquase believes these pornographic tapes were the corporate tapes made by Ms Armstrong:

Billy: I arrived just as those men were coming out of the screening room and I can tell you those men were highly stimulated.

Brenda: Were they really?

Tsaba: You sound surprised!

Brenda: Well I wouldn't think men from the maintenance department would find it that engaging.

Billy: One viewer commented it was one of the finest videos he had seen. He told me had seen quite a few. Another viewer wanted his own copy.

Tsaba: But had they absorbed any of the content?

Billy: We did not manage to convince them about the Asian model. One man was impressed with the flexibility of the Asian model. Actually one said how much he liked the Swedish way of doing it! ... I'm having fifty copies made. I am going to send it to every government office in the country. We are putting our full weight behind this.

The double entendre here refers to the sexual stimulation of the men, so the element of 'sense' - the reality of both meanings - is what allows the 'nonsense' to pass. There is an ideological class dimension referenced implying working class men would appreciate the salacious quality of the tapes more readily. Ms Armstrong denies that working class men would appreciate the niceties of the corporate tapes so would be a poor test audience to use. This example provides a disparity between the normal subject position occupied by the viewer and the dislocation in the ideology provided by the sitcom. The scene articulates the relations between subordinate (those working class men who do watch pornography and believe there should be no censorship) and the dominant ideology (people who do not watch pornography) imbricating them onto one another. This scene suggests a reform of personal subjectivities in response to the intention of the new constitution in SA (Bennett & Woollacott, 1987:5).

Sexual identity and pornography

The right to assume the sexual identity of one's choice has been addressed in the new constitution for South Africa but the political implications of homosexuality are not universally accepted. In "The Case of the Historically Advantaged Pale Males" episode, Richard Beynon creates a stereotype with a twittering pair of homosexuals whose presence on the board of the company now makes the company politically correct in order for the Afrikaans construction company to bid and win contracts from the Government of National Unity. Jabu, the clown, lampoons the homosexual pair in his inimitable style, and the consequence is a double consciousness through the "logic of the absurd" or satire to promote heterosexuality and deny homosexuality as an

abomination. These identity politics created by the production team emphasise how identities operate through exclusion with a construction of the marginalised subjects (in this example the gay men) outside the field of the symbolic, where the 'accepted' identity excludes 'different' men. Until 1975 the construction and application of the South African obscenity law 47(2) of the Publications Act of 1974 came under the jurisdiction of criminal law (Loots, 1994:42). After this time, the independence of the courts was replaced by a government appointed administrative tribunal which led to control over the public communication material. The state censorship laws were ostensibly to offer concern over morals and decency, but really naturalised state power. These laws have been significant for investigation into political censorship in South Africa. Leanne Loots (1994:94) comments:

[T]hat democracy is informed by the clause freedom of speech and expression, does not necessarily imply an engagement in discourses around gender equality. With the debates around sexually explicit material in this historically specific South African society, the privileging of clause 15.1 does not offer a challenge to patriarchal assumptions around women's (sexual) subjectivities.

Over one hundred and ten films and publications have been banned from the public's viewing despite the promise in 1994 that "never again in this country will anyone decide what other intelligent and rational beings may or may not watch or hear" (citing the Minister of Home Affairs, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Over one hundred and twenty Films and Publications Banned, *Mail & Guardian*, 1996-1997, December 24-January 9). This reneging on the promise of a transformation from the bad days of authoritarian apartheid rule, suggests a 'reconciliation' towards the conservative element of the previous regime who had banned so much including political writings, films and videos. This conservative response to a new development in mass culture echoes the reaction to cinema in the 1920s and television in the 1950s in the United Kingdom where "moral reformers were ... fearful for the effects of these new mass-produced cultural forms on those 'weaker' members of society - women, children and the 'lower orders' in general - whom they sought to protect" (Gray, 1996:119). Among the educated Zulu focus group, in order to protect children from seeing pornography, one of the young women strongly recommended removal of the tape after watching the video in bed with one's partner, as children have a habit of entering early in the morning to play the video cassette recorder (Chapter Six, Appendix E). Definitions of pornography and erotica have been slippery at best so the mere fact that it is not illegal to watch pornographic videos indicates transformation in the country but not

necessarily reconciliation between those who view censorship differently (Over One hundred and twenty Films and Publications Banned. 1996-1997, December 24 - January 9, *Mail & Guardian*)

There are two issues about male and female sexuality arising out of the narrative about the mixed up pornographic video tapes. The first issue concerns the manner in which technological revolutions can implement profound change in a society. In *GU II* and *III*, Mrs. Jakobs develops computer skills and uses equipment available to her at the law firm to teach herself African languages. She is trying to bridge the economic gap that can change her socioeconomic status in the society. She uses a video cassette recorder for transcribing contents of videos under legal examination, and the second issue describes how surreptitiously she also watches a pornographic video brought in as evidence. Ann Gray suggests the video tape recorder has been a “major innovation in home entertainment” as the way women watch television and video raises complex issues for women in their everyday lives (Gray, 1996: 118). The hire or purchase of video tapes for viewing in the privacy of one’s home means that women too can now watch pornography in the private space of their bedrooms with or without a partner. The narrative discredits the traditional assumption in South Africa that pornography is viewed only by men.

Intertextuality in *Going Up III*

The theory of intertextuality says any one text is read in relationship to others and is affected by the spaces between the texts (Fiske, 1987: 108). The meanings of a text depend on its intertextuality with all texts that allude to a theme in that text. The reader of the text can activate intertextuality in certain ways - that is create meanings depending on the clues available in a particular group of texts. Horizontal relations occur between those texts linked by genre, character or content while vertical intertextuality refers to the link between a television programme/series and texts that refer to it explicitly. Genre is the most influential form of intertextuality (Fiske, 1987: 109). Intertextuality allows for a multiplicity of voices and meanings often in conflict with each other, and provides a subversive text counter to the main one or provides a site of struggle for meaning (Bennett & Woollacott, 1987). The theory of intertextuality proposes that the television text is seen in context as part of the broader cultural industry. There are three levels of intertextual relations. First, the formal qualities of production values in the

primary text must be seen in context as part of the industry's other products. The second level is horizontal intertextuality which links the relations within the genre. Here *GU III* is linked to *Suburban Bliss*, also a local sitcom, both having content about the changes in South Africa. The third level is vertical intertextuality, occurring between the primary text, *GU III*, and other secondary texts of a different type. Based on his fame as S'Dumo in *S'gudi*, *S'naysi*, (*SgSn*) Mafela won the Most Popular Personality Television award. He then acted in the fried chicken commercials for the Chicken Licken fast food chain, which presented a permanent menu of take-away food with names like "S'Dumo Special Burgher" and "Joe's Full House Chicken". Joe Mafela was the link among both black and white for all three of the *GU* series as well as *SgSn* and *Kukuleka*. Rex Garner, as Mr Cluver, signifies farce, light dramatic compositions marked by broad satiric comedy and improbable plot. Because of his very successful career in repertory in South Africa in which he has starred regularly, Garner signifies this mode of comedy. He is popular with white audiences so his presence links the programme with expectations of farce. Abigail Kubeka is an international singer so her compact disks would provide further intertextuality. Publicity for the production team or news relating to the production, plus reviews of the programme fall into the category of the third level of intertextuality.

A change in the market/ audience figure of Mafela carries the programme independently of its potential market. The industry/ideology relationship is in tandem as Mafela floats as the signifier for the black 'Everyman', from the popular *S'gudi S'naysi* series. He is also pinned down in the *Going Up* series because the new Mafela is re-articulated for a different audience as Jabulani Cebekulu because Joe Mafela has star quality. Although the rest of the characters also motivate the story Mafela, as Jabu, is the agent of the narrative as he faces social conditions of change and frequently indulges in self parody. In the scene prior to acting as interpreter for Tsaba, the construction men and the gays, Jabu parodies their affected mannerisms, simultaneously mocking himself by copying their mannerisms. Rex Garner has been appearing in repertory theatre, particularly farce productions, for the past thirty five years and as a result has the 'star' quality among white theatre goers, who patronised this type of theatre. As Reginald Cluver, his amiable old-world manners, bespeak the finesse and timing of a solid professional whose deadpan expressions and controlled body movements provide the 'straight man' to Jabu's 'court jester' or clown. Henry Jenkins (1992: 224) contends that the clown's function had assumed a civic role

- that of the court jester with comic disruption permitted, but in mass culture the clown assumes a more democratic stance speaking to and for the popular.

Signifier as bearer of meanings

To determine the possibilities of any television programme it is necessary to examine the content, and the aesthetic and ideological elements in its production. After determination of the ideological and aesthetic elements it is possible to decide whether the production coincides with the dominant ideology and where it diverges from it (Bennett&Woollacott,1987:81). Joe Mafela, who plays the black character, Jabu, is also responsible for ideas in the writing, which provides a certain validity and authenticity for black viewers. As an African member of the production team, he represents "[those] class origins and views of the group controlling the production" (Bennett & Woolacott,1987:185). As bearer of different meanings Joe Mafela, the signifier, assumes an **arrangement** of signification whereby different points in time equal historic specificity; a different context in each production contributes the same as new social formations. Audiences of different ethnicities and class provide a plurality of meanings and pleasures. Joe Mafela coordinates and connects as signifier, and the social formations of Mafela in each production remain current, as a moving sign of the times from *S'gudi S'naysi* in 1987 to *Going Up III* in 1996. In each production the signifier changes the context and the caveat is that Mafela also gives voice to the popular response as the voice of the popular hero, since the popular response to ideology is to see the real lived experience of that ideology. This response implies concurrence with the reality of the historic specificity of the event portrayed, so the ideology depicted in the narrative does not disintegrate (Bennett&Woolacott,1987). Thus the popular hero and the mobile signifier constantly allow Mafela to re-assemble his signification. The elements of this analysis include the narratives in each programme, race and gender as Mafela reorganizes the narrative in individual texts by also modifying the meaning in individual texts.

Satire confused with parody

Satire mocks and attacks social norms, even attacking deviations (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:19). In "**The Case of the Historically Advantaged Pale Males**", as the translator, Jabu controls the narrative since he speaks Afrikaans but Edwin Tsaba, although he is the lawyer, does not do so. Therefore Jabu can direct the construction men to embark on what is a 'satirical' venture,

changing names, and inviting gays, women and the handicapped onto their board. However, because of the currency he carries as a well-known performer, Mafela is able to 'launch' his recommendations in a convincing manner. While these recommendations might appear ridiculous to most white viewers, the force of his signification as Joe Mafela, among black viewers, combined with Jabu's position of power as translator in the context of the programme, inspires belief in the male characters, whom he addresses, as well as in the audience. This allows him to initiate a satirical situation in a commonsensical manner and modify the meaning in the text, where historically advantaged white males can conform to a politically correct position. However, Mafela, in his conversation in Sotho with Edwin, (who deplores the Afrikaners' stupidity to assume they would continue to be awarded government contracts with the demise of apartheid) brushes aside their stupidity, recuperating the role of ideology in instituting affirmative action on a racial basis. In the same episode, Jabu lampoons the manner and actions of the gays who have been co-opted to the board of the construction company. The gays' appointment to the board of Indaba signifies social disapprobation of homosexuality, because it satirises the manner in which they conduct themselves. The gays' appointment institutes Jabu's original suggestion for the company '*om reg te lyk*' or to look correct and thereby ridicules the process of affirmative action on a sexual basis. Thus the satiric narrative functions as a vehicle for explaining and ordering comic transformations (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:151), by 'setting up' deviations in order to conquer them.

In the "**Flexible Asian Models**" episode, freedom of expression is taken to an absurd conclusion, when Jabu again controls the narrative by mixing up the boring corporate tapes with the pornography. The star, Joe Mafela, since "star images are always extensive, multimedia, intertextual" (Dyer, 1986:3) simulates concern that females are crying while Mrs Jakobs is watching the pornographic videos. Because of his star persona and the constant bickering between them - he always makes fun of Mrs Jakobs - the audience knows he is not genuine in his concern. When Piet Gouws requests a copy of a pornographic tape, Mafela plays the ignoramus about pornographic videos and their content - "Leather and whips, that's cowboy movies" - and effects nonchalance about these matters, re-assembling his signification as an adept law associate who knows these things. In both episodes, Mafela re-affirms the power of the patriarchy, subverting Mrs Jakobs' venture into pornography, and dismissing homosexuality as an aberration.

Performance factors

Nuances of Mafela's presentation are apparent as in the office he wears a khaki dust coat and wheels his tea trolley, the harbinger of tea pot and cups, signifying his servile position, and the remnant of his baggage from the days of apartheid. The comedy and humour are dependent on all characters opening up an ideological space. Jabu's prowess as an interpreter frequently sabotages all the players as the new codes of conduct in South Africa are parodied, including pornography. "Not in our office" Jabu says to Klein Piet, when the latter describes the 'pornographic'/corporate tape. Intrinsic also to the programme is the highly visual pleasure of the spectacular in the dancing and singing in the *shebeen* with well-edited close-up shots. The spectacle of Klein Piet singing the rap song interpellates the audience to connect with the popular conception of South African political reality. The spectacle serves as an interpretation of current history indicating the mainstream ideology, which advocates that western values must adapt to the new realities in South Africa. The message allows diversity in the meanings so that 'gaps' are created by the situations. The production team wanted to de-politicize the racial aspect inherent in Mafela's blackness, so that he symbolises 'entertainment' and is not a political figure. However, when asked whether television drama could play a part in nation-building Richard Beynon replied:

*I think **Going Up** does exactly that. I think that **Suburban Bliss** to my befuddlement also does. I don't know to what extent it plays that role amongst whites but I'm sure I know that when I am writing it. I write knowing that black audiences love Cliver. I don't know if white audiences love Jabu. I don't think that that's the nation building ingredient quite necessarily, but I also think that it's different now, from what it was when we made the first series. Because then the whole situation was invented clearly as a kind of mixed race situation. What I love about Jabu is a breaking of the stereotype. His major contribution to white audiences is, he is the hero of the series and it's his acumen and his cunning and his under-handedness that get results and get it in a way that the white lawyer would never think of. So I think in terms of breaking the stereotype, even though we might use another stereotype to do it, it is really good news [for] the new series [which] deals with real issues of hijacking fears of whites and blacks and I don't know how that contributes to nation building. Nation building is not part of our agenda [as] when we have our workshops we're not saying what will heal the wounds of the country (interview October 1996, Appendix C).*

The Jabulani character broke the stereotype held by whites about blacks so his major contribution has been to alter this conception of a black man being stupid and servile. Jabu demonstrates how,

in fact, he is the smart hero of the series. It is his acumen, cunning and underhandedness that achieve results and motivate the story in ways the white lawyer would never consider utilising.

African oral tradition

In *GU*, Jabu as the trickster/entertainer has successfully adapted to an African oral tradition. In her discussion about African 'situation comedies', Louise Bourgault (1996a:69) suggests the success of the situation comedy in Hausaland is due in part to the presence of "the trickster and moral tales common throughout much of Africa ... [as] these 'situation comedies' derive from the indigenous folktale tradition. Like oral tales, they serve to instruct, explain and reinforce Hausa values, as well as to entertain". In Bourgault's terms (1996a:75) the *GU* series also focuses on professional and social problems of the new urban middle class, treating various issues, providing moral lessons for the ordered rural world as well as a discourse tradition "borrowed and adapted from West African oral traditions to teach their lessons". Moral confusion accompanies rapid change which engenders corruption and the breakdown of social mores so the 'situation comedies' try to create meaning and a moral.

Jabu as the black clown/trickster signifies the racial stereotype providing "the base image(s) of the 'grammar of race' (Hall, 1990: 7). The 'native' has a good side portrayed in primitive nobility and dignity and in the bad side as one with cunning and even savagery (Hall, 1990:15). A third variant is the clown or entertainer which captures 'innate' humour. It is unclear whether or not the black clown/trickster is laughed at or with, since there is a deep ambivalence in "the double vision of the white eye through which they are seen" (Hall, 1990:160). Both visions are aspects of primitivism with race as a significant theme. In his interview, Richard Beynon remarked that Mafela provided ideas, "usually limp" which were subsequently workshopped by the rest of the production team (interview Appendix C). Jabu's 'limp' contribution could indicate that, as an African from an oral culture, he is able to conceive situations directly relevant to the audience's daily life. However, in the construction of Jabu's character, the racial stereotype of the "slave figure, the native and the clown or entertainer" deliberately or unconsciously reproduces the ideologies of racism (Hall, 1990:8). In adapting Mafela's ideas to create the 'entertainer' Jabu, "a good man capable of putting out every gloss he likes on the world to achieve its approval"

(Benyon interview, September 1996, Appendix C) the production team creates an ambivalence. In the oral tradition, events are understood in terms of particular spiritual agents causing them and derived from an examination of the way oral narratives are transmitted. First the griot or bard begins by making an intimate communication with the audience so that he is one of them (Bourgault, 1996b:182). African leaders, aware of the need for intimate connections have personalised all their actions so that the African oral tradition corroborates the views of the African ruler as a spiritual symbol of the people (Bourgault, 1996b:4).

Thus the chronicler is bound up in a communal role with the hero of an oral tale and with his audience. With the communal ego and superego contributing, plus the rapt attention of the audience, the chronicler becomes the hero. This is where Mafela fits in perfectly in his contribution to the motivation of the plot. African art and religious styles show how African culture shows plasticity and can absorb other style and forms and make them its own, having the propensity to synthesise and incorporate diverse elements into a new whole and this is particularly apparent in music. Oral traditions reflect a society's current preoccupations not idle curiosity. The oral view seems seamless - old contentious views are ignored and new accounts created (Ong, 1982:46). When cultures persist and outlast the structures which originally gave rise to them it is called 'cultural lag'. The oral tradition, the discourse style it fostered and the value systems it nurtured stayed on. African culture then becomes part of the mix.

African social life was bound up in its relationship to the cosmological system of the society. Social values in African systems of social organisations stress group orientation, continuity, harmony and balance to negotiate personal needs within the framework of the community so that happiness and success are defined as an ability to juggle forces (Ong, 1982:50). There is a strong group orientation so appeasement and placation of oppositional forces retain smooth group relations. Bards, storytellers and village historians used stories to explain histories and struggles and moral lessons about the gods. Jabu fulfills this role when he sums up the events in the **HAPMS** episode guiding those in the audience to be aware of trying to change who they are. Thus he recuperates the ideology back into the mainstream for those who do not want to change into this individualistic western person but prefer to remain as part of an African identity. Oral discourse is additive and listeners will participate in it, so his tale-telling takes place in the

‘imagined community’ of the *shebeen* where in the telling, elements important to that community would be included. In the recreation of the history, the **sound** and the rhythm are important - not the story as much as the embellishments. In the African oral tradition the bard would think in clusters to help his recall and would delight the audiences with images, and a repetition of verses designed to move the narrative forward through group participation. In *GU III* repetition to delight the ear takes place through the songs sung in the *shebeen*. The songs created by Abigail Kubeka and sung in the *shebeen* in *Going Up* have this repetition and provide metaphoric images of an earlier time during the Sophiatown music of the 1950s..

‘Comic realism’ and the allegoric mode

The *Going Up* series could be viewed as part of a Reconstruction and Development (RDP) programme because the comedy “lampoons present day South African society-warts and all” (Worsdale, *Mail & Guardian*, 1996, October 24-31:34). There is also a parallel between metaphor and comedy as both produce surprise and deviation but because an element of similarity is involved, the perception is of an identity common to the two but actually incompatible (Palmer, 1994:61). Again a gag and a metaphor incorporate deviant usage which in the gag is ideological, when the associated concept of normal is implied (Palmer, 1994:75). Klein Piet, the somewhat naïve security guard, asks about “dangerous weapons concealed on your person” and one gay responds “I didn’t think you’d notice” then referring by innuendo to male genitalia. This is an ideological play on ‘weapon’ as the gay couples’ behaviour is seen to be deviant and hence funny. The gay comment is deviant in relation to the ‘common sense’ terms defined by that particular society where ‘weapon’ signifies danger. The incongruity of male maintenance workers appreciating a corporate video is ideological at a class consciousness level. The Zulu focus groups laughed less frequently at the jokes, indicating a possible lack of linguistic parity for the verbal signifiers (Appendix I, Laughter Table) but they laughed when Klein Piet says “boring” after he returns the corporate video tape, thinking it was a pornographic tape. In this example the narrative had explained the concept and the literal meaning of the sign became the starting point for a set of derived meanings of connotative codes. The knowledge of the meaning evolved from an understanding of the concept, based on the groups having experienced the actual event in the narrative. The sitcom offers stability at the expense of change (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:253). At

the end of “**The Historically Advantaged Pale Face Males**”, Jabu pronounces the common sense verdict that “you can’t change who you are, just by changing your name” so recuperates those who have tried to change their identity, and society is thereby returned to the status quo.

Richard Benyon maintained that although comedy can provide a forum for confrontation of serious issues, it should not be portentous (interview, September, 1996 Appendix C):

I just think that comedy is very serious and I take it very seriously so I think in a way there are more issues that are more seriously dealt with. It's easier to confront them without being earnest about them, because for me I think that's a big trap in drama. I mean it's so important how you deal with [these issues] without becoming portentous (interview Benyon 1996, Appendix C).

When asked whether the *Going Up* series has elements of allegory whereby the building represents South Africa, the law office a privileged white South Africa with a modest representation of a black lawyer and a coloured secretary, while Jabu floats between the black world of the ‘shebeen’ or ‘speakeasy’ and the white world of the law office, Durrant’s reply was:

I think you're right in the sense that we did see it like that. And I think the whole exercise that we went through to use it was also involved in the microcosm theory. But it's done on purpose. When we thought it out we wanted a vehicle where we could have this kind of melting pot. We also wanted a vehicle which was reminiscent of what was old and then [also] the new coming in. Because I mean right now you don't get these. In the days of the prohibition, you have endless routes, so in a way one wanted to bring back the old because Chiver is colonial. So he's bringing that baggage with him. In terms of it being a microcosm example of what could possibly happen in the whole. Obviously not incorporating it but we did have certain objectives and one of them was to bring the opposites together. Now Jabu is a very streetwise character and he comes with baggage in a sense - with subservient baggage. He also has to break through a lot of that stuff. And he's also learnt how to play the game. The new character (Edwin Tsaba) is meant to arrive, he's the lawyer, the young one. He comes with no baggage, he's come back to the new SA. I can't say he's got no social conscience but he's mainly interested in himself.

And then the women. Now June (Mrs Jakobs) is quite an interesting character because that's the woman in the business world. She's now living in Johannesburg, away from her frame of reference which is the Cape flats. So everything that's dear to her is hidden down there. She's quite an isolated person, quite a lonely person because all her references are somewhere else. And I think that's the strength of her character because she's able in quite an innocent way to comment on the goings on all around her, because she's standing a bit outside the arrangements, she's standing sort of to one side. She's also trying to be something in a way that she's not ... I mean the whole

way that she talks, she's quite 'posh'. She's practised her English so that it's quite good and underneath you see there's the sort of Afrikaans typically Coloured background. And she sees herself, definitely, as a couple of notches up from Jabu. There's that level.

Durrant revealed how the production team tried to link the South African historical situation with the subjectivities of all the people, by creating the series as a microcosm of the society. The world of Cluver & Associates is located as a sign and “allegory discloses the truth of the world ... and represents a world where ‘reality’ and truth are found in the free play of signifiers” (citing Cowan, Hendershot, 1995: 5-6).

Production of *Going Up*

Cultural artefacts like television programmes are produced in specific historical contexts for specific groups and they promote meanings for particular values and beliefs, which can not be separated from the sociohistorical context in which they are created. Social practice defines the social history of film as analysing the way it participates in the production and distribution of knowledge, so that meaning is produced (Haralovich, 1986). Applying this concept of social history to television programmes indicates how these programmes then serve as important sites of struggle where meanings are created, contested, debated and negotiated. But television producers and directors select or exclude points of view that conflict with dominant ideology. Durrant had experienced the brunt of the government-controlled SABC apartheid ideology when, in 1985, her Alexandra township project was cancelled by top executives, who suddenly realised the programme was a criticism of the apartheid system.

Researcher: *Was it a criticism of the system?*

Durrant: *Totally, absolutely. And I was given such peculiar reasons. My husband, who is German, was working for the news network, ZEF and so on, and he had press clearance from the government as a foreign press agent. And I was told that the reason why we couldn't do this production was because, and this is so ridiculous, he would then be able to get into Alex to shoot this thing and then he would be able to shoot all sorts of other things that were going on and ship it out the country. And then he would have access to Alex when they banned all these foreign people. And this was the reason which was the most putrid reason in my mind (interview 1996). (Appendix B)*

A State of Emergency had been declared during this period of 'total onslaught' and the South African Government's media policy during this period became influenced by "the doctrine of 'Total Strategy' which permeated government thinking and planning, and which formed the basis for an attempt to restructure the whole of civil society - including the media" (Teer-Tomaselli, 1992:43). Because of the Group Areas Act (repealed in 1991 prior to the 1994 election) all whites had to have permits to enter black areas like Alexandra township. The press had to have special permits to enter these areas as the apartheid government did not want negative reporting on South Africa, since it would adversely affect investment. The myth of 'total onslaught' on South Africa by the international community was believed to be the work of a minority of communist-inspired black racist terrorists (Teer-Tomaselli, 1992:45). Consequently all media were muzzled to prevent any possible access to negative facts about conditions in South Africa. In 1990, when *GUI* was produced, it involved a multiracial cast. This occurred during apartheid when the SABC did not allow for multiracial programmes. However, after F. W. DeKlerk released Mandela from prison things began to change:

Researcher: [T]he ideological assumptions of the SABC during this period were still based on the old apartheid concept in dividing the channels?

Durrant: They were changing you see. With TV 4 it was starting to happen and then when CCV came about with Madala, it was a funny kind of thing because Going Up almost preceded the CCV concept. When CCV actually came about, Madala was quite thrilled to have Going Up because at least it was a programme [whose] ideology was correct. We were almost pushing ahead of time (interview 1996).

CCV was the channel which merged the separate channels TV2, 3, and 4 to allow more representative multiracial programming. The SABC still decided on what terms these programmes would be aired and only in 1993 with the election of a new SABC board, more representative of the ideology of the majority, did the reshuffle begin.

The hermeneutic cycle of television production

Inherent in the process of production the commerciality of authorship competes with creativity, as in every production there are financial and economic factors, the requirements of the institution of television (Meehan, 1986), the personal occupational ideologies of the production team and the

ideological analysis of the text (Bennett&Woollacott,1987). These are potentially oppositional elements but hermeneutic questions of understanding and interpretation are affected by these elements. As Eric Michaels indicates “the media engage unprecedented numbers of people in [...]signifying activity” so it is insufficient to say people engage with television differently without acknowledging how the structures of the television medium negotiate between the producers, technology and audiences. Michaels (1990:12) suggests that meaning production in television transmission is a “continuous and cyclical process, and one can choose any position on this ‘hermeneutic circle’ to begin analysis”. In this ‘hermeneutic circle’ there are a number of ‘texts’. The *conceived* text is a creative idea by people in an institution who present a *conceptual* text, which is flexible and negotiable property (Chapter One, Teleported Text for *Going Up*, Appendix J).

There has always been a team of four authors for *GU* but Mafela, with his African antecedents overtakes them as the actor and he stabilizes the point of reference. It is important that the text and viewers always are culturally activated to provide mobility and retain the audience’s loyalty because of the economic factors inherent in television. When the text is culturally mobilised its popularity begins operating in relation to the audience’s response and a dynamic relationship develops. The text can be seen as a ‘site’ of the inter-textual internal coordinates that attempt to organise the expectations of the way the audience will ‘read’ the programme. The choice of genre and the audience’s expectations for this are part of this paradigm. The manifestations of apartheid from the 1950s to the 1990s inform the text in its social organisation. The various characters assume functions to represent the racial groups in South Africa. Mr Cluver depicts the white colonial aspirations of English-speaking South Africans, Edwin Tsaba is a member of the new educated elite, who have returned to South Africa with the demise of apartheid; Mrs Jakobs depicts the ‘Coloured’ population who are wedged between the white colonial, Mr Cluver, as his ‘handmaiden/secretary’ and Jabu, the versatile translator, ‘Everyman’ returned from his spell as S’Dumo in *S’gudi S’naysi*.

Penguin Films and the problems of production

The mid 1980s, named ‘total onslaught’ by the apartheid government, was a time of awesome conflict in South Africa. Durrant explained her attempt to produce a series about the horrors of

apartheid in Alexandra township by showing how vigilante gangsterism was stopped by the SABC. Eventually, in 1986, because the funds had been allocated already for the Alexandra township project, she was allowed to produce a comedy *S'gudi S'naysi* (*SgSn*) with Joe Mafela in the lead as S'Dumo, the 'Everyman'. Her first *conceived* text was rejected but the second text for *SgSn* was accepted. Richard Beynon, a writer was also involved at this stage, and Durrant said she felt guilty to be producing a comedy because of the prevalence of violence everywhere, but Mafela assured her "you don't know what a need there is for people to laugh in South Africa today" (interview Durrant 1996 Appendix B). *SgSn* proved very successful as it had the basis of the township setting, with Joe Mafela as the Everyman character, who survives by eking out a living under very trying circumstances. All the storylines represent survival and many of the audience were able to identify with his circumstances. Durrant explains:

These tapes circulated all over the place, they were seen by South Africans all over the world. One of the things that was extraordinary for us when Mandela came out of prison, Tembi [one of the actresses] actually met with him as part of a music delegation, and when he saw her he just couldn't believe it. He tore out of his diary [and wrote] "with warmest regards to Joe, Daphne, Gloria, Tembi and little Berto" because I think he thought I was a male³ actually and he said at the time that S'gudi S'naysi was his favourite programme and when he was in prison he never missed it - he always watched it and he loved it. He loved it because it was a comedy, it made him laugh, it entertained him. Really I think that's what S'gudi S'naysi did and therefore, despite the fact that it was happening during that period that's really the purpose that it served (interview Durrant 1996, Appendix C).

S'gudi S'naysi really represented a subtle oppositional text, with a completely black cast speaking only Zulu. It was permitted for broadcasting due to its humour and its apparent innocuous storyline. Mafela, however, says when he developed the concept for *Going Up I* he wanted to reach a white audience which required the programme to be in English:

*Mafela: What happened is that we did S'gudi S'naysi in Zulu. And there was a symposium at SABC to say how can we make this work if we get to do it in multilingual. I said it can happen because what we got to do is to take [an] every day life situation in Jo'burg because people talk in different languages. And then I came up with the concept of *Going Up*, to take for instance the lawyer's office, the interpreter and from there when he knocks off what does he do? He goes to the shebeen, then from there he goes home. So we followed that up: from work with Chiver, from there he goes up to Squeezer's shebeen and then home.*

³ Berto, being the male version of 'Roberta'

Researcher: *In terms of the audience what kind of audience do you think you are reaching?*

Mafela: *The idea was to breakthrough and get the white viewership on CCV because they didn't understand the language before. If you do it in Zulu you get in the closing doors. Then we had to use sub-titles. We said then 60% they are using English, and then we demarcate the other languages (interview, Appendix B).*

Going Up I had a difficult time being placed on a channel since it was multicultural, and multicultural programmes had never been aired before, it took two years to be broadcast.

In the evolution of the text from its initial creation to the moment of production, transformations occur. Michaels (1990:14) contends that there are always two texts, the original *conceived* text and then the text which owes its changes to the industrial process at work on the *production* text or script, which is changed and can be very different from the *conceptual* text. Durrant explained how problems occurred during production of *GU III* in trying to find the right channel on which to air the sitcom:

Now [choosing a channel] created all sorts of problem areas because these two channels weren't used to working with each other. It was [a problem with] Paul Kemp [programme manager for TV2 and Sacks Kubeke programme manager for TV4] and so on. Paul Kemp felt that Going Up wasn't sophisticated enough for his audiences, his white audiences. And we kept trying to pin him down to what he meant by sophistication. To cut a long story short, they sort of developed the scripts but eventually they got the production budget out of TV 2 although it was going on to TV4. We turned around in circles with various people at the SABC for 2 years with Going Up before it saw the light of day. We started in 1989, eventually in 1990 we did the first pilot in April. It was a hell of a long business. But you see it emerged at the right time, in a way, because we had F.W. [DeKlerk] coming out in 1990. It was at a time where it happened simultaneously. I mean if that didn't happen, I'm sure Going Up would never have happened. They were so suspicious of it. We had to write three scripts that were then evaluated and they nearly, after the first three scripts, tried to turn it down. Then we did a pilot and then it was extensively researched by the HSRC (Human Science Research Council). So eventually we got the first [go ahead] (interview Durrant September, 1996, Appendix C).

Eric Michaels' model of the teleported text is useful to apply when examining the production process. The *production* text, or shooting script receives the interpretive input from actors, directors, cameramen, editors and other enhancements because of equipment failure, illness, bad

weather to become the *produced text* and the final *transmitted text*, may have advertisements or promotional attachments within the programme.

By the time the *received text* reaches the audience it may have changed in terms of framing, picture resolution, colour and intensity. At this point the audience engages with the text and decodes it so as to obtain an internally coherent *perceived text* with meanings. These are affected by the social text of prior experience, (South African political situation) including linguistic ability, (Zulu not understood by English speakers) and expectations for the performance depending on the conventions of the genre or other semiotic codes. The social and ideological implications of the text of *GU* serve as a commentary on South African society through comic realism, but the culture and ideology make the text intelligible for the viewers. The use of class, gender, ethnicity and nationalism gives access to the discourses in the text, which the audience can enjoy or they can be repulsed by these. To understand why the programme appeals, it is necessary to investigate what activates the text in specific ways and why it is popular. Cultural history allows researchers to ask how popular texts participate in larger ideologies and it is their popularity that makes them significant (Bennett&Woollacott,1987). In *GU* all three elements necessary for popular appeal in a visual production are present - performance, comedy and spectacle, and the comedy and spectacle open a space for contradictions.

Michaels (1990:16) contends it may be best to say the *perceived text* is a story individuals tell themselves about a story they saw. In fact, there may be a proliferation of idiosyncratic readings wherein people negotiate and revise the meanings assigned by the production team.

Intentionality of the production team

The organisation of the SABC, financial constraints, existing conventions in the use of the sitcom as a genre all have a definite effect on the ideologies of the production team. Using comic realism, the production team attempts to apprehend South African identities through portrayal of characters involved in addressing social and cultural issues in *Going Up III*. The concept behind the *GU* series was to reach a white viewership because whites could not understand Zulu so they would have to use subtitles. It was decided to use mostly English, as 60% of viewers could

understand English. Mafela himself speaks fifteen languages. He said the concept of *GU* was to locate the production historically in the 1950s and introduce elements of the 1980s and 1990s with current situations. Richard Benyon maintained he never visualises a particular audience but he assumes he is a member of an audience and he has to surprise himself. While the cast and the writing workshop respond to the narrative as an audience would, he contended that he writes for himself, or rather, for the child in him, not consciously restricting his vocabulary but modelling it for that child:

Richard: *In a way I think that comedy is a cyclical idea. You almost always get back to where you started. There's no role development in comedy. I don't think in characters, what makes them durable and interesting is, are these characters kicking against forces they're not aware of? They go through, they inevitably end up where they start in a tragic way. I mean that is the tragedy of comedy. Improbability is not part of the comic world and I think that inspires compassion in me. Comic characters are all trapped in that kind of karma (interview, 1996, Appendix C).*

In the creation of the episodes being examined, the production team articulates certain elements of South African society in a way that represent a set of meanings (Hall, 1990:9). In the discourse of the three series of *GU*, the production team's ideological statements have changed from initially only wanting to create "a vehicle for a multicultural/multilingual 'melting pot'" (Roberta Durrant, personal interview April, 1995 re *GU I & II*), to the current *GU III* where Richard Benyon indicated he attempts "to make people speak and respond to events the way they occur in South Africa" (personal interview, September 1996, Appendix C). In addition the ideologies of the team construct characters with identifications so that they speak the 'ideological truths' of their creators (Hall, 1990:9). In Stuart Hall's terminology (1980a:134) media 'language' can present a perspective of society but is a system of signs so that television programmes are shaped in texts through symbolic encoding and the view of cultural power and social relations is part of the encoding process by the production team. Roberta Durrant wanted to produce a series representing a microcosm of the whole of South African society, where the series would be a "vehicle or melting pot, reminiscent of what it was like in the days of prohibition when blacks were not allowed to be served liquor, bringing together the music of the 1950s and 1960s and representing the entire colonial/ apartheid era."

Only after extensive testing with focus groups from different ethnicities plus the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990, did the SABC air the multiracial, multilingual series on CV IV, the channel traditionally watched by black viewers. The success of the series led to advertising sponsorship, glowing press reviews and eventually further series.

Durrant suggests that, even though Jabu is portrayed in a slightly servile capacity in the series, he carries no baggage of apartheid but he understands “how to play the game and change identity when required” (personal interview April, 1995, Appendix B). Louise Bourgault (1996a:69) explains how the trickster/entertainer and moral tales are beloved in African folk tales. Jabu, also scurries between modernity and traditionalism, imposing a moral code which instructs, explains, advocates and reinforces values, as well entertains thereby indicating a pathway to avert the clash between tradition and modernity (Bourgault, 1996a:69). Here industry and ideology were coterminous so ‘Mafela’ is pegged both into the trickster character beloved in African oral tradition and the comic black figure performing as clown (Hall, 1990:15). The new Mafela is now ‘Jabulani Cebekulu’, re-articulated for a different audience, which is white as well as black.

Factors relevant in reception study response

Although there was disagreement among the Zulu women concerning the advisability of allowing legalization of the *shebeen*, the production team’s intention was to use the concept of a *shebeen* as a symbol of earlier times, as Mafela articulated:

I think we are actually trying to say this is what Jo'burg was like (in the 50s), and then we actually do bring out a little bit of the 80s and 90s and today's life. Just that characters and the style in the shebeen. The guys are like wayback.

This interview with Mafela illustrates how production concepts can be misinterpreted by the audience. In Michaels’ teleported text, the *social* text evolves from the original concept, with a certain weeding out or cross-checking of interpretation, moving from variability to commonality. In social discourse it is necessary for an efficient information exchange to occur, so individuals need to have shared certain rules of discourse, namely to understand each other. Michaels believes differences in interpretation may be due to social and class structures; people from different backgrounds who work and socialize together would interpret similarly a television

programme or a film. The question that arises out of this concept is whether **associations** cause individuals to share meanings or to have the same semiotic resources.

Class as a factor in reception

However, Ien Ang (1996:117) contends it is a form of social determinism when class is said to play a role in how respondents make sense of the text; she suggests there are problems in essentializing class, where a simple opposition is constructed between class and cultural formations as inconsistencies and variances in informant's accounts indicate the individual is not inevitably trapped within the cultural limits of a particular class. Michaels poses the question whether television bring its viewers together, pulls them apart or maintains existing boundaries. He demonstrates how American television's rhetorical stance is so complex that intended meanings tend to be arbitrary, referencing the sitcom *All in the Family*, (Chapter Seven). In comedy the 'fissure' or 'gap' in the signifier can be taken up and seen as comedy by all members of a group providing they have the prior knowledge to fill in that gap. Michaels suggests class or social stratifications as possible catalysts for mutual sharing of the meaning. But sometimes linguistic parity is missing among viewers so that these difficulties with a second language can prevent comprehension. However, when the narrative explicates the circumstances, the viewer, even if they are second language English speakers, will laugh at the incongruity of the juxtapositioning of an event (Chapter Six for Zulu women's reaction, Appendix E).

Economic constraints

Television needs to sell audiences **and** programmes to advertisers, but **economic** constraints can occur. Since both audiences and programmes are required, the attention of an audience is value laden and ratings become a measurement for assessing the popularity of a programme based on the number of viewers watching. However, ratings based on sampling, surveying and statistical correlation of viewing patterns of some viewers are seen to be unreliable (Meehan, 1990). The *public* text Michaels says is the message of the producer, who recognises certain elements in society and presents in the form of a *public* text for discussion. Durrant contends that *GU III* transcends a time period because the themes are perennial:

Funnily enough, both S'gudi S'naysi and Going Up are not time bound. It's a recipe. We could do S'gudi S'naysi now. It would be equally popular because it's about

characters and their interrelationships that transcend periods of time. They don't have to be locked into any specific period. The current series of Going Up [GU III] is fabulous because we've been able to look at all sorts of current themes, social climbing, the gravy train, the labour movement, the homeless, pornography, taxi violence, hijacking. I'm just mentioning a couple of themes that we've centred our episodes around. We've been able to do that very successfully. We have had a wonderful reception from the press this time when we've shown the various episodes. We have an episode for example called "The Case of the Historically Advantaged Pale Males", who can't understand why they're not getting any government contracts or anything. We've got interracial marriages. It just goes to show that if you've got the right characters in the right situation, the right basis, the right recipe for a sitcom, it's not locked into any period of time. It really isn't. You can take that and put it into any period. It's just these same characters, they were operating in 1990 and now they're operating in 1996. And South Africa's moved on and there are different things happening now (interview 1996, Appendix C).

All the current themes Durrant mentions are sources of friction in the society. This friction has accompanied the transition from the hegemony of white Afrikaners to one of the black ANC, whom many whites, Indians and 'Coloureds' see as corrupt. The perennial aspect of this *public* text could change. But hegemony is unlikely ever to be complete, and Michaels (1990:21) pronounces "people's reading of media is based as much on their lived experience, historical circumstances and cultural perspectives". Also the *perceived* texts represent the language and culture of the producers, and when perceived by Zulu viewers in KwaZulu Natal these viewers offer discrepant readings. The concept of a *public* text introduces the notion of a public sphere, where the platform of a television programme is being used to negotiate the merits of issues placed before a South African viewing public. Television is a complex system of representation through which individuals experience their world so it relates to points of view in various ways. Programmes reveal existing (dominant) ideologies by reproducing (consciously/unconsciously) myths, values and beliefs of the society.

Current issues in South African society raised by *Going Up III*

In the *GU III* episodes presented for the focus groups' discussion, most of the issues were concerned with the changes being made in the democratic society, including current reverse discrimination against Afrikaner businesses where affirmative action had reversed the power roles of the races. In addition, the Constitution has now legalised the rights of homosexuals in South African society, and since heterosexuality is still regarded as normative, the producers parody

stereotypical homosexual behaviour, perhaps to state their own ideological position on the matter. Again the narrative lampoons South African society's obsessive behaviour about pornographic videos, illustrating the effects of the new law since the introduction of freedom of expression in the Constitution. Additional subtexts regarding women's role in society are also apparent, but the primary focus in terms of the mandate from the SABC, is to depict a unified nation - 'nationhood' as a goal for reconciliation of all races. Television thus creates its own ideology by reinforcing, creating or contradicting specific ideologies.

Folk musical comedy in an 'imagined community'

In the post-apartheid period after 1990, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) has been given the task of contributing to the development of a national identity and culture (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1994). Thus within the narrative of *GU* the 'imagined community' with its image of 'we' and 'us' is symbolised by the *shebeen* where people of different cultures mix (Van den Bulck & Van Poecke, 1996: 164). In this 'imagined community' of the shebeen patrons are encouraged to partake of excess consumption of alcohol, but this is not seen by Mafela as a negative influence in the society (personal interview, April 1995, Appendix B). The *Shebeen* Queen refuses service to a customer when she feels he has had too much to drink, and she might even request a fellow customer to escort an inebriated customer home. Mafela never mentions prostitution in the *shebeens* but affirms they now have regular liquor licences and operate until 04h00 to accommodate men who work shifts. Roberta Durrant's vision of the *shebeen* was to use it as a colourful space reminiscent of the old Sophiatown with prohibition and the "township jive" of the 1950s.

The concept behind a folk musical comedy is to satisfy the viewer's desire to escape from a humdrum existence with excerpts of music, dance and song. This genre involves the spectator in a work of art creating 'a utopian world' by projecting the viewer into a mythicised world of the past. *GU III*'s music segments colour the world with the transforming powers of memory, less stable than art or dreams, suspending the viewers in an intermediary space of South African tradition and folklore (Altman, 1987: 273). Roberta Durrant had said she wanted to create a space reminiscent of the 1940s and 1950s and the *shebeen* located on the top of a downtown building

becomes the meeting place for friends, both black and white. The family grouping of the folk musical is replaced by a substitute family of friends and here Squeeza, the mother figure (played by Abigail Kubeka) watches over the clients, entertains them and feeds both their soul and their body with song and alcohol as Mafela explains:

***Mafela:** The role of the Shebeen Queen is that guys will always come back from work either depressed or excited. And the Shebeen Queen really knows exactly what you feel when she sees you coming in and then she says, "I will play you some lovely music" and then she will change your mood. You then go home without bad feelings from work.*

***Researcher:** Do you think we still have those places?*

***Mafela:** Yes! now they've got licences and they serve everything just like a tavern, like a bar. Their hours are quite loose, they close maybe at about 4 am. Shebeens accommodate guys who work shifts (interview Mafela 1995).*

In keeping with the concept that musical elements are borrowed from the past, this element borrows from the present as it represents aspects of the South African scene as transformed by the popular arts. The set construction and costuming aspire to a remembered reality characterised by a conventionalized realism of the past (Altman, 1987:328). There is the notion of an 'imagined community' and the relationship between the semantic and the syntactic negotiates between the television programme and its audience. Musicals are dual focus narratives, where instead of focusing all interest on a single central character, they build around parallel stars and radically divergent values. In Altman's terminology (1987:328) the folk musical builds meaning around the confrontation of two different worlds and symbolically projects a sphere of action where the merging of whites and blacks consecrates the new South Africa. The audience can recognize and enjoy the material provided by the production team, which is familiar appealing to a mass audience. This familiarity unifies the audience itself whom it defines in terms of a shared musical past.

In the episode **HAPMS** the use of rap as well as 1940s and 1950s *township jive* in other episodes serve as popular memory and remind the audience of times past, which they are invited to recognise as their own. The audience is not meant to have time to think of **separate** national backgrounds, radically divergent class interests or class-defined or race defined needs. Rather the

attempt is to unify nationalities, traditions and classes by appealing to a common denominator.⁴ In using this musical 'identification' the viewers can recognise parts of their bodies, (through the gyrating movements of the dancers), their lives and their psyche. This leads to an identification with the traditions of representational forms and the subsequent sense of a community identification. By sharing this performance, the viewers see themselves represented on the screen but then see themselves reflected in each other, stripped of qualitative differences, as they laugh together. The creation of Squeeza's *shebeen* implies the refraction of the events that occur there "into a specific imagined world of vernacular readers; and also illustrates how important to that imagined community is an idea of steady, solid simultaneity through time" (Anderson, 1983:63). Durrant's invention of this nostalgic 'space' in time and place depicts a kind of 'official nationalism', a strategy used by previously dominant groups when threatened by marginalization or exclusion from an emerging nationally-imagined community (Anderson, 1983:101).

As the process of establishing a firm and stable audience is built on certain shared factors of generality (like music) to permit broad assimilation, there is a process of accommodation between nostalgic ritual and the producer's ideological goals. The relation between the audience and the genre is a symbiotic one. The viewers will support the programme by viewing SABC television regularly as long as a supply of programmes of the desired type is aired. A popular genre guarantees the coherence and continuance of the audience. The structures of the genre do not replace the audience, but they define a mass audience whose community identity is constituted by their enjoyment of these structures of music and comedy (Altman, 1987:19). The music used provides a popular rhythmical and familiar tune stimulating viewers to tap their feet and sing along. As an audience, they develop a sense of family, feeling connected to that 'second audience' participating in the *shebeen* scene: the audience for television then project themselves into the space presented by the sitcom's world.

The repetitive elements of the folk musical draw in the viewer, surrounded by nostalgic music from the culture's early days. Symbolic social equilibrium in the participation/identification of watching the show exhorts this television audience through representation to join in

⁴ Musical history in South Africa cannot be interpreted from abstract social relations because popular black performance at the turn of the century had structured social relations working against an analysis that only looks at class (Erlmann, 1991:94).

(Altman, 1987:335). The cultural symbolism of black and white people interacting with the music, dance and alcohol hints at happy 'nationalism' with singing and dance, creating a festival. This helps sustain the myth of an 'imaginary community' predictable in its style, where one can be reaffirmed hearing old stories, participating in old events. There is a strange sentiment in the setting, yearning for that distant time when part of South African history was tied into prohibition of alcohol for blacks, which in turn gave rise to the *shebeen*. This draws the audience to that mythical moment when the past was more complete, more rewarding. Altman suggests (1987:344) symbolic spectatorship occurs if the programme engages the audience in a symbolic way transferring the locus of meaningful structures from the text back to the spectator. Then the metaphoric becomes the structure of society and the text, with its popular music, should keep the audience's attention "as it fills the need for instant gratification" (Altman, 1987:347).

Music and dancing in *Going Up III* - a musical identity

Abigail Kubeka explained how her musical talent enabled her to sing all over the world starting with the female group "Skylarks" in the 1960s (personal interview, April 1995, Appendix B). At that time she said South African blacks were not allowed to sing in clubs in the same cast with whites, but the owners of clubs kept a lookout for the police and when they arrived the black singers suddenly started washing dishes in the kitchen.

The scenes in the *shebeen* reflect a tension between reality and fantasy, between class and race structures in South African society, when the fantasy exaggerates the escape from the boundaries of race and time. There is an awareness that the workers, including Jabu, must return to their jobs or move on to their homes. In the **HAPMS** episode the ambivalence is structured through Piet's experimentation with his new persona - Mr. Snowman - and the anti *toyi-toyi* political message. Jabu's fedora signifies the persona of the '*pantsula*' gangster of the 1940s, based on the American gangster B movies. Jabu's companions wear leather caps and leather jackets, adding to the reflective quality of the *mise-en-scène*. The signification of the dancers' performance points to themes of class, race and sexual relationships and the social tension arising from these. Squeeza's sinuous body movements and the loose hipped body movements of the dancers hearken back to the jazz brothels of New Orleans.

Genres of American popular music derived from African-American styles were imported into South Africa before 1948, influencing the music of local blacks (Coplan, 1985: 134). Coplan explains (1985: 43) that this musical interaction between blacks of America and South Africa helped “foster a racial self-respect that became the basis for a non-violent struggle against a society determined to crush African aspirations” and became the music of resistance. The cross fertilization of “Afro-American music brought to South Africa before 1948 included gospel songs, ragtime, spirituals, early syncopated dance music, early jazz and swing” (Hamm, 1988: 5). Performing artists were thus able to give the struggle against apartheid a tremendous cultural vitality which expressed the voice of the community. Black American performing styles appealed to urban black South Africans, because both groups lived in a white dominated society and both had selected diverse materials to express their aspirations in a world of insecurity and change.

Popular music in *GU III*, is part of the encoding by the production team to create a sense of nostalgia and a lighthearted fun atmosphere (Mafela interview, April 1995). However Klein Piet’s rap song in “**The Case of the Historically Advantaged Pale Males**” (*HAPMS*) episode conveys the production team’s perception of comedy of the absurd, when Piet Gouws changes his name to “Mr. Snowman” to promote his singing career. Songs in musical revues and variety shows use wit and jokes, which imply a control of language for the sake of humour (Neale & Krutnik, 1990: 48). The text of the song plays with the meaning of ‘*toyi-toying*’ and lampoons the political process following the format and rhythm of a typical rap song, moralising about changing identities. Frith contends: that “identity is mobile, a process not a thing and ... music making and music listening is best understood as an experience of this *self-in-process* [Frith’s italics] (Frith, 1996: 109).

Kubeka explained about the *kwela* and *township jazz* that was played in the *shebeen*:

Researcher: *Tell me something about the Kwela music and the township jazz. What’s your style?*

Kubeka: *That’s my style but blacks have always been influenced by America [jazz]. Even the African songs that we use to sing has a jazz feel, a jazz beat. Being an African, I sang it in Zulu but it was a jazz number. That’s how it’s always been. And then we had the raw traditional music. That’s now from the mountains, from Zululand, Venda or Lesotho. The township jazz was jazz in Zulu. Miriam Makeba and the Skylarks (interview, 1995).*

It has been suggested that dance on television can 'manage' the tensions in the social structure (Fiske & Hartley, 1978:128) and in the dancing in *GU III*, the latter appears to simulate real life as a ritual based on normal and social behaviour and socio-cultural influences, in other words ritualized social coherence. The signs television provides reassure the audience as members of the culture that other members share their way of seeing and encoding the reality that contributes to their social identity. In the *shebeen* scenes the 'audience' consists of ordinary whites and blacks ignoring racial and class differences, so that class mobility is depicted as a performance. Then the television audience can reconcile the paradox of South African culture - the maintenance of harmony between people of different races, but retention of the heterogeneity of race. Squeeza and the dancers use a form of behavioural irony, adapting traditional African dances to the musical beat of popular jazz or, in the **HAPMS** episode, to rap. Piet Gouws's song, as 'Mr Snowman' uses a rap format to lampoon the political message on *toyi-toying*. The codes are artificial and the television audience knows the dancers are ordinary people, but Squeeza's dress sparkles and scintillates bringing a certain fake opulence to assert the fantasy of being not what she really is. There is a double consciousness played here because Abigail Kubeka is a renowned international singer but in the diegesis of *GU III* she is only a '*Shebeen Queen*'. These dances are choreographed from traditional dances performed in African society, but now they are perfectly rehearsed and synchronised to emphasise a social unity and coherence (citing Lange, Fiske & Hartley, 1978:131).

Sociohistoric context of the *Shebeen*

The rise of the *shebeen* in the cities can be traced to the mining revolution at the turn of the century and the subsequent industrialisation, which meant women were drawn into proletarianisation and urbanisation (Walker, 1990:18). Both the indigenous ruling class and the colonisers had agreed for different reasons to restrict the mobility and autonomy of African women. But the migrant labour system, which sought to draw off able-bodied African men to work in industry in the cities, impoverished the rural homestead as a productive social and economic unit. Numbers of African women moved out of the rural areas in defiance of law and custom, as African marriage became less stable as an institution (Bonner, 1990). In the new proletarian culture, many of these female migrants illicitly brewed beer, which gave them an

income to survive, achieving an independence in relation to African men and the state. The locale was called a *shebeen* or speakeasy and the *shebeen* Queens' initiative and self reliance, combined with a sense of communality acquired from their role in the homestead, fostered an adaption to this life style. A divergence occurred between the norms of 'respectable' churchgoing women and these 'unrespectable' African women with class differentiation becoming a factor, which is reflected in the mixed response about the *shebeen* from those Zulu women attending the focus group discussion (Chapter Six, Appendix E).

There had also been an ambivalence from African men in response to the beer-brewers: the men were patrons of the *shebeen* as well as rejected patriarchs because the women were financially independent '*shebeen/skokiaan* queens'. Many of the women were promiscuous and the *famo* dance described by David Coplan expresses this:

the famo was almost defiantly suggestive. Women made shaking and thrusting movements with their shoulders, hips and bosoms, while lifting their flared skirts. The dancers wore no underwear but instead had 'painted rings around the whole area of their sex, a ring they called "stoplight"' ... Men dancing alongside or seated against the walls chose the women they wanted and took them into the back for intercourse (Coplan, 1985:98).

Kubeka admits prostitution might have been a problem in the past but recently the *shebeen* owners have been able to obtain a license to sell alcohol and achieve respectability (personal interview, April 1995).

Kubeka: *So in this production there is a shebeen and the shebeen is being run by a queen. The lady that runs, the owner of the shebeen is called a 'Shebeen Queen.'*

Researcher: *And her status in the community is what?*

Kubeka: *Just a business women.*

Researcher: *There's no overtures of prostitution?*

Kubeka: *There is yes until one proves herself "no this is strictly business". But some of them, that goes together with the business, especially the way there's a group of men. Where there's a group of men it automatically, I don't know whether it's naturally. But in this production we don't have that.*

Researcher: *No that would cause problem in any event to produce for prime time family viewing, that would not be acceptable.*

Kubeka: *Just like a social club where people Jabu and his friend use to meet and plan their day to day activities over a drink and have fun and that's all (interview, 1995).*

She stresses this respectability, maintaining that the *shebeen* in the show is a business without prostitution, portrayed as a social club or community, where Jabu and his friends meet to discuss the days' events and have fun.

The folk music genre offers a dualistic approach, presenting opposing cultural values to counter cultural drives. The music of the *shebeen* has been associated with **black** faces - now a **white** man sings rap - a **black** man's milieu - so the stereotype is overturned. During apartheid **blacks** were not part of '**us**' so now '**they**' are with '**us**' - and **whites** are being arrested. A new kind of equality exists, where race does not marginalize anyone from being arrested or singing rap, which would signify political resistance and an anti-establishment stance. In the musical approach to meaning, the key technique is repetition, where configurations are repeated, changing the context only to create the pattern within which meaning will be transcribed. Thus the folk musical uses the same material whose effect depends on this repetition, intratextually and intertextually. Piet changes his name and the Afrikaners change their name; when the episode opens Piet starts singing and then he sings the same song when the policeman comes to arrest him.

In the search for autonomy and a sense of collective humanity (as the selection of a particular style of a performance becomes an index of meaning) urban performing arts represent the creation of a culture established between audience and performer, as people manipulate symbols to define who they are, or who they wish to be. The history of the black performing arts among South Africans shows how cultural expression is shaped by social process, and the network of intercommunication between cultural products and producers, reflects social distinctions among urban residents (Coplan, 1985:232). Durrant maintained she wanted to create this community in a timeless zone of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s where the music would provide the ambience to show how integration can work in the society. The context for her idea is relevant to the period of apartheid as African artistic performances had been essential to the pursuit of black cultural autonomy. The performances provided images - connections for reshaping and reordering cultural categories that underlay the communities. In South Africa today these artistic performances are still embodiments of values and qualities that black South Africans identify with themselves; they learn new modes of behaviour through them, bringing order out of the chaos of diverse and

conflicting images in their new environment. Connections between all groups - white, black, Coloured and Indian groups - can be forged through performance as “[T]he role of the performing arts ... is primarily ideological ... bringing about change as part of the process of urban adaptation ... but to be truly effective it needs the material power of control at other levels” (Coplan, 1985:166).

Production team’s goals: the ‘Pleasure of the audience’

Durrant’s ‘imagined community’ introduces the uses and gratifications theory and functionalist approach, which contend that light entertainment programmes satisfy people’s needs for diversion, reducing tension and a fantasy to escape (O’Sullivan, T., Hartley, J., Saunders, D. & Fiske, J., 1983:245). Semiotics asks from what does entertainment divert the audience towards what and why? The main objection to the uses and gratifications approach is that it has no theoretical basis as it does not explain anything. DeFleur and Dennis (1994:566) suggest that with effects theories only weak effects were revealed but the uses and gratifications theories showed that media audiences are active in selecting media content for personal uses and gratifications (DeFleur & Dennis, 1994:567). David Morley (1992:85) argues that the concern is how a programme establishes a relationship with its audience and what ‘appropriate’ forms of identification would be with that audience.

Conclusion

Popular fiction observes the process of hegemony by establishing and shifting identities. It also relates us to ideologies with our consent. So when hegemony is in disarray a generic change in popular fiction stabilizes identities and gives space to dismantle outmoded ideologies (Bennett & Woollacott, 1987). In this way popular fiction carries the seeds of a new hegemony to provide a consensus. Since hegemony can never be locked in, and the role of ideology in winning the consent of the dominated classes may be even more significant, popular fiction then becomes a catalyst not a reflection, so control or access is very important. Popular fiction can thus stitch the audience back into the process of hegemony by providing the audience with an optimistic view and in its examination of areas of concern in South Africa this is precisely what *GU III* achieves.

In South Africa 'stitching' dominated classes back into an ideology which can win their consent has been complicated further with the sudden enfranchisement of more than 35 million people, and the introduction of a totally new system of democracy with the demise of apartheid.

In the analysis of assigning humour as a function in the process of transformation and reconciliation, the question arises whether humour is subversive or conservative? In social realist comedy such as *GU*, the audience sees the breaking of established social codes. But, because in comic realism, meanings are assigned by the production team to features of the external world without penetrating the seamless world of ideology, this humour is conservative; the codes are placed to *conserve* the social order. The signifiers are not capable of producing a specified effect regardless of the context of what is said, because the context of what is said is sociologically structured. Hegemony, where ideology is seen as the site of struggle, means any individual item would be determined by reference to the role it plays in the class struggle at any given point in time and place. The assigning of meaning can change at any time according to the place and time created, purpose for which it was used or the identity of the participants. "Humour is ambivalent, it involves no commitment and its meanings change according to the circumstances of its utterance" (Palmer, 1987:224). Finally, the most significant transformation occurs in the *production* of the series where a mixed black and white production team create a sitcom for heterogeneous South African audiences, providing their individual Eurocentric or Afrocentric perspective.

CHAPTER V

Towards Mediation and Accommodation: Discursive representation of 'audience activity' (Ang, 1989)

Case study of *Suburban Bliss*

Introduction

In the creation of a programme for television the producer focuses on materials appropriate to the audience's needs, which are located in the cultural mould underpinning the society (Yaple & Korzenny, 1989:308). These needs rise in response to the need for balance and hegemony which is described as:

a set of meanings and values which are experienced as practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of the world ... which as they are experienced as practices become reciprocally confirming (Williams, 1980:38).

Hegemony describes how the domination of one class over others is achieved by a combination of political and ideological means and how the role of ideology in winning the consent of dominated classes may be even more significant (Gramsci, 1973). The ideological impact on the construction of the television message and the way the programmes mediate the producer/audience relationship make an important contribution to the hegemonic process, which is unlikely ever to be complete (Yaple & Korzenny, 1989:308). The balance between coercion and consent varies in different societies. In cross-cultural reception studies the interpretation of the text can be very different in the decoding from that originally intended by the producer or encoder when creating the programme. In the situation comedy *Suburban Bliss* (SB) the intentionality of the production team according to Carl Fischer, producer of SB had been to:

build an audience. So those were the criteria. Politically - we wanted 100 episodes to design something to attract blacks and the political imperative was to get people watching CCV [later TV2]. Thus to design to attract black viewers as well, so Gray [Hofmeyr] and I designed with calculation and deliberate decision to go sitcom (Fischer, interview September 1996 Appendix A)

As a result of the 'political imperative' the intentionality of the production team, using humour as a catalyst, addresses sensitive social and cultural issues in *SB*. The episodes selected portray conflicts about relationships in the private sphere of the home and in the governance of the neighbourhood - that gray area between the home and the public sphere of local government.

Symbolic encoding and the view of cultural power and social relations are part of the encoding process in shaping television programmes (Hall, 1980a: 134). In producing meaning the focus groups frequently disagreed with the meaning encoded by the production team and would decode a sign completely differently from that intended by the production team - an oppositional decoding (Morley, 1980). The ideological sign is a material segment of reality, as the sign, and the effects it produces, happen in outer experience but the understanding of that sign involves an act of reference between the sign understood and other signs already known. A policeman shouting "Quiet" may signify little to a white woman who has never been accused of contravening the law but for a person of colour who has had to acquire skills to circumvent trouble with the law, a blue uniform shouting "Quiet" promotes a chain of activity in understanding. The woman then moves from sign to sign merging in interaction between one individual consciousness and another, until the ideological becomes the way she will communicate her fear of the apartheid system or express relief by laughing as she realises it is a representation of a policeman in a television text (Vološinov, 1973: 147). Fischer had stated *SB*'s goal was *to attract black viewers* and the three Zulu groups' responses reflected their *interaction* with the production team's representations of characters and situations. The non-black focus groups' responses represent their *reaction* to these representations, which signified the changing structures of the society and the role of ideology in attempting to win the consent of those now dominated by a new government.

The conflicts in *SB* concern domestic labour relations, familial and ethnic relationships but all illustrate the wielding of power in society and the struggle over power in the private sphere. Bigotry and expressions of hostility punctuate the dialogue between black and white characters, who hurl biting satirical racial epithets. According to Norman Lear, producer of *All in the Family* to which *SB* owes Billy Dwyer and Hempies Van Rensburg, "humour can be a remarkably effective weapon against prejudice (Adler, 1979: 123). The concept of a civil society is a contested one but "civil society is an absolutely essential space of uncoerced human association and also the

set of relational networks - formed for the sake of the family, faith, interest and ideology - that fill this space" (citing Walzer, Dahlgren, 1995:6). Civil society serves as a buffer against politics, economic production, the market and nationalism as civil society is where people can enjoy friendly companionship rather than being organized for a common purpose. The paradox exists where in civil society citizens cannot be completely apolitical but must be *beyond* politics to bolster their companionship. However, when citizens socialize it helps to sustain a democracy because the boundary between the political and sociocultural is a fluid and permeable one (Dahlgren, 1995:6).

Reception research tells much about what takes place in the audience's sociocultural reaction to what is perceived on the television screen. Television as a public sphere needs 'publics' in the sense of intermediaries, and reception research can be applied beneficially to society's everyday life so as to examine the viewers as citizens (Dahlgren: 1995:120). By using the genre of situation comedy to attract black audiences, Fischer and Hofmeyr were actually inviting black viewers to share in the joke of poking fun at South African civil society. "A joke must be both perceived as a joke and *permitted* [my italics] as a joke" (citing Douglas, Palmer, 1987:21). In *SB*, people of colour and blacks in particular, are being given permission to laugh at the structures of the society as a result of apartheid as well as the new structures that are replacing them. Since the political context has changed since the 1994 election, black South Africans are being included as equals to laugh at or question all representations of civil society. They are free to interpret the excessive stereotyping of racial, class and sexual differences. This interpretative function indicates the way the sitcom genre operates - being a site of negotiation of cultural change and difference. Genres rely on convention to render the implausible credible, but since conventions change, this leads to new ways and standards of credibility (Palmer, 1987:74). Since all forms of the comic are semiotic and involve expectation and logic with different meanings and signs, the meanings generated may indicate that expectations of dignity and power are actually contradicted (Palmer, 1987). Humour is ambivalent and its meaning changes according to the circumstances of its utterances, so, if the ideology underlying the content is then conceived as the site of struggle (applying Gramsci's theory of hegemony) then the meaning of any individual practice would be determined:

by reference to the role it plays in that class struggle at any given point in time and place ... to the purpose for which it was used and to the identity of the participants involved in its consumption (Palmer, 1987:223).

Ambivalence in the interpretation of humour becomes apparent in this chapter where ethnographic discourse analyses the nine randomly selected focus groups' responses after their viewing of three episodes of *SB*. The micro-processes of viewing the *SB* episodes engage with the macro-structures of media and society where the data from the Zulu groups has been organised for discussion into sections which examine the representations of women in society, democratization and class, freedom of speech and social integration. The combined data from the non-black groups follows to demonstrate the way in which these groups address the representations in terms of their own sets of meanings and values, experienced as practices and expectations, which do not necessarily become reciprocally confirming.

Case Study: Humour, genre and decoding by the audience of *SB*

When the focus is on the sender or producer of the message, biographical and historical criticism is undertaken, but now the focus will be on the receiver or focus group where sociological concerns like social class, educational level, ethnicity and race contribute to an understanding of the relationship between the audience and the humour (Berger, 1980:151). Humour establishes incongruous relationships (meaning) with a sudden-ness (timing) that leads to laughter (Berger, 1980:153). When an ideological perspective is given to an event in the narrative, examining the meanings of a television programme can illuminate other aspects of how narratives work, how notions of masculinity and femininity are derived and how the symbol systems encountered make the everyday meaningful (Allen, 1987:4). Because the focus groups came from different cultural backgrounds, sometimes they interpreted the signs with underlying ideological meanings about justice and human relations differently. When responding to the messages in the text they interpreted certain political and economic structures, which form the basis of South African society according to their perception of the relationship between the text and their personal ideological position. Fischer explains his concept of how all audiences could view *SB*:

For the first time, on television, they are seeing characters that they know exist in South Africa, but have never been represented on the screen. They are seeing situations and they are seeing ... both the negative and the positive sides of South African society represented on the screen as they have never seen before, because it's only been recently that white people see blacks as people. Before, on television, black people are generally criminals and servants (Fischer, 1996 interview, Appendix A).

In the text of *SB*, humour is used as a method of negotiating, evaluating and reconstructing past and present history. The sitcom uses a sign system based on the cultural experiences of the South African social formation and the contexts of each episode represent a reaction which mediates the relationship (Chapter Three). Adapting the original decoding model David Morley used in the *Nationwide* research into a framework of genre theory, resulted in a more flexible model of text/audience relations for analysis (Morley, 1992:27). Since the current reception analysis is based on the investigation of the effects of humour on cultural reconciliation, a laughter table was constructed to illustrate the high points of humour indicated by each group. This chart deals with elements of "relevance/irrelevance and comprehension /incomprehension [indicating the] dimensions of decoding" so that it registers when groups understood and/or enjoyed the programme (Morley, 1992:128). The understanding of a genre is governed by a set of rules for the production of meaning "governing the combinations of signs into specific patterns which regulate the production of texts by authors and the reading of texts by audiences" (Morley, 1992:127). Genre films and television series reflect how emerging social relations in imaginary situations conceal the underlying process through symbols, and justify prevailing conditions to affirm the dominant ideas of society (Tomaselli & van Zyl, 1992:396). *SB* is a situation comedy, and since humour involves the basics of communication theory in the act of reception there is also an act of evaluation, manifested through laughter (Palmer, 1994:163). Humour may also fail, if it is found offensive or, if the receiver/viewer does not identify with it, it could be an oppositional reading. These aspects of humour were important factors in evaluating the groups' responses to the sitcom.

Overview of response to the three episodes

All the focus groups watching *SB* focused on some form of power as an issue in their discussions. The black groups debated the circulation of power in family relations - especially between male/female, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, mother and children, and to a lesser extent in

the devolution of power in new institutions now controlled by blacks, but race was not the main issue. The Coloured group to a lesser extent examined the male/female relations of power in their community, and seemingly were more concerned about their location in the new political and economic **order** in South Africa. The Hindu group provided a narrative of the familial relations and obliquely evinced anxiety for the new inverted power structure of race. The Afrikaans group, more than all the other groups, was conscious of the race issue with the devolution of power, but gender and the role of women were barely discussed. The English-speaking white groups responded very differently in that the secure economic base of Janet's group meant that integration between the races was never even an option, although concern about the devolution of power with the enfranchisement of blacks led to concerned remarks about lowered 'standards'. Leigh-Anne's working class English group expressed a surreptitious fear of integration and racist overtones peppered their discourse, with covert male/female power issues, a discernible thread. The discourse that emerged from the English-speaking lesbian group articulated a much more overt concern with class and gender and the power relations emanating from these. Racism was discussed briefly but never became a focused issue.

The measurement of the laughter of the groups was on a scale of one to five, ranging from a couple of people laughing briefly being a 'one' to all the group members laughing heartily being 'five'. The laughter tables (Appendix H) demonstrate both how phrases spoken and/or performances of actors were assessed. In "**Maid from Hell**" there were four occasions on which one-liners, gags and performance reached a **total** high of '12' among the groups but on each occasion this did not necessarily mean all groups evaluated by laughing at the same time. The laughter levels in "**Maid from Hell**" were lower than those of the "**Campaign Trail**" which reached a total high of '17' while "**Comic Relief**" was much higher than either with total laughter levels rising to '21'. Laughter in every group except Eunice's Zulu group resulted from the code "**Hempies says :Chin Chin ma wetu**" [Good luck my friend] to Ma Moloi. The incongruity occurs as the racist Boer sits down to drink with Ma Moloi. The lack of laughter could be ascribed to rejection of this kind of fraternisation among members of the old apartheid guard and traditional blacks. Eunice's group did laugh at the code "**Ma Moloi: In the new South Africa we can hate legally**". Again the code "**Kobie: eighteen hours and stretch marks**" was laughed at by all except the lesbian group, possibly since child-birth was not necessarily part of

lesbian subjectivity. **“Comic Relief”** received the highest laughter ratings since its content appeared overtly to be concerned with changing norms of parental control over children. The subtext does address the freedom of expression issues in the constitution but this was subtly introduced. **“Maid from Hell”** advanced relations of power which had a greater impact on the groups since everyone was sensitive to the power dynamics apparent in the content. The nine groups’ positive or negative response also signified the extent to which the groups comprehended the content. Individual reactions to the questions are described to contextualise how as an audience their interaction with the text served as a micro-process of viewing, representing the macro-processes of viewing by larger population groups in society.

Overview of groups’ laughter responses

“Maid from Hell”

Samples of phrases, situations or performance that engendered laughter:

I. The stolen ashtray

Ma Moloi informs Thando that the maid just interviewed has stolen the ashtray which has been secreted by Ma Moloi into her bag. Four groups did not laugh at all, Eunice and Theodora (Zulu), Janet and Leigh-Ann (English).

II. Blacks pay badly

Dalia’s fabricated story to Thando that Kobie had said Thando paid badly because she was black. The three Zulu groups did not laugh at this.

III. Hempie’s comment re steak being left

Hempies suggests that Kobie is leaving her steak for the maid. Susan (Hindu), Joanne (Coloured), Theodora (Zulu), Janet’s (English) groups did not laugh at all.

IV. Policeman says “tula” or “quiet”

The white policeman at the station shouted “Quiet” to both groups and the three black groups and Joanne’s group found this very amusing, Joanne’s slightly less so and Theodora’s Zulu group at a ‘4’. The white and Hindu groups did not laugh at this at all.

“Campaign Trail”

I. *Ma Moloi: blue people*

Only Elizabeth (Zulu) and Janet’s (English) group did not laugh at this.

II. *Andrew: stop crime-emigrate*

Eunice (Zulu), Elizabeth (Zulu) and Freda’s (Afrikaans) group did not laugh at this

III. *Billy: Bayete nkosi (Hail to the Chief).*

Theodora (Zulu), Leigh-Ann (English working class) and Freda (Afrikaans) did not laugh.

IV. *Performance: Toyi-toyi by Ike and Ma Moloi.*

Elizabeth (Zulu), Janet (English), Freda (Afrikaans) and Leigh’s (lesbian) group did not laugh.

“Comic Relief”

I. *Andrew: Headmaster finds panties*

Leigh-Ann (English) and Freda’s (Afrikaans) groups did not laugh.

II. *Kobie: 18 hours of labour and stretch marks*

All laughed except Leigh’s (lesbian) group.

III. *Cartoon: Hempies and Ma Moloi getting married - the ‘new’ South Africa.*

Only Susan’s (Hindu) group did not laugh.

IV. *Hempies: Chin chin ma wetu - (goodluck my friend).*

All laughed except Eunice’s (Zulu) group.

V. *Ma Moloi: In the new South Africa, we can hate each other legally.*

All except Elizabeth (Zulu) and Susan’s (Hindu) groups laughed.

Representation of women

Since the sitcom “operates as a *site of negotiation* [authors’ italics] of cultural change and difference” the structuring mechanisms (characters like Ma Moloi, representing an ideology of traditional blacks versus the Hempies character, representing apartheid) can then reaffirm norms in the society (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:236). Attempting to persuade the viewer to accept particular cultural systems of decorum as well as conventions that draw on a shared area of experience and cultural identity, implies that, if these conventions are breached, then the perpetrator will be marginalised, forced outside the norm (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:242). In the ‘stolen’ ashtray scene, the gag resides in the act of Ma Moloi accusing the job applicant of stealing

something which she had secreted into the woman's purse. That in itself is deviant but her reasons for so doing underscore the ideological framework - should Thando have a maid? For South African whites there is no deviance in the concept of employing domestic help as they have been exploiting domestic labour for years. The breach lies in a *black* woman being able to do so. For people of colour, for blacks, to employ someone to fulfill that function might be perceived as deviant, since cultural norms could indicate the worth of a woman is linked to the performance of her household duties and that is where the acceptance or rejection by viewers lies.

Domestic workers are among the most exploited group of women in terms of class and race in South Africa and despite the changes in rights for women, through the provisions of the Constitution, these rights are barely perceived by many employers (Cock, 1980:8). Exploitation of domestic workers in South Africa has affected many groups of people including San, Khoikoi, European, Coloured, Indian and African and reflects the changing patterns of racial and sexual domination, where employers set wages and conditions of work frequently disadvantageous to the worker (Cock, 1980: 7). The capitalist system of production and class structure have operated to produce a complex inequality. Domestic service in South Africa has constituted the second largest source of employment for black women (Cock, 1980) and the employment of black workers is a microcosm of racial inequality which continues in South Africa despite the political equality for all people today. The role of the domestic worker was an important factor in socialisation into the dominant ideological order of apartheid. The social reality of impoverished female black workers, who have limited skills and education, leads to an eager horde of workers willing and anxious to find domestic employment, which is aptly demonstrated by the variety of women who arrive to apply for the position of maid with the Dwyers and the Molois.

Responses of Zulu women

The dialectic between women's resistance to and exploration of the new dispensation was apparent in the debate between the traditionalist, Esther, and Nonhlahla, the progressive. Among the group the age of individual women as well as whether or not they were married were important elements in shaping the way women responded to the debate. The older women had status and security invested in the perpetuation of the homestead system through the marriage of their sons. Among Elizabeth's group women were said to be guilty of keeping their sons at home

until the sons were well into their forties. This situation kept adult men in a state of dependency on their mothers so that when they married they expected their wives to care for them in the same dependent manner. In African society, communal responsibilities and kin are stressed over individual rights, but although legal changes introduced by the colonial administration at the turn of the century were intended to give women greater freedom of action it ended up tearing down the existing norms of the society (Walker, 1990:168). Elizabeth's group debated the bridewealth/*lobola* tradition which had social, political and economic implications for the two families thus united. A third dimension to the situation regarding women's position in society had been the way in which the missionaries had assumed Western culture to be superior and believed in the 'civilising' power of wage labour, which eventually led to a capitalist system (Meintjies, 1990:127).

Among the three Zulu groups interviewed, the reaction to Ma Moloi's 'Aha' when she accuses the maid of stealing the ashtray indicated that the audience were made up of individuals from complicated patterns of sub-groups and sub-cultures within which those individuals are situated (Morley, 1992). In evaluating why Eunice and Theodora's groups did not laugh at the 'Aha', offering an oppositional reading, the following commentaries portray their interaction:

Eunice's group:

Lindiwe: Mgoba ungumakoti yeklana wonke umsebenzi kufamele ureenziwe utena.
[Because she is a bride, all the work **must** be done by her.]

Theodora's group:

Winnie: No. Because she has the ability to make things look clean on her own. Because she is a wife ... ***She*** has the job to take care of her **own** place.

Thembi: ntombezaan. [She is also a young girl.]

Theodora: Because her **job** is to [clean]. Because she's **not working**.

Francisca: She is housewife.

Thandiwe: Because she didn't like to help the mother-in-law. She has long nails always.

Based on this traditional interpretation of the role of the housewife there was no sympathy for Thando when Ma Moloi attempts to undermine Thando's efforts to obtain a maid. Most of Elizabeth's group found the incident very amusing but within their own ranks there was disagreement about the role of a maid in traditional Zulu society and the relationship with a mother-in-law. Thandiwe, a mother and school teacher, felt Thando was not the type to do

housework but, in general terms, when living with a mother-in-law it would be better to provide help as mothers-in-law could slander one if they were dissatisfied with one's performance in their home. Within the group there was disagreement about the relationship between a daughter-in-law, the *makoti*, and a mother-in-law. Esther, the traditionalist, held out for the traditional roles for women rather than for frivolous time spent shopping. Thando, the black wife, was perceived to be very sophisticated, but her stereotype as upwardly mobile wife was critically received by the traditional Zulu women. The cultural implications of a wife neglecting her household duties to spend all her time on her appearance are profound and in their reading the group resisted this concept. Elizabeth's group seemed more affected by the possible impact on traditional Zulu society and the argument arose whether or not to assimilate western customs. Becoming assimilated into western culture was a recurring theme in their response to most of the facilitator's questions. Their responses appeared to comprehend the preferred meaning in the text but resisted its validity as they valued a collective sense of community not the individualism and consumerism, implicit in western values and apparent under the Government of National Unity. Despite social positioning giving them access to the same cultural codes as the western focus groups, these Zulu women assigned negative values to certain aspects of the text as evidence of their resistance to the reading. According to Shawn Moores,(1993:22), two different interpretations sometimes occur at the same time and the stance taken by a group in relation to specific ideological propositions can depend on the framings.

Nonhlanhla: Then she [Thando] thinks she'll turn white, because she has somebody calling her "madam". Yes. This is not accepted in our culture. She didn't have the need to have a maid in the first place. Because she doesn't go to work. Secondly is not right for her to be called a "madam".

Elizabeth: "Madams" refer to whites and browns.

Nonhlanhla: No. They are more or less the same age. She and the maid. So she cannot call her "madam". Rather should call her sisi ... According to age. All according to age.

Maureen: But even before that. Her mother-in-law is aware that she's lazy. She's just lazy. If they are lazy, they have to get a maid.

Nonhlanhla: But does that mean she needs a maid?

Esther: [For] her mother yes ... Because her mother is always teasing her ... being lazy ... So she must get somebody who is going to fulfill the needs of her mother-in-law ... Because if mother-in-law wants tea, she'll just tell the maid to bring tea ... In the old days they used to have slaves, you know. In your house you used to have a poor person. Maybe your neighbour, who would come in and help and you know - ukusinda. Because you used to use the cow dung on the

floor. To have somebody to go to the fields to help ... And when you reap. She will go back after you have been reaping with her. Then she will have to go back again on her own, going to pick up what was left while you were reaping. Then she will take that home. That's why it ... it has always been there ...

Nonhlanhla: They were helpers. They were not maids. They were helpers.

Thandiwe: You didn't have money before [to pay them].

Esther: Yes. They didn't have fields [to work in].

Nonhlanhla: No. She was helping you. Not being your maid. You went to the fields with her. This woman for Thando is the maid ... she works on [for] her in Thando's house - she's a maid.

Esther: I think this issue is critical ...

Nonhlanhla: Is she your maid or helper?

Esther: She was my maid, because I'm paying her.

Nonhlanhla: These are two different situations ...

Esther: If I like I can say she is a maid.

The tension between Nonhlanhla and Esther really symbolises the tension between the new customs emerging and the old mores from a more traditional group. Nonhlanhla is a young widow struggling to support four children as a teacher on less than R19000 per year, and throughout the interview she questions all the traditional Zulu ways of being and seeing. Esther, over fifty, lives next door to Elizabeth, does not go outside the home to work and has domestic help. She and her family live on a very large tract of land heavily planted and her husband has a long-standing position with Bakers Biscuits, an old established corporation in Durban. There is an economic dimension to their argument where their personal social reality intersects with the representation in the narrative and the convergence of traditional Zulu customs and norms.

The responses of the three Zulu groups tended to be a mix of preferred and oppositional readings of their interpretation of the text. Viewers' decodings cannot be reduced to their socioeconomic location which could have limited the codes available. However, the influence of western values where individualism is rewarded as opposed to the community-oriented values and beliefs of African norms and *ubuntu* is more apparent among those whose personal economic situation is more secure (Chapman, 1997:25). Elizabeth's group negotiated their reading when they laughed at Ma Moloi's effort to undermine the maid-hiring process and when they debated among themselves the validity of hiring a maid. The embourgeoisement of Thando was acknowledged but the principle of increased *personal* affluence eroded traditional Zulu norms as women's traditional role was believed to be one of subservience. All groups evinced an ambivalence

towards the changes implied by the new constitution, in that now there seemed to be no definable boundaries for cultural identity, male/female identity, and so hierarchical structures within families or within cultural societies were perceived to be in jeopardy. Eunice and Theodora's groups offered an oppositional reading by not laughing at the maid being accused of stealing, and they rejected completely a changing role for women, whose role they saw as caretaker of the home. They believed in a patriarchal society in which women did not go outside of the home to work and earn money; men earned sufficient money to retain women as caretakers, preserving a distinct division between the sexes and their roles in society.

Egalitarian society with respect for all

Blacks don't pay

Most of Elizabeth's group was working, so they were aware of the practical implications of consumerism. 'Maid hiring' implies the existence of an economic organization defined by private ownership and control of capital, where money pays for the service of a maid. If blacks can't or don't pay adequately for the service, the competitive market framework will regulate their ability to obtain service. Ideologically labour is exchanged for the abstract token of wages or money and capitalism is seen as "the historical rupture between labour and needs" (Lee, 1993:6). Elizabeth's group did not laugh at the gag *blacks don't pay* at all since, from their previous discussion, the issue of what to pay a maid became a moot point, as the expediency of traditional Zulu women employing anyone to assist them was debatable: neither of the other two Zulu groups laughed either.

The question of domestic labour is a sensitive one. In the discussion about nuclear families and women's place in the home, the discussion reverted to that of the male being the traditional wage earner. If men were gainfully employed women would be able to stay home to fulfil their traditional roles. The white settler mores, which had permeated Zulu society had depicted an ideal of restricted female domesticity, where women's roles were seen as nurturing ones; obedience to God, men and authority, piety, thrift and service to others being the goals for which women should strive (Walker, 1990). The groups' perception of roles was hotly debated but there was a sense that women should be shielded from verbal abuse and treated with respect. Ike had

spoken harshly to Thando and this was negatively perceived. Eunice translated for Jabu from Zulu:

She says ... he mustn't fight with her. He mustn't shout at her all the time. Because if he is shouting at her all the time, she's going to be frightened of him. She's going to not respect him now. Because she's frightened of him ... If he wants her to respect him, he must talk to her nicely, he must say "hello my darling, wait a minute, please. I'm still reading the paper". He mustn't say "No I can't! Can't you see I'm reading the paper!"

Jabu is under thirty, matriculated, unmarried with one child and not working, so although her response indicates a trend in expecting women to be treated differently, it also signifies that she relates to the Moloi's world. Television's central ambiguity is that the audience knows the characters are not real yet gain pleasure from them because they *seem to be real* (Jhally & Lewis, 1992:22). Earlier there was discussion about Kobie and the frank way she spoke to Billy, where criticising him was regarded with scorn by Eunice's group:

Evelyn: Bakhona abesifazane aba khuluma noma kanjani emadodeni. *[There are plenty of women that talk anyhow (without due consideration)]*

Researcher: Are they black or are they white?

Evelyn: All black.

Jabu: And white too.

[...]

Evelyn: It's bad because even if it's not a man ... your husband ... but any man, even if it's with us they judge like that. If I talk to you anyhow that's not nice. I must have a manner when talking to you whether you old or young. I must have a certain manner of talking to you.

The consequences of lack of respect for fellow human beings are also evident in African folk tales where the traditional African religious view is linked to earthly affairs. Fellow human beings judge an offender according to norms of social behaviour in African society. "Communal cooperation by *ubuntu*: [our] capacity for sharing, understanding and empathy" means involvement in the community with others, allowing for a sharing of one's humanity (Chapman, 1997:25). Respect for elders and even for children with accompanying appropriate behaviour is highly valued in Zulu society. Theodora's group confirmed that women must show respect for everyone:

Researcher: Kobie - now the white woman, the young white woman ... the way she speaks to her husband? Do you think that's bad or good?

Theodora: Yes, it's good.

Francisca: It's bad.

Theodora: Bad.

Researcher: Oh. Well why is it bad? I mean, if he's being stupid, why shouldn't she tell him?

Francisca: It's bad. She must have respect for him.

Researcher: OK. What do you think then that she's telling ... him when he's being stupid. She's not allowed to tell him? I mean sometimes he behaves like a real fool.

Winnie: It's wrong.

Researcher: It's wrong for her to tell him that?

Theodora: She said her husband is fool even to you. You don't like someone to tell you you are being stupid? It's wrong.

Winnie: She must have respect for him.

Conversely the way Ike speaks to Thando when he forbids her to accept the nomination for president was perceived as treating her like a dog but the younger women felt she had a right to be part of the election. Theodora categorically stated *"It's your right"*.

Esther in Elizabeth's group said she would have voted for Thando because what she had said about racial harmony was progressive or productive. A "change of discourse from the rhetoric of oppression to that of process and exploration" (Ndebele, 1991:71) is occurring in the narrative and whether or not this is seen as contrived and moralistic, as Janet's group perceived it, extending personal and social experience to provide a role model for women to emulate was well received by the Zulu women. The new constitution addresses all women's rights, irrespective of race (South African Bill of Rights, 1996: Page 9). This is a major departure from the norms and codes previously practised in the society and is also intended to encourage fair treatment of all citizens regardless of race. Previously in African society a system of gender relations had existed where the reproductive and productive capacities of women were exploited by men (Guy, 1990:35). However a transition from this occurred with colonialism, when the system was filtered through racially informed class relations. Two dominant forms of patriarchy existed - that of the pre-capitalist Bantu-speaking societies of the region and that of the colonial states established by the European settlers. Although the two systems collided, under the unifying system of colonial capitalism the settler system dominated, but not with an undisputed dominance (Meintjies, 1990:127). As a result of these sociohistoric influences, black women have suffered

a triple oppression in South Africa - gender, race and class (Walker, 1990:168). When Elizabeth's group interacted with Ike trying to dominate Thando, very controversial comments about spouse abuse followed:

Nonhlanhla:...being abused is not culture. It never is. No why ? ... As we say, it is an accepted thing. I don't accept it.

Esther: Let me tell you one thing. At night. You have been working all day. You have been changing the furniture. The whole house. Washing and ironing, trying to put the curtains on, because you can't sleep without curtains on the wall. And you go to bed and your man is already in bed. As soon as you get in bed he .. he starts touching you. And you know that you are so exhausted. You never say no.

Nonhlanhla: Those are the type of thing we should come together and discuss. Why allow yourself to get used to such things - we should stop these things. It's not my favourite thing ...

Maureen: So when you come to refuse him, your ... your husband chases away your parent ... [but what] about **his** parents Huh?

Nonhlanhla: I don't have to live with my in-laws, I didn't marry them. I married my husband. Not them. I don't live with them. I respect them, but I don't expect abuse from them. [Babble]. Why do you say it's an accepted thing to stay with the in-laws?

Maureen: No. It was our culture that we stay with our in-laws. [Babble].

Nonhlanhla: We can't stick to the extended family now. Now in the modern times we got to change.

Elizabeth: Yes.

Nonhlanhla: There should be no resistance to change. Now why ... if you don't change you are frustrating yourself. And the women are the sufferers. We always just [suffer]. [Babble] [...] Because they [women] don't speak up. They will always suffer because they don't speak up.

Elizabeth: Yes.

Nonhlanhla: They say "it's wrong. He's a man".

Fikile: [You cant] do whatever you like to do. They say that man must tell you [what to do].

Nonhlanhla: That is none of their business if I do. That is none of their business.

Fikile: Your husband is supposed to hit you even if you not like to do washing.

The sitcom's perceived realism is a source of pleasure causing this group to identify with the characters and situations and to incorporate these into their own reality (Jhally & Lewis, 1992:29). Subcultural experiences and social location can be sources of differentiation in a group and this is illustrated in the above excerpt where Nonhlanhla recommends to women that they start refusing to be abused, verbally or physically. From a subcultural group, outside the extended

family of most, she shares her concrete social reality so that the group gives a preferred reading to Thando's acceptance of the nomination in defiance of Ike's command not to run for the election. The laughter table 5.1 (Appendix H) reflects how Elizabeth, Eunice and Theodora's groups did not laugh at Dalia's reference to the low pay from black employers of maids, which would imply an oppositional reading. Elizabeth and Eunice's groups laughed at Hempies's caustic suggestion that Kobie was keeping the steak for the maid since steak is expensive and the incongruity of giving the maid this expensive food would be amusing and thus a preferred reading. In addition to this, Hempies' performance always involves name calling and insults, which have long been "a weapon of humour and a traditional part of all comedy [but] ... primarily at the lower end of the social and intellectual scale" (Grote, 1983:102). In comedy, insults are defensive devices not aggressive, and are resorted to by people when they can think of nothing better to use against those who frighten them or deviate from the norm, which Kobie has done by employing a maid (Grote, 1983:102). Theodora's group did not laugh, implying an oppositional reading and since many in that group were not working and might have identified with the maid, this may have triggered their oppositional response. On the other hand, for some in that group Hempies is the symbol of apartheid. All laughed heartily when, at the police station the policeman shouted: "Tula" or "Quiet" as both families were arguing vociferously and slinging invectives at each other. Since none of the white groups laughed, the laughter would be a negotiated reading as the people of colour, who had been mistreated regularly by the police for many petty offences during apartheid, laughed from a sense of nervous release because the situation is not real (Chapter Seven).

Perceptions of race, class and relationships

"Campaign Trail" (Ma Moloi: *'blue people'*; Andrew: *'stop crime- emigrate'*; Billy: *'Bayete Nkosi'*; Performance : *Toyito-yi*).

Despite the recent enfranchisement of thirty-five million black South Africans and the displacement of white voters, some whites are attempting to run for public office. Mr. Limpid, when canvassing for votes to be president of the Neighbourhood Association, awkwardly refers to the Molois in their upward mobility as "you people" and Ma Moloi immediately asks him what colour people did he mean - 'blue people?'. Elizabeth's group gave an oppositional reading by

not laughing, as they felt resentful at Limpid's patronising manner and were not prepared to be amused; Limpid being perceived as typical of most whites:

Nonhlanhla: *They don't want to adjust themselves. They're pretending to adjust themselves.*

[Babble].

Thandiwe: *How about blacks?*

Nonhlanhla: *Whites are all like that man. Ninety nine percent of them are like him. It is only time that is making them change. Now.*

Elizabeth: *Of course it will be gradual.[...] Maybe one of these people who are taking steps, in step by step - gradual change. Not the radical like that old man! Because when ... when we didn't want to be called kaffirs, they said we **are** - plural.*

[Babble].

Nonhlanhla: *[He (Hempies) calls] us names. Just because he didn't want to accept us as people.*

Thandiwe: *The white man is always good when he's going to gain. Just like a white man who is a rep [for school books] when he comes to our school. When they know they are going to gain something.*

Maureen: *Yes.*

Thandiwe: *They are just good as anything.*

Elizabeth: *But I think they are just people. They have got differences, characters. Different characters. Just like anybody.*

[...]

Thembile: *But blacks are worse.*

Esther: *This 'new' South Africa is making people to be so excited. [overreact] You know even if you are walking in the sideway [sidewalk] in the streets. You come across a white man or white woman then you always see some black people just going straight - maybe there is space to go - you know, but you have to share these passages. But you will see a black man always going straight to a white woman - maybe she's carrying a baby - just **bashing** her hair with er ... his shoulder. And sometimes you'll say - like I am very talkative - I'll always say "Mfana wanu Haai!" [My boy! **Hey!**] [He will say in return] "They must know this is the 'new' South Africa. She must move away from me. Can't she see that I'm coming?" You know [it's bad like that] ...*

An analysis of this conversation demonstrates that Esther is still thinking as a traditionalist, feeling concerned about black/white relationships but Nonhlanhla has a different perspective and ruthlessly dissects the motives of the whites in the light of the new enfranchisement. This issue was a potent one as many who had not contributed directly but merely 'babbled' in Zulu among themselves spoke with conviction and distaste, agreeing with Nonhlanhla. Elizabeth, who works

with nuns at the mission hospital as a midwife, sounded the note of moderation urging all to refrain from generalisations.

Eunice's group laughed giving a preferred reading since Ma Moloi's remark was a put-down for Limpid. When asked about their reaction to Limpid they admitted they did not like being addressed as "you people" and they had understood Limpid wanted their votes for councillor but they did not like him. However they expressed a loss of faith and disenchantment with **all** councillors not a white versus black rejection, but disappointment with the political system and its non-delivery of improvement in their daily lives. Enfranchisement had not improved their daily living - all are still without jobs despite the two younger women having been educated. When asked how important 'racial harmony' and 'property values' are for influencing one's voting, Jabu, matriculated without a job, living in a dwelling with twelve people, a child and no husband complained about the election process:

***Jabu:** I was not feeling nice because ... On all my [voting] cards, I don't vote.*

***Researcher:** You don't like the councillors, oh really! Now that's interesting.*

***Jabu:** They are not reliable.*

***Researcher:** They are not reliable. OK. Now when you say they are not reliable, what do you mean, they are not reliable?*

***Lindiwe:** So they ... they not racial, but that's what I know.*

***Jabu:** They just make ... make us vote for them promising us big, big things, right? Frightened us to vote. Everything we haven't got and things we never ever get, to be done, they never do anyway - they don't take notice of us. [we are] Down there, down there. They all are like that.*

***Researcher:** So for you none of these things that they talked about that they are going to fix? You thought it was a lot of rubbish?*

***Jabu:** Not one of them.*

***Researcher:** What did you think?*

Zulu [Babble].

***Eunice:** They going to keep promising them because they want them[us] to vote for them. Once [we] they vote for them ... once you [they] win, they are only going to help their [own] families. Forget about them [us] down there. They are also there because of their [connections]. They put them to be up there.*

Comparing the economic status of the three Zulu groups, Elizabeth's group seemed to be the most financially secure, with fewer persons per household unit, most of the women working in reasonable paying jobs and living with their partners thereby sharing costs (demographic tables Appendix E). This indicates an emerging middle class with basic amenities, who see whites with

much more, causing some women to desire more recognition and power. The emergence of middle class values causes an ambivalence about removing those cultural borders. Eunice's group saw no improvement in their situation and were disillusioned with all politicians. Theodora's group seemed much less aware politically and when asked about their reaction to Thando's election platform announced:

All: *Abaqondi okushiwayo.* [We don't understand]

However, when asked which of the male characters they liked or disliked the measure of the dislike was stated in terms of apartheid. Francisca, twenty-five, standard nine education, no permanent partner, two children, living in a dwelling with twelve people:

I don't like Billy Dwyer, because he's got apartheid. He doesn't like blacks.

Conversely Hempies, depicted as the racist boer, was liked by Victoria, twenty five, standard two, earning under R2000 per year, ten in her dwelling, two children and her partner living with her:

He's a negative-positive-positive-negative

When pressed she explained he had a controlling influence on all the characters, which in certain respects harkens back to pre-1994 when many controls were evident. In Eunice's group Evelyn, a housewife, who is fifty plus with a grade three education, approved of Hempies "because he talks nice, he ... and he's straightforward in talking ... it's the way white people like to talk whether it's wrong or right". In the same group Jabu, twenty-five, said she liked Andrew, "because he's got no apartheid" and was like his mother, Ma Moloi, while Evelyn and Jabu both disliked Ike because they felt he hated people and "he got jealous" especially of his brother Andrew. Eunice also liked Billy's enthusiasm:

Eunice: *I like Billy, because Billy is busy doing everything. He's coming to his wife and say let us do this or that now. OK. He [also] goes to the old man [Hempies] OK Now let us do something, casino or what, what.*

Individuals in each of the Zulu groups interpreted characters differently and their response to different characters seemed to be influenced by the gratification of their own needs. Francisca disliked Billy because she perceived elements of racism, but Evelyn thought he was wonderful because:

Researcher: *Billy's such a keen house cleaner. He's got to clean everything right. How do you feel about a man doing this kind of work ... a man who loves to clean?*

Evelyn: *It's nice. It's nothing ... there is nothing that ... that this is a woman's work and we must share the house. We must share! The husband of the white lady he must do the cooking ... The other day you watched the ads [to see] we must help each other.*

Lindiwe: *Things have changed.*

Researcher: *You think that's a good thing?*

Evelyn: *It's very very good. He must know - he also must know and feel how it is to bear children. If only one, just one mistake problem ... [God] He should have made men to be pregnant. Even if it is dragging, but he must fade ... he must fade ... husband [and wife] to come together [to work] with him come from work.*

Evelyn later complained how tired she was cleaning house and waiting on her husband who did nothing for himself, so Billy and his housekeeping skills would seem like a dream come true and her pleasure here was manifest. Hers would be a preferred reading of Billy's character. The Zulu groups' reading of the stereotypes of the characters tended to resist the preferred meaning and when asked about the black characters they were far more aware of gender inequalities than for example the Afrikaans group. In Elizabeth's group they identified with Ma Moloi thereby giving a preferred reading:

Nonhlanhla: *I like Ma Moloi because she reminds us all of our mothers. That is how they behave. Even if it's not your mother-in-law, our mothers behave like that. So we ... we get used to it. We don't hate them, because they behave like that.*
[Babble].

Among the Zulu groups their readings were tied to perceptions of power, and arguments ensued about the traditional responsibilities of women, which were mooted by some and bewailed by others. Women were regarded as abused homemakers, with excessive responsibilities for housekeeping. The purpose of the Beijing conference had been to advance the cause of women's

rights at a global level by bringing together women from as many different countries as possible. The reaction of these women to certain of the issues promulgated at that conference was significant, as the publicity generated by the conference had made an impact on their subjectivity. Although Thando's running for president was regarded as progressive, there was the perception among some that the Beijing conference had sparked unrealistic expectations for women:

Esther: But there's something very ... cultural about women. Women are going to ... where's that place? - Beijing ... [...] They want freedom. But they don't know what is their freedom really.

Nonhlanhla: We do ... we do.

Esther: We ask them what we want ... Like men, they want to be ... Babble in Zulu.

Nonhlanhla: I don't want to be a man! Just want to be me. Not ... [Babble].

Esther: Yes. They want to go. They're not as strong ...

Nonhlanhla: Who said men are strong? Who said men are strong?

Esther: They [women] are always folding or fussing about this freedom. [Babble].

Nonhlanhla: Women must go for same salaries ...

In employment outside the home, generally women were paid less than men but now because the constitution spells out equality, it is hoped that women will receive pay equal to that of men. Esther explains how living in cultural harmony involves a break with tradition:

Esther: In this programme there is Sotho. There is a Xhosa woman. There is a Zulu. There is a Venda. All living in one suburb. Now I want to do my part. She wants to do hers. She wants to do hers. She wants to do her husband's, you know, everybody's building their own culture now. I used to live in Table Mountain, where my home is. And there were laws there I had to abide by. Now I come to Kwandengezi, oooh I'm so free - I can do what I like. I'm going to take the doek off. There's no mother-in-law here. Why should you wear doeks? I'm going to argue with you. Why shouldn't you wear doeks? Why shouldn't you wear lipstick? Why shouldn't you smoke? Because I'm just living here, not with my in-laws. I only visit them. I can do what I please ...

Nonhlanhla: So you should speak to them. No no no. Not you as a person. You mean we should speak to them.

Esther: I think - yes.

Nonhlanhla: Even if you don't like them?

Esther: [But I am] like zombie makulu¹ You seem to be a zombie or somebody else, because you have cuts. You see. I'm not having cuts². I'm the ingwalu. You have got cuts. I can't do your ... your tribal [rituals]. See. But now when you are together, I want you to change your styles because I'm having second style. I think everybody should do as they feel. You see.

The negotiation of cultural change is apparent in Esther's commentary but when she had seen herself on the video at the end of the session she confirmed she was happy to be who she was and had no intention of changing. A conservative stance was not universally accepted by the group and thus the reading of women's economic and political role in society was not resolved.

Andrew: 'stop crime - emigrate'

Of the Zulu groups only Theodora's group laughed at this comment and it would seem that since Andrew was very popular with this group they would laugh at his performance and the act of delivering lines more than at the words themselves. Andrew is a street-wise young man with the special wisdom that derives from that environment. Thando looking for a political platform asks Andrew's opinion for an appropriate slogan because he is indirectly involved with crime and has 'connections'.

Much research uses race and class to categorize and evaluate the impact of the viewers' readings of the text. Race and class are undertaken to demonstrate certain reactions, because every group has elements of both as well as the pleasure aspect. It is necessary to allow a space to account for readers' pleasures as social categories. Winnie, a young housewife from Theodora's group, said she liked Andrew "Cause he makes it funny ... and he does it in a funny way" confirming that his personal appeal as an actor as well as his lines are what give pleasure. This would appear to be a negotiated reading based on the group's positive feelings towards the performer not the ideological comprehension of the joke and the incongruity of reducing crime by leaving the country in the logic of the absurd type humour. Gandy and Matabane (1989:330) cite Ball-Rokeach, who argues that "one's location in the social structure is likely to influence one's media

¹ This was a ghost who had never received proper burial and wandered forever among the people without rest and without a place (Elizabeth Mncadi's explanation).

² Cuts are incisions on the body symbolising the excision of evil spirits for which different groups had different interpretations of these (Elizabeth Mncadi's explanation).

orientations”, and structural location “includes all the conventional stratification variables such as class, status, and power”. Nevertheless needs for and limitations on access to alternatives for play and recreation also influence media dependencies (citing Ball-Rockeach, Gandy & Matabane, 1989:331). The women who admired Andrew, regardless of their structural location, obtained pleasure because their expression of enjoyment is related to Andrew’s ability as a comedian.

Billy: ‘Bayete Nkosi’

Billy’s performance ridiculing Ike’s decision to run for president of the Neighbourhood Association lampoons the traditional African practice of a ‘praise singer’³ who extols the virtues of a chief on a momentous occasion. “Bayete Nkosi” means “great Chief” and Billy bends in mock subservience to Ike shrilly declaiming “Bayete Nkosi” to ridicule him. Because Elizabeth’s group had a strong sense of their Zulu identity, this performance mocked their traditions, so they gave a negotiated reading of ‘2’, indicating that some disapproved of the performance. However, Eunice and Theodora’s groups laughed heartily at the performance, providing a preferred reading, and not taking offence at the ridicule. They took pleasure in the performance and movement. Again the performance of the ‘*toyi-toyi*’ (Glossary in Appendix) by Ma Moloi and Ike was to celebrate the decision to “support the informal sector” instead of a platform to combat crime in the neighbourhood. Elizabeth’s group did not laugh, thereby expressing their resistant reading. The reasons for this are complex but with enfranchisement for all, and a burgeoning crime rate, there are those among an emerging middle class who would prefer to see support for anti-crime legislation not just unrestricted trading on pavements in neighbourhoods, encouraging further crime.

Thando, the female black lead, is not representative of the middle class black but she is a stereotype of certain upper middle class women in South Africa, who try to improve their social position by any means (Fischer, interview 1996, Appendix A). Kobie, a stereotype of lower middle class of white South African women, is unconcerned with social climbing and more

³ The praise singer follows the African oral tradition in which “oral performances are felt as ‘voicings’ as oral cultures produce powerful verbal performances with artistic and human worth” (Ong, 1982:14). According to Ong in the oral tradition words are considered to have magic potency and power so names convey power over things and as such confirm the power of the chief, as “redundancy [and] repetition of the just-said keeps the speaker and the listener on track” (Ong, 1982:40). Billy’s performance lampoons both Ike and the African tradition of the praise singer, implying Ike’s ambition for the power of the presidency is ridiculous.

malleable to the new political realities. 'Low class' is a term used constantly by the black female character Thando. When Elizabeth's group discussed 'low class' it was called '*iqaba*', as used by Thando, and this term encompasses those who have no education, no respect for others, no manners - but the concept has nothing to do with money or lack thereof. The other two groups expressed a singular disinterest in discussing this term possibly because of the relatively impermeable social structures and egalitarianism within Zulu society, so the term 'low class' in Western terms was outside their reality.

Freedom of expression and social interaction

"Comic Relief": *Andrew: says the headmaster found 'panties', Kobie: '18 hours and stretch marks'; Cartoon of Hempies and Ma Moloi; Hempies: 'Chin chin ma wetu'; Ma Moloi: 'hate each other legally').*

Andrew: says the headmaster found 'panties',

All groups liked this episode and the first code enjoyed by all the black groups was Andrew's suggestion to Frankie that she create a cartoon about the headmaster of her high school finding a pair of panties on campus and holding them up, asking what they were doing there. The enjoyment here by the various groups was two-fold - panties as a sign of sexuality and its covert admission of sexual activity on any school campus amused all the Zulu-speaking groups, possibly because of embarrassment. Also Andrew's performance gave pleasure and since the incongruity of the panties was intentional, all groups presented a preferred reading with their laughter. The whites generally have inherited a Victorian prudery about sexuality which is in marked contrast to the sexual openness of African society. Although women do not enjoy the same sexual freedom as men in African societies, female sexuality has had a social recognition unthinkable in white settler society and its modern form (Walker, 1990: 168).

Kobie: '18 hours and stretch marks'

The Zulu groups were not homogeneous but the sitcom was able to interpellate the Zulu groups' subjectivity by linking into commonly held concepts. The success of connecting residual cultural elements (even if these are at a distance from the effective dominant culture) was borne out by the laughter generated among the Zulu women. The incorporation of the actively residual in any

culture “by reinterpretation, dilution, projection, discriminating inclusion and exclusion [confirms] that the work of the selective tradition is especially evident” (Williams, 1977: 123). Similarly applying Richard Hoggart’s cultural analysis (1957: 19) of the English working class with their “commonly accepted attitudes, how they are altering those attitudes and how they are meeting resistance” to these Zulu groups is illuminating. Since investigation of cultural change and reconciliation is the reason for the interviewing these groups, subtle shades of difference become manifest. Where resistance is found there is evidence in the culture of these Zulu women (just as there was among the English working class) an “ability to survive change by adapting or assimilating what they want in the new and ignoring the rest” (Hoggart, 1957: 31). All the women related to Kobie berating Frankie for her lack of gratitude for being born - a seemingly perennial cry from mothers regardless of culture, with which the viewers identified. Ien Ang (1989: 84) argues that the pleasure of consuming fiction (or laughing in this instance) means taking up a subject position aside from the usual social and cultural identity produced by that society and its discourses. This means a viewer is not a person whose identity is static. Consequently the framework for the viewers’ laughter might be the subject position of their own lives or one inhabited at the time to provide a preferred reading.

Cartoon : Hempies and Ma Moloi

The cartoon, “The New South Africa” created by Frankie, showed Ma Moloi and Hempies married and was intended as a commentary on the constant bickering and sniping between the two characters because of diametrically opposed ideological positions. It scored the highest laughter rating, with only Susan’s Hindu group not participating. The colour-bar was being satirised and this was portrayed early in the episode by the interactive friendship between Andrew, a black male and Frankie, a white girl. Discussions with the groups on the subject of mixed race dating proved most illuminating. Theodora’s group, when asked how realistic it was to depict whites and blacks living next door to each other and socialising felt it was acceptable, but qualified this, maintaining “blacks have been suffering”, “Whites undermine blacks” and “they have suffered a lot”. In Eunice’s group, Evelyn, who was over fifty said she was not that comfortable with the situation:

Eunice: Nangu usefikile u Andrew. [*Here comes Andrew!*] Mirth ... himself at night and we ask a white guy

Eunice: If two of them fall in love is OK.

Researcher: OK. Ja. It’s OK. How do you feel?

Evelyn: Oh, I'm ... I'm the old type.

Researcher: Yes! Yes! Tell me

Evelyn: Anyway, I would ... I would accept it. But it was not allowed.

Researcher: But it did happen

Evelyn: Yes. But at these times you must accept it.

Researcher: Now it's OK?

Evelyn: Yes.

Eunice: Now it's OK for everyone.

Researcher: Everyone. How do you feel?

Eunice: Now it's the 'new' South Africa. I wouldn't be worried about or even if my daughter ... If my son says, Ma ... That's all, I must say. OK, my son. Go ahead. Because if I say no [then say] so I meet a friend of my son and daughter-in-law. If I said 'No', even my son would run away.

Evelyn explained that if she resisted her son's decision to associate with or even marry a woman of a different race she would lose him so despite not really liking the idea of a 'mixed marriage', she would accept the fact in order to keep her son's affection. In Elizabeth's group, Thandiwe maintained there were many who socialise with members of different races. When Elizabeth asked what would happen if there were to be a child, Thandiwe without hesitation said they would marry, characterizing the significance of children in the society, hearkening back to a preindustrial society when children were regarded as an asset towards assisting in the agricultural economy (Guy, 1990:39).

Black aspirations and the political power shift

Joanne's Coloured group found the Ma Moloi incident with the ashtray amusing and laughed. In their discussion of Thando hiring a maid, they criticised Thando for being too pushy and regarding herself as superior to other racial groups. Thando was seen to be lazy, breaking the traditional stereotype of woman's role in a patriarchal society. The Coloured group had generally shown themselves to be conservative in their views. During apartheid the co-option of Coloureds was part of the hegemonic process of consensus by the apartheid government and the Coloureds' representation had given them a sense of 'place' within the society. The repeal of the Mixed Marriages Act and Section 16 of the Immorality Act in 1985, (Brits, 1995:157) forbidding sex across the colour line gave ideological meaning for many in the Coloured community (Teer-Tomaselli, 1992:138). However with the 1994 election, the system of separate racial groups was removed. Whereas Coloureds might have been somewhat patronising about blacks before, political power has now changed. In the new situation certain assumptions circulated about the

latest social hierarchy and these were “the delicate ideological suppositions that inform the sites where program and viewer meet to create meaning and pleasure”(Jhally & Lewis,1992:9). The meaning arrived at by the Coloured group comes from the interplay between attitudes brought from those traumatic years when the introduction of the Population Registration separated the Coloureds from the whites with whom they had always allied themselves. Consequently the group’s reaction to Thando was very negative:

Joanne: She’s actually like one of those dolls that you wind up to talk, now. You know - this is what I must do, and this is how I must say it.

Pamela: You didn’t actually see her being like a very good wife or a good daughter-in-law or sister-in-law. She didn’t come across as that, you know.

Elaine: Now she was trying to please her neighbours, by having material things and having things that she thought was what white people normally had.

The reference to ‘what white people normally had’ refers to the maid and in laughing at Ma Moloi’s effort to undermine the process of acquiring a maid they give a preferred reading, laughing at Ma Moloi’s performance in secreting the ashtray. Disequilibrium specific to humour means awarding (Palmer, 1987: 25) to a person or a thing two conflicting identities so that the group’s laughter was in Palmer’s terms “a state of contradiction and resolution, where the contradiction creates disequilibrium and its resolution restores equilibrium” (Palmer,1987:25). The Coloured group were glad actually that Thando’s plans were being thwarted since “she’s too pushy”.

Susan’s Hindu group in many ways reflected the attitudes of the Coloured group since both had suffered the indignities of apartheid, being people of colour. Both had been defined in that hierarchy that placed them a notch above the black South Africans but a notch below the whites politically, if not (for many Indians) economically. The constitution of 1983 had established the Tricameral Parliament with an executive presidency elected by Members of Parliament in which Indians and the Hindus had been represented (Teer-Tomaselli,1992:137). The Tricameral system made no new provisions for blacks. During apartheid a few Indians, like Mac Maharaj, Minister of Transport and Jay Naidoo, Minister of Telecommunications had been activists and subsequently were rewarded for their activism by the ANC-led government after the 1994 election (Adam & Moodley,1993:74). However, there has been an ambivalence towards blacks among many Indians some of whom colluded with and ideologically supported the apartheid regime (Adam &

Moodley,1993:17). Susan's group evidenced this ambivalence towards blacks in their assessment of Thando:

Mano: More competition with the lady next door. And the lady being white also! She wants to be on a par with the lady next door.

Pat: I think something's wrong with that, I mean.

Mano: But there's nothing wrong with it.

Pat: There's nothing wrong with having a maid. She can afford to pay her, but she should be paid.

Puni: Yes,[but] she [Thando] doesn't work. If there's no micesies in the house they have the bacon and egg and they finish [off] the freezer and the fridge. OK. Unlike if you at home, like with my Mom, she's at home and she's watching the maid to clean behind the curtains or something. [Mano] she's got a maid and she's working. Her maid skips behind the curtains unless she watches. You see?

The suspicions regarding a maid's ability are also tied into the ideology which regards women as having the responsibility for the cleanliness of the house. These norms stem from the traditional role of women in a patriarchal system which can be traced back to the miseries of indenture of the Indian in KwaZulu Natal. The struggle for a 'family life' (even though women may have been dominated), seems to have provided a focus to resist racial oppression (Beall,1990:145). Indian indentured immigrants in Natal had been imported to serve the sugar industry (Beall,1990:147). Women were deemed, initially, of little use in sugar production and although the planters saw the system of indentured immigration as a way to replace the labour force, the Indian women's presence underscored the permanence of the Indian population. This was felt to be an unnecessary complication to Natal's social fabric. However, planters discovered the value and uses of women's productive labour. The conditions of indentured labourers in general and women in particular were appalling with unhealthy living conditions and remuneration being almost negligible. Indians were also indentured to the tea estates, employed by the Natal railways and the coal mining industry, but in all these labour ventures both Indian men and their employers regarded women as property, to be bought, sold or given away (Beall,1990:155).

A small number of Indians, known as 'passenger Indians' came to Natal at their own expense. They were predominantly Moslems but included Gujarati-speaking Hindus and Moslems. They formed a distinct and comparatively privileged community, engaged in importing and retailing. In time these traders competed with white merchants and African traders, which caused much

resentment. Indians in the colony differed among themselves in language, religion and class position and did not form a homogeneous group. One of the far-reaching consequences of the Indian community's experience of the miseries of indenture was to regard the institution of the family as a 'haven in a heartless world' (Beall, 1990: 157). The private space of the home acquired a public political significance, in that domestic conservatism meant Indian women themselves upheld patriarchal gender relations. In dominated Indian and African communities in South Africa, this struggle for a 'family life'.

In the governing of India in the nineteenth century, Macaulay's *Minute on Indian Education* (1835) expresses the British government's effort to co-opt the Indian community as a class "who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect (citing Macaulay, Spivak, 1988: 282). A westernised approach is apparent among the Indian community in South Africa, particularly Durban, and attitudes about interracial interaction are articulated. The education of Indians in state schools has complemented their interpretation of the laws of apartheid. The interpretation of the historical narrative of Indian identity in Singapore is analogous, since with an increasing number of Indians born being locally, the diasporic relationship with the old homeland, India, has altered (Devadas, 1996: 71). This problem is vocalized here in South Africa with the need to be 'Indian-South African' but reconciled with an 'Indianness' so that a nation/culture tension provides a duality of identification manifested in this group's attitude to shifting social relations. Thus the meaning Susan's group derived from the text and the construction which the group places on it indicate that these readers, in Morley's terms "inhabit codes and ideologies derived from other institutional areas which correspond to and work in parallel with those of the programme" (Morley, 1992: 87). They demonstrated a preferred reading when they laughed at Ma Moloi's activity in undermining Thando hiring of a maid, since with the political power shift, their personal definition in the political hierarchy has altered and Thando's aspirations confirm their feelings of insecurity.

The reaction of white groups to the representation of women in the sitcom varied according to class, language and gender. There were three white English-speaking groups, two of whom were middle class and one white Afrikaans group, which was also middle class. The statements made

by these groups were frequently statements about black people in general although with their limited experience of black people outside of an employer/employee relationship, according to Jhally and Lewis's research (1992:32), the group were not qualified to do this. Bess from Freda's group announced with conviction "Well, you see in the black culture, they can speak like that - but we'd never say ... we'd never speak like that to our mother-in-laws". When she was corrected about this, she responded "...she's educated, she's now a white black".

Leigh-Ann's working class group was not amused by Ma Moloi's remark when she found the secreted ashtray and in an indirect manner indicated disapproval of Thando's embourgeoisement:

Charmaine: But I don't think her reasons for wanting a maid are right.

Kathy: Dead right, but I feel that if she wants a maid, what's there to stop her? If you know, it's an open thing if you want a maid you have a maid. It's a personal thing, and I don't think there should be anything stopping her. But I don't think the real reasons are right ...

Leigh-Anne: This is your mother-in-law thing.

Janette: Ja, she's trying, like the whites have always had maids, right? With the 'new' South Africa, she's thinking that she must also just be like that - she must also have a maid. Trying to keep up to the same reputation as the white people!

This group, three of whom were related, later explained how one brother was married to an Indian woman and during the discussion it became apparent there were strong racist feelings about people of colour. New classes and social forces have been emerging in South Africa since the 1994 election transformed social relations. According to L. Chisholm (1990:296) at the turn of the twentieth century new classes and social forces emerged in South Africa. Similarly today with the development of the new democracy, different classes are emerging so that race is no longer the dividing line. At the turn of the twentieth century a ruling class allied to British imperialism wanted to transform social relations and modernise the state (Chisholm, 1990:296). Also a new black and white proletariat had been created but was not homogeneous. Among the white working class, a division separating the 'employed' from the 'unemployed' appeared, the latter being known as the 'poor white', a sign of racial degeneration amongst the 'civilised' races, a product of the uncontrolled development of a black and white proletariat thrown together in the cities (citing Dubow, Chisholm, 1990:300). The marginality of these groups could be unpredictable so "those [women] who violated the standards of white womanhood had to be punished or prevented from contaminating the others" (Walker, 1990:22). The development of a system of

reformatories based on race, class and sex followed this type of Social Darwinist thinking. Deviance was frequently linked to breaking the sexual code, particularly the taboo of miscegenation and its threat to white hegemony. This led to increased control of the sexuality of white women by the ruling classes who policed the social boundaries of the white race to keep the underclasses divided.

Janet's English-speaking group brought forward similar arguments to Leigh-Anne's group objecting to Thando's desire for a maid. It became apparent that the loss of political power was the real issue, suggesting that "politics is not simply determined by the economic and the ideological: it enters into and helps construct the everyday" (Dahlgren, 1995: 110). The macro structures functioning in the society control distribution of power and resources, and since these have not filtered down to the black proletariat, the interaction with white employers is frequently still an exploitative relationship. The paid worker is dependent on the employer but does not accept the legitimacy of her own subordination in the social order. She is not a deferential worker. The unpaid worker, on the other hand, is dependent on her husband, but "usually accepts the legitimacy of her own subordination and is a deferential wife" (Cock, 1980: 85). In Janet's group their response barely concealed their disapproval of the new black empowerment process:

*Lynne: To me **they**'ve obviously got an idea of how we live. I mean, if **they** came into **our** area, **they** have to try and be like **us**. Be what we're like. Everybody has a maid and everybody has this and everybody has that. But you know it's not always the case. **They** didn't realize until **they're** actually in that situation.*

Janet: And that was a typical example of the preconceived value.

The process of defending one's social position and by implication one's identity in this post-apartheid society was engaged with supercilious scorn by Janet's group. Most of the groups obtained some of their identity from their exclusiveness - the idea of **those** outside who are not **us**, so the world of **them** in this instance would be those blacks who now are competing for the privileged life previously only enjoyed by whites. The gist of these words were written by Richard Hoggart (1957:62) reporting on the way in which the working class kept their identity separate from the middle class in England. But as Stuart Hall (1997b:7) stated in his summation of the conference on *Identities, Democracy, Culture and Communication in Southern Africa*, the post-colonial is a new conjuncture deeply implicated in the form of the liberation movement and the

aftermath. Janet's group had been a group accustomed to privilege but now as Hall states "It's not simply what **they** are doing to **us** ... but when **they** are doing that to **us** and some of **us** are doing that to **us** as well ... where is inside and where is outside become much more complicated questions" (Hall, 1997b:7). Thus by refraining from engaging with the humour of the 'stolen' ashtray, Janet's group indicated their oppositional reading of Fischer's intention that white people should see blacks as people.

Freda's Afrikaans group was an interesting mix of women (an occupational therapist, two school teachers, an executive secretary and a building society employee) and evidenced a high number of university graduates. Afrikaners have been associated with the origins of apartheid but the principle of racial capitalism actually can be found in the Act of Union of 1910, when blacks throughout the four provinces of South Africa were subjugated to white rulers (Teer-Tomaselli, 1992:132). Pragmatic segregation was practised in South Africa until the ascent of the National Party in 1948 when segregation became institutionalised. By the mid-1970s, 70 per cent of Afrikaners belonged to a relatively secure middle class due to the economic reconstruction of the 1970s. Within the National Party a split between the *verligtes* (enlightened) and the *verkrampes* (reactionaries) occurred leading to the establishment of a Conservative Party (Teer-Tomaselli, 1992:134). The urban middle class resisted any change towards accommodation of black aspirations for better conditions, but finally internal and external pressures forced the government to abandon certain policies, leading to the gradual unravelling of the apartheid system. Introduction of the principle of equal pay for equal work abolished segregation regulations in factories, shops and offices, with the gradual loosening of petty apartheid laws. By the end of 1985 a social reform programme had done away with all but the Population Registration Act, Group Areas Act and the Land Acts, when a State of Emergency was declared (Teer-Tomaselli, 1992:139).

After the legalizing of banned organizations and the release of Nelson Mandela in February 1990, the abolition of formal apartheid and the gradual repeal of the race laws during 1991 was not a huge event (Adam & Moodley, 1993:29). Many of the laws had been ignored or not enforced strictly in the last few years so their repeal merely confirmed what was happening in reality. However the dominant minority remained unthreatened as long as the disenfranchised enjoyed no

formal political power (Adam & Moodley, 1993:40). The end of the Cold War brought complete liberalization. The propaganda that “total onslaught” was imminent became discredited and the referendum of 1992 led to the free elections of 1994 and the enfranchisement of previously disadvantaged black South Africans. Primarily, ideology concerns the behaviour of individuals and groups when, as a generalised representation, it is understood by a particular group to distinguish its own interests from those of other people and of society in general (Hall, 1982:65). The Afrikaans group did not laugh while watching Ma Moloi attempting to secrete the ashtray in the maid’s purse. But when she said “Aha!” that sparked their laughter because she was undermining Thando’s plan to hire a maid. The apartheid ideology they had absorbed promoted certain codes of behaviour and the acceptance of certain beliefs and customs. Afrikaner Nationalism’s apartheid policy provided an idealistic picture of a future of complete freedom and independence among a racially pure group. This attitude explains the efforts to keep the Afrikaner racially pure by implementing policies of ‘separate development’ (Kotze & Van Wyk, 1980). The forces of Afrikanerdom propagated self-determination, the republican ideal, primacy of the Afrikaans language and culture, and gave primacy to the role of race, so that it became self-evident and natural (Oosthuizen, 1990:43). Many supporters suffered inconveniences but regarded them as a small price to pay for the pursuit of absolute separation.

Ideology and religion among the Afrikaners provided forms of understanding and interpretation in which the past explains the present, and the future justifies the nature of the present, which then proscribes boundaries and limits of behaviour and the need for certainty and control (Kotze & Van Wyk, 1980). Ideology also provided a set of beliefs and ideas to guide the behaviour of the group and it set the criteria for group characteristics by defining who are the ‘in-group’ and the ‘out-group’. During apartheid, Afrikaners were that ‘in-group’ and the rest of the country the ‘out-group’ defining those myths which sustain group action and coherence (Kotze & Van Wyk, 1980:78). Bessie’s interpretation of blacks’ behaviour comes from her internalisation of these myths. In matters of cultural and social power those who have the power can define the rules and everyone else then has to subscribe to those rules unless they are deviant (Hall, 1982:62). Thando’s hiring of the maid was seen as an attempt to ameliorate her social position to one comparable with the whites, thereby undermining ‘separate development’ since the power to

define the rules has moved to the newly enfranchised. Among the Afrikaner group the hiring of a maid by a black woman was debated (Appendix):

Freda: Thando wants a maid. Why do you think she's so keen?

Bessie: Well in the first place, it was probably because she has to show the white person that she now lives in the suburbs ... She's like her - she has to have a maid although she's black herself.

Linda: Ja, she tries to be like the whites.

Bessie: Ja.

Freda: Then do you think it's a good idea for her to have a maid?

Bessie: No. I wouldn't say she shouldn't have one. I mean if you look at some of these very up and coming black families now, they do have maids now, they do have live-in maids. I mean a person mustn't now go and say alright, you know I am, I don't want to say that I'm not um ... that ... but I mean...I think that they ... mother and father's working, they got exactly the same, if they can afford a maid let them go for it. I mean why must mother or the black woman come home and find that she has to do the maid's work. When us as white women don't want to do it. We want to have a maid.

Freda: But Thando's not working.

Bessie: No, she's not working. But she's not ... no but she now moved into the upper class. But she's a hairdresser - it's beneath her now - it's common, like she says.

Linda: Because Ma Moloi is doing everything anyway.

Bessie: Ma Moloi is anyway doing everything. On the other side, now again, on the white side.

Linda: Just shows you where the difference comes in.

Suzette: Just in today's "Lifestyle", they ... , if the blacks do move up, because, in my work situation we get such a lot of this, there are people that live in your area, in Umhlanga, and if they do lift themselves, that are like that black man, there's a ... there's a father that used to come in last year, and he would come in in the mid ... middle of summer and he actually ... 'cause they then do smell ... they have a ... he smells like very passable, because he always has this fresh, fresh soapy perfumed smell and clean. And the [his] kids are like that [too].

Hannetjie: And they have servants.

Suzette: And they have servants.

Hannetjie: The servant brings the kids to school.

Suzette: Yes they do have servants. And they are actually, some of them are very, very highly educated, they are much more educated than I am. And their children are ... they really are the better blacks. I think they have a better life than I do!

Freda: I'm sure that some of them do.

In this excerpt the group attributes to Thando their own fears that blacks are trying to improve their social position to the detriment of whites. There is a faint perception voiced that some of

the black families actually might be displacing the whites from power in the private space of their own neighbourhoods, like Umhlanga, as changes in the social structure are bringing about new forms of political culture. The social position of blacks is changing since now many are employed in middle class management positions and can afford better homes. Civil society is in transition but the Afrikaans group mediates the message by 'letting' the blacks have a maid since whites also have a maid - there is the paternalistic 'let'. At the school where she teaches, Suzette appeared quite fascinated by a black father with the "soapy fresh perfumed smell" and she projected an incredulity that **'they'** have servants and might be better educated than she is. Suzette has a university degree, is in the 25-34 age group, divorced with one child. She gave the impression that she was desperately trying not to feel overwhelmed by the encroachment of blacks into her space as a white person, reared as she had been with the promise of 'separate development' for Afrikaners. The **'them'** and **'us'** was apparent since in the aftermath of apartheid, all the group were trying to accommodate these feelings of being displaced by blacks and so trying to transcend the new realities. By laughing at Ma Moloi triumphant "Aha!" they could identify with that moment of reprieve, thereby giving a preferred reading.

Leigh's lesbian group were the most qualified educationally and very sensitive to gender issues. Their direct experience of the world in some ways created specific meaning based on their own personal lives (Geraghty, 1996b:267). In the ethnographic discourse it becomes possible to demonstrate how a television programme can become a conduit for the focus groups to share their understanding of how the norms for their particular society interact with those of other groups. Cultural processes affecting viewers' patterns of identification and differentiation help the researcher unravel connections between disparate and similar characteristics of group participants (Ang, 1990:257). The lesbian group discussed a number of issues about the employment of a maid. One of the primary complaints was resentment that the sitcom was still representing the maid situation in South Africa as if no transformations had occurred after the elections:

***Karen:** I mean it's just what's going to happen in South Africa, the way [there is an] agenda, the way um ... the domestic [situation is interpreted]? I mean. Always being ignored and they depicting South African life ... like the old South Africa got stuck there and didn't move forward with the changes. It's not showing the changes or moving along. [They could] really have made something of it. That was very strange.*

Pamela: But I don't think that was their purpose. I don't think that their purpose was that. To ... to depict the change in ... in South Africa.

Glen: Do [...] you not think that we're taking this whole thing a little bit too seriously?

These three responses indicate the heterogeneity of the group, representing their ideological position outside of the collective identification with lesbianism. Karen, bilingual but from an Afrikaans background, is a political analyst, who appears defensive because theoretically the law has made changes in the society but the chasm that existed prior to elections for many has not been bridged. Pamela, a high school teacher, who indicated a privileged background within a middle class society, responded as a critical viewer, seeing the programme separated from reality but presenting a didactic 'message'. Glen, an architectural technician, watched *SB* regularly and enjoyed the humour. Their varying and different reactions illustrated how identities are never unified but are constituted from different intersections, practices and discourses so that the unity of homogeneity can be a constructed form of closure (Hall, 1996b:5). Jill, a medical doctor originally from England, who was protective of her lifestyle and did not fill in a questionnaire, was prepared to rewrite the script as she felt the producers could have improved the satire:

Jill: The political issues that do exist in the 'new' South Africa, and unfortunately, we are getting it rammed down our throat ..., and that [...] you can take the maid situation - it does exist - it has changed, and it's changing and it's very very funny. And we could have made far more or um ... content like that which is brilliant material to use. And it's quite interesting that it's got to be a maid. You can't have a man.

Mercia: Everybody will knock on your door!

[...]

Jill: And that is quite interesting because, I do know in the 'new' South Africa, of some er ... men who are housekeepers.

Pamela: But I think for a man to be a housekeeper is almost a better job than a woman to be a housekeeper.

Jill: Yes.

Karen: You know it's almost more. [...] It's better to have a man housekeeper than it is to have a woman housekeeper.

Jill: Yes.

Catherine: Ja, because there's something unusual about the man housekeeper, whereas there's everything degrading about the woman.

Karen: Ja, ja.

Jill: It is degrading. But that is one aspect of the content [...] where you want to captivate your audience. So you got to have a framing structure. So I think the

idea is good to use a satirical situation, whereby you can take the maid. And many people would laugh at various people talking about that maid.

Leigh's group's reading was negotiated in terms of gender. They accepted the concept of employing a maid and its implications in the 'new' South Africa was very funny so they laughed at Ma Moloi's attempts at undermining the employment of a maid. When a group complains that the media is misrepresenting how they see themselves, it raises the question of how realistic representation can be, where public and private constructions of identity are at stake (Geraghty, 1996a:271). Identification for women has dealt more with their ability to control narrative events which might "challenge the boundaries of patriarchal construction" (citing Clark, Geraghty, 1996a:316). But reality is not just a set of facts, so the media define reality by selecting, presenting, structuring and shaping characters, thereby making these representations of women a 'signifying practice' (Hall, 1982:64). The ethnographer is an active interpreter (citing Geertz, Moors, 1993:62). Therefore in analysing the cultural dimensions offered by this group the ethnographer's interpretation searches for the engagement these women make with the text, and how they attribute political and social changes occurring in the society in terms of their lifestyle and sexual orientation.

Perceptions of a hierarchy of class

A 'taste' thesis on people's class consciousness about taste has been argued, where a social hierarchy of consumers leads 'taste' to act as a marker of 'class' for whom "[t]aste classifies, and it classifies the classifier". In this way the denial of 'lower' or 'vulgar' enjoyment implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with those sublimated and gratuitous pleasures [is] forever closed to the irreverent (Bourdieu, 1984:7). On this basis the white upper class English-speaking group reacted negatively when interpreting the text of *SB*; they actively disliked all three episodes finding the production 'irritating', and in parts moralistic and boring. People will often charge the television fictions they dislike with being 'unrealistic' or 'unreal' (Jhally & Lewis, 1992:18). Part of the groups' irritation was manifested by dialogically contesting 'nationhood' since none of the white English-speakers related to the concept of one nation. Kobie's character was regarded with distaste as 'common' as the viewer did not know 'people like that'. Other comments included 'vulgarly American not like the subtle British humour'. Muriel Cantor (1994:162) argues there is always an ongoing struggle for control of the channels

of communication between citizen pressure groups, government and those responsible for creating the content on television.

Janet's group said they derived little pleasure from the characters, as there were no representations of their own class with whom to identify, yet their laughter levels indicated an appreciation of the incongruity of situations. According to Jhally and Lewis (1992:27) middle class viewers feel obliged to be critical of television rather as a display of intellectual ability. In the same way working class audiences could query the validity of television working class characters (citing Morley, Jhally & Lewis, 1992:27). Traditionally, however, the strata in social class ranges from those who have power and prestige through inherited family position, wealth and education, to those groups with successively less. Thus people's ranking has been based on a relationship between their social class and cultural consumption. However, as a researcher, one's critical judgement about a popular product is different due to one's need to understand its popularity. It remains necessary to understand the pleasures it offers consumers in order to understand how hegemony operates through popular culture (Morley, 1992:35). Janet's group maintained the production values were poor. They did not enjoy *SB* because they did not relate to the characters or the events. Yet the message of the sitcom was interacting with discourses about the changing of political power from whites to blacks and it is this aspect with which they had a problem. Although they could not or would not identify with the message from the production team, according to the laughter table (Appendix I, 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3) they still laughed as much as other groups.

The one code on the chart which coincided with their laughter pattern was Andrew's *Stop crime-emigrate* and this represented their reality since so many English speakers have emigrated from South Africa a preferred reading was allocated for this response. Billy's *Bayete Nkosi* also had a fair response because it satirized the black political ambition for election to the presidency so a preferred reading was assigned here. Kobie's *Eighteen hours of labour and stretch marks* received a preferred reading with a hearty display of laughter, since being women and mothers, they could relate to the hectoring Kobie gave to Frankie. The cartoon showing Ma Moloi and Hempies married, representing the 'new' South Africa was an example of a negotiated reading. In the interview this group disagreed with social integration so the cartoon was perceived as

satirical. It has been suggested that producers and viewers have a “conspiracy of cognitive dissonance, proposing two contradictory ideas at the same time without acknowledging the contradiction” (Jhally & Lewis, 1992: 17). The Ma Moloi and Hempies gags in **“Comic Relief”** are an example of this conspiracy. Cognitive dissonance is said to occur when people find dissonance or a lack of fit between their attitudes, or attitudes and behaviour, unacceptable and try to reduce it adding or modifying their cognitions (Festinger, 1957). Hempies’ *Chin chin ma wetu* and Ma Moloi’s *in the new South Africa we can hate each other legally* both received laughter, with Ma Moloi receiving a stronger rating.

In the discussion of ‘low class’ Freda’s Afrikaans group identified elements of ‘low class’ among many Afrikaans people. ‘Low class’ was nomenclature for the dress and behaviour codes of people regarded as ‘common’ and this term also applied to those who lost control and fought when drunk. It was suggested by one member of the group that Afrikaans people can be very ‘common’ and the ‘railway’ people (those who work for the parastatal railways) are the worst with their bare feet and curlers. In addition ‘common’ people are those who might know what they want but never attempt to achieve it as they have no ambition. Embedded in this interpretation is the core of post-modern western ideology where the individuals in the society have to be goal-driven to improve their status, earning more to consume more. Previously the Afrikaans-speaking group admitted they had not regarded blacks as ‘common’ as they had never felt threatened by them, in that black ‘culture’ and behaviour were so different from their own. Black women could happily breastfeed their babies in the street, but if a white woman did that her behaviour would be ‘common’. Among the lesbian group, gender was the unifying element but class and language were the differentiating factors. Mercia, of an Afrikaans background, felt that ‘low class’ means “you’re coarse ... and in South Africa black low class live in Cato Manor in shacks, white low class live in smaller houses” so class was clarified in terms of financial status. Freda’s group discussed the reality of seeing blacks represented in the sitcom as middle class and how this reality occurring in society has affected them as a cultural group:

Bessie: But you know, you, you think ... its funny you grow out of it, you try and grow out of it. But I think you don't really lose part of that background, it still stays there. I'm like that at work too. I know Charles gets very annoyed with me, when I say 'kaffers maak my mal!' [Kaffirs make me angry!]. And that's what I feel like, because they do. And he will say 'ag Bessie, moet nou nie so sê nie'. Ek

sê 'ag! Los my uit!'. Dis hoe dit is. Hy kan my nie verander nie. Ek kan nie verander nie. [*Oh, Bessy, don't say that. I say 'Oh! Leave me alone. That's how it is. He can't change me. I can't change.'*] I'm trying to adapt. Look, but I say it. Play our troubles at work. I say it all the time, and I get myself into trouble every time and I do it. But it's not that I've got anything against them - it's just in me. I'm brought up like that you see? My father's still like that.

Hannetjie: *It's a Free State habit.*

Bessie: *Yes. I'll always have it in me. I can't get rid of it. Yes! We do, we do. They talk like that at home.*

Hannetjie: *When they talk ... then they open the paper. Look at this! You wouldn't believe it.*

Linda: *My father says 'Wat maak jy daar by die DP? Kyk wat gaan hier aan'. [What are you doing at the DP(Democratic Party). Look at what's going on here.]*

Freda: *That's the way they talk.*

Bessie: *It's true! It's true, you know you people don't realize it, but it's true! He's just like Hempies. Like you see Hempies. That's like my father is. He's just like that. He'll not pay his TV now because there's no Afrikaans on TV.*

Hannetjie: *My brother- in- law's the same.*

Bessie: *My broer [brother] in Johannesburg. My brother is an Advocate in Johannesburg. He mixes with a lot of blacks ...but he will not pay his TV now because there is no Afrikaans on TV for his children. That's what it's all about. People don't realize what they're doing. They can't cut off cultures and try to bring up more. That is wrong! But that's what's happening. (Appendix D)*

Their pleasure in recognising their own reality in Hempies' character hurling invectives at Ma Moloi helped them come to terms with the way they have felt about blacks. There is a tone of powerlessness in Bessie's cry "They can't cut off cultures and try to bring up more cultures. That is wrong!" They laughed at Hempies' remark about saving the steak, giving a preferred reading but Andrew's remark to stop crime and emigrate got no response at all. Hence it was an oppositional reading. They identified with Hempies and always laughed at his performance and castigations of Ma Moloi, but they did not relate to Andrew because he is black and his effervescence is a strange characteristic for them to accept from a black person implying equality. In addition, Afrikaners do not easily accept emigration from South Africa as a viable option, since language and identity are intertwined with the location. *Ma Moloi's blue people* caused oppositional laughter, since the group was not in sympathy with middle class blacks, but laughed in derision at their temerity in being upwardly mobile. Billy's '*Bayete Nkosi*' to lampoon Ike's bid for the presidency did not arouse a glimmer of smile since even its parody signifies the root of Afrikaners' loss of political power - so it received an oppositional reading. Similarly political

overtones in the *toyi-toyi* signified demands for increased political rights so the group did not laugh and gave an oppositional reading.

In the “**Comic Relief**” episode, Kobie’s comment on stretch marks was given a preferred reading as women and mothers all could relate to this, but the ‘new’ South Africa cartoon showing Hempies and Ma Moloi getting married got a very weak negotiated reading ‘1’ in accepting integration of the races. However, Hempies sitting down drinking alcohol with Ma Moloi got the highest score, a ‘5’. In the play of the signifier *Chin, chin ma wetu* within the **context** of possible social integration between the archetype of apartheid, Hempies, and the black mother of the nation, Ma Moloi, humour can allow a cultural negotiation. The sociological characteristics of the participants in the comic process - the speaker, Hempies (an icon for apartheid); butt of the joke - Ma Moloi (an icon for black aspirations); and audience are the important constituencies (Palmer, 1987:223). These three elements are involved in the struggle for meaning which could be determined at any point in time by the ongoing race and class struggle so this received a preferred reading. In this way meaning can change in a flash because humour is ambivalent (Palmer, 1987:224). In the next code on the chart, Ma Moloi declaims *We can now hate each other legally* which received no laughs from the Afrikaans group and therefore instigated a resistant reading since the reality of ‘hate’ as an alternative was articulated.

In the working class white group there was a tension between class and race mediated by their strong religious affiliation with the Salvation Army. When asked to articulate the meaning of ‘low class’ Leigh-Ann, who lives in a working class neighbourhood, suggested “I think basically it’s the way you behave” and when asked to define this behaviour and whether they knew anyone who was ‘low class’ their Indian sister-in-law was cited:

Kathy: *She came into this marriage, ja, this marriage with two - four kids ... we don't even know!*

Charmaine: *But they're all there.*

Kathy: *The way she portrays herself to us is like a person that doesn't work, therefore she doesn't look after herself. The way she speaks to her kids, looks after her kids, it's like she just couldn't care. And, and to me that is a low class. Where you can't bring yourself up just to say "well look, this is me". She's a low class. Um ... no money, no self esteem, nothing. She thinks she's nothing, you know.*

Charmaine: [...] I think sometimes the opportunities you have, um ... money has got a lot to do with it.

Researcher: You don't know any rich people who are low class?

Charmaine: No, I don't.

Kathy: I ... I feel money buys class.

Researcher: You do?

Charmaine: Maybe it's wholesome?

Kathy: Ja. It could ... it could be.

Janette: You don't have to have a lot of money to be ... to hold respect.

Kathy: That's it. That's it.

Charmaine: Ja, I think respect is also [important ...] But you have to earn respect.

[...]

Patricia: I think low class is a person that can't speak properly.

Janette: And you can see ... you can see **how** they speak [the sort of] language as well.

You can tell, you can, even amongst the black kids, you can tell, just by the way they speak ...

Charmaine: I think the language ... How they been brought up, you understand - I mean how they been brought up. ... And ... you know and what standards they have. You can tell by the way they speak and the way they been brought up, you know. You know when we are in church [they] call Janette's daughter ... when she came to us she couldn't speak a word of English, you know [...] Now they call her Scottish and black.

There are a number of ideological threads in this conversation including a covert racial discomfort because of a member of the family's marriage to a person of colour, an Indian. The group constructed a reality to accommodate perceived positive attributes of money and accent as vital to avoid being labelled 'low class'. Since an hierarchical structure is implicit in the concept of 'low class' they proceeded to articulate a web of meanings and references to provide the full connotation of their comprehension about their social position. The legitimization of social differences - "abstract inclusion and concrete exclusion" - depends on the convergence of the political (power) and the economic (money) which in combination will provide social status (Martín - Barbero, 1993:7).

In terms of their response to the code charted for *blacks don't pay* they had offered a preferred reading based on their 'common sense' view that blacks would pay less, which supports an underlying notion of racism. They also gave a preferred reading to Hempies' comment on *steak being saved* by laughing heartily, indicating steak was too good and expensive for blacks. Janette

volunteered that "Bacon and eggs. You know be honest, who is going to provide that? I've had a maid for sixteen years I've never fed her yet. She's always looked after herself". *Blue people* was given a resounding '4' as a preferred reading since in fact it was a performance by Ma Moloi's interaction with Limpid. The pleasure in her repartee engaged the viewers, who did not see themselves as racist at all, even though their comments belie this. Although 'official' racial barriers may have been discarded, class barriers still prove unpassable for whites and blacks, because of disparities in income in a capitalist society. There is the myth of a level playing field with opportunities for successful entrepreneurship so that a 'low' class background is not limiting to economic success (Jhally & Lewis, 1992:68). Limpid's comment of "you people coming up in the world" and "nice to see you moving into the neighbourhood" although patronising are positive comments and part of the textual structures to encourage upward mobility. Thando replies "Why not just people?" This working class group are in an same economic blind alley with limited opportunities, and with affirmative action their opportunities are reduced further. Andrew's remark '*Stop crime- emigrate*' reached a '5' on the chart and indicates how their preferred meaning confirmed the secret yearning of many white South Africans to leave but most working class people cannot afford to do this.

Among Joanne's Coloured group there was no direct discussion of 'low class' but a solidarity was evident among the women who lived in the community of Wentworth about being 'coloured' and an acknowledgement about the 'low class' assignation to the area:

Mary: No - it was my daughter's twenty first and this girl from Riebler Park and she [the mother] ... [was upset for] her daughter to come here to Wentworth.

Pamela: Yes. There's a stigma attached to Wentworth. They put you under a microscope to just now see how you are going to behave.

Researcher: Are you talking about other people in the Coloured Community?

All: Yes!, yes!

Researcher: So this is happening in the er ... Coloured community? [Mirth].

All: Yes.

Pamela: And you know they got the cheek to say 'Oh, I didn't know there were such nice people from Wentworth'. Or that we were clean. [Mirth from all]. When my daughters were chosen for Natal hockey, I'll never forget the judges only chose Sydenham students and Park people. But the Wentworth - up until today - they outstanding in sport. And you know what, they [the judges] come and they say now "OK now you can er [give] ... your name and address and your

school" and they say "Wentworth?" Five or six in that eleven a side is chosen from Wentworth. We got star runners, star players, they stars in anything.

Among themselves the women accepted an economic hierarchical location in the society. But they refused to discuss the question of women dealing with political changes in South Africa. Joanne deftly avoided the issue "I just want my share [and then] put me there behind the cabinet" implying resistance to acquiring a profile in the community.

Joanne's group responded to *Policeman shouts Quiet!* with laughter indicating a preferred reading. As people of colour they had also experienced the harshness of the police during apartheid and here they could laugh with relief because "all signs depend upon their inscription in the real in order to have meaning" (Palmer, 1994: 173). In the delivery of Ma Moloi's *blue people* remark, the meaning and value of a group of people is being questioned as the theme involves race although Thando asks why can't they be just 'people'. This group laughed since colour is the signifier and for them this always has been a major issue and still is, with the new political power play. In addition to the theme of race, canvassing invokes the power of voting and Ma Moloi's sharp retort always gets a laugh indicating a preferred reading.

Andrew is liked by all the group and Elaine said:

I like Andrew because he's what our youth is all about. They not as artificial as [the older people] ... That's within the context of the movies we saw. Andrew is not as artificial as the adults were. Umm, he wasn't trying to impress or pull the wool over the other person's eyes, or trying to be what he's not. He was just always himself and also trying too ... and ... and he mixed well without actually looking forceful. You know with another race ... and that is what our youth is actually like now. That's ... the majority ... are actually [good with other races...].

Whatever Andrew says as a performer causes the group to laugh. This community is very stable and unlikely to move on, so their reading was a preferred one. Emigrating to improve crime is the logic of the absurd, since having emigrated one will not experience crime, where the signifiers are 'crime' and 'emigration'. Joanne's group enjoyed Billy's performance *Bayete Nkosi* because satirising Ike's bid for the presidency, touches upon their reality and their ambivalence about the new dispensation. Although all people are now equal, previously **they** were a little more equal than **them** - the black majority, whose numbers now will overwhelm their constituency.

The response to the *toyi - toyi* of Ike and Ma Moloi was a negotiated reading since the incongruity of Ike dancing the proletariat's political dance in his elegant house with Ma Moloi supporting the informal sector was not a position that would be supported by this group which tended to be conservative. They laughed giving a preferred reading to Andrew whom they liked with his story of the *headmaster finding the panties*. Like all the other groups they gave a preferred reading for Kobie's *eighteen hours and stretch marks*.

Susan's Hindu group demonstrated strong allegiance to their religious beliefs, and class here was conflated with caste when the discussion occurred about 'low class':

Mano: ... in today's Indian society.

Rookmuni: Doesn't happen today, but ...

Mano: It doesn't happen, but it does. Like my mother's sister, the eldest one, she is very conscious of where you should marry and especially grandsons and granddaughters. Who's acceptable and who's not - you know that ... that so called ... [...] The caste thing.

Pat: It's a class **and** a caste thing.

✓ **Mano:** But for me er ... to me somebody that comes from the lowest caste and class could have so much of class. ... that somebody coming from top of the shelf, with all the money ... would never reach there. You know, even in that person from the lowest caste can have all the class it's ... in the personality ... [...]

Susan: [It's] the way you treat other people.

Pat: Your treating of other people.

Susan: The way you come across. The way you would want ...

Mano: Respect for other people, and you know, just relating, you mustn't think that ... that like er ... there are people now, I'm referring to particular people that ... feel that now that they doing their masters, they are actually better than the others. [Babble]. [...] Kubeshni - not you. Kubeshni was a perfect example actually, where others ... now feels that since she's got a masters, like her nose is in the air. That if she has to pick up - her nose up a little bit more, she'll drown in the rain. You know that kind of attitude. [Mirth] [Babble]. You know that superciliousness that comes from nadi - nothing! Because to me she comes from a background that is er ... nothing to shout about.

Emphasis on education among this community is an important goal but caste is also seen as a way to stabilise the boundaries of **them** and **us**. Evidence of the effects of consumerism was also verbalised since clothing, cars and jewellery had become symbolic expressions of class as the younger women explained a prospective husband must drive a BMW and wear a Gucci chain (Appendix D). Transformations of capital have impacted on contemporary culture and the politics

of representation in that the concept of *value* is at issue (Lee, 1993: 160). As Pierre Bourdieu has suggested it is not possible to concentrate social relations under capitalism into purely economic relations. These are cultural and economic relations allowing cultural values to circulate as a process for different social groupings, with different cultural values which can invest in symbolic goods (cars, jewellery) acting as signs of prestige and status of social standing (Bourdieu, 1984). Symbolic struggles over cultural distinction among the Indian groups in South Africa had been restricted by apartheid, so that for many these cultural artefacts became important signs of success and identity, replacing the older impermeable religious boundaries of caste. Rookmuni explained caste in terms of eating patterns among the Hindu:

So the older people like, say Ma-in-laws and all, now, if they say that a certain caste is a low caste, and now we, like we never used to eat beef and all those things. But today they do. Right? If they having that, they don't give them in the same plates. You don't give in your plate and your cup the food. You have a different dish when they come to dish them up. You don't make them sit on the table, because they have beef and the pork and all that, that we don't eat. You see that's that's what the caste, the low caste they used to call it. Who they wouldn't want their children to marry that caste.

In the serving of food to prevent contamination by those unclean who eat “beef and those things” separate dishes are given to non-Hindus. This symbolises the way the solidarity of the group is maintained and disintegration through contamination with **others** is averted. Since the Hindus do not eat beef when *Hempies comments on saving the steak for the maid* there was no response and therefore this is an oppositional reading and in the same way there was no response to the *policeman's 'Quiet!'* since Indians were not bullied by the police the way blacks and Coloureds were. However *Ma Moloi's blue people* signified colour and race, with the context of the ‘upwardly mobile’ in ‘you people moving into the suburbs’ this touched a chord providing a meaning in the interaction between their reality, and the empirical world. The Indian community has traditionally been a merchant class with assets to purchase housing in better neighbourhoods. So a preferred meaning was given and in the same way Andrew’s *stop crime-emigrate* received a preferred meaning since many Indians have in fact emigrated. During apartheid those who could afford to do so sent their children overseas for a good education as they could not gain access easily to certain local university institutions because of apartheid. Today many wish to leave because they fear the crime, and since there has been competition between themselves and blacks

for scarce resources since the end of the nineteenth century. Indian women were replaced by African men on the sugar estates, and although on average African male workers were paid more than Indian women, the new recruits came with their wives and children, who, by law could also be made to work for the landowner (Beall, 1990: 155).

Susan's group enjoyed Billy's *Bayete Nkosi*, since like Joanne's group, the satirising of Ike's bid for the presidency, also signifies their own limited access to resources. During apartheid, they had enjoyed a special dispensation as 'token blacks' with access to jobs in many fields. Billy's performance provides a sensation of incongruity and stresses an ambivalence about the new dispensation. Although all people are now equal, previously **they** were a little more equal both politically and economically since many were traders and merchants. The fear is the government is insisting with affirmative action that more jobs be given to blacks. A preferred reading was given. The principle of *affirmative action*, if poorly applied, may cause a tense relationship with the principles of non-racialism and non-sexism (Innes, Kentridge & Perold, 1993). Affirmative action is controversial and can mean different things to different people.

The performance of the *toyi-toyi* was enjoyed by this group and a preferred reading given because the humour came from the perception of incongruity in the behaviour of the trader businessman, Ike, supporting the proletariat and the informal sector (Palmer, 1994: 94). The response to the *toyi-toyi* of Ike and Ma Moloi was a negotiated reading since the incongruity of Ike dancing the proletariat's political dance was not sustained by this group which tended to be conservative. Andrew's reference to *panties and the school master finding them* is accepted as a lark and performance by the group and a preferred reading results. *Kobie's eighteen hours and stretch marks* also received a preferred reading but the cartoon of *Hempies and Ma Moloi* failed to draw any laughter. A resistant reading here represented the ideology of separation of the races, especially for marriage which was expressed earlier by Rookmuni "Well they wouldn't want their children to marry that caste" which is in the similar cultural group. Socialising was regarded a little differently so the incongruity of association is allowed and Hempies's *Chin chin ma wetu* provides value to the performance while Hempies and Ma Moloi together presented a preferred reading. Finally Ma Moloi's comment *to hate legally* is perhaps an aspect understood by this group who gave it a negotiated reading of '2'.

The changing discourse of liberal capitalism

The *S B* series propagates a goal of consumerism for black viewers by depicting a black couple with expensive clothing, leather living room furniture and modern kitchen as proof of their newly acquired status by western cultural standards. Elizabeth's group (six school teachers, a nursing sister and a housewife of substantial means) appeared oblivious to the signifiers of consumerism in the text, but most indicated a preference for the white family's kitchen because it was 'homely', which was a discrepant reading of the text since the black family was being depicted enjoying the modern consumer symbols of success. Sut Jhally & Justin Lewis (1992:119) in discussing black perception of images on television in the United States, state:

Behind the preference for the Cosby Show lies a subtle interaction between race and class in the context of American culture - displayed on television and elsewhere- in which, to be working class, is a sign of failing in the meritocracy. In the upwardly mobile world of popular television, it is only when black people are presented as middle class that they become normal and are assimilated into the succession of images of social success.

The group's responses appeared to comprehend the preferred meaning but resisted its validity. Despite their social positioning giving them access to the same cultural codes as the other focus groups, these Zulu women assigned negative values to certain aspects of the text as evidence of their resistance to the reading.

The Hindu group response to consumerism suggested one is judged by material assets and in seeking a marriage partner today young Hindu women are not concerned about sexual attractiveness but evaluate a prospective husband by consumer symbols of prosperity "his car, his Gucci chain, you know the gold chain and [that] wearing Daniel Hector clothes or driving a BMW with an NUR registration". An explanation for this move to consumerism came from a participant, Kubeshni, a young woman not related to the family:

Kubeshni: *I just want to say we are caught in between this thing of love and of an economic assessment of a class is versus other things. Now, traditionally we come from that way of thinking [love] so is this like this because everybody else [thinks like that].*

The Coloured group was not as overwhelmed by consumerism and when asked about whether shopping or gambling was worse characteristics, a couple of women confessed to a 'controlled' addiction' to gambling. The attitude to consumerism was indifferent as shopping was associated with grocery shopping. "Only the main essentials, but the luxuries - Christmas is alright for the luxuries. And maybe Easter".

The response to consumerism among the white groups depicted different perceptions, depending on the class. Janet's group indicated they found Thando quite interesting with a sense of style but Kobie they would never introduce to their friends. They confessed they loved to shop and to gamble but not excessively, however in their evaluation of class among white people they felt "There are more low class low income group people than there are upper income group people and if people drink and sleep around they are low class". This evaluation contradicted itself as money was the criterion for class (low income and upper income) but, in addition, behaviour and moral values were considered indicators of class. Appearance and dress were seen also as class indicators. However, one participant described a woman with "dyed blond hair with dark roots, skin tight pants, yet when she spoke she was obviously well educated and not 'low class'. Other members disagreed "Because low class is low class. That's that". The response was really an example of cognitive dissonance where having said class was not related to money the picture of the frowsy woman made them revert to that view. Leigh's group was more caustic about the black consumer aspirations, seeing the Moloi's kitchen as a reflection of the way a black family "wanted to have dinner at a dining room table by 'Morkels'" (a low income furniture store). As discussed earlier, Leigh-Ann's group, working class and having a difficult time coping financially, felt that with money and the right accent one could overcome many difficulties.

The cultural implications of consumerism must be seen as both social and economic as the circulation of cultural values in capitalist societies harmonizes for different social groups the capacity to invest cultural value in symbolic goods. The broader social codes within which the signs are framed are first circulated and interiorised by that particular community of users so that those symbolic goods function as social signs of prestige, status and social standing (Bordieu,1984). Each group offered an interpretation of what was of cultural value so that among certain Hindus a BMW and Rolex watch were said to be important assets in a marriage

partner. For the English upper class group, understatement is the ultimate state- they knew it when they saw it and if it stated too much it was unacceptable. For those lacking financial resources, like the Coloured and English working class, enough money to “have a flutter at gambling or a few luxuries on the dinner table at Christmas was the answer” or at least enough to retain one’s class position.

Freda’s group articulated a consensus of resentment towards Ike, the black male character, being well dressed, whereas Billy, the white male character, is depicted as sloppy and badly dressed. Coupled to this they expressed outrage that the home of the whites was shabby while the blacks owned a modern home. Their oppositional reading confirms the privileged meaning intended by the production team (Appendix A) but the depiction of the material comforts of the black family angered the Afrikaans focus group, because it substantiated their worst fears of blacks becoming elevated in their social position. They resented any evidence of black consumerism signifying increased black power since that implied a reduction of white consumerism and a diminution of white power. Freda’s group responded negatively to many of the black images in *SB*. Their primary interpretation was grounded in an interactive discussion about black families moving into traditionally white areas and initially they rejected any positive images of blacks. The discussion ranged over a wide sociological area but the speakers seemed to re-inscribe blacks into an apartheid mode by the negative manner in which they assessed black students’ ability to cope with multiracial classrooms. One of the teachers suggested a slower pace for the absorption of black children into the white English schools, because they could not speak English and had no one at home to help them with their homework. Another teacher, who taught pre-school, felt black children were not experienced in using toilet facilities and so were not ‘school-ready’ even though they had reached the age of seven. The women also explained how among their own parents there was much anger and they too were upset by affirmative action where ‘unqualified’ blacks were getting jobs.

Evaluation of groups’s reaction to research

The lack of personal narrative among Theodora and Eunice’s Zulu groups in their responses to the episodes, might be because they lacked familiarity with the ‘commonplace knowledge’ of how the format for a group’s response in the everyday social world works (Baker, 1984:303). Carolyn

Baker (1984: 303) suggests that standardised questions and follow-up questions derive their sense among a group from what are commonly available ideas of people's behaviour. The Afrikaans group knew one another and the interview immediately became conversational and anecdotal. In this group women's roles tended to be naturalised as "common sense" and thus the production team's encoding was the preferred reading. The group endorsed the dominant meaning encoded into the programme for the role of the maid and the codes for the employment of workers. The group initially accepted the preferred meaning of Thando's relationship with her mother-in-law and her arrogant manner to Ma Moloi was interpreted as aberrant "black culture".

Elizabeth's Zulu group was sensitive to the need as interviewees to share a 'common sense knowledge' of their social structures with the interviewer. When the group shared details of how Zulu society functions, the group's particular responses to *SB* became comprehensible to the researcher. The data generated by the group discussion actually parallels those cultural details that arise from the patterns of social organisations familiar to both the group and the researcher. The Zulu women's interpretation seemed to be resistant to the preferred meaning. With the new dispensation and the promulgation of laws affecting customary Zulu norms since the Government of National Unity came to power, they feared their traditions would be eroded. This included changing the status of the *makoti* (daughter-in-law) and the traditional hostility between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Previously (Guy, 1990) control over women and their fertile capacity had taken place through marriage with the male transfer of rights over women and their unborn children from father to husband. Bridewealth or *lobola* was the method of payment - usually in the form of cattle but in modern times this is frequently supplemented with hard cash or goods and remains as part of the system of abuse of daughters-in-law (*makoti*) discussed by the groups. The oppression of women in pre-colonial society was different from today's experience since, because of the importance of fertility, women enjoyed status and a certain autonomy (Meintjies, 1990: 125). When the precapitalist era had passed and gender was no longer central to the society, male control over female labour actually was no longer necessary in African society (Meintjies, 1990: 127). By the late 1920s and 1930s there were far-reaching effects of the industrial transformation when large numbers of women became wage labour (Berger, 1992: 292). Many ambiguities accompanied this transition where women's new independence meant an increase in economic and emotional insecurity. Despite the limitations that occurred in colonial

society, some African women had appropriated elements of the new order and others defended the old. An essential element of male power in the society is '*lobola*' since women, because they had been 'paid for' were made to feel they had to be submissive. Some of the focus group women vigorously protested this argument, contending that the purpose of *lobola* was to provide family ties with other families through their marriages, not to provide slaves for the family of the husband (Appendix D).

The practice of *lobola* as a particular societal element was not included in any of the episodes of the programme, but affected the way the Zulu participants negotiated the preferred meaning for the role of women in the home. In Zulu society, after the primary status of the husband, as household head comes the mother-in-law, regardless of the size of the family. The Zulu group negotiated their reading of the ambiguous role of the mother-in-law in the Moloi household, where Thando constantly challenged Ma Moloi's position. The role of a maid in the household was also decoded oppositionally; no black woman should be called 'madam' because it was not egalitarian in Zulu society where any women of equal age would be called '*sis*'. The stereotype of a black woman stealing in a servant capacity was also read oppositionally since the depiction of a woman engaged in stealing reduced the credibility of black women; this act was seen as an erosion of the power of black women.

The social interaction which developed after viewing and discussing the videos was more obvious among some groups than others. This could be attributed to the context and the process of the interview. As David Silverman (1993:55) suggests "even if the ethnographer is silent their presence implies matters relevant to 'identity' should be highlighted, and categories of kinship or ethnic labels are emphasised by participants who [actually] name the identity devices for ethnicity". The Zulu women's reading of the stereotypes of the characters tended to resist the preferred meaning and when asked about the black characters they were far more aware of gender inequalities than all the groups except the lesbian group (Appendix D). The Zulu group seemed to singularly ignore the white characters in most of the discussion and their readings were tied to perceptions of power (Appendix D) so that arguments ensued about the traditional responsibilities of women. Women were regarded as abused homemakers, with excessive responsibilities for housekeeping. Although Thando's running for president was regarded as progressive, there was

the perception by some that the Beijing conference had sparked unrealistic expectations for women (Appendix D).

In evaluating the merit of these interviews the *ambivalent* comments from different groups provided semiotic signifiers for the signified located in the cultural mould underpinning their society (Yaple & Korzenny, 1989:308). The need for balance and hegemony can be found in that “web of conflicting historical, social, economic, political and psychological discourses out of which further texts arise,” (Tomaselli, 1996:21). This includes the researcher’s own text as an interaction between the participant and the interviewer, for whom the interviewee encodes a new text which is then decoded for you, the reader of the text, *ad infinitum*.

The range of mediated accounts opens up new perspectives for modifying the media form into **meaning** and **significance** for the viewer. The genre then for a ‘preferred’ reading analysis can make the difference in evaluating the responses of different focus groups. In trying to find the role that concrete, shared social experience plays in determining how one decodes a message with ideologically ‘preferred’ readings the compromise between the search for media effects and meanings of media content becomes apparent (Fiske, 1987). Also the pleasure of the viewer plays a role in the way in which they decode the text. For the sitcom, laughter has enabled the researcher to gauge a benchmark of this pleasure but the reasons for the laughter can vary tremendously. The research analysis has attempted to identify those ‘structural conditions’ which proclaim different cultural competencies (Morley, 1980). However it was necessary also to look at the subcultural and class differences in processing messages across the cultural divide. ‘Cultural reconciliation’ is a signifier for the signified ‘harmony’ or ‘peace’ and is a symbolic form or meaningful construction but it also raises problems of understanding and interpretation (Thompson, 1990:274). The term ‘cultural reconciliation’ has been appropriated to describe a state of accord for ‘nation-building’ which has no fixed meaning; it signifies acceptance of the new order since white privilege and apartheid have ceased to be the dominant ideology.

Mediation and accommodation in civil society in this incongruity obviously works, as the intentionality of the production team is vindicated by those 1,4 million viewers watching

“situations and representations of people coping with the changes in South Africa through humour” (personal interview Hofmeyr, March 15, 1996 Appendix A).

CHAPTER VI

Transformation and Reconciliation: A Flexible Model

watching television ... complex cultural practice full of dialogical negotiations and contestations (Ang, 1989)

Case study of *Going Up III*

Introduction

This chapter examines the responses of four groups of women, two black and two white, to the episodes selected from *Going Up III* (*GU III*). Reception studies were undertaken in October 1996 and completed in January 1997. *GU III* is significantly different from *Suburban Bliss* (*SB*) since the latter was created to attract a black audience (Chapter Three) and the former series was created to attract a white English-speaking audience (Chapter Four and interviews Mafela and Durrant, 1995 Appendix C). The humour is different since *SB* is modelled after the American situation comedy *All in the Family*, with its bigoted working class character, Archie Bunker and “structured by the language of realism” (Taylor, 1989:38). The characters in *SB* are locked into their situation as business partners and as neighbours. This generates the comedy and the characters’ monstrous display of bigotry inverts bourgeois decorum. However, *GU III* is written in the more absurdist British style of humour. This style is constructed by a series of ‘gags’ (Palmer, 1987:41) analysable into two moments - a ‘peripeteia’, being the construction within the narrative of a shock or surprise and a ‘syllogism’, a system of reasoning in which the viewer moves from the major premise (a well-known state of affairs) through the minor premise (empirical observation) to a conclusion (result of correct reasoning). In comedy of the absurd, the syllogism is constructed from two contradictory syllogisms, in which implausibility and false reasoning function together. But the two moments of the gag are inseparable and there is a balance of plausibility and implausibility that transforms the peripeteia into comic surprise (Palmer, 1987:43). Thus the narrative in *GU III* depicts plausible incidents - clients making appointments with the lawyers for advice - and the implausible results arising from this. A woman arrives to set divorce proceedings in motion because she found pornographic video tapes in her

husband's closet. She leaves the tapes as evidence and they are mixed up with video tapes made for the government. Mrs Jakobs decides to watch the pornography tapes and an absurd situation results.

According to Richard Beynon, the writer of *GU*:

I like the politically non-correct stuff ... I don't like morals. I try not to have morals in Going Up. ... What I don't like at all is where you know it's all convention when the convention has overtaken all our considerations ... I try to make people speak. I try to have them respond to events in the way that I think South Africans respond to events. South Africans of different kinds. A lot of the humour is just off-the-wall humour. It's absurdist. I think that's the direction I intend to go. I really think it's the way people speak that responds, rather than the situation (interview, October, 1996 Appendix C).

Bearing in mind Beynon's comments, the focus groups' responses to *GU III* were examined in terms of a laughter table similar to that described in Chapter Five. The ease with which the participants comprehended the narrative and responded to the humour influenced their engagement in interpreting the programme. In *GU III* the plot centres around situations with which many South African viewers are familiar, including attempting to find work despite the effects of affirmative action in "A Case of the Historically Advantages Pale Males" (HAPMs). The subtext for mixing up video tapes in "Flexible Asian Models" (FAM) jibes at government inefficiency and points out that adults have access now to pornography.

Humour as signifying and social process

To participate fully in the discussion the viewers had to identify with the text and internalise the events that occurred against the background of their knowledge, experience and culture. Sometimes the humour was interpreted differently by the Zulu speakers as it may have required participation in a similar incident where the viewer would have been required to internalise it, adding to it from their own experience and filling in events not shown on screen. This was apparent when Tsaba negotiated with the female filmmaker on behalf of the government because her tapes were so boring. Perhaps a lack of the relevant experience from the corporate world to

relate to the situation meant participants did not find the scene amusing, judging by their lack of laughter (laughter table - *Brenda: Public Works*, Appendix I).

When viewers did find the programme entertaining, and expressed their pleasure by laughing, this became a value judgement based on their own view, not an absolute one. Palmer (1987:216) citing Freud, explains many jokes are directly aggressive, the butt of the joke causing the laughter and allowing free rein by the reader's subconscious aggression. Freud conflates all forms of jokes with what he calls 'tendentious jokes' meaning that the pleasure given by jokes serves the purpose of releasing some drive, which otherwise would be repressed. Freud's argument states that all people are motivated from a need to relieve emotional stress and if the attempt to do so is successful then a sense of gratification is achieved (citing Freud, Palmer, 1987:218). Jests and jokes neutralise criticism by combining sense and nonsense, making possible that which was forbidden by direct criticism. Therefore symbolic sources like fiction, by assuaging unconscious human guilt feelings in the awareness of restraining their sexual drives, cause people to enjoy their symbolic form of expression as an agreeable catharsis. Humour, being both a signifying and a social process, can indicate appreciation. While viewing the sitcom, the intended joke or performance of the actor caused the groups to laugh, demonstrating they had filled in the 'gap' caused by the structure of the humorous situation. This laughter represented their level of enjoyment, which was recorded by the researcher. Jubilee and Elizabeth's Zulu groups laughed but not uproariously. In terms of Palmer's exposition (1994:5) whether or not the women found the sitcom funny and the implications of this are analysed in this chapter.

Situation comedy is institutionalised humour poking fun at individuals to indicate acceptable behaviour. Therefore it becomes a social corrector using laughter as a weapon to show people how not to behave in social situations and/or making fun of sacrosanct institutions as a means of releasing frustration with authority (Grote, 1983:31). John Fiske has argued that there are a number of devices, including humour, that generate more meaning than the author intended and thus the author has no control over the audience's reaction because humour depends on contradictions in the discourse (Fiske, 1989:70). However, when the text is sufficiently accessible, the viewer can become actively involved by creating a meaning both relevant culturally and giving pleasure. To obtain this pleasure, the viewer needs to feel control over part of what s/he is

viewing and feel a sense of power from the process of viewing. Applying Fiske's thesis to the narrative when it seems humour is employed as a device demonstrates how the act of laughing can also give a sense of power (Fiske, 1989:71). Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz, in their cross-cultural reception study in Israel for *Dallas*, used an interesting method to analyse their data (Liebes & Katz, 1989:205). They contend that in reception studies "empirical evidence for a critical ability is still very sparse". With evidence based on the analysis from the *GU III* groups it is suggested that laughter itself indicates a form of critical ability by an audience when viewing a sitcom.

There are three methods which audiences might use to comprehend the narrative (Liebes & Katz, 1989:205). First the semantic, second, the syntactic for recognition of the genre or other formulaic structures and third, the pragmatic, when the viewers of *GU III* were aware of the processing by their cognitive selves. Viewers tended to use the programme referentially rather than critically to connect to their own real life rather than critically. However, in the focus-group discussion, critical readings were not necessarily a defence against ideology as evidenced in Morley's *The Nationwide Audience*. His focus-group discussions of a television news magazine "accepted the ideology of the program (sic) even while they were critical of its aesthetics. Others opposed the ideology while remaining uncritical of the construction" (citing Morley, Liebes & Katz, 1989:222). Several of the viewers of *GU III* could accept the ideology of the programme but criticised the aesthetics recognising the narrative schemes, the genre or formulae and conventions. Under semantic criticism the typology can include 'themes' and 'messages' where the critical viewer can see the programme as separate from the viewing and understand how the messages are trying to tell them what to do (Liebes & Katz, 1989:209). Many respondents replied more referentially than critically to questions about the programme thereby connecting it to their own lives.

David Morley (1985:41) has suggested that prioritising the **comprehension** of television over the individual responses of the groups is preferable. However, in the research under discussion, the goal was to investigate how a convergence of age, education, class, and gender (demographic tables Appendix F) among different racial groups influenced the decoding of the sitcom in terms of their own lives. In evaluating the content by comparing the laughter levels of the four groups,

an attempt is also made to articulate arguments about the sub-categories of race, class and language. When speaking of the world they lived in, all the groups gave a particular characteristic to that world. Since the researcher was present, together they all constructed a version of that world “appropriate to what we take to be self-evident about the person to whom we are speaking and the context of the question” (citing Carlyn Baker, Silverman, 1993:90).

In interactionism, however, the interviewer creates the interview context and the interviewee **complies** or **resists** the definition of the situation (Silverman, 1993:95). The reliability of the data comes from these ‘subjects’ (the focus group) who provide a ‘depth’, arising from their sustained relationship with the interviewer. They are allowed to define their unique world and to raise important issues not contained in the schedule (citing Denzin, Silverman, 1993:95). A criticism of interactionism, according to Silverman (1993:96), is that it neglects the assumptions made when selecting specific types of open-ended questions. These questions remain a form of social control shaping what the interviewees say, as the interviewer decides what questions should be asked and what is relevant. Silverman (citing Denzin, 1993:97) suggests there are difficulties in penetrating the private world (feelings) of the respondents and maintains the context (place) of the interview can influence the social interaction.

In qualitative research there is a lack of concern with standardising the interpretation of data but it is important to retain good access to the worlds of the subjects or participants. Transcribing the tapes generated by the discussions provided an opportunity to look for topics and themes which helped in the examination of the culturally defined narratives, rather than factually correct statements. In a narrative analysis it is possible to examine the nature and sources which can suggest the interviewees’ perspective. In applying Silverman’s (citing Glassner & Loughlin 1993:107) description of interactionism it is apparent that the interviewer and the interviewees relied on their commonsense knowledge about categories of people. This reliance reproduced and rearticulated the particular group’s cultural details which were grounded in given patterns of social organisation. A distortion of social reality actually can conceal what the interviewer wants to know (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1993:107) but Silverman suggests (1993:108) that true/false reports really present perceptions of the interviewees’ concept of their society. Thus the analysis of the way they speak to each other provides an access to a cultural universe and its moral

assumptions. An ethnographic discourse analysis would be based on the analysis of the recorded 'talk', and can be attentive to its sequential embeddedness, indicating a heterogeneous range of social science issues, including those pertaining to gender relations and social control. In the transcripts of the interviews for both sitcoms, 'conversation' rules, whereby people waited for their turn to speak, were often broken as the group became excited about the issues being discussed. The result led to 'babble' where it was impossible to discern the individual remarks, but this 'babble' demonstrated that the topic was of considerable interest to the group.

Oppositional readings were apparent particularly for Elizabeth's Zulu group, whose income, educational background, cultural capital and home status seemed, (based on the 'intuitive' judgement of the researcher) to be middle class, while Jubilee's group was working class. Class formation among black South Africans has been hampered by racial oppression so that:

middle class and working class identity are based more on cultural pattern, social aspiration and self perception than income or position in the relations of production. Culturally, Africans made social distinctions among themselves based on educational level and the degree to which they deliberately pursued Western tradition. Yet even here differences were more a matter of emphasis than opposition. In different ways both middle class and working class Africans responded to the dehumanisation of the South African system by adapting traditional forms and principles to urban needs (Coplan, 1985:67).

Jubilee was the only facilitator who had not convened a group for the reception study on *SB* but, in any event, group participants for *GU III* were different from those who had responded to *SB*. Jubilee's Zulu group appeared to be working class since a couple of the women were living in the shacks, using battery-operated lamps, with at least ten people per household unit, and although two were matriculated, most had lower educational standards. Despite these disadvantages, this group was much more politically aware and all seemed to be active members of the African National Congress (ANC). Janet's English-speaking group was deemed upper middle class (intuitively by the researcher) based on location of their homes, expensive cars (Mercedes, BMW) driven, number of persons per household unit and standard of education being above matriculation (demographics Appendix F). Freda's Afrikaans group was middle class and some spoke both

¹ David Morley describes (1985) how he "intuitively" assigned class position in his demographics for research in *Family Television: Cultural power and domestic leisure* as respondents never wanted to divulge income earned. The researcher had to assess class position on vehicle driven, professional position and address provided.

English and Afrikaans but a couple of the women used Afrikaans exclusively (demographics Appendix F).

Overview of responses to the two episodes from *GU III*

“The Case of the Historically Advantaged Pale Males” (HAPMS) episode is about changing identity. The programme opens in Squeeza’s *shebeen* (speakeasy) introducing elements of a folk-musical comedy (Chapter Four). The dancing and music was enjoyed by Jubilee’s group but not by Elizabeth’s group who felt that since alcohol was served there, it was inappropriate for them to dance that ‘township jive’ invented by the musicians from Sophiatown. Freda’s group also said the music was not to their taste and Janet’s group disliked the noise level of the music but admired the energy levels of the performers. The first unanimous laughter level came when blonde-headed Piet Gouws suggested that he could become a famous singer like the black Michael Jackson and although it was only a ‘5’ it meant everyone was following the storyline. The narrative portrayed Afrikaans construction business interests attempting to change identity to accommodate affirmative practices taking place in business in South Africa and thereby gain government contracts. Both black groups felt it was unnecessary for anyone to change their identity in the ‘new’ South Africa but were unanimous in declaring that during apartheid many blacks had changed their identity to Coloured as it was advantageous to do so.

Elizabeth’s group laughed the least of all the groups, while Freda’s group was upset by the caricature of Afrikaner males in their short khaki trousers. Jubilee and Janet’s group found the disjuncture of a ‘black van der Merwe’ hilarious. Their reaction bears out Freud’s (1960:56) explanation of ‘condensation’ and ‘abbreviation’ in jokes, so that there is “an interpenetration of the constituents of the two components” providing a playfulness in the judgement in the joke, where hidden similarity between dissimilar things is found, in this example - blacks bearing an Afrikaans name. Freda’s Afrikaans group did not laugh at the joke, giving an oppositional reading and since they indicated their resistance to the portrayal of Afrikaners this was to be expected. Elizabeth’s group did not laugh, giving an oppositional reading since, as they explained changing of identity was a common practice during apartheid.

Homosexuals are introduced into the narrative when the Afrikaans businessmen are instructed by Jabu to appoint them to their Executive Board, together with women and the handicapped. The purpose is “*om reg te lyk*” (to appear correct) at this time of dislocation in the new South Africa and homosexuals provide a ‘scapegoat’ or ‘Folk Devil’ during times of great cultural and political change “into which all the disturbing experiences are condensed” (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke & Roberts, 1978:157). In South Africa anxiety about changes in the social and political structure of society provide a sense of cultural dislocation focusing on the deviance of homosexuality, a symbolic expression of social disorganisation. Attendant fear of change, which undermines fragile securities, is projected onto the ‘Folk Devil’ the alter ego for ‘Virtue’. “We are very alternative” suggests one of the gays, with the play on the word ‘alternative’ as Board members. This ‘alternative’ is a negation, symbolic of those disturbing elements occurring in South African society which can then be *contained*, signifying intense feelings of what goes wrong (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke & Roberts, 1978:161). Since with the new constitution, homosexuality is no longer a crime the use of the Afrikaans slang word *moffies* (for hermaphrodite or gay) caused a **total**² laughter level of ‘8’ but again excluded Elizabeth’s group (laughter table 6.2 Appendix I). When the troupe of prospective board members had passed inspection by the security guard, Piet, the gays made a play for him, and thereafter Gouws’ heartfelt “*Sies*” (Ugh in disgust) received a **total** of ‘11’ across all groups (laughter table 6.2 Appendix I). The next unanimous laughter level occurred when the young black lawyer, Edwin Tsaba, dictated a letter to Mrs Jakobs but she misunderstood his, “that will do it” and proceeded to transcribe that phrase as well. Mrs Jakobs is the butt for much comedy in the episodes, and for most of the groups she signifies subjugation and is viewed as a stupid woman who does her job poorly (transcript Appendix D). Finally, when Jabu lampoons the gays, fluttering his eyelashes and holding his hands effeminately, his inimitable performance scored a **total** laughter level of ‘12’ indicating a participation across all groups (laughter table 6.2, Appendix I).

“**Flexible Asian Models**” concerns the mixup of corporate tapes with pornographic ones. The first unanimous laughter from all groups was a **total** of ‘9’ after Mr Cluver had suggested Mrs Kipling try talking to her husband about the possession of the pornography tapes (laughter table 6.1 Appendix I). Instead she yelled out “You bastard”. Some of the participants from the black

² ‘Total’ indicates the total sum of individual group scores for the laughter levels for the particular joke.

groups were very distressed at her lack of emotional control (transcripts Appendix D). Janet, and Jubilee's groups were really amused by Mrs Jakobs' performance when she surreptitiously watched the pornography tapes at her desk, while in Elizabeth's group only a couple of women smirked, but Freda's group did not laugh at all, illustrating how they felt about pornography. All groups laughed heartily at Piet Gouws' conversation with Jabu, after he had returned the borrowed video tape. Jabu, unwittingly, had given him one of the corporate tapes and when Gouws was asked whether he enjoyed the film his disgusted "*most boring film*" received a total of '10' and a total of '9' for the follow up remark "*blou films*" (blue films). The final big laugh line occurred when the government official from the Public Works Department, the enraptured Billy Noquase, not realising that the tapes screened for the maintenance department were pornographic tapes, told Tsaba how the men had *just loved the videos* and received an '11' laughter response from all groups.

Summary of groups' joint responses

✓ "Case of the Historically Advantaged Pale Males" (HAPMS)

I. Michael Jackson. Piet Gouws wants to become a rap star and feels eventually when he is famous people might confuse him with Michael Jackson. All groups laughed.

II. Jabu: Refers to gays as 'moffies'. Jubilee's group laughed to a '4', Janet's group to a '3' and Freda's group to a '1'. Elizabeth's group did not laugh.

III. Tsaba dictating to Mrs Jakobs: 'that should do it'. All four groups laughed but Elizabeth's group laughed the least.

IV. Performance - Jabu: Mimics gays. All four groups laughed with Jubilee's group at a '5' and Elizabeth and Freda's groups a '2'.

"Flexible Asian Models" (FAM)

I. Mrs. Kipling: 'You bastard'. Mrs Kipling thinks she has found pornography tapes in her husband's closet. She comes to Mr Cluver to arrange a divorce. He suggests she should first speak to her husband about it. She then calls her husband "you bastard". Jubilee's group laughed to a '4', to a '1' for Elizabeth and both Freda and Janet's groups to a '2'.

II. Performance: *Mrs Jakobs* decides to view the pornographic tapes and exhibits a marked reaction to them. Freda's group did not laugh. Jubilee and Janet's group laughed to a '3' and Elizabeth's group to a '1'.

III. Mrs Jakobs, watching the tapes: '*Poor, poor girly*'. Freda and Janet's groups laughed to a '4'. The black groups did not laugh at all.

IV. Piet: '*Just passing*'. Piet knows pornography tapes have been delivered to Cluver and Associates and so he hangs around the entrance. When Jabu is about to lock up he asks him what he is doing there and Piet replies '*just passing*'. Elizabeth's group did not laugh. Janet's group laughed to a '4' and Freda's group to a '2'.

III. Piet: '*most boring film*'. Piet returns the film and in reply to Jabu says '*most boring film*'. Jabu had mixed up the tapes and given him one of the corporate tapes. All groups laughed but Elizabeth's only to a '1'.

IV. Piet: '*blou films!*'. This is in response to his disgust about pornographic videos which he never saw. All except Jubilee's group laughed.

V. Billy: '*They loved it*'. All groups laughed. Janet's group to '4', Freda's to '3' and the black groups to '2'. There was a double entendre here because Billy mistakenly thought the Maintenance Department had watched a corporate video, but actually they had watched pornographic videos.

The 'message' of *GU III* according to the groups

The encoding/decoding model as derived from Frank Parkin's work in his book *Class Inequality and Political Order* was cited by Morley (1985:45) to be limiting when applied to his model for the reception study of *Nationwide*, as it would have been better to have found what type of material the groups would have been interested to watch. Morley felt it was less relevant for his *Nationwide* groups to make a dominant, negotiated or oppositional reading than what programme they would have chosen to watch. However, for this research with the multicultural women the encoding/decoding model was appropriate for establishing how the groups felt about certain issues. It was useful to apply the model with three positions in which the audience or decoder may stand to the decoded message; first, fully within the interpretative framework which the message proposes and prefers, a preferred reading; second, a modification of the message to inflect their position - a negotiated reading; third, the viewer may understand but provide an

alternative frame of reference working in an oppositional way (Morley,1992:89). However Morley does not regard one oppositional reading of a televisual text as representative of sub-categories of the audience. Responses of individuals can vary where particular readings are represented by different subjectivities so that not all subject positions are equivalent. The analysis of the responses of the four groups took into account the sociohistoric context of who they were - black or white or Afrikaans or Zulu or English speakers - where they lived, within what communities and with whom they associate. In some ways, members of the groups were homogenous in their reactions to race and sexual orientation but, within the groups for attitudes to heterosexuality, they offered more heterogeneous responses.

The episodes were produced as sitcoms with comic episodes inserted into the narrative framework and **HAPMS** ridicules affirmative action, by having the Afrikaners change their identities, but the black groups responded oppositionally. The plausibility of the narrative in terms of the groups' life experience caused them to read the programme oppositionally and sometimes they evidenced no critical ability to understand the **genre**. Jubilee's group did laugh heartily at the gay's comments on the man's thighs but their response to the humour here was restricted more to the farcical portrayals of homosexuality. Palmer's concept for the manner in which the logic of the absurd influences the sitcom where "it articulates gags together into farce sequences ... [and] the more often the logic of the absurd is used to articulate gags onto realist narrative in order to serve realist purposes, the more realist the narrative as a whole will seem" is applicable to Jubilee's group's response (Palmer,1987:155).

In Elizabeth's group, Constance, who is an underwriter for a major insurance company and has qualifications in accountancy suggested:

Well, the message is that ... if we are in the new South Africa, we must think that we are the best nation [better] than the others. We are still all the same although the government is black now.

The patterns of communication were slower in getting started in this group but Elizabeth, the facilitator and a qualified midwife followed up saying:

But the government is multiracial. Everybody's got an equal standing to the government, it's democratic ... we don't try to change ourselves and make another

colour. We are still acceptable the colour we are. With the colour we have - we are just like butterflies with colours - but skin butterflies.

The reaction to this last remark was received with enthusiasm and seemed to open the group's patterns of communication because thereafter there was much more interaction among the participants. Since the aim was to compare cultural differences in the programme and although the variations in education made it difficult to do so, some participants were sufficiently articulate to be able to express themselves. Reactions to the programmes's presentational style (sitcom genre) have more to do with taste than differences for a preferred meaning, which is based on an ideological proposition (Moore, 1993:21). Elizabeth's group indicated a concern with identity when Constance said "we are still all the same although the government is black now". The concept of **identity as sameness** can be distinguished from **identity as subjectivity** where the one deals with the location of subjects and their historic individuality, and then proceeds to the collective communities of nations, gender, classes, generational, racial and ethnic groups (Gilroy, 1996:40). Identity can thus be traced back to sources in the institutional patterning of identity in terms of the spoken versus written languages, the memory of groups and the governance of that group where in fact identity-producing mechanisms form and reproduce an 'imagined community'.

During the screening in Jubilee's group, Agnes fell asleep, so she only began contributing when the discussion became general and the group narrated their experiences in the community. Maureen, a hawker living in the shacks but with a matriculation exemption offered her understanding of the message of the programme:

In the first instance ... they are in a shebeen, like enjoying ... everybody there irrespective of colour or creed ... that's in there and I like that. And secondly the way Joe Mafela (Jabu) is talking to the client there, by the lawyer's office. I like his style[s] of talking. He can partake inside everybody's culture. He is too democratic and I like his style. And the lawyer, the way he's taking up cases from the client and the way they are working hand in hand together. I liked it ... Just because it's a democratic government now things are going to change. People are going to be in one level.

Maureen's response demonstrated how she has located herself as aware of principles of democracy. In her questionnaire she described her involvement in politics as a fully paid member

who works with the African National Congress (ANC). Her commitment to the ANC meant she had the task of explaining about democracy and the reconstruction of the country. She used the word 'democracy' frequently and its meaning for her was flexible, covering a broad base which implies 'inclusive'. She identified with Durrant's concept of the *shebeen* as an 'imagined community' with people 'enjoying' and being there 'irrespective of colour' (Chapter Four). The group did not have a critical view of the episode as defined by Liebes and Katz, since they did not see it as being separate from reality, Jabu being perceived as the archetype of democracy because 'he can partake inside everybody's culture' through his ability as translator. For this group **"The Case of the Historically Advantaged Pale Males"** (HAPMS) was taken literally and there were intense feelings about the issue of changing identity to accommodate one's economic needs.

Elizabeth's group felt an identity crisis occurs when blacks lose touch with their roots and Winnie, mother of four children and a school teacher found it amusing that whites now wanted to be treated like blacks:

Winnie: [During apartheid] the black people are not allowed to go to the bottle store. At least they had to send the coloured people to buy for them. I've [heard] people who have the whites' surnames because they wanted to be treated as whites. Yes they do, it's time. Those people they call that "zimtiti"³. Yes, because they wanted to be treated as whites. Now it's the time the whites want to be treated as blacks. [Mirth] And now it's the visa-versa. [Mirth].

Elizabeth: And now those people who changed their names now again they are [changing] their surnames to be Zulu. Just like that girl, Miss South Africa. Miss Khumalo [...] has another English surname. Now that South Africa is the 'new' South Africa. [Babble].

During the introductions, Mary had introduced herself as working in a clothing factory as a machinist, but on the questionnaire stated she was a housewife. This act of hers demonstrated that she felt it was more appropriate to be a housewife than work in a factory. There seemed to be a certain status accruing to 'housewife' as this appellation implied she did not have go outside the home to work so economic benefits are insinuated. Since the government of National Unity had come to power Mary was having difficulties with her documentation, as during apartheid she had changed her ethnicity to Coloured to be able to obtain work as a machinist:

³These were people exempted by law who were allowed to buy liquor, being well educated and rich (Source Elizabeth).

Mary (alias Abigail): That always happened, like myself. Before I was Mary [X] because of my I. D. I was not born in Durban. Now I came from the farm. [When I arrived here] the government said I [had to go] back to Ixopo to find a job. Now I organized one [and] my friend [took] me to Coloured affairs to take the Book of Life⁴. Now they call me Mary [X] [but] after so long I got a problem. Afterwards [now] I was married. Now I don't know what to do. I must change my I. D. too, and my friend, [took] me to our union organization. Now they make a big issue. They say I must go to the lawyer and make a case ... to change now again to my mother's surname, then I go back to marriage. That was what happened because of the apartheid.

Elizabeth: They played coloured, it was said "I'm playing coloured because I want to earn a better [living in] South Africa".

Today affirmative action means people of colour are to be given priority for jobs but whereas previously Indian and Coloured people were included in this category there is a perception that only blacks will qualify for this preferential treatment (transcripts, Appendix D). Consequently many, who changed their identity to qualify for the privileges accorded Coloureds, are now rushing to change back to black. Identity is also conceived as solidarity, so that whatever happens in society is connected but distinct and separate, so that events occurring can affect both individuals and society (Gilroy, 1996:41). The 1994 elections changed power relations from a white minority power to a black majority government; now blacks would appear to be favoured in the economic sector (Adam, 1995 July).

The agency or control that individuals have is restricted within the society but, whether individuals deliberately separate themselves into particular groups, or if economic or historical circumstances determine the process, is not always certain. In this instance economic factors have been responsible for people changing their identity. The idea that identity cannot be changed is tied into the concept of 'agency' and to the politics of a place or a location, as well as those problems that are inherent in all 'identity politics' (Hall, 1996b:4). Here the idea is not that the subject or identity should be abolished on the basis of decentring, but to think of it as a new decentred position, one of identification. Ajuna, one of Jubilee's group explained the problems she had in obtaining a job under the previous government when Coloureds were given priority over Indians:

⁴The 'book of life' was issued to indicate birth date etc and race. The new book of life has no race category. Today to be eligible to vote in elections as a citizen, people have to register, since prior to the election blacks were not issued with a 'book of life'.

Ajuna: In a previous government - I can say like this - previous government. Right, my name it's Ajuna. Right! But now sometimes they say [fill in] application forms. I do my application at home ... I post it. Now they will reply me that to say, right, I must go in, for interview. But once I reach over there ...

Agnes: You got short hair!

Ajuna: I got short hair. Now this people when they are [serving] in the office ...

Maureen: They don't accept ...

Ajuna: ... they'll never accept me now because why they going to see me with my short hair. They going to say something I'm an Indian. I'm Ajuna. And the way I spoke on the phone, I was speaking very very nice. They couldn't say I'm a Coloured or Indian. But once I come over there, I can't get no job, no money. You know what, what I'm going to tell you girls ... you got a Standard Ten Certificate? - Yes I got my Standard Ten Certificate. Or now go home. We'll give you a call. You gonna wait for the call until ... You don't get no call, and then what you going to do? You going to phone again. You see now I'm still waiting. No vacancies. The answer. That's it. Now ... [Babble] whites, I can say that whites, that whites now, they do applications to the offices. They let ... they put them down. You see. When they go over there they can't get the jobs. Now they changing their names. To be Jabulani, Sibiya or whatever.

Agnes: And they get the job.

Ajuna: Now they getting a job. Because they been changing [their names] [Babble]

Maureen: What happens if they want to see them personal?

[Babble]

Agnes: They can't change the colour of their skins. Now that's why the tender was there. [Referring to the Afrikaner construction men in HAPMS].

The 'common sense' concept of an identity in this instance, is based on the recognition of a common origin, shared characteristics with some person or group, or even an ideal and the shared loyalty derived from this. In this instance Ajuna's straight hair prevented her from obtaining the job since under the previous government it was felt most Coloureds, who had curly hair, were favoured and given priority in job allocation. For the research the assumption had been that the entire group's ethnicity was Zulu, given that they all lived in that neighbourhood and were black. Ajuna's contribution confirmed that identities are constructed within discourse. There was a hybrid group of women, some of whom were Zulu and others Indian, married or living with black men. Stuart Hall (1996b:4) contends that the production of a hybrid identity at a specific time or place materialises during a political discourse of power, to spell out a sense of difference and separation. By describing her experiences and difficulty in obtaining work, Ajuna confirmed that as an Indian she too had experienced discrimination during apartheid.

The black groups in fact engaged with the text but redefined it in terms of their own socioeconomic status so that the 'coloured butterfly' analogy expressed by Elizabeth redefined identity as different in terms of colour, but sharing the same historic background. Winnie, a mother of four and a school teacher, explained why everyone must think in terms of being multiracial:

I think to be multiracial is now a matter of [urgency]. That means we should contribute our customs, beliefs but in our norms and [values] we shouldn't change that. Although we mix wherever we go with the whites and blacks they should mix [together], but they should not change their background. Should not forget about Africa. So that's all I can say.

Here Winnie's notion of multiculturalism suggests people of different cultures should interact with one another but retain their individual cultural values. In the formation of a new South Africa the identity of each group is said to be guaranteed as the language of that group is to be protected. Language constructs meanings so through that thoughts, meanings, ideas and feelings are represented in a culture. Stuart Hall contends (1997a:2) that culture is "primarily concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings ... between the members of a society or group ... [where] they interpret the world in roughly the same ways" and this reinforced Winnie's comments about blacks and whites mixing and contributing their customs.

However the complexity of a culture is found in the traditions and institutions as well as the historic elements indicating the stages of the process where "the 'residual' and the emergent' are significant both in themselves and in what they reveal of the characteristics of the 'dominant' (Williams,1977:122). The 'residual' was formed in the past but is still active in the present cultural process and, in Zulu society, the role of women would fall into this category since male/female relations in many rural communities are lived and practised on the previous formation. The 'emergent' would incorporate the new meanings and values, new practices and relationships being created since the 1994 election in South Africa. Defining 'residual' and 'emergent' depends on the understanding of the dominant culture as the residual hearkens back to earlier social formations, when those meanings and values were generated representing aspirations and achievements which the dominant culture neglects, opposes or represses. It is this residual formation of which Winnie speaks and this, according to Williams (1977:124) is at the heart of

change in the “formation of a new class ... and the coming to consciousness of a new class ... and emergence of elements of a new cultural formation”.

During the screening of both episodes of *GU III*, Elizabeth's groups had a limited response to the humour in the text. Both Eunice and Phyllis dozed initially, but their subsequent interaction in discussion demonstrated that they were applying the content of the episodes literally, relating back to their own experiences. In the *shebeen* scene at the beginning, like all the groups, they laughed at Piet Gouws' comparing himself, the blonde headed white man, to Michael Jackson, famous black singer (laughter table 6.2 Appendix). In South Africa at an entertainment and social level with the addition of music, emergent changes are already in place in the society, where **young** whites and blacks socialise in the *shebeen* whereas previously this interaction was taboo.

In Janet's group, acknowledgement of the message of change was referenced in a narrative of affirmative action. The emergence of a new class is not based on the privilege of a white skin but a black skin and Jennifer, a middle aged woman, who described herself as ‘a gardener and a homeworker who had been at home for thirty five years’, spoke for all, with her comment “We got a long way to go” which was met by raucous laughter. Sylvia, a practising psychiatric nurse, “and we got to sit back and laugh a bit. Because if you don't laugh you cry”. Marie, who had come with Jennifer and was also a grandmother felt:

We have to change, regardless. There is no way that you can live in South Africa and not change. I thought ... how did we live in this country and not really do something about it? Because we all knew what was going on, and now that things have changed ... we must try, and especially if you're a Christian, you must try to prod this on a bit, so that, you know, maybe overlook some of the things they do that you don't like, or they're not up to standard.

Paul Gilroy (1996:41) argues that since identity is conceived as solidarity, whatever takes place in society affects individuals in that society. Following this reasoning in the discussion of the process of change among this group there was much concern about retaining ‘standards’. Cultural change implies an ability to relinquish certain codes, symbols of living and values by giving up part of an inherited identity (Robins, 1996:61). Kevin Robins suggests “there is a basic fear about the mortality of the collective institution” and similarly the focus group of white upper-class English speaking women recognised the possible demise of their way of living as a privileged

minority. Sylvia asked whether they should lower their standards if the blacks were not up to standard, which stimulated a discussion between Jenny, who works in a bank, and Sylvia, the psychiatric nurse:

***Jenny:** The problem is also that everybody's too busy walking on eggs. We're all walking on eggs and we're too scared to say what we actually feel and it's like in the working world - you know I work in a Bank and there's such fraud that's going on that we all know about. We know and they know -- who the perpetrators of the fraud are, and yet they [management] cannot do anything about it because there's no tangible proof, and if you say anything to them, or if you insinuate and you suspect them, the repercussions are unbelievable. And they say 'oh, but you know you say that only because I'm black.' You wouldn't be saying that to Janet, because Janet's white. So everybody skirts around the issue, walking on eggs.*

***Sylvia:** It's very much a reversed apartheid, in a lot of ways. You cannot take up an issue with a black person without it being thrown back at you and you've actually got to reiterate it's not a racial issue, this is an issue regarding something you've done, ... Oh, but no, the race issue gets brought into it and you've actually got to kick it out all the time.*

Among the white English speakers there was fear that change would threaten 'everything' especially the meaning and 'standards' of a Eurocentric culture. However change implies the capacity to give up certain aspects of a given identity. Kevin Robins (1996: 61), citing Cornelius Castoriadis argues there is "a kind of living deadness in a culture that does not admit the possibility of its own mortality". Without an openness in cultural identities, rigidity and closure are promoted.

In their critical response to the episodes, Janet's group said **HAPMs** was "over the top" and preferred "**Flexible Asian Models**" (**FAM**). Sylvia, the psychiatric nurse thought it was "being quite factual on what goes on in our country" but Jenny felt they (the writers) were making too much of a point and that more subtlety would have meant that as a group they might have listened to the message. This group also laughed at Piet being compared to Michael Jackson, and in fact indicated through laughter the extent of their enjoyment and comprehension throughout both episodes. They particularly liked jokes at the Afrikaners' expense and this type of rejection of Afrikaners has had a long history in South Africa, starting with the Boer War.

Alternative sexuality

Gays as 'moffies'

On the laughter chart this coding was laughed at by a couple of Freda's group but this was a negotiated reading since the group was prepared to discuss the subject of homosexuality, indicating how they regarded gay men as more fun than lesbians:

Carin: *But ... I must say, I enjoyed them ... I'm a Freestater.*

Margerie: *... there's lots of um ... them that I like, I still don't approve ... I don't approve, but I enjoyed. I laughed at them, but I don't approve of them. I know it might seem ... their ideas, but I don't approve.*

Carin: *Dis fine om nie um ... saam te stem, maar moet mense gemeentheid gee. Ek ken baie, ek ken baie mense, ek ken "gay" mense, en hulle is nice ... maar ek moet sê ek sal nie gemaklik voel saam met "gay" vrouens nie. [It's Ok not to agree with them but a person must give them recognition. I know many gay people and they're nice people but I must say I don't feel comfortable around gay women].*

Joliena: *Ek stem met jou saam. Ek stem met jou saam. Ek dink mans is die grootste fun om met saam te wees omdat jy gemaklik kon wees, maar vrouens is 'n ander ding nou. [I agree with you. I think men are the greatest fun to be with but women are another thing].*

Freda: *Ons [het paneel] gehad by die kerk oor seksualisme toelaat [moet wees] ... twee lesbians op die paneel gehad en ek was woedend toe, ek wil uitloop. Die een, as iemand iets gesê het oor God, het sy gesê noem jy hom "hy" gegaan. En so dis so te sê. En daar was ook mense in die gehoor wat haar bietjie aangepak het daaroor. Ek het ook ... ek gaan liewe saam met die gay men as saam met die lesbians. Dis vir my meer aanvaarbaar. Maar ek ken nie baie nie, net daardie twee wat ek ... wat baie aggressief was. [We had panels at church on whether alternative sexuality should be allowed ... two lesbians on the panel made me so furious I wanted to leave. The one whenever someone spoke of God instead of calling 'him' should be 'her'. And there were people in the audience who attacked her on that and I felt the same. I would rather be with gay men than with lesbians. For me it is much pleasanter. But I don't know many, just the two that I found so aggressive.*

Estrelita: *We went to the premiere of Philadelphia, the evening was in aid of a Hospice for gay HIV positive patients. Ninety percent of the people were gay men or gay women. And I think of myself as being quite enlightened, but I must be honest with you, when they served the food, the first thought that crossed my mind was "gee! I wonder who prepared this". Being enlightened till I thought to myself, now don't be ridiculous in the oh, then they had a guest speaker from the University who is the Dean of the Faculty ... whom I happen to know ... came up and said "I'm also gay". And I think I cried more than anyone else in the audience, because there was so much pathos and so much empathy with this guy. ... but to me it was quite frightening to think that I could have thought "ooh! Wie het hierdie kos gaar gemaak? Was hulle hande gewas? Het hulle [handskoene]*

aangehad?”. *[Who cooked this food? Were their hands washed? Did they wear gloves?] Just shows you how hypocritical you can be.*

The Afrikaans group evinced a range of reactions to homosexuality indicating a heterogeneity amongst the group and in this context it became a question of how each woman felt about their social situation. All were religious, and had belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church but cultural background influenced their cultural competency in dealing with the acceptance of alternative lifestyles. Freda’s anger about the lesbians who insisted that God can be female also exposed her acceptance of male authority and stitched her back into the patriarchy. Margerie, who openly disapproved of homosexuality was the same participant who was breaking ranks with her cultural background by discarding her language for English. These women would probably never have watched a programme advertised with a homosexual theme but as a sitcom it familiarised them, exposing the deviance of the lifestyle and even recuperated back homosexuality, as the Afrikaans construction men admitted the introduction of “pink hard hats” on the construction site was a good idea.

The readings by all other groups were preferred since all had laughed with gusto, but the participants refused to be drawn into any discussion about it, indicating their opposition by a ‘structured absence’ of discussion. Within the groups of the same ethnicity there were differences of opinion and values. On David Morley’s terms (1985:46) the “interpretive procedures standing between the individual user and the mass media ... about forms of receptiveness or indifference” seem to relate in these groups to discriminatory practices tied into the process of their identity. *Piet Gouw’s: “Sies” [disgust]* which also received a high score from all groups confirmed the dominant reading of rejection of homosexuality as a lifestyle (laughter table 6.2 Appendix I).

Representation of characters

Tsaba dictating to Mrs Jakobs: ‘That should do it’

The reaction here was also for the dominant reading, with Elizabeth’s group giving a negotiated reading and this is borne out by their criticism of Edwin Tsaba, the black lawyer whom they saw as alien to other blacks:

Elizabeth: He does not mix with other people. All types of people. And he does not know all the languages ... everything he does is translated. He’s a Sotho.

Brought up overseas. He doesn't even know his own language. He doesn't even know Afrikaans. He only knows English. So Jabu is playing around with him. He translates the wrong message to the people and he's too Westernised. He doesn't know his culture at all ... he knows more of the European culture. Just like this people who grew up overseas. They know nothing. You know I had my sister-in-law here, Thandi, you remember her?. She grew up in London and everything. Came to South Africa. Her mother was a politician. She was a doctor. She was never satisfied with whatever she had. You know. She thought she was white, when she's actually black. We stayed with her here in the house and she was not um ... acting like us, you know. She was so Westernised she know nothing about her black culture ... she got so frustrated when we went to the farm she couldn't understand all those cultural things and she got so frustrated. You know at the end, she committed suicide.

The response concentrates on Tsaba's inadequacy as a black Sotho man and the perception that many blacks who left during apartheid to be educated overseas and who have now returned do not have a black identity or understand how the local people feel and think, since they have become Westernised. The returned expatriates have acquired a different identity by living abroad and in a truly divided society, it is almost impossible for an individual to assume an identity other than those prescribed by the community where the person resides. Thus people define and interpret their existence where it will signify power and status differentials (Adam & Moodley, 1993:134). South Africa, however, because of the 'official' labelling of ethnic communities by the apartheid government "comprises a variety of cross racial common characteristics so that many whites and blacks can afford to act as if they live outside their communally imposed category" (Adam & Moodley, 1993:134). But for a tradition-inspired group such as Elizabeth's, this would be viewed as aberrant.

'that should do it'

The group also only saw Mrs Jakobs as inefficient and 'unstable' so the fact that she foolishly copies down *'that should do it'* is seen as comic. As a female performer this double-bind of her 'comic spectacle' (because she is depicted as a woman limited in talent and skills) is paradoxically the source of the audience's pleasure, and by this, the narrative, of necessity, stitches her back into the patriarchy (Mellencamp, 1991:331). Freud discusses "nonsense and absurdity which appears so often in dreams and has brought them into so much undeserved contempt ... [where] absurdity in the content of the dream takes the place of the judgement 'this is a piece of nonsense' in the dream-thoughts" (Freud, 1960:233). Freud explains how jokes and dreams share this

representation of the opposite as it enables the person to evade the difficulties of invectives. Instead it produces comic pleasure because it stirs the hearer into a contradictory expenditure of energy reality of the situation is too painful (Mellencamp, 1991:330). The reality is that women are frequently portrayed as stupid, inadequate creatures where domestic order is seen as their primary responsibility. Concern for this disorder in a work situation means Mrs Jakobs' performance is premised on the idea that her disorder and inadequacy in the business world of men is funny.

Jabu mimics the gays

The high score of laughter for this code by all participants in the research indicates a dominant reading. Jabu Cebekulu, the lead character, plays with boundaries of fact and fiction, blurring the line between himself, Joe Mafela, and the character he plays. When talking about the character, Jabu, the black viewers sometimes would mix up the names and call him 'Joe Mafela'. The viewers seemed to enjoy the programme's easy realism as Jabu's antics are fun to watch, moving away from any unpleasantness of ordinary life (Jhally & Lewis, 1992:42). Jabu's parody of the gays is doubly coded: it is the effeminate gesture with his hands, making sense in the narrative of the text, and the 'natural' action of the character outside the text, namely homosexuals in general, so that Jabu's performance works as "a point of summation, not just of narrative development, but also of the ideological conditions pertaining at that moment" (Higson, 1991:175). Jabu constructs the meaning and the conventionality for the representation of gays as the summation of their deviant image.

Sexuality and identity

In watching "**Flexible Asian Models**" three groups gave a preferred reading to Mrs Kipling's 'Bastard' indicating by the strength and volume of their laughter their pleasure. Elizabeth's group gave a negotiated rating since they felt Mrs Kipling's behaviour was unnecessary:

Constance: I think she acts very bad because one wasn't sure that maybe the husband was still going to show her the cassettes. Maybe then [he] was going to play the cassettes on their bedroom that night. [Mirth] She was supposed to wait and see what was the husband going to do with the cassettes and then after [make a fuss] ... Sometimes it is nice to watch the sex videos, especially if you are with your husband in your bedroom. It's very enjoyable to watch those

cassettes. You can't just watch it to the dining room with your kids here. Something private.

Phyllis: Must be not in front of the childrens. It's OK with your husband, but not in front of the childrens.

Elizabeth: But be careful. Your children should not steal them one day. [Mirth]. [Babble].

Phyllis: You know what happens ... you know what happened to my sister-in-law and they ... they just put the cassettes in the video and they fell asleep. In the morning their son came and then he switch on the video cassette. All what they hear is what that noise uhhu uhhu. [Mirth]. They just wake up and say "go out. What you watching?"

Elizabeth: You mustn't forget that those kids are so curious they would take them and play them.

In the decoding of the television text, the groups appeared amused by Mrs Kipling's overreaction to finding the tapes. In the discussion following the screening, all groups were asked since so many characters seem to want to watch videos, what they believed was in the videos which made people want to watch them. They were also asked whether censorship of pornography was a good or bad thing for South Africa. The individual subjectivity of participants as well as the researcher's questions generated frank responses to the text. On Morley's terms (1989:19) the readers in a **preferred** reading model would be "engaged in productive work but under determinate conditions" which were supplied by the text "**Flexible Asian Models**", the producing institution (Penguin Films) and their social history.

Performance of Mrs Jakobs: Reaction to pornographic tapes

Elizabeth's group had demonstrated remarkable openness about watching pornographic tapes but for Mrs Jakobs' performance, they gave a negotiated reading with only a couple of people laughing. This could have been due to those who watched tapes with their husbands identifying with Mrs Jakobs as subject and object. Freda's group did not laugh at all and they had expressed their position on pornography as a negative one so their reading would be oppositional. The 'gap' of Mrs Jakobs' performance in the sitcom uses narrative, expectation of pleasurable performance and narrative suspense for the audience's expectation of the comic and humour. Freud's assessment of the comic and humour in situations where both subject and object are women has significant consequences and since the comic is not gender defined, he notes that "persons become comic as a result of human dependence ... on social factors (citing Freud, Mellencamp, 1991:329).

When Mrs Jakobs watches the tapes, it takes over the male domain of physical comedy by overturning patriarchal assumptions about women watching pornography (Mellencamp,1991:330). Mrs Jakobs is a female victim, both subject and object, performer and spectator as she finally makes the decision to watch the pornography. The viewer can either laugh unconcernedly- a comic response or become angry that she is being exploited. Freud suggests that humorous pleasure comes from “an economy in expenditure on feeling” which saves feeling because the reality is too painful (citing Freud, Mellencamp,1991:330). Thus the viewer’s response is split between comic and humorous pleasure; to deny emotion by humour or the sheer pleasure of comic laughter depicted in Mrs Jakobs’ comic movement and situation (Mellencamp,1991:331). Janet’s group gave a preferred reading and Freda’s group gave a negotiated reading for the watching of tapes by Mrs Jakobs but for very different reasons.

In Freda’s group Helene (late twenties, occupational therapist, unmarried) had seen *Basic Instinct* in the US and found it was embarrassing that a woman’s body should be displayed in this way. Young Marjerie felt that the younger generation who had grown up with television and a more permissive, open society would not be as upset by it. Carin (early twenties, unmarried, occupational therapist) also found any form of pornography totally unacceptable and agreed with Freda who had boycotted the local convenience store wanting a “porn free” environment. Estrelita spoke for freedom of choice and it was not her choice but she did not believe it was the government’s job to monitor or control pornography but a personal decision and for young people “at the end of the day you’re learning about life”. The laughter inspired by the phrase ‘poor, poor girly’ confirms Freud’s explanation where the comic is not gender-defined and derives from the human beings’ relations with the harsh world. So the viewer experiences a pleasurable empathy with that person (Mrs Jakobs) who is pitted against the harsh world watching poor women involved in pornographic acts. If the viewer had had to view those acts, that would cause distress, but since they only watched Mrs Jakobs’ distress, they can laugh at her discomfiture.

Janet’s group was less condemnatory about pornographic books and videos, suggesting that if people wanted access they should subscribe through the mail. Sylvia believed strongly that it was demeaning to the woman to have pornographic magazines lying around the house. Most felt that the choice to see pornography was a personal one that should not be controlled by the

government although Marie seemed a little uncomfortable and Jenny felt her teenaged daughters would not be interested. *Basic Instinct* was said to be embarrassing but Sally informed everyone that it was showing on television the following week. There was a difference between the two groups' reaction to pornography where Freda's group had a zealous quality to its rejection; this ties into what was discussed about the sociohistoric background of the Afrikaner Calvinist (Chapter Five). The age range was 21 - 45 with a higher proportion of tertiary education among this group. Janet's group varied in age from 35 - 49 (largest proportion) a couple over 50 and one at 65 with two with tertiary education and the rest with matriculation (demographic tables Appendix F). The perception here was that the younger women had experienced videos and magazines but were not inclined to share this information in an open forum in case of approbation. Their reading was a preferred one based on their acceptance of the principle of free access to pornography.

However Jubilee's group responses to the question of pornographic videos were less liberal than Elizabeth's group:

Jubilee: They all want to watch it but then no one says "I want it". They want to watch it secretly. Why?

Maureen: Sex. Because those pornographic videos makes people to be sex maniacs.

Agnes: I think so. What they are watching I don't know.

Jubilee: Sex is not something that is watched by many couples. Now what about you? Do you watch those people doing sex things?

Maureen: It stimulates those people who are watching that particular pornographic er ... film. I think like that.

Agnes: I think that sex is for the bedroom not for public.

Ajuna: Not for public. Yes.

Jubilee: It's for two people - only. Take it [think about it] when you are in a bedroom and someone other people are watching you sexing ...

Ajuna: No no no!

[Babble].

Aisha: They like to see those ... those er ... [things].

Jubilee: Why? Why?

Agnes: Because that is a secret for a wife and a husband.

Jubilee's group did not laugh at all as they disapproved of the whole principle of pornographic videos. Foucault used sexuality as a means of examining a culture's entire notion of itself and offered a broad view of the importance of sexuality in the modern age and the inseparability of

the ideas of sexual liberation and repression (citing Foucault, Williams, 1990:282). There is the notion that the pleasures of the body can be accepted and do occur but are subject to changing social constructions (Williams, 1990:3). Power must be conceptualized positively for what it constructs in discourse to prevent sex in all modes (including pornography) from encroaching on bodies and their pleasures.

Mrs Jakobs: Poor, poor girly.

Once Mrs Jakobs starts watching she becomes very absorbed and is singularly disturbed by the content to the extent that she commiserates with the female character's trial and tribulations. Only Janet and Freda's group laughed and very heartily, confirming a dominant reading. However this is in direct violation of the Afrikaans group's stated values and attitudes to pornography. In the responses from Freda's group there was a marked resistance to any form of pornography and Jolina proceeded to explain her resistance to pornography:

Jolina: Ek dink hulle gaan dit miskien nou openlik lees en daarvan vergeet. Dit gaan dit wees. Dis nie meer verbode terrein nie. Dat hulle gaan gou gewoond daaraan, en daar is dit verby. Solank dit nog verbode was, wou almal dit lees en dis onder die tafel geles. Jy kon nie daaroor iets sê nie. Nou is dit oop. Nou kan jy daaroor praat. Jy kan ... kan hulle verbied om dit te lees. Of ... Ja, dit is so. Ek het daarvan gesien en ek was ... ek was nogal geskok om te sien. So ek hoop maar nie. Boeke. En um ... dit is vir my nie aanvaarbaar. Ek kan nie aanvaar nie. So ek hoop maar net dit verdwyn op 'n stadium.

[I think it (pornography) will perhaps now be available to read. It'll definitely happen as it is no longer a forbidden area. People will get used to it and then it's over. As long as it was still forbidden, everyone wanted to read it. Now that it is open and you can even talk about it, as you are not forbidden to be read it. I saw some and was so shocked - it is unacceptable and I hope it disappears].

This response was consistent with the rest of the group who felt strongly about not allowing pornography into the stores to be sold or hired as videos. Janet's English group had a more liberal attitude suggesting that:

Sylvia: I think we have to ask the old school South African very much to do something that we should be doing because we had this very powerful government telling us what we could do and what we couldn't do.

Janet: What do you think is wrong with watching as a consenting adult, with or without a partner? I don't think all porno movies are perfect ...

Marie: Ja, you see I never watched one, so I can't make a distinction, but for somebody else or everybody. I feel that these porn magazines, if you want them

you know ... Subscribe. And let them subscribe. Get them through the post. Don't put them on the shelves where children can get hold of them.

The four groups had different perspectives on the availability of pornography or erotica. The responses from all four groups presented an example of a cultural studies approach with no fixed point of enunciation called 'truth' but oppositional discourses with many categories, boundaries and differences.

Piet: Most boring film

Piet had asked Jabu to lend him a pornographic video so as to 'inform himself' and of course he actually got the corporate video, which was so 'boring' as it concerned the government taking legal advice. All groups laughed giving a preferred reading as all knew that the tapes had been mixed up and Piet did get the 'boring' video.

Piet: 'Blou films!'

Piet speaks out aloud to himself his apparent disgust with pornographic videos but actually he had previously indicated he wanted to watch "so that he would be informed". There were preferred readings, excluding Jubilee's group whose silence indicated an oppositional reading and this could have been a lack of comprehension.

Billy: 'They loved it'

Billy Noquase works for the Public Works Department and had ordered corporate videos on models of work for his department. The tapes were so boring that he was planning to sue the filmmaker. The tapes were mixed up with pornographic tapes which are then shown to the men in the maintenance department. The intentionality of the production team is to present the idea of watching pornography as "a male thing" and a "working man's activity" and they achieve the latter through the double entendre of the working class men being "very stimulated" after watching the mixed up tapes. But, although this was a preferred reading by some of the older women in Janet's group and Jubilee's group, with the attendant condemnation of pornography, the younger women in all groups, provided an oppositional reading of the text. They supported an unconditional lifting of the ban on pornography and, as females, indicated their interest in watching pornographic videos.

Among these women of different political affiliations and socioeconomic differentiation, there were those who believed it was their right to freedom of expression of their sexuality to view pornographic tapes. The notion of self - regulation as opposed to regulation by the community emerges as the expression of individual liberty. This transformation from apartheid years does not necessarily mesh with reconciliation, since there are many individuals who would like to return to complete censorship of pornography. This view of “porn free” was expressed in strong terms by the Afrikaans group and the working class Zulu women, most of whom were of Islam. The reasons from both groups varied, depending on their subjectivity, but two women from the English group advocated censorship for the reason of feminism discourse, where patriarchal power is regarded as the dominant power in society and, as such pornography exploits women’s bodies. One woman from the English group and one from the Afrikaans group proposed a liberal feminism position placing the onus of censorship on the individual to view and respond to material as the woman sees fit.

Until 1975 the construction and application of the South African obscenity law 47(2) of the Publications Act of 1974 came under the jurisdiction of criminal law (Loots,1994:42). After this time the independence of the courts was replaced by a government appointed administrative tribunal which led to extended control over the public. The state censorship laws are ostensibly to offer concern over morals and decency but really naturalise state power and have had significance for investigation into political censorship in South Africa. Leanne Loots comments:

[T]hat democracy is informed by the clause freedom of speech and expression, does not necessarily imply an engagement in discourses around gender equality. With the debates around sexually explicit material in this historically specific South African society, the privileging of clause 15.1 does not offer a challenge to patriarchal assumptions around women’s (sexual) subjectivities (Loots,1994:94).

Definitions of pornography and erotica have been slippery at best so the mere fact that it is not illegal to watch pornographic videos indicates transformation in the country but not necessarily reconciliation.

Language/identity, towards transformation/reconciliation

Freda's Afrikaans group did not answer directly a question about the 'message' of both episodes but in discussing the programme it became apparent that they saw the incident with the Afrikaans construction people as "*'n identiteits krisis.*" (an identity crisis). Estrelita, a student councillor at a convent and a mother of teenage boys, felt the Afrikaans construction men, instead of changing their identity, should have changed their attitude and presence. A surprising response came from Margerie, the seventeen year old daughter of Joliena:

Margerie: Afrikaans uitgebeeld is sleg, dis hoekom ons nie as Afrikaners wil geken word nie. Ons wil Engels wees. Ons wil al hê mense dink ons is Engels. Verstaan u? Al ... al die kinders wil net Engels lees. [*Afrikaans' image is bad - that's why we don't want to be known as Afrikaners. We want people to think we are English. Do you understand? All the kids just want to learn in English.*]

Helene: Ja? [*Yes?*].

Margerie: Ons wil nie Afrikaans leer. [*We don't wish to learn Afrikaans.*]

Freda: Afrikaans nie leer nie? Dis baie interessant. [*Not learn Afrikaans. That's very interesting.*]

Helene: Dis sad [*That's sad*].

Freda: Dis sad. [*That's sad*].

Joliena: Dis sad vir my. [*That's sad for me*]. {Margerie's mother}.

However Margerie was adamant that Afrikaans was no longer acceptable as a means of communication among young people:

Marjery: You don't want to be Afrikaans. I don't know, because maybe they see that English people has more cool ...

Helene: Afrikaans is verkramp. [*Afrikaans is reactionary/narrow-minded.*]

Freda: Ja. [*Yes*]

Carin: Afrikaans is so verkramp.

The message from this episode about change in South Africa and the parodying of affirmative action illustrating how Afrikaner men attempted to change their identities to obtain contracts caused much discomfort for the group. Margerie's confession in rejecting her mother tongue caused further unpleasantness for those present. Language has the advantage in being the conduit to provide meanings for cultural groups and has always been the way a culture could store its values. It accomplishes this as a representational system where thoughts, ideas and feelings can be represented through signs and symbols (Hall, 1997a: 1). By young Afrikaners rejecting the

language, effectively they are rejecting Afrikaans culture. Members of the same culture share the same cultural codes which help them to think about the world so if young people dissociate themselves from their culture, they will no longer interpret the world in similar ways to their parents, and families, and eventually will even reject the beliefs and values of that culture. Language thus is a signifying practice, and when at the end of the session the group was asked to explain what it meant to be 'Afrikaans' there was a range of replies:

Margerie wrote: *You speak Afrikaans but it doesn't matter to me to speak English.*

Jolina (Margerie's mother) wrote: *Afrikaans is not the only thing that counts.*

Helene wrote: *... to have a pride in our ancestors but also a lot of pain for what happened in the past. To be Afrikaans also means to know how to bake and enjoy koeksisters and melktert. [sweet traditional Afrikaans delicacy].*

Estrelita wrote: *I actually see myself as a South African who speaks both English and Afrikaans. I was born of Afrikaans parents went to a parallel medium school, attended University of Cape Town - I genuinely speak both languages.*

Freda wrote: *I am proud of certain things in being Afrikaans, but some too narrow-minded - and I feel embarrassed by them.*

In response to the question - **I felt the programme should have she wrote:** *Not portray Afrikaners as they do, it's not totally fair.*

Carin wrote: *... Is to be your own person no matter what you are.*

What is apparent in the writings and the previous transcripts is that these Afrikaans women, as members of a hegemonic block, are now feeling uncomfortable about their cultural heritage and the consequences of apartheid, which enforced learning of Afrikaans in schools in the hegemonic process of domination after winning consent of many whites. This programme was read oppositionally as all appeared to reject the stereotype and refused to see any humour in the situation. What is interesting is that a seventeen year old **young** woman is in the forefront of discarding the trappings of the culture, by no longer wishing to speak Afrikaans. Gramsci writes of the "the struggle between civil society and political society in a specific historic period ... characterised by a certain unstable equilibrium between the classes" and this situation is analogous to the current situation in South Africa (Gramsci, 1973:245). 'Empowerment' has been associated in relation to language and literacy, however empowerment does not come with language but language reflects power (Smith, 1993:1). People and things on their own do not have an identity

but find these from other people and things, which leads to a category system so that identity happens because of a contrary system - 'them versus us' and the idea of a boundary within the communication process and then another implies a possibility of contamination or absorption by them (Van den Bulck & van Poecke, 1996: 159).

Language is a contested area in policy making, where specific attendant changes in South Africa and implementation of a multi lingual language policy democratically applied is still being resolved. Although multiculturalism and diversity ostensibly are accepted into the society, economic success means speaking flawless English and becoming homogenised into mainstream culture. Frank Smith maintains "everything in South Africa literally reduces to black and white so race and language is inescapable in discussion of social and economic confrontations" (Smith, 1993: 5). In response to Mrs. Jakobs' remark "in the new South Africa democratic people are colour blind" Elizabeth's group felt that if a person is not democratic, he is usually racist. Elizabeth commented:

You know, I always feel very irritated when a person tells me "Umlungo uthe", [the white man said], I say leave all those ideas of apartheid. Always don't specify the colour, don't specify, you know the race of the person all the time. When you talk. This is a person. You know it's so irritating.

However the old apartheid ways where blacks were relegated to insignificant positions for doing business are still operational as Constance attested when explaining her work situation:

Constance: The company's being run by the Afrikaans people - Sanlam is the Afrikaans people. And there is still apartheid there. You can see as you working there is still apartheid. Especially for the whites who are coming from Cape Town; the whites living in Durban are very much better than the whites who are coming from Cape Town. Ja ... I just mean maybe the people who are living in Durban are now understanding democracy [better] than the people who are living in Cape Town.

Researcher: So you mean that people from Cape Town will treat you differently because you are black?

Constance: Yes. Yes they do.

During a thirty year period apartheid rhetoric hid its true goal of Afrikaner nationalism to assist the emergent Afrikaner capital from 1950 to the 1970s. It was 'racial capitalism' which made legal economic, political and social arrangements to serve these goals and the apartheid discourse

became 'internalised by individuals, classes and groups' (Tomaselli, 1997:3). Sanlam was a major player towards the goal of Afrikaner nationalism and is still a very significant economic force with its head office in Cape Town. Constance's remarks indicated Sanlam has not embraced democracy for its staff and to redress the disparities caused by *apartheid* is still a major endeavour. Elizabeth described the inherent prejudices ubiquitous in South Africa:

You know the intensity of apartheid. In Natal you even feel much more of apartheid. Even during the olden days. But in Jo'burg, Free State, the Cape ... there was apartheid there. In Natal there wasn't much of it. And ... Yes. We [blacks] discriminate [against] each other. Yes. You say this one is a Xhosa, this one is a Sotho, this one is a Zulu. You know I once picked [this] up ... the labour ward in the Northern States. It was very busy and the lady [the patient], who looked quite traditional - she looked like she was a Xhosa. And I had a Xhosa nurse and a Zulu nurse here working. I didn't like to look when they were talking together. Then the Zulu nurse said "hey, I'm sick and tired of those Xhosas coming to fill up this place here". And the Xhosa nurse said "hey! You racist. Stop it". You can ask this person who she is, [she] can tell you that she's Mashongani ... Mashongani [which is] er ... is the Zulu, proper Zulu name. So she is Zulu.

In terms of the Liebes and Katz model, Elizabeth has drawn on the political, and in her moral opposition has provided a referential message of her own to illustrate a 'lack of colour blindness' among professional nurses. Discriminatory practices are tied into the process of identity. The subject in the community sees itself in others and sees others in itself so that the very idea of 'sameness' brings in the idea of otherness and difference. Within groups of the same ethnicity there will be differences of opinion and values, as evidenced by the Zulu nursing sister and her colleague. However there is the assumption that deep connections reside beneath the surface beyond non-essential differences. In the 'circuit' of culture, meaning becomes a dialogue "always only partially understood and always an unequal exchange" (Hall, 1997a: 4).

Jubilee's group presented an interesting approach to language when asked about Mrs Jakobs's remark regarding democratic people who are colour blind:

Agnes: It's so important to, to learn other people's languages. You must not know only your own language.

Languages work through representation and are 'systems of representation' using sounds, words,

notes on a scale, clothing and facial expression and these 'signs' construct meaning and communicate it. Jabu's facility with languages was respected and admired and for the purpose of achieving democracy, multilingual ability was deemed an asset. The Zulu women's attitude to language was in marked contrast to that of the English women whose children did not even want to learn Afrikaans. Durban is primarily Zulu and English speaking and has never had a strong Afrikaans presence, unlike the Free State and the Western and Eastern Cape (Appendix F, language distribution in South Africa). The construction of national identity or identification with one's local community indicates a belongingness. Deconstructing 'identity' is an attempt to erase key concepts where it is indicated that essentialist concepts are still used for thinking about identity. In between discarding them and thinking about these concepts a gap exists before the emergence of new concepts takes over. Williams says "a new class is always a source of emergent cultural practice, but while it is still a class, relatively subordinate, this is always likely to be uneven and is certain to be incomplete" (Williams, 1977:124). Identity falls into this category "in the interval between reversal and emergence" - thus it cannot be thought about in the old way, but without using the concept, important questions cannot be asked.

Janet's group admitted that the possibility of democratic 'colour blindness' mentioned by Mrs Jakobs was imminent, when Jennifer remarked that "You're not so much aware of whether it was a black guy who said this to me, or was it an Indian? It was **just a person**". The irreducibility of the concept of identity lies in the way it is so close to 'agency' and to the politics of a place or location as well as those problems that are inherent in all 'identity politics'. Here the idea is not that the subject or identity should be abolished on the basis of a decentring but to think of it in novel terms as a new decentred position, one of identification. The 'common sense' concept is based on the recognition of a common origin or shared characteristics with some person or group or even an ideal and the shared loyalty derived from this. Language plays a role in this since it is a signifying system and Jenny described what now happens at the bank where she works:

But I actually think, you know, with the language thing it also depends on who the black people are -- the old school or not. Because I find that the people are coming into the bank, for instance you get the old people that will say that ... we've got this chap Mr Ncobo, comes in, he's got a hang of a sense of humour, and he always comes in and he insists on greeting us in Zulu and just joking, you know, and he ... he's trying to teach us how to respond to him in Zulu, because to him it's very important - he says 'I've learned your language, so therefore you should learn my language'. It's fair enough. But then you get the other extreme

that come in and they try to speak like we do, you know, they refuse to speak in Zulu, and they speak amongst themselves. This morning somebody, - and they were speaking - a family that came in and they were actually talking English to each other. They weren't even talking Zulu to each other at all, and when she ... she actually blasted the one girl at the bank - this person - and because of something that was done incorrectly, and she was very articulate in English.

Janet suggested that this may be one of those families exiled and recently returned so they may not have been living in the country for the past twenty years. Identification functions across symbolic boundaries with ambivalence as a feature of this. Jenny is surprised that a black person can share her language, English, **and** be articulate.

However, a discussion about identities needs to incorporate the impact of globalization where the processes of migration have occurred so that:

actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves (Hall, 1996b:4).

Identities are constructed within discourse so their production in specific historical and institutional sites emerge within specific power plays in a political discourse to articulate difference and separation. Only in relation to what it is **not**, or the '**other**', or what it **lacks** can identity be constructed, where the boundary is constructed and the internal homogeneity is a closure, created and destabilised by what it leaves out. Jabu's performance as an accomplished translator for both attorneys acts as a useful motif for *GU III* since language has been a major point of discussion in the transformation process in South Africa. In South Africa there are eleven official languages, including English, Afrikaans, Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and a host of other black languages (languages, Appendix F). Language policy is often a reflection of the relationships between political ideology and political economy where the dominant language of colonisation becomes the gateway through which all rewards flow (Teer-Tomaselli, 1997:124). "Empowerment does not come with language; rather, language reflects power" (Smith, 1993:1). Apartheid language policy contributed to awareness of separate and different languages so that in the media there were language based radio stations, and television language policy together

with advertisers were crucial in defining ideas of identity (Teer-Tomaselli, 1997:127). *GU III* uses a mix of languages with subtitles and this mix was regarded as positive by Elizabeth's group:

Elizabeth: *You liked the mix before. Did you like the mixing of the languages? Afrikaans, Zulu, English?.*

Juvenia: *Yes. Even before was no, was no. Before was apartheid. The Afrikaners, the Afrikaner government did not like the Zulu language at school, Zulus learn English and the Zulu language. At school. So now, the English now they leave in the Zulu. But they leaving the African children at school. Together. Ja. It's nice because sometimes you don't know [how to] speak that language. You have a problem with [the language].*

Elizabeth: *So at least when you hear it on TV. At least you are able to identify a few words when you go out of this room to another Province. It's not like, you know, you are from another island, getting to another island.*

Facility with language was seen as an important component to avoid allowing people to take advantage of one and Jabu's status as a trickster was used to substantiate how he took advantage of those who could not speak many languages:

Aisha: *Bonke abangenayo bayaba highjacker. [Everybody that walks in, they highjack them.]*

Agnes: *Jabu always make ... Mr Cluver a fool ...*

Ajuna: *Cluver doesn't understand Zulu.*

Agnes: *Jabu, what they are saying in Zulu, Jabu changes in English the other way round. [Mirth]. That's why it's so important, to learn other peoples languages. You mustn't know only your own language.*

Both Zulu groups perceived the advantage of learning many languages as a method of controlling their environment. In this regard knowledge of other languages was regarded as a powerful tool.

For Freda's Afrikaans group Jabu was seen as the character who activated the action:

Helene: *But I mean, ja. He's actually the guy who did more [and] accomplished more than the two attorneys and the secretary, I mean ...*

Freda: *He's the guy who keeps everything going in there.*

Margerie: *I think he was more sort of open. He sort of knew everything. Because he could change languages like changing shoes (Appendix E).*

Jabu is the cultural representation of many blacks who do speak a number of languages but in addition he is the comedic soothsayer, signifying the African oral tradition (Chapter Four). While some of his actions seem disruptive - like mixing up the video tapes - the comedic plot centres

around Jabu's movement towards a greater conformity in the social expectations of the sitcom genre.

Janet's English group had become aware of the implications of the signifying practices of language and saw their identity as a South African less problematic or even a comfort to be part of a nation:

Sylvia: As a South African, it's actually quite comforting when you hear all this slang put together. Because we are part of the culture, whether we like it or not. So it can be a comfort ... as well as a being part of that nation. We all are there. We all use slang and other people don't know about.

Janet: And it's quite interesting what you say about the man [Jabu] coming in to translate from Afrikaans to English, when normally you would expect a translator to translate from the black language to English. But here he was actually translating from Afrikaans into English. So I wonder if that's telling us something?

Sylvia: My kids can't wait to drop Afrikaans at school.

Wanda: But it also doesn't help communication.

If language is the medium through which meanings are constructed and shared, it works because it operates using signs and symbols to represent to others concepts, feelings and ideas. The representation suggests meanings but this is not straightforward and is constantly being negotiated so that the resultant ambivalence can even call identity into question. These four groups completed the passage of the 'cultural circuit', decoding the two episodes of *GU III* and depending on their particular sociohistoric context or individual viewpoint, they negotiated meaning among themselves (Hall, 1997a: 10). However the presence of different intercultural codes led to differences in interpretation by the groups and sometimes different decoding from the encoding by the production team.

Conclusion

The ethnographic goal for this research has been to examine multicultural groups of women, to describe and interpret a fundamental process of social and individual change, due to the changes in government in South Africa since 1994. Most elements of the society continue to be much the same, even though the rate of change has quickened and these women had become more aware of democracy and transformation. Within the social changes which are taking place, this

ethnography has attempted to discover the inner coherence and logic of the complicated social and individual changes for women in a contemporary South African society - specifically , a modern heterogenous community in Durban, Kwazulu Natal.

The original problem to be investigated had been to examine how communication of modern western culture through humour in a television programme was being interpreted by women and whether social change in a specific community was taking place. Economic organization, power structures, sexuality, identity and language with the values that underlie these have been examined through the perspective of these groups of women. Social change in South Africa is the result of historical, economic processes and communication. "The subsequent set of institutional arrangements, a social system , is related to dominant values and is ultimately mediated through human action"(Powdermaker,1962:12).

Although changes in culture may be initiated from within, more occur from without. Cultural diffusion results in cultural differentiation and then ultimately they converge (Powdermaker,1962:24). Contacts with other cultures and new forms of communication mean, as the scale of the society broadens, mobility and personal freedom increase, and the closed world of the 'local village' becomes broader (Powdermaker,1962:14). The black groups expressed self awareness of their personality and their place in history. The pain of change occurs from homogenous to heterogenous culture, from a society previously set within narrow limits to one which is now part of a continent, looking out on the world, while humour signifies the triumph of the ego and the pleasure principle (Freud,1964:162).

CHAPTER VII

Identity and the Comprehension of Humour: Negotiating the Notion of Pleasure Among Multicultural Viewers

Introduction

Humour has been conceptualised as a communication process where the building of a communication model with a sender, message and receiver can transfer the information in the message in such a way that the message generates laughter (Berger, 1980:151). The notion of incongruity in the establishment of certain relationships and situations can create laughter, but the creation of laughter is directly involved with understanding related to the class and cultural position or gender of the audience who negotiates its own meaning from that event. *Suburban Bliss* utilises humour to narrate the trials and tribulations of one black and one white middle class family in their adjustment to a new society in transition, and to represent an element of active culture in the process of creating a new society. In the legal offices of Cluver and Associates as the sitcom revolves around the activities of Jabulani Cebekulu and the old-fashioned lawyer, Reginald Cluver, *Going Up III* with its multilingual narrative lampoons all aspects of life in South Africa. Sitcoms are an integral part of prime-time viewing and present the nuclear family as a model of stability while the *Going Up (I)* family also exists as an office family.

With the end of apartheid, many white South Africans are experiencing an identity crisis reflected in the comedy *SB*, where ideological values like owning a home or owning one's own business are shown as the values of a black **and** a white family and the comedy genre appeases the conflict through humour. The fundamental convention in comedy presents an embattled couple who sustain a confrontation disregarding social propriety in various situations. In *Suburban Bliss* the two families, the Dwyers and the Molois, symbolise the embattled couple, but comedy appeases the conflict compromise between the characters. The conflict is not resolved but the moment is frozen, masking the sense of loss associated with compromise, and ritualising the collective value of the characters' integration into an idealised social unit (Schatz, 1981:155). *Going Up III*, being a hybrid genre, uses music and humour to satirise the changes taking place in South African

society, where political power has changed and the “consciousness is [now]reached of solidarity of interests among all the members of a social class” (Gramsci,1973:182). The corporate interests in their present and future development have not yet been transcended and become the interests of all other subordinate groups, so that the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a whole lot of subgroups is not yet accomplished (Gramsci,1973:182). The new hegemonic bloc, the ANC, is still in the process of achieving hegemony in civil society by ideological means.

How thirteen focus groups with different cultures, languages and education background responded to the humour in *SB* and *GU III*, grasped the intended political sub-text of black and white groups accommodating each other and then applied that concept to their own lives is evaluated. The new political order in South Africa has already been established by the electorate so the characters in the texts are shown to be in the process of cultural integration with the ultimate goal being to develop a position within the community without leaving it. Texts are part of a process which reconstructs history through historiography and other forms of representation from the public memory (Tomaselli and Van Zyl,1992:396). Both production teams encode cultural and ideological information into the text which is not necessarily a conscious process, but the use of the sitcom genre is like an agreed code to link the expectations of the producer and the audience (Tomaselli and van Zyl,1992:398). How humour is constituted in the creation of new programmes in South Africa, and how the notion of pleasure found in the comprehension of humour by the focus groups is observed.

Perceptions of power and identity

Post-structuralist writings in feminism have been interested in the unmasking of power inherent in claims to knowledge and truth (Giroux,1991:5). A new departure has been the application to liberatory movements themselves, where a universalising theory becomes a form of domination by silencing differences and voices from the margins. This applies particularly in relation to racism within feminism where power is something identified within particular ways of being, seeing and speaking (Yates,1993:169). This chapter also investigates the power relations in institutional arrangements and cultural concepts perceived by the groups, revealing the oppositions and silences set up by their discourses. The terms of the framework concerning gender and race in

the language of feminist politics is transformed and contained when it is made policy or law, but transformation and containment take place not because policy-makers represent the 'ruling class' but because the contested meaning and lines of exclusion are excluded in the discourse. Thus post-modernist theory has been seen also by some to disempower women, because the concept of a global village reconstructs women's absence from consciousness, and reinforces women's silence in post-modern discourse. Therefore in the process of reading the texts and the discussion which followed, it became apparent that the different groups of women had begun to be aware that gender roles for women in South African society needed to be changed. They engaged with the male and female characters in the texts by laughing at their performance, which indicated their own subjectivity had been 'accessed'.

Identification through representation

John Hartley has listed seven types of subjectivity, defined as a "structure of accessed identifications" and these include self, gender, age-group, family, class, nation, ethnicity (citing Hartley, Fiske, 1987:50). The viewer is encouraged to identify with various abstract social values of the characters, having been given concrete representation in the programme. Television is able to construct these subject positions for the reader to occupy, rewarding the reader with ideological pleasure because the meanings of their world and subjectivities are confirmed, namely the pleasure of recognition, depending how closely the viewer's ideology connects with the dominant ideology (Fiske, 1987:51). This recognition can also be the pleasure of the narrative in reaching out into the real world of the viewer. The narrative then becomes applicable to their own private situations and social roles so that representation interacts with the women's social experience but it may mean shifting the construction of the subject position (Geraghty, 1996a:306). The blurring of the distinction between the representation and the real disguises the fact that it was a construction of ideologically determined actions and the audience's identification encouraged them to share the experiences, accepting but not necessarily critiquing the actions of the actors. Central to the process of the viewer's projection onto the character is a type of wish fulfilment, where identification is criticized from at least two points of view; first because it is escapism and second because the values of the dominant ideology are thereby naturalized into desires of the individual and thus reproduced and perpetuated (Fiske, 1987:170).

The reward for the identification is pleasure, because it entails a greater sense of control for the viewers and engages them in completing the meaning of the character or incident from their knowledge of themselves.

Textual pleasure arises from an awareness of the text where the social experience of the viewer is also textualised and by bringing these experiences to interpret the text, the one informs the other (Fiske, 1989:66). The actual ability to do this determines the subjectivity of the viewer, and is actualized in different forms at different moments so that these intertextual relations begin when the viewers start the viewing process. This signals the cultural process because they must invest an effort of semiotic activity to comprehend the narrative, where the laughter potential of the sitcom depends on contextual and intertextual aspects. However, if there is no immediate *historic* context this laughter potential will not happen (Chapter Eight).

Television and audience production

There is the assumption that although broadcast and print media expose various communities to a variety of messages, the signs and symbols of the texts may signify other associations for certain of these viewers creating a different discourse. One of the purposes of the reception research has been to evaluate to what extent South African women would understand the intended humour in *Suburban Bliss (SB)* and *Going Up III (GU III)* because “the TV audience is not an ontological given, but a socially constituted and institutionally produced category” (Ang, 1991:3). Alternatively it was queried whether they would unintentionally create their own hidden or subversive codes to negotiate meanings through the group dynamics of participative interaction (which are investigated in Chapters Five and Six). The aim of the research has not been to objectify an audience, but to research the contradictory dispersed dynamic practices and experiences enacted in their everyday lives (Morley, 1985:19). There is always a “surplus of meaning which subverts the permanent stability and final closure of a ‘television audience’ as a discursive construct” (citing Laclau & Mouffee, Ang, 1991).

The writer's point of view

Penguin Films and Dapple Productions had been trying to generate new audiences in the respective productions - *GU III* and *SB* - a larger white audience for Penguin Films and a black audience for Dapple productions (see Chapter Two). Penguin Films with their multiracial South African crew produced the text *Going Up III (GU III)* in a discourse that does not always speak as they intended to a focus group of Zulu women, who then activated the text in a particular context of their own reality. Gray Hofmeyr, chief writer of *SB* responding to the question about a female spectator's subject position in relating to the characters in *SB*, cited examples of the character's different 'cultural practices':

***Researcher:** If female spectatorship negotiates its subject positions, I'm a female spectator, I'm looking at this, how can I relate to this work? The reason I'm asking this question is, one of the women I asked to lead a group refused, because she said, "I can't stand that woman who smokes all the time." [Kobie].*

***Hofmeyr:** Let me say first of all, that, rightly or wrongly, and I'm reiterating what I said earlier, is that the characters were created to be interesting characters and funny characters more than any kind of role model. I think your point is valid. Perhaps I should have taken it more into account. The problem is that your more role model stated? Characters are quite often not as interesting as flawed people. As far as Kobie is concerned, I think she ... more than any one else in the series, people have very strong opinions about her. They either absolutely hate her or they like her very much [...] The people who don't like her, hate her for the reasons that this woman has given. One might find, although I don't know it, that the people who hate her are perhaps generally upper crust. I don't know whether that's the case or not. Kobie is very, very true to herself at all times. She's very consistent. She's not a hypocrite in any way. She may lie occasionally about whether she's bet on a horse, but she's true to herself and her own perception of herself. And I think that's what makes her strong. And I think in a way that's a better moral characteristic than to not smoke, which everybody knows smoking is bad. We don't advocate her smoking, she's the only character in the series who does. But she's, you know, she says, bugger you, so I smoke and I like my gin, you know, and I'm a slob. What's wrong with that?*

The audience's point of view

When asked what they thought of the way Kobie spoke to her husband Billy and whether her smoking worried them the groups generally disapproved of her manner depending on age. The Coloured group said "I think she's an embarrassment". The Hindu groups had a mixed reaction with the older members saying "She comes across like having no respect for her husband" and the youngest, Pat, commented "I think she actually she's quite cool. Sometimes it is good because ---

everything is cool. I've got girls that work in the office. They don't let the bosses upset them - they just smoke that cigarette. And she's always got a cigarette in her hand". The response to the character of Kobie varied among the groups, especially regarding her smoking as Elizabeth's group had a slightly different take on it:

Nonhlanhla: Whatever. If you see me smoking in my yard. It's none of your business. I do what I like.

Maureen: Selling drugs?

Nonhlanhla: Selling drugs is another issue. I'm speaking about habits now. [Babble].

Nonhlanhla: I'm speaking about habits. If I drink, it's my own business. If I smoke it's my own business. As long as it doesn't affect you. As a person. [Babble].

Nonhlanhla: Two different issues. Now, if I am smoking [it] is not somebody's business.

Thandiwe: Black ladies are not used to that. [Babble].

On the other hand Theodora's group were much younger but seemed a trifle more conservative in some ways than Elizabeth's group, yet some had children, but no fathers living with them:

Sandra: Yes. She is always smoking. His husband is not smoking.

Researcher: Oh. If her husband were smoking it would be OK?

All: No!!

Thembi: [S]He [must have] respects for his husband.

Researcher: She must have respect for her husband?

All: Yes!

Researcher: OK. What do you think then that she tells ... him when he's being stupid. She's not allowed to tell him? I mean sometimes he behaves like a real fool.

Winnie: It's wrong.

Researcher: Huh. It's wrong for her to tell him that?

Theodora: She said her husband is [a] fool even to you.

The qualities that Hofmeyr had touted so positively were not really seen as attractive by most women who appeared tied into the patriarchy and content to be there since Kobie's frank manner was not well received. Leigh-Ann's group said "she gets so cross with her husband at times you know. I would never speak to him in that way" indicating how they became referential and identified with Kobie. Karen, in Leigh's lesbian group, was very frank since she had been brought up in an Afrikaans home and felt Kobie was:

Stereotypical of an Afrikaans woman. And if they showed her, she'd have slippers and very sexy too tight clothes and appropriate to the stereotype of her age. So it's absolutely the typical Afrikaans woman. I think it's a bit common, but I'm sure they had some kind of plan of what they wanted to accomplish with that. I don't really feel they have accomplished anything with that. I think it goes back to just women being put down throughout the show. Not necessarily directly, but in a very subtle way".

Linda in Freda's Afrikaans group had a very interesting reaction as she felt there was a sexual attraction between Kobie and Ike:

Linda: I don't like that lady anyway. [...] She's always like untidy and sloppy and dirty and in one episode she was like flirting with that black guy...

Betsy: That's right, ja.

Linda: And that really irritated me.

In every reaction, the speaker's ideological position became apparent and their subjectivity in attributing certain behaviours really represented how **they** felt.

How the writer visualizes comedy

Richard Benyon, chief writer of *GU III* volunteered he had written about six episodes for *SB* but he usually worked with Penguin Films (interview October 1996, Appendix C). He regarded comedy as cyclical without the development of character roles but the characters became durable and interesting in the way they kick against forces of which they are unaware although they inevitably end up exactly where they started - in a tragic way - and that is the tragedy of comedy. Improbability is not part of the comic world and Benyon contended that the context of improbability inspires compassion in him as comic characters are all trapped in a type of karma. He disliked *Suburban Bliss*, where the characters are not very forgiving of each other as he believes that people forgive each other all the time - many are doing just that right now in South Africa. He also felt that the gags used in American comedy are poor. Benyon hated comedy to moralise, preferring a politically incorrect sitcom, for example, *Roseanne* and he also liked *Seinfeld* because it is so accurately observed and close to reality. He said he attempts to make people speak and respond to events the way they occur in South Africa, and while he enjoys absurdist humour and the way people speak in comedy of the absurd, he felt in real life there have to be consequences for things that people say to each other. Therefore he disliked the way in a situation comedy like *Suburban Bliss* characters are rude to each other. Roberta Durrant, as

producer, felt that Mrs Jakobs, a Coloured woman from the Western Cape, was trying to improve herself constantly and that was her motivation - trying to become 'posh.'

Audience's response to female characters

Elizabeth's focus groups after watching *GU III* saw Mrs Jakobs' character in a very negative light. They believed that many people could behave the way she did but since women had been oppressed for a long time they tended to be more like that:

Winnie: Both men and women ... Black or white ... It's natural to be like Mrs Jacobs. Because everybody is unique.

Elizabeth: She's somebody [with] jumping ideas. She's not stable. She jumps from an idea to another idea to another idea. She's a person who's not pretending to be herself. Sometimes she hides many things and she pretends not to be something when she's actually doing something, you know.

Winnie: Yes. She's not logical. She hasn't got a logic mind. She doesn't plan. [...]

Elizabeth: You know, it's more of women who are like that. Because women have been oppressed for a long time so they got jumping ideas. They [are] never stable. They looking at your face. If you say "yes", they say "oh yes". If you say "no", they say "oh no". Because they got that [uncertainty] in them.

These women interpreted Mrs Jakobs' behaviour as weakness and even though some had laughed while she watched the pornographic tapes, they believed her vacillation in deciding to do so, was unstable. Philosophically 'representation' presupposes a difference between reality and its doubles and in anthropological studies "'culture' has served as a sort of umbrella concept for representations" (Fabian, 1990: 754). Although there is a connection between representation as an idea, central to various semiotic and symbolic approaches, the problem with representation is not in the difference between reality and its images, but between re-presentation and presence (Fitzgerald, 1966).

Laughter, humour and the comic

Laughter is not always seen as characteristic of comedy but if laughter and humour are not definitive of comedy they are definitive of the comic. The degrees of laughter depend on the audience and on the occasion, so a separation should be made between the representation, the laughter it can engender and the circumstances (Neale & Krutnik, 1990: 64). The basis of an

interpretation of the representation is dependent on the textual and the institutional cues which shape the interpretation. The comic therefore depends on certain sociocultural rules and conventions and conditions; laughter occurs depending on certain utterances on certain occasions and conditions. Formal comedy is produced institutionally so it is called 'entertainment' and since these utterances have cues from generic conventions, funniness depends on social or individual circumstance and is subject to negotiation or dispute. Whenever interpretation, negotiation and laughter take place they do so at points in a statement which share certain features. So a situation can be comic, a statement cued as serious - horror film, or an act (like selling heroin or sacrificing children as in "**Maid from Hell**") but interpreted as comic if humorous features can be found; then the comic is cued and inscribed in the gag or joke.

For purpose of theory, the comic is distinguished by the 'ludicrous' and the 'ridiculous' which can be in the mind (ignorance - three Afrikaners not understanding about how people got contracts; imprudence - Thando and Kobie employing the maid) or in the body (ugliness, deformity). All instances of the comic involve a departure from the norm - action, dress code, behaviour - but there must be an element of the normal in the abnormal, the appropriate in the inappropriate, logical in the illogical and sense in the nonsense. This departure from the normative is at the bottom of the incongruity (discussed as semantics and logic) and surprise (shown, conceived and measured in a short-lived expression). The gag is the typical model having two elements - a logical one and an aesthetic or narrative one- a syllogism and a *peripeteia* or reversal (Chapter Six). The logic of the absurd produces a 'comic insulation' so that ugliness or error are painless (citing Palmer, Neale & Krutnik, 1990:69). Part of this is accomplished through implausibility, where the characters are not taken seriously (as in the mix up of the video tapes in *GU III*). History and the culture's social norms are relative to the plausibility and so variation occurs. One age group may find something plausible, another would find it unconvincing because when conventions change, old conventions look absurd. All examples and forms of the comic are semiotic as they involve meanings and signs and entail contradiction leading to a surprise (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:70).

Joking, wit and 'the comic'

Freud distinguishes between joking and wit and 'the comic' being really based on the semiotic status, the differences in the way they address the subject, and the levels they comprise (Neale & Krutnik, 1990: 71). A joke is produced by a statement using language, but the comic can be observed. Freud says the comic comes from comparison with a difference between the superior position and capacities of the observer, and an inferior position of the observed results. There are two kinds of jokes: innocent - the technique with a play on words as wit and then tendentious jokes, where word play acts as 'fore-pleasure' allowing aggressive and erotic wishes. When Piet Gouws in the **HAPMS** episode pats down the gay men and asks if they are concealing any dangerous weapons, one replies "I didn't think you'd notice" which is an example of an aggressive and erotic wish, circumventing repression. However, Neale and Krutnik argue for a semiotic component in comic situations of everyday life, where when a situation occurs sharing the characteristics of the comic described by Freud, that situation is present only in semiotic form characteristic of the joke with a narrator, a spectator and a butt. There are many gags and comic moments voicing aggressive or erotic wishes but pretending to be formal play. The focus of the pleasures and processes of the comic is the figure of the observer (in a television programme it is the spectator) who becomes identified with the wishes at stake by accepting, understanding and laughing at a wisecrack or gag. Aggression is always involved in any form of the comic and the spectator is always absolved, because what is at stake is a position of superiority - narcissism and its object, the ego (Neale & Krutnik, 1990: 75).

For Freud humour is separate from joking and the comic, since all humour disavows the motivations of reality with a butt, a target of aggression, which is the 'reality' of castration - marking the limits of the ego (Neale & Krutnik, 1990: 76). In self-directed humour, the position of superiority corresponds to a position of indulgent adulthood, and the position of inferiority to one of childhood - what one once was, a major identification. Humour makes of the world a jest - absurd so the narcissism it voices is comic envelopment - a lack of pain. Narcissism, childhood and identification are at stake in the comic, where the butt is always ridiculous, so laughter disavows what one once was. The ego is founded in alienation and the image of childhood produces an identification showing childhood as a lack of coordination and control (citing Freud, Neale & Krutnik, 1990: 78). The spectators' laugh means they identify with aggression but also

deny that it shows a childish lack of control. Horror and comedy are different but similar, since shock and surprise are used by both in narration, at the point where the spectator by a physical articulation of affect will show anxiety by screaming or laughing. Laughter indicates the viewer's restoration of superiority and power, and in the horror film, when the monster seems unconvincing/ridiculous, laughter and the comic become a kind of defence. The unexpected and uncontrollable kind of laughter indicates that 'satisfaction' and 'control' are contradictory and fragile. If a position of power can be found it can be lost; if laughter is a mark of control it is also uncontrollable, so a position of power is at stake but is not stable, and is the object of a wish which can only find articulation in fantasy. The two moments of the comic show the disruptive surprise and moment of semantic and logical resolution, voicing the loss and restoration of the position of control and power.

The pleasure of humour

Pleasure comes from the four primary characteristics of the comic - a loss of control, cued as playful, so safe; second, the pleasure of aggression against convention; third, suddenness of the lost and the restoration; fourth the absurd and 'magical' nature of the moment of resolution. Most aesthetic forms share these characteristics but gags and jokes have a predominance of the absurd (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:80). Jokes are ambiguous, exploiting the arbitrary nature of language and signification but avoiding pure nonsense. Every joke has a reason or excuse with limits on the extent of the subjectiveness involved. The joke disrupts the assumptions of a natural relation between language and meaning and is a screen for the fact that the relation never existed. There is ambiguity about the ideological and aesthetic role of comedy, for although it may be subversive because of breaking convention, it is also reactionary using cultural stereotypes where the breaking of convention is a generic convention (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:82).

Comprehension and humour

In the coherence of the comedy genre there are two factors: the affirmed relationship between the text and the audience and the pleasure appropriate to the genre (Palmer, 1994:148). In situation comedy, as the plots are centred around situations with which the audience would be familiar, the genre tries to reaffirm cultural identity where the audience is 'inside' the community while there is the 'outside' with contrary and oppositional values (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:242). This

boundary is established by the telling of a joke, which establishes a bond of power between those inside- the audience and inclusion - versus exclusion, outside. Joke-telling is like a social contract because it promises pleasure, which is tied to being included, so the sitcom institutionalizes the pleasures and processes of joke-telling with a deterministic class ideology, asserting stability instead of change (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:252). Palmer argues jokes and comedy are successful only "if the encoding and decoding are homologous, if the real reader accepts the subject position offered as the position of the implied reader" (Palmer, 1994:148). In Frankie's cartoon of Ma Moloi and Hempies getting married and titled the 'New South Africa', all groups accepted the position as 'implied reader', except the Hindu group who did not laugh; in the discussion with them it was apparent that identity was regarded as 'solidarity' so marriage into a different ethnic group was taboo.

The success of humour

Freud also stresses success - jokes can fail - since they are not technically distinct but the form of pleasure they give is distinctive. Jokes, humour and comedy all have one thing in common, namely a mix of sense and nonsense, but only in jokes is the successful reception of this relevant. For a joke or humour to succeed it must be given permission by the audience to pass the threshold - that is the 'identity' of the person to whom the humour is addressed. Thus that entry into 'humorous discourse' first has to be negotiated (citing Mulkay, Palmer, 1994:149). When the negotiation for permission to be funny is in question, certain principles are involved. There is also a borderline between comprehension and incomprehension, since to be funny, a joke must be understood. The information provided must be part of the culture of the individual, who responds to the joke and, in fact, part of the belief system of the individual would include not only information but emotional investment in a particular symbolic order, and the relationship between culture and identity.

Therefore in the reception of humour a fit is essential between the culture of the persons, who produce the humour and the culture of the receiver, so that a 'common frame of mind', where the participants agree on the emotional significance of the events and situations, is portrayed. Palmer suggests that "shared pleasure [of the humour] seems to depend on some common agenda [and] that the layer of identity derived from the culture is more than just cognitive but affective and

motivational” (Palmer, 1994: 150). The positioning of the reader comes from the affirmation of that reader (to whom the jokes or the humour are addressed in *GU III* and *SB*). Freud maintains there are always three enunciative or affirmed roles for the **speaker**, the **listener** and the **butt** of the joke. In *SB* Billy is frequently the butt and so is Thando, and structurally these are balanced in gender and in the way they contribute nothing to the welfare of the business or the home (Chapter Three). Ike and Kobie are seldom the butt of a joke but Hempies and Ma Molois trade the role of **speaker** and **butt** for jokes constantly, and in terms of the African oral tradition this slanging between the two is relevant to the symbolic order, and as such was much appreciated by the black groups.

Ambiguity of humour

Jokes and metaphors serve to create intimacy through mutual comprehension because of the role of presuppositions inherent in them, as they mobilise background knowledge. This is the part of the culture shared by the joker and the receiver - the ‘in-joke’ but the credo that all jokes must be permitted does not mean permitted by everyone. A border is therefore established at the point of those included and those excluded in terms of the social order (Palmer, 1994: 153). An example of this occurs in the use of the word ‘*snaaks*’ [strange] (**HAPMS** laughter table Appendix I) which amused the English and Afrikaans speakers, both of whom had to learn Afrikaans at school. In KwaZulu Natal many black people cannot speak or understand Afrikaans so Edwin Tsaba’s misunderstanding of the word, calling it ‘snacks’ did not amuse these groups. Thus the absence of relevant information made the joke incomprehensible. Ambiguous humour is common in western culture where the role of the humour is more equivocal, mixing the role of fear and mirth in some form of transformation (Palmer, 1994: 156). An example of this type of ‘black’ humour where the humour is juxtaposed with anxiety, occurs when the Molois have been accused of witchcraft and sacrificing children but only the Afrikaans group laughed.

The mixture of emotions is often referred in the term ‘grotesque’ which has a history involving taste and style to ‘the maximum degree of indecorousness’. Caricature and comedy were justified uses to ridicule deviation of an “unstable mixture of heterogeneous elements, the explosive force of the paradoxical” (citing Kayser, Palmer, 1994: 156). Eventually the term ‘grotesque’ becomes associated with broad humour and the burlesque. In the narrative of “**Maid from Hell**” both

families are accused of horrendous crimes by Dalia, but no one laughed at the possibility of the Dwyers making and selling heroin in their kitchen - perhaps this was too inconceivable an event for the reality of the groups.

Humorous performance of characters

Incongruous behaviour in the construction of the characters Billy and Hempies is also seen as comic, which has an element of irony especially for Billy whose reactions and behaviour through his malapropisms caused smirking rather than laughter - "I want a retractor for the cartoon". However, an audience can derive pleasure from his mistakes, identifying with him unconsciously and thereby enjoy the comedy (Palmer, 1994: 160). On the other hand, humour can fail if the performance is inadequate and comic performance needs to adapt to the local conditions, so when Billy mimics a praise singer in broad over-the-top humour, it received laughs from everyone. Although communications theory states the receiver of the message is as integral to the message as the sender, the message and the context, the act of **evaluation** of a fictional message or those for entertainment is very important. In the **HAPMS** episode of *GU III*, the joking by the gay men was partially accepted as Janet's English group laughed heartily, but there was reservation from the other groups. A joke may thus become offensive if something in the circumstances makes the behaviour inappropriate - reference to 'weapon' was laughed at by the Janet's group but received a restrained response from Freda's group. In contrast though when Jabulani (Mafela) parodies the gay stance it overwhelmed the viewers with laughter. Heterosexuality was in accord with his performance, but had homosexuals or the lesbian group been present this may not have received the same response - they may not have given 'permission'. There are variables involved in the process where humour may be regarded as offensive, and these variables include whether the structure of the joke is seen as a representation of the world outside the joke.

The Afrikaans group disliked having Afrikaners depicted as 'stereotypical' where the three Afrikaans contractors' appeared 'stupid in their short khaki pants'. An additional aspect is the relationship between the joke-teller - Jabulani - and the others. The Afrikaans group felt, as a cultural group, they were the 'butt' of the joke when the construction men approached an attorney for assistance to obtain government contracts, displaying ingenu characteristics. Joking relationships between participants are another aspect of humour where the identity of the

participants is relevant, because disparate participants have different roles and distinct power in terms of their structural position in the society (Palmer, 1994: 164). Whereas during apartheid Jabulani (Mafela) as a black man would never have been permitted to ridicule Afrikaners, their situation in the society has changed because the power structure has changed. Ethnic humour requires the identity of the speaker to be known in terms of its humour, since an Afrikaans joke told **by** an Afrikaner could have a different effect to one told **about** Afrikaners.

Humour, farce and burlesque

Comedy is not just funny, it has other meanings but in farce everything is subordinated to producing laughter (Palmer, 1994: 120). Another distinction between the two is that comedy has a social value. But farce is part of popular or 'mass' culture as it subordinates all to laughter, whereas comedy falls into the canon of literary merit. Originally all farce had serious meanings from the medieval sense of folly. The two were split basically during the Renaissance, being a split of cultural levels. Burlesque, on the other hand, adopts and exaggerates the traditional demeanour of sexuality, while ridiculing the norms by which erotic performances are judged (Jenkins, 1992: 263). It involves demonstrating the artificiality of the glamour pose "reflecting a diminishment of female authority, linking the sexual display of the female performer and the scopic desire of the male patron" (citing Allen, Jenkins, 1992: 264). In a sense Mrs Jakobs' performance disrupts the flow of the narrative when she adopts the role of the pure performer, calling into question the constraints on female behaviour. Her parodic excesses in watching the pornography made visible and laughable the dilemmas of femininity, becoming rather like the masquerade (Jenkins, 1992: 266). The following is an appropriate description of Mrs Jakobs watching the pornography:

One gender identity - a hyper feminine one is layered over another gender identity - a hyper masculine one; both have been assumed by a woman who can claim neither as her own and who constantly hesitated, fluctuated, between the two ... masquerade as an unconscious process, outside the woman's control and betraying her anxieties (citing Rowe, Jenkins, 1992: 266).

Humour from Mrs Jakobs' performance comes from obtaining pleasure in spite of the dithering effects that interfere with it. Her performance and the plausibility/implausibility of the situation are encoded and in the decoding most participants responded with laughter. Where humour fails

to amuse, according to Palmer, there is a deviation in the encoding to decoding process. Previous theories of humour assumed no intrinsic structure applied to humour, so if it failed it was established only on the basis of negotiation. However, the analysis of humour suggests there is a structure, and the significance of this is negotiable, based on certain principles of comprehension, good performance and being inoffensive, where the latter depends on who the audience is. This leads to an aesthetic judgement rooted in a perspective of quality - 'good taste' or comprehension but a 'joke explained is a joke ruined'. Roberta Durrant explained what the goal was in *GU III*:

we trod a very fine line because we looked at the whole thing of affirmative action and joked about it. Basically we were highlighting the idiotic part of it [...] Different people doing different things and highlighting that, their motivations and examining it. I think in doing that, we did tread a fine line. Particularly now, where everything [is taking place]. We have to be able to confront things and I do think humour is a good way to do it and I think it's good to be able to laugh at whatever. Nothing is so precious that you can't laugh at it (interview 1995 Appendix B).

Conflicts investing sexuality and sexual humour plus power apply to the joke concerning Mrs Jakobs watching pornographic videos and even though, as a woman, she is included among the select coterie of men watching pornographic videos, it is her performance as a ditsy woman that stimulates the humour. Humour is directed at the butt, Mrs Jakobs, since women are not assumed to enjoy pornography. All but a couple of Elizabeth's group found it funny. This means the pleasure offered by the joke-structure asserted the suitability of the theme and the occasion. The women gave it a preferred reading and asserted the continuity of patriarchal relations. If the audience does not laugh in protest, refusing to allow that a joke has occurred, they could also be accused of lacking a sense of humour (Palmer, 1994: 169). Humour can perform serious tasks like squashing a political opponent, but this has a cultural dimension requiring a certain rhetorical structure where mockery and humiliation would devalue the butt. In Billy's verbal attempts to undermine Ike's bid for the presidency much of what he has to say devalues him as a weak character. The form of the humour and the structure of the joke need a mixture of plausibility and implausibility where the incongruity, sense-in-nonsense of the joke is necessary, but Billy's lines are meant to deliberately fall flat to maintain the inconsistency of his character. He is genuinely funny when he is serious, as occurs when he gives Ike the notice about the AA meeting after hearing from Dalia that Thando has a drinking problem; this enters the area of farce.

Permission and pleasure in humour

The essence of comedy is its irrepressible 'life force' or vitality where everyday humour happens from stimuli that only work if one is in the mood for them and comedy humour is structured into the narrative. Palmer suggests that the joke must be understood and permitted and contends that sociological and psychological differences have no effect. However, there is the notion of pleasure to which everything is subordinate since that is what causes the joke to take place. So conventional signs, the relationship between occasion and transgression and pleasure to do with a particular semiotic mechanism, provide the key to recognize the joke. If there are meanings in texts which can transcend historical and social change, these could be universalised humour. The element of pleasure is central to this within a consensual framework, since all reader response criticism involves evaluation and meaning-assignation. The mass media can be a hierarchy of discrimination, remaining stable and with an institutional base to present inclusion and exclusion, because **shared** taste allows entrance. Power divided among classes of discrimination implies different places in the social structure, and the institutional base is the taste of the dominant class. Palmer contends "by finding a relationship between this universal form and the occasion on which joking is permitted it is possible to ascribe a universal function to joking" (citing Douglas, Palmer, 1994:17).

Joking relationships

Jokes take advantage of something in the social structure of the society and the social relationships which are being questioned. This can include the laws, (affirmative action, censorship) fixed customs (*lobola*, miscegenation), kinship (mother/daughter, mother-in-law/daughter-in-law). The joke form and the occasion making it possible, copy the sense of community instead of a sense of structure, where a network of fellow-feeling is constituted, and joking mirrors the subversion of established patterns. Joking will express these feelings, subverting established patterns and is rooted in pleasure - the pleasure coming from the sense of relaxed control to the unconscious. It attacks any classification and hierarchy symbolised in the community. This may not apply to commercial entertainment but in both *SB* and *GU III* the attempt was being made to construct this kind of reality, representing South African society. In the power which constitutes joking relationships, an important element is that whoever is conspiring to make the jokes must be **allowed** to do so. Traditional and historical conditions of

reception are insufficient to establish the humour, as aesthetic evaluation is necessary where pleasure can be distinguished by its internal structure. Taste is an individual response as the rule of taste cannot be formulated because it only comes in the form of pleasure, and this comes from the unconscious according to Freud (Palmer, 1994:186).

Freud (1960:228) has said: "The person who is the victim of injury/pain - might obtain humorous pleasure while the unconcerned laughs from comic pleasure" and in the jokes in *SB* and *GU III* there are polarities of male/female, black/white all split down the middle and alternating the comic with humorous pleasure, depending on one's view as to who is the victim. This invocation of different pleasures suggests a complexity of shifting identifications amidst gendered historical audiences. Humour is a 'substitute' produced at the cost of anger, so that instead of getting angry about something the groups could laugh. Freud contends humorous pleasure comes from an economy in expenditure upon feeling, rather than lifting of inhibitions which is the source of pleasure in jokes (Freud, 1960:235). Unlike the 'liberating' function of jokes, 'humorous pleasure' saves feeling because the reality of the situation is too awful to contemplate. Freud says the situation is dominated by the emotion that is to be avoided, which is unpleasurable. Strategies of humorous displacement include the highest defensive processes and the comic, like the sitcom, avoids the unpleasant effects of its own situation (Freud, 1960:231). Thus comedy replaces anger, if not rage, with pleasure and in this factor lies the possibility of 'cultural reconciliation' among all ethnic groups.

The power of pleasure in humour

At the heart of the notion of humour lies the notion of pleasure (Palmer, 1994), and at the heart of this is the idea of what people do with the media (citing Halloran, Morley, 1992:51). This stresses the role of the audience in constructing meaning but overestimates the 'openness' since there is a 'dominant cultural order' where the 'encoding' by the production team exerts an 'over-determining' effect (citing Hall, Morley, 1992:52). It is suggested that the 'uses and gratifications' approach ignores that television consumption really depends on selection by familiarity, for example people choose their entertainment by genre. Again it is suggested that although content might have various interpretations, the dominant cultural norms and values would not be challenged that easily. The focus groups were informed that they would be viewing a sitcom but

the selection thereof was not their choice. However, their laughter responses in the research were interpreted as a form of pleasure. Since South Africa is in transition to democracy there are “complex interrelations between movements and tendencies both within and beyond a specific and effective dominance” of particular cultural norms and values (Williams, 1977:122). The residual culture of the previous social and cultural institution retained through certain experiences and meanings are being practised still, and this residual culture is represented in the responses from the various groups. Therefore together with the socio-economic conditions of existence and the social nature of the consciousness of individuals, the sign emerges as a vehicle of social communication and struggle (citing Woolfson, Morley, 1992:53). Individual focus groups formed from sub-cultural groupings as ‘socially situated individual readers’ shared a cultural orientation, and the practices from this led to their readings being framed by these factors. Universal pleasure in humorous meaning is not necessarily localised to Durban or South Africa, since the convergence of the things **everyone** laughed at were sexual or concerned with hierarchical relationships (laughter tables Appendix I). Identity and subjectivity played a role in the response where the social experience of the viewer together with the awareness of the text informed each other, resulting in the pleasure of recognition and laughter.

A syntagmatic perspective implies a ‘dialectic’ with an audience and this means a joke can be analysed structurally as a series of events that lead to humour - the punch line (Palmer, 1994). Thus two different worlds are presented in the joke and the basic techniques here use stereotypes and misunderstanding, or the humour of identity and language where the humour is dependent on the misunderstanding. Since semiotics is the study of the way people make sense of information, where current meanings evolve as interaction occurs between people, their beliefs and the way they live (Tomaselli, 1996:20), if the audience does not recognise the stereotype or the specific language used in the joke, they might create their own joke by looking at the frames in the sitcom and producing special meanings from them to create their own mental ‘text’ (Dalia eating the apple in *SB* Chapter Five). When an audience interrelates these meanings with their personal experiences they discursively create an intertext of meanings (Hall, 1997a:3). Meanings can change but integrated communities generally agree about their responses, so meanings remain steady even though multiple interpretations can survive on the same levels among interpretive communities. Tom Schatz (1981:67) suggests that most genre films allow society to triumph but

set up the values in terms of a conflict. Applying this concept to the two television series *SB* and *GU III* means the comedy genre mediates the contradictions of the new social life developing in South Africa, which is evoking anxiety among many people. The characters in the series act as surrogates for the viewers and solve problems through the action of each episode, cultural contradictions being reconciled in the narrative.

Narrative and perception of power relations

In the discourse created by the women, different groups responded differently in their interpretation of the effects of power within their society. For the black groups the social relations between men and women were seen to be the area that demanded transformation so that women would resist abuse and obtain control over their lives. However the hierarchical system of address in families was still regarded as important, as respect for all was obligatory. Whereas an optimism pervaded discussion of black/white relations and all laughed at Mrs Jakobs' efforts at a multilingualism greeting of clients, there was the perception that many whites merely had changed their attitude to blacks for their own advantage to accommodate the new laws. In terms of identification with the representations of the characters they had doubts about Ike who was alternately seen as untrustworthy and 'jealous' of his younger brother Andrew (perhaps competitive?). Marriage between the races was accepted more readily among the younger women from the Zulu and the Coloured groups, whereas the white and Hindu groups saw the 'solidarity of identity' as primary as hybridity was anathema. The style of humour in both sitcoms suggests a new style of South African humour is emerging. A 'New Humor' also emerged in the US at the turn of the twentieth century. Its transition in American society indicates an appropriate model for what is happening in South Africa, where similar conditions of multiculturalism, urbanization and the shifting of class position is apparent.

'New Humor' and situation comedy

At the turn of the twentieth century in America a societal shift from rural to urban accompanied by the mass migration from Europe with the introduction of different ethnic groups as well as the industrialization of the cities led to the 'New Humor'. Gray Hofmeyr, writer of *Suburban Bliss*, explained how he, together with Craig Gardner, an American living in South Africa had

workshopped the episodes for *SB* and based the characters of Billy and Hempies on Archie Bunker from the American sit-com *All in the Family*. The origins of situation comedy as a popular media form indicate how the social construction of taste through generic formulae are ways of “controlling the viewer’s affective and cognitive experience and exploiting and resolving ideological tensions” (Jenkins, 1992:19). Relations of power highlight and separate the realm of culture into selected classifications and commercial entertainment adapts older popular traditions, which had previously expressed ideological resistance (Hall, 1981:227). The adapted traditions, having become ideological, have elements of recognition and identification to incite basic disgruntlements in the community, and being contradictory, have resonance with an element of resistance.

At the turn of the century ‘New Humor’ which had been the forerunner of vaudeville and the situation comedy was used to express frustration against the inability of American institutions in not fulfilling promises (Jenkins, 1992:35). The ‘New Humor’ absorbed ethnic materials entering the national culture as well as the harsh life of urban American culture. Its base in oral culture meant it responded quickly to changes in popular taste and social practice, with absorption of easily available ghetto-type material and a commodification of the joke with the crude, vulgar material. In the early part of the twentieth century, the New Humor expanded its market towards the middle classes, blurring the taste categories between different social classes (Jenkins, 1992:40). Jokes and pratfalls proliferated until the aesthetic discourse assumed a moral and social dimension, expressing fears about industrialization, urbanization, immigration, women’s suffrage and the fear that the lack of boundaries would lead to class warfare and social decay, since the price to pay for jokes meant a lessening of respect for sacred institutions (Jenkins, 1992:43).

‘Comic realism’ and situation comedy in South Africa

Just as the ‘New Humor’ assimilated ethnic materials and the ruthless life of local culture, so in South Africa humour, with a base in oral culture can respond to changes in popular taste and social practice. As an ideological form the sitcom can play its part to transcend the aftermath of apartheid addressing sensitive cultural and social issues and playing a part in a Reconstruction and Development (RDP) programme by lampooning present-day South African society - warts and all. Comedy is the flip side of paranoia, (Anstey, September 8, 1996, *Sunday Times*, Section 2 p.19)

while further reports suggest that, mixed in with many of the tragedies of the new South Africa, laughter is emerging as a positive response to fear, as gallows humour uses personal experiences, not just faceless stereotypes. There is general consensus that the crime rates are extraordinarily high in South Africa and that black, white, coloured or Indian groups are hijacked, raped, robbed and killed without discrimination, hence the use of laughter as an attempt to oust fear. This type of humour is therefore attempting to deconstruct personal experiences into a 'logic of the absurd' - a shift away from the farces and refined 'subtle' comedies, which had regaled the elite in previous years to relieve white middle class anxiety about social change. Similarly at the turn of the century in America there was a tremendous societal shift, analogous to South Africa today with the enfranchisement of 35 million black South Africans, so entertainment must adapt from the older popular traditions to a 'new comedy'. With the development of its own 'New Humour' in South Africa, the pleasures and processes of joke-telling can create a communal bonding between all participants. The relationship of power becomes an exclusion or inclusion (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:243) so that popular pleasure can occur when meanings become part of the larger cultural process making sense of material existence (Fiske, 1987).

Class and the 'inter-discourse' text

The focus groups who viewed *GU III* and *SB* devised their own discourse relevant to their joint and individual circumstances. David Morley discusses how Pecheux locates 'inter-discourse' at the rendezvous between text and subject:

the text of the dominant discourse does privilege or prefer a certain reading in part by inscribing certain discursive positions from which its discourse appears 'natural', transparently aligned to the 'real' and credible. However this cannot be the only reading inscribed in the text, and it cannot be the only reading which different readers make of it (Morley, 1992:65).

In the *Nationwide* research Morley conducted in 1980 he explains there was a tendency to think of 'deep structures' like class as influencing the direct effects of cultural practice (Morley, 1992:80). One cannot conclude from a person's class, race, gender or sexual orientation how that person will read a given text but in the following example Lynn, (Janet's English-speaking group Appendix D) in expressing her opinion of Thando's character substantiated a

number of factors indicating what codes she, Lynn, had access to and how she felt about her living situation. In the negotiation of femininity, the textual construction of the image engages the viewer with a large emotional involvement, embodying modes of femininity where “versions of gendered subjectivity are endowed with psychical and emotional satisfaction and dissatisfaction and specific ways to deal with conflicts” (Ang, 1990:83). Fantasy is very important and the pleasure derived from this gives the viewer a chance to take up a position she could not do in real life. Subjectivity is a product of the society and culture in which people live, where every person has a number of these subject discourses presented, so identity becomes the contradictory result of any of the positions inhabited at a particular moment in history. Lynn in fact was a ‘white’ Thando. She dressed expensively and drove a Mercedes Benz, so, although Thando was black, she fitted into Lynn’s league. However Kobie, with her loud manner and rough speech was not in the same league by Lynne’s standards. Class and gender issues in terms of power struggles were commented upon by the focus groups’ reaction to the sitcom *Suburban Bliss*, where both wives (Kobie and Thando) are extremely manipulative in their relationship with their husbands. There has been much discussion of gender equality recently in the South African press and on television, so the introduction of situations in the narrative, which embodied these elements, sparked volatile discussions (Chapter Five, Elizabeth’s Zulu group Appendix E). The ‘taste publics’ of which Herbert Gans (1974:133) writes are sharply defined by class, age and other factors and introduce a subcultural programming for all classes and ages.

People respond to television in different ways depending on whether the location for viewing is at home, at work or at an airport. Different readings of the same material in different contexts on different topics can produce a ‘preferred’ reading, (in this research by laughing) where the reader gives a successful ideological closure in agreement with that of the hegemonic bloc, the ANC. A negotiated reading will arise if not all aspects are agreed upon and an oppositional reading when the reader disagrees completely with the ideology presented in the programme and does not laugh. It is ‘the reader’ who makes the reading not the discourse that speaks to them. In this way there is not a passive notion of subjectivity but people actively generate meanings from a restricted range of cultural resources to which their structural position has allowed them access. The English-speaking women from Janet’s group (Chapter Five), (Appendix D) seemed to have

a more privileged life but Lynn, one of the most privileged gave a preferred reading for the character Thando:

Leanne: Her furnishing doesn't seem to go with her clothes. Her house is quite nicely furnished and material and that sort of thing, [but] it doesn't really go with her personality.

Lynne: It's almost like a contradiction in terms.

[Babble and mirth]

Lynn: Actually I don't have a problem with her. As her character I wouldn't mind her coming into my house and introducing her to our children. Quite an interesting person.

[Babble]

Ja, ja. I would rather have her in my home than the other one [Kobie]. That cigarette hanging out of her mouth and I don't know that's [awful]. I would certainly introduce her [Thando] to friends. I would accept her. Ja.

The denial of 'lower' or 'vulgar' enjoyment implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with those sublimated and gratuitous pleasures [is] forever closed to the irreverent (Bourdieu, 1984:7). On this basis the white upper class English-speaking group reacted negatively when interpreting the text of *SB*; they actively disliked all three episodes finding the production 'irritating', and in parts moralistic and boring.

Role of class and ideology in humour

Within the cultural context of the clusters of groups there were class variations and corresponding ideological interpretations. Among the three black groups (Eunice, Elizabeth, Theodora Appendix D) who watched *SB* the laughter response to the hiring process in the "**Maid from Hell**" was minimal, indicating an oppositional reading except the performance factor of Ma Moloi hiding the ashtray in the interviewee's purse which caused mirth. But the most significant divergence from the other six groups occurred when Dalia coolly picks up an apple from the Dwyer's fruit bowl and, without asking permission, proceeds to eat it. Two factors here indicate Dalia is in complete control:

- ◆ She can do as she pleases as the domestic who invents incredible stories and sends her employer into frenzies of fear.

- ◆ Zulu society emphasises politeness so one **waits** to be offered food. Dalia's behaviour signifies a change of power structures, as she behaves as if the Dwyer household is her territory.

A cultural and sociohistorical context was indicated when the focus groups demonstrated their “structured complex of social collectivities of different kinds ... in different positions in the social structure” (Morley, 1992:55). Elizabeth and Jubilee's groups while watching *GU III* laughed at the incongruity when Afrikaners were about to assume Zulu names, they also laughed at the sexual innuendos about pornographic tapes (hence preferred readings) in “**Flexible Asian Models**” so they shared the ideological position of heterosexuality encoded by the writers. During the scene when Mrs Jakobs watches the tapes with a mixture of fascination and pleasure, not all Elizabeth's group laughed, and in the discussion they admitted they watched pornography with their spouses, so their ideological position about pornography differed. Every group indicated an accord with heterosexuality regardless of class or race; when asked questions about the gay men there was a ‘structured absence’ without replies. As indicated all the groups appeared to be determined “economically, politically and ideologically” (citing Neale, Morley, 1992:58).

However, within the ostensible homogeneity of each of the groups, (Zulu, English and Afrikaans) a heterogeneity emerged among the individuals within the group when discussing the representations and relationship of characters or the politics of identity construction. As indicated in Chapter Six, the groups also enunciated differences in their attitude to sexual and musical identity and the moral lessons implicit in the text. In the groups' responses, sometimes a conflict occurred between modernity and traditionalism, or a rift appeared in the perception of change between women of different socioeconomic classes, where clear cut moral choices had been portrayed as evidence of rapid social change (Thando's acquisitiveness, Kobie's independence). Pierre Bourdieu interprets “cultural capital” as a circulation of meanings and pleasures difficult to control and different from a circulation of wealth, whose meanings and pleasures are harder to possess (Bourdieu, 1984:110). ‘Cultural capital’ includes ‘popular cultural capital’ when meanings and pleasures that serve the interests of subordinate and powerless groups may be used as strategies to resist or oppose the value systems of the dominant ideology (Bourdieu, 1984:120).

Janet's English-speaking group was socially and economically advantaged and because they had the 'cultural capital' they could not visualise that Afrikaans speakers in the construction business might be so desperate for work they would cross the boundary of identity to become assimilated and change their names to African ones; they were *amused* by the absurdity of the logic intended by the writer, so theirs was a preferred reading. The Zulu group's 'popular cultural capital' was their personal experience in fighting a system that had excluded them from any social or economic recognition; they understood the strategies employed by the Afrikaner men to take advantage of the situation and never saw humour in the situation, so theirs was an oppositional reading as they did not laugh. The Afrikaans group resented the stereotype of Afrikaans men wearing short khaki trousers and being portrayed as so stupid they were unaware of the economic changes of power in the society. Meanings the groups expressed validated their social experiences not their subordination. They could thus make socially pertinent and pleasurable meanings from the semiotic resources of the text by asserting their social identity in negotiation with the structures of domination in South African society. The changing role of women in South African society was a topic of particular interest among the Zulu women.

In the encoding process for the *GU III* the translating skill of Jabulani was a major signifying practice producing and communicating meaning. Jabulani controlled the narrative as he spoke various languages and swung back and forth between Afrikaans, Sotho and English; language as a symbolic practice gave meaning to the notion of 'belonging' to a culture (Hall, 1997a:5). Freda's Afrikaans group really felt the erosion of power for Afrikaans speakers and responded negatively to many of the black images in *SB*. The Zulu women's reading of the stereotypes of the characters tended to resist the preferred meaning and when asked about the black characters they were far more aware of gender inequalities than the Afrikaans group. They seemed to singularly ignore the white characters in most of the discussion and the oppositional reading. Their readings were tied to perceptions of power, and arguments ensued about the traditional responsibilities of women.

Conclusion

The responses of all the groups who watched *SB* and *GU III* tended to be a mix of preferred and oppositional meanings of their interpretation of the text with some groups laughing more than others. Often the younger women indicated more tolerance, but aside from the Zulu women, all indicated some agitation about the shifting class positions. Frequently there were two interpretations at the same time, and the stance taken by a group in relation to specific ideological propositions depended on the framings (Moore, 1993:22). Viewers' decodings cannot be reduced only to their socioeconomic location which limits the codes available, but the stance taken by these groups was based on a societal and ethnic perspective for the Zulu women and a racial prejudice based on fear of loss of power for the rest of the women. Although this might be interpreted as a class position, Gray Hofmeyr stressed a sitcom must be entertaining and present a reality the viewers can recognise. Eventually **negotiation** between black and white will cease to be the main issue, because the petty neighbourly interactions and conflicts become the situations for comedy. *SB* and *GU III* tries to normalise relations between blacks and whites, but although both series poke fun at racism, they avert putting down a particular political group.

Thus if meaning is no longer determined by the structure of reality itself (being conditioned on signification through a social practice) then it is necessary to examine how language has this polysemic alliance with the real world (Hall, 1982:77). If the same set of signifiers can have different meanings for different groups of women, then by "intersecting differently oriented social interests in every ideological sign ... [S]ign becomes an arena of struggle" (citing Vološinov, Hall, 1982:77) and meaning is also a struggle for mastery in discourse. Apartheid as both an ideology and a language (system of signs) was always "dialectically intertwined with an objective economic dynamic" (Louw & Tomaselli, 1991:101). Therefore in the present post-apartheid period, the reconstructive planners need a semiotic programme for **altering** both the material and ideological components. Central to Vološinovian semiotics is that the study of the sign, dialectically connects to the interface of the subject and the social context, which is class struggle, and this is where ideology is engendered, as then the 'dominant ideology' tries to stabilise itself (Louw & Tomaselli, 1991:107). Gramsci's idea of the performance of 'traditional' intellectuals

who attempt to stabilise the ideology that underpins the ruling hegemony is applicable to the efforts by the SABC which is encouraging programming to assist in this stabilisation.

The 'inner' dimension of ideology and its relation to the 'material' (the situation comedy) helps provide access where 'democracy' as a term can be understood differently by different groups depending on their social context (Chapter Six for different focus group response to this). Consensus can also be a variable, since dominance means the imposition of one framework by coercion or persuasion on a subordinate class at the conscious or unconscious level. Hegemony implies that dominance of certain structures is secured by cultural leadership. However, when whites reject the cultural background of the black leaders, on the basis of race, a sitcom with humour can attempt to engage this debate by having all racial groups laugh at these 'foibles' together, achieving a moment of 'cultural reconciliation'. These are exaggerated in the sitcom to secure the hegemony of the ruling ANC by winning active consent from those whites not committed to this.

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusion:

The tension between 'roots' and 'routes' (Stuart Hall, 1997b).

This dissertation has incorporated women as the organising principle of the research, abstracting the notion of womanhood/woman-ness operating in South African communities (Walker, 1990:7). In summation of the responses of the focus groups, a brief history of the gender relations of each race and ethnic group follows. Although the researcher's personal history and values could have influenced her conclusions, she has attempted to remain unbiased in applying a critical analysis in this research. As evidenced in the discussions for the case studies for *SB* and *GU III*, white women are discriminated against as women. However, according to Walker (1990:2) as members of a privileged racial group they do not always experience the same problems as do black women. In South Africa there has been a singular absence of women's voices, particularly those of women of colour, whose presence is acknowledged but whose historical agency is obscured. In the discussions among the focus groups it became apparent that the responses of the different ethnic groups were framed by their particular sociohistorical experiences in South Africa. In conclusion it is helpful to review briefly the sociohistoric experiences of black, Indian, Coloured, Afrikaans and English communities to evaluate how these experiences positioned their responses. Identity and agency, identity and difference in the formation of new subjectivities in South Africa is examined as a negotiation to create a national culture for South Africa, reconciling the old and the new in the process of transformation.

Sociohistoric influences of ethnic identity

Zulu participants

In Zulu society, the system of bridewealth or *lobola* (Guy, 1990:39) at marriage was criticised by some black women, because they felt it had made them slaves. In the old days they used to have 'slaves' in the sense of a less fortunate neighbour, who willingly would come into the home to help or go to the fields to help with the reaping of the crops and be rewarded with food or the surplus crops. These were the helpers or *ukusinda*. However the *makoti* or daughter-in-law had

no rights and the women felt she was treated like a slave because she had been paid through the system of *lobola* or bride price (transcripts, Appendix D). These traditions were no longer accepted by all women as the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of South Africa passed in 1996, guarantees that:

The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth (South African Bill of Rights, 1996: Section 9).

For some women this new law was in conflict with traditional Zulu culture which did not allow women these rights. By oppressing women in the precolonial farming societies of southern Africa, men had been able to control women's reproductive and productive capacity (Guy, 1990:39). A simple technology had existed so the norm was to accumulate people to perform agricultural functions rather than things or equipment. Male control over women and their fertile capacity took place through marriage with the male transfer of rights over women and their unborn children from father to husband. Bridewealth or *lobola* was the method of payment - usually in the form of cattle but in modern times this is frequently supplemented with hard cash or goods and remains as part of the system of abuse of daughters-in-law (*makoti*) discussed by the groups. The oppression of women in pre-colonial society was different from today's experience since, because of the importance of fertility, women enjoyed status and a certain autonomy. When the precapitalist era had passed and gender was no longer central to the society, male control over female labour actually was no longer necessary in African society (Meintjies, 1990:127). By the late 1920s and 1930s there were far-reaching effects of the industrial transformation when large numbers of women became wage labour (Berger, 1992:292). Many ambiguities accompanied this transition where women's new independence meant an increase in economic and emotional insecurity. Despite the limitations that occurred in colonial society, some African women had appropriated elements of the new order and others defended the old.

As described in Chapter Three, there has been a dialectic between women's resistance to and exploration of the new dispensation, which provides full freedom for all South Africans. In

colonial Natal, for a short period, there was an effort at reconciling indigenous systems with norms in colonial society, but in the twentieth century this changed. A more conservative approach emerged with the restructuring and entrenching of customary law. This led to a racially stratified sex-gender system in South Africa where African women were discriminated against both as women and as blacks. Linked to the migrant labour system of the mining and manufacturing industries was its demand for cheap labour so that 'traditional' homestead production was preserved in prescribed areas to make sure of this labour supply.

In settler society, women's proper place was in the domestic sphere of children and kitchen - apart from the sphere of men, the world of money and power. According to Ann McClintock (1990:98) women's domestic labour was not the central domestic force as in precapitalist society, and the dominant ideology stressed their role as reproducers rather than producers. In South Africa the colonial ideology of gender was magnified through race. Anne McClintock contends that the patriarchy was re-constituted in South Africa based on the ideologies of race and gender found in Victorian culture (McClintock, 1990: 98). When Victorian ideology was applied in South Africa the colonies provided the declining British rural squirearchy with a regeneration process. The reassertion of a 'phallic authority' in Britain had been threatened in the metropolis by a rising new manufacturing class, female and working-class insurgency. In this process the races and sexes were ranked according to their alleged distance from the mental, physical and moral superiority of the adult British male. Therefore when this ideology was applied in South Africa in order to control black male labour for industry, the control over black women was achieved by perpetuating the labour process in the homestead.

In addition to taking care of their own domestic arrangements African women have had to manage the domestic affairs of white middle class women, resulting in a hierarchical ranking of women into 'them' and 'us'. Consequently in the discussion about the **"Maid from Hell"** (Chapter Five) among the Zulu groups, the employment of a maid by a Zulu woman maid was seen in a negative light for two reasons. First the *makoti* was understood to be responsible for household care so that introducing a maid would undermine this traditional system (Elizabeth transcripts, Appendix D). Secondly the role of women was perceived to be one of taking care of the home (Theodora

transcripts, Appendix D). Among the white participants, the fact that Thando wished to employ a maid was generally perceived as ‘wanting to be white’, aping white women (Freda, Susan and Leigh-Ann transcripts, Appendix D). If black women are financially empowered to employ a maid, this ability implies an equality with other members of the middle class. Since blacks in South Africa traditionally have been at the lower end of the hierarchical social scale both in terms of opportunities and ideologically, this changed situation is symbolised by a black woman, Thando who can afford to employ a maid.

Indian (Hindu) participants

Indian indentured immigrants in Natal had been imported to serve the sugar industry (Beall, 1990:147). Women were deemed, initially, of little use in sugar production but planters discovered their value and subsequently made use of their productive labour. The conditions of indentured labourers in general and women in particular were appalling with unhealthy living conditions and remuneration being almost negligible (Beall, 1990:155). One of the far-reaching consequences of the Indian community’s experience of the miseries of indenture was to regard the institution of the family as a ‘haven in a heartless world’ (Beall, 1990:158). Their domestic conservatism meant Indian women themselves upheld patriarchal gender relations (Beall, 1990:155). The Hindu focus group in their responses indicated a strong familial connection as well as domestic conservatism.

The group’s middle class values were geared towards consumerism. Gayatri Spivak explains Indian assimilation of British cultural values in India during the colonial rule was cultivated by the British government in its effort to co-opt the Indian community “as a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect” (citing Macaulay, Spivak, 1988:282). A westernised approach is apparent also among the Indian community in South Africa, particularly Durban, and attitudes about interracial interaction are articulated. With an increasing number of Indians born being locally, the diasporic relationship with the old homeland, India, has altered (Devadas, 1996:71). In South Africa ‘Indian-South African’ is reconciled with an ‘Indianness’ so that a duality of identification was manifested in this group’s attitude to shifting social relations. Thus the meaning Susan’s group derived from the

text and the construction which the group placed on it indicated that these readers inhabit codes and ideologies derived from other institutional areas (Morley, 1992:87). They demonstrated a preferred reading when they laughed at Ma Moloi's activity in undermining Thando hiring a maid, since with the political power shift, their personal definition in the political hierarchy has altered and Thando's aspirations confirmed their feelings of insecurity. Generally the Hindu women seemed to appreciate the humour but when this was in conflict with their perceptions as Hindus they did not respond to the humour. The youngest sister, Pat, was much more amenable to the humour compared with Rookmuni, who is much older and very traditional (demographic table, Appendix, and Appendix D, Susan Group). Their responses were generally similar to those of the white middle class English-speaking groups of Janet. They found amusing every remark or situation that put down blacks. In addition remarks that criticised discrimination against people of colour, they found funny, indicating their ideological position (laughter tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3, Appendix I).

Coloured participants

Together with the Indians, the Coloured community occupied that middle rung of the racially defined hierarchy. Until the twentieth century Coloured people were accorded the same legal status as whites and even kept the franchise as 'white' when the Indians had their franchise removed in 1893 (Walker, 1991:14). The Population Registration Act and Group Areas Act introduced in 1950 (Brits, 1995:102) required all citizens to be registered, identified as a member of one of the official racial groups. Borderline cases were decided by boards specially set up for this purpose. People who thought they were white found they were Coloured, so this reaction was in accord with Mafela's explanation about the rivalry between Jabu and Mrs Jakobs (Chapter Five). This bears out Elizabeth's Zulu group's response to Afrikaner men trying to change identity and Elizabeth's explanation of not being allowed to practice nursing in Cape Town. The Act was particularly traumatic for the Coloureds, and evidence of the trauma of rejection by the whites among the Coloured group participants surfaced when Joanne confessed she had not revealed to the researcher where she lived in case she was not allowed to participate. Her reaction was an indication of her subjectivity about being rejected by whites and her reluctance to provide her address until the researcher arrived to collect her for the session with the focus group.

In “**Comic Relief**” Frankie and Andrew created cartoons and the families attempted to ‘change’ their personalities. The Coloured group found this simulated ‘relationship’ between Hempies, a white Afrikaner and Ma Moloi, a black Zulu woman and the remark “Chin Chin *ma Wetu*” the most amusing on the laughter table (laughter table 3.3, Appendix). The response reflected their subjectivity about white/black relationships between males and females and the laws of miscegenation. The reference to ‘what white people normally had’ in “**Maid from Hell**” refers to the maid and in laughing at Ma Moloi’s effort to undermine the process of acquiring a maid they gave a preferred reading, laughing at Ma Moloi’s performance in secreting the ashtray. Disequilibrium specific to humour meant awarding (Palmer, 1987:25) to a person or a thing two conflicting identities, so that the group’s laughter was in Palmer’s terms (1987:25) “a state of contradiction and resolution, where the contradiction creates disequilibrium and its resolution restores equilibrium”. Actually the Coloured group were glad actually that Thando’s plans were being thwarted since “she’s too pushy”, which made their own position in society less secure.

African women in the cities

Rural decline had led growing numbers of African women to move out of the rural areas in defiance of law and custom, as African marriage became less stable as an institution. Without the control by men, women achieved personal independence, as Kubeka so vividly described in her interview (Chapter Four Appendix B). Individualism among black women was promoted by these changes, contradicting the ideal of compliant female behaviour: African women were active in establishing themselves in the towns despite official hostility and economic hardship (Bonner, 1990). Among Elizabeth’s group the dialectic between traditional and progressive action was revealed in the response to the notion of a *shebeen* Queen, when certain women were pragmatic about the necessity for survival, insisting customers should assume responsibility for their actions instead of relying on an authoritarian restriction from the government. This attitude indicated a move away from the ‘solidarity’ of an identity which looked to a male authority for protection and guidance.

Afrikaner women

The Boer War and the emergence of Afrikaner nationalism had added further dimension to the concept of the *volksmoeder*, as the new Afrikaner nationalists were concerned with the

degeneracy of the new poor whites and ‘degeneration’ of the Afrikaner. The industrial expansion in the first half of the twentieth century also drew increasing numbers of white women, (mainly Afrikaner women) into wage labour, and the ideology of female domesticity began to unravel. The role of women in Afrikaner society had included the notion of *volksmoeder*, or ‘Mother of the Nation’ (Chapter Three) where the woman was idealised as a central unity for Afrikanerdom (Brink,1990:274). The mores produced women who were “disciplined, inhibited, conforming and [who] placed perceived familial and social needs before those of the individual” (citing Roberts,Brink,1990:203). Victorian domestic ideology in Britain influenced Afrikaner ideas of motherhood where “the woman’s status turned on her success as a housewife in the family economy, in domestic management and forethought, baking and brewing, cleanliness and child-care” (citing E.P. Thompson,Brink,1990:274). Imminent danger of fraternisation with non-whites and working class women is portrayed in the Afrikaans group discussion of ‘low class’. The notion of the *volksmoeder* became part of an Afrikaner mythology, promoting a dependent position for women. Social recognition for women was earned by not being active in their own lives, but by consolidating the *volksmoeder* ideology (Brink,1990:292). The advent of the ANC government meant the Afrikaans focus group was struggling to come to terms with a different government and different ideology. Although the group discourse periodically attempted to reinscribe blacks into an apartheid framework, there was acknowledgement that the Afrikaner identity previously created by Afrikaner nationalist sentiments needed to be reassessed. The Afrikaans groups did not always engage with the humour of the sitcoms, indicating a discomfort and reluctance to accept changes. They did not laugh at incidents or dialogue which satirised the Afrikaner but did seem to enjoy the incongruity of Hempies sitting down to drink with Ma Moloi, a situation which would have been unthinkable during apartheid.

English women

The tempo of change within the indigenous and settler sex-gender systems had begun with the mining revolution after the 1890s and the subsequent industrialisation meant women were drawn into proletarianisation and urbanisation (Walker,1990:18). Just as new classes and social forces emerged in South Africa in the early twentieth century, similarly with the new democracy, new classes are emerging and legally race no longer divides classes. The new ruling class, the ANC, intends transforming social relations. A new black and white proletariat has been created but it

is not homogeneous. It is informative to reflect upon events in the 1920s in South Africa during the suffrage campaign, which although a women's rights issue, was entailed with the maintenance of white privilege so was predominantly English-speaking and middle-class. Moreover subsequent to the enfranchisement of white women only, in 1930, most white suffragists saw little contradiction between their own enfranchisement and the votelessness of black women (Walker,1990:24). Later in the century, a lack of interest in women's rights by middle-class women 'may be due to increased dependence of women on men' as well as 'reduced interest in change among the privileged' (citing Robertson & Berger,Walker,1990:24). The focus for English-speaking women has been on the domestic/private sphere rather than the public sphere, as women have kept generally in the background in the private realm of the home. In turn this has defined the English-speaking women's position, shaping their social identity and self-awareness. This transferred into a singular lack of interest in political areas so that, although the English-speaking focus groups accepted the inevitability of the transition of power to blacks, they did not foresee social integration as a possibility except on a limited basis at an elite level.

Women and 'agency'

The locus of power in gender relations is seen less as one group's "consolidated and homogeneous domination over others" than as something "which functions in the form of a chain" (citing Foucault, Walker,1990:30). Walker (1990:30) intimates that:

Without belittling the historical significance of women's rebelliousness, one needs to take note of how women have also acted as agents of gender socialisation on behalf of the prevailing norms of the society, as mothers of course, but also as teachers, missionaries, social workers, peers and employers. On both sides of the racial divide, female energy, initiative and solidarity have been directed at resisting but also at upholding women's subordinate position.

Radical changes in economic systems alter traditional communal goals of kinship and family structure. New leaders obtain their control by democratic voting and their success is measured by the benefits they bring their voters (Powdermaker,1962). Originally European standards introduced a new middle class, new status groups and intelligentsia but masses of illiterate people remained. Modern education brings new ways of thinking. Individuals in the focus groups represented some of the aspects described above and many of the focus groups disagreed among themselves as to the positive or negative aspects of change. The sitcoms were generally

comprehended by all, although misunderstandings did occur. In Jubilee's group Ajuna complained there were no Asians represented in the episode, although it was called "**Flexible Asian Models**". The subtleties of pornographic videos and reference to the sexual exploits of Asian models was not understood by her as she had expected to see Asian people represented in the video. (Jubilee's group. Appendix E). Pornography and its terminology was not part of her cultural capital, so in this sense her comprehension was limited.

Comprehension and viewers' responses

In the *Nationwide* study, David Morley says he interviewed groups in public places but viewers' decodings were contradictory. Consequently he felt the arguments about the relationship between specific genres of material and categories of audience needed review. Now he would prefer to place actual comprehension over and above the viewing process. Responses were contradictory in the *Nationwide* news programme, as some of the groups were assumed to represent particular classes. Their responses might be seen to represent fundamental positions for their total cultural practice. Applying the axiom of class to this research, in Janet's English group, Lynn preferred reading Thando's character as someone she liked because she recognized herself. This is not evidence to confirm she would make similar preferred readings of sophisticated black women for other programmes in other contexts. The talk show hostess, Felicia Mabuza-Suttle, is very sophisticated and beautifully groomed (qualities admired by Lynn) but her television discourse has been militantly anti-white. Based on this response it could be interpreted that the subject's positioning (Lynn) could differ and be contradictory in certain positions (Morley, 1985:41).

There is criticism of the essentialist view that individuals are always coherent, unified subjects whose actions and consciousness reflect their underlying essence, arguing that subjectivity is the effect of people's actions and social relations (citing Laclau & Mouffe, Morley 1992:43). Only in social relations do people assume 'subject positions' as the subject identity is multifaceted and overdetermined, built of many overlapping relations. An ANC party supporter may be the owner of a business, a home owner and at the same time support the informal sector, like Ike Molo. In Africa there are many jobs that combine elements of the bourgeois and the proletarian, so class

analysis must be aware of not only economic criteria but the political and ideological (Gerry & Birkbeck, 1981:125). Some decodings occurred where viewers produced unconnected readings of cultural practices in different contexts assuming the arrangement of the components could be lost in the different circumstances.

Formation of new subjectivities

In the focus groups' discussions there was an awareness that meaning and values were changing just as the particular environment of relationships of ethnic groups in South Africa are emerging (Williams, 1977). A class-based identity is changed by historical forces and this is what seems to be happening in South Africa (Gilroy, 1996:54). Since the abolishment of apartheid, racially fixed class structure has begun to change and access to exclusive locations is not closed to people of colour, if they can pay for entrance. The 1994 general elections in South Africa promised the democratic libertarian approach whereby reconstructive aspirations of all races would be the basis of change and this is still integral and essential to the national consciousness. '*Simunye*' or 'We are one', the promotional logo for SABC 1, acts as a magnifying glass of the society encouraging unity among people of all races. But the 'nation-state' cannot remain the main legitimate idea without also examining and analysing all cultural relations including identity.

Tied into customs and rituals is a hierarchy of age, gender, race or ethnicity (Gilroy, 1996:35). In his perception of the characters and the narrative, Joe Mafela presented a more Afrocentric approach than Benyon (personal interview, April 1995. Appendix C). He criticised the way the fumbling lawyer, Cluver a symbol of white South African society, can not even pronounce the African name of a prospective client as he only knows English and perhaps a little Afrikaans. Cluver's attitude represents that of many whites whose identity is tied into their language and social formation. As Afrikaans and English were part of the 'structure in dominance' (Hall, 1996b:11) in South Africa it was never regarded as necessary to become conversant in African languages. Mafela contended that Edward Tsaba, an Oxford graduate and the lawyer in *GU III*, is stereotypical of those blacks educated outside of South Africa, who never really experienced the struggle for liberation on the ground. Also Mafela believed within African tradition, that the role of the *shebeen* Queen is important to help men unwind from the stress of

the day, with 'lovely' music to change their mood so they can return home leaving behind the bad feelings from work. Interview Appendix B) The explanation offered by Mafela represents his perception of African identity, since the Zulu tradition of serving men with liquor has been a longstanding one (Bonner, 1990). Implicit in Mafela's interpretation of the purpose of the *shebeen* is the concept of 'identity as sameness' (as was the perception offered by the Hindu group's attitude to mixed marriages) which can be distinguished from 'identity as subjectivity'. The latter is contained in the concept of identity "point[ing] initially towards the question of the self" (Gilroy, 1996:38). The location of subjects and their historic individuality expands into collective communities of nations, gender, classes, generations, race and ethnic groups (Gilroy, 1996:40). Gilroy argues that identity can also be traced back to sources in the institutional patterning of identity in terms of the spoken versus written language, the memory of groups and the governance of that group. Identity producing mechanisms then form and reproduce an 'imagined community' and an "engagement with the dynamics of identification: how one subject or agent may come to see itself in others" (Gilroy, 1996:40).

Identity and agency

Identity lies close to 'agency' and to the politics of a place or location together with those problems that are inherent in all 'identity politics'. The notion is not that the subject or identity should be abolished on the basis of a decentring but rather thought of as a new decentred position, one of identification. This 'common sense' concept is based on the recognition of a common origin or shared characteristics with some person or group or even an ideal, and the shared loyalty derived from this. To a certain extent all the groups shared the notion of identification as Afrikaner, Zulu, Hindu, Coloured or English. However, the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, always in the process of becoming, where it will never delete difference but as a signifying practice, so that identification functions across symbolic boundaries with ambivalence as a feature of this. The agency or control that individuals and groups have is restricted within the society but whether individuals deliberately separate themselves into particular groups, or if economic or historical circumstances determine the situation, the process is uncertain (Gilroy, 1996:41). Some of the Afrikaans group indicated they were 're-grouping' - the younger ones no longer wanted to speak Afrikaans, preferring to speak English. There was a sense of adjustment to accommodate the requirements of a multicultural society among the

upper class English groups, but Leigh-Ann's working class group seemed a little more wary as there was no cushion of money or privilege to protect them from being overwhelmed. A 'common sense' concept of an identity for women is based on the recognition of a common origin or shared characteristics with some person or group or even an ideal and the shared loyalty derived from this. The actual selection of women for the focus group discussions was based on the notion of a common origin - English, Afrikaans, Hindu, Coloured and Zulu. However a sense of difference and separation was apparent in the discussions when all the groups sought to explain their own perception of where and how they now related to the new hierarchy developing in South Africa. The parameters were being constructed in relation to what each woman was not, or what the 'other' lacks, to create a closed homogeneity circumscribed by difference and destabilised by what was left.

One thinks of identity when one is not sure where one belongs or how to place oneself in a variety of manners and patterns, so identity is the name given to the escape from the uncertainty (Baumann, 1996:19). As an immigrant one feels this way in a new country. Identity is something one assumes to be true and in a modern sense is conceived as an individual task. This implies that building an identity means having individual incompetence which requires a dependency on an expert for guidance like trainers, teachers, counsellors. But the real problem develops not in building an identity but in maintaining it, because today in the late twentieth century the world has been constructed by disposable objects for immediate obsolescence; identities also can be discarded like a change of costume. The freedom to move at will can be terrifying without roots, as when people draw on kinship as a source of identity they call upon old and new forms of relating, as well as the tensions between them (Strathern, 1996:45). Jabu, (Mafela) translator and trickster, signifies this freedom to move around effortlessly and to cope with many situations, floating easily between them all, from the boundary of one language to another.

Competitiveness became apparent among Joanne's Coloured group who now feared through a policy of affirmative action that they would lose their jobs, as did Leigh-Ann's working class group. Mafela theorised that there have been many changes in women's status compared with previously, but actual improvement of their situation is still elementary as they have been given very little responsibility in the job market. (Interview 1995, Appendix D) 'Hybridity' can imply

an indeterminacy with a 'double consciousness', but nevertheless reconciles the old and the new, both the pure and impure, so there is intermingling and transformation in unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas and politics. In the new era in South Africa, black South Africans have political power, but the perception is that aside from the black elite, many black individuals and groups do not have economic or social power. The negotiation to create a national and nationalizing culture has been the task of the South African Broadcasting Corporation, seeking to construct a more homogeneous culture, constantly broadcasting visuals accompanied by the singing of '*Simunye*' (we are one) to signify unity and homogeneity. A newspaper article (Hartley, 1996, December 22, *Sunday Times*) suggests that there is a reawakening of tribal and ethnic loyalty in South Africa's political life since the advent of democracy. The ANC always has followed an anti-tribal policy, arguing against ethnic territories and in favour of 'non-racialism' but across the country's rural areas, ethnicity and old tribal identities are emerging now that there is no longer the common enemy of apartheid.

Power in transition

Cultural identities, in the context of cultural relationships, can promote an awareness of self (Robins, 1996:63). The interaction with diverse cultural groups provides new experiences, modifying fears and prejudices and recognizing the other as a culture apart, not an extension of the same culture. If struggle over power involves issues of identity, it could be rearticulated "within the larger context of modern formations of power" (Grossberg, 1996:88). The concept of power is in fact central to the result of the elections in South Africa and in the process of trying to create a democracy, the struggle for power in and between different ethnic communities continues. 'Modern formations of power' include business and financial institutions, as well as the media, since during apartheid these institutions were white-owned monopolies integrated vertically and horizontally. The power position thus formulated the identity of blacks for whom programming was provided in the multicultural mode so as to keep blacks separate and apart. Hybridity, border and diaspora offer a useful applicability for the South African situation where many returning expatriots have difficulty in being assimilated back into the identity into which they were born. Elizabeth, in discussing the character of Edwin Tsaba, the lawyer, also felt he was no longer part of Africa as he could not even speak his mother tongue Sotho, adequately.

Identity of 'difference'

There is the assumption that deep connections reside beneath the surface beyond non-essential differences. Identity can thus be traced back to sources in the institutional patterning of identity in terms of:

- ◆ the spoken versus written languages
- ◆ the memory of groups
- ◆ the governance of the group, where in fact identity-producing mechanisms form and reproduce an 'imagined community'.

However, Elizabeth's group for *GU III* were pragmatic about changing identity and did not laugh at the Afrikaners changing their identity to conform to being 'politically correct' for obtaining work. Elizabeth explained how during apartheid, black nursing sisters were not allowed to work in Cape Town. Elizabeth's comments aroused the group as everyone started to talk rapidly and 'babble' ensued, indicating intense debate and interest in this topic. Grossberg (1996:91) contends hybridity typifies border existences where subaltern identities exist between two competing identities, and using this terminology this was apparent among Jubilee's Zulu group living in Chatsworth who acknowledged their 'Zuluness' but also announced they were adherents of Islam. This 'in-between' place Chatsworth is a township where by decree only Indians were allowed to own homes during apartheid. These women had made the 'border crossing', being between two cultures, emancipated, female, Zulu and ANC supporters but also part of an Indian Muslim community. Of all the groups, Jubilee's groups appeared to have made the transition to hybridity the most successfully and were coping with these 'fluid' identities, regardless of their economic situation. Their comments substantiated Jim Clifford's contention cited by Grossberg (1996:92) the way "the diaspora links identity to spatial location and identifications, to 'histories of alternative cosmopolitanisms and diasporic networks'".

According to a recent television documentary feature, there are many Coloured people who are trying to change their names back to African ones (Max Du Preez, October 24 1996, Sunday, SABC 2,) to enable them to be considered for restitution of land rights and jobs. Homi Bhabha (1996:58) argues the concept of a space or the 'mediating position of experience' (historically to change identity is to benefit within the current power base) implies that "identity is an historical

construction ... but that each of the three planes of individuation are constructed temporally” seeing:

- ◆ subjectivity as internal time-consciousness
- ◆ identity as the temporal construction of difference
- ◆ agency as the temporal displacement of difference

People experience the world from a particular position, so white English speakers found it inconceivable to change an identity because they have always operated from a secure power base. However the black viewers’ experience viewed the situation more pragmatically. The act of being a Zulu and black, or Afrikaans and white might be adjusted to accommodate the economic needs of the time. This was illustrated in the narrative of *SB* when in the “**Comic Relief**” episode the Dwyers and the Molois in self-defence against the creation of more cartoons being based on their foibles, attempt to change their identities to avoid being parodied by Frankie and Andrew.

Interpretation of the text by the focus groups

The oldest member of the Hindu group, Rookmuni, gave detailed descriptions of her role as a young Hindu wife and the application of the ‘dot’, explaining the role of women in an extended family. Joanne’s Coloured group defined how badly they were made to feel living in the Wentworth neighbourhood, a working class area, ostensibly notorious for crime. Leigh-Anne’s English working class group detailed the difficulties they experienced in their Salvation Army work. The groups engaged with the humour of the videos in different ways. The Afrikaans women were less inhibited about expressing their reaction through laughter. Since humour is dependent on a deliberate misunderstanding, the intended joke depicts stereotypes and misunderstanding through identity and language. The Afrikaans group identified completely with the racist Hempies - “just like my father”, while the Zulu group reacted with pleasure, laughing at the incongruous image of middle class Ike and Ma Moloi toyi-toying like the proletariat on the streets, in their elegant living room. Current meanings evolved as interaction occurred between the women, their beliefs and the particular eccentricities of the way they lived. Equally, when the audience did not recognise the stereotype or the specific language used in the joke, they created their individual meaning to form their own mental ‘text’. In the interpretation of the internal

structure of the text, the cultural background of the readers played a role (Morley, 1992:76) as described at the beginning of this chapter. How an audience makes sense of the world that media offers depends on the extent to which they can appropriate or contradict other messages. In decoding the production teams' discourses, each participant of the focus group brought their individual experiences as mother, worker, wife, Catholic, Protestant, Zulu, Hindu, Afrikaner, with attendant images, representations and stereotypes with which they were familiar to decipher the discourse. Even **within** groups of the same ethnicity there were differences of opinion and values. Despite these differences of opinion about the consolidation of identity, the assumption circulated, that deep connections beneath the surface were more significant than non-essential differences.

Value systems of the groups

The groups expressed differing value systems about the authoritarian control by the state; some of the individuals of the Zulu focus groups, argued vehemently about the validity of the 'traditional' concept of the *shebeen*. Some felt these should be banned to prevent men wasting money that should be used for food and clothing for their children. However others felt the *shebeen* Queen was earning an honest living, and they argued that customers should exercise self control, not demand government intervention, as drinking was a personal matter. This libertarian approach is a marked change from the traditional African mores where there is much control by the community of the individual. The concept of self - regulation as opposed to regulation by the community is perhaps more an emphasis on a political expression of individual liberty. It implies genuine transformation and cultural reconciliation since it confirms tolerance of, and respect for, other human beings with an emphasis on individual liberty and social justice. Such a proposal is not in conflict with the Africanisation process demanded by some intellectuals as recognition of systems that are African, but is in alliance with the idea that deconstructing 'identity' is an attempt to erase key concepts when a gap exists before the emergence of new concepts (Hall, 1996b: 1). An identity of Africanisation falls into the category of being "in the interval between reversal and emergence" - thus it cannot be thought about in the old way, but, without using the concept of Africanisation, important questions cannot be asked about transformation of power. Previously during apartheid *shebeens* were illegal and people went to gaol if caught there by the police, but with the new dispensation, a new power structure has legalised *shebeens*. Kubeka agreed that the *shebeen* might be a negative representation for black society in South Africa, but many blacks

regarded visiting a *shebeen* as normal as going to church, even though attending church is cheaper (personal interview, April, 1995. Appendix B). A person who visits a *shebeen* cannot be punished for doing so, as it is a cultural tradition, signifying the community's popular memory and interaction from aboriginal times.

Intertextuality of the actors

The status of actors in the programme influenced the way the groups responded as they all knew about Joe Mafela, so his character Jabulani was accepted. Some knew Rex Garner from his repertory performance in farce, so Reginald Cluver, as the attorney, was expected to perform in similar vein. When there was identification between characters and the audience often they gave their assent to the performance by laughing. The sitcom, as a genre had **assumptions** behind the content representing the lives of the 'middle' and 'lower' orders of society (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:12). The text cannot be considered in isolation but its historical conditions of production and consumption are important aspects for interaction with the audience (Chapter Three) (Morley, 1992:86). Certainly *SB* was seen to be able to play a role in 'cultural reconciliation' after the elections of 1994 since it functions in conjunction with the SABC (Chapter Two). Since it was intended for a black audience, perhaps it is not surprising that many English speakers did not find an identification with it although Leigh-Ann's group, (working class) enjoyed it and comprehended the jokes (Neale, 1992:40).

Destabilised identities - 'free at last'

The historic events that have occurred in South Africa have also led to changes in 'structures of feeling' as a cultural revolution is occurring in South Africa - a country which had been synonymous with authoritarianism now has moved towards deregulation and fragmentation (citing Jameson, Bertelsen, 1996:89). In the construction of postmodern identity, tight "stratifications of class and occupation may have been eroded ... with social distinction conferred by possessions and appearances" (Bertelsen, 1996:89). Elizabeth's middle class Zulu group appeared oblivious to the signifiers of consumerism in the text, most indicating preference for the white family's kitchen because it was 'homely', which was a discrepant reading of the text since the **black** family was being depicted enjoying the modern consumer symbols of success. If consumption is the hallmark of postmodernity then the Zulu group had not yet caught up with it or the encoding was

not successful. However, in the period 1990-1995 the identities of white and black South Africans have been destabilised so that all are 'free at last' since those fixed connotations and stabilised meanings of the 1970s and 1980s ended in crisis in 1990 (Bertelsen, 1996: 101). New identities with different meanings or competing ideologies are floating around as the urban black subject of the 1990s no longer resembles the revolutionary. The militant worker, youthful community leader, or leftist dissident has been replaced by the suave corporate worker. The active construction of consent via struggle within institutions and practices (citing Hall & Mouffe, Bertelsen, 1996) together with the 'multi-accentuality of discourse and ongoing social contest over meaning' from Vološinov (1973) brings together 'historical subjects' at the edges of discourses, with stability when the discourses confirm one another - the preferred meaning. However when new discourses contradict the old, subjectivities change.

In the historic processes of change in South Africa it is still difficult for some white middle class audiences to laugh at the 'New Humour' in *GU III* or *SB*. *GU III*'s narrative takes place in an office environment, where most whites are more accustomed to interacting with people of colour. Jabu (Mafela) is in the traditional black role in South Africa of 'service' and the recent hegemonic power shift is not emphasised in suggesting power alterations in race or gender. The political importance for *SB* and *GU III* had been to revise the idea of 'common sense' in describing racial oppression and class exploitation, allowing an advertising discourse of entitlement. There was a residue of African tribal culture through the character of Ma Moloi, so now the new black South African subject is contradictorily interpellated. A cultural struggle or reconciliation for the 'sign' in these 'historical moments' is taking place demonstrating the range of discourses circulating. A single text for analysis is insufficient because the 'sign' is mobilized, placed and articulated with other texts in different ways. Black programmes in Zulu can indicate control of the 'sign' but *GU III* and *SB* are aimed at multicultural audiences and because of the interdiscursive nature of textual meanings this struggle continues. Ang says the object of ethnography's critical edge (Ang, 1990: 257) is to attempt to unravel the diverse and the homogeneous. Morley says an absence of coherent sense of identity is at least a problem (Morley, 1992: 28).

Conclusion

There is a relationship between the pleasure gained from particular genres by particular audience groups, and humour, which can offer a ubiquitous interpretation concerning the human condition. Certain sectors of society favoured or resisted 'penetration' by the range of different ideological forms found in *SB* and *GU III*, but popularity of the sitcom genre depended on whether it 'fit' their cultural competence. Enjoying a genre implies a competence by that audience in understanding it and familiarity with the conventions of that framework. If the groups did not have this competence to obtain pleasure, they would not like it. They did not choose the material - they were just shown it by the researcher. Some of the upper class English said they hated it but they laughed enthusiastically in "Campaign Trail" and "Comic Relief" (laughter table 3.2 and 3.3 Appendix I). The **Afrikaans group** admitted some watched *SB* and certainly all the other groups had watched at various times. In the relevant/irrelevant and comprehension/incomprehension dimensions of interpretation and decoding, Janet's English group was the most antagonistic but they laughed the most, agreeing with the preferred meaning. The salience of the programme for different people with different social backgrounds means that, although not all the participants laughed all the time, the humour and jokes did intersect their subjectivities some of the time, thereby acting as a form of 'cultural reconciliation'.

Njabulo Ndebele articulates how writers should write about the everyday to touch the popular pulse. He believes that just as *mbaqanga* music is rooted in location culture, and was successfully adapted when the African peasant moved to the new industrial cities, writers in South Africa should look to the popular culture for their inspiration (Ndebele, 1991:88). The work of Hugh Masekela and Semanya have internationalised the *mbaqanga* music as a specific contribution to musical culture. Kente's work in drama also exploited township behaviour, which confirms that since he too took into consideration the popular political climate, the success of drama and music is connected into the relationship between popular culture and progressive experimentation with culture in form and content. By not abandoning the class basis of their respective art forms, drama and music were successful. Therefore writers need to assess and cultivate their understanding of their communities and become as inclusive about politics as possible to bring real liberation to the centre of modern popular consciousness (Ndebele, 1991:95). Searching for an indigenous humour common to both whites, blacks, Hindu and Coloured may be a difficult task but from the results of the laughter table, (Appendix I) at least in terms of people's humanity,

sexuality, race and class, it is possible to reinforce the values and advocate morals whenever there is conflict between traditional and modern values. The social problems of the new elite can be mixed with love, the changing roles of women and examination of ambivalence about corruption in the society. The rupture between social classes and the moral disarray following social and economic change, apply to everyone's experience in the new South Africa, so it could appeal to all. Thus in an emergent new South Africa, an integrated society would be presented with television tales of common interest to all members and these tales could universalise a valid and rational message.

In the ethnographic and participatory process, a top-down model was precluded as the interactive communication between researcher and the focus groups encouraged negotiation of meanings, when the various communities with different cultural traditions differed in their interpretations. The political and social realities that emerged from these discussions were represented in the texts created by the focus groups indicating how the programmes connected to the reality of the audience (transcripts Appendix D and E). In developing new research strategies for acquiring knowledge about viewers of television, it is necessary to give primary analysis to concrete situations of 'television audiencehood' as the social world of the actual audience needs to be contextualised in the way "people encounter, use, interpret, enjoy, think and talk about television" (Ang, 1991:62). Ethnographic research has implications for the future educational and cultural policy of a society, as viewers typically use television fiction as a forum for discussing their own lives and negotiate the agenda set by the producers of the programme (Liebes & Katz, 1993:154). In addition, by incorporating popular texts into the curricula of classrooms, children and adults would be able to develop aesthetic judgement, learn the classification of artistic forms, the ideological underpinnings of a story, attitude towards women and minorities and the values of another culture (Liebes & Katz, 1993:25).

Fidelity to the **phenomena under study** must be maintained, not just attention given to a set of methodological principles. The social world cannot be understood by simple causal relations as the same physical stimulus means different things to different people. People's behaviour does not happen mechanistically so it cannot be measured by causal analysis or only by attributing certain laws. Rather behaviour is constructed depending on the reason for interpretations of

situations in which people find themselves as evidenced by all the focus groups studied. Intercultural research is the ultimate test of a theory because the greater the range of contexts examined, the greater the potential for understanding the phenomena in general and for discovering universals of human communication. In order to draw conclusions from the research it is necessary to structure methods in a flexible manner to compensate for error and surprise. The researcher must look at the effects of the historical factors as well as the audience's level of comprehension and deploy the laughter model. Sharing in overlapping cultures can thus be a source of cultural vitality, as ethnicity becomes a desirable identity not necessarily involving the maintenance of a separate culture (Fitzgerald, 1966). Additional discourses of the cultural, educational and institutional practices of the subject are created but in the articulation between the encoding and the decoding, not in the reading. Therefore ethnographic studies, if combined with a textual analysis, can provide a 'multi-focused approach' supplying insight into the way social patterning of taste is tied into social power (Moore, 1993: 152). To provide a balance in society the phenomenon of humour can dissipate the social power of some groups and, acting as a catalyst, break down cultural barriers among people of different cultures and language. In the process humour can dilute anger so that 'cultural reconciliation' is effected.

References

Primary Sources

Reviews of publicity of *Going Up* and *Suburban Bliss* in the South African *Star*, *Sunday Times*, *Kalender*, *Sowetan*, *Rapport*, and *Tydskrif* from 1991 to 1993.

Video tapes of three episodes of *Suburban Bliss*, 1995/1996 produced by Dapple Productions:

Maid from Hell (Episode 6, 1995)

Campaign Trail (Episode 24, 1995)

Comic Relief (Episode 35, 1995)

Video tapes of two episodes from *Going Up* 1996 Produced by Penguin Films

The Case of the Previously Advantaged Pale Males.

Flexible Asian Models.

Transcripts:

Nine focus groups Zulu, Afrikaans, English- speaking women 9 included Hindu, Coloured, Class stratification and alternative lifestyle) discussing episodes of *Suburban Bliss* (March 27, 1996- May 5, 1996).

Four focus groups of Zulu, Afrikaans, English women discussing episodes of *Going Up III*. (November 2, 1996 - January 16, 1997)

Six interviews with Production team for *Suburban Bliss* (March 14 - 16, 1996):

Carl Fischer, producer; Gray Hofmeyr, writer; Peter SePuma, director.

Actors: Sue Pam Grant (Kobie), Sylvaine Strike (Frankie), Desmond Dube (Andrew);

Six interviews with Production team for *Going Up III* (April 1995 & September/October 1996):

Roberta Durrant, producer; (1995 & 1996)

Joe Mafela, writer/actor (Jubulani Cebekulu) (1995)

Abigail Kubeka, actor/singer (1995)

Richard Benyon, writer (1996).

Videos

Durrant. R. (Producer). (1996). *Going Up III*. Episodes 4 and 24. Johannesburg: Penguin Films.
Du Preez. M. (Presenter). (1996, October). Focus. Johannesburg: SABC.

Fischer, C. (Producer). (1955/1996). *Suburban Bliss*. Johannesburg: SABC
 Modise, T. (Host). (1997, April 24, 2130). *Question & Answer SABC TV3*
 SABC 2. (1996, October 24). Sunday Max du Preez, anchor.

References

- Abercrombie N., Hill, S. & Turner, B.S. (1984). *The Penguin Dictionary of sociology*. London: Penguin
- Adam, H. (1995, July). The politics of ethnic identity: comparing South Africa. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 18 (3), 457-475.
- Adam, H. (1993). *The negotiated revolution: Society and politics in post-apartheid South Africa*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers.
- Adam, H. (1971). *Modernizing racial domination: The dynamics of South Africa politics*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Adam, H. & Moodley, K. (1993). *The negotiated revolution: Society and politics in post-apartheid South Africa*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers.
- Adam, H. & Moodley, K. (1986). *South Africa without apartheid: Dismantling racial domination*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman.
- Adler, R. (1979). *All in the Family : A critical appraisal*. New York: Praeger Publishers
- Allen, R.C. (1995). *To be continued: Soap operas around the world*. London: Routledge.
- Allen, R. C. (Ed.). (1987). *Channels of discourse, reassembled: Television and contemporary criticism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina.
- Altman, R. (1987). *The American film musical*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Ang, I. (1996). *Livingroom wars: Rethinking media audiences for a postmodern world*. London & New York : Routledge.
- Ang, I. (1991). *Desperately seeking an audience*. London: Routledge, & New York : Routledge.
- Ang, I. (1990). Melodramatic identifications: Television fiction and women's fantasy. In M. E. Brown (Ed) *Television and women's culture: The politics of the popular*. London: Sage.
- Ang, I. (1989). Wanted: Audiences. On the politics of empirical audience studies. In E. Seiter, H. Borchers, G. Kreutzner & E.M. Warth (Eds.) *Remote control: television, audiences and cultural power*. London: Routledge.
- Ang, I. (1985). *Watching Dallas: Soap opera and the melodramatic imagination*. London: Methuen.
- Association of Marketers, (1993, August). Communication to the SABC Research Department,
- Ayittey, G. B N. (1992). *Africa betrayed*. New York: St. Martin's.
- Baker, C. D. (1984). 'The search for adulthood: membership work in adolescent- adult talk', *Human Studies*, 7, (301-323)
- Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, music, text*. Glasgow: Fontana Collins.
- Baumann, Z. (1996). From pilgrim to tourist - or a short history of identity. In S. Hall & P. Du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity*. London: Sage.
- Beall, Jo. (1990). Women under indentured labour in Natal, 1860-1911. In C. Walker (Ed.), *Women and gender in Southern Africa to 1945*. London: James Currey Ltd.
- Bennett, T. & Woollacott, J. (1987). *Bond & beyond - The political career of a popular hero*. Series: Communication and Culture. Exec Eds. Stuart Hall, Paul Walton. Basingstoke:

Macmillan Education Ltd.

- Berger, A.A. (1980). Humor as a system of communication. In A.A. Berger (Ed.) *Television as an instrument of terror*, (pp.151-154). Newbury Park: Sage.
- Berger, I. (1992). *Threads of solidarity: Women in South African industry 1900 -1980*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bertelsen, E. (1996). Post-mod cons: Consumerism and cultural studies. *Critical Arts* 10, (1), 87-106.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1996). Culture's in-between. In S. Hall & P. Du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity*. London: Sage.
- Bill of Rights, Chapter 2, Section 16, 1b and 1c (1996 : 9). In *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108*.
- Bird, E. (1996). Drama broadcasting and the public broadcaster. In K.G.Tomaselli (Series Ed.) & A. Mpofu, S. Manhando, & K. G. Tomaselli (Vol. Eds.), *Studies on the Southern African media: (Vol. 5.) Public service broadcasting: Policy directions towards 2000* (pp. 6-57). Johannesburg: Anthropos Publishers, South Africa.
- Boafa, S.T.K. & George, N.A. (Eds.). (1992). Introduction. In S.T. K. Boafa & N.A. George (Eds.). *Communication research in Africa:Issues and perspectives* (vi-xi).. Nairobi: African Council for Communication Education.
- Bold, L. (1994). *There's a Zulu on my stoep: Case study*. Unpublished MA theses, Centre for Cultural and Media Studies, University of Natal.
- Bonner, P. (1990). 'Desirable or undesirable Basotho women?' Liquor, prostitution and the migration of Basotho women to the Rand, 1920-1945. In C. Walker (Ed.), *Women and gender in southern Africa to 1945*. London: James Curry Ltd.
- Borcelle, G. (1985) *Jobs for women: A plea for equality of opportunity*. Paris:Unesco.
- Bordwell, D. & Thompson, K. (1993). *Film art: An introduction*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Bordwell, D. (1985). *Narration in the fiction film*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. R. Nice, (Trans.). Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). Outline of a theory of practice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourgault, L. M (1996a). Television drama in Hausaland: The search for a new aesthetic and a new ethic. *Critical Arts*, 10,(1), pp.61-84.
- Bourgault, L. M (1996b). *Mass media in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Braman, S. (1996). Interpenetrated globalization: Scaling, power and the public sphere. In Sandra Braman & Sreberny-Mohammadi, A. (Eds.) *Globalization , communication and transnational civil society*. Series Editors IAMCR Publication Committee. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Brecht, B. (1964). Short description of a new technique of acting which produces an alienation effect. (J. Willett, Trans.). In J. G Butler (Ed.). *Startexts: Image and performance in film and television* (pp.66 - 79). Detroit: Wayne State University.
- Brink, E. (1990). Man-made women: Gender, class and the ideology of the *volksmoeder*. In C. Walker (Ed.), *Women and gender in southern Africa to 1945* (pp 272 -312). London: James Currey.
- Brits, J. P. (1995). *The Penguin Concise Dictionary of historical and political terms*. London: Penguin Books.
- Brown, M. E. (1994). *Soap opera and women's talk: The pleasures of resistance*. London: Sage.
- Brunsdon, C. (1989). Text and audience. In E. Seiter, H. Borchers, G. Kreutzner & A.M.

- Warth (Eds.) *Remote control : Television, audiences and cultural power*. London: Routledge.
- Cantor, M. G. (1994). The role of the audience in the production of culture: A personal research perspective. In J.S. Ettema & D.C. Whitney (Eds.), *Audience making : How the media create the audience* (pp. 159 -185). Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage.
- Carter, K. & Spitzack, C. (Eds.). (1989). *Doing research on women's communication: Perspectives on theory and method*. Norwood, N. J.: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Cawelti, J. G. (1984). *The six-gun mystique*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press.
- Chapman, M. (1997). South Africa in the global neighbourhood: Towards a method of cultural analysis. *Critical Arts* 11, 1&2.
- Chisholm, L. (1990). Gender and deviance in South African industrial schools and reformatories for girls, 1911-1934. In C. Walker (Ed.), *Women and gender in southern Africa to 1945* (pp 272-312). London: James Currey.
- Cock, J. (1980). *Maids and madams : A study in the politics of exploitation*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Collins, R. (1993). Reforming South African broadcasting. In E. Louw (Ed.) *South African media policy: Debates of the 1990s*. Bellville: Anthropos.
- Coplan, D. (1985). *In township tonight! South African black city music and theatre*. London: Longman.
- Corner, J. (1995). Reappraising reception: Aims, concepts and methods. In J. Curran & M. Gurevitch (Eds.) *Mass media and society*, (pp 281-304). 2nd edition. London: Arnold.
- Dahlgren, P. (1995). *Television and the public sphere: Citizenship, democracy and the media*. London: Sage
- Dalrymple, L. (1987). *Explorations in drama, theatre and education: A critique of theatre studies in South Africa*. Unpublished Ph.D thesis. Durban: University of Natal.
- De Fleur, D. & Dennis, E. (1994). *Understanding mass communication. A liberal arts perspective*. 5th edition. Dallas: Houston Mufflin.
- Devadas, V. (1996). (Pre)Serving Home: 'Little India' and the Indian-Singaporean. *Critical Arts* 10 (2).
- Dyer, R. (1986). *Heavenly bodies: Film stars and society*. New York: St. Martins Press.
- Eilersen, G. S. (1995). *Bessie Head - Thunder behind her ears : Her life and writing*. Portsmouth NH: Heinemann.
- Erlmann, V. (1991). *Africa stars: Studies in black South African performance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fabian, J. (1987). Presence and representation: The other and anthropological writing. *Critical Inquiry*, 16 , 753-772.
- Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Evanston : Row.
- Feuer, J. (1987). Genre study and television. In J. C. Allen (Ed.). *Channels of discourse*, (pp. 113-133). London: Routledge.
- Fish, S. (1980). *Is there a text in this class? The authority of interpretive communities*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press .
- Fiske, J. (1990). Ethnosemiotics. *Cultural Studies*. 4 (1).
- Fiske, J. (1989). Moments of television: Neither the text not the audience. In E. Seiter, H. Borchers, G. Kreutzner & E. M. Warth (Eds.), *Remote control: Television audiences and cultural power*, (pp. 56-78). New York: Routledge.
- Fiske, J. (1987). *Television culture*. New York. Methuen.

- Fiske, J. & Hartley, J. (1978). *Reading television*. London: Routledge.
- Fitzgerald, J. (1966). *Peirce's theory of signs as foundation for pragmatism*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Freire, P. (1985). *The politics of education: Culture power and liberation*. New York: Bergin and Garvey.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Trans. M. B. Ramos.) London: Penguin.
- Freud, S. (1964). Humour. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, (pp. 162-163). Vol XXI. London: The Hogarth Press
- Freud, S. (1960). *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious*. (J. Strachey, Ed. & Trans.). London: Penguin.
- Freund, E. (1987). *Return of the reader. Reader response criticism*. London: Methuen
- Frith, S. (1996). Music and identity. In S. Hall & P. du Gay, (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity*, (pp. 108 -127). London: Sage.
- Gandy, O. H. & Matabane, P. W. (1989). Television and social perceptions among African Americans and Hispanics. In M. K. Asante & W. B. Gudykunst (Eds.) *Handbook of international and intercultural communication*. London: Sage.
- Gans, H. (1974). *Popular culture and high culture: An analysis and evaluation of taste*. New York: Basic Books Inc. Publishers.
- Garnham, N. (1990). *Capitalism and communication: Global culture and the economics of education*. London: Sage.
- Gecau, K. (1996). Popular culture social change. In H. Arntsen (Ed). *Media culture and development I*, (pp.34-64). Oslo: University of Oslo. Department of Media and Communication.
- Geraghty, C. (1996a). Feminism and media consumption. In J. Curran, D. Morley, D. & V. Walkerdine, (Eds.) *Cultural studies and communications*. London : Arnold.
- Geraghty, C. (1996b). Representation and popular culture. In J. Curran & M. Gurevitch (Eds.) *Mass media and society*. London: Arnold.
- Gerry, C. & Birkbeck, C. (1981). The petty commodity producer in Third World Cities: Petit bourgeois or 'disguised' proletarian? In F. Bechhofer, & B. Elliott, (Eds.), *The petite bourgeoisie: Comparative studies of the uneasy stratum*. London: The Macmillan Press.
- Gilroy, P. (1996). British cultural studies and the pitfalls of identity. In J. Curran, D. Morley and V. Walkerdine (Eds.), *Cultural studies and communication*, (pp.35-49). London: Arnold.
- Giroux, H. (Ed). (1991). Introduction. In *Post-modernism, feminism and cultural politics: Redrawing cultural boundaries*. New York: Suny Press.
- Godsell, G., Hall, R.S. and Tomaselli, K. (1985). A report on the industrial relations film *Indaba Ye Grievance*. Pretoria : Human Sciences Research Council. Research Finding PERS-392.
- Gramsci, A. (1973). *Selections from the prison notebooks*. Q. Hoare & G.N. Smith (Trans & Ed.). London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Gray, A. (1996). Behind closed doors: video recorders in the home. In H. Baehr and A. Gray (Eds.) *Turning it on : A reader in women and media*. London : Arnold. *Boxed in: Women and television*. London: Pandora.
- Grossberg, L. (1996). Identity and cultural studies: Is that all there is? In S. Hall & P. du Gay, (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 87 -107) London: Sage.
- Grote, D. (1983). *The end of comedy: The sit-com and the comedic tradition*. Hamden, CT: Archon.

- Guy, J. (1990). Gender oppression in southern Africa's precapitalist societies. In C. Walker (Ed.), *Women and gender in southern Africa to 1945*. Cape Town: David Philip Publishers.
- Hall, S. (1997a). Introduction. In S. Hall (Ed.) *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Thousand Oaks: The Open University.
- Hall, S. (1997b). Random thoughts provoked by identities, democracy, culture and communication in South Africa. *Critical Arts*, 11 (1&2).
- Hall, S. (1996a). Introduction: Who needs identity? In S. Hall & P. Du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity*, (pp.1-17). London: Sage Publications.
- Hall, S. (1996). Signification, representation, ideology: Althusser and the post-structuralist debates. In J. Curran, D. Morley, & V. Walkerdine (Eds.), *Cultural studies and communication*. London, New York: Arnold.
- Hall, S. (1990). The whites of their eyes: Racist ideologies and the media. In M. Alvarrado & J. O. Thompson (Eds.), *The media reader* (pp.7-23). Worcester: Trinity Press.
- Hall, S. (1982). The rediscovery of ideology: Return of the repressed in media studies. In M. Gurevitch, T. Bennett, J. Curran & J. Woollacott, (Eds.). (1982). *Culture, society and the media* (pp.56-90). London: Methuen.
- Hall, S. (1981). Notes on deconstructing 'the popular'. In R. Samuel (Ed), *People's history and socialist theory* (227-24). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Hall, S. (1980a). Encoding/decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe, & P. Willis, (Eds.). *Culture, media, language*. London: Hutchinson in Association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham.
- Hall, S. (1980b). 'Cultural studies: two paradigms', *Media, Culture and Society* 2. London: Sage
- Hall, S. Critcher, C. Jefferson, T., Clarke, J. & Roberts, B. (1978). *Policing the crisis: Mugging, the state, and law and order*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Hall, S. & Du Gay, P. (Eds) (1996). *Questions of cultural identity*. Thousand Oaks. Sage.
- Hamm, C. (1988). *Afro-American music, South Africa, and apartheid*. New York; Institute for Studies in American Music, Conservatory of Music Brooklyn College of the City University of New York.
- Hammersley, M. & Atkinson, P. (1983/1995). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. 9th edition. New York : Routledge.
- Haralovich, M.B. (1986). The social history of film: heterogeneity and mediation. *Wide Angle*, 8, (2).
- Hayman, G. & Tomaselli, R. (!989). Broadcasting technology as ideological terrain: Some concepts, assumptions and problems. In R. Tomaselli, K. Tomaselli & J. Muller (Eds.), *Currents of power: State broadcasting in South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: Natal Witness.
- Hebdige, D. (1982). Towards a cartography of taste 1935-1962. In *Hiding in the light*. London: Routledge.
- Higson, A. (1991) Film acting and independent cinema. In J. G. Butler (Ed.), *Startexts: Image and performance in film and television*, (pp. 165 - 181). Detroit: Wayne State university Press.
- Hoggart, R. (1957). *The uses of literacy: Aspects of working-class life, with special references to publications and entertainments*. London : Chatto & Windus.
- Holt, A. (1997). How the other was invited to stay: Castle Lager and the Charles Glass Society: 1978 - 1992. Paper presented at the *Conference on Identities, Democracy, Culture and Communication in Southern Africa*, University of Natal, Durban, 4-9 February.
- Holub, R. C. (1984). *Reception theory: A critical introduction*. New York : Methuen.

- Independent Broadcasting Authority Mandate, Broadcasting Act (1994, 30 March). Approved by the Transitional Executive Council in 1993
- Innes, D. Kentridge, M. And Perold, H. (Eds.). (1993) *Revising discrimination: Affirmative action in the workplace*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Jenkins, H. (1992). *What made pistachio nuts? Early sound comedy and the vaudeville aesthetic*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Jhally, S. & Lewis, J. (1992). *Enlightened racism: The Cosby Show, audiences, and the myth of the American dream*. Boulder: Westview press.
- Kerlinger, F. (1973). *Foundations of behavioural research*. Second Edition. New York: Holt, Reinhardt and Winston.
- King, B. (1991). Articulating stardom. In J. G Butler (Ed.), *Startexts: Image and performance in film and television*, (pp 125- 154). Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Kosloff, S. (1988). Narrative theory and television. In R. C. Allen (Ed.), *Channels of discourse, reassembled* (pp.67 - 100). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Kotze, H.J. & Van Wyk, J.J. (1980). *Basiese konsepte in die politiek*. Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill.
- Krueger, R.A. (1994). *Focus groups: A practical guide to applied research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Ladner, J. (1987). Introduction to tomorrow's tomorrow: The black womanhood. In S. Harding (Ed.) *Feminism and methodology* (pp 75-83). Bloomington: Open University Press.
- Language Policy, 1994. SABC Johannesburg: SABC Archives.
- Lee, M. J. (1993). *Consumer culture reborn: The cultural politics of consumption*. London: Routledge.
- Liebes, T. & Katz, E. (1993). *The export of meaning: Cross cultural readings of Dallas*. Oxford: Polity.
- Liebes, T. & Katz, E. (1989). On the critical abilities of television viewers. Seiter, E. & Borchers, H. & Kreutzner, G. & Warth, E. M. (eds). *From Remote control: Television audiences & cultural power*. London: Routledge.
- Lindlof, T. R. (1995). *Qualitative communication research methods*. California: Sage.
- Lipsitz, G. (1990). *Time passages: Collective memory and American popular culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis
- Loots, L. (1994). *Poststructuralist pornography*. Unpublished MA thesis, Gender Studies, University of Natal.
- Louw, P.E. (Ed.) (1993). *South African media policy*. Bellville: Anthropos Publishers.
- Louw, P. E. & Tomaselli, K. (1991). Semiotics of apartheid: the struggle for the sign. *European Journal for Semiotic Studies*, 3 (1-2)
- McClintock, A. (1990). Maidens, maps and mines: King Solomon's Mines and the reinvention of the patriarchy in colonial South Africa. In C. Walker (Ed.), *Women and gender in Southern Africa to 1945*. Cape Town: David Philip Publishers. London: James Curry Ltd.
- McLean, P.E. (1992). Methodical shortcomings of communication research in Southern Africa: A critique based on the Swaziland experience. In S.T.Kwame Boafo & N.A.George (Eds.) *Communication research in Africa: Issues and perspectives*, (vi-xi). Nairobi: African Council for Communication Research.
- McQuail, D. (1991). *Media performance: Mass communication and the public interest*. London: Sage.
- McQuail, D. (1986). Media institution and organization: Production of media culture. In *Mass communication theory: An introduction*. London: Sage.

- Marc, D. (1984). The comedy of public safety. In *Demographic vistas: Television in American culture*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.
- Martin - Barbero, J. (1993). *Communication, culture and hegemony*. (Trans.) E. Fox and R.A. White. London: Sage.
- Mbilinyi In Meena, R. (Ed.) (1992). *Gender in Southern Africa: Conceptual and theoretical issues*. Harare: Sapes Books.
- Meehan, E. (1990). Why we don't count : The commodity audience. In P. Mellencamp (Ed.). *Logics of television : essays in cultural criticism*, (pp. 117 - 137). Bloomington : Indiana University Press.
- Meehan, E. (1986). Conceptualizing culture as a commodity: The problem of television. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 3 448-457
- Meintjies, S. (1990). Family and gender in the Christian community at Edendale, Natal, in colonial times. In C. Walker (Ed.) *Women and gender in southern Africa to 1945*. Cape Town: David .
- Mellencamp, P. (1991). Situation comedy, feminism and Freud: Discourses of Gracie and Lucy. In J. Butler (Ed.), *Star texts: Image and performance in film and television*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Michaels, E. (1990). A model of teleported texts (with reference to Aboriginal television). *Continuum: Communication and Tradition, Essays after Eric Michaels*, 3 (2) 9-31.
- Miles, R. (1989). *Racism*. London: Routledge
- Modleski, T. (1982). *Loving with a vengeance: Mass produced fantasies for women*. Hamden: Methuen.
- Mody, B. (1991). *Designing messages for development communication: An audience participation - based approach*. London: Sage.
- Mofokeng, M . (1994). A pilot study into the use of media in the Mafeking and Mmabatho areas. *Unpublished Honours research project* , University of the North West, Department of Communication.
- Moore, S. (1993). *Interpreting audiences: The ethnography of media consumption*. London: Sage.
- Morley, D. (1992). *Television, audiences and cultural studies*. London: Routledge.
- Morley, D. (1989). Changing paradigms in audience studies. In E. Seiter, H. Borchers, G. Kreutzner & E. M. Warth . (Eds), *Remote control: Television, audiences & cultural power*. London: Routledge.
- Morley, D. (1985). *Family television: Cultural power and domestic leisure*. London: Comedia.
- Morley, D. (1980). *The "nationwide" audience: Structure and decoding*. London: British Film Institute.
- Mouton, J. & Marais, H. C. (1988). *Basic concepts in the methodology of the social sciences*. Pretoria: HSRC.
- Mpofu, A., (1996). The role of the public broadcaster in a future South Africa. Broadcasting policy research: The framework report. In K.G. Tomaselli (Series Ed.) & A. Mpofu, S. Manhando, & K. G. Tomaselli (Vol. Eds.), *Studies on the Southern African media: (Vol. 5.) Public service broadcasting: Policy directions towards 2000* (pp.6-57). Johannesburg: Anthropos Publishers, South Africa.
- Muller, J. & Tomaselli, K. (1990). In J. Mouton & D. Joubert (Eds). *Knowledge and method in the human sciences*. Pretoria: Gutenberg Book Printers.
- Munyuki, F. (1996). Mass media in Africa: Constraints and possible solutions. In M. Andersen (Ed.). *Media and democracy -IMK-report no 17* (pp. 167-182). Oslo: University of Oslo.

- Murdock, G. & Golding, P. (1987). Capitalism, communication and class relations. In M. Gurevitch, J. Curran & J. Woollacott (Eds.) *Mass communication and society* (pp. 118 - 150). London: Arnold.
- Ndebele, N. S. (1991). *Rediscovery of the ordinary: Essays on South African literature and culture*. Johannesburg: COSAW (Congress of South African Writers).
- Neale, S. (1980). *Genre*. London: British Film Institute.
- Neale, S. & Krutnik, F. (1990). *Popular film and television comedy*. London: Routledge.
- Nkululeko, D. (1987). The right to self determination in research: Azanian women. In C. Qunta (Ed.), *Women in southern Africa*. Johannesburg: Skotaville.
- Ong, W. (1982). *Orality and literacy: The technologizing of the word*. New York: Methuen.
- Oosthuizen, L.M. (1990). Ideologie, media en Afrikaanse nasionalisme. *Communatio*. 16 (1) 38-48.
- O'Sullivan, T., Hartley, J., Saunders, D. & Fiske, J. (1983). *Key concepts in communication*. London: Methuen.
- Palmer, J. (1992). *Taking humour seriously*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Palmer, J. (1987). *The logic of the absurd: On film and television comedy*. London: BFI Publishing.
- Powdermaker, H. (1962). *Coppertown: Changing Africa*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Public Services Bill (1995). IBA.
- Radway, J. (1984). *Reading the romance: Women, patriarchy, and popular literature*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Reader's Digest great encyclopedia dictionary*. (1962). Oxford: Oxford Press.
- Robins, K. (1996). Interrupting identities: Turkey /Europe. In S. Hall & P. Du Gay (Eds) *Questions of cultural identity*, (pp. 61 - 86). London: Sage.
- Robins, K. & Webster, F. (1986, May -Aug). Broadcasting politics: Communications and consumption. *Screen*, Vol 27. In M. Alvarado & Thompson, J. O. (Eds.) *The Media Reader*, (1990). Worcester: BFI Publishing.
- Roome, D. (1997). Transformation and reconciliation: 'Simunye' a flexible model. *Critical Arts* 11(1 & 2), 66-94.
- Roome, D. (1996). Humour as 'cultural reconciliation': *Suburban Bliss* and multicultural female viewers. Paper presented at IAMCR Conference, Sydney, August 18-22.
- Rose, N. (1996). Identity, genealogy, History. In S. Hall & P. du Gay. (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity*, (pp. 128 - 150). London: Sage.
- South African Advertising Research Foundation (SAARF). (1995). Johannesburg: SAARF
- SABC. Annual Report. (1991). Johannesburg: Archives of the SABC.
- SABC. Annual Report. (1996). Johannesburg: Archives of the SABC.
- Scannell, P. (1989). Public service broadcasting and modern public life. In P. Scannell, P. Schlesinger & C. Sparks (Eds), *Culture and power*. London: Sage.
- Schatz, T. (1981). *Hollywood genres*. New York: Random House.
- Schumann, H. (1982: 23). Artifacts are in the mind of the beholder. *American Sociologist* 1 (21-8).
- Seiter, E. (1987). Semiotics, structuralism and television. In R. C. Allen (Ed.), *Channels of discourse, reassembled*, (pp. 31-66). Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press.
- Seiter, E., Borchers, H., Kreutzner, G., Warth, E. M., (Eds.). (1989). *Remote control: Television, audiences, and cultural power*. London: Routledge.
- Silverman, D. (1993). *Qualitative data: Methods for analysing talk, text and interaction*. London: Sage.

- Sless, D. (1986). *In search of semiotics*. London: Croom Helm.
- Smith, F. (1993). *Whose language ? What power?* New York: Teachers College Press.
- South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) (1996). *SABC Television division, guidelines for programme content*. SABC: Johannesburg.
- Sparks, C. (1997). Walt and Winnie; A story about the limits of globalization. Paper presented at the *Conference on Identities, Democracy, Culture and Communication in Southern Africa*, University of Natal, Durban. 4-9 February.
- Spigel, L. (1992). *Make room for TV: Television and the family ideal in postwar America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Spindler, G. & L. (Ed.). (1987). *Interpretive ethnography of education: At home and abroad*. New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Assoc.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.) *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*, (pp. 271-486). Basingstoke: Macmillan Education
- Stam, R. & Burgoyne, R. & Flitterman-Lewis, S. (Eds.). (1992). *New vocabularies in film semiotics: Post-structuralism and beyond*. London. Routledge
- Strathern, M. (1996). Enabling identity? Biology, choice and the new reproductive technologies In S. Hall & P. Du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (pp.37-52). London: Sage.
- Sudman, S. (1976). *Applied sampling*. New York: Academic Press.
- Sudman, S. & Bradburn, N.M. (1993). *Asking questions: A practical guide to questionnaire design*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Taylor, E. (1989). *Prime time families: Television culture in postwar America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Teer-Tomaselli, R. E. (1997). Language, identity and nationalism: An historical overview of the SABC's language policy. Paper presented at the *Development, Culture, Communication (DECCO) International Conference Workshop*, sponsored by the Human Sciences Research Council. Pretoria.
- Teer-Tomaselli, R.E. (1996a, November). The public broadcaster and democracy in transformation. Lecture delivered for the *Graham Spry Fund for Public Broadcasting* in Montreal Canada.
- Teer-Tomaselli, R.E. (1996b). Debi does democracy: Recollecting democratic voter education in the electronic media prior to the South African elections. In G. E. Marcus (Ed). *Connected: Engagements with media*, pp. 377- 421. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Teer-Tomaselli, R. E. (1995). Moving towards democracy: The South African Broadcasting Corporation and the 1994 election, (pp.577-600). *Media, culture and society*. London: Sage publication.
- Teer-Tomaselli, R. (1994). The mediaization of culture: John Thompson and the vision of public service broadcasting. *South African Journal of Philosophy*, special issue on the work of John Thompson.
- Teer-Tomaselli, R. E. (1992). The politics of discourse and the discourse of politics: Images of violence and reform on the South Africa Broadcasting Corporation's Television News Bulletins July 1985 - November 1986. Unpublished Ph.D dissertation. University of Natal.
- Teer-Tomaselli, R. & Tomaselli, K. (1994). Reconstituting public service broadcasting: Media and democracy during transition in South Africa. *Communicare*, 13, (2), 44-66.
- Thompson, E.P.(1964). *The making of the English working class*. London: Gollancz.
- Thompson, J. B. (1990). *Ideology and modern culture: Critical social theory in the era of mass*

- communication*. London: Polity Press.
- Todorov, T. (1977). The grammar of narratives. In R. Howard (Trans.), *The poetics of prose*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Todorov, T. (1975). *The fantastic: A structural approach to a literary genre*. Cleveland, OH: Case Western Reserve University Press.
- Tomaselli, K.G. (1997). Globalisation and localisation: The political economy of shifting South African media identities. Unpublished paper presented at the *Conference on Identities, Democracy, Culture and Communication* at University of Natal, Durban 4-9 February.
- Tomaselli, K. G. (1996). *'Appropriating images': The semiotics of visual anthropology*. Aarhus: Intervention Press.
- Tomaselli, K. G. (1994). Representing orality visually. Paper delivered at the 1994 *Congress of the International Association of Semiotic Studies*. Berkeley.
- Tomaselli, K.G.(1993). 'Colouring it in': Films in 'black or 'white'-reassessing authorship in *Critical Arts*, 7 (1&2).
- Tomaselli, K. G., Louw, P.E. & Tomaselli, R.E. (1990). Language and the crisis of hegemony in South Africa. In S.Thomas, (Ed.). *Communication and culture*, 4, pp. 1-17. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Tomaselli, K. G., Tomaselli, R. E. & Muller, J. (1989). *Currents of power: State broadcasting in South Africa*. Cape Town :Anthropos.
- Tomaselli, K. G., Tomaselli, R.E. & Muller, J.(Eds.). (1987). *The press in South Africa*. London: James Curry
- Tomaselli, K. & van Zyl, M. (1992). Themes myths and cultural indicators. In J. Blignault & M. Botha (Eds.) *Movies, moguls, mavericks: South Africa cinema 1979 - 1991*(pp. 395 - 471). Vlaeberg: Showdata
- Tomaselli, R., Tomaselli, K., & Muller, J. (Eds.). (1989). *Currents of power: State broadcasting in South Africa*. Belville : Anthropos Pub.
- Tomaselli, K.G. (1985). Indaba Ye Grievance: Discussion of film realism and its communicative competence. In G. Godsell, R.S. Hall and K. Tomaselli A report on the industrial relations film "Indaba Ye Grievance"(pp. 5-17). Pretoria: Human Sciences research Council.
- Van den Bulck, H. & Van Poecke, I. (1996) . National language , identity formation, and broadcasting: The Flemish and German-Swiss communities. In Braman, S. & Sreberny-Mohammadi, A. (Eds.) *Globalization, communication, and transnational civil society*. (pp. 157 - 177) Cresskill NJ: Hampton Press Inc.
- Vološinov, V. N. (1973). *Marxism and the philosophy of language*. New York: Seminar Press.
- Walker, C. (1991). Women and resistance in South Africa. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Walker, C. (Ed.). (1990). *Women and gender in Southern Africa to 1945*. London: James Curry Ltd
- Walker, C. (1990). Introduction. In C. Walker (Ed.) *Women and gender in Southern Africa to 1945*. Cape Town: David Phillip Press.
- Wallace, M. (1990). *Invisibility blues: from pop to theory*. London: Verso.
- Waterman, P. (1996). A new world view: Globalization, civil society and solidarity. In Sandra Braman & Sreberny-Mohammadi, A.(Eds.) *Globalization, communication and transnational civil society*. Series Editors: IAMCR Publication Committee. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Williams, L. (1990). *Hard core: Power, pleasure and the "Frenzy of the Visible"*. London: Pandora.
- Williams, R. (1980). *Problems in materialism and culture*. London :Verso.
- Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and literature*. Oxford : University Press

- Williams, R. (1976). *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society*. Revised edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Worth, S. (1980). *Studying visual communication*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Yaple, P. & Korzenny, F. (1989). Electronic mass media effects across cultures. In M.K. Asante & W.B. Gudykunst (Eds.) *Handbook of international and intercultural communication*. London: Sage.
- Yates, L. (1993). Feminism and Australian state [policy: Some questions for the 1990s. In M. Arnot and K. Weiler (Eds.), *Feminism and social justice in education: International perspectives*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Younghusband, T. (1996, December 8). Afrikaners in TV licence protest. *Sunday Times*.

Primary Sources

Video tapes of two episodes from Going Up 1996 Produced by Penguin Films

Transcripts: Four focus groups of Zulu, Afrikaans, English women discussing episodes of Going Up III.

Newspapers

- Adam, H. (1997, March 6-13). Embarrassment of 'filthy richness'. *Mail & Guardian*, B3.
- Anstey, G. (1995, November 5). *Sunday Times, Johannesburg*
- Blignault, C. & Prabhakaran, S. (1997, November 7-13). Gay coalition claims victory over Omar. *Mail & Guardian: Johannesburg*.
- Brown, R. (1992, February 15). TV's newest channel is a real winner. Johannesburg: *Show Times*.
- Campher, L. (1997, March 7-13). Spotlight on the media. *Mail & Guardian*, B5.
- Edmunds, M. (1995, November 10-17). Blissful contract for suburban series. *Mail & Guardian*, p. 12
- Farquhar, G. (1997, April 11-17). IBA rules under fire. *Mail & Guardian*, B7.
- Going Up - a taste of multi-cultural television*. (1991, February 24). Johannesburg: The Star Tonight.
- Golding-Duffy, J. (1997, February 13-20). IBA's plans for SABC 'too costly'. *Mail & Guardian*.
- Golding-Duffy, J.G. (1996, December 24-31). Bottom falls out of the sex industry. *Mail & Guardian*, p.8
- Golding-Duffy, J. (1996, Dec. 13-19). Spotlight on media. *Mail & Guardian*.
- Golding-Duffy, J. & Farquhar, G. (1997, Feb. 7-13). Agencies 'out of touch' with reality. *Mail & Guardian*, B 8.
- Gordon, D. (1991, February 10). It's time to have a laugh at the new South Africa. Johannesburg: *Sunday Times*.
- Haffajee, F. (1997, Dec. 24 - Jan. 8). The year SABC went commercial. *Mail & Guardian*.
- Kelly, T. (1996, Jan 28). LSMs, the universe and everything. *Sunday Finance*, p.5.
- Kirby, R. (1996, February 8). Sorry little bunch of bums. Johannesburg: *The Star*.
- 'Kick Butt' broadcasting. (1996, November 29 - December 5). *Mail & Guardian*, p. 36
- Kobokane, T. (1997, September 9). SABC's downsizing pays off. *Sunday Times*, p.4. Johannesburg.
- Mda, Z. (1997, April 13). On the small screen. *Sunday Times*.
- Mda, Z. (1997, March 23). On the small screen. *Sunday Times*.

New head of SABC (1996, December 1) *Sunday Times*.

SABC's downsizing pays off. *Sunday Times*, p. 4. Johannesburg

Schedules fail SABC's new TV service. (1996, April 3). *The Star, Sunday Tribune* p. 16

Schmidt, M (1996, Dec. 1). New SABC boss wants fewer official languages. *Sunday Times*.

Smith, J. (1997-1998, Dec 24 - Jan 8). The Molois, Dwyers and Forresters still rule. *Mail & Guardian*, Johannesburg p.20.

The good, the bad and the ugly. (1996, December 24-January 9). *Mail & Guardian*.

Time to salvage SABC. (1997, April 18- 24). *Mail & Guardian*, p 22.

Trengrove-Jones, T. (1997, Nov.21-27). No more gay martyrdom. *Mail & Guardian*: Johannesburg.

Worsdale, A. (1996, Oct. 24-31). The restoration of comedy. *Mail & Guardian*, p. 34.